Streamlining Accountability:
Concepts, Subtypes, and Empirical Analyses*

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Introduction

“Accountability” has become an ubiquitous buzzword in recent years. It is used at individual, organizational, governmental, inter-governmental, and global levels. A greater level of accountability has been called for by politicians and activists, by the right and the left, by EU’s top bureaucrats and by the grass-roots movements in India. It has become a key concept in improving almost everything such as the public administration, business management, education, health-care, and transnational governance. Some even call the current era as “the age of accountability”(e.g., Fisher 2004).

The field of Political Science is no exception. Scholarly attention to accountability has grown dramatically during the past few decades, with the increasing recognition about the importance of this concept. Broadly speaking, accountability addresses two classic issues in politics: representation and governance. In the modern representative form of democracy, citizen’s ability to check their representatives poses an inherent problem. Having effective accountability mechanisms not only install legitimacy of the elected, but also secure the responsiveness from the representatives. At the same time, accountability enhances the efficient and effective delivery of public services.¹

The importance of accountability in politics does not mean installing it cures all the ills; under some circumstances, more accountability may result in undesired outcomes. For example, in addition to the increased transaction cost in reporting, more accountability may lead to negotiation breakdown (Stasavage 2004; Naurin 2007), abstaining from expressing dissenting opinions (Meade and Stasavage 2008), or choosing less beneficial policies to the constituents (Fox 2007b). These are important caveats. However, we maintain that the benefits of accountability outweigh its undesired consequences, and that exploration into effective use of accountability mechanisms is one of the crucial issues for the study of politics.

In this paper, we attempt to contribute to this emerging literature in three ways. First, we provide a clear definition of accountability by synthesizing the existing studies

¹ The literature showing the benefits of accountability on representation and governance are numerous. For example, see Halperin et al. 2010, Przeworski et al. 1999, Deininger and Mpuga 2005, Besley and Burgess 2002.
on the concept. Currently, there is little consensus about what accountability means as scholars have adopted varying definitions. We examine the major variants and come up with a definition combining the relevant components in view of the concept’s etymology and real-world applications. Second, building on our definition of accountability, we provide a comprehensive view of the various types of agents of accountability, whereas the extant literature tends to focus only on one type of accountability agent or mechanism at a time. Third, we identify areas that need further research based on our review of existing studies.

The paper is organized as follows. In the first section, we provide backgrounds to the recent rise of accountability as a research agenda in Political Science. The second section first examines the existing definitions of accountability, and then provides our own. The third section discusses the agents of accountability. It also provides a comprehensive view of accountability mechanisms that combines the components and the agents of accountability. The fourth section identifies future research directions.

1. The Rise of Accountability Research in Political Science

As a word, accountability is a term almost exclusively developed within the English language. According the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the word first has appeared in a history book on Vermont published in 1794. Borowiak (2007) however points out that the word actually was used, although very sparingly, in the U.S. ratification debates between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists (citing Storing 1981, p. 1000 fn.2), which was seven years earlier than the OED entry. Its origin is attributed to the old Latin word *accomptare* (to account), a prefixed form of *computare* (to calculate), which in turn derived from *putare* (to reckon). In the languages other than English, however, it is difficult to find an equivalent. (Dubnick 1998, 69) notes that in French, Italian, and Portuguese, various forms of the term “responsibility” is used in lieu of the English word accountability. When a translated word is used, for example in Dutch, Danish and

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[4] Dubnick (1998) also include Spanish as a language that use a word related to responsibility to refer to accountability, but the Spanish equivalent of accountability is usually “*rendición de cuenta*” (render an account).
German, it means “an obligation or duty to live up to terms of a trust” (Dubnick 1998, 70; Bovens 2007, 5).

Institutional arrangements that embody the contemporary meaning of accountability—having someone or some organization answer for their actions and face sanctions (detailed discussion on the definition later)—have existed much earlier, since the time of Ancient Athens. In the fifth century BC, Athens had an institution called *euthynai*, which made all *magestrates* (administrators) to undergo public scrutiny at the end of their term in office. A board of ten inspectors conducted this scrutiny, and its report was made public so that any citizen could accuse of a *magestrate* for malpractice. In the 13th and 14th century England, with the advent of the ‘ministerial responsibility’ doctrine, royal agents became to be held accountable to parliament for alleged wrongdoings through impeachment, while the king’s immunity was protected (Seidman 2005).

Scholarly research addressing the issue of “accountability” has rapidly grew during the last several decades in various fields. These include sociology (Scott and Lyman 1968), psychology (Tetlock 1985), public administration (Day and Klein 1987), health care (Emanuel and Emanuel 1996) and education (Kogan 1986). Political science is one of the disciplines that exhibit a similar trend. Figure 1 shows the number of academic articles and books that contain the word “accountability” in the title and in the abstract in political science journals and books cataloged in the Worldwide Political Science Abstracts database. The figure shows a dramatic surge in scholarly attention to the issue of accountability in recent years—in the 1970s, “accountability” appeared only in 34 titles and 78 abstracts, while it increased to 845 in title and 2856 in abstract during the period from 2000 to 2009.

Several reasons for this popularity of accountability in political science can be pointed out. First and most importantly, accountability has become one of the key words in the study of democracy in post-transition countries. Starting around the mid-1970s,

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many countries became democratized. Reflecting this real-world phenomenon, the study of transition to democracy has become a popular topic of inquiry among political scientists. The attention of scholars, however, has gradually shifted from the question of regime change to the quality of democracy in the aftermath of democratization (e.g. Diamond and Morlino, 2005). In this conjuncture, accountability has become one of the key concepts. For example, in one of the most well-cited articles in the transition literature, Schmitter and Karl (1991) redefine the concept of democracy by focusing on the concept of accountability. In lieu of traditional Schumpetarian notion of procedural democracy, they note:

*Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives (ibid: 76).*

More specifically, two types of accountability-related concerns have emerged in addressing the quality of democracy, namely, representation and governance. O'Donnell (1994) has argued that representation in newly democratized Latin American countries was at risk, and characterized these new democracies as “delegative.” In this type of democracy, the chief executive, once elected, marginalizes institutions of accountability such as political parties, the legislature and the judiciary and governs as he/she wishes. Consequently, alongside the nominal existence of democratic institutions, representation of the citizen’s interests and preferences are undermined. A second concern is governance, or the ways in which the government is managed to deliver services effectively and efficiently. Even after achieving political democratization, many new regimes continued to suffer from persistent corruption and economic

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7 Schumpeter defines democracy is "institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (1943, 269).

8 Writing in 2004, Schmitter reflects that when the article was published in 1991, their emphasis on accountability as the key to the definition of democracy “met with a surprising amount of indifference or even hostility,” but also points out that the next decade saw “a veritable explosion of scholarly concern with the notion of political accountability” (Schmitter 2004, 27).
underdevelopment. Accountability gained attention as one of the remedies to these governance problems (World Bank 1992). In light of these concerns, a number of studies on new democracies have used accountability as the key concept (e.g. Przeworski et al. 1999; Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner 1999; Mainwaring and Welna 2003; Fox 2008).

Secondly, accountability became one of the favored vocabularies of the international policy community, specifically, of the development community and those concerned with the governance of the European Union (EU). As for the development community, the World Bank, in recognition of the failure of the market-oriented development strategy, started seriously addressing the issue of accountability in its 1992 report. It stated that the accountability of recipient governments was one of the important remedies for economic development (World Bank 1992). In 2005, OECD, in promoting a new policy direction in international aid, issued the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness that urged aid donors and recipients to be jointly responsible for achieving development goals, which they termed “mutual accountability.” For EU, since the late 1990s, accountability of this supra-national institution became a hotly debated issue as EU’s authority and geographic coverage expanded. In its Governance White Paper published in 2001, EU officially included accountability as one of the “principles of good governance.” A number of EU scholars also examined this issue from a multitude of aspects (e.g. Arnull and Wincott 2002; Gustavsson, Karlsson, and Persson 2009; Bovens, Curtin, and ’t Hart 2010).

Third, many political scientists have increasingly come to view political relations as a chain of principal-agent relationship, in which principals delegate authorities to agents, and in turn agents are accountable to principals. This view has been adopted in studies that analyze the relationships between voters and politicians (Fearon 1999; Besley 2007), party members and leaders in the legislative process.

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9 The Bank’s interest in accountability can be seen as early as in 1989 in its 1989 Annual Report. However, unlike the 1992 report that highlights accountability as a major concern at all levels of government, the 1989 report only pays a scant attention to accountability at the level of banks in recipient. See: http://elibrary.worldbank.org/content/book/9780195207880 (accessed September 7, 2011).
10 http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,3343,en_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html accessed December 26, 2011.
12 For a useful review of studies that adopt the principal-agent model, see Bendor, Glazer and Hammons 2001.
(Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Strom, Muller, and Bergman 2006), politicians and bureaucrats (Huber and Shipan 2002), and international organizations and their member states (Hawkins et al. 2006).

Taken together, these three developments have expanded the scope of analyses in several ways. First, the agents/institutions of accountability have increased. Traditionally, accountability typically meant electoral accountability between voters and politicians in the American political science literature, and in the Westminster systems it was synonymous to “ministerial responsibility” of the cabinet to the parliament. As we will discuss in detail in Section 3, the agents of accountability have increased in the recent literature to include new agents such as intra-state institutions (Schedler et al. 1999; Mainwaring and Welna 2003) NGOs and mass media (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2006), and public opinion (Odugbemi and Lee 2011).

Second, while traditional notion of accountability mostly pertains to democracy, recent studies have addressed the issue of accountability in non-democratic settings. One of the earliest such attempts is Roeder (1993)’s study of the Soviet Union. He argues that while accountability to the larger populace was almost absent, Soviet policymakers were to an important degree accountable to their bureaucratic constituencies, which he calls the relationship of “reciprocal accountability”\(^\text{13}\) Studying China’s local governance, Tsai (2007) frames her argument that even when formal institutions of accountability are absent or weak (by which she means that citizens are limited in their power to elect and remove officials as they wish; the intra-state oversight mechanism are weak), the delivery of public services is still achieved through the community solidarity groups as an accountability mechanism. Comparing China and Viet Nam, Abrami, Malesky, and Zheng (2008) argue that the difference in the intra-party as well as intra-state design of accountability institutions between China and Vietnam explains the different degrees of resource redistribution.

Third, while accountability was traditionally a matter of domestic politics, recent studies extend the scope of analyses to international arena. In the 2001 presidential address of the American Political Science Association, international relations scholar Robert Keohane urged political scientists to study how to craft

\(^{13}\) He argues that the institutionalization of reciprocal accountability has increased the stability of the polity, but failed to adopt societal change. This eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.
institutions at global scale that meet the standard of accountability (Keohane 2001). In line with this call, increasing number of studies have produced on the accountability mechanisms in global governance that involve various actors such as the states, international organizations, NGOs, and multilateral corporations (Grant and Keohane 2005; Woods 2001; Hawkins, Lake, Nielson, Tierney 2006; Koenig-Archibugi 2010).

Above developments in the accountability literature suggest a double-edged nature of the concept. On the one hand, accountability can be a useful unifying concept that cuts across regime types, national-international divides, and different types of political institutions within a country. Accountability, as one of the essential principles of governance in divergent settings, may be able to provide a synthesized way of looking at politics, which other key terms such as democracy may not. On the other hand, however, its omnipresent nature may pose a danger of “concept stretching” (Sartori 1970). Indeed, those who have made close scrutiny of the accountability concept have characterized the term as a “garbage can filled with good intentions”(Bovens, 2005: 184), “chameleon-like”(Sinclair 1995), and “ever expansive”(Mulgan 2000). As Mainwaring (Mainwaring 2003: 6) notes, accountability is a “far-from consensual” concept.

In light of this situation, how can we define the concept in a manner that can reasonably distinguish accountability from those that are not? In the reminder of this paper, we address this question by first focusing on the components of accountability, followed by the examination of agents of accountability.

2. The Components of Accountability
Before discussing what comprises the concept of accountability, several background settings need to be provided. First, we are only concerned with accountability as political mechanisms, but not accountability as a virtue. As Bovens (2010) points out, these are two major usages of the concept. As a mechanism, accountability refers to the existing rules and organizations that entail components of accountability. As a virtue, accountability means a set of behavioral standards or desirable state of affairs, and often used as a rhetorical tool. In this paper, we are only concerned with the former. Second, we call the actors involved in accountability relations as accountability-holder and
accountability-holdee. Some authors have preferred to call these the principal and the agent (e.g. Moreno, Crisp, and Shugart 2003; Lindberg 2009). We do not adopt the principal-agent terminology because we consider that the relationships between the two do not always fall into the realm of principal-agent relationships. For example, the ombudsman, which is usually considered as one of the accountability mechanisms, is not a principal to the institutions that they audit. In other words, they are not in the position to delegate authority to government institutions.

To define accountability, we need to specify what comprises the relationship between accountability holder and holdee so that it can be appropriately considered that the latter is accountable to the former. In other words, what are components of accountability mechanism?

The major literature on accountability seems to be in consensus, albeit roughly, that answerability and sanction are the two core components of accountability. Answerability refers to the obligation of accountability-holdee inform about their decisions, explain or justify why such decisions are made. From the viewpoint of accountability-holders, they have the right to demand such information and explanation (Schedler 1999, 14-15). Sanction refers to rewarding good and punishing bad behavior of the accountability-holdee. Dismissal, demotion, reduced salary, fines, and/or imprisonment are the examples of negative sanctions, and hiring, re-hiring, promotion, and/or increased compensation are cases of positive sanctions. These are examples of formal sanctions. While same scholars include informal type of sanctions such as the loss of face or reputations as part of the concept of sanction (e.g. Bovens 2007), for the sake of tractability, we are only concerned with formal/legal sanctions.

However, scholars disagree in terms of precise treatment of these two components. For instance, some consider that sanction should be the only component,
while others view two are both necessary components. Table 1 summarizes the points of contention.

[Table 1 around here]

Those who adopt the principal-agent view of politics consider that sanction is the main component of accountability. Answerability appears to be a self-evident precondition for effective sanctioning, but the studies in this camp usually provide little mention about its role. Fearon (1999, 55) provides a succinct definition based on this perspective: 18

*We say that one person, A, is accountable to another, B, if two conditions are met. First, there is an understanding that A is obliged to act in some way on behalf of B. Second, B is empowered by some formal institution or perhaps informal rules to sanction or reward A for his/her activities or performance in this capacity.*

The basic premise of this conception is to see the relationship among actors as that of principal and agent, in the sense that the principal delegates authority to the agent on behalf of the principal in exchange for some kind of compensation for the agent. The agent, in return, would be sanctioned if he or she does not satisfy the principal, or rewarded in the case of satisfactory performance. More specifically, scholars adopting the principal-agent framework usually consider the settings that involve voters as the principal and elected officials as the agent. While answerability is not explicitly excluded from the components of accountability, the crucial point is that without sanction, a relationship cannot be called that of accountability.

Philp (2009), in opposing the principal-agent view of accountability, argues that the core element of accountability should be limited to answerability, and that sanction is not a necessary condition but only a “contingent condition” (ibid, 30). In his view, what can appropriately called accountability relationships are not necessarily

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18 Similarly, Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes (1999, 10) defines: “governments are ‘accountable’ if citizens can discern representative from unrepresentative governments and can sanction them appropriately. Retaining in office those incumbents who perform well and ousting from office those who do not.“
principal-agent relations that assume a bilateral relationship between the principal and the agent who serve the interest of the principal. To support this point, he gives the example of teachers: they are supposed to serve the interest of their students, but the students are not the principal to the teachers. Thus he defines accountability as:

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A \text{ is accountable with respect to } M \text{ when some individual, body or institution, } Y, \text{ can require } A \text{ to inform and explain/justify his or her conduct with respect to } M \text{ (ibid, 32).}
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A third type of accountability definition considers that fulfilling either answerability or sanction, or having both, all qualified to be an accountability relationship. Schedler (1999, 17) best elaborates this position.

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A \text{ is accountable to } B \text{ when } A \text{ is obliged to inform } B \text{ about } A\text{'s (past or future) actions and decision, to justify them, and to suffer punishment in the case of eventual misconduct.}
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He calls accountability as a two-dimensional concept composed of accountability and enforcement (sanction), and argues that it exhibits the characteristic of a “radical concept” as opposed to “classical concept” in the sense that even when one of its components are lacking, the object (accountability mechanism in this case) can appropriately be called as the concept in question.\(^\text{19}\) Fox (2007, 668-669) also consider that answerability and sanction can independently constitute accountability, calling the former as soft accountability and the latter as hard accountability.

The forth type of conceptualization considers that both answerability and sanctions are necessary components. Lindberg (2009, 8)’s definition is a good example in this camp. He maintains that the defining characteristics of accountability are as follows:

1. An agent or institution who is to give an account (A for agent);
2. An area, responsibilities, or domain subject to accountability (D for domain);

\(^\text{19}\) For the radical and classical concept, see Collier and Mahon 1993. In our reading of Collier and Mahon, however, the way Schedler characterize accountability does not qualify as a radical concept, because there is no “radical” (i.e., an element that is always included) component.
3. An agent or institution to whom A is to give account (P for principal);
4. The right of P to require A to inform and explain/justify decisions with regard to D; and;
5. The right of P to sanction A if A fails to inform and/or explain/justify decisions with regard to D.  

Similar to Manin et al. (1999), this definition adopts the assumption that a principal-agent relationship exists between the actors/institutions interacting, but unlike the strictly principal-agent based definition, it explicitly states that answerability is another necessary component. Scholars who conceptualize accountability in this manner consider that the scope of accountability to be broader than the mere voter-politician relations, but expand it to include the relationship within bureaucracy and/or across state institutions.

Above discussion identifies four different definitions of accountability depending on how the two components are combined. How can we resolve the difference? More importantly, how can we provide, in a reasonably clear manner, a useful definition that can distinguish accountability mechanisms from those that are not? Our review indicates that there are at least two points of contention. First, scholars disagree on the point whether or not to include answerability. Those who strictly adopt principal-agent view of politics appear to neglect, although do not deny, the importance of answerability and only note sanction as the necessary component of accountability (e.g. Fearon 1999). We argue that answerability should be included as a necessary component of accountability for two reasons. First, given the etymology, which is that the original meaning of the word is “to give account,” excluding answerability component would be abandoning the essence of this concept. The second reason why we should not exclude answerability is that there are real-world institutions that embody

20 Richard Mulgan (2000, 10) offers a similar definition: “the full core sense of accountability thus includes the right of the account-holder to investigate and scrutinize the actions of the agent by seeking information and explanations and the right to impose remedies and sanctions. Moreno et al. also offer this type of definition in stating that accountability is best understood as a concept that refers “not only to ‘answerability’ for one’s actions…but also to sanctions (2003, 80). But unlike Lindberg and Mulgan, they consider that only those relationships that can be seen as principal-agent relations (i.e. involving delegation) can be called accountability relations. Thus they call what others called horizontal accountability (e.g. intra-state mechanisms of checks and balances) as horizontal exchange.
only answerability component and still widely referred to as accountability institutions. Examples include the ombudsman (Gregory and Giddings 2000) and truth commissions (Rotberg and Thompson 2000). Indeed, we argue that answerability is the necessary—or “radical” (Collier and Mahon 1993)—component in the concept of accountability.

The second point of contention is about the treatment of sanction. In Philp’s definition, sanction component is absent, although he somewhere else states that sanction is a “contingent conditions” (2007, 30). In other definitions reviewed above, sanction is a necessary condition (e.g. Fearon 1999; Lindberg 2009), or a part of either-or condition (Schelder 1999). Is sanction a necessary condition? We consider it is not. Treating this as a necessary component means that we need to discard institutions such as the ombudsman and truth commission from the analyses of accountability. This limitation does not appear justifiable, given the prevalent notion that the Ombudsmen and truth commissions are one type of accountability mechanisms. Is sanction an either-or condition? That is, does sanction alone constitute the concept of accountability without answerability? We maintain it does not. For example, election is the most commonly cited example of sanction. If we only take out the act of voting, it may be a pure mechanism of sanction. However, if we consider election to include pre-election campaigning and inter-election period of media scrutiny, answerability component is an indispensable part of election. Indeed, studies on election as a mechanism of accountability usually consider the inter-election period as part of the model (e.g. Basely 2007), which in turn indicate that answerability component is implicitly addressed in the studies that claim to focus on sanction mechanism of elections. In addition to elections, Schedler (1999, 18) notes that the case of Indonesia’s Suharto being removed from office through street demonstration is an example of sanction-only type of accountability. He is correct in saying that demonstrators did not request any explanation from the long-term dictator but just wanted to sanction. However, this is not an institutionalized mechanism but a single-event, thus this example does not meet the scope conditions of accountability. In short, we consider that accountability mechanism does not function without having answerability component.

The forgoing discussion leads us to view sanction as a secondary, but not necessary, characteristics of accountability. In this light, we offer the following definition.
A is accountable to B when A is obliged to provide explanations about A’s past or future activities, and in addition, B can impose positive or negative sanction A’s activities.

“Obliged” here refers to two situations. First, A is institutionally mandated to inform B about A’s activities. For example, Access to Information (ATI) laws explicitly provides that the government agencies are accountable to citizens by legal mandates. Second, A is obligated to provide explanation when it is considered appropriate to do so within society. Electoral laws usually do not have any legal provision that politicians should provide explanation about their activities, but it is generally viewed as politicians’ obligation to do so. Also, the object of explanation by A includes activities of the past or future, or both.

Our definition treats accountability as a “radical concept.” Here, answerability is the radical component of the accountability concept, that is, the necessary condition to be met all the time, and sanction is the secondary component that may or may not be present. Our definition is similar to what Philp (2009) discusses in his article, although his definition per se does not accurately state his position concerning sanction. Ours does. Further, this conception treats accountability as a one-dimensional concept, rather than two-dimensional as argued by Schelder (1999), since we do not consider sanction as a necessary component. We also call the accountability mechanisms or institutions that only address answerability soft accountability, and the mechanisms that involve both answerability and sanction as hard accountability. Table 2 illustrates our definition.

3. The Agents of Accountability
As argued earlier, the agent of accountability is no longer limited to voters who control elected officials by rewarding and punishing based on their policy performances. In

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21 Fox (2007a) uses a similar terminology, but his definition of hard accountability and ours are different. Fox equates hard accountability to sanction, while our conception of hard accountability combines both answerability and sanction.
addition to this agent of electoral accountability, the roles of other agents have loomed large in the literature of accountability. More specifically, intra-state organizations are an agent of generating the horizontal mechanism of accountability. The mechanism includes oversight agencies, legislative oversight, judicial review, truth commissions, and ombudsman (state-appointed). Moreover, non-state organizations such as civil society actors/non-state organizations such as NGOs and mass media are an agent of societal accountability. The agents exercise the societal mechanism of demanding accountability through social auditing, citizens’ council, ombudsmen, media, social movements, and participatory budgeting. Finally, international actors are an agent of international accountability, which includes foreign government, supra-national organizations such as the European Union, and international organizations. The mechanism of generating international accountability functions in two directions. On the one hand, these international agents demand aid conditionality and accountability for domestic political actors. On the other hand, domestic actors including government and societal actors exert accountability pressures for international actors.

In short, we identify four agents of accountability: voters (the agent of electoral accountability), non-state organizations (the agent of societal accountability), intra-state organizations (horizontal accountability), and state/international actors (the agent of international accountability). As discussed in the previous section, each type of agents is further classified by the types of components of accountability: soft accountability and hard accountability. The relationship between the types of agents, components, and accountability mechanisms are summarized in Table 3. How each agent exercises the mechanisms of accountability is illustrated in Figure 2. We will discuss in more detail below how each type of agent generates the mechanism of accountability.

Voters as an Agent of Electoral Accountability

Traditionally, elections have been considered to be a primary mechanism of generating accountability (Powell 2000). Voters are the agent of this accountability mechanism by rewarding good and punishing bad performances of elected officials at times of elections. Basically, this line of argument assumes restrospective voting. Office-seeking
politicians intend to be reelected, and therefore are motivated to be more responsive to the electorate, because they punish or reward the incumbents based on the performances politicians give while they are in office (Downs 1957; Fiorina 1981; Key 1966). In order to judge the incumbents’ performances, voters need to have sufficient information. Electoral competition improves electoral accountability because both voters and the opposition make a credible threat to incumbents’ political survival. It creates “institutionalized opportunities for the opposition to be represented and to monitor the government in order to check the power of the executive” (Beer 2003, 21). This greater representation allows the opposition to gain more accurate information about the government policies and thus disseminate it to the voters (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999, 48). Thus, electoral competition is expected to overcome the information asymmetry between politicians and voters through enabling the opposition to monitoring and disclosing information about incumbents’ behavior, which improves voters’ ability to hold elected officials more accountable to those who elect them.

However, previous works unravel the following shortcomings pertaining to electoral accountability. First, elections occur only intermittently and thus do not provide voters with a tool of controlling politicians’ behavior in the periods between elections (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2000). Second, as mentioned earlier, the problem of information asymmetry between voters and politicians is intrinsic to electoral competition (Cheibub and Przeworski 1999; Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes 1999). Third, institutional complexity obscures the clarity of responsibility for government performances, which limits the effectiveness of electoral accountability that voters exercise through making vote choices based on retrospective judgment of politicians’ performances (Powell and Witten 1993). More specifically, institutional factors, such as minority governments, coalition governments, and divided governments, are more likely to diffuse responsibility and thus attenuate anti-incumbent voting (Anderson 2007). In other words, the effectiveness of electoral accountability is contingent upon the specific political context in which this mechanism works.

These shortcomings of electoral accountability is more salient in new democracies, in which democratic institutions are usually underdeveloped and the principle of democratic representation does not work to the same extent as that of advanced democracies. In particular, socioeconomic inequality is supposed to undermine electoral accountability and democratic representation. Latin America and
Africa are typical examples. In these regions, enhanced political inclusion (universal suffrage) coexists with deep social exclusion (Karl 2003). Persistent inequality and poverty evidences lack of serious commitment of policy makers to the interest of the poor, a group which constituted a large part of the population. Traditionally, taxation and spending have been regressive in favor of the wealthy and middle class at the expense of the poor, which suggests that elections have not translated the majority’s demands into policy outputs (ibid.). This is partly due to the fact that, assuming that poverty causes a low level of education, voters may lack the ability to process relevant information, which prevents them from accurately assessing incumbents’ performances and thus failing to punish those who make and implement policies unfavorable to them.

Given such skewed representation and weak electoral accountability, the non-electoral form of mobilization works as an effective supplementary mechanism of representing popular demand through demonstration, media coverage, and protest. While the mechanism of electoral accountability is certainly the primary impetus to hold elected officials cater to voters’ interests, societal or non-state actors other than voters exercise another type of vertical accountability, that is, societal accountability, through mounting societal pressures on the interest calculation of office-seeking politicians.

**Non-State Organizations as an Agent of Societal Accountability**

According to Larry Diamond, civil society is defined as “the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules” (Diamond 1999, 221). This organized civil society effectively exerts societal pressure to hold elected officials accountable, which is so-called societal accountability (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2000, 150). Furthermore, as democratization widens political space from a realm solely for elites to a space for the mass public, it is expected that independent societal or non-state actors will have a greater incentive and ability to check, monitor, and constrain the abuse of power by state actors and thus hold politicians to accountable to all citizens. More specifically, the agents of societal accountability include the media, social movements, and civic associations including non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As discussed in more detail below, these agents attempt to enhance government accountability through diverse mechanisms such as participatory budgeting,
social auditing, citizens’ council, ombudsmen, and media.

The mechanisms of societal accountability have the following advantages relative to electoral accountability. First, they can put pressure for government to hold accountable to citizens “between elections” and are not confined by “fixed calendars” (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2000, 151). Second, compared to formal oversight institutions, the societal mechanisms can activate “on demand”, because they can perform oversight even if they are neither supported by constitutional entitlements or majoritarian principle (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2003, 310). Borrowing an often cited analogy from McCubbins and Schwartz, formal oversight functions as a police patrol, whereas social accountability serves as a fire alarm (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984). 22

According to Catalina Smulovitz and Enrique Peruzzotti, due to this flexible nature, the societal mechanisms are able to articulate the demands of popular sectors which may not be represented or responded by formal institutions (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2003, 310).

Smulovitz and Peruzzotti summarize three primary functions of the societal accountability: (a) “[e]xposition and denunciation of wrongdoings,” (b) imposition of symbolic sanctions on incumbents, and (c) “[a]ctivation of horizontal mechanisms” (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2003, 311-312). These actions are taken by such agents as civic association, social movements, NGOs, ombudsmen, and media (Smulovitz and Peruzzotti 2000, 153). In our terminology, these belong to the category of “soft accountability,” which is characterized by answerability and but not usually accompanied by “legal” sanction due to its informal nature (Table 3).

More specifically, social movements and media serve as (a), (b), and (c) by attracting public attention to wrongdoings by politicians. NGOs and ombudsmen play a role primarily in (a) and (b) through investigating government activities and detecting the misconduct of incumbents. Such monitoring and oversight by societal actors is called “social auditing.” Governments often create “citizens’ council” consisting of experts in specific policy area, which serve as a consulting body to government officials. If they are sufficiently independent of the officials who appoint them, those experts can serve as (a) and (b).

22 In addition to the works by Smulovitz and Peruzzotti, this analogy is frequently employed by the literature on societal accountability (e.g., Fox 2007a).
In addition to soft accountability, we argue that there is a societal mechanism which may impose formal sanctions as well, and thus is classified as hard accountability: participatory budgeting. There have been a growing number of regions which introduced this alternative method of making public budgetary decisions. Societal actors are directly involved in the budget work, which allows them to represent their interest and also monitor how public money is actually spent. Because the process of public budget making is formal in nature and citizens’ participation is supposed to enforce compliance with public servants, those who fail to implement the budget are subject to formal sanctions.

**Intra-State Organizations as an Agent of Horizontal Accountability**

In addition to electoral and societal accountability, the mechanism of accountability exercised by different intra-state organization generates the so-called horizontal accountability. Scott Mainwaring classifies the relationships of “intra-state accountability” into three types (Mainwaring 2003, 20). The first type of mechanism forms a principal-agent one, in which “a principal commissions an agent to perform some function and has ultimate control over that agent” (Ibid.). The primary focus is on the control over bureaucracy by elected officials, which has been extensively studied mostly on the case of the United States (e.g., Epstein and O’Halloran 1999; Huber and Shipan 2002; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). The second type is inter-branch relationships, which is stipulated by the legal system of the checks and balances between state actors. The inter-branch monitoring and oversight has also been studied to a great extent, again, largely on the presidential systems. For instance, while the legislature can demand impeachment of and form investigative committees for presidents who commit wrongdoing (Baumgartner and Kada 2003; Pérez-Liñán 2007), presidents can exercise the veto over the legislative bill (Cameron 2000). The judicial branch conducts judicial review over legislative and executive behavior, and has the ultimate sanctioning power over misconduct of public officials (Epstein and Knight 1998). Third, intra-state accountability is exercised by oversight agencies as discussed

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23 Porto Alegre in Brazil is often cited as a successful case of this citizens’ initiative in budget making (Abers 2000; Avritzer 2009). Recently, some countries in Africa initiated this innovative budgeting (McNeil and Malena 2010).

24 Baum (2011) is an exception. She provides a book-length project on the cases of East Asia.

25 There have been an increasing number of studies on the judicial politics of new democracies,
below. Although their independent status is protected by the law, the degree of autonomy from state actors significantly varies.

Employing our terminology, the first and second types belong to the category of hard accountability, which is accompanied by both answerability and legal/formal sanctions. The third type is further classified into hard accountability and soft accountability. Oversight agencies include accounting agencies, electoral administrative institutions, anti-corruption agencies, ombudsmen (state-appointed), and truth commissions, etc. Generally, the former three agencies have sanctioning powers over misconduct, the latter two play a role in investigating public officials’ wrongdoing such as the violation of human rights. Thus, while the former subtype exercises hard accountability, the latter subtype is an agent of soft accountability.

Although studies on the control over bureaucracy (the first type) and the inter-branch relationships (the second type) abound, the mechanism of intra-state accountability by oversight agencies (the third type) is still understudied. An important seminal work gives detailed case studies on how oversight institutions that administer elections, judicial systems, anti-corruption agencies, and central banks enforce “self-restrains”: state actors are required to subject themselves to control by other state actors (Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner 1999).26 There are only a handful of works on the origins and functions of electoral administrative institutions (Ackerman 2007; Eisenstadt 2004; Hartlyn, McCoy, and Mustillo 2008). Studies on the politics of auditing agencies are even fewer (Ackerman 2007; Melo, Pereira, and Figueiredo 2009; Santiso 2009). The same are works on ombudsmen.27 Thus, further studies are expected to explore the variation of oversight agencies as well as the conditions under which these institutions are more likely to develop.

**International/Transnational Actors as an Agent of International Accountability**

Agents of accountability are not confined to domestic area. They exercise pressure for generating accountability across borders. These agents include foreign government,

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26 Another exception is Grzymala-Busse’s on the development of oversight institutions in post-communist democracies (2007).
27 Most of the studies on ombudsmen are conducted by legal scholars. Kucsko-Stadlmayer (2008) and Buck, Kirkham, and Thompson (2011) provide comprehensive overview of ombudsmen systems.
international organizations, supra-national organizations such as the European Union, and international NGOs. As figure 2 shows, the directions of such pressure for enhancing accountability are two-fold. On the one hand, these external agents exert accountability pressure for domestic political actors. For instance, in providing financial assistance a country in financial crisis, foreign governments, international organizations, and supra-national organizations demand government transparency and accountability as a condition that the lending countries are expected to comply with (Magen and Morlino 2008; Whitehead 1996; Youngs 2001). International NGOs, which are allied with domestic NGOs through transnational networks, press public officials of a targeted country in advocacy of human rights, environment protection, and women’s rights (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Alternatively, they may activate societal accountability exercised by domestic NGOs, through forming civil society coalitions (Brooks and Fox 2002). On the other hand, the reverse direction is also identified. Domestic actors, including both government and societal actors, monitor the behavior of international organization and demand accountability. For instance, academics and/or domestic NGOs may evaluate operations and impacts of assistance programs by international lending organizations such as the World Bank (Fox and Aranda 1996). Member countries may demand accountability and transparency in collective decision making by the European Union.

The aforementioned international agents entail both components of hard accountability and soft accountability. For instance, when international organizations impose aid conditionality on the recipient countries, they exercise hard accountability because the failure to comply with the conditionality would lead to formal sanctions. Conversely, international financial organizations such as the International Monetary Fund requires that the lending countries follow disclosure policies, such pressure for transparency is more likely not associated with punishment in case of non-compliance. Although the external pressure for accountability has become far from negligible, the accountability mechanism linking external and domestic agents is much underexplored.28 Further studies are expected to deepen our understanding of how this mechanism works in both directions: how domestic actors enhance international

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28 Exceptions are Collier (2009) and Pevehouse (2005), for instance.
accountability, and how international actors exert pressure to improve government accountability from outside.

4. Research Agenda

As mentioned earlier, both advanced and new democracies share a concern as to how to improve government accountability. Four types of agents – voters, non-state organizations, intra-state organizations, and international actors – generate both hard and soft accountability. We will identify below several research agenda which should be undertaken in order to enhance our understanding of the accountability mechanism and to search for a comprehensive analysis which explains the development of all these mechanisms.

First, further empirical analyses of the causes of some accountability mechanism are required. More specifically, the traditional mechanisms of accountability – electoral and the first and second types of horizontal accountability (principal-agent and inter-branch relationships respectively) – have been extensively studied. However, further studies should be conducted on other agents of accountability such as oversight agencies (the third type of horizontal accountability), non-state organizations (societal accountability), supra-national organizations such as EU (international accountability) are much needed. In emerging democracies in particular, there has been an important political movement toward establishing independent electoral management bodies to ensure free and fair elections as well as detect electoral fraud. Furthermore, in the past decades, many countries have established freedom of information laws, which is a precondition for enhancing horizontal accountability, because only ensuring access to information enables citizens to monitor governments’ behavior and thus exert the control over government policies (Pirker 2006, 13). Despite this growing importance, there are only a few studies on political process underlying the adoption of the law. Mapping how each components and agent of accountability has been institutionalized in each country would be the first and important to task before elaborating empirical research.

Second, we need to explore the interaction between the four mechanisms of accountability. Those mechanisms have been separately studied, employing distinctive

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analytical framework, although they share the same concern and concept of accountability. For the following reasons, we need to elaborate a comprehensive analytical framework that could straddle these areas of studies on accountability. Currently, it is a world-wide trend to advance reform to strengthen the four accountability mechanisms identified in this study. From this simultaneous trend, it would be reasonable to suppose that distinct mechanisms interact with each other in advancing the reform process (Chang, Golden, and Hill 2010; McAdam and Tarrow 2010; Moreno, Crisp, and Shugart 2003; O'Donnell 2006). For instance, when democratizations motivate both individual voters and organized civil society to control governments’ behavior, the mechanisms of electoral and societal accountability become more effective. They may augment public pressure to establish oversight agencies. Thus, in order to identify general conditions leading to successful accountability reform, it is an imperative task to construct analytical framework that integrates previous works on the four distinct mechanisms.

Third, we need to conduct cross-regionally comparative studies, based on which to construct a general theory of accountability reform. In other words, comparing the development of specific accountability mechanism across different regions would help draw useful insights for this purpose. To date, the existing research on accountability is largely confined to those in the advanced democracies. However, in the context of democratization, there have been an increasing number of studies on the development of accountability institutions in new democracies (e.g., Mainwaring 2003). We suggest that conducting cross-national or cross-regional studies, including both advanced and new democracies, will help determine explanatory factors leading to the development and reform of accountability institutions in general.

Fourth, alongside examining the causes of accountability reform, we should embark on research regarding the consequences of the accountability institutions. Although there has been an increasing number of works on the consequences, further efforts are required to address the following questions, which are relevant to the real-world problems facing a great many countries in the works. How does the

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development of accountability mechanisms advance crisis management such as disaster or reconstruction after the crisis? How do the mechanisms of accountability improve or deteriorate distribution of social spending across regions and generations (that is, distributive consequences of accountability)? Do the activated mechanisms of accountability lead to greater protection of human rights in post-transition countries? Do accountability institutions, oversight agencies in particular, really constrain politicians’ incentive to use public resources for private gains? These are only a few questions which are still underexplored. Taken together, we stress that further studies are needed to elucidate what the cause and consequences of accountability reforms are.

Finally, as argued in section 1, while most of the studies on accountability focus on the cases of democracy, either advanced or emerging, there are some studies which scrutinize the mechanisms of accountability in non-democratic regimes: the works on “reciprocal accountability” of the Soviet Union (Roeder 1993), on accountability in local government of China (Tsai 2007), and on intra-state design of accountability institutions in China and Vietnam (Abrami, Malesky, and Zheng 2008). The former works implicitly assume that accountability is a concept inherent to democracy. However, those emerging literature poses a question as to whether accountability is a concept specific to certain type of political regime. In other words, does accountability also exist in authoritarian regimes such as China? If it does, what kinds of mechanisms, components, and agents of accountability are identified? Are they different from those of democracy? Addressing these questions helps to further understand the nature of accountability towards building a general theory of accountability reform.

Conclusion
In this paper, we have discussed how to conceptualize accountability, what the components and agents of accountability are, what we need to study in order to advance out understanding of accountability reforms which are undergoing in the world. In the recent decades, a renewed attention has been cast to accountability in various areas of scholarly research such as democratization and principal-agent theories, as well as international organizations such as the World Bank, EU, and OECD in light of good governance. The development of studies on accountability expanded the scope of analysis by elucidating the role of new agents such as intra-state organization and
international organizations in enhancing political accountability. However, in order to avoid “concept stretching” problem (Sartori 1970), we have scrutinized accountability by focusing on the components and agents.

In defining accountability, we need to understand what the relationship between accountability holders and holdees is. The existing works largely assume that “answerability” and “sanctions” comprise the core of accountability. The “answerability” means that accountability holdees are supposed to disclose information about their decision making and give an account of the rationale behind such decisions. On the other hand, accountability holders have the right to demand such information and explanation. The “sanctions” are imposed by accountability holders. They can reward or sanction accountability holdees, judging from their behavior. We argue that answerability is the radical component, and sanction is the secondary. In other words, we consider that accountability mechanism should have the answerability components, but can function without having the component of sanction. Furthermore, we have denominated the accountability mechanism that involve both components as hard accountability, whereas the accountability mechanism only with sanction as soft accountability.

As for the agents of accountability, we identify four types of agents, each of which exercise distinct mechanisms of accountability: voters for electoral accountability, non-state organizations for societal accountability, intra-state organizations for horizontal accountability, and international/transnational actors for international accountability. First, traditionally, elections have been considered a primary mechanism of accountability. Voters exercise hard accountability accompanied with both answerability and sanction. Second, non-state organizations, such as NGOs, mass media, and social movement, functions as the mechanism of societal accountability, through diverse mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, social auditing, citizens’ council, ombudsmen, and media. Except participatory budgeting, the agents exercise soft accountability which only addresses the answerability components. Third, three types of intra-state relationships activates the function of horizontal accountability: principal-agent relationships in which elected officials control bureaucracy, inter-branch relationships stipulated by the legal system of checks and balances, and independent oversight agencies. Most of the intra-state organizations exercise hard accountability, but a part of oversight agencies such as truth commissions and ombudsmen are the
agent of soft accountability. Finally, the agents of international accountability include foreign governments, supra-national organizations such as EU, and international organizations and NGOs. They entail both components of hard accountability and soft accountability. However, international NGOs only have the mechanism of soft accountability.

Although electoral and horizontal accountability (principal-agent relationships and inter-branch relationships) have been extensively studies, further research is required to better understand causal mechanisms behind the development of various accountability mechanisms. First, further empirical analysis of the causes of the development of oversight agencies, and societal and international mechanisms are needed. Second, although different mechanisms of accountability have been studied separately, we need to explore the interaction between them, in order to identify general conditions leading to successful accountability reform. Third, it is necessary to conduct a cross-regional comparative analysis, based on which to construct a general theory of accountability reform. Fourth, we should produce further studies on the consequences of the accountability institutions, such as corruption, equity in redistribution, human rights protection. Finally, we need to examine whether accountability is a regime-specific concept. Although there has been a growing number of scholarly works which address these research agendas, they are still at an incipient stage and further scholarly endeavor is expected.
Table 1. The Components of Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answerability</th>
<th>Sanction</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No mention</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Fearon 1999; Manin et al. 1999; Basely 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Philp 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes and/or No</td>
<td>Yes and/or No</td>
<td>Shedler 1999; Fox 2007; Goetz and Jenkins 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lindberg 2009; Moreno et al. 2003; Mulgan 2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled by the authors.
Table 2. One-dimensional Concept of Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Answerability</th>
<th>Sanction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soft accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard accountability</td>
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Source: Compiled by the authors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agents of accountability</th>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>Non-state organizations</th>
<th>Intra-state organizations</th>
<th>International actors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elections</td>
<td>- Participatory budgeting</td>
<td>- Aid conditionality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Answerability + sanction (hard accountability)</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Oversight agencies</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Legislative oversight</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Judicial review</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Answerability (soft accountability)</td>
<td>- Social auditing</td>
<td>- Truth commissions</td>
<td>- Pressure for transparency and accountability reform</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Citizens’ council</td>
<td>- Ombudsmen (state-appointed)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Ombudsmen</td>
<td>- Media</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Social Movements</td>
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Table 3. Accountability Mechanisms
Figure 1. The Number of Academic Articles and Books Containing “Accountability”

Source: compiled by the authors.
Figure 2. Four Mechanisms of Accountability
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