

## Accountability and Abuses of Power in World Politics

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**D**ebates about globalization have centered on calls to improve accountability to limit abuses of power in world politics. How should we think about global accountability in the absence of global democracy? Who should hold whom to account and according to what standards? Thinking clearly about these questions requires recognizing a distinction, evident in theories of accountability at the nation-state level, between “participation” and “delegation” models of accountability. The distinction helps to explain why accountability is so problematic at the global level and to clarify alternative possibilities for pragmatic improvements in accountability mechanisms globally. We identify seven types of accountability mechanisms and consider their applicability to states, NGOs, multilateral organizations, multinational corporations, and transgovernmental networks. By disaggregating the problem in this way, we hope to identify opportunities for improving protections against abuses of power at the global level.

**T**he interdependence of states, globalization of business, expansion of the scope and authority of multilateral organizations, and rapid increases in the number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have heightened concerns about the way power is used and abused on the world stage. Controversy about globalization pivots around the twin issues of accountability and democracy. A crucial feature of representative democracy is that those who govern are held accountable to the governed. If governance above the level of the nation-state is to be legitimate in a democratic era, mechanisms for appropriate accountability need to be institutionalized. Yet these mechanisms cannot simply replicate, on a larger scale, the familiar procedures and practices of democratic states.

We seek in this article both to explain why accountability is so problematic at the global level and to suggest pragmatic improvements in accountability mechanisms. Our analysis considers accountability as only one of several ways in which power can be constrained, examines nondemocratic accountability mechanisms as well as democratic ones, and scrutinizes the analogy between global and domestic power structures in order to specify the nature of the problem of accountability in global politics more clearly. We distinguish two basic concepts of accountability: delegation and participation. We explore accountability mechanisms of both types that could be utilized to regulate

global powers in a manner compatible with democratic principles (see Held 1995 and Young 2000, chap 7).

Our analysis helps to resolve a puzzle that is posed by conventional views of accountability. The prevailing view in the international relations literature of multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO), is that these entities are weak relative to states. But critics of globalization view such organizations as relatively uncontrolled, criticizing them as “unaccountable” while celebrating the democratic accountability of states (Dahl 1999). Thus, multinational organizations are characterized as both weak and unchecked at the same time. We argue that multilateral organizations are in fact accountable—indeed, more accountable in many respects than powerful states—but in ways quite different from those envisaged by observers who equate accountability with participation. Similarly, our analysis helps to explain why the parties to the debate over global accountability so often seem to be “talking past each other.” To officials of the World Bank, it is the NGOs who seem accountable to nobody, whereas the officers of the Bank must answer to their supervisors and ultimately to the states that empowered them. To the representatives of the NGOs, it is the World Bank that lacks accountability because it does not answer to those affected by its policies, the very people for whom the NGOs claim to speak. An agreement on the need for greater accountability will not resolve this disagreement without a consensus on what accountability entails.

*Accountability*, as we use the term, implies that some actors have the right to hold other actors to a set of standards, to judge whether they have fulfilled their responsibilities in light of these standards, and to impose sanctions if they determine that these responsibilities have not been met. Accountability presupposes a relationship between power-wielders and those holding them accountable where there is a general recognition of the legitimacy of (1) the operative standards for accountability and (2) the authority of the parties to the relationship (one to exercise particular powers and the other to hold them to account). The concept of accountability implies that the actors being held accountable

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have obligations to act in ways that are consistent with accepted standards of behavior and that they will be sanctioned for failures to do so.

Thus, not all constraints on abuses of power in world politics constitute mechanisms of accountability. Unilateral uses of force, though they are often described as “holding someone accountable,” do not qualify as accountability mechanisms in our sense. In the classical, European balance of power system,<sup>1</sup> the principal mechanism of constraint was, ultimately, coercion or the threat of coercion. States were the exclusive sources of legitimate authority, and though they could legally bind themselves through international treaties, if treaties were broken, states had to resort to self-help to assert their rights. States in a balance of power system are not “held accountable” in any meaningful sense, although they may be constrained by coercion or the threat thereof. Similarly, the economic interdependence of states creates constraints, but states that are bargaining for advantage on economic issues are not necessarily held accountable to one another. States in the nineteenth century engaged in bilateral tariff negotiations, confronting limits on their ability to achieve their objectives. But since they had undertaken no prior obligations by joining multilateral institutions, there was no accountability process involved.

There is another important mode of constraining the powerful that must be distinguished from accountability. “Checks and balances” are mechanisms designed to *prevent* action that oversteps legitimate boundaries by requiring the cooperation of actors with different institutional interests to produce an authoritative decision. Accountability mechanisms, on the other hand, always operate after the fact: exposing actions to view, judging and sanctioning them. The executive veto power in the U.S. Constitution is part of a system of checks and balances. The impeachment power is an accountability mechanism. Of course, though they always operate *ex post*, accountability mechanisms can exert effects *ex ante*, since the anticipation of sanctions may deter the powerful from abusing their positions in the first place.

At a minimum, institutions of governance should limit and constrain the potential for abuse of power. The problem of abuse of power is particularly serious in world politics, because even the minimal types of constraints found in domestic governments are absent on the global level. Not only is there no global democracy, but there is not even an effective constitutional system that constrains power in an institutionalized way, through mechanisms such as checks and balances. Lacking institutionalized checks and balances, the principal constraints in world politics are potential coercion (as in the balance of power) and the need for states and other actors to reach mutually beneficial agreements. But these constraints are quite weak in restraining powerful actors, and they are not institutionalized

in generally applicable rules. Accountability mechanisms of various kinds—whether strictly democratic or not—are therefore also required if abuses of power are to be limited in nonarbitrary ways that can be defended on ethical as well as practical grounds.

Thus, our focus in this article is on the role of accountability mechanisms in world politics. What kinds of accountability mechanisms are likely to be effective in constraining international organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF)? Should we think about accountability in the same way when considering powerful entities that are structured quite differently from multilateral organizations—multinational corporations, NGOs, transnational organizations, and states? How should we think about global accountability when there is no global democracy? Accountability mechanisms in world politics are not limited to those that are emphasized in participatory models of democracy, and even these mechanisms should be viewed, not in isolation, but in the context of other constraints on the abuse of power. How can understanding accountability at the level of the nation-state clarify the problem of accountability at the global level?

## TWO GENERAL MODELS OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR NATION-STATES

Accountability functions to expose and sanction two sorts of abuses: the unauthorized or illegitimate exercise of power and decisions that are judged by accountability holders to be unwise or unjust. In politics, ensuring accountability requires establishing institutions that provide information to those people trying to hold power-wielders accountable and that enable them to impose sanctions on the power-wielders. “To be accountable means to have to answer for one’s action or inaction, and depending on the answer, to be exposed to potential sanctions, both positive and negative” (Oakerson 1989, 114). Information and sanctions, however, are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for accountability. They presuppose norms of legitimacy that establish, not only the standards by which the use of power can be judged, but also who is authorized to wield power and who is properly entitled to call the power-wielders to account.

In an effort to clarify different forms of accountability, we describe two theoretical models of accountability. The distinction between them is grounded in alternative conceptions of the legitimacy of political authority, which have different implications for how accountability is understood. Each of the models represents a schematic distillation of a line of argument that has been developed over centuries. One can find similar views competing in debates between Federalists and Antifederalists over the U.S. Constitution, for example, as well as in contemporary debates over whether international organizations such as the World Bank should be held accountable to the states that authorized their creation or to poor people who are most affected by their policies. We have labeled the

<sup>1</sup> “A type of system for the conduct of relationships among states” that operates to restore equilibrium when it is threatened by a single state, or bloc of states, becoming overwhelmingly powerful (Claude 1962, 41–3).

**TABLE 1. Two General Models of Accountability for Nation-States**

Power-Wielders Regarded as	Who Is Entitled to Hold the Powerful Accountable?	
	<i>Those Affected by Their Actions—Participation</i>	<i>Those Entrusting Them with Powers—Delegation</i>
<i>Instrumental agents</i>	Ia. <b>“Direct democracy”</b> : Actions of power-wielders are what those affected (the people) instructed them to do in this contingency.	Ila. <b>Principal-Agent</b> : Power-wielders act as faithful agents of principals who empower them.
<i>Discretionary authorities</i>	Ib. <b>Populist</b> : Policies followed by the power-wielders lead to outcomes approved by those affected, which leads those affected to confer additional powers.	Ilb. <b>Trustee</b> : Power-wielders perform the duties of their offices faithfully.

models a “participation” model of accountability and a “delegation” model of accountability.<sup>2</sup>

Our two basic models differ fundamentally in their answer to the question: “Who is entitled to hold the powerful accountable?” In the participation model, the performance of power-wielders is evaluated by those who are affected by their actions. In the delegation model, by contrast, performance is evaluated by those entrusting them with powers. In addition, each model has two variants distinguished by different understandings of the relation between the powerful and the publics they are meant to serve. Power-wielders are viewed either as instrumental agents of the public or as authorities with discretion. The result is a 2 × 2 table, Table 1.

Both distinctions in the table are significant. The columns reflect the familiar distinction between democratic participation and populist theories, on the one hand, and theories emphasizing consent, legal authorization, and office, on the other. In the latter theories, it need not be the people as a whole, but could be some elite group or institution, that entrusts power-wielders with power. The rows distinguish between direction and control. As emphasized above, all institutional arrangements for accountability include an element of *ex post* control. In the second, “discretionary authorities,” row, reliance is placed entirely on such *ex post* mechanisms. Those who entrust authority to others do not expect to direct the power-wielders’ behavior beyond defining official duties. Instead, they expect to limit the abuse of power and control the power-wielders either through a system of checks and balances or through *ex post* monitoring and imposition of penalties (such as loss of office) when performance is not satisfactory. In the “instrumental agents” row, on the other hand, mechanisms to direct the actions of power wielders *ex ante* are also employed. Only when

the instructions given to agents are not obeyed is there a need for accountability mechanisms.<sup>3</sup>

We begin with the participation model in the first column of Table 1. A fundamental principle here is that, ideally, individuals ought to be free to make decisions for themselves, since nobody can both know and care for your interests as well or as much as you do. A second principle is that people should be treated equally. It follows that where collective decisions are required, each person ought to have an equal say. Legitimacy depends on full participation. Further, public power is legitimate only to the extent that decisions serve the interests of the people as a whole, which is interpreted to mean to the extent that the outcomes of decisions reflect what individuals desire. For these reasons, people with power ought to be accountable to those who are affected by their decisions.

On the basis of these principles, direct democracy could be defended as the ideal form of government, preferable to representative government in principle, though that is impossible in most circumstances for reasons of scale. For this reason, we refer to this model as “direct” democracy (Ia). In this model, as the closest approximation to the ideal, representatives ought to reflect their constituents’ interests and beliefs, and this is most likely when representatives are similar to their constituents demographically and when representative assemblies are large.<sup>4</sup> Referenda are desirable tools in this model, as are term limits and frequent elections. Executive officers of government are often seen as mere instrumental agents of the legislature with little leadership role. High levels of participation in politics and in governing institutions are considered highly desirable and serve as a direct accountability mechanism. Representatives and officeholders need to be called to account by the governed, who can have

<sup>2</sup> These terms are a kind of “shorthand,” and the reader should take their meaning from the discussion that follows. Terminology varies in discussions of models of democracy or representation. Contrast Dahl (1956), who speaks of “Madisonian democracy” and “populist democracy.” See Krouse 1982 for the tension between “elite” and “participatory” democracy in J. S. Mill’s writings. See also Arendt 1963, 237.

<sup>3</sup> Pitkin (1967, 146–47) makes a similar distinction between mandate and independence theories of representation.

<sup>4</sup> Similar ideas were expressed by the antifederalists during the contest over ratification of the U.S. Constitution; see Brutus, the Federal Farmer, and Melancton Smith, in Storing 1981, 39, 114–15, 336–37, 340–41, 344–45. For a contemporary description see Cook and Morgan 1971, 1–42.

some control over the decisions that affect their lives through political participation.<sup>5</sup>

The populist alternative (Ib) is also a form of government consistent with the underlying principles of the participation model, but one in which there is a much greater role for the political leader. In this model, the people entrust a leader or a party to speak for the interests of the people as a whole against groups in society that are understood to be “special interests.” Direct participation of the people in governing institutions is not seen as a primary goal. But the legitimacy of the party and its leader depends on the extent to which they can credibly speak for the people. Thus, the populist leader and party are held accountable to the public through frequent appeals to mobilized public opinion and through elections that serve as referenda on the leader’s or the party’s performance in office (Taggart 2000, esp. 65–66).

The delegation model and its variants (IIa and IIb), on the other hand, are grounded in the notion that power is legitimate only when it is authorized by the legitimating consent of those who delegate it. And since power is always delegated for a reason, it is legitimate only so long as it serves its original purposes, which, in the case of the nation, are the protection of rights and the pursuit of the public good. The act of delegation is what distinguishes authority from raw power. Nobody can claim authority over another on the basis of personal privilege, wealth, hereditary right, or superior force. Those in power hold offices with specified duties so that power is not personal but, instead, is associated with the authority of office. The central principle of accountability here, implied by this conception of political legitimacy, is that people with power ought to be accountable to those who have entrusted them with it. And the standard for recognizing abuses of power will be violations of that trust: acting beyond the authority of the office or in violation of its purposes (Locke [1690] 1980, esp. par. 149, 151).

According to the delegation model but not the participation model, representation is superior to direct democracy. One reason is that representation has advantages for accountability. It is often said that representation is advantageous because people can delegate their power to those most able to govern. It is less often noted that representation allows for a separation or distance between the governed and their governors that allows the former to call the latter to account. When particular powers are delegated to officeholders and representatives, it is clear whom to blame. And when the people are distanced from their representatives, they can judge their actions without being implicated in them themselves.<sup>6</sup>

Two conceptions of accountability are consistent with the principles of the delegation model. The first, borrowed from economic models of employer/

employee relations, is the principal–agent model (IIa) (Pollack 1997). Political officials (including elected representatives) are understood to be “employees” (“agents”) of their constituents or their executive superiors (“principals”). In principal–agent models, the principal’s preferences are taken as given, and the relationship is judged a failure if the agent deviates from them. In this understanding, accountability is ensured when agents have incentives to do what the principals want them to do. Agents are seen as instruments of the principal’s will, and they ought to act as the principal himself would if he held the position (Maravall 1999, 155).

Yet the relation of officeholder/public differs in important respects from the employee/employer relation. First, once appointed or elected, officeholders make decisions that govern members of the public; employees do not make rules to which their employers are subject. The power relations in the case of politics are therefore more complex (Rousseau [1762] 1988, I.6). Second, unlike most employees, when a politician is given a job, he or she is generally given a great deal of power and considerable discretion as to how to use it. Often, officeholders are entrusted with power on account of their superior expertise or judgment. They *ought* to exercise their discretion in performing their duties.<sup>7</sup> Principal–agent models are inappropriate, for example, when calling judges to account. Power is certainly delegated to judges, but they are not responsible for enacting the will of those who empower them; they have different sorts of official duties. In fact, one might say that among their duties is the duty to resist enacting the will of those who empowered them when to do so would bend or violate the law. In general, the principal–agent model sharply restricts the scope for leadership. It does not allow that the role of a leader could include defying the transitory popular will or forming people’s preferences in the direction of their true interests, obligations, or long-term good.

The trustee model of delegation (IIb), in contrast, presupposes that officials will use discretion. Hence, the implicit standard for abuse of power differs from that implied by the principal–agent model. Deviations of the agent’s actions from the principal’s desires would not necessarily constitute abuse of power. A representative or officeholder could defend an unpopular exercise of power as legitimate by showing that it both was within the officer’s jurisdiction and actually served the purposes for which he or she was authorized to act (Burke [1774] 1949). Accountability mechanisms consistent with this model are designed to ensure that officials exercise their discretion, which might be considerable, in accord with their official duties.

The two basic models, participation and delegation, lead to different strategies and mechanisms for accountability, because they are grounded in different notions of legitimacy. In the participation model, those affected hold power-wielders accountable directly through participation, whereas in the delegation

<sup>5</sup> See The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society (1962) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (2002) background paper.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton, Madison, and Jay (1787) 1982, nos. 10 and 49. See Grant and Grant 1981, 35–36.

<sup>7</sup> For an interesting discussion of “two logics of delegation,” agency and fiduciary, see Majone 2001.

model, those delegating power hold power-wielders accountable through a variety of mechanisms for judgment after the fact.

The two basic models of accountability can also lead to conflicting political judgments. For example, the IMF and the World Bank were created by governments, which delegated their powers to them, provide funding, and ensure creditworthiness. In their weighted voting systems, the major financial powers control the executive boards of these organizations. When senior officials of the World Bank, such as former chief economist Joseph Stiglitz, severely antagonize the U.S. Government, they are forced to resign.<sup>8</sup> This is as it should be where the delegation model of accountability operates. Yet at the same time, the World Bank (2000) acknowledges the importance of “empowerment” of poor people in order to increase the “accountability and responsiveness” of public sectors to them (9). The language of empowerment suggests a participatory model of accountability, the logic of which could easily be extended to imply more empowerment within the Bank itself for the people who are affected by its policies, whether they are represented through state leaders or NGOs.

There is a clear tension between the concept of a World Bank that is accountable to poor people and one that is accountable to the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury. Similarly, the IMF might be considered accountable to those whose money it is lending to take only reasonable risks, which leads to a policy of requiring structural adjustments. But it is also called to account for the effects of those structural adjustments within the countries accepting the conditions of IMF loans. The actual patterns of accountability facing the IMF and the World Bank combine practices justified on the basis of both delegation and participation models: practices which are often in tension with one another.

In liberal democratic states, practices based on these alternative models are often fused, and there is no tension between them. For instance, democratic elections are examples of both accountability through participation and accountability through judging the performance of one’s delegates. Thus the process of democratic elections can be endorsed readily as an effective mechanism for accountability by anyone holding any one of the four views articulated here. This convergence, however convenient in the context of liberal democracies, does not apply in contemporary world politics, since democratic elections are not viable mechanisms for accountability at the global level. Failure to distinguish the theoretical principles involved in these models has therefore become a source of confusion for the analysis of accountability in world politics. Maintaining the analytical distinctions among them should help to determine the extent to which domestic democratic accountability mechanisms are applicable to the problems of accountability in global politics.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN GLOBAL POLITICS

One way in which the delegation–participation distinction can help to clarify our thinking is indicated when we recognize that many power-wielders in world politics acquired their power without delegation. States, subunits of states, multinational firms, and NGOs were all created either without any act of authorization at all or without having been authorized to act by any set of entities even remotely representative of the world population as a whole. Only international organizations had their authority to act in the international arena explicitly conferred on them—in this case by states. Thinking that accountability is only relevant when authority has been delegated can lead observers to overlook the accountability deficits of those power-wielders, such as states, multinational firms, and NGOs, that do not depend for their existence on delegation.

On the other hand, thinking only about participation could lead to different forms of confusion. If one conceives of accountability solely in terms of its participatory democratic forms, one is apt to despair of the prospects for effective accountability in world politics. Since world democracy does not seem feasible, some commentators have seen a stark choice: between sacrificing the benefits of international cooperation for the sake of democracy, on the one hand, and accepting rule by nondemocratic and unaccountable international organizations, on the other (Dahl 1999). Other commentators, less pessimistically, hold to participatory democratic forms of accountability as the ideal, treating the problems of global accountability as directly analogous to domestic accountability (Falk and Strauss 2000).

But comprehensive programs to institute democratic accountability at the global level on the basis of an analogy with domestic democracy founder on the absence of a coherent and well-defined global public. At the domestic level, those affected by the power-wielders are generally understood to be those subject to the laws of the polity, so it is fairly easy to determine who has a right to participate. But having the right to participate in politics as an affected party is ambiguous at the global level. For example, if being affected by a decision were sufficient to support a right to participate in decision-making, anyone who buys gasoline would be entitled to participate in OPEC’s deliberations, and anyone affected by world interest rates to participate in discussions at the Federal Reserve or the European Central Bank. In the absence of a public whose boundaries are defined by participation in a polity, it is very difficult to specify either who should be entitled to participate or how they would do so.

Today, there is no large and representative global public, even in the relatively weak sense of a global “imagined community” (Anderson 1991)—a transnational community of people who share a sense of common destiny and are in the habit of communicating with one another about issues of public policy. Particular global publics are indeed emerging—for instance, in issue-areas such as human rights and environmental protection (Keck and Sikkink 1998)—but they surely

<sup>8</sup> See *Financial Times*, June 16, 2000, and Stiglitz 2002.

are not representative of the world's people, and they are by no means coterminous with the sets of people affected by the policies of states, multinational firms, or multilateral organizations.

In order for a global public to function politically, there would need to be some political structure that would help to define who was entitled to participate, and on what issues. In addition, many more people would have to identify transnationally and be willing to participate as members of a global public.<sup>9</sup> The number of participants would have to be sufficiently large and representative, and the means of participating sufficiently open, that the views of the active public could be seen as reflective of the opinions of people in the world as a whole to a significant extent. Whether such conditions could ever be met or whether the problems of scale render global democracy impossible or even undesirable will continue to be highly contested questions. What we can say with confidence is that, today, while there are fragmentary global publics, a genuine global public comparable to publics in well-established democracies does not exist.

Another way of making this point would be to say that world politics today lacks a public in two distinct senses. There is no juridical public on a global level, since no legal institutions define a public with authority to act globally. There is no sociological global public, because only a very small minority of people in the world identify and communicate with other people on a global basis, or even follow world events very closely. This analysis suggests that proposals for global participatory institutions, such as that of Richard A. Falk and Andrew Strauss (2000), are premature at best. There is no global *demos*, and "if there is no *demos*, there can be no democracy" (Weiler 1999, 337).<sup>10</sup>

In democratic nations, the existence of a clearly defined public provides the responses to the fundamental questions about accountability: (1) What constitutes an abuse and why? and (2) Who is entitled to hold power-wielders accountable and why? Power is abused whenever it is used for private or partial interests contrary to the interests of the public. And the public is entitled to hold power-wielders accountable in a democratic nation for abuses of power, either as the source of that power (the delegation model) or as the body affected by it (the participation model) or both. On the global level, there is no public that can function in this way—to provide answers to the fundamental questions about accountability and to ground the justification for accountability mechanisms of a democratic

type. This is the crucial difference between problems of accountability globally and domestically. There is no simple analogy that can be made between domestic democratic politics and global politics. Consequently, we must seek elsewhere for answers to these two fundamental questions if there is to be coherently justified and practically effective accountability at the global level.

Effective accountability at the global level will require new, pragmatic approaches: approaches that do not depend on the existence of a clearly defined global public. Attention will need to be paid to delegation problems: exercising control over agents to whom important tasks have been assigned. And the participation issue will have to be addressed as well. "Those affected" might be defined in some cases as those subject to a rule or regulation promulgated by a transnational organization. In other cases, it might mean publics in a particular region. Improved mechanisms for participation could range from processes akin to "notice and comment" provisions in administrative law to the increased transparency necessary for public scrutiny in the media. Increased *domestic* democracy can be an important form of participation in global politics in cases where states are the primary actors in international organizations or where global policies must be implemented by state action. Of course, domestic democracy can improve accountability to citizens and, at the same time, work against the interests of people affected by government policies beyond state borders. Indeed, there is a danger that gaps between rich and poor countries could be widened by relying on domestic democratic accountability, because, in general, rich countries are more democratic than poor ones. Different attempts at increased participation will have different advantages and disadvantages. It is well to remember also that there are alternative forms of accountability as well. The International Criminal Court, for example, is an accountability mechanism without any participatory element.

Before discussing how specific accountability mechanisms might function with respect to each of the various types of global powers, however, we must address the two questions that we have identified as central to any theory of accountability: What constitutes an abuse of power? and Who is entitled to hold power-wielders accountable? But now we need to address them with respect to world politics in particular. We need to know how standards of legitimacy can be established in world politics and what mechanisms are available for empowering some actors to hold others accountable to those standards.

## STANDARDS OF LEGITIMACY IN WORLD POLITICS

World politics is characterized by sharp conflicts of interests and values, and by potential or real violent conflict in the absence of a common government. Inclusive international organizations—which can make claims for legitimacy on that basis—are often the most

<sup>9</sup> The World Values Survey, taken in 70 countries at two different periods of the 1990s, indicated that only 15% of respondents viewed themselves as identifying primarily with their continental regions or the world as a whole. Forty-seven percent had principally local and regional attachments, while 38% listed their nation-state as their principal affiliation (Norris 2000, 161–66).

<sup>10</sup> David Held (1995, 232) has notably made the case for "cosmopolitan democracy" as an ideal, in which associations of democratic states would lead to people learning "the theoretical lesson that democratic legitimacy can ultimately only be redeemed transnationally." We are more sympathetic with Held's argument for an eventual cosmopolitan democracy than with the institutional proposals of Falk and Strauss.

divided for that very reason. Furthermore, many of the chief sources of legitimacy at the domestic level, such as constitutional mandates, electoral processes, legality, and tradition, are not available to transnational organizations or to states when they exert coercive effects on noncitizens. Hence claims to legitimacy at the global level depend on inclusiveness of state participation and on general norms of fairness, which have been increasingly affected by democratic values.

The standards of legitimacy against which power-wielders can be held accountable derive primarily from three sets of informal norms. First, legitimacy derives from conformity to human rights norms that are widely shared by the elites and publics of the most powerful states in the global political system and that are maintained by a public discourse. For example, the *Kosovo Report* declared the NATO war against Serbia in 1999 to be legitimate, because it was designed to protect an innocent population, even though it was technically illegal according to the United Nations Charter. The “responsibility to protect” innocent populations trumped the norm of state sovereignty, even as expressed in the Charter.<sup>11</sup> Second, there has been increased agreement that many normative principles inherent in democracy are applicable at the global level (Sen 1999), such as the right to exercise voice about domestic governance. Third, there has been intense normative pressure on the patterns of extreme economic inequality that permeate the contemporary global political economy.

It follows that power-wielders may be held accountable to standards of conduct articulated in transnational civil society, even though there is no applicable international law and even though their power does not derive from authority delegated to them. When Nike was criticized in the late 1990s for hiring contractors using “sweatshop” labor, it had not necessarily broken any laws. Activists complained, not of legal violations, but of the inequity of workers in the Dominican Republic or Vietnam being employed under miserable conditions, and paid badly, to produce luxury goods that would be sold for many times their production costs in rich countries. Although some of the human rights norms used to hold former leaders accountable in Latin America are legalized, they operated also through non-legalized social processes involving elites’ desires for legitimacy and esteem (Lutz and Sikkink 2000, 658–9). When standards are not legalized, we would expect accountability to operate chiefly through reputation and peer pressure, rather than in more formal ways.

Another source of legitimacy is law (Franck 1990, 1995). In traditional international law, those entities that are neither states nor international organizations—such as firms and private associations—are subject to the laws of the states possessing jurisdiction. But states, and in some instances non-state actors, also can be held to standards articulated in international law. Human rights treaties and the statute of

the International Criminal Court constitute obvious examples: states and their leaders can be held accountable for violations of their provisions. The WTO issues rulings binding on states, which must often, in order to comply, enact or alter domestic laws or regulations applying to firms and their transactions. Even if no treaty provisions cover a situation, international law includes a category of *jus cogens*—peremptory norms, such as norms against piracy, whose violation justifies legal accountability. Finally, customary international law reflects state practice “accompanied by the conviction that it reflects a legal obligation,” known as *opinio juris* (Malanczuk 1997, 44).

For international organizations, to whom authority is formally delegated, legitimacy depends on some combination of conformity to shared norms and to established law. The predominant legal instruments are charters or articles of agreement that specify the procedures by which they have to act to make their rulings authoritative, defining what is often referred to as “input” or “process” legitimacy. Equally important, however, the charters of international organizations typically specify, in general normative terms, their purposes. The United Nation was formed “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,” as well as to promote fundamental human rights, create the conditions for justice, and promote social progress (UN Charter, Preamble). These purposes change over time. The World Bank was designed in 1946 to assist in postwar reconstruction, promote private foreign investment, and promote the growth of international trade; only a subordinate clause in its Articles of Agreement refers to “the encouragement of the development of productive facilities and resources in less developed countries.” Its Web-site now declares that “today’s Bank has sharpened its focus on poverty reduction as the overarching goal of all its work.”<sup>12</sup>

As a practical matter, then, even in the absence of a global public comparable to domestic publics, standards have begun to emerge in answer to the question, “What constitutes an abuse of power?”

## SEVEN ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

Our second question, “Who is entitled to hold power-wielders accountable for abuses?” receives a variety of answers in the practice of global politics. We have identified seven discrete accountability mechanisms that actually operate in world politics on the basis of which improved practices of accountability could be built. These accountability mechanisms are summarized in Table 2.<sup>13</sup> Some operate most effectively when standards of legitimacy are formally encoded in law; others

<sup>11</sup> See Independent International Commission on Kosovo 2000 and International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001.

<sup>12</sup> International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Articles of Agreement, Article 1. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/EXTARCHIVES> (visited September 30, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> For earlier discussions of accountability mechanisms, (see Keohane 2003 and Keohane and Nye 2003). The former article contains a table that is very similar to our Table 2, although Table 2 omits electoral accountability, as not relevant to contemporary global institutions.

**TABLE 2. Seven Mechanisms of Accountability in World Politics**

Mechanism	Accountability Holder	Power-Wielder	Cost to Power-Wielder	Example
Hierarchical	Leaders of organization	Subordinate official	Loss of career opportunities	Authority of UN Secretary-General
Supervisory	States	Multilateral organization and its executive head	Restraints on ability to act, loss of office	World Bank and IMF governance by their executive boards
Fiscal	Funding agencies	Funded agency	Budget restrictions	Withholding of UN dues
Legal	Courts	Individual official or agency	From restriction of authority to criminal penalties	International Criminal Court
Market	Equity- and bond-holders and consumers	Firm or government	Loss of access to, or higher cost of, capital	Refusal of capital markets to finance developing country governments during world financial crises
Peer	Peer organizations	Organizations and their leaders	Effects on network ties and therefore on others' support	Independent marine certification body's evaluation of the Greenpeace-Shell controversy
Public reputational <sup>a</sup>	Peers and diffuse public	Individual or agency	Diffuse effects on reputation, prestige, self-esteem	Effects on U.S. "soft power" of unilateralism

<sup>a</sup> Reputational effects are involved in all issues of accountability, as mechanisms leading to punishment through hierarchy, supervision, fiscal measures, legal action, the market, and peer responses. The category of public reputational effects refers to situations where the other means of accountability are not available, but reputational effects are widely known and significant.

enforce less formal norms. Four of these mechanisms rely heavily on delegation: hierarchical, supervisory, fiscal, and legal accountability. The remaining three—market, peer, and reputational accountability—involve forms of participation, although the participants in each of these forms of accountability are different. It should be noted that these categories should not be too rigidly applied: Legal accountability, for example, involves a participatory element in any legal system that allows citizens to sue powerful entities for failures of responsibility.

*Hierarchical accountability* is a characteristic of bureaucracies and of virtually any large organization. Superiors can remove subordinates from office, constrain their tasks and room for discretion, and adjust their financial compensation. Hierarchical accountability as we use the term applies to relationships within organizations, including multilateral organizations such as the United Nations or the World Bank.

*Supervisory accountability* refers to relations between organizations where one organization acts as principal with respect to specified agents. For instance, the World Bank and IMF are subject to supervision by states and by institutions within states, such as courts. These supervisory relationships are more or less democratic as states are more or less democratic. Indeed, courts in democracies could demand that international organizations such as the IMF and World Bank follow procedures that meet due process standards of international law (Stewart 2003, p. 459). Advocacy groups

within states can put pressure on such organizations as the IMF and World Bank through domestic political institutions, as environmentalists did with respect to World Bank loans for dam projects in the 1980s (Fox and Brown 1998). Firms also hold state agencies accountable, through the political process, for their policies in international organizations, such as the WTO, whose decisions are relevant to the firms' interests.

*Fiscal accountability* describes mechanisms through which funding agencies can demand reports from, and ultimately sanction, agencies that are recipients of funding. This form of accountability was fundamental to the emergence of parliamentary power in England during the seventeenth century and is particularly important for international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, which rely on government appropriations to fund substantial parts of their activities.

*Legal accountability* refers to the requirement that agents abide by formal rules and be prepared to justify their actions in those terms, in courts or quasi-judicial arenas. Public officials, like anyone else, can be "held accountable" for their actions both through administrative and criminal law. Courts do not have the broad general authority of governments or of electorates in democracies. Instead, the courts apply a narrow version of the trusteeship model (Iib), asking whether the power-wielders performed the duties of their offices faithfully in a limited sense: whether they obeyed the law. Legal accountability has long been



important in constitutional democracies and has become increasingly important in world politics during recent years (Goldstein et al. 2001). The WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism, the operations of the Hague Tribunal on the Former Yugoslavia, and the creation of a new International Criminal Court all illustrate the incursions that conceptions of legal accountability have made in world politics.

*Market accountability* is a less familiar category, but an important one. We want to emphasize that this form of accountability is not to an abstract force called “the market,” but to investors and consumers, whose influence is exercised in whole or in part through markets. Investors may stop investing in countries whose policies they dislike or, at least, demand higher rates of interest (Mosley 2003). Consumers may refuse to buy products from companies with bad reputations for labor standards or other practices, as well as from companies with inferior or costly products.

*Peer accountability* arises as the result of mutual evaluation of organizations by their counterparts. NGOs, for example, evaluate the quality of information they receive from other NGOs and the ease of cooperating with them. Organizations that are poorly rated by their peers are likely to have difficulty in persuading them to cooperate and, therefore, to have trouble achieving their own purposes.

*Public reputational accountability* is pervasive because reputation is involved in all the other forms of accountability. Superiors, supervisory boards, courts, fiscal watchdogs, markets, and peers all take the reputations of agents into account. Indeed, reputation is a form of “soft power,” defined as “the ability to shape the preferences of others” (Nye 2004, 5). The category of public reputational accountability is meant to apply to situations in which reputation, widely and publicly known, provides a mechanism for accountability even in the absence of other mechanisms as well as in conjunction with them.

There are also processes that do not meet the standards for accountability but that serve to constrain power. As in a system of checks and balances, overlapping jurisdictions or interest areas may require actors to compromise with one another to secure the cooperation necessary to define or implement policy. Such a situation is characterized by *negotiation constraints*. Since our ultimate goal is to provide greater restraints on the abuse of power, negotiation constraints are properly included in this analysis, though they are not accountability mechanisms and, therefore, are not listed in Table 2.

## ACCOUNTABILITY CONSTRAINTS IN WORLD POLITICS

How do these mechanisms constrain the major power-wielders in world politics? The most accountable of these power-wielders are probably those toward which, ironically, the most accountability-criticism is directed: multilateral organizations such as the WTO, IMF, World Bank, European Commission, and United

Nations. State officials closely supervise all of these entities. Indeed, these organizations are constrained from the start since the legitimacy of their actions is often judged simultaneously by three sets of potentially conflicting standards: whether they serve the interests of their member states, the purposes for which they were established, and evolving standards of benefits and harms.

The criticisms of these organizations on grounds of accountability refers not to lack of accountability *per se*, but to weaknesses in *democratic* accountability (Dahl 1999). Even then, often the version of democratic accountability that is contrasted with actual institutional practice is a highly idealized one. As Andrew Moravcsik (2002) argues with respect to the European Union:

Most critics compare the EU to an ideal plebiscitary or parliamentary democracy, standing alone, rather than to the actual functioning of national democracies adjusted for its multi-level context. When we conduct the latter sort of analysis, we see that EU decision-making procedures, including those that insulate or delegate certain decisions, are very much in line with the general practice of most modern democracies in carrying out similar functions. (621–22)

If we focus not solely on democratic accountability, but on accountability more broadly, we can see that *supervisory accountability*, with states as the accountability holders, is quite strong for multilateral organizations. For example, the World Bank has both an executive board, composed of state representatives, that makes policy, and an inspection panel that is designed to ensure that its policies are actually followed within the organization. *Fiscal accountability* is also strong, since multilateral organizations depend on subventions from states. Both of these forms of accountability, which follow the delegation model, have been strengthened in recent years (Nielson and Tierney 2003). The Bank’s uses of participatory forms of accountability are less formalized, but one can see evidence of participatory accountability in the Bank’s efforts to enter into a dialogue with NGOs (implying a form of peer accountability) and in its efforts, clearly evident on its web site, to justify its policies to a broader public (manifesting reputational accountability).

Multilateral institutions are, indeed, highly constrained by accountability mechanisms.<sup>14</sup> The problem is not a lack of accountability as much as the fact that the principal lines of accountability run to powerful states, whose policies are at odds with those of their critics, and which may or may not themselves be fully democratic. Publics within countries are not heavily involved in these processes.

NGOs are often seen as the entities to which power-wielders such as the World Bank should be held accountable. In this view, they are the “virtual representatives” of publics adversely affected by other global

<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that accountability is perfect by any means (Fox and Brown 1998; Woods 1998, 2001).

power-wielders. Increasingly, NGOs are formally represented at international meetings, often with specific rights and privileges. However, international NGOs are not legitimated by ties to a defined public. In practice, few NGOs have well-defined procedures for accountability to anyone other than financial contributors and members—quite a small set of people. They can identify elements of what they consider to be “the public interest,” but what constitutes the public interest is contested. The fact that NGOs are typically the result of entrepreneurial initiatives by activists means that they do not result from a process of delegation. As a result, there is no organization that endowed them with powers formally responsible for holding them to account.

Even NGOs whose members may see themselves as pure-spirited guardians of the public interest can abuse their power—which for NGOs is usually limited to their ability to provide information and mold public opinion. Greenpeace, for instance, demanded in 1995 that Shell not dispose of its Brent Spar drilling rig in the North Sea, alleging that it contained 5000 tons of oil, vastly more than Shell estimated. After a huge media campaign, very costly to Shell’s reputation, Greenpeace had to admit that it had greatly overestimated the amount of oil on board. Eventually, an independent marine certification body broadly confirmed Shell’s original estimates (BBC 1998).

NGOs are *fiscally accountable* to their major contributors, who can demand reports. Insofar as they depend on a small number of donors who monitor their behavior, these donors may be seen as delegating authority to them through their dollars and as capable of holding them to account by withdrawing their support. Only in this very limited sense is the concept of delegation operable with respect to NGOs. NGOs that appeal to a large public are largely subject to participatory forms of accountability. Although the public pays attention only intermittently, NGOs have to maintain their reputations, which may imply being concerned also about peer accountability. Furthermore, they operate in a “market for donors,” so are in that sense subject to *market accountability*. The judgment of the independent marine certification body, about Greenpeace’s claims, is a good example of peer accountability. Too many false alarms lead such NGOs to be ignored or scorned by other NGOs with which they compete, by the press, and by individuals in various societies, on which they depend for contributions and political support. In general, the weakness of NGOs—their dependence on reputation and funding and their lack of coercive force or huge material resources—makes the lack of formal accountability mechanisms for them less likely to lead to serious abuses of power than is the case for states. However, as NGOs become stronger, with credibility that is not easily shaken even as they make false or prejudicial claims, their lack of such mechanisms of accountability, apart from legal provisions within states against fraud, becomes a more serious issue.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See “The Democratic Accountability of Non-Governmental Organizations,” symposium proceedings published in the *Chicago Jour-*

Firms, including media firms, may be limited in some ways by their own stockholders, but there is little reason to believe that stockholders will object to behavior that benefits the firm at the expense of outsiders. Management wields power delegated from stockholders, but since stockholders share certain narrow institutional interests (for instance, in profits), they do not substitute for effective external accountability. Firms are subject to domestic supervisory and legal accountability, since they are chartered by states. But at the global level they are only subject to broad participatory accountability, through reputational accountability and in related ways, through the market. Firms with brand names to protect may be quite vulnerable to consumer boycotts, as the movement against sweatshops, focused for a time on Nike, demonstrated. Media firms are particularly subject to reputational accountability. Commenting on the resignations of the two top editors of *The New York Times* in June 2003, a commentator observed, “They, of course, had to resign. Any company has to sell the credibility of its product, but a media company has nothing else to sell.”<sup>16</sup> Firms whose reputations suffer because of their real or alleged behavior are likely also to suffer in the marketplace. They may therefore have incentives to adopt codes of conduct in order to protect both their reputations and their market share (Garcia-Johnson 2000).

A recent systematic analysis of accountability by the One World Trust (2003) rates various multilateral organizations, multinational firms, and NGOs on eight criteria, four relating to “internal stakeholder accountability” and four to “external stakeholder accountability.” The internal dimensions include member control, procedures for appointment of senior staff, compliance mechanisms, and evaluation processes; the external dimensions include external stakeholder consultation, complaint mechanisms, corporate social responsibility, and access to information. Seven NGOs, six firms, and five multilateral organizations were evaluated, using the same standards. In the summary graphs provided in the report, scores for member control and access to information were combined. Interestingly, there were no significant differences in composite accountability ratings among these three types of organizations. Organizations of all three types ranked toward the top, and toward the bottom, of the list.<sup>17</sup>

In many issue-areas, harmonized policies are worked out among functionally defined units of different governments, such as securities regulators, central bankers, and antiterrorist units (Keohane and Nye 1974; Reinecke 1999–2000; Slaughter 2004). These *transgovernmental networks* do not provide mechanisms for either delegated or participatory accountability. Since these networks are informal, it is often unclear which

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<sup>16</sup> The quote is from Warren L. Batts, Adjunct Professor at the University of Chicago School of Business (*The New York Times*, June 6, 2003, p. A 28).

<sup>17</sup> The average ranking for all three types of organization was between 9 and 10.

organizations have delegated powers to them. Furthermore, participatory accountability is minimal: The general public is not involved, and transparency is typically lacking. Abuses of power might in some instances be controlled by the fragmentation of power and conflicts of interest between the participants, but cooperation among the members of such networks could easily become collusion against the interests of outsiders.

In our terms, there is some *peer accountability* within transgovernmental networks, since the entities involved may demand information from one another and sanction other entities for perceived misbehavior. But there are no clear mechanisms of accountability, because accountability requires that there is a public standard of legitimacy to which political actors are held. On the other hand, there is the potential here for negotiation constraints. The power of an entity in the network may be checked insofar as abuses are against the interests or principles of the other entities within the transgovernmental networks. Diversity among the parties is a precondition for constraint; without it, collusion is the more likely possibility.

Finally, what about constraining abuses of power by states? States vary a great deal in their susceptibility to accountability mechanisms, so we consider separately three categories of states: (1) weak, dependent states, such as those poor countries that rely heavily on foreign aid for budget support; (2) independent states that are not great powers; and (3) great powers, particularly hegemonic states. With respect to the latter two categories, it is important to distinguish between autocracies and democracies.

Weak and dependent states may be subject to *fiscal* and *supervisory accountability*, often through international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank or, in cases of state breakdown (as in parts of the former Yugoslavia), the United Nations. Typically, states delegate extensive authority to international organizations to supervise their behavior only when they find themselves in great difficulty. Even weak states often succeed at evading the mandates of the World Bank and IMF, but the overall structure of power guarantees a substantial measure of accountability.<sup>18</sup>

For states that are fiscally and legally independent but not great powers, much depends on their internal regimes as well as the extent to which they are enmeshed in networks of interdependence. It was extraordinarily difficult even for the great powers, acting through the UN Security Council, to hold Saddam Hussein's Iraq accountable for its weapons of mass destruction, and in 1998 Iraq expelled the UN inspectors from the country. Self-financing autocracies that do not depend much on the rest of the world, such as North Korea and Myanmar, or that can generate sources of funds with which to purchase goods illegally, such as Iraq under Saddam Hussein, are very hard to hold accountable.

For democratic states involved in multiple relationships of interdependence, control of abuses of power

is easier. Negotiation constraints are most important for these states, since even quite powerful states need cooperation from others, even in the absence of institutionalized accountability mechanisms (Keohane and Nye 2001). The more they are enmeshed in networks of interdependence, the more they are likely to try to avoid being out of step with most of their peers, as the example of members of the European Union certainly illustrates (Moravcsik 1998). However, the more powerful the state, the less constraining may be negotiation constraints on any individual issue.

The most complex issues arise with respect to very powerful states with constitutional democratic governments, such as the United States. Such governments are accountable to their citizens and to an array of domestic interests and institutions, but as we have noted, this does not assure accountability to outsiders. Large and powerful states do not depend on subventions from others or on markets, and there is no strong international legal structure governing their actions, despite the new International Criminal Court. Indeed, as recent U.S. behavior shows, such states often resist international legal accountability. The only forms of external accountability to which they are consistently subject, across a range of issue areas, are *peer accountability* and *reputational accountability*. These attempts at accountability, however, depend on efforts, often *ad hoc*, to establish a basis of legitimacy on which to hold a state accountable. In the debates over war with Iraq in the winter and spring of 2003, for example, France, Germany, and Russia engaged in "soft balancing"—seeking to constrain the United States by denying legitimacy to its attack on Iraq. However, as this episode shows, it is difficult to impose peer or reputational accountability without a firm consensus on what constitutes legitimate behavior. If the powerful state controls substantial material resources, including force, and if it has strong internal legitimacy—so that its public does not react negatively if its leaders are criticized abroad—it may be largely immune from sanctions, as the United States was in 2003.<sup>19</sup>

The major exception to the generalization that powerful states do not delegate powers of supervisory accountability over their own actions is the WTO. Ironically for those who attack the WTO as unaccountable, it represents one of the few attempts in world politics to formalize legal and supervisory accountability over the actions of sovereign states.

This discussion may clarify the role of *transparency* in accountability. The availability of information is crucial for all forms of accountability, but transparency, or the widespread availability of information, is essential to market, peer, and reputational accountability, as well as to the internal workings of democratic accountability in states which play a supervisory role. Public reputational accountability, for example, relies almost exclusively on transparency. But transparency is not sufficient for effectiveness. Without standards and sanctions—and

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of accountability on environmental issues, see Fox and Brown 1998.

<sup>19</sup> For some suggestions designed to improve accountability on issues of military intervention coming before the United Nations, see Buchanan and Keohane 2004.

**TABLE 3. Power Wielders and Constraints**

Power-Wielder	Relevant International and Transnational Accountability Mechanisms	Strength of Constraints
Multilateral organization	Delegated and participatory: Supervisory, fiscal, hierarchical, reputational	Strong
NGOs	Mostly participatory: Peer, reputational, market	Strong when NGO is weak; weaker when NGO is strong
Transgovernmental networks	Mostly participatory: Peer	Quite weak; more a matter of negotiation constraints
Firms	Mostly participatory: Market, reputational	Stronger for brand-name firms in consumer markets and media firms than for more anonymous firms
States	External accountability mostly participatory: Peer, reputational Delegated accountability (supervisory and fiscal) only for weak, dependent states who have accepted supervision as a condition for support	Varies with state power and degree of interdependence. For relatively powerful states, negotiation constraints are more important than accountability mechanisms.

a configuration of power that enables sanctions to be imposed relatively consistently on all violators of standards—accountability that is both effective and widely viewed as legitimate will remain elusive.<sup>20</sup>

The above discussion is summarized in Table 3, which lists the five types of power-wielders that we have discussed and the constraints that are likely to be most significant for each. Two interesting conclusions can be drawn from Table 3. First, multilateral organizations and democratic states are the only types of organization in world politics consistently subjected to delegated as well as participatory accountability. Second, as a result, multilateral institutions are in general more accountable than NGOs, firms, transgovernmental networks, and nondemocratic states—not less accountable, as a casual reading of the critical democratic literature on accountability might suggest.

Of course, the appropriateness and efficacy of any of our mechanisms for accountability will depend on the particular context. For example, firms that depend on brand-name products can be expected to be more constrained by reputational accountability than other firms. Moreover, with respect to states, the actual character of accountability will depend as much on *internal* institutions, especially those of democracy, as on accountability mechanisms at the global level. The fact that we have emphasized the latter should not be interpreted as implying that we downgrade the significance of internal democracy. Elections are the principal means by which ordinary individuals can have an impact on policy. The fact that global democracy is infeasible does not mean that domestic democracy is

unimportant. What we do emphasize, however, is that domestic democracy is insufficient. Even democratic states will act in a biased way toward noncitizens. The mechanisms of accountability that can work so well to make governments responsive to their own citizens also can work against the interests of noncitizens affected by government policies.

Nothing in our discussion is meant to imply that accountability mechanisms in world politics work optimally, or even very well. We have emphasized that democratic standards for accountability are not met at the global level. Accountability in world politics is inextricably entangled with power relationships. Each of the seven mechanisms of accountability that we have identified empowers different actors. Those who would hold power-wielders to account need power themselves. Weak actors—including small, poor countries in the Global South and, more, their often disenfranchised publics—lack the capacity systematically to hold powerful actors accountable. Furthermore, accountability is relatively haphazard. Nothing guarantees that the issues brought to public view are the most important actual or potential abuses of power in the world at a given time. There is no working torts system that would promote consistent legal accountability, or any sort of world “ombudsman.” Ironically, the accountability mechanisms that do exist may sometimes have perverse effects. Fear of adverse publicity can discourage bold action that could save lives and otherwise promote human values. Having been lambasted for building big dams, the World Bank is likely to be very reluctant to build any big dams again, even if some such projects would be beneficial for development.

In world politics, accountability for most power-wielders is likely to be less constraining than is optimal. Power-wielders certainly cannot be expected to hold themselves accountable—they resist

<sup>20</sup> We are therefore less optimistic than Ann Florini (2003), who argues that “transparency is providing new opportunities both to enforce rules and standards and to hold accountable those who purport to act in the public interest” (196).

accountability because it restricts their autonomy. But the answer is not simply “more accountability.” Instead, we need more intelligently designed accountability systems that are sensitive to the variety of possible mechanisms of constraint, the shortcomings of existing accountability mechanisms, and the normative claims of those adversely affected by global entities.

## CONCLUSIONS

We do not expect that the debate over accountability in world politics will end any time soon. In fact, we have argued that this debate is fueled by a fundamental tension between claims derived from delegation models and claims derived from participation models of accountability. Attending to the ways in which these claims can and should be accommodated and balanced differently with respect to various global power-wielders can open new prospects for improving accountability to constrain abuses of power.

Recognizing new possibilities for accountability requires abandoning the belief that global accountability, to be genuine, must conform to abstract, maximal principles of democratic participation. Such a belief prevents us from recognizing specific opportunities for limiting abuses of power. We suggest instead that accountability is only one way of constraining power; that there are many forms of accountability that are not particularly unique to democracy; and that there are various ways of conceiving of democratic accountability, including delegation models as well as participation models. Participation is an important value. Indeed, the activist participation of individuals and NGOs in debates on global governance has put accountability on the global agenda, and efforts should be made to facilitate greater participation in global governance, particularly through transparency. But with respect to those entities to which power was delegated, establishing minimal standards for the accountability of power-wielders to those that delegated power in the first place can achieve positive results by limiting corruption, fraud, and abuse of power, even if broad participation is not achieved.

We should be seeking to create processes for checking abuses of power with the full recognition that every type of power is subject to abuse. Improved accountability mechanisms should be explored, but other means of constraining power ought to be considered as well. And finally, we must recognize that there is no single “problem of global accountability”; there are many. The point is not to design a comprehensive, ideal accountability system but, rather, to figure out how to limit abuses of power in a world with a wide variety of power-wielders and without a centralized government.

If we focus on the conditions for the operation of a variety of accountability mechanisms, rather than on pure democratic accountability, we will see opportunities for feasible actions to improve accountability. Each of the components of accountability at the global level exists to some extent: *standards*, *sanctions*, and

*information*. Each could be improved, in combination with progress on the others.

The example of agricultural subsidies and the WTO illustrates the importance of standards of behavior. There is an emerging consensus that rich countries’ agricultural subsidies, which are seven times as great in magnitude as all official development aid (Wolf 2004), and which severely harm very poor countries, cannot be justified in terms of either efficiency or equity. Governments of poor countries have been attacking such subsidies in the Doha Round, and their rich-country counterparts have had difficulty defending them (partly because they have been active for years in criticizing agricultural protectionism by other rich countries). As a result, the WTO—whose policies reflect prevailing norms insofar as they are accepted by powerful governments—has been moving, haltingly, toward restricting agricultural subsidies. Here is an example of the kind of accountability process that we have been describing. This accountability process is not particularly democratic, nor is it pure: It works partly because of negotiation constraints arising from the refusal of developing countries to make trade agreements without concessions on agricultural subsidies. But peer and reputational forms of accountability are certainly at work here.

The second condition for accountability is the availability of sanctions. Any effective sanctions in a feasible global accountability system will have to be decentralized, since there is no central government to impose them. But decentralized sanctions are quite feasible where incentives are strong to impose them, and where the capacity to do so is distributed fairly widely. The history of the international trade regime demonstrates that among relative equals in power, decentralized sanctions can work (Barfield 2001). Indeed, many people worry that the ability of the WTO to impose sanctions has recently become *too strong*, insofar as WTO rules override local democratic control. However, sanctions remain the weak point in global accountability since they can only be implemented by the powerful—for example, by powerful states over multilateral organizations to whom they have delegated power. As we have emphasized, the principal means in domestic democracies of participatory sanctions—elections—is not available on a global basis.

The final component of accountability, information, may be the easiest to achieve. Crucial to the efficacy of an information system for controlling abuses of power is that control over it not be limited to power-wielders and the entities that originally authorized their actions. On the contrary, the system should be open to new groups, seeking to provide information relevant to the question of whether power-wielders are meeting appropriate standards of behavior—and to make that information widely available. The decentralization and diversity of world politics make transparency easier to achieve than in previous generations, since the means of modern communication, and their diffusion across societies, give a wide variety of voices the capacity to express themselves (Florini 2003). Furthermore, the costs of providing information through web sites are

now so low that it is difficult to use cost or inconvenience as an excuse; people around the world are increasingly used to being able to get the information that they want almost instantaneously. The transparency of major multilateral institutions, including the IMF, World Bank, and WTO, has markedly increased over the past decade. Markets are increasingly demanding transparency from finance ministries of states, and from firms. NGOs must also be increasingly transparent if they are to remain credible. If an organization does not reveal information itself, others are likely to spread information, in more critical forms, about it. The cacophony and disagreement endemic to world politics mean that it may be more feasible to establish an effective information system for accountability in this domain than to establish it in many national states—either in those with repressive governments or in those with uniformity of opinion on a set of important issues.

A prerequisite to improving accountability in world politics is to think about it clearly. There are two key questions about abuses of power and accountability: (1) What constitutes an abuse and why? and (2) Who is entitled to hold power-wielders accountable and why? The analysis of two competing models of accountability makes clear that these questions do not have a single answer. Power wielders can be called to account for failing to fulfill their official duties or for failing to serve the interests of those affected by their actions. And they can be called to account by those who authorized them as well as by those affected by them. Both delegation and participation models are important: An effective accountability system should combine elements from both. But strict analogies from domestic democratic politics should be regarded with skepticism, and we should resist the temptation to narrow the issue of accountability to that of democratic control. Ingenuity in devising effective mechanisms, and the ability to synchronize their operation, will be more important for controlling abuses of power than a single-minded and mechanical application of the ideals of democracy. Our aspiration should be to create and support various kind of accountability systems in world politics based on an appreciation of the competing and complementarity possibilities within democratic theory.

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