

**“The Culture of Accountability: A Democratic Virtue” by Gianfranco Pasquino and
Riccardo Pelizzo, Taylor & Francis, 2022.**

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The Culture of Accountability: A Democratic Virtue examines the notion of accountability and reveals the influence of institutional and cultural factors on political accountability. The novelty of the book is that accountability is treated as a product of three distinct processes: taking account of voters’ preferences, keeping account of voters’ preferences, and giving account of one’s performance in office. Another appealing point is that the book explores the accountability-culture nexus. Besides the traditional conceptualization of culture (civicness, religion), it pays attention to the culture of government. In addition to cultural factors, the book explores the impact of institutional conditions (the parliamentary form of government) on accountability.

The book can be divided into two main parts. In the first part, the book problematizes the notion of accountability and makes two claims. First, the authors challenge the previous conceptualization of accountability in terms of geometric metaphors such as horizontal, vertical, diagonal, and societal. This is because these concepts of accountability do not capture answerability or enforcement at the same time. Conversely, the traditional forms of accountability (i.e. electoral, interinstitutional) are more appropriate and entail both answerability and enforceability dimensions of accountability. Secondly, the book claims that accountability remains undertheorized and previous scholarship only focused on giving account without due attention to keeping account and taking account of voters’ preferences.

Chapter two addresses electoral and interinstitutional accountability in democratic societies. Electoral accountability in democratic societies progresses through three stages such as the electoral campaign where the candidates *take into account* voters’ preferences, elected assemblies where the representatives must *keep account* the desires of the electorate, and finally, most representatives attempt to run for re-election where they are obliged to *give an account* of what have they been able to produce during their term in office. The chapter defines interinstitutional accountability as a countervailing power-sharing between the legislative, executive, and judiciary. Governments and elected officials are held accountable to both legislative and judicial branches through the oversight function of parliaments and judicial reviews.

In chapter three the authors examine the working of electoral accountability in Asia and Africa. Using survey responses, the authors examined whether voters believe that elections contribute to accountability in the regions. Although the electoral system is imperfect with limitations in non-Western settings, it remains the only way for the voters to voice their concerns. The findings suggest that elections in Africa and Asia, to a certain extent, secure the taking into account and giving account, however, remain ineffective in keeping into account voters’ preferences.

Another important contribution of the book is that interinstitutional accountability is extended to bureaucracy, the military, and the judiciary. With respect to accountability in bureaucracy, the authors highlighted the model of obedience, the model of discretion, and the shrewd system in the US. Referring to the recent US cases, the authors fairly noticed the deviation of judicial accountability from normative ideals. This is because, more recently, some judicial positions are filled by elections which enables the judges to be accountable to the electorate. This makes judicial accountability more controversial and out of the circuit of interinstitutional accountability. The most attractive argument in this chapter comes with the notion of systemic accountability, which is observed when the citizens are accountable to government agencies, government agencies are accountable to the government, the government is accountable to the legislative branch and the

latter is accountable to the electorate. The chapter challenges the democratic deficit in the European Union and claims that the EU offers a good example of systemic accountability.

The second part of the book explores the influence of cultural factors on political accountability. In chapters 5 and 6, the authors examined the relationships between the political culture and accountability, and other dimensions of good governance (e.g. government effectiveness, the rule of law, control of corruption, political stability, and regulatory qualities). In exploring the relationship between religion and accountability, the authors included control variables such as years of democratic rule, the presence/absence of a parliamentary form of government, and other parliamentary questions along with political culture treated as a religion. As a result, findings show that the percentage of the Christian population, years of democratic rule, and parliamentary form of government have a statistically significant impact on accountability. Next, examining the relationship between religious denominations (Catholic, Protestantism) and indicators of good governance, the authors find that the percentage of the Catholic population has an impact on accountability and political stability. Conversely, the percentage of the Protestant population does not have any impact on any governance indicators.

The final chapter analyzes the influence of other dimensions of political culture (civicness, familism, postmaterialism) on accountability. Authors articulate a few major claims that some dimensions of culture (e.g. civicness, postmaterialism) have a higher impact on accountability. Secondly, according to the book, we should not treat culture (religion) exclusively in the ideational form, but also should consider practical terms. This is because the culture of government has an impact on accountability, that is said, the countries with a long history of democratic rule of government have a higher level of accountability.

This book makes convincing claims and enriches the literature on accountability. However, it could be improved further by addressing the following recommendations. Firstly, the book does not show the boundary between interinstitutional accountability and the system of checks and balances. For novice readers, it is hard to differentiate between the two concepts which lead to some uncertainties. Secondly, the geometric terms (horizontal, vertical) of accountability have been criticized at the beginning of the book, but the authors keep on using them in subsequent chapters. Finally, in examining bureaucracy and accountability the book will benefit by adding the recent practices where the front-line bureaucrats involve citizens in decision-making, which challenges the traditional notion of accountability in bureaucracy.

In sum, this comprehensive and interesting book definitely makes a huge contribution to the scholarship on accountability. The book will generate a scholarly debate, which in turn, will enhance the research on accountability and broaden our understanding of this crucial phenomenon.