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Accountability in Multi-level Governance: The Example of Australian Federalism

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Introduction

This chapter examines accountability in Australian federalism as an instance of accountability in multi-level governance (MLG) and networked governance generally. The question of accountability in Australian federalism has long been seen as problematic, largely because of the overlapping responsibilities between the federal government and the governments of the states and territories. This overlap leads to continual bickering and the notorious 'blame game' between the two levels of government. The issue gained prominence under Kevin Rudd's Australian Labor Party (ALP) Government (2007–10), which revamped the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) structure in an attempt to clarify the respective responsibilities of each level of government and to remove the causes of the blame game. In spite of such efforts, however, recrimination between the two levels continues, helping to fuel growing public perceptions that federal and state and territory governments are not working well together (Griffith University 2014). Locating these problems within the wider context of accountability in multi-level and networked governance may help to explain the reasons for their intransigence, as well as throwing light on possible solutions.

Networked governance is a broad term referring to processes of governing undertaken by more than one organisation working together in partnership or collaboration (Rhodes 1997). It includes partnerships between different government organisations, as well as partnerships between government and private organisations. Federal divisions of authority, where two constitutionally independent levels of government – central and provincial – work together on common policies or problems, can therefore be counted as a species of networked governance. In this light, however, federalism as a species of networked governance fits only with those aspects of federalism that exhibit features of 'concurrent' federalism involving overlapping responsibilities (Galligan 1995; Painter 1998). It does not apply to those areas of government that fit the theory of 'coordinate' federalism, where each level of government operates separately within its own sphere of activity (though each separate jurisdiction may itself exhibit aspects of networked governance, for example, between its different government departments and agencies and between each government and non-government organisations).

Accountability, in turn, can be understood as the obligation to answer for the performance of duties, paired with the correlative right of someone else, typically the person for whom the duties are performed, to demand such an answer (Mulgan 2003: Chpt. 1; Bovens 2007; Bovens et al. 2014). It involves a number of elements or stages: reporting or informing (transparency); justifying and explaining (discussion); and the imposition of remedies, including compensation or sanctions (rectification). The accountability of democratic governments to their citizens typically involves a complex system of processes and institutions, including a range of different accountors (*who is accountable?*), different account-holders (*to whom are they accountable?*), different aspects of government operations (*for what are they accountable?*) and different mechanisms (*how are they accountable?*).

Accountability in networked governance

The question of accountability in networked governance turns on a comparison with the systems of accountability found in non-networked governance (i.e. in a unified governing system under a single controlling authority). From this perspective, the most important mechanisms of accountability in unitary systems of representative democracy operate

through a chain of principal–agent relationships, linking the popular election of representative leaders with the control exercised by these leaders at the head of the hierarchically based organisations of executive bureaucracy. Within this chain, each agent is accountable to its respective principal, linking rank-and-file public officials to the voters.

The Westminster system of parliamentary government, operating at both the Commonwealth and state and territory levels, provides a classic example of such 'vertical' accountability within a single, unitary government structure. Under conventions of ministerial responsibility, ministers answer to parliament and the voters for the actions of their subordinates, fulfilling all three elements of accountability – providing information, discussing policy options and rationales, and imposing remedies in the light of public exposure and criticism. Members of the bureaucracy, in turn, help to implement this vertical accountability structure through internal accountability to their organisational superiors.

Vertical hierarchical accountability is not the only accountability mechanism operating in unified government systems. In addition, a number of 'horizontal' mechanisms supplement the overall accountability of the government by exercising the first two stages of accountability (informing and discussing) without being able to impose remedies. These include legislative committees and accountability agencies, such as auditors and ombudsmen, as well as more informal organisations such as the media and stakeholder groups. Although they lack the power of enforcement themselves, they often provoke the executive to take remedial action through the power of adverse publicity and potential reputational damage. In this sense, they operate 'in the shadow of hierarchy' (Schillemans 2008), relying on the background potential of controlling hierarchies to enforce their assessments. Unitary governments are also subject to judicial accountability, depending on the constitutional framework and the scope of administrative law, a form of accountability with both vertical and horizontal elements in which courts exercise the power of coercion but exist outside a structure of overall hierarchical control – this is dubbed 'diagonal' accountability (Bovens 2007).

Because networked governance, by definition, lacks a single central point of control, it is unable to provide vertical accountability in the same way as unified governing systems. There is no single person or body in charge and, therefore, no one who is obliged to answer to the public for the collective actions of the collaborating partners or to impose remedies

when mistakes come to light. The absence of clear responsibility provides increased opportunities for blame avoidance and buck-passing (Mulgan 2003: 198–99). Moreover, when compared with unitary governments, multi-level governments such as federations do not offer the same range of horizontal accountability agencies to cover their joint activities because many such agencies – for instance, legislatures, auditors and ombudsmen – are constitutionally confined to investigating the actions of only one level of government. From this perspective, then, networked governance in general, and federal systems in particular, suffer from a serious 'accountability deficit' (e.g. Rhodes 2006; Michels and Meijer 2008; Mulgan 2014).

On the other hand, networked governance does not lack mechanisms of accountability. First, some forms of horizontal accountability certainly apply across jurisdictional boundaries (Michels and Meijer 2008; Papadopoulos 2007; Schillemans 2011). The news media, for example, can investigate and report on the outcomes of joint programs where responsibility is shared between different regimes. Individual citizens can share their own experiences of government networks through social media platforms.

Second, the pluralistic nature of many networks, in which different members pursue different, if overlapping, agendas, often allows for more open disclosure of information than is found in more closed, hierarchical structures (Mulgan 2003: 211–14). Networks, therefore, have the potential to be more transparent than monolithic hierarchies. Much depends on the nature of the network, on whether it is open and outward looking or closed and inwardly focused.

Third, at the local level, networks of committed professionals belonging to different organisations can offer individual citizens more direct accountability for government services than is provided through a standard hierarchical chain of command, provided they are given sufficient discretion to make their own decisions (Stoker 2006; Hupe and Hill 2007; Hendriks 2009). Because they are closely engaged with each other and with their communities, members of these networks can respond quickly and effectively to individual grievances without having to negotiate detailed and often inappropriate instructions from their separate bureaucratic superiors. This form of bottom-up accountability is well suited to networks in comparison with the more top-down, hierarchical accountability found in bureaucracies.

Fourth, networks can also subscribe to joint objectives, which is a common feature of successful collaborative partnerships based on shared values and mutual trust (Agranoff 2007). If members of the network also agree to public reporting of their performance in terms of meeting these objectives or to assessment by independent regulators, they also become more transparent and publicly accountable.

These different processes of horizontal accountability and transparency involve the first two stages of accountability (informing and discussing) but they can also lead to the final accountability stage of remedial action and rectification. For example, members of the network may be concerned to avoid adverse reputational consequences and may respond collectively to being named and shamed. The fact that responsibilities are divided and no one is clearly in charge can certainly offer more opportunities for shifting blame than in a unitary governmental system. But this does not mean that remedial consequences never follow from the exposure of faults in networked structures. In genuinely collaborative partnerships based on trust and shared values, as Agranoff (2012: Chpt. 8) points out, different partners with different limited rectification powers can each contribute to a collective solution.

Overall, then, networked governance may suffer from an accountability deficit because of the absence of a single point of authority, as well as the limited jurisdiction of some accountability agencies. In mitigation, networked arrangements have the potential to open government processes up to greater transparency and to stimulate voluntary rectification from network partners. Moreover, it should be remembered that unitary systems can also produce accountability deficits; for instance, through the tightness of their central control. In spite of their systems of vertical authority, rectification is not always straightforward in unitary governments where governments can often find means of avoiding consequences for mistakes; for example, through denial of responsibility and suppression of evidence (Mulgan 2014). The accountability ledger, therefore, is not wholly on the side of unified hierarchies, though the balance may be said to lie in their favour.

Notwithstanding any possible deficit in terms of accountability to the public, networked arrangements can also exhibit a number of characteristics that stem from their basis in shared values and partnerships and may compensate for deficiencies in terms of external accountability (Radin and Romzek 1996; Agranoff and McGuire 2001; Bogason and

Musso 2006). In the first place, partners in a network are often accountable to each other as they cooperate together in joint programs. For example, bureaucrats dealing with opposite numbers in cognate agencies regularly quiz each other on matters of common interest. This type of internal accountability need not be open to the public; in this case it does not count as a form of public accountability. It can help, however, to keep individual network members honest by requiring them to answer to people beyond their own organisation. Internal accountability built on mutual dialogue is particularly important in the not-for-profit private sector, which is generally less subject to external scrutiny than both the public sector and the commercial private sector, and relies more on the shared values and commitment of individual members (Goodin 2003).

More broadly, the extent to which members of a network are genuinely motivated to pursue generally accepted public values affects the extent to which they need to be subject to external supervision. In particular, not-for-profit charities engaged in providing public services can be trusted to act voluntarily in the public interest more than commercial contractors. Similarly, members of highly disciplined and regulated professions such as doctors and nurses, which are subject to their own professional regulatory bodies, need less additional scrutiny than mainline bureaucrats or commercial contractors. In networks involving such members, any accountability deficit associated with the networked nature of governance becomes less of an issue. If a network is based more on mutual trust and genuine commitment to the public interest it will be less subject to the opportunistic shirking and blame-avoidance, which the absence of vertical accountability encourages.

Some analysts sympathetic to the role of networks in governing have sought to defuse the impact of any supposed accountability deficit by redefining the concept of accountability itself, for instance, to include government responsiveness to the needs or preferences of citizens and communities without any obligation to answer publicly through the normal processes of accountability (Considine 2002). Accountability in governance has also been identified with public justifications made in terms of public reason and the public interest, thus, again, circumventing the need for political control (Weale 2011). Admittedly, accountability is a notoriously slippery concept (Mulgan 2000; Pollitt and Hupe 2011) and no definition can be categorically insisted on. Rather than extend the concept of accountability beyond its normal implication, however, it is

preferable to admit that networks may be comparatively unaccountable but that other positive features of networks may counterbalance this deficiency.

Application of accountability in networked governance to federal–state relations in Australia

How, then, do these general conclusions about accountability in networked governance apply to federal–state relations in Australia? To begin with, the accountability deficit due to the absence of a single point of unified control in matters of overlapping responsibility is a familiar feature of Australian federalism. Its effects were well illustrated in the public criticism that surrounded two of the Rudd ALP Government's major spending programs designed to combat the global financial crisis (GFC) – the home insulation program and the school building program. In each case, the respective federal ministers were subject to fierce and continuing attack from the parliamentary opposition and sections of the media. Criticism centred on the federal government's role in authorising and supervising each program and led the government to implement substantial reviews and adjustments. Indeed, the minister in charge of the home insulation program, the minister for the environment, Peter Garrett, was replaced as minister in charge of the program and the program itself was abruptly wound down (Mulgan 2012).

State and territory governments, however, were also involved in each program. For example, in the home insulation program, the crucial function of occupational health and safety and safety inspection was a state and territory responsibility and, therefore, outside the direct control of the Commonwealth minister. The frenzy of media scrutiny prompted by the federal opposition's attack on the minister ignored this fact. Similarly, in the case of the school building program, most of the major failures were in government, rather than private, schools. Government schools are administered by state and territory bureaucracies who have their own agenda and are responsible to their own ministers with independent political priorities, which include extracting as much funding as possible from Commonwealth sources to use for their own purposes.

Because accountability was driven by a focus on federal politics, state and territory bureaucracies largely escaped being held to account for their delays and extravagance. In neither case did state nor territory ministers have any interest in the accountability of their departments for what were seen as primarily Commonwealth initiatives and failures. The Commonwealth Auditor-General, in his inquiries into the home insulation and school building programs, made pointed reference to the fact that he was unable to investigate or comment on the actions of state and territory governments and private contractors (ANAO 2010a; 2010b), even though they were heavily involved in the policy failures.

These examples confirm the absence of formal accountability mechanisms covering programs in which both levels of government are involved. They also underline the force of ministerial responsibility as a vertical accountability mechanism in Australia, which has both positive and negative effects for overall government accountability. The benefits flow from the pressures exerted on ministers and their departmental officials by opportunistic oppositions and sensation-hungry journalists. At the same time, concentration on the responsibilities and possible failings of federal ministers draws attention away from the contributions of state and territory governments and actively discourages public discussion of shared responsibilities. Ministers at both levels are encouraged to give highest priority to actions for which they and their governments can be seen to be directly responsible. By the same token, they have little incentive to claim a share in responsibility for joint programs, particularly when these programs come under public criticism.

If, like other instances of networked governance, Australian federalism experiences a clear deficit in terms of top-down vertical accountability, does it exhibit any of the other aspects of accountability found in networks? In the first place, joint policies involving both levels of government are certainly subject to horizontal accountability through public investigation in the media, which increases the transparency of such policies. Although some sections of the media, notably gallery journalists observing both levels of government, tend to concentrate on the actions of ministers and other politicians in one particular parliament, other sections of the media specialising in distinct policy areas, such as agriculture, industry or health, pursue particular policy outcomes across jurisdictional boundaries. Thus, media stories on irrigation in the Murray–Darling Basin cover the combined contributions of federal and state governments to the problem. Accounts of government responses to the impending closure of General

Motors' Holden factories in Victoria and South Australia referred to the intended input from both levels of government. Reporting of contentious issues often includes reference to the mutual recrimination between governments, providing continuing evidence of the notorious blame game and drawing attention to the lack of overall political responsibility. Such media exposure certainly increases transparency by giving publicity to joint government activities.

Second, Australian federalism provides a leading example of how the pluralistic nature of networked governance can open the processes of governing to wider scrutiny. The duplication of top-down vertical Westminster-style governments involved in joint programs may facilitate buck-passing and blame-shifting. But it also provides parallel sets of accountability institutions and processes, such as parliamentary inquiry and freedom of information legislation, that offer more points of contact between governments and the wider public, particularly for well-resourced and politically sophisticated interest groups and other stakeholders (Galligan 1995: Chpt. 1). Major interest groups, such as the Australian Medical Association or the National Farmers' Federation and its constituent organisations, have close relationships with both Commonwealth and state and territory bureaucracies and are able to gain access to a wide range of government information. In the discussions over proposed changes to the environmental assessment of development projects, involving both the Queensland and federal governments, environmental groups were able to put questions to both state and federal environment ministers and departments, thus widening public discussion of a contentious issue.

Third, Australian federalism, like other federal systems, may encourage bottom-up accountability by networks of committed professionals answering directly to local communities. Such networks are certainly found in service areas such as social and employment assistance, involving members of Commonwealth and state and territory governments, as well as local governments. Indigenous affairs, in particular, provides frequent examples of frontline administrators cooperating across institutional boundaries to serve local communities (O'Flynn et al. 2011; see also *Jarvie and Stewart*).

Such bottom-up accountability of professional networks is not confined to federations and can also be found in unitary systems (Hupe and Hill 2007). Federalism, through its constitutional division of powers and

overlapping responsibilities, however, provides more opportunities for administrative discretion by frontline officials dealing with a greater range of different government agencies. It is not coincidental that theories of street-level administration and bottom-up accountability have been particularly influential in the United Sates, a federation with notably divided powers (e.g. Lipsky 1980; Agranoff 2007; 2012).

Fourth, Australian federalism has attempted to use performance reporting as a means of increasing accountability for joint Commonwealth–state and territory programs. First steps in this direction were taken by the annual reports on government services, which were introduced in the 1980s and coordinated by the Productivity Commission. But the COAG reforms that began in 2009 took the process much further. The new system has a number of foundations, beginning with the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations (2008–09), the *Federal Financial Relations Act 2009* and an expanded role for the COAG Reform Council (established in 2006, since abolished in 2014) (O'Loughlin 2013).

Two main types of agreement have been associated with funding grants from the federal government. One type is national agreements, which deal with broad service sectors such as education, affordable housing, health care and Indigenous reform. Each national agreement sets out the agreed general objectives for the policy area as well as various outcomes, outputs and targets that contribute to these objectives. It then outlines the roles and responsibilities of the respective governments, including roles and responsibilities shared by both levels of government as well as those distinct to each level considered separately. Each agreement also stipulates mutually agreed performance indicators and benchmarks that can be used to assess governments' progress towards the agreed outcomes. The COAG Reform Council then reported publicly on the performance data received from each government, making comparisons and pointing out opportunities for improvement.

The national agreement system has certainly increased the level of public information about government performance in key areas of overlapping responsibilities. Both federal and state and territory governments are therefore more accountable in the sense of improving the public transparency of their achievements. On the other hand, like similar schemes in other federal systems, such as the United States (Radin 2006) and Canada (Anderson and Findlay 2010), the COAG reporting system did not meet all the hoped-for goals of its advocates.

One common problem is difficulty in collecting and collating comparable data. Though the COAG Reform Council exerted major efforts over the years into improving the quality and consistency of data, reported performance information still suffers from inconsistency because of the different priorities and incompatible administrative practices of different participating governments.

The adoption of performance reporting in networked governance assumes agreement between the partners on common objectives that can then be reported against as a measure of the network's joint success. In federations, however, such uniformity of purpose is not always forthcoming. The national agreements recognise this reality by allowing for some policy differences between individual states and territories and by tolerating a certain divergence in priorities. Such divergence, however, tends to undermine the attempt to use performance reporting as a mechanism of joint accountability. For this reason, the COAG Reform Council tended to adopt a unifying stance, placing its emphasis on common objectives and agreed measures.

In theory, COAG is a creature of all participating governments and stands in an equal relation to each one as it coordinates joint performance towards mutually agreed goals. In practice, however, COAG is driven by the Commonwealth Government and can easily be viewed by the states and territories as another instrument of Commonwealth control, more a centralising than a coordinating body. The Commonwealth is the main funder of services under the national agreements, while the states and territories are the main service providers and the main suppliers of performance data. Although the agreements talk the language of equality and consensus, the underlying reality is closer to that of purchaser and provider or principal and agent, a fundamentally unequal relationship that is associated more with vertical accountability.

A principal–agent approach is even more explicit in reporting for the other type of agreement under the 2008–09 intergovernmental arrangements, the national 'partnerships' (an Orwellian coinage, given that the partnerships are, in fact, less like genuine partnerships than the agreements). The partnerships have a similar structure of national policy objectives, defined outputs and performance benchmarks, but they differ from the agreements in that funds are located for specific activities or projects agreed to by each state or territory. In some cases the Commonwealth also offers reward payments on the basis of reported

performance. In effect, the Commonwealth has used its funding power to forcibly impose a form of performance management on the states and territories in line with what is considered international best practice (Bouckaert and Halligan 2008).

In so far as the COAG reporting system is perceived as making separate states and territories individually more accountable for the performance of federally funded and defined services, it does not count as a form of genuine accountability for shared outcomes in networked governance. It is more akin to improving the accountability of states and territories to the Commonwealth as agents to principals, leaving the prime responsibility for the direction of policy with the Commonwealth. Alternatively, the states and territories are being treated as independent governments separately responsible for their own policies. For example, one of the benefits of the new reporting system claimed by COAG is that the system provides individual states and territories with measures of each other's performance, thus offering them benchmarks and encouraging a process of administrative learning. In either case, whether states and territories are seen as agents or independent governments, the background assumptions are coordinate rather than concurrent. Accountability is, therefore, allocated to one particular level, not shared between levels.

The lack of shared commitment to joint objectives may help to explain the general lack of interest in acting on the basis of performance information. As the former chairman of the COAG Reform Council, Paul McClintock, frequently complained (e.g. McClintock 2012), when the reports have been published they attract little public or political attention, which is a common feature of performance measurement reporting systems in general (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011: 109). McClintock was particularly disappointed in the lack of political response to reports on progress towards national agreements. In contrast to successfully functioning networks, where partners willingly cooperate in imposing remedies and improvements, the general COAG experience has been that partner governments either ignore information of poor performance or else revert to the accustomed game of mutual recrimination. In this respect, the aim of eliminating, or even curtailing, the blame game, as championed by the COAG Reform Council, must be judged a failure.

On occasion, cooperative interaction across jurisdictional boundaries can support a form of performance reporting that is much closer to the networked governance model of accountability. For example, the National

Mental Health Commission was established by the Commonwealth Government in response to lobbying by mental health experts and consumer groups. It is made up of experts and consumer advocates in the field of mental health and collects and publishes information, both quantitative and qualitative, relevant to mental health provision in the different jurisdictions (Smullen 2016). Different mental health bureaucracies and institutions voluntarily contribute data and then make use of the joint information in decision-making. In this case, the members of the network are motivated by genuinely shared values and willingly embrace public accountability as a means of improving their individual and collective performance. The extent of voluntary cooperation, however, serves to highlight the contrast with other COAG-based agreements where the state and territory governments reluctantly acceded to performance regimes as the price of receiving Commonwealth funding.

Discussion

Overall, then, Australian federalism does exhibit some of the features of public accountability associated with networked governance. The extent of such accountability gains, however, does not appear to outweigh the undoubted deficits due to the lack of unified top-down control and external scrutiny. Such judgments, relying on patchy evidence and subjective impressions, are inevitably complex and contestable. But Australian federalism conforms to the general pattern that networked arrangements suffer from deficiencies in external accountability.

In this case, does Australian federalism display any of the countervailing features that are sometimes claimed to compensate for any deficit in external accountability in networked governance? For instance, does the networking between governments and government officials display a sufficiently high level of shared commitment to the public interest that would reduce the need to exercise external scrutiny? Can cooperating politicians and public servants in different jurisdictions be trusted to serve the public with as much dedication as, say, groups of social workers belonging to non-profit charities and government welfare agencies?

Again, the relationships between governments are too complex and disparate to allow any firm conclusions. In favour of a more optimistic view, we could point to the large body of uncontroversial, routine business regularly conducted between politicians and bureaucrats from

different governments. A great deal of mutual cooperation occurs between members of the different governments, particularly among bureaucrats and professionals, either through the formal process of the ministerial councils and the officials' committees that support them, or informally through the regular interactions between opposite numbers in different bureaucracies. For the most part, cooperative relationships across jurisdictional boundaries operate informally and confidentially without being subject to public scrutiny. They may involve internal accountability between the respective partners as they question each other on relevant issues (Painter 1996) but they are typically not open to public view.

That much of this activity escapes public attention (and the interest of academics) is plausible *prima facie* evidence that it leads to outcomes that are generally welcome to the various sections of the public affected. These areas of genuine cooperation provide scope for the positive virtues of networks and partnerships, such as shared values and mutual trust. The fact that these aspects of federalism are largely unreported should not be allowed to minimise either their extent or their significance.

On the other hand, like other federations, Australian federalism provides ample opportunity for conflict between different levels of government. Relations between the respective governments of the Commonwealth and the states and territories are often marked more by self-interested competition and mutual suspicion than by trust and cooperation (Painter 1998: Chpt. 3). Open conflict with the Commonwealth is a perennial vote-winner for state and territory politicians, while their respective bureaucracies harbour entrenched antagonisms with their opposite numbers in the Commonwealth Government. Joint institutions, such as COAG leaders' meetings, are a site for political grandstanding and the self-interested pursuit of domestic advantage as much as for genuine interchange and cooperation.

This uncertainty over the respective extent of cooperation and conflict reflects the well-documented pragmatism that underlies Australian federalism (Hollander and Patapan 2007; Carroll and Head 2010). Intergovernmental relations are characterised by flexibility and the *ad hoc* use of institutions to suit current political imperatives without any strong commitment to constitutional federal principles. These imperatives, in turn, are set by the shifting agendas of federal governments, particularly prime ministers, as well as those of the state and territory governments.

It is to be expected, therefore, that patterns of interaction will adjust accordingly, displaying cooperation or conflict as the political dynamics demand.

Conclusions

In summary, federalism involves a clear deficit in terms of top-down accountability while offering certain accountability benefits through a higher number of points of access and potential for mutual scrutiny. Single-level government, conversely, can offer the advantages of top-down control and rectification, though at the cost of making government less transparent and less open to public questioning. Responses to these acknowledged differences in accountability structure vary according to the weight given to the different accountability mechanisms and also the value placed on decentred forms of governance and the institutional checks and balances they impose.

For some, the restrictions to top-down vertical accountability amount to a serious and insuperable accountability deficit in MLG and networks generally, when compared with single hierarchies (Rhodes 2006; Michels and Meijer 2008). Because these structures do not offer a single point of control, no one person or body is obliged to take ownership and responsibility of policy and programs and to impose remedies for failure. MLG provides opportunities for buck-passing and blame-shifting that can frustrate the public's demand for answers and solutions.

The demand for clear, hierarchical accountability has particular resonance in Westminster-style jurisdictions such as Australia, with their strong traditions of ministerial authority and responsibility. Criticisms of federalism centre on the alleged unaccountability of shared responsibility. By the same token, attempts to reform Australian federalism, whether by Commonwealth takeover of hospital services or by performance-based reward payments, are aimed at reducing the extent of shared responsibility by centralising control in Canberra. Calls to reduce vertical fiscal imbalance and restore more taxing power to states and territories are similarly driven by a preference for a single point of responsibility and accountability. Few voices are heard for the virtues of dispersed responsibility and cooperation.

The appeal of single-point vertical accountability, however, while strong in Westminster-style jurisdictions, carries less weight in other institutional systems that do not offer such an effective method of political accountability through elected leaders. In the United States, for example, the separation of powers and a more devolved bureaucratic structure mean that accountability through elected leaders is merely one of many external pressures facing government officials and is far from being the dominant relationship that it is for public servants in Westminster-style systems (Rhodes and Wanna 2009). Under such a system, more weight is likely to be given to the virtues of divided authority and multiple channels of accountability (Radin 2002). In Australia, too, liberal constitutionalists who value the checks and balances of federalism are more likely to emphasise the accountability gains that federalism offers (Galligan 1995). But theirs is a minority view. For the most part, Australians appear to prefer a structure that clearly allocates responsibility and accountability to a single level of government.

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