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## Having it all: can collaborative governance be both legitimate and accountable?

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### ABSTRACT

Collaborative governance arrangements are frequently criticized for achieving collaboration at the expense of legitimacy and accountability. We explore the conditions under which legitimacy and accountability can occur in collaborative governance, ultimately aiming to discover whether collaborative arrangements can 'have it all', simultaneously being both legitimate and accountable. We leverage the Collaborative Governance Case Database to analyse a diversity of cases, employing a rich, qualitative comparative analysis. We find that legitimacy and accountability do co-exist in some cases and identify competing sets of conditions for this concurrence. Based on this exploration, we formulate propositions for future research.

**KEYWORDS** Collaborative governance; legitimacy; accountability

### Introduction


For many years, collaborative governance through networks and partnerships was seen as the lender of last resort – attempted only when hierarchical and market-based forms of governance had been tried and found wanting. This has changed in recent years, as collaborative governance is increasingly seen as a strategic governance tool on par with hierarchy and markets.<sup>1</sup>

Collaborative governance is frequently used to tackle wicked and unruly problems (e.g. climate change and gang-related crime), to mobilize private resources, to enhance pluri-centric coordination in environmental protection and health promotion, and to design and muster support for innovative solutions. Collaborative governance is welcomed by public and private actors who realize that a group of actors collaborating constructively with one another can often solve problems and tasks that none of them could solve alone (Huxham and Vangen 2013).

Despite their popularity, the value of collaborative governance arrangements is still hotly debated. Collaborative governance arrangements are the 'collective decision-making process based on more or less institutionalized interactions between two or

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more actors that aims to establish common ground for joint problem solving' (Douglas et al. 2020). They are expected to be efficient, effective, legitimate, equitable, adaptive, accountable, sustainable etc. to be truly valuable (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015). Various authors have questioned whether collaborations can deliver on any or all of these expectations. Dickinson and Glasby (2010), for example, question the ability of networks to be effective, as they emerge mainly from the desires of stakeholders rather than evidence of practice. Stoker (1998) argues that collaborations will struggle to obtain legitimacy due to the inherent voluntary participation mechanisms and the opaque nature of their decision processes. Potentially, collaborations may only achieve a sub-set of various ends at the expense of the others (Klijin and Koppenjan 2015); for example, collaborations may have to sacrifice speed and effectiveness to achieve inclusive decision-making processes involving all partners.

Here, we focus on a particular aspect of the debate regarding the value of collaborations, exploring whether collaborations can be both legitimate and accountable at the same time (see also Hendriks 2008). The legitimacy of collaborations by itself is already contested due to their often-shaky connection to formal mandates and democratic oversight (Torfing and Sørensen 2014). Similarly, the accountability of collaborations is criticized for the difficulty in holding 'the many hands' involved in collaboration to account for their contributions (Sørensen and Torfing 2021; Sullivan 2003; Willems and Van Dooren 2011). Achieving both legitimacy and accountability may then be impossible, as the mechanisms ensuring accountability (e.g. clear rules and responsibilities) may scare off partners and reduce the legitimacy of the collaboration among these stakeholders, just as the mechanisms ensuring legitimacy (e.g. diverse participants, large groups) may hinder accountability (Klijin and Koppenjan 2015).

Responding to these concerns, we aim to explore whether and under what conditions both legitimacy and accountability occur in collaborative governance arrangements.

From the available literature, we derive the conditions deemed crucial for the attainment of legitimacy (the presence of a large, heterogeneous set of participants who are informing decisions) and for the occurrence of accountability (the presence of clear ground rules and unshared leadership structures).

We then perform a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) of 34 cases drawn from the Collaborative Governance Case Database, which is an open access resource of high-quality case studies collected by and for collaborative governance researchers (Douglas et al. 2020). We investigate the alternative combinations of conditions in which legitimacy and accountability occur; both separately and together. These combinations of conditions are explored further in a closer discussion of specific empirical cases, finally generating a set of propositions for future research.

We find that some configurations of conditions lead to the occurrence of legitimacy and accountability. More importantly, we find that a sub-set of these configurations seems to lead to the concurrence of both legitimacy and accountability at the same time. Especially the presence of collectively shared leadership in combination with a clear set of rules seems to be critical for the concurrence of legitimacy and accountability.

As this study is strongly exploratory in nature, the specific properties of the cases drawn from the database and the limitations of QCA must be taken into account, yet these first results give some hope that a legitimacy-accountability trade-off is not always necessary – and that collaborative governance can indeed 'have it all'.

## **Legitimacy and accountability within collaborative governance**

### ***Can collaborative governance be legitimate?***

Legitimacy can be defined from a strictly normative perspective as the idea that a particular set of inputs, processes and outcomes confirms to socially constructed rules, norms and standards (Orr et al. 2016; Suddaby, Bitektine, and Haack 2017). However, as collaborations are often initiated to tackle complex problems through the formation of new modes of interactive governance (Head and Alford 2015), there may not be an articulated framework of rules, norms and standards against which to assess the legitimacy of the collaboration.

A more sociological perspective on legitimacy may then be more appropriate, defined as the extent to which a particular governance mechanism enjoys widespread support from relevant and affected actors. This widespread support can be equated to active participation. Paraphrasing Orr et al. (2016), we might say that taking part in consultations, negotiations or otherwise participating in collaborative processes signifies tacit consent of the governance arenas. Conversely, lack of participation, boycotting or withdrawal from participation in collaborative arenas indicates a lack of consent and legitimacy.

This legitimacy may be driven by several factors. Collaborative governance arrangements may enjoy widespread support if they are likely to produce effective and desirable solutions (output legitimacy). However, the outputs of collaborations are hard to define, highly uncertain and different constituencies will assess them differently (Head and Alford 2015). Alternatively, support for collaborative governance may rest on a positive evaluation of the ground rules and their ability to ensure fair, inclusive and transparent interaction and decision-making that neutralizes power asymmetries (throughput legitimacy). However, collaborative governance tends to be weakly institutionalized and characterized by informal rules that are difficult for participants to assess (Ayres 2020). Finally, the legitimacy of collaborative governance may be derived from the inclusion of actors (input legitimacy). Actors may support and choose to participate in collaborative networks and partnerships that bring together all of the actors with relevant experiences, ideas and resources (Ansell et al. 2020). Here, we focus on this input legitimacy.

Input legitimacy tends to rely on two core conditions: the ability of a relatively large group of actors to participate and the ability of diverse and relatively heterogeneous actors to partake. Firstly, allowing for a large group of actors to be involved ensures that it is not only a few privileged actors who are involved in decision-making. Secondly, ensuring a high degree of diversity among these actors ensures that more interests are represented and that a broad range of ideas and resources are mobilized in formulating a joint solution. The more actors that participate and the more heterogeneous they are, the more widespread is the support from relevant and affected constituents (Fawcett and Daugbjerg 2012; Papadopoulos 2007). These conditions are not always met, as organizers may fear that too many actors will enhance the transaction costs or that a high degree of heterogeneity will hinder consensus-building.

### ***Can collaborative governance be accountable?***

In its most basic form, accountability refers to decisionmakers who are answerable to other actors with a legitimate claim to demand information and explanation about

key decisions and results, pass a judgment and impose relevant sanctions (Bovens, Schillemans, and Goodin 2014). Collaborations could thus be considered accountable when public authorities and the internal and external stakeholders can actively monitor, critically scrutinize and effectively sanction its processes and goal attainment.

Yet collaborative governance arrangements are difficult to hold to account (Klijn and Koppenjan 2015). They often fail to provide accessible, non-technical accounts that facilitate scrutiny. They often share responsibility for both idea generation and implementation with public authorities, thus making it difficult to see who is responsible for what. Finally, it is difficult to find effective ways of sanctioning the relatively self-regulated arenas that consist of appointed participants representing key constituencies. Critical dialogue, ‘naming and shaming’ and threats to take back the decision-making power delegated to collaborative arenas are typical forms of sanctions.

To ensure a regular production of accounts and facilitate responsive dialogue with relevant accountability forums, two conditions must be fulfilled. First, there must be clear rules that regulate to whom collaborative governance arenas are accountable and to ensure that proper accounts are produced and made available for scrutiny (Klijn and Koppenjan 2015; Ostrom 1994). Second, leadership must be unshared so that it is clear who in the collaborative governance arenas is responsible for producing regular accounts, organizing and mediating the exchange between the collaborative arena and relevant accountability forums, and ensuring that questions are answered and that criticisms are considered and receive response (Ansell and Gash 2018).

### ***Can collaborative governance be legitimate and accountable at the same time?***

Many collaborative governance commentators claim that both legitimacy and accountability are rare birds in collaborative governance and that it is virtually impossible to imagine both being present at the same time (Huxham et al. 2000; Purdy 2012; Willems and Van Dooren 2011). Papadopoulos (2007) explicitly cautions that collaborations may fail to obtain either legitimacy or accountability.

The informal, secluded and distributed character of most collaborations renders it difficult for outsiders (and frequently also insiders) to understand who has actually participated in making key decisions, thus undermining the input legitimacy. Moreover, as collaborations involve a plethora of public and private actors with multiple ambitions in solving complex problems with relatively undefined structures (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Page et al. 2015), it is hard to see how relevant accountability forums can hold collaborative arenas to account for their actions.

Arguably, the very conditions that allow for the presence of legitimacy (large group size, heterogeneity) may block the conditions that allow for accountability (clear rules and unshared leadership) and vice versa. Collaborative governance arrangements with the large and heterogeneous groups of participants required to ensure input legitimacy will be less accountable, as it becomes difficult to identify who, among all the diverse actors involved, is responsible for what. Conversely, collaborative governance arrangements with the strict rules and unshared leadership required to ensure accountability will tend to have low input legitimacy, since the formal regulation and hierarchical leadership will deprive the collaborative arena of ‘flexibility to include more actors in the collaboration and tailor processes to match citizen needs’ (Fung and Wright 2003). In line with this, Willem and Lucidarme (2014) observe that collaborations that push

for formal rules and control mechanisms to attain stability tend to lose out on the flexible arrangements required for trust.

A more optimistic account would be that legitimacy and accountability are not necessarily mutually exclusive; rather, they possibly occur together and even reinforce each other. As more and heterogeneous actors become involved in collaborative governance, more actors and constituencies will actively monitor what is achieved through multi-actor collaboration, and good performance and positive results may in turn generate further support, enticing more actors to join the partnership (Ostrom 1994). This virtuous cycle would be supported by an unshared leadership that enhances performance and by rule-based inclusion mechanisms that make it easy for people to join – the accountability system may even spur dialogue with external actors who want to get involved in collaborative value production (Grossi and Tommasson 2015). However, this concurrence may only materialize in specific governance regimes (Emerson and Nabatchi 2015) or modes of governance (Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017).

Following the competing arguments about legitimacy and accountability in collaborative governance, several questions emerge: Can collaborative governance arrangements meet the conditions for legitimacy to occur? And for accountability to occur? Is it possible for legitimacy and accountability to occur simultaneously? Or will a trade-off between the two necessarily occur, meaning that legitimacy will emerge at the expense of accountability (and vice versa)? And to what extent does the broader context or mode of collaborative governance arrangement matter?

## Method

To answer the questions above, we employed fuzzy-set QCA (fsQCA) on 34 collaborative governance cases drawn from the Collaborative Governance Case Database. In particular, we explored which combinations of conditions (configurations, in QCA parlance) – including the size and heterogeneity of the set of participants, rule clarity and leadership sharing, and governance modes – led to either legitimacy or accountability, or both.

Our approach is explorative in nature. First, we conducted a QCA on the conditions leading to legitimacy. We then did the same for the conditions leading to accountability. Finally, we compared the resulting configurations. If at least one common configuration existed, this would suggest that ‘having it all’ is not an unattainable ambition and that a trade-off between legitimacy and accountability is not necessary. The common configurations would also reveal how ‘having it all’ might be possible, thus suggesting how to make collaborative governance legitimate as well as accountable. Based on this analysis, some propositions for future research are formulated.

In the following, after first describing the empirical setting and data collection techniques, we explicate the reasons why we opted for fsQCA as our analytical tool. Finally, we will show the criteria we used for the operationalization and calibration of outcomes and conditions (in QCA parlance) before presenting the results of our analysis.

### *Empirical setting and data collection*

The data used in this study originate from the Collaborative Governance Case Database ([www.collaborationdatabase.org](http://www.collaborationdatabase.org)). This is an open access database,

a common pool resource by and for collaborative governance researchers, where they can publish and find high-quality case studies (Douglas et al. 2020). Each case is extensively described in a 20-page case form, containing qualitative, free-text case description and more quantitative Likert-scale variables. The case format generally covers different elements, such as starting conditions, institutional design and accountability. All of the cases in the database are vetted by the editorial team of collaborative governance scholars overseeing its quality.

At the time of this study, the database included 39 cases of collaborative governance drawn from different countries, multiple levels and different policy domains, 34 of which were used to perform the analysis. Reasons for case exclusion were either that the case author was ‘not very confident’ in the reliability of the empirical assessment for one or more of the conditions we have selected or that data on either the relevant conditions or the outcomes were missing. These considerations led us to exclude five cases from the analysis, leaving us with 34 cases.

The selected cases are all empirical examples of collaborative governance, situated across Europe, North America, East Asia and Australasia, covering different levels (e.g. local, regional, national, supranational, cross-border and multilevel) and policy domains (e.g. agriculture, culture, environment, healthcare, infrastructure, security, social employment). The characteristics of the selected collaborative governance cases in terms of country, level and policy domains are displayed in Table 1, and a complete list of the cases is provided in the Appendix.

The Collaborative Governance Case Database supplies data referring to the beginning, middle and end of the observed period. We selected the end of period value for each condition and outcome because we are interested in what collaborative governance can ultimately achieve.

The data entered into the data base come from an extensive process of data collection and analysis conducted by the case author. Each case relied on multiple data collection methods – including document analysis, interviews, surveys and participant observation – so as to allow the triangulation of the information and enhance data reliability.

Despite this, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the data base. First, the cases included in the database are not randomly selected, so we cannot say they are representative of collaborative governance. Secondly, data are inserted by individual authors without any assessment of intercoder reliability, although it should be

**Table 1.** Overview of the collaborative governance cases.

Countries	Jurisdictional level	Policy domains *
Australia (4)	Local (12)	Agriculture (3)
Canada (1)	Regional (6)	Culture (6)
Colombia (1)	National (3)	Economy Trade (2)
Denmark (1)	Multilevel (1)	Education (4)
Germany (1)	Local & Multilevel (2)	Environment (14)
Vietnam (1)	Local & Regional (6)	Infrastructure (5)
Italy (1)	Local, Regional & National (2)	Health (7)
Netherlands (10)	Local, Regional & Multilevel (2)	Security (6)
Norway (1)		Social Employment Planning (9)
Switzerland (1)		
Sweden (1)		Technology/Transport (1)
USA (11)		

Number of cases in parenthesis \* More than one policy domain is possible for each case



mentioned that clear operational definitions are provided. Given these limitations, the aim of our study is purely explorative, as we merely want to investigate whether and under which conditions it is possible for collaborative governance to be both legitimate and accountable, based on the insights from a medium-n set of cases. The existence of at least one combination of conditions in the QCA analysis leading to both legitimacy and accountability would suggest that it is possible to ‘have it all’, and it will spur our interest in which combination(s) of conditions falsify the assumption of an inevitable trade-off between legitimacy and accountability.

### **Fuzzy-set QCA (fsQCA)**

QCA is a set-theoretical method (Ragin 2000; Schneider and Wagemann 2012) that conceives conditions and outcomes as sets. Cases are assigned as members (or non-members) of a set, and the effect of each individual condition is measured in terms of set membership (the process of assigning cases in a set is called calibration). QCA assumes interconnection among conditions, which allows the exploration of the combined effect of the selected causal conditions on the expected outcome. QCA also sheds light on complex causality because of conjunctural causation (i.e. conditions combine to produce an outcome), equifinality (i.e. there may be more than one pathway to a given outcome), and asymmetry (i.e. the same outcome may be produced by the presence or absence of a certain condition, depending on the combination with other conditions) (Misangyi et al. 2017; Ragin 2008).

In this perspective, QCA differs from both conventional regression analysis and case-study research. Regression analysis focuses on the net effects of individual independent variables (conditions in QCA parlance) on an outcome. The case study method allows comparison between limited numbers of cases. By contrast, QCA allows the identification of multiple causal ‘recipes’ (Ragin 2000, 2008) that are simultaneously associated with an outcome by analysing medium-n samples (Ragin 2009).

On the basis of these premises, QCA allows us to explore whether and which combinations of size and heterogeneity of the group of participants, rule clarity, leadership sharing and governance modes may lead to either legitimacy or accountability, or their concurrence.

In this work, we use fuzzy-set QCA (fsQCA) (Ragin 2009), which allows researchers to calibrate partial membership in sets using values in the interval between 0 (non-membership) and 1 (full membership). In so doing, ‘fsQCA allows to include more information in the analysis, distinguishing between differences among cases both in kind and in degree. This results in a higher content validity’ (Schneider and Wagemann 2012; Warsen, Klijn, and Koppenjan 2019, 6).

### **Operationalization and calibration**

Table 2 shows the measures and calibration thresholds for each condition and the outcomes. Conditions and outcomes originate from the Collaborative Governance Case Database.

Calibration is needed in QCA to determine the membership of the cases in the sets representing the conditions and outcomes. This requires the definition of thresholds (or ‘anchors’) that allow to distinguish which cases can be considered fully in or fully



**Table 2.** Operationalization and calibration of conditions and outcomes.

Conditions and outcomes	Measures	Thresholds for calibration
Size of the set of participants SIZE	22. How many (institutional/group) actors were involved in the collaborative process? (from 1 to 5, from 6 to 10, from 11 to 15, from 16 to 20, more than 20). We built an ordinal variable, ranging from 1 to 5 depending on the number of actors involved.	Full non-membership: 2; Cross over point: 3; Full membership: 4
Heterogeneity of the involved actors HETER	23. What different types of actors took part in the collaboration? Please select the backgrounds of the different participants. 23.1 Political organizations/politicians; 23.2 Public organizations/civil servants; 23.3 Private, for-profit organizations; 23.4 Private, non-profit organizations; 23.5 Citizens/informal citizen group. We built an ordinal variable, assuming values from 1 to 5, depending on the number of different categories of actors involved.	Full non-membership: 2; Cross over point: 3; Full membership: 4
Rule clarity RULECLA	24. To what extent were the procedural ground rules for the collaboration clearly explicated by and for the participants? (1 = Very little articulation of ground rules, 5 = Very detailed articulation)	Full non-membership: 2; Cross over point: 3; Full membership: 4
Leadership sharing LEADSHA	30. Characterize the locus of leadership roles in the collaborative process. 30.1 One-lead actor; 30.2 A few lead actors; 30.3 Shared collectively among all actors. We built a categorical ordinal variable, assuming values of 1, 2 and 3 depending on whether leadership is played by one lead actor (1 = hierarchical and no-shared leadership), a few lead actors (2) or is shared collectively among all actors (3).	Full non-membership: 1.5 Cross over point: 2; Full membership: 2.5
Collaborative governance modes GOVMODES	56. To what extent did the collaboration use any of the following forms of collaborative governance? (1 = Very low extent, 5 = Very high extent) 56.1 co-initiation, 56.2 co-development, 56.3 co-production. We built a categorical ordinal variable, assuming values equal to 1, 2, or 3, depending on whether the highest value was attributed to co-initiation (1), co-development (2), co-production (3).	Full non-membership: 1.5 Cross over point: 2; Full membership: 2.5
Legitimacy LEG	55.6 To what extent did the collaboration produce the following outputs or outcomes? (1 = Very low, 5 = Very high). Increase legitimacy and support among different constituents	Full non-membership: 2; Cross over point: 3; Full membership: 4
Accountability ACC	50. To what extent was there active monitoring of goal attainment? (1 = Very little monitoring of goal achievement, 5 = Very active monitoring of goal achievement)	Full non-membership: 2; Cross over point: 3; Full membership: 4

out of the set under consideration, as well as the cross-over point of maximum ambiguity regarding membership of a case in a particular set (Greckhamer et al. 2018).

We relied on Tosmana,<sup>2</sup> a software often used for QCA, to identify the thresholds. Tosmana provides a threshold-setter that can be used to set and adapt thresholds while viewing the data distribution (Cronqvist 2003).

## Findings

The first step in the QCA is to perform an analysis of necessity. The aim is to ascertain whether any of the conditions are necessary for causing the outcome: a condition is necessary when the outcome occurs only when the condition is also present. The subsequent step involves performing an analysis of sufficiency: a condition, or combination of conditions, is sufficient when each time the condition occurs, the outcome also occurs. Through a process of minimization, the analysis of sufficiency produces a simpler equation for the conditions (or combinations of conditions) leading to the expected outcome. This so-called ‘minimal formula’ describes the configurations that are sufficient for the outcome.

We used fsQCA and Tosmana as software for the analysis.<sup>3</sup>

In the following, we firstly present the necessity and sufficiency analysis for the legitimacy of collaborative governance arrangements ( $\text{leg} = f(\text{size, heter, rulecla, leadsha, govmodes})$ ). Secondly, we present the necessity and sufficiency analysis for the pathways leading to accountability ( $\text{acc} = f(\text{size, heter, rulecla, leadsha, govmodes})$ ). Finally, we compare the combinations of conditions leading to legitimacy and accountability, respectively, and discuss the resulting evidence. If legitimacy and accountability share at least one configuration in common, this would here suggest that the joint achievement of both is possible. Moreover, the common configurations can point us to the conditions that made this legitimate and accountable collaborative governance arrangement possible.

### *legitimacy = f(size, heter, rulecla, leadsha, govmode)*

As Table 3 shows, none of the selected conditions (both in their presence and absence) can be considered as necessary for legitimacy in collaborative governance arrangements. No condition, in fact, exceeds the normally accepted 0.9 consistency threshold (Ragin 2000).

Table 4 displays three configurations that are sufficient for the legitimacy of collaborative governance arrangements. Logical remainders were addressed by opting

**Table 3.** Legitimacy: analysis of necessity.

	Consistency	Coverage
SIZE	0.601423	0.683815
~SIZE	0.506355	0.596407
HETER	0.596339	0.685965
~HETER	0.563803	0.656213
RULECLA	0.758007	0.658569
~RULECLA	0.307575	0.53257
LEADSHA	0.671073	0.653465
~LEADSHA	0.498729	0.71087
COLLGOV	0.781901	0.651971
~COLLGOV	0.275546	0.520653

Note: the ~ sign indicates absence of the condition

**Table 4.** Legitimacy: overview of the configurations leading to legitimacy.

	Path 1	Path 2	Path 3
	size*~heter*rulecla* govmodes	~heter* rulecla*leadsha* govmodes	size*heter* rulecla*leadsha
Raw coverage	0.250127	0.247585	0.330453
Unique coverage	0.099136	0.096594	0.205389
Consistency	0.901099	0.979879	0.923295
Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term	X, E, K	T, X, AN	C, U, L, M, O, Q, V, Y, AA, AI, AM
			Solution coverage: 0.552110 Solution consistency: 0.905755
Complex solution Frequency cut-off: 1; Consistency cut-off: 0.87			

Note: The \* sign indicates the logical operator 'and', and the + sign indicates the operator 'or'; the tilde sign (~) is used to indicate negation or absence of a condition. The notation = > denotes the logical implication operator.

for the most conservative solutions (Schneider and Wagemann 2012). The frequency and consistency cut-off and the consistency and coverage scores for each path and the overall complex solution are also provided (details about the analysis of sufficiency, the Truth Table analysis and the minimization process can be found in the on-line appendix). The overall solution coverage is 0.552110, showing that the three paths explain 55% of the legitimate solutions, and the solution consistency is 0.905755, indicating that 90% of the empirical data presenting the three configurations are legitimate.

Two additional measures may be used to assess the fit of each configuration: raw consistency and raw coverage. Raw consistency refers to the proportion of empirical data consistent with the expected outcome, while raw coverage measures the proportion of instances of the outcome that exhibit a certain causal combination or path (Fiss 2007, 2011). A solution or path is informative when its consistency is above 0.75–0.80 and its raw coverage is above 0.25 (Uruena and Hidalgo 2016). Our configurations all exhibit consistency scores above 0.90 and raw coverage above 0.25, so they all can be considered informative and worth analysing further.

### Configuration 1

This configuration features a large number of relatively homogeneous actors governed by a clear system of rules and engaged in the coproduction mode of governance. The leadership structure is not relevant to reach legitimacy. This seems to suggest that when dealing with the co-production of policies and services, legitimacy is favoured by the presence of a large and homogeneous set of actors: the large number of participants provides a venue for the expression and consideration of multiple needs, whereas their homogeneity seems to favour the implementation of policies and services provision, thus increasing internal and external support. In this situation, clear rules also seem to reinforce input legitimacy, as rule-based inclusion mechanisms render it easier for people to join, thereby increasing participation.

In Case E (Joint Committee for Counterterrorism of the Dutch national government agencies), for instance, the collaboration brings together civil servants from all of

the national ministries and agencies in charge of interventions to fight violent extremism (i.e. the ministries of Justice, Defence, Social Affairs, Health, and Finance, plus directors of the intelligence agencies, police, crown prosecution, customs, national guard, and other organizations). The participants are therefore relatively homogeneous, as they are all coming from national government organizations, but their large number allows the representation of at least two different perspectives: (a) security and protection, and (b) social welfare and cohesion.

Security and intelligence agencies and police forces are responsible for addressing the most pressing and direct threats, whereas the various social agencies work to improve the living conditions of those who are most at risk of being recruited by terrorist organizations. In fact, after an initial approach was deemed excessively security-focused, it was precisely this increased consideration of the social aspects of radicalization that helped to widen the internal and external support for the overall approach to counterterrorism.

This legitimacy is further bolstered by the fact that both sides (security and social cohesion) are directly involved in strategy implementation (corresponding to the co-production mode of collaborative governance) and not just in agenda setting or strategy formulation. In this case, the nature and sensitivity of the activities and the objectives of the collaboration did not push for the broader inclusion of citizens or other private/non-profit organizations, but the high number of participants from multiple public organizations – who often had longstanding relationships with each other across multiple domains (e.g. drug trafficking or immigration control) – ensures that the various dimensions of the problem at hand are tackled in the best possible manner.

Whereas this collaboration was created through a ministerial decree rather than self-initiated by participants, input legitimacy is nonetheless facilitated by the participants' awareness that all of the relevant public agencies engaged in fighting terrorism are involved in the arrangement and are willing to join their problem-solving capacities to ensure success. Rule clarity combines with large size, relative homogeneity, and strategy implementation in promoting legitimacy, because the procedural rules set by the ministerial decree clearly state in which capacity all the relevant actors are to participate, and wider rules structuring the relationships between the agencies clearly detailed who is answerable to whom and which type of information can be shared.

## **Configuration 2**

The second configuration shows another situation leading to legitimacy, when actors are engaged in policy and service co-production. As in Configuration 1, the homogeneity of the participating actors, combined with clear rule-based mechanisms, seems to favour legitimacy. Input legitimacy also seems to be supported not by a large number of actors (as in Configuration 1), but rather through shared leadership, which helps to ensure that diverse and potentially conflicting needs are taken into account.

Case AN (Usual Suspects. Fight Against Organized Crime, Human Trafficking, The Netherlands) provides an example of this configuration, where the participants were initially just four individuals (a public prosecutor and three members of local and national police forces) who wanted to develop a new approach to fighting child trafficking by means of: (i) reframing the criminal problem of children engaged in

theft and begging from one of mobile banditry and instead in terms of a humanitarian problem involving human trafficking and smuggling; (ii) gaining new insights into the nature and scope of the problem through research investigating the modus operandi of various gangs and criminal rings; and (iii) developing a problem-oriented approach based on collaboration with other public sector organizations. Similar to Case E, participants quickly became aware of how other stakeholders operating in public and non-profit domains (local government, social work and youth care) were to be involved in the effort, not only to increase much needed capacity, but also to provide the young victims with key services, such as housing and care. This integral approach increased both internal and external input legitimacy, also because it was combined with a system of rules that clarified the partners' contributions to the three aforementioned steps/objectives of the collaboration, and with shared leadership that facilitated a common understanding of different partners' perspectives and roles (addressing crimes at various levels vs. providing social and care services). As in the previous case, the various partners' direct involvement in strategy implementation (co-production mode) was a complementary factor in support of legitimacy, which was most visible in how the actors jointly carried out a successful international operation in Spain, where they traced an international gang, arrested two of its leaders and saved several children involved in these criminal practices.

### **Configuration 3**

This configuration describes a situation that is partially different from those illustrated in Configurations 1 and 2. Here, the mode of governance is not relevant for legitimacy. Regardless of the governance mode, then, the legitimacy of collaboration is reached via a combination of a large number of heterogeneous actors who share the leadership of the collaboration and are governed by a clearly stated set of rules. This seems to suggest that when a large set of heterogeneous actors participates in a collaborative arrangement and shares the leadership, more interests are involved and represented, which boosts legitimacy. Rule clarity also contributes to increasing actors' participation and therefore broader consideration of relevant needs, thus enhancing internal and external support.

Case O (Design and Implementation of the Congestion Charge Zone – Area C, Milan, Italy) exemplifies this configuration, where a large number of stakeholders from the public, private and non-profit sectors as well as local citizens were involved in all phases of the collaboration, from design to implementation and consolidation (which likely explains why the specific mode of collaborative governance is not relevant in this case to attain legitimacy). In fact, Milan's municipality set up a basic system of rules over four months for the Congestion Charge Zone drawing on a pre-existing programme, and then launched it so that city users could experience it and contribute possible solutions to arising problems (e.g. which vehicles should be granted free access? How could car parks located in the city centre be compensated for reduced incomes?).

Here, the heterogeneity of actors combined with their large number to enhance legitimacy, because not only different perspectives and ideas, but also specific individual requests were taken into consideration (although only those judged to be of common interest fed into the implementation of the programme). A clear system of rules further combined with large size and heterogeneity of actors, because it indicated

**Table 5.** Accountability: analysis of necessity.

	Consistency	Coverage
SIZE	0.574956	0.753757
~SIZE	0.518518	0.704192
HETER	0.561728	0.745029
~HETER	0.490741	0.65858
RULECLA	0.745591	0.746908
~RULECLA	0.294533	0.588028
LEADSHA	0.61067	0.685644
~LEADSHA	0.48545	0.797826
GOVMODES	0.808201	0.777024
~GOVMODES	0.243827	0.531122

Note: the ~ sign indicates absence of the condition

and welcomed the categories of actors (widely defined to include all of the city users) who could participate in the process; it defined the modes and avenues for needs to be manifested and contributions to be expressed; and it stated how user requests were to be assessed and managed, both if accepted or rejected.

An additional complementary factor in support of legitimacy was the fact that leadership roles were shifting among different individuals and across sectors, giving voice to different categories of city users – ranging from business associations to patients in the hospitals located in the city centre – who were able to see their needs and suggestions taken into consideration. Leadership roles were shared, also among the senior public officials involved in the programme – including the mayor, the alderman responsible for mobility, and the chief of the division in charge of the Congestion Charge Zone – who used their respective positions and skillsets to foster commitment both within the municipality and among citizens, which also increased legitimacy.

**Accountability =  $f$ (size, heter, rulecla, leadsha, govmodes)**

For collaborative governance arrangements to be accountable, neither the size and heterogeneity of the set of participants nor the clarity of rules, the sharing of leadership or the governance modes are necessary conditions (Table 5).

The analysis of sufficiency shows three paths that are sufficient for the accountability of collaborative governance arrangements (Table 6). Logical remainders were addressed by opting for the most conservative solutions (Schneider and Wagemann 2012). Table 6 reports the frequency and consistency cut-off, the consistency and coverage scores for each path, as well as for the overall complex solution (see the online appendix for more information about the analysis of sufficiency, the Truth Table analysis and the minimization process).

### Configuration 4

This configuration suggests that when dealing with the co-creation of policies and services, accountability can be ensured by a large number of actors combined with the presence of a clear system of rules governing the collaboration. The leadership structure and the extent to which participants are heterogeneous or homogeneous are not relevant for ensuring accountability. This seems to suggest that when the implementation of policies and services is in the co-creation mode, clarity of rules and large size of the set of participants may lead to accountability, as explicit rules render it easier to

**Table 6.** Accountability: overview of the configurations leading to accountability.

size*rulecla*govmodes + ~heter*rulecla*leadsha* govmodes + size*heter*rulecla*leadsha => ACC			
	Path 4	Path 5	Path 6
	size*rulecla* govmodes	~heter*rulecla*leadsha* govmodes	size*heter*rulecla*leadsha
Raw coverage	0.440476	0.197531	0.29012
Unique coverage	0.152557	0.083774	0.026896
Consistency	0.913163	0.901408	0.934659
Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term	C, N, Q, U, X, Y, E, H, K, L, M, O, V, AI, AM	T, X, AN	C, U, L, M, O, Q, V, Y, AA, AI, AM
			Solution coverage: 0.551146
			Solution consistency: 0.925926
Complex solution			
Frequency cut-off: 1; Consistency cut-off: 0.83			

Note: The \* sign indicates the logical operator 'and', and the + sign indicates the operator 'or'; the tilde sign (~) is used to indicate negation or absence of a condition. The notation => denotes the logical implication operator

identify who is responsible for what, and more actors monitor the collaborative results. At the same time, the intense involvement of a high number of participants in collaborative implementation may also be that which facilitates monitoring, as participants better understand what is being done and can observe and evaluate the immediate effects.

Case K (Homelessness policy development and program funding in Vancouver, Canada) provides an example of this configuration. Established as part of the national government's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI), the case describes the creation of local partnerships whereby local governments, civil society groups and service providers in more than 60 Canadian cities are incentivized to collectively devise a plan to address homelessness and to jointly decide how to allocate (mostly federal) funds among non-profit organizations providing services to the homeless. The large number of collaborating partners ensures that the process includes several local stakeholders with their own perspectives and approaches to addressing homelessness.

Moreover, the partners' participation in the co-creation mode here implies that these stakeholders are involved not only in devising a local plan to address homelessness to be submitted to the relevant government minister for approval, but also in reviewing proposals from service providers and collectively deciding whether to fund them. Clear rules determine who gets to participate in these partnerships, how they are meant to function, and their reporting duties to the minister and to their regional staff in charge of the local-level monitoring. Upward accountability is ensured by very detailed requirements that the local collaboration's membership and community plan, as well as their funding decisions, need to be formally approved by the Minister.

At the same time, large size coupled with clear ground rules facilitate the types of transformative deliberative processes found in the Vancouver Metro collaboration, which promote transparency and accountability among participating stakeholders. The heterogeneity/homogeneity of participating actors and their contribution to leadership activities are not relevant to accountability in this case, as the heterogeneous partnership is already mandated by the rules that govern its establishment, and because local level leadership is generally administrative in nature.



### **Configuration 5**

This configuration is also focused on the co-production mode<sup>4</sup>; in contrast with Configuration 4, however, it displays a situation where the presence of homogeneous actors, who share the leadership of a clearly rule-based collaboration, ensure the accountability of the co-creation of policies and services. The extent of the collaboration is not relevant to reach accountability. A group of homogenous actors makes it easier to identify who responds for what, and the sharing of leadership collectively makes all the actors accountable for the collaboration's results. On top of everything else, as long as effective instruments for monitoring and disclosing results are in place, shared leadership is not necessarily opaque.

The above-mentioned Case AN (Usual Suspects. Fight Against Organized Crime, Human Trafficking, The Netherlands) is an example that features the presence of accountability. This may be linked to the fact that collaborating actors had clearly stated their desired outputs and outcomes in addition to the rules governing the collaboration, and they were able to show how their co-produced activities unfolded and produced results. As mentioned above, the first desired output was that of reframing the problem of children engaged in theft and begging, and the partners were actually able to reframe it from mobile banditry to human trafficking and smuggling.

The second desired output was to gain insights into the nature and scope of the problem. The partners were able to conduct research and produced two reports (one on the socioeconomic conditions of the criminal families and one on child exploitation), which clarified that the crime-related dimension of the problem could not be successfully solved in the longer term without addressing the broader social context in which those children were growing up.

Lastly, the partners aimed to develop a problem-oriented approach: they succeeded in developing it and operationalizing it, crucially also via the integration of security-oriented and socially oriented measures directly implemented by the partners, which culminated in the joint international operation in Spain.

This clarity of objectives and of the intended paths to pursue them fostered accountability because of their visibility, which extended to the role to be played by the various partners. Shared leadership and direct involvement (co-production) further combined with such rule clarity to produce accountability, because they allowed shared decision-making and a commonly agreed division of labour among partners, thereby facilitating the overall process-and-outcome monitoring.

### **Configuration 6**

This configuration suggests that collaborative governance is accountable when a large set of heterogeneous actors shares the leadership of the collaboration under a clear system of rules, irrespective of the governance modes. The large set of heterogeneous actors embodies the possibility of control on behalf of a plurality of actors. The fact that leadership is shared collectively, combined with a clear system of rules, allows for a transparent distribution of responsibilities and the related possibility to identify who respond for what. As mentioned above, in fact, shared leadership may be accountable – despite the fact that responsibilities are likely to be distributed among different actors – if adequate rules or tools are in place.

This configuration may be exemplified by Case AA (Friends of Redington Pass – FRP, Arizona, USA), which began as an informal voluntary group committed to improving the environmental conditions on Redington Pass, a neglected part of the Coronado National Forest in Arizona, USA. Its early membership included local hikers, dirt bikers, horseback riders, hunters and nearby residents; it later expanded to create a broader, more inclusive network of recreation and conservation groups to work alongside the Coronado National Forest and other public agencies.

The stated aim of FRP was to contribute to the protection of the rural Redington Pass backcountry for the benefit of all recreational and resource users, while providing for public access and the management of future recreational initiatives. Over time, the group was formalized and became a non-profit, established bylaws and created a board of directors, while also expanding its vision and mission statements, articulating FRP's ambitions and desired outcomes. The collaboration therefore began as an informal group, but then evolved following a bottom-up drive into a formalized non-profit with clear, functioning rules. This, together with early success in contributing to local management plans and being acknowledged as a trustworthy counterpart by local public agencies, increased visibility and the willingness to participate on the part of additional and diverse actors, which was facilitated by those same clear ground rules.

Accountability was facilitated by the combination of these elements (more and more diverse) actors willing to contribute to activities and monitor their results), as well as by a leadership shared among board members – themselves representatives of different groups of participants – who were willing to first enhance and then maintain the effectiveness of the collaboration. The contribution of such shared leadership to accountability was supported by clear and transparent rules governing the board members' duties and responsibilities, including the rules related to decision-making processes, frequency of participation in board meetings, monitoring of the FRP activities and its financial obligations, and effort to be devoted to fundraising.

Accountability was also most likely sustained by the fact that the group's shared motivation increased over time after initial recruitment and successes, and that the relational elements of that motivation enhanced the cohesion, including mutual trust and understanding, internal legitimacy and shared commitment.

## Discussion

Despite increasing in popularity in recent decades, collaborative governance is not without its problems or critics (Papadopoulos 2007; Rasche 2010). We have focused here on the concerns regarding the ability of collaborative governance arrangements to ensure legitimacy and accountability, whether just one of the two or both. Our study can help to alleviate these valid concerns.

Firstly, the study suggests that collaborative governance arrangements can achieve both legitimacy and accountability. The analysis identified two configurations that lead to legitimacy and two configurations that achieve accountability when partners are involved in policy and service co-creation. Our study also identifies one configuration for reaching legitimacy and one for reaching accountability, irrespective of governance mode.

Secondly, our study finds evidence that legitimacy and accountability can be reached simultaneously within collaborative arrangements. The comparison between the results of the legitimacy and accountability analyses highlights two configurations

that achieve both legitimacy and accountability simultaneously (configurations 2/5 and configurations 3/6) (Table 7). This suggests that legitimacy and accountability can jointly occur and that a trade-off between the two is not an inherent feature of collaborative governance.

As Table 7 shows, our data uncover two pathways to ‘having it all’. In the policy and service co-creation, achieving both legitimacy and accountability seems possible when a homogenous set of participants – regardless of size – collectively shares the leadership of a collaboration governed by a clear system of rules (configurations 2/5). Whereas the relative homogeneity of participants may be linked to certain features of the collaboration (e.g. the nature and means of the fight against terrorism), the presence of clear rules ensures that the duty and/or right to participate is well established and clearly recognized by the relevant actors. This fosters legitimacy, because it clarifies the capacity in which actors are participating while simultaneously securing accountability, because it defines roles and responsibilities both internally and towards external actors. At the same time, a shared leadership allows that decisions result from different participants’ contributions, which increases legitimacy, and that these contributions and their possible implications are transparent, which enhances accountability.

As an alternative, regardless of the specific governance mode, legitimacy and accountability seem to co-exist in collaborative governance arrangements when a large group of heterogeneous actors collectively share in the leadership of an explicitly ruled-based collaboration (configurations 3/6). As more (and more diverse) actors become involved in collaborative governance, more (and more diverse) actors monitor the collaboration’s results, and good performance and positive results may in turn generate further support, inducing even more actors to join and participate. This virtuous cycle appears to be supported by a collectively shared leadership that ensures that more interests are considered and that more people are responsible and monitor the results of the collaboration. This shared leadership is combined with a clear system of rules that ensures the transparency of the process, makes it easy for people to join, increases the clarity of objectives and of partners’ contributions, and monitors the shared leadership structure, thus avoiding that it becomes opaque.

Based on these configurations, identified in this first exploration of a medium-N set of cases, we would like to generate two different propositions for testing in future studies.

*Proposition 1a: Legitimacy and accountability can jointly occur in the co-creation of policies and services when a homogenous group of participants, regardless of size, share the leadership collectively and are involved in ruled-based collaboration.*

*Proposition 1b: Legitimacy and accountability can jointly occur in collaborative governance arrangements when a heterogeneous and large group of participants share the leadership collectively and are involved in ruled-based collaboration.*

Furthermore, the analysis of the cases studied here suggests that factors deemed to render legitimacy and accountability mutually exclusive may actually interact in a positive, virtuous way and lead to the concurrence of legitimacy and accountability. In particular, if we compare the four configurations leading simultaneously to legitimacy and accountability, the conditions that are likely to explain this joint outcome

**Table 7.** Comparison of the configurations leading to legitimacy with those leading to accountability.

	LEGITIMACY			ACCOUNTABILITY		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
SIZE	●		●	●		●
HETER	○	○	●		○	●
RULECLA	●	●	●	●	●	●
LEADSHA		●	●		●	●
GOVMODES	●	●		●	●	
Cases with greater than 0.5 membership in term:	X, E, K	T, X, AN	C, U, L, M, O, Q, V, Y, AA, AI, AM	C, N, Q, U, X, Y, E, H, K, L, M, O, V, AI, AM	T, X, AN	C, U, L, M, O, Q, V, Y, AA, AI, AM

Black circles represent the presence of a causal condition, and white circles represent the negation of a causal condition. Blank cells represent irrelevant conditions.

(and possibly mutual support) ultimately seem linked to the role played by a leadership structure that is shared rather than embodied by a single individual, coupled with a clear system of rules governing the collaboration.

Shared leadership appears to play a critical role in supporting collaboration legitimacy, as more actors are responsible for defining the direction of the collaboration, convening its actors, mediating conflicting interests, and monitoring the results of the collaboration, thereby increasing the likelihood that more actors will support it. At the same time, clear rules appear to play a decisive role, as they clarify who gets to participate and how they are expected to contribute.

These rules may be more or less flexible and inclusive, depending on the aims and the characteristics of the collaboration, but they do not appear to jeopardize legitimacy as suggested by parts of the literature (see Fung and Wright 2003). Rather, they help to clarify the needs and interests of the parties involved, which increases legitimacy, while also pointing to how different actors will contribute to the collaborative outputs and outcomes, which increases accountability. When actors feel that their needs are taken into account and channelled through adequate procedures and leadership structures, their disposition towards monitoring results is enhanced, as well as towards being more accountable for them to internal and external stakeholders. On top of that, clear rules determining who is responsible for what within a shared leadership allow for the transparent distribution of responsibilities, and the related possibility to identify who is accountable for what.

These insights are supported by our qualitative case analysis. Our interpretation of the cases suggests that clear rules may help in making a shared leadership accountable, and that a shared leadership may be able to design a system of rules that is adaptive and inclusive, and which therefore fosters legitimacy. In Case O (Area C – Milan), for instance, clear rules for stakeholder engagement by political as well as administrative leaders facilitate process and outcome transparency, both within the municipality and externally, towards those same stakeholders and the citizenry in general. At the same time, these political and administrative leaders have an interest in devising and making public a system of rules that is adaptive and inclusive, both for political and efficacy reasons. In fact, this allows different perspectives and must be considered (if not always accommodated) during design and implementation, rather than once the Congestion Charge Zone is already up and running. In the Area C case, for instance, such shared

leadership sees the Urban Mobility Alderman taking the role of the *sponsor* (Crosby, 't Hart, and Torfing 2017) or the Director of the municipality's Central Directorate for Mobility and Transport assuming the role of the *champion* (see Trivellato et al. 2019). The commitment of these actors to the success of Area C has made them more conspicuous, thereby also subjecting them to higher scrutiny on the part of citizens, which translates into greater accountability.

On the basis of these considerations, we tentatively formulate an additional proposition about the development of legitimacy and accountability over time, which again should be subjected to further scrutiny through testing in other research designs.

*Proposition 2. Legitimacy and accountability can mutually reinforce each other in collaborative governance arrangements within the context of shared leadership combined with clear rules.*

The clear rules and shared leadership found to be particularly conducive to the concurrent presence of legitimacy and accountability deserve closer scrutiny, especially in how they are likely to trigger positive reinforcing dynamics. Future research efforts will consider the micro-level dynamics that allow these virtuous interactions to take place and explore how these interactions may impact the (different types of) outcomes of the collaboration.

### **Limitations of this study**

As far as we know, no authors have previously been able to systematically analyse multiple cases to identify the conditions for the concurrence of legitimacy and accountability. The data stored in the Collaborative Governance Case Database lend themselves generously to the QCA analysis of a large number of diverse cases and help to detect conditions for the achievement of both legitimacy and accountability; even then, however, our study has some significant limitations.

Since the sample is not randomly drawn from a larger population of collaborative governance arrangements, we cannot generalize the results pertaining to the proportion of cases with concurrence of legitimacy and accountability or the prevalence of cases with conditions favouring this concurrence. What we *can* say is that we found cases of collaborative governance in our case selection that obtained both legitimacy and accountability. Different sets of conditions seem to support this concurrence. Whether these sets of conditions will produce similarly positive results in new cases will have to be examined in future studies (Sørensen and Torfing 2009).

Considering the cases within our analysis, it is also important to remark on some yet unexamined dimensions. As already mentioned, the 34 cases are drawn from very different contexts, as they play out in different policy domains, countries and government levels. This makes it hard to understand the role of context in the emergence of legitimacy and accountability. Most poignantly, some cases in the database, such as Case H on the Vietnam Flood Management System, take place in a generally undemocratic context, as Vietnam is a one-party state. What do legitimacy and accountability mean here if the citizenry has no electoral control over the public actors and authorities in the case? More specifically, what does accountability mean if separated from the decision-making power and sanctions? It would risk becoming 'empty' (Borowiak 2011). This points to the larger questions regarding the need for collaborative

governance to be embedded in democratic governance, but our current analysis does not examine these concerns.

## Conclusion

This article set out to explore the conditions for achieving both legitimacy and accountability in collaborative governance arrangements, and it shed light on two different paths leading to the concurrence of legitimacy and accountability. In short, the conclusion is that we may be able to ‘have it all’, since, under specific circumstances, collaborative governance can be both legitimate and accountable. As such, there is no reason for restricting the use of collaborative governance out of concern for the lack of legitimacy and accountability; at least not if one of two different sets of conducive conditions is present. The question is less how we can justify the lack of legitimacy and accountability and more how we can create the conditions for both legitimacy and accountability to emerge in collaborative governance arenas.

Our results can help those in charge of governing collaborative arrangements to strive for achieving both legitimacy and accountability; here, handing them the suggestion that clear rules, involving a large group of heterogeneous actors, and establishing shared leadership might deliver on that ambition. This insight largely confirms the general experience: that clear rules are crucial for successful, transparent collaboration (Doberstein 2016); that inclusion is a key source of legitimacy (Johnston et al. 2011); and that collaborative governance thrives on a distributed, integrative leadership (Bolden 2011; Page 2010).

We have not intended to contribute to theory development, but the results may encourage governance researchers to ponder: first, why the conditions that our study has identified as conducive for ensuring legitimacy and accountability have the said effect; second, whether these mechanisms would be applicable in all contexts; third, where desirable, how these conditions can be ensured by the actors involved in collaborative governance; and, finally, whether there are inherent tensions between the conditions supporting legitimacy and accountability and conditions aiming to secure other desirable outcomes, such as equity, innovation and effectiveness.

As regards the latter point, legitimacy and accountability may be viewed as key aspects of democratic governance, and a major, important question has been when and how collaborative governance in networks and partnerships will be able to enhance democratic as well as effective governance (Sørensen and Torfing 2009). Now that our study seems to highlight some conditions for collaborative governance to be democratic by simultaneously enhancing legitimacy and accountability, future research may take on the challenge of using QCA to explore the pathways to both democratic and effective governance.

This conclusion adds to the growing stock of knowledge produced by governance researchers interested in the institutional conditions for collaborative forms of governance and their impact on key democratic norms. Our emphasis on the conditions conducive for reaping the fruits of collaborative governance fuels the growing interest in institutional design (Alexander 2005; Fung 2003; Skelcher and Torfing 2010). Governance researchers must be able to advise practitioners on how to design the institutional arenas for collaborative governance in order to achieve specific outcomes.

However, the robustness of our findings needs to be tested on a larger, representative sample that allows the integration of additional conditions and examination of the

role of contexts. Moreover, our explorative study should be supplemented by in-depth comparative case studies testing the mechanisms behind the propositions we formulate.

Finally, the bigger question is whether collaborative governance can be arranged in ways leading not just to legitimacy and accountability but also to effectiveness, efficiency, adaptability and other desirable outcomes. We must explore whether there are inherent tensions between the conditions supporting legitimacy and accountability and those necessary for securing the other aims of collaboration, or that these outcomes can all concur happily together. This study is therefore merely the first step towards understanding the wider set of configuration and consequences we must seek to understand.

## Notes

1. Although the concepts of network governance and collaborative governance are frequently used interchangeably, they have different roots and slightly different meanings. In this paper, we perceive the two concepts as two sides of the same coin. While the ‘network governance’ concept focuses on the structured interaction between governance actors, ‘collaborative governance’ pays attention to the collaborative processes unfolding in pluricentric governance networks (see Torfing et al. 2019).
2. Cronqvist, Lasse. 2018. Tosmana [Version 1.6]. University of Trier. Internet: <https://www.tosmana.net>.
3. Ragin, C. and S. Davey. 2014. Fs/QCA (Computer Program), Version (2.5/3.0). Irvine, CA: University of California.
4. We included the configuration in the analysis, as its coverage is close to 0.25. As Raab et al. (2015, 503) argue, ‘even if the raw coverage is low, a configuration can still be important from a theoretical perspective, because from a case comparative perspective as QCA represents, every case contains important information’.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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**Appendix. List of cases**

cod	Case Name
B	Independent Inquiry into Container Deposit Legislation in NSW
C	Blackfoot Challenge (Montana, USA)
E	Joint Committee for Counterterrorism of the Dutch national government agencies
F	Community Enterprise Het Klokhuis
G	Community Enterprise De meevaart
H	Collaborative governance in Vietnam flooding
I	Chinchina Basin Management Plan
J	The Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence in Victoria, Australia
K	Homelessness policy development and program funding in Vancouver, Canada
L	Public-private-people collaboration in peri-urban area development, Netherlands
M	Collaborative policy making committees in Gentofte, Denmark
N	Spitex
O	Area C – Milan
Q	Baker River Hydroelectric Project
R	Delaware Inland Bays
S	Narragansett Bay (RI)
T	Rhode Island's Salt Ponds
U	Lake Tahoe
V	Tampa Bay
W	Tillamook Bay, Oregon
X	Foodborne disease outbreak in Germany
Y	Infant Mortality CollN
Z	Living Lab Stratumseind
AA	Friends of Redington Pass
AB	Local Network for Combating Illiteracy (City A, The Netherlands)
AC	Local Network for Combating Illiteracy (City B, The Netherlands)
AF	Revitalization of Central Dandenong, Melbourne
AG	Elite-Citizen Collaborations in NSW Parliament's Energy Inquiry
AH	Okay, here's how it goes (Fight Against Organized Crime, Motorcycle Club)
AI	Aquaculture Partnership
AL	The 'Neighborhood Renewal Program', City of Stockholm
AM	Collaborative policy making committees in Svelvik Municipality, Norway
AN	Usual Suspects (Fight Against Organized Crime, Human Trafficking)
AO	Wanted Partners (Fight Against Organized Crime, Human Trafficking)