Beyond Comparative Anecdotalism: Lessons on Civil Society and Participation from São Paulo, Brazil

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Summary. — Detailed fieldwork in São Paulo, Brazil, shows that the conventional understanding of civil society and citizen participation is flawed in two major ways. The dominant focus on the participation of individual citizens is misplaced, as it is civil organizations *representing* different sectors of the poor that participate in substantial numbers in participatory institutions. The civil society approach in international development suggests that the most effective voice of the poor in policy making comes from civil society organizations (CSOs) that are independent of political parties and state agencies. Across different participatory institutions in São Paulo, however, the most active representatives of the poor are those well connected to conventional political actors—political parties and state agencies. This connection between civil and political actors suggests the need for a "polity-centered" approach to understanding issues of participation and representation. © 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Key words — participation, representation, civil society, Brazil, polity approach

1. INTRODUCTION

The conventional understanding of citizen participation in formal or quasi-formal processes of public policy making is flawed, empirically and conceptually, in two major ways. First, there is a dominant focus on the participation of individual citizens. [1] In this paper we demonstrate, in relation to São Paulo in particular, that this focus is in many ways misplaced. Civil organizations, *representing* different sectors of the poor, participate in substantial numbers in formal participatory institutions and are likely to have substantial influence within such institutions. Second, the civil society approach dominant in research and policy on participation obscures the close connection between direct and representative forms of democracy. [2] In particular, detailed fieldwork in São Paulo shows that the organizations that are most likely to represent the poor in participatory institutions are those well connected to the actors of classic representative democracy—political parties and state agencies. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, these civil organizations

are not coopted, but instead are more likely than their poorly connected counterparts to organize public demonstrations and to make demands on the government through multiple channels.

In this paper, we present the evidence on these points and locate them more broadly in the current debate on civil society, participatory institutions, and their intersection. This

debate has been heavily influenced by a first wave of studies that used forms of comparative anecdotalism to make generalizations—that is, findings from individual case studies of actors or participatory institutions are pooled together into broad explanations. [3] This paper is part of a second wave of studies that builds on the insights of the first but uses more systematic forms of comparative analysis to draw generalizable conclusions. In particular, the paper uses comparisons across different types of civil organizations and formal participatory institutions—the city's participatory budget, sectoral policy councils, and lesser known participatory institutions—to identify who represents the poor within processes of public policy making. The analysis uses data from a survey of civil organizations that work with or for lower income groups in the city of São Paulo (population of 10 million, within municipal boundaries), undertaken in 2002.

Seven broad lessons emerge from the analysis of the survey's results. The first five are empirical. (i) Civil organizations that represent sectors of the poor can, and in São Paulo do in substantial numbers, participate in participatory policy processes alongside individual citizens. (ii) Ties to political parties and contractual relations with state agencies can increase (rather than reduce) the ability of civil organizations to represent the poor in these processes. (iii) Civil organizations have differential capacities for participation and constitute a highly diverse universe, offering different sectors of the poor different ways to access participatory policy processes. Because (iv) only a minority of civil organizations are membership based, it is necessary to explore not only questions related to participation but also to representation, and in particular what kinds of representation are being constructed within participatory institutions. (v) Institutional design of participatory institutions influences which organizations participate, and appears to neutralize some of the advantages wealthier organizations might enjoy over poorer ones.

The sixth lesson is conceptual. (vi) The dominant civil society approach in international development provides a poor guide to understanding "civil society" or participation. Its strong normative belief in civil society as an independent sphere of action, separate from that of politics, with its own unifying (and virtuous) logic is not supported by our findings. [4] There is no discernable unifying logic (cooperative, deliberative, or other) among the complex universe of organizations in our survey and it is the nexus between civil and political society that is the most important for understanding participation. To understand the dynamics of participation, including why ties to political actors and institutional design shape participation, requires that we rethink the boundaries between direct and representative forms of democracy, a move made possible within a polity-centered approach (Houtzager, 2003).

In a polity approach, participatory institutions are understood as political products, negotiated in an iterative process between state and societal actors. It suggests that negotiated institutional design features will favor some actors over others. [5] Using a polity approach, we suggest that civil organizations with ties to political parties and government agencies participate at higher rates because they have (a) a greater chance to influence the design of participatory institutions and engineer their access and, at a subsequent stage, (b) greater facility in obtaining policy-related and political information, as well as legal and technical expertise. In making this argument, we avoid the heavy normative load and analytic assumptions associated with the concept of civil society by using the more normatively and theoretically neutral *civil organizations.*

The last lesson is policy oriented. (vii) When organizations that represent the poor participate in the design of participatory spaces, they have a one-off opportunity to engineer their institutional access and thus facilitate their future representation of low-income groups.

The survey on which this paper is based was undertaken in a single city, and it would be foolhardy to claim that its findings are generalizable across national contexts. We do believe, however, that the study's comparative strategy—between organizations that participate and those that do not different types of organizations, and different types of participatory institutions—has produced strong enough findings to raise basic questions about the civil society approach that shapes much conceptual and empirical work on civil society and participation.

2. INSTITUTIONS AND ACTORS IN SÃO PAULO

The city of São Paulo is a veritable laboratory of citizen participation. It contains a wide array of participatory institutional arrange-

ments, a diverse set of political and societal actors who can participate, and a variety of moments in the policy process during which participation is possible. Decentralization reforms initiated in Brazil with the postauthoritarian Constitution of 1988 have sought to enhance both the responsiveness and efficiency of the state by, among other measures, increasing opportunities—beyond the electoral cycle and legislative bodies—for citizen voice in policy making and for holding government accountable. In addition to shifting a larger share of tax revenue to state and municipal governments, along with greater decision making authority, the novelty of the new participatory institutions in Brazil is that they bring citizens directly into executive branch policy making, in such policy areas as health, education, housing, or more broadly in municipal budgeting. We are thus not talking about participation in the elected local territorial governments that one finds in much of the world, and that have been the centerpiece of most recent devolution reforms in Africa, South Asia, and elsewhere.

For the sake of the analysis undertaken here we grouped São Paulo's participatory institutions into three categories: the *Participatory budget*, sectoral *Policy councils*, and *Any Participatory Fora*. The last category includes a host of less common participatory councils, committees, and programs, *as well as* the participatory budget and policy councils. The advantage of including the latter two in *Any Participatory Fora* is a large sample size with which to work and the ability to analyze a diverse grouping of participatory spaces that are rarely studied.

Participation in these three groups of institutions occurs in a variety of ways. The new participatory institutions were intentionally designed to include civil organizations, and in some cases individual citizens, in the different moments of public decision making and action—in the design of policy and regulation, in supervising or monitoring implementation, and even in the implementation of policy or management of programs. It is not necessary, for our analytic purposes, however, to distinguish between the different forms of participation. The important analytic point is that participation occurs in institutionally defined mechanisms and moments. Neither is it necessary for us to take into account the frequency or intensity of participation. It is possible to affirm, however, that the vast majority of the actors which participate in one or more institu-

tion, stated that, to them, participation was either ''very important'' or ''indispensable''.

The Participatory Budget (PB) is the best-known experiment in the democratization of public policy in Brazil and possibly elsewhere. In São Paulo, the budgeting process is currently in its fourth year. At the time of the survey in 2002, the spending priorities of approximately a third of the municipal budget for public investment, or 12% of the total municipal budget, were set in the participatory budgeting process. The municipal administration estimates that 34,000 people participated in the first budgeting exercise in 2001, then 55,000 and 80,000 in the subsequent two years.

Officially, the PB involves both direct citizen participation and in a second phase, elected delegates who serve as representatives. By law, only individuals can participate, and studies of the PB have focused on participants as individual citizens. However, leaders of community and other organizations participate at substantial rates in the PB, and in our survey, such leaders stated that their *organizations* had participated—that is, they did not distinguish between their participation and that of their organization. [6] Other studies show that participation of such leaders of civil organizations is widespread in PBs throughout Brazil and has considerable weight—they are far more likely to be elected as delegates for later rounds in the PB cycle. For example, in the PB of the cities of Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte, Recife, Santo André, and São Paulo over half the delegates elected during the first round of the PB were leaders of civil organizations (Wampler, 2004a, 2004b, Table 3).

The São Paulo PB has evolved in the last four years, but since 2002, the core features have remained the same. There are two cycles—a Thematic (Policy) Cycle and a Territorial Cycle. The Thematic Cycle starts with assemblies in nine regions of the city. After the Secretariats of the municipal administration present their programs to participants, the assembly defines the priorities for the next year and elects delegates to policy-area plenaries. These plenaries set spending priorities and elect councilors to the Coordination Council of the PB, which oversees the administration's implementation of the decisions made during the budgeting process and negotiates changes proposed by public officials. [7]

The Territorial Cycle follows a similar process but with a few notable differences when it comes to the breath of citizen participation

and the types of demands participants are allowed to make. Preparatory assemblies occur in 270 small territorial divisions that cover the entire city, and the deliberative assemblies are organized according to the city's 96 administrative districts. Residents and delegates present and debate proposals for public works and services for their regions in the areas of education and health, and, in a third area that is decided by the assemblies themselves.

Larger cities in Brazil have a truly baroque structure of participatory councils. The councils can, however, be classified as policy councils, program councils, issue-area councils, and councils for specific public infrastructure or autarkies. [8] Policy councils most closely fit the widely held image of deliberative participatory spaces and make up our variable *Policy councils*. The other types of councils are included in the variable *Any Participatory Fora*.

The policy councils are mandated by the federal Constitution of 1988 and have specific implementing legislation. They are organized in a federated structure that parallels that of the government, in policy areas that the Constitution itself defines as high priority—health, education, rights of the child and adolescent, and social services. They are, therefore, institutions whose creation and areas of competence, in addition to the forms of civil society participation, are legally mandated and guaranteed. The councils have tripartite representation of civil organizations, public authorities, and professional associations of service providers in the relevant policy area. The number of seats each sector receives varies, however, as it is determined by specific enacting legislation or by the Council's internal statutes. [9]

Any Participatory Fora contains not just the less prominent types of councils but also a mix of other institutionalized forms of citizen participation that link societal and state actors to facilitate consultation, regulation, or the design or implementation of public policy. These include working groups, committees, commissions, and so forth. For reasons given above, the variable also includes *Participatory budget* and *Policy councils*.

(a) Civil organizations

The universe of civil organizations in São Paulo bears little resemblance to the portrait found in the literature on civil society or on citizen participation. It is extremely heterogeneous, defying the presumptive analytic unity suggested by the CSO label. Furthermore, a substantial majority are not membership based. Organizations' relations to their beneficiaries or constituencies range from members who are individuals to members that are other organizations, from target populations to imagined communities that are either territorially defined (such as the neighborhood) or defined in terms of other identities (such as the homeless). Although few have members, half of the organizations stated that beneficiaries "almost always" participated in the planning of their activities, and a bit over half in the execution of activities. Ties to political parties are not uncommon: approximately 15% of the total sample supported political candidates during elections, while the share of neighborhood associations who did so is far higher at 33%. There is of course also a tremendous variation in how organizations work, the issue areas they cover (and whether they are single or multiissue organizations), the relations they have to other civil organizations, or to parties or the state.

We constructed a typology of organizations in order to explore the differential capacities for action, such as participation, in this diverse universe. The typology is built using two analytic criteria: the type of activities organizations undertake (such as service delivery to individuals, representation of groups or organizations *vis-á-vis* the state, defining problems as public issues and influence policy debates, etc.) and the nature of their relation to their stated members/beneficiaries (membership of individuals or of other organizations, the community, target population, or others). It is *not*, therefore, derived inductively from the data. [10] The typology has five categories, summarized in Table 1. The distribution of each type is *not* representative of their share in the universe of societal actors. The size and the nature of this universe are not knowable given the state of existing data and depends on the definitional boundaries one draws. The sampling technique produces a purposeful over-representation of Coordinators (which are relatively scarce) and underrepresentation of local Associations (which are numerous).

Associations encompass a variety of local and territorially based actors who have either members or who work on behalf of a territorially defined "imagined community". Unlike in some of the richest democracies, and the USA in particular, the number of organizations that have a formal membership is small. Instead, a large

Table 1. *Typology of civil organisations*

Organization type	Percent of sample	Examples
Associations	27	—Neighborhood associations —Community associations organized around specific activities, such as those with a civic/cultural purpose —Social movement organizations such as the Downtown Housing Movement
Coordinators	20	—Popular Movements Central (a social movement coordinator) —Association of Brazilian NGOs —Association of Housing Movements of São Paulo
Advocacy NGOs	27	—Popular education and community organizing centers —Institutes concerned with gender, race, reproductive rights, AIDS, the environment, etc.
Service nonprofits	15	—Baptist Association for the Encouragement and Support of Man —Centers for social promotion —Centers for professional training of youth
Others	11	—Corporate and other foundations —Catholic church pastoral organization —Rotary and Lions Clubs
Total sample	299	

number of neighborhood associations in the sample define themselves as working for "the community". The category also includes local movement of the homeless such as the Downtown Housing Movement, which works with an imaginary community that is defined by an attribute that is lacking—housing. Finally, the category includes community associations of various types.

In the absence of a formal membership, the indicator that we take here of the kind of relation these organizations have to their "community," as they define it, is whether or not community members participate in the planning and executing of the organizations' activities. They do participate, and at a higher rate than for the general sample: 60% of Associations stated community members participate "almost always" in planning of activities and 52% stated they did so in the execution. Organizations can, however, be expected to overstate the true extent of participation, because in the contemporary context such participation is an important basis of legitimacy.

Coordinators encompass a variety of actors which bring together other collective actors or represent the interests of issue-based imagined communities at the municipal, state, or national level. They are associations of organizations, such as the Union of Housing Movements of Greater São Paulo and the Inte-

rior (UMM) and the Central of Popular Movements (CMP), which coordinate city wide movement networks, or the Network of Brazilian Philanthropic Service Entities (REBRAF) and the Brazilian Association of NGOs (ABONG), which coordinate national networks. These diverse actors coordinate debate and action amongst member organizations and mediate relations with the state. The definition covers the types of federated national organizations discussed by Skocpol (1992) and Skocpol (1999) in the context of the 19th century USA, which she found had organized local chapters across that country, but in the case of 21st century São Paulo, most coordinators are created by local and regional civil organizations and are more horizontally than vertically organized.

Advocacy NGOs is a specification of the concept NGO. [11] The central task of these organizations is the transformation of social problems into public issues and campaigning around those issues to influence public policy or private behavior, whether at the local, national, or transnational level. The relation Advocacy NGOs such as Ação Educative (Education Action) or Geledes (a black women's rights organization) have to their beneficiaries is that of a "target population". There is often direct contact but it is restricted and there is no formal membership. In this regard, they are different

from Advocacy NGOs in rich countries, where organizations such as Green Peace have a large formal membership body (although this membership is limited to contributing money). Surprisingly, 40% of Advocacy NGOs claimed that members of target population "almost always" participated in its planning activities and 66% in execution of activities. This is far closer to the percentages for Associations than one might expect.

The primary mission of *Service nonprofits* is service provision to the public. Service provision can be undertaken as charity or as part of an empowerment strategy, but their beneficiaries are individual clients. Service nonprofits include actors who provide professional training or employment counseling, medical care, and shelter for battered women. Many in São Paulo have a religious basis and deliver services on behalf of the state to specific client populations. Some service nonprofits do make demands on the government and participate in collective action, but it is not a core activity. Although the share of service nonprofits that stated that their clients participated "almost always" in planning activities is lower than for Associations, as one might expect, it is again surprisingly high at 40%. For execution of activities, this drops to 31%.

The category *Other* includes a broad range of actors which have only a small representation in the sample. These include philanthropic foundations, pastoral organizations of the Catholic Church, and such classic civil society actors as the Lions and Rotary clubs. Combined they make up 11% of the sample, but individually, each type is statistically insignificant.

3. SURVEY AND STATISTICAL METHODS

Two features distinguish this paper from the first wave empirical work on civil society, participatory institutions and their intersection. First, its comparative strategy makes possible testing a series of hypotheses about which constellations of factors affect participation—our universe includes both organizations that participate and those that do not, different types of organizations, and different forms of participatory institutions. Initial research in low and middle-income countries are detailed case studies that examine particular civil society actors or participatory experiences. On the one hand, these studies provide a wealth of information

and insights, but, on the other hand, they select on the dependent variable. Although this has a variety of virtues, it inevitably introduces a strong bias into analysis, and it is impossible to know to what extent their findings can be generalized. In order to draw broad generalizations, authors have engaged in forms of comparative anecdotalism—that is, studies herded idiosyncratic cases from different contexts together into a single explanation. [12] These cases, however, are rarely comparable because they are either not instances of the same things or occur in markedly dissimilar sociopolitical contexts.

Second, the survey of São Paulo civil organizations was designed to meet the challenges posed by the diverse and disperse universe of actors difficult to identify *a priori*. [13] The sample was drawn using a snowball technique, which relies on "chain referrals" to build up a sample that is purposefully targeted, and hence not random. [14] The interviews that start in snowball samples have a particularly big impact on the composition of the sample and can produce unwanted selection bias. We therefore diversified our starting points as much as possible: the snowball had 20 different starting points, distributed across four different lower-income regions of the city. [15]

The statistical techniques used in the paper are appropriate for dichotomous variables—univariate relative risk ratios and multivariate logistic regressions. The three dependent variables—*Participatory budget*, *Policy councils*, or *Any Participatory Fora*—are dichotomous. We first used univariate relative risk ratios to identify a number of factors that increase actors' propensity to participate in the three types of participatory institutional arrangements. Then, we identified which of these factors have the greatest influence on the propensity to participate, when all the significant factors are controlled for. To do so, we created a number of statistical models using multivariate logistic regressions. We obtained three different models that are applicable and are valid for the three types of participatory institutions. Finally, we examined the goodness of fit and the possibility of sample selection bias in the data.

Tests for biasness confirm that the sample does not suffer from unwanted bias that can arise in simpler snowball sampling strategies. Our findings, for example, show strong effects of PT-ties and government contracts on actors' participation in all three types of institutional arrangements. It is possible that actors with

PT-ties only had relations with actors who also had relations with actors who also had such ties. Once a snowball enters such a network of actors, it can be difficult to escape. The same applies for actors with government contracts. We therefore checked for these two potential sources of bias, however, and found no indications of such bias. [16] We are confident that, using the modified snowball technique, our sample is representative of *civil organizations that work with lower income groups and are more active.*

4. FINDINGS: WHO PARTICIPATES?

The core dynamics of civil society participation in São Paulo offer important confirmation that the new participatory institutions create opportunities for organizations who work with lower income groups to acquire a voice in public policy. All three types of institutions provide opportunities for such actors. Their participation is high, particularly when one takes into account that these institutional arrangements are relatively recent creations: 33% of the 229 actors interviewed took part in the *Participatory budget*, 34 in the *Policy councils*, and 59% participated *Any Participatory Fora*. Moreover, they do so irrespective of their "wealth" (*Budget size*). Rich and poor civil organizations in our sample, which range from annual budgets of $0 to well over $3 million, are as likely to participate in all three institutional arrangements. Simple logistic regressions show that actors' budget size, in the sample of collective actors who work with lower-middle class, working class, and the poor, does *not* affect participation.

The principal hypothesis we wanted to explore was whether actors with ties to traditional political actors such as parties, unions, and the state were more likely to participate than actors without such ties. We were also interested in finding out (i) whether the different actors authorized in the literature as authentic civil society—NGOs or local associations—are more likely to participate than others actors and (ii) whether our typology captured basic distinctions between actors that might influence participation. Finally, to test whether institutional design of participatory spaces matter—that is, the rules that define the composition, mandate, and internal, procedures—we created a different model for each institutional arrangement.

The basic structural model therefore centers on the relationship of actors to political parties and the state and included Advocacy NGO, Coordinator, Association, and Other. [17] Table 2 presents the models for each of the three dependent variables. Advocacy NGO, Coordinator, Association, and Other are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of types of actors. Service NonProfit is the reference category and therefore left out of all three regressions. [18] Ties to the PT and Contractual relations with the state are not mutually exclusive and act as controls for each other as well as other variables. We also used relative risk ratios to identity whether a wide range of other factors might alter the propensity to participate in any of the institutional settings, such as the period during which organizations were created, the issue area on which they work, whether they had ties to other civil organizations, what kinds of actors helped create the organization, and so forth. The factors that proved significant were

Table 2. *Three models of participation*

	Participatory budget	Policy councils	Any Participatory Fora
Pseudo-R^2	0.2138	0.0963	0.2060
Ties to PT	3.68**	229**	5.73**
Contractual relation with state	3.04**	2.28**	4.28**
Coordinator	7.99**	5.76**	8.23**
Association	15.39**	2.03	2.65**
Advocacy NGO	3.55*	1.87	1.79
Other	3.23	0.87	0.72

As we have two control variables—*ties to PT* and *Contractual Relation with state*, the odds ratios should not be understood simply in terms of odds ratios with respect to the reference category of Service nonprofits. Data source: IDS–LSE–CEBRAP, "Rights, Representation and the Poor: Association Survey—São Paulo, 2000".
No asterisk implies statistical nonsignificance.
* Significant at the 10% level.
** Significant at the 5% level.

then added to the multivariate logistic regressions.

Of the three models in Table 2, we can say the most about the *Participatory budget*, then the *Any Participatory Fora*, and far less about participation in *Policy councils*. The pseudo-R^2 offers a measure of the goodness of fit; the interpretation of these values is less intuitive than R^2 in linear models. For that reason, we conducted goodness of fit tests. The first goodness of fit test for participation in *Any Arrangement* yielded 20 covariate patterns with a Pearson χ^2 of 16.72; thus showing that the model cannot be rejected at the 21% level. The same test showed that the model for participation in the budget could not be rejected at the 60% level. Thus, our results are particularly strong for participation in the budget. Participation in councils could not be rejected at the 13% level. Although our results are weak for participation in the councils, we are confident that these models provide interesting explanations for determining factors in all of the three participatory institutions. [19] *The significance level and trends are more important than the values.*

Ties to the Worker's Party or to the government via contracts to deliver services, along with being coordinators or associations, are the best predictors of participation in all three types of participatory spaces. [20] The size of the government's contribution to an actor's budget, or the share of the actor's budget it accounts for, however, does not influence participation.

The importance of Ties to PT raises the question whether the significance of relations with the party reflects the fact that it was in office at the time of the survey. Did organizations who participate establish ties to the PT after it took over the municipal administration in 2000? The answer appears to be no. The overwhelming majority of actors with ties to the PT had established those ties well before the party won the municipal elections in 2000. The mean length of time for such ties is over 12 years.

The finding also raises the question, "Are participators with contractual ties to the state simply clients in patron–client chains or are they coopted in other ways?" We tested whether actors with government contracts were less likely than other actors to engage in the organization of protests and other forms of mobilizational (extra-institutional) politics. The opposite is in fact that case. Actors who engage in mobilizational politics (protest and demonstrations) are considerably more likely to be involved in the participatory budget. This finding is consistent with arguments in the social movement literature that groups who engage in extra-institutional activity are often also involved in institutionalized channels of politics (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2002).

There are studies that suggest relations to organized labor and sectors of the Catholic Church could influence participation of civil organizations. [21] Although a substantial share of actors did have relations with labor unions or sectors of the Catholic Church, both close to 40% of the sample, there is no statistical effect of these relations on the propensity to participate in any of the three types of institutional arrangements.

The three models show that different types of organizations have significantly different propensities to participate in the three types of spaces. The poor therefore obtain different levels and forms of representation by type of actor and type of participatory space. The values in each model should be compared to Service NonProfits that provide services to individual clients. Although the coefficients presented in Table 2 should not be taken too literally, actors that are Coordinators are roughly eight times more likely to participate in the government space than actors that are Service NonProfits. Thus, Coordinators are roughly three times more likely to participate than Associations. Similar conclusions follow for other variables in the model. The three models do not support a narrow focus on Advocacy NGOs as the principal participatory agents—Advocacy NGOs are no more likely to participate than non-Advocacy NGOs. Instead, they show that local Associations and Coordinators have substantially higher propensities to participate. As one might expect, because of their focus on serving individual clients, Service NonProfits (the reference category) have a lower propensity to participate than other actors. Overall, the variation across the categories of civil organizations suggests that the typology does capture important distinctions, that, among other things, influence participation.

The models also identify an important division of labor between local Associations and Coordinators. Associations participate at high levels in the participatory budget and at much lower levels in the policy councils. Coordinators participate at high levels in the councils (they are nearly six times more likely than non-

coordinators) and at lower levels (including lower than associations) in budgeting.

The effects of institutional design on participation should be visible in variation across the three models and also in the thematic areas organizations work. The three models do indeed vary, suggesting that the differences in institutional design of each type of participatory institution may be affecting participation. Table 2 shows that design effects on participation are statistically significant, but their influence varies according to the type of actor. There are strong interaction effects between type of actor and institutional design of the participatory space. Conceptually, this is not a problem: the participatory budget and councils are designed to draw in particular types of actors—such as neighborhood associations or coordinating bodies. And while coordinators have far higher participation rates in councils than they do in the participatory budget, associations have the reverse pattern.

The issue areas on which actors work are not significant, with one important exception. Organizations who work primarily in health are more likely to participate in the *Participatory budget*. (This "issue area effect" is not present for councils, for reasons given above. [22]) Health, along with education, is a mandatory issue area in the participatory budget, and hence, there are institutional mechanisms and incentives that encourage participation in this area. The importance of institutional design therefore receives some support from this finding. However, the other mandatory policy area in the budgeting process—education—has not stimulate similar participation. Institutional design therefore cannot be the entire explanation. The next section explores what other factors may contribute to participation in the case of health.

There are other factors that affect participation but do not weaken the relations in the structural models shown in Table 2. For example, involvement in civil society forums makes participation around 70% more likely in *Policy councils*. The presence of ties to association increases the probability of participation in *Any Participatory Fora*. Organizations that have ties to Coordinators are half as likely to participate in *Policy councils*, although Coordinators themselves participate at relatively high rates in councils. The explanation for this inverse relationship, between participation in councils and ties to coordinators, may lie in a division of labor among civil society actors in which

the council seats are in large measure occupied by coordinators. Councils are after all municipalwide bodies. Associations with ties to coordinators who have seats would therefore have little reason to participate. This interpretation has some support from the fact that coordinators have in large measure been created by other civil organizations.

5. SEVEN LESSONS FROM SÃO PAULO

Most of the lessons from São Paulo run counter to the conventional wisdom on civil society and participation. The first lesson is that "citizen participation" is a combination of engagement by civil organizations and individual citizens. A substantial share of organizations participate in the PB, policy councils, and other participatory institutions. Although the PB's rules stipulate that only individual citizens can participate, the data show that leaders of community and neighborhood organizations participate at high rates and carry their organizations with them. Furthermore, such leaders are disproportionately elected as delegates to higher-level decision making bodies in the budgeting cycle, providing civil organizations considerable influence in the PB.

Lesson number two is that our understanding of civil organizations and participatory institutions needs to broaden dramatically to address the *representation of the poor*. The representational activities of civil organizations raises important questions about the forms of representation that are being constructed in the new participatory institutions, and how these new forms of representation involve ordinary citizens in policy making. Only a minority of participating organizations have formal members, yet involvement of intended beneficiaries in organizations' planning and implementation is common. The survey data do not allow us to verify with any precision whether the claim that neighborhood and other community associations in Brazil have, since the mid-1970s, encourage high levels of community Participation in their activities (Alvarez, 1993; Costa, 1994). The ambiguous picture of the relation between civil organizations and their beneficiaries provided by the survey suggests, however, that such affirmations cannot be taken at face value.

Lesson three is that the actors best able to represent the interests of the people living in poverty are those who establish ties to agents of representative democracy. The politics of

direct democracy and representative democracy are intimately connected. Organizations with ties to political actors, particularly political parties or state agencies, are more active representatives of the poor than those lacking such ties. They are considerably more likely to participate, and they are also more likely to engage in public demonstrations and other forms of demand making on the state. Such ties to parties and the state, therefore, do not automatically lead to cooptation or depoliticization. It is possible that the highly competitive political system in São Paulo—parties from the left, center, and right regularly alternate in power and compete for small electoral margins—counters some of the tendencies toward cooptation that are said to accompany such ties elsewhere.

These findings from São Paulo counter assumptions of the civil society approach but fit well with a substantial literature that emphasizes the role political actors' play in negotiating conflict within segments of civil society and in coordinating or facilitating their interaction with state bureaucracies. [23] For example, in their review of the 12 democratic decentralization reforms in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Crook and Sverrisson (2003, p. 254) reach a similar conclusion. The extent to which these reforms increased government responsiveness to the poor, and enhanced participation specifically, varied significantly according to political regime dynamics, and especially relation between central ruling elites and local elites and the dynamics of political parties.

Lesson four is that civil organizations make up a highly diverse universe and lack the clear or "unique" logic suggested by the civil society approach. They have variable relations to their beneficiaries or constituencies and distinct capacities to participate. The type of organization favored in many civil society analysis, Advocacy NGOs, are no more active participants than other actors in São Paulo. In contrast, Coordinators and local-level Associations have far greater propensities to participate. Coordinators participate more in policy councils; and, Associations are far more likely than other actors to be present in the participatory budget.

The fifth lesson is that the *institutional design* of participatory arrangements does have significant effects on who participates. Variation in the significance of the main variables in the three models suggests this is the case. Institutional design, as Fung and Wright (2003),

Avritzer (2003), and others argue, can counter some of the effects of social inequality and actors' variable capacity for action. Indeed, one reasonable interpretation of the *wealth* finding—that rich and poor organizations have similar propensities to participate—is that income-based differentiation among civil organizations working with or for the poor is counteracted by other factors, such as institutional rules that set out criteria for participation, formula for representation, the territorial distribution of physical spaces for participation, and so on. Such rules favor the participation of certain kinds of actors over others. The design of the PB, for example, includes two cycles that favor different types of actors. The territorial cycle is designed to facilitate access of local territorially-based associations (such as neighborhood associations) with an interest in obtaining urban infrastructure, while the thematic cycle favors issue-based organizations that work on policy at a municipal level. The rules governing policy councils are also designed to favor issue-based organizations, as well as those representing particular types of users and worker organizations, irrespective of territorial base.

There is ample evidence, however, that similar institutional arrangements have dramatically different effects in different contexts (Evans, 2003; Putnam, 1993). Institutional design alone cannot explain variation in participation.

Lesson six is conceptual. To understand why ties to politics actors and institutional design shape participation, we need to shift from a civil society approach to a broader view of the polity (Houtzager, 2003). The civil society approach draws misleading conclusions from the findings above because it (i) does not make basic analytic distinctions within civil society, either between the participation of individual and of collective actors or between that of different types of collective actors; (ii) it insists on the separateness of CSOs from politics and ignores the effects of political dynamics on civil society and participation; and (iii) it focuses on the importance of the institutional design of participatory processes in a way that is abstracted from context-specific relations between local actors who seek to mobilize these institutions. In contrast, the polity approach "focuses on how particular societal and state actors are constituted, how they develop a differential capacity for action and to form alliances, and how they cooperate and compete across the

public/private divide to produce purposeful change" (Houtzager, 2003, p. 2). Here, the capacity of political actors to produce a politics of inclusion is shaped both by the institutional terrain in which they operate, and their success in engineering "fit" with political institutions able to grant leverage in policy processes.

For example, Alvarez (1993), Goldfrank (2003), and others show that, in Brazil, networks of civil organizations are aware of the importance of institutional design and have sought to engineer their access to policy processes during the moments when participatory institutions were being crafted. In the iterative state-society negotiation over the format of new participatory institutions such as the PB and sectoral policy councils, particular civil organizations have had a greater influence on the form these took than others, facilitating their long-term access to these institutions.

Relations with progressive political parties and contractual relations to the Brazilian state played an important role in overcoming obstacles to participation in two ways. First, they provided particular civil organizations with a greater opportunity to influence the design of participatory institutions within legislative bodies and within state agencies. Second, in subsequent moments, they provided privileged access to vital policy-related and political information, to legal and technical expertise, as well as to allies within government agencies. Organizations that have contractual relations with the state to deliver services may lack the first advantage, but they have similar advantaged access to information and allies within government as those linked in to progressive political networks.

The conceptual shift from civil society to the polity brings to the fore a critical policy lesson (number 7). Organizations that represent the poor should play an important role in the design of participatory institutions. Providing such an opportunity enables organizations of the poor to negotiate a set of rules that govern the functioning of participatory institutions that facilitate their access and involvement. The design phase of institutional building provides a critical, possibly one-off, opportunity for such organizations to engineer their access.

6. CONCLUSION

Extensive fieldwork in São Paulo points to the substantial role civil organization play in representing people living in poverty in the policy process. The dynamics of this representation cannot be understood on the same terms as that of individual citizen participation. Sectors of the poor obtain very different levels and forms of representation from civil organizations because these vary tremendously, including in their capacity to participate and in the type of relations they have to their beneficiaries/constituencies. Local associations and coordinators are more likely to participate in these processes than advocacy NGOs or other types of civil organizations. Civil organizations vary as well in their ties to other (noncivil) actors and such ties have fundamental consequences: organizations with ties to the principal actors of representative democracy are the most likely to participate in formal or quasi-formal processes of public policy making.

These findings suggest that the dominant perspective on civil society and participation in international development—the civil society approach—is a poor conceptual guide to understanding contemporary patterns of participation. It lacks the differentiated view of civil organizations needed to understand this extremely diverse universe of actors. It is premised on a theoretical separation of direct and representative democracy that in practice does not appear to exist. A polity approach, we have argued, provides a stronger analytic basis for understanding the dynamics of participation by civil organizations that represent the poor, and the kinds of factors that shape that participation. Such an approach brings to the fore that participatory institutions are fundamentally political products, the rules of which are negotiated by political actors with different capacities.

NOTES

1. See among others, Abers (1998), Avritzer (2003), Baiocchi (2001), Fung and Wright (2003), Chaudhuri and Heller (2002), and Krishna (2003).

2. This civil society approach can be found in studies on participation within the deliberative democracy literature, such as Fung and Wright (2003) and Avritzer

(2003), and in the policy statements and publications of national governments and international organizations such as UNDP, the World Bank, or the OECD's Development Assistance Committee. For general critiques of the civil society perspective, see Foley and Edwards (1996), Harriss, Stokke, and Törnquist (2005), Houtzager (2003), and Jenkins (2001).

3. See, for example, the large multicountry projects undertaken by Santos, with MacArthur Foundation support, "Reinventing Social Emancipation," www.ces.fe.uc.pt/emancipa; the Ford Foundation, "Civil Society and Governance Project," http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/civ-soc/index.html and on Brazil specifically Dagnino, 2003; as well as research of The Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies at http://www.jhu.edu/~ccss/ and in Saloman et al. (1999). Second wave studies include Baiocchi (2003), Chaudhuri and Heller (2002), Krishna (2003), Mendes (2004), Schönleitner (2005), and Wampler (2004b).

4. This logic is one of "cooperation for mutual gain" (Putnam, 1993), or of public reasoning that produces moral consensus and concrete solutions (Cohen, 1998; Cohen & Arato, 1992).

5. This focus on the "polity" builds in particular on the insights of historical institutionalists such as Evans (1995, 1996), Skocpol (1992), Skocpol and Fiorina (1999), Tilly (1978), and Tilly (1997).

6. Abers (1998), Avritzer (2003), Baiocchi (2001, 2003), and Santos (1998, 2002).

7. Among the 92 councilors of CONOP in 2003, only, 14 represented the municipal administration. The council also had seats for eight associations that work with special segments of the population, such as women, afro-Brazilians, the homeless, the disabled, children and adolescents, gay and lesbians, and Indians, as well as four representatives appointed by the respective Municipal deliberative councils.

8. This typology is a modified version of Tatagiba, 2002.

9. Furthermore, in most cases, the number of seats for civil society actors is legally specified, and in a few instances even the actual actors are specified.

10. The use of this classification is not limited to work that adopts a civil society perspective (cf. Evans, 2002, footnotes 16 and 30).

11. We were forced into this specification when we found that over 40% of our sample identified itself as NGOs, despite differing markedly in terms of activities,

organizational structures, relations to members/beneficiaries, and so forth. Many actors appear to use the label NGO for the purposes of public self-representation.

12. See references in endnote 2.

13. In São Paulo, as in most cities, there is no reliable listing of associational life from which a random (or weighted) sample could be drawn. Such a listing would also entail accepting a prior definition of what is associational life or civil society, which we wanted to avoid.

14. Constructing a universe from the rosters of the participatory institutions had its own problems, not the least of which is losing the ability to compare actors who participate with those who are active but do not participate. At the extreme, using lists of entities participating in councils, under these conditions, makes an inference blind to the universe of excluded associations. On snowball sampling, see Atkinson and Flint (n/a), Goodman (1961), and Sudman and Kalton (1986).

15. In each region, we began mini-snowballs by interviewing a local organization recommended as very active in working with the community by (1) a local representatives of the Catholic Church; (2) a representative of an evangelical church; and (3) a local government representatives. A fourth organization was selected from a list of neighborhood association drawn from the *Cadastro Geral de Empresas do IBGE* (General Registry of Companies). The latter is by far the most complete list of civil organizations, but organizations that do *not* have tax registration are excluded. In cases where an organization provided few referrals we added a fifth interview from the same source who had indicated that organization.

16. Using the model with the highest explanatory power we find that while nearly 58% of our sample of actors participates, our model predicts that 50% of our sample would participate even if these actors had no ties to PT and 46% would participate even if they had no contractual obligations, although proportions are higher for either of these types of organizations. A second possible source of over-sampling of actors with PT ties or contracts is if these actors have extremely high participation rates. In that case, naming any actor with ties to the PT or government contract would influence participation positively. In fact, only 16% of actors with ties to the PT *do not* participate in the government space, while 25% of the contract holders do not.

17. The dataset has two indicators for ties/autonomy to political parties: whether the actor declares that it has (i) formal or informal ties to political parties or to the

Worker's Party in particular, and (ii) supported a political candidate in recent elections. Because ties to parties and to the Worker's Party co-varied significantly we used Tie to PT to obtain a more precise result. Support for candidates was not significant in the risk ratios and was droped. For ties to political parties, religious organizations and unions we used interviewees' declaration of whether such ties existed or not. For ties to government, we used a question that asked specifically whether the organization had a contract to deliver services with the government. The dataset had a number of other variables that measured institutional ties to the state, including the share of an actors' budget that came from pubic funding, but Contract consistently gave the strongest results.

18. Inclusion of Service NonProfit would make the model completely multicolinear—that is, there would be no variation amongst the categories of types and they would always add up to 1. The interpretation of the results, however, does not depend on which category is used as the reference.

19. Although the meanings assigned to both odds ratios and relative risk ratios are essentially the same, the formulae differ. The qualitative results are not likely to differ.

20. It is possible that actors with PT ties and government contracts participate at high rates for some reasons other than the fact they have these two characteristics.

We believe that there are no strong statistical instruments which we could use to test for this kind of latent variable problem in this dataset. However, only the 20 starting points were selected to be from the most active segment of civil organizations. Whether the actors these initial interviewees stated having relations with, and which where subsequently interviewed, belong to the most active segment we do not know.

21. Seidman's (1994) work on urban labor in Brazil, which suggests that unions associated with the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) represent a form of social movement unionism that flows from the workplace into urban communities, raises such a possibility. A similar possibility is raised by Diomo (1995), and many other works, on the crucial role progressive sectors of the Catholic Church played in creating and supporting community organisations and social movements, particularly during the 1980s.

22. In the case of the policy councils, it is very likely that the lack of statistically significant results for health is related to the small number of actors who participate in any one council. When all policy councils are taken together, the number of participating actors in the sample is substantial, but when disaggregating by particular sectoral councils, such as health, the statistical results are not significant.

23. For a discussion on this topic, see Houtzager (2003, pp. 12–13).

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