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Participation and the Poor: Social Accountability Institutions and Poverty Reduction in Brazil

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I. Introduction

Democracy, according to a large body of research, contributes to human development by improving citizens' lives (Przeworski et al. 2000; Gerring et al. 2012; McGuire 2010; Baum and Lake 2003; Gerring et al. 2015). Broad evidence demonstrates that democracies provide higher standards of living, on average, for their citizens than authoritarian countries (Boix 2001; Brown and Hunter 2004; Brown and Mobarak 2009; Besley and Kudamatsu 2006; Lake and Baum 2001). But what is it about democratic practice that enhances the quality of its citizens' lives? Proponents argue that democratic practices such as competitive elections, checks and balances, and protection of individual rights contribute to government's responsiveness to citizens' demands, which in turn improves the quality of government performance and citizens' well-being (Rueschemayer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Przeworski et al. 2000; Fox 2015; Sen 1999; Diamond 1999; Gerring et al. 2015; O'Donnell 1998). But many new democracies

are beset by weak party systems, low voter knowledge, entrenched clientelistic practices, fragmented states, and partial protection of the rights formally guaranteed by new constitutions. These limitations often combine to hinder the ability of democratically elected governments to improve basic human development (Przeworski et al. 1999; O'Donnell 1998; Weyland 1996; Cleary 2010). And yet, some new democracies are now improving and expanding public goods provisions, which enhances citizens' basic social well-being and helps them to develop basic capabilities (Sen 1999; Gerring et al. 2015). In this article, we identify three causal pathways that establish a close link between democracy and human capabilities to provide a more robust accounting of how specific features of democratic regimes lead to specific improvements in human development. It is important to note that we control for elections' potential influence on local poverty rates, but we argue that elections are too distant from ongoing policy cycles to impact poverty directly. Instead, we present evidence for specific institutions and policies' role for reducing local poverty in Brazil. We also control for economic growth, which represents the dominant explanation for poverty reduction in Brazil and around the world.

Democratic regimes often engage in multiple strategies to advance well-being for their citizens, including top-down policy efforts to improve social policy design and direct engagement with civil society to expand public participation. In this article, we address the question: to what extent are *expert-designed public policies or citizen participation* (exercising voice, vote, and oversight) mechanisms responsible for improvements in social well-being? We argue that the establishment of a rights-based citizenship regime best explains improvements in the quality of social well-being (Marshall 1950; Yashar 2005; Hunter and Sugiyama 2014; Wampler 2015). We provide

empirical analysis to show how the introduction of an extensive public participation architecture, the expansion of universal public goods provisioning, and improvements in subnational provision of public goods contribute to reducing poverty in Brazil.

We focus on the ways improving public goods provision and increasing income through federal cash transfer programs- two consequences of the rights-based regime- create multiplier effects that reduce poverty in the local economy. The first multiplier stems from new income from cash transfers, which leads to greater consumption, greater production to meet market demand, and broader employment to produce goods and services. Overall, the Brazilian Federal government invested nearly 100 billion dollars in the Bolsa Família conditional cash transfer program over the 10 year period from 2005-2014. The majority of this funding is distributed to citizens through small, monthly outlays that allows individuals living in extreme poverty to have a steady source of basic income. The second multiplier is from public goods provision, which stimulates the economy through outsourcing local spending because companies winning contracts for service provision purchase material and hire new workers to deliver the goods in the short term. In the long-term, public goods provision leads to increased productivity because it fosters a healthier, better-educated workforce. Ultimately, we provide evidence that participatory institutions, federal social programs, and public goods spending have independent and interactive influences on immediate aspects of poverty such as income, employment, and inequality.

Establishing a Rights-Based Citizenship Regime

The establishment of a rights-based citizenship regime, beyond electoral procedures, serves as a foundation for improvements in social well being. The Brazilian case illustrates how a rights-based citizenship regime can alter the political and policy terrain through which citizens express political voice, claim social rights, engage their fellow citizens and public officials, and hold government officials accountable. Brazil's 1988 Constitution explicitly guarantees political rights (e.g., voting in representative democracy, participating in policymaking venues) and social rights (e.g., education, universal health care). The Constitution *initiated* a political process that legitimated civil society demands and government officials' (elected, appointed, and career civil servants) equity-enhancing policies. Yet, there remains a wide gap between the formal rights guaranteed to citizens and the ability of tens of millions Brazilians to gain access to these basic rights.

The expansion of rights-claiming by citizens and civil society organizations during Brazil's democratization had at least three distinct effects on Brazil's contemporary democratic landscape. First, representatives from diverse civil society sectors—unions, the church, and social movements—participated in the development of a new party system. Social movements and unions would form the core of the newly founded leftist Workers' Party in 1980 (Keck 1995; Hunter 2010). A second contribution was in the design of the Constitution (1988). Civil society engaged with the Constituent Assembly to advocate for the inclusion of social rights, e.g. the right to health care (Vianna et al 1998; Weyland 1996), public participation (Avritzer 2002 and 2009), and decentralization (Montero and Samuels 2004). Third, civil society advocated for the adoption of subnational participatory institutions. Alliances between social movement

leaders and elected officials often drove the adoption of legally constituted institutions, which require the approval of a legislative chamber (e.g., a “city council”) and the executive (e.g., mayor) (Avritzer 2002 and 2009; Wampler and Avritzer 2004). By expanding rights, participation, and local governance, there are greater opportunities to connect citizens and civil society organizations to policy outcomes. This potential is even greater when one considers that municipal governments spend nearly 15% of all public funds (Montero and Samuels 2004). Citizens now have clear incentives to engage the municipal state because municipalities deliver essential services (e.g. education, sanitation, and health care) and citizens’ participation decisions can make meaningful differences in policy outcomes.

Poverty in Brazil

We focus on poverty in order to assess well being in Brazil. Specifically, we evaluate income, employment, and income inequality at the subnational level. Brazil has experienced high, but varying rates of poverty like other developing and middle-income countries at the start of democratization (World Bank 2015). These rates have fallen much farther in some cities and regions relative to others over the course of Brazil’s democratic consolidation, but median incomes remain relatively low and inequality remains quite high in most of the country. Subnational governments have taken different approaches to experimenting with poverty reducing social programs and met with different levels of success (Brazilian Ministry of Social Development 2015). However, scholars and practitioners still do not know the extent to which new democratic institutions or social programs are responsible for Brazil’s reductions in poverty, especially in the context of

rapid economic growth *that should account for a large proportion of reductions in poverty*. The evidence surrounding economic growth and job creation, income growth, and household consumption is clear and the connection between an expanding economy and improvements in standards of living is widely accepted (Rodrik 2000; Dollar and Kraay 2001; World Bank 2005; Kraay 2006; Ferreira 2010). The goal of this paper is not to challenge this view: we also expect higher levels of economic productivity to be associated with lower levels of poverty in Brazil in keeping with broad, cross-national literature. However, some studies demonstrate economic growth's relatively small impact on Brazilian poverty (Ferreira, Leite, and Ravallion 2010). At minimum, our study adds to the poverty literature by exploring the independent influence of factors beyond economic growth, such as local politics and policies, which might also influence poverty at the municipal level.

The Brazilian government collects fine-grained, municipal-level data on new democratic institutions, new social programs, budget management, elections, and well-being that help us to bridge the gap between competing explanations and provide evidence-based policy recommendations for improving local outcomes. Brazil thus offers a unique opportunity to test the relative influence of participatory institutions, policy, and managerial aspects of democracy on local well-being at a level of breadth and depth that has never been achieved.

This study leverages the benefits that come from a subnational, single-country study, which holds national institutions, bureaucratic, and electoral politics constant (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994; Snyder 2001). Brazilian municipalities are responsible for delivering many services and there is now remarkable variation in local experiences

with participatory institutions, coverage of new social programs, and local administrative performance. This variation means that the quality of life and the potential for individuals to develop agency varies greatly across the country. Brazilian federalism renders municipalities independent and politically autonomous units of government, which means that they represent ideal laboratories for examining the role of democratic mechanisms on human development outcomes. But Brazilian municipalities also rely on the federal government for financial transfers, thus allowing the federal government significant opportunities to induce municipalities to adopt new policies and institutions.

A rights-based citizenship regime serves as the foundation for the democratic mechanisms that contribute to improved human development outcomes. Brazil's rights-based citizenship regime is rooted in three processes. First, the adoption of a broad participatory architecture in the 1990s and 2000s grew out of the expansion of civil society in the 1970s and 1980s; second, the establishment of federal, expert-designed social policies that are intended to deliver universal public goods to poor citizens and diminish clientelistic exchanges; third, the use of federal oversight over subnational monitoring to diminish clientelism and corruption and guarantee equality of treatment by the state. The evidence that we present in this article shows that democratic renewal, technocratic reforms, and more local funding for public goods independently produce positive effects but that it is the combination of these reforms that produce the most extensive improvements in social well-being.

II. Democracy at Work

How does democracy produce improvements in human development?

Conventional arguments on the role of democracy in governance hold that elections are the main mechanisms that incentivize democratic governments to adopt policies that correspond to citizens' preferred outcomes and policy preferences. For instance, much of the literature on democracy points to the role of electoral competition in generating citizen accountability and incentives for politicians to respond to the needs of median voters (Duverger 1959; Downs 1957; Shepsle 1979; Przeworski et al. 1999; Ferraz and Finan 2011; Gerring et al. 2015; Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner 1999; Brown, Touchton, and Whitford 2011). Other scholars argued more recently that it is that the length of democratic experience along with political commitments from Leftist governments that are most important for reducing income inequality and poverty (Pribble, Huber and Stephens 2009; Huber and Stephens 2012; Sandbrook et al. 2007; Baiocchi et al. 2011).

In the Brazilian context, the introduction of competitive elections with compulsory voting in the late 1980s could potentially induce elected officials to provide policies that improve social well-being in three ways. First, competitive subnational elections in Brazil provided opportunities for small, opposition parties to compete. Political outsiders were able to win elections because the local political stakes were lower at the municipal level and competing required fewer resources (Keck 1995; Hunter 2010). After winning elections, there were strong incentives for these outsider political parties to design and implement innovative policies that would reach out to citizens who were new voters or who were unattached to the more well-established parties (Ames 2001; Samuels 1999).

Second, national-level elections produced governments interested in crafting policies to address the needs of broad constituencies. In Brazil, poor citizens represent a sizable share of the population, thereby creating incentives for national politicians to address the poor's policy needs.¹ In theory, we should expect to see redistribution emerge as a political priority as elected officials seek to ensure their political survival in settings where poverty and social inequality are high (Meltzer and Richard 1981; Lustig et al. 2013). For example, the Cardoso (1995-2002), Lula da Silva (2003-2010) and Dilma Rouseff (2011-2014; 2015-) administrations crafted new types of policies at the national level that would help poor citizens gain access to social rights guaranteed by the 1988 Constitution.

Third, political and administrative decentralization means that local officials have significant responsibility for service delivery. Mayoral elections carry political weight as politicians use executive offices as stepping-stones for their political ambitions (Samuels 2003). As such, mayors often employ policy platforms to reach constituents and compete for support. Taken together, electoral competition ought to result in greater accountability at the municipal level.

However, the causal mechanisms associated with national elections are, we believe, still too distant from ongoing local policymaking and policy implementation processes that are necessary to improve human development and social well-being. We agree that national elections are an important part of the democratic process that produces long-term change, but we argue that the internal dynamics of Brazil's democracy—ongoing citizen participation in public policy arenas, the expansion of technically sophisticated policy

¹ For instance, in 1990 42% of the population fell below the poverty line (IBGE 2015).

programs that are designed to reduce clientelist exchanges, and the establishment of public goods based on democratic rights—are not captured in election-oriented analyses at the national level. Our task, in the remainder of the article, is to evaluate two new causal pathways associated with the introduction of a rights-based citizenship regime in Brazil that are typically omitted from studies on the relationship between democracy and human development. Our argument is that these independent and interactive causal mechanisms—expansion of participatory institutions, a rights-based conditional cash transfer program, and a commitment to public goods provision— generate improvements in human development and social well-being. The next sections of the paper describe each of these areas in greater detail.

Participatory Democratic Institutions

Participatory institutions are thought to improve well-being through the creation of deliberative decision-making bodies that forge new relationships among citizens, civil society organizations (CSOs), and public officials. These new relationships, in turn, establish the basis for investments in public goods that poor citizens need. Participatory institutions are state-sanctioned institutional processes that devolve decision-making authority to venues that citizen-participants and government officials *jointly control*. Participatory institutions are incremental policy-making bodies because they produce specific incentives for citizens to select both narrow and broader public goods. They also function as new forms of democracy by overcoming deficiencies associated with existing representative democracy, such as limited deliberation or a bias in favor of middle and upper class groups (Schattschneider 1960; Fung and Wright 2001; Santos 2005; Pateman

2012). The current wave of new democratic institutions allows citizens to pursue their specific policy needs while also expanding democracy's breadth.

In the Brazilian case, public policy management councils are the most common type of participatory institution, with nearly 60,000 municipal-level councils and at least 300,000 citizens elected to hold positions on them (Pires 2011). Council membership is typically comprised of equal parts representation from civil society and the government. Members have the right to propose new policies and they must approve year-end reports to ensure that governments are complying with the appropriate legal and policy frameworks. Ultimately, the councils are designed to encourage deliberation, thus allowing citizens the ability to expand the public debate.²

Policy councils represent new interfaces between state and society, given their equal composition of representatives from government and civil society (Pires and Vaz 2012; Wampler 2015). The civil society representatives are fairly heterogeneous—they come from community associations, social movements, professional non-profit service delivery organizations, and labor unions, but the evidence also suggests that they tend to be better educated and wealthier than participants in Participatory Budgeting (PB) programs (For councils see Almeida et al. 2015; Lavalle et al. 2015; For PB see Avritzer 2002 and Wampler 2007).

² Council members have two basic forms of authority. First, council members have the right to introduce and vote on new policies. Government officials must also secure the approval of council members when they want to establish new programs. The voting power of the councils tends to be a “weak” vote but it is an additional veto-point that the government needs to consider as they establish new policies (Wampler 2015). Second, members have oversight authority by approving the annual budget and “year end” report and engaging in ongoing monitoring of project implementation.

The federal government encourages the adoption of policy councils in certain areas such as education, healthcare, and social assistance, by enacting regulatory controls or by offering municipalities increased funding should they choose to adopt these councils. However, there are at least 18 additional council types (women's councils; food security councils; children's rights councils) that are voluntary and not strongly induced by the federal government (Lavalle et al. 2015). Federally induced councils account for at least 15,000 of all existing councils, while voluntary councils are more common in cities, states and regions with denser networks of civil society organizations (Avritzer 2009).

Expansion of Social Provisioning

The third wave of democracy in developing countries coincided with the introduction of neoliberal market reforms that constrained governments' abilities to finance social programs. Pressure to respond to pent-up citizen demands for services as part of newly acquired social rights increased at the same time as governments faced diminished resources to enact policy reforms. Not surprisingly, large-scale social policy innovation stalled during much of the late 1980s and early 1990s. International development agencies, such as the World Bank and Inter American Development Bank, promoted social safety nets to mitigate the effects of unemployment caused by neoliberal reforms (Graham 1994). Later, the international development community would encourage governments to focus on programmatic efficiency and targeting of resources to serve the neediest populations (Teichman 2004). Universal social welfare policy emblematic of the Nordic welfare state would be an unrealistic goal for Latin American

countries. Instead, countries throughout the region would embrace more targeted poverty alleviation strategies.

Social policy research reveals that governments need not spend large sums of money in order to achieve marked improvements in education and health. Policy design and progressive investment in areas that affect the poor, such as primary school and preventive health care, are more important than absolute spending levels (McGuire 2010; Hunter and Sugiyama 2009). This is particularly true for developing countries that have historically prioritized social investments in expensive services such as hospital services and tertiary higher education that appeals to elite interests, rather than more basic services for which the poor are dependent on state provisioning.

Brazilian social sector reforms are reflective of the developing world's need to design social programs that are well targeted to serve the poor. Since the mid-1990s, social policy reforms have spread across the country as public officials and citizens developed creative solutions to address enduring social problems (Tendler 1997; Sugiyama 2007 and 2012b; Avelino, et al. 2005). Many of these programs have their roots in municipal-level reforms but were later replicated to varying degrees by Brazil's Federal Government. Programs such as *Bolsa Família* (Family Grant) reflect social policies that seek to increase household income, increase consumption, reduce inequality, and expand citizens' access to education and health care (Sugiyama 2012a). Importantly, these programs were established in the context of the new rights-based citizenship regime.

The Bolsa Família, established in 2003, is the world's largest conditional cash transfer (CCT) program. It is the government's most visible and far-reaching poverty

alleviation program, and includes about a quarter of the population. The Bolsa provides poor and indigent families with cash grants on the condition they meet behavioral requirements that are thought to enhance human development.³ Namely, beneficiaries must ensure their children attend school regularly, receive vaccinations and regular check-ups, and mothers must receive pre-natal and post-natal care. Although the Bolsa Família includes conditionality requirements, the government's discourse surrounding the program focused on rights-based access to incomes that cover basic human needs, health care, and education (Hunter and Sugiyama 2014). Research demonstrates that the Bolsa has contributed directly to poverty reduction through its transfer of cash to poor households (Soares et al. 2010; Bither-Terry 2014; Sánchez-Ancoche and Mattei 2011; Soares 2012). It has also contributed to human development, primarily in health care and education. For instance, scholars have identified enrollment in the Bolsa with significant improvements in school enrollment (Soares et al. 2010), performance in school (Batista de Oliveira and Soares 2013) enrollment, nutrition (Gilligan and Fruttero 2011), and declines in infant mortality (Rasella et al. 2013).

Much of the scholarship on Bolsa Família and poverty highlights the program's small, but consistent influence on different purely economic poverty measures such as income and consumption (Bither-Terry 2014). Yet, in addition to fostering short-term economic development, federal social programs such as the Bolsa were designed to increase long-term human development as well. For instance, the conditions attached to

³ The Ministry of Social Development (Ministerio de Desenvolvimento Social, MDS) periodically updated its formulas and adjusted values for the cash grants. Amounts vary according to the composition of the family – age and number of household members - and their monthly income per capita. The payments can range from R\$32 to R\$242 depending on family profiles; in 2010 the average benefit was R\$96.97 (MDS Bolsa Família Website; Ministério de Planejamento 2011). This translates to USD \$55 per month at 2010 exchange rates.

Bolsa Familia payments are intended to increase the likelihood that citizens would fulfill their rights to health care and education, which we also expect to increase income, employment, and reduce inequality in the longer term. This is because a better educated, healthier labor pool translates into a more productive workforce. Higher productivity per worker, in turn, leads to greater profits, the potential for higher wages, and the possibility of a virtuous circle: greater income through new jobs and/or increased productivity leads to greater consumption. Greater consumption brings the need for greater production to meet higher consumer demand, which necessitates hiring more workers. These workers then increase their own consumption and drive the continuation of the productivity, consumption, employment circle.

As Brazil is a large federal country, social policy implementation requires significant intergovernmental coordination and municipal authorities administer the Bolsa programs. The past three presidential administrations (Cardoso, Lula da Silva, and Rousseff) have made strong efforts to draw from subnational and international examples to craft national policies designed to improve citizens' access to the social rights formally guaranteed under the 1988 Constitution (Sugiyama 2012a). Although social policies are not directly subject to voters' approval through referenda, scholars generally argue that the expansion of pro-poor policies in Brazil and in Latin America more generally is reflective of democratic values emerging from a sustained experience with democracy (Huber and Stephens 2012; McGuire 2010).

State Capacity in Democracies

Development specialists acknowledge that even well intentioned and designed public programs can be undermined through their capture by private interests for political

ends. As observers of politics in developing countries note, entrenched clientelism and patron-client relationships often distort governing in ways that perpetuate poverty and harm the poor (Weyland 1996; Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2012; Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999). Low levels of state capacity (e.g. poorly trained personnel, poor access to telecommunications, and lack of equipment) can make it difficult to execute even well designed public policy. Decentralization was thought to be part of the solution to this problem in large federal countries where public policy implementation takes place at the subnational level because it would render local authorities more responsive to voters, corruption more visible and thus easier to control, and improve the quality of services (Grindle 2007, 7-8). Yet, decentralization has not lived up to expectations in practice in many settings and has not proven to be the panacea its advocates had imagined.

Brazil's municipalities feature uneven economic development and varying experiences with local clientelism. Decentralized governance therefore poses serious challenges for standardized and universal delivery of social benefits.⁴ For this reason, federal authorities have simultaneously tightened administrative oversight of state and municipal governments to diminish clientelism and corruption during the 1990s and 2000s (Sugiyama 2012b; Eaton and Dickovick 2004). The result is a merger of the principles of the 1988 Constitution (universal access to public goods provided by the state) with those of new public management (Barzelay 2001; Grindle 2007). Local governments thus improve their administration of programs designed by national level

⁴ Brazil's state is characterized by "islands of excellence" associated with regionally concentrated industrialization that contributed to rapid economic growth in the 1960s. The state did a poor job providing basic public goods (education, public security, transportation) to vast sectors of the population (Eakin 1997).

bureaucrats as both a response to technocratic reforms targeting clientelism and corruption, and a means to promote social rights.

Several changes contributed to improving the quality of service delivery across many policy areas. First, the federal government began to require greater fiscal transparency and responsibility. For example, the *Lei de Responsabilidade Fiscal* (Fiscal Responsibility Law) enacted in 2000 requires municipalities to spend 50% of their annual budget on health care and education and to provide year-end fiscal information to the federal government. Second, the federal government established an independent Supreme Audit Institution to ensure that other public officials are more actively involved in the ongoing monitoring of policy implementation. Third, the state created more stringent rules that promoted hiring civil servants through tests rather than through nepotism or political patronage. The best example is the introduction of a professional management career (*gestores de políticas públicas*) at the federal level. Municipal governments now face strict limits on the amount of their budget that they can spend on personnel as these requirements are extended throughout the country.

Interactive Effects

We argue that the three main components of Brazil's rights-based citizenship regime interact with one another to improve governance, service delivery, and well-being. For instance, building new participatory institutions influences technocratic policymaking by allowing citizens to propose new policies, suggest policy reforms, and engage in oversight of policy implementation. The adoption of technocratic policies influences the parameters of what is debated in participatory venues. Deliberations move away from

broad generalizations about demands and concerns to more specific technical needs. But the participatory venues also permit citizens to bring local knowledge (*mētis*) to bear on intricate policy discussions (Wampler 2015). The technocratic solutions developed and mandated by the federal government introduce more efficient, universal, and democratic (non-clientelistic) policies. Poor citizens' lives then improve as public goods—health care, education, and basic income—reach greater numbers. Finally, the creation of a more capable local state is more likely to provide better quality information that helps to inform deliberation within participatory institutions. This occurs both at the level of policy formulation and policy oversight

Controlling for the role of economic growth

Brazil experienced economic stabilization during the 1990s, and an economic boom during the 2000s. First, the state downsized and privatized key industries following then Finance Minister Fernando Henrique Cardoso's 1994 economic stabilization package (Madrid 2003; Montero 2014). Brazil experienced rapid economic growth during the 2000s as a commodities boom, the return of a neo-developmental state, and the infusion of cash into the poorest households brought new capital into the country and spread it among the population. Brazil's growth brought new jobs, increased the country's revenue base and offered the poor many new opportunities.

The connections between economic growth and poverty reduction are well established (Rodrik 2000; Dollar and Kraay 2001). Most studies tie increases in growth to decreases in poverty in a direct material sense, such as through increasing income and household consumption (Dollar and Kraay 2001; Ferreira 2010). Many arguments in this

area suffer from sparse global data and an inability to statistically account for confounding variables on a global scale. Other studies resolve this issue by focusing on a subset of countries or on one country in particular (Ravallion and Chen 2007). By focusing on Brazil, our analysis controls for cross-nationally confounding variables such as trading regime, exposure to globalization, or regional growth rates in evaluating economic determinants of living standards at the municipal level.

Furthermore, others have connected growth to poverty within Brazil, leading us to include economic control variables in our statistical models of well-being (Lopez-Calva and Rocha 2012; Lustig et al. 2013; McGuire 2010). We can better separate any independent influence from new democratic institutions and social programs on well-being from the potential benefits of economic expansion by including measures of economic productivity in our models.

IV. Research Design and Case Selection

We evaluate connections between local participatory governance, federal social programs, and poverty outcomes by drawing on an original dataset covering Brazil's 5,570 municipalities. Much of our data extends back to 2000, but we have full coverage of all indicators between 2006 and 2014. This translates to one of the largest datasets on subnational policies in the developing world and the only one aligning key local aspects of participation, social programs, and public goods with local outcomes. Our analysis demonstrates that participatory institutions, federal social programs, and local public goods provision all play an important role for reducing poverty. We also show how these institutions, programs, and abilities buttress one another and interact to improve citizens'

ability to meet their basic human needs. The result is a new understanding of how different aspects of democracy work together to reduce poverty and a new understanding of democracy itself. A description of each variable in our models of poverty follows below.

Variables and Methodology

Dependent Variables: Income, Employment, and Income Inequality.

There are many ways to measure poverty in Brazil and around the world. We focus on income, employment, and income inequality because they relate directly to whether households have enough resources to meet their basic needs in the present and whether they will continue to meet those needs in the future. Firjan, the Industrial Federation for the State of Rio de Janeiro, collects data to code a municipal development index for each of Brazil's 5,570 municipalities from 2005 to 2014. We use the economic component of this index, which includes income, employment, and income inequality. The measure is constructed similarly to the UNDP's Human Development Index, where municipalities receive an annual score between 0 and 1. Scores between 0 and 0.4 reflect low municipal development, those between 0.4 and 0.6 reflect median levels of development, those between 0.6 and 0.8 translate to moderate levels of development, and between 0.8 and 1.0 to high levels of development (FIRJAN 2015). The mean score is 0.39 and the standard deviation is 0.15.

Firjan's data collection process is standardized across municipalities and therefore allows for comparisons between different municipalities across space and between the same municipalities over time. We can then use this data to evaluate the extent to which

municipal-level participatory institutions, federal social programs that are administered at the municipal level, and local economic conditions influence municipal-level poverty indicators. Any connections between participatory institutions, federal social programs, state capacity, elections, service delivery, and poverty should emerge in these data. The data is available from Firjan's website: <http://www.firjan.com.br/ifdm/>.

Independent Variables: Adoption of Policy Councils

We use the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics' survey data on the presence of 21 different local policy councils among Brazil's municipalities from 2000 to 2014 (<http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/economia/perfilmunic/>). These councils are thematic and include education councils, health councils, sanitation councils, women's councils, housing councils, and cultural councils. Municipalities adopt some of these councils, such as health and education councils, at high rates because of the federal financial incentives the government uses to promote their adoption. For example, the mean adoption rate of health councils in our data is 80% and recent years exhibit adoption rates well over 90%. The presence of these councils could plausibly relate to poverty by promoting policies that increase workers' health and education and therefore their economic productivity. There are many other councils that cover areas beyond education and health care that could plausibly relate to poverty; six of these do not carry with them federal financial incentives. These councils include women's councils, children's rights councils, food security councils, sanitation councils, women's health councils, and urban policy councils. These councils are less-commonly adopted at the municipal level compared to health and education councils, which are accompanied by

federal funding. We treat the councils that carry no federal funding as being more “voluntary” than those for which there is a clear financial benefit for the municipality to adopt the council. We also hypothesize that adopting these more voluntary councils represents a greater commitment to promoting democratic participation by municipal governments and local civil society organizations than does adopting councils after receiving federal inducements.⁵ This argument is consistent with scholarship connecting the growth of a stronger civil society and an interested mayoral administration with the voluntary adoption of additional councils (Avritzer 2009; Lavallo et al. 2015). Finally, voluntary council adoption signals that CSOs and public officials also seek collaborative relationships to improve policy outputs.

Two dummy variables account for local policy councils. The first is coded “1” if a municipality features all of the six voluntary policy councils that could relate to healthcare and infant mortality in a given year. Municipalities that do not have all six councils are coded “0”.⁶ Seventeen percent of observations are coded “1” and 83% are coded “0”. The second variable records whether municipalities use the councils that do carry federal funds with them and may be related to poverty. These are health councils, housing councils, education councils and environment councils. Sixty-three percent of municipal observations feature all four policy councils and are coded “1”. The remainder

⁵ It should be noted that the federal government did not always incentivize the adoption of local policy councils. Early municipal adoption of health and housing councils could thus be construed as a similar commitment to the subsequent adoption of council that carried no financial incentives with them.

⁶ The source surveys we use often do not include the same question for each year. In some instances we have four-year gaps between questions for some policy councils, whereas a one or two year-gap is common for others. We assume municipalities maintained their policy councils through the mayoral administration in which the survey question was originally asked in the absence of countervailing information from another survey round within that same administration. We argue that this assumption is sustainable because only 3% of municipalities eliminated a policy council during the same mayoral administration based on the survey responses in our dataset.

are coded “0”. Finally, we code a dummy variable to indicate municipalities with a high frequency of policy council meetings. Many municipalities adopt policy councils to gain federal funds, but may not promote active councils or sustain them over time. We capture variation in commitment to using these councils by coding municipalities “1” when they feature *multiple* council meetings each month and “0” if the councils meet monthly, quarterly, annually, or never meet at all. Thirteen percent of municipal policy councils meet frequently, while 87% do not.

Bolsa Familia Coverage

We incorporate data from Brazil’s Ministry for Social Development on municipal coverage of the *Bolsa Familia* program into our models. The Ministry records annual data on the percentage of eligible families that receive benefits from the *Bolsa Familia* conditional cash transfer program.⁷ The mean coverage level is 83% in our data and the standard deviation is 31. This is the same variable used in Rasella et al. (2013) and Macinko et al. (2006).

Bolsa Familia Management Quality

The *Bolsa Familia* program is administered at the municipal level and the quality of local management varies considerably from municipality to municipality. We use the *Índice de Gestão Descentralizada* (Index of Decentralized Management, or IGD), which is operational data from the Ministry of Social Development (MDS), to capture this variation in local governments’ ability to manage the Bolsa. The MDS rates each municipality on how well it administers program elements, such as updating the

⁷ www.MDS.gov.br/bolsafamilia/gestaodescentralizada

Cadastro Único (Unified Registry) and follows beneficiaries' compliance with conditionality requirements. The Ministry uses the IGD to evaluate local performance, with higher transfers going to cities that perform better. The quality of local management should reflect a combination of local political commitment as well as existing municipal state capacity. The quality of local management is also likely to influence local outcomes independently from the broad *Bolsa Família* coverage, which is often high in municipalities where management is poor, such as settings with more dense poverty. This variable is continuous from 0 to 1 and each municipality receives an annual score with better management resulting in scores close to 1 and worse management close to zero. The mean score is 0.76 and the standard deviation is 0.15.

Percentage of Per Capita Municipal Spending on Public Goods

We use the percentage of per capita municipal spending devoted to health care, sanitation, and education to test connections between commitment to public goods that help the poor and poverty outcomes. Brazil spends a comparatively high level of resources on public goods provision, but has not consistently produced high-quality outcomes related to human development indicators (McGuire 2010; Hunter and Sugiyama 2009). We follow previous literature on public goods spending and poverty to assess whether municipal commitments to public goods have at least some connection to poverty rates at the municipal level. We calculated our indicator from annual municipal spending provided by the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Economics as well as Brazil's Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education. The mean is 0.23 (23% of public spending on health care, sanitation, and education) and the standard deviation is 0.18.

Competitive Elections

We evaluate the extent to which local electoral competition alters government priorities and influences poverty rates. We code data on the relative competitiveness of municipal elections in several different ways. First, we record data on the mayor's share of the vote in the first and second rounds of the previous election. We also record data on the mayor's margin of electoral victory in each of the previous election rounds. We use this data to code a dummy variable for competitive elections, which takes a value of 1 if the margin of victory in either election round is under 5% of the vote. We also record data on whether mayors ran unopposed in the previous election. The measure comes from Brazil's Superior Electoral Tribunal: <http://www.tse.jus.br/>.

Left-leaning and PT Mayor

Previous studies have identified positive connections between a mayor from Brazil's Workers' Party (PT) and local public goods provision (Touchton and Wampler 2014). This is because many of Brazil's democratic innovations are associated with the PT's national electoral success and PT mayors might therefore have more political incentives to adopt and support participatory governance at the local level. Similarly, subnational research on public goods reforms finds that left and center-left parties are more likely to adopt progressive social policies (Sugiyama 2012a). Finally, it is possible that mayors from the PT gain more federal patronage in the form of federal funding for local projects than non-PT mayors. We therefore code a dummy variable as "1" if municipalities have a PT mayor in a given year in our dataset with mayors from all other parties generating a municipal score of "0" for that year. We also create an indicator for

mayors from left-leaning political parties. Ideologically, it is these mayors that we expect to promote policies that improve service delivery and reduce poverty. We also expect these mayors to seek the poor's votes through improved governance and subsequent improvements in problem areas that harm the poor disproportionately, such as poor housing, education, and health care.⁸

Per Capita Size of the Municipal Economy

We evaluate the extent to which municipal economic conditions are connected to poverty in Brazil. Increases in the size of the local economy may reduce poverty directly through increased employment opportunities and higher incomes. We include an indicator for per capita gross municipal product to capture this relationship and account for variation in economic conditions among Brazil's cities. The measure comes from the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics and is available at the following website:

<http://www.cidades.ibge.gov.br/xtras/home.php>.

Estimation Strategy

We use conditional negative binomial models with fixed effects to model medical count and rate outcomes of interest. Negative binomial regression models for panel data resolve several statistical challenges in estimating the relationships between policy councils, new social programs and indicators associated with well-being over time and across space. Specifically, negative binomial regressions provide improved estimation in

⁸ Municipalities with mayors from the PT are correlated with the percentage of municipal spending devoted to health care and education at the 0.19 level.

cases where count-outcome data is widely dispersed- as it is in our case where the unconditional mean of our poverty measure is much smaller than its variance (Hilbe 2007).⁹ We then use panel data models with fixed effects to account for correlations between unobserved, time-invariant characteristics of the panel and our independent variables.¹⁰

For our data, the time-invariant characteristics include those of the municipality, such as its historical or socio-political experience, that remained fixed over the timeframe of our study. These fixed, unobserved, elements could influence municipal adoption of voluntary policy councils as well as local coverage for federal social programs such as *Bolsa Familia*. For instance, policy councils may have emerged first in areas with lower poverty rates that were already committed to reducing poverty before we record data on their efforts. The estimates of policy councils' impact on poverty rates could thus suffer from selection bias if our models failed to account for fixed, unobserved characteristics that might influence our independent variables. Using fixed, not random, effects adds a term to our models that allows us to control for this potential selection bias (Shahidur et al. 2010).

⁹ The negative binomial regression is similar to the Poisson regression model, but with a component to model the over-dispersed nature of the dependent variable. The result is narrower confidence intervals that provide more targeted estimates of the relationships in the data (Cameron and Trivedi 2009). Our results are very similar for all independent variables when using cross-sectional time-series Poisson regression as well as negative binomial regression.

¹⁰ We choose fixed effects over random effects based on the results of Hausman tests and on the arguments in Wooldridge (2014), Shahidur (2010) and Frees (2004) surrounding fixed effects models and impact evaluations.

V. Results and Discussion

TABLE I
Federal Social Programs, Policy Councils, and Poverty
2006-2014. This model uses cross-sectional time series Negative Binomial
Estimation with Fixed Effects.

| Variable | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|---|----------------------|---------------------|
| | Coefficient (SE) | Coefficient (SE) |
| Voluntary Council Commitment | 0.047** (0.001) | |
| Incentivized Council Commitment | | 0.054* (0.02) |
| Bolsa Família Coverage | 0.0003* (0.00004) | 0.0002* (0.0001) |
| Bolsa Família Management | -0.02** (0.006) | -0.04 (0.03) |
| Per Capita Municipal Public Goods Spending (% of total spending) | 0.11** (0.02) | 0.13** (0.04) |
| Per Capita Gross Municipal Product | 0.0003** (0.0001) | 0.005* (0.002) |
| Competitive Elections | 0.04 (0.04) | 0.02 (0.02) |
| Left-leaning Mayor | 0.02 (0.03) | 0.03 (0.09) |
| Constant | 0.34 (0.57) | 0.44 (0.59) |
| N | 21,075 | 22,530 |
| Wald Chi ² (6) | 164.37 | 193.77 |
| Prob> Chi ² | 0.000 | 0.000 |

* indicates significance at better than 0.05 (two-tailed test).

** indicates significance at better than 0.01 (two-tailed test).

The first model in Table I provides several important findings. Our first finding surrounds the role of local policy councils for reducing poverty. The presence of voluntary policy councils that are related to poverty have a negative, statistically

significant connection to infant mortality in Brazil. *We estimate that the presence of these councils is associated with a 0.47 increase in Brazil's municipal income, employment, and inequality scores.* This may seem like a small influence, but it represents a 12% improvement in the poverty indicator from current mean levels. Of course, there are many differences between Brazilian municipalities beyond the presence of local policy councils. Our results suggest these councils are relevant for reducing poverty while holding all other observed influences on poverty constant at their mean. By extension, our results also highlight the importance of committing to local, demand-side participatory institutions for improving well-being as Putnam proposed for civic engagement (1994) and Sen for human capabilities (2001).¹¹

We also measure municipal-level commitment to the most widespread councils related to poverty through data on the frequency with which these federally induced councils meet. This is because many municipalities may happily accept federal funds to create a council, but never ensure it meets regularly. The results in the second model in Table I show how municipalities with health councils that meet every two weeks or more, as opposed to monthly, quarterly, annually, or never, are associated with lower levels of poverty than municipalities with less frequent council meetings. We estimate that municipalities with active health councils exhibit a 0.05 improvement in our poverty indicator. *This figure translates to a 13% improvement in municipal income, employment, and inequality score for the municipalities in our sample.*

11 We present the results of estimation using the presence of federally induced health councils as the primary independent variable in Table I (a) in the technical appendix. The results show how the presence of local policy councils that the federal government induces municipalities to create are not statistically connected to infant mortality levels in and of themselves.

Federal Social Programs

Our third finding showcases the importance of top-down, federal social programs representing expert-led approaches to service delivery and poverty reduction. Measures of municipal *Bolsa Família* coverage as a percentage of eligible families are associated with higher municipal scores on the income, employment, and inequality index. These results replicate prominent findings in the literature on *Bolsa Família* such as Soares et al. (2010), Rocha (2008), Soares (2012), Bither-Terry (2014), and Sugiyama and Hunter (2013). Our results also corroborate recent evidence *Bolsa Família*'s direct impact on poverty is much smaller than that of economic productivity (Bither-Terry 2015).

Next, evidence on the relevance of local management of the *Bolsa Família* program for poverty does not support our hypotheses. The federal indicator for the quality of local *Bolsa Família* management, "IGD", is a statistically significant determinant of the municipal development score in the first model, but the direction is negative, which is unexpected. The coefficient on this variable in Model 2 is not statistically significant. There are several possible explanations for these results. The strongest explanation may simply be that getting money into the hands of the poor through greater *Bolsa Família* coverage is important in terms of the particular poverty indicator we use, which includes two areas that *Bolsa Família* payments should influence directly: income, and inequality. Improving *Bolsa Família* management and state capacity in general are also associated with improvements in health care and education service delivery, but our results suggest that *Bolsa Família* management is not directly connected to employment, income, or income inequality.

The percentage of municipal spending that is devoted to health care, sanitation, and education is positively associated with municipal scores on our central poverty indicator. Given Brazil's federal spending requirements, most municipalities spend very similar percentages of their budgets on health care and education. This means that any municipality that devotes a slightly larger percentage of their budget to public goods compared to other municipalities may see an outsize impact on poverty. *Moving from the mean percentage devoted to certain public goods spending to one standard deviation above the mean results in a 21% improvement in municipal income, employment, and inequality scores.* This relationship is in the expected direction and is independent from the influence of voluntary policy councils, which are only correlated with the percentage of municipal spending that is devoted to health care, sanitation, and education at the 0.18 level.

We do not identify connections between competitive elections and poverty in our data. Importantly, neither the mayor's vote share nor their margin of victory is a statistically significant determinant of our central poverty indicator. Furthermore, the local presidential vote share is not significant, nor is the mayor's party or the mayor's ideological orientation. The only significant relationship we identify between electoral variables and poverty is a negative connection between mayors who run unopposed and poverty rates, which is consistent with arguments connecting a total lack of political competition with clientelism and poor government performance.¹² As discussed above, these results do not impugn previous scholarship on elections, democracy, and well-being in a cross-national context. Instead, our results highlight the importance of more

¹² This model appears in Table IV in the technical appendix.

proximate aspects of electoral democracy, namely citizen participation, social policy reform efforts, and municipal administration at the local level.

It is important to note that all of the above results control for per capita gross municipal product. This variable is also connected to improvements in the municipal income, employment, and inequality scores in our data, as expected. The point here is that reducing poverty is not only a matter of how much municipalities spend, but of *how* they spend their *own* money (as monitored by policy councils) and of how much federal support they have through the *Bolsa Família* program. We argue that these areas are connected: local monitoring and local program spending choices interact with one another through connections between citizen participation in local politics, the presence of civil society organizations, and the presence of motivated municipal officials to spend on public goods. Thus *Bolsa Família* is much more than a simple cash transfer to the poorest households; these programs work well when the local administration is able to allocate the necessary resources to ensure that recipients are being embedded into a larger network of policy support programs.

Finally, our results show that three main components—the active presence of participatory institutions, technocratic social programs, and greater public goods spending—each have an independent effect on municipal poverty rates. But it is the ongoing interaction among these areas that we estimate to have the strongest influence on infant mortality. The results in Table II below show how the presence of voluntary policy councils surrounding poverty interact with public goods provision to influence municipal development scores in our data. We argue that policy councils can monitor public goods spending and improve its quality. For example, women’s rights councils might provide

better oversight of women's health care in a way that improves maternal health.

Municipalities in the top quintile of per capita public goods spending as a percentage of total spending *and* with a commitment to voluntary policy councils related to poverty are associated with a 0.19 improvement in income, employment, and inequality scores. This corresponds to an estimated improvement in municipal development scores of 38%, based on mean scores in our data.

TABLE II
Voluntary Policy Councils and Federal Social Programs (2006-2014)
for Different Configurations of Policy Councils and Public Goods Spending

| Variable | Councils, Top 20 Percent Spending | No Councils, Top 20 Percent Spending | Councils, Bottom 20 Percent Spending | No Councils, Bottom 20 Percent Spending |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| | Coeff (SE) | Coeff (SE) | Coeff (SE) | Coeff (SE) |
| Councils*Public Goods | 0.19** (0.03) | | | |
| Per Capita Public Goods Spending | -0.0004 (0.0003) | 0.0001* (0.00004) | -0.0001 (0.0001) | -0.00003 (0.00002) |
| Bolsa Família Coverage | 0.0003* (0.0001) | 0.0005 (0.0003) | 0.005* (0.002) | 0.004** (0.001) |
| Voluntary Councils | -0.003 (0.004) | Dropped | 0.002 (0.004) | Dropped |
| Bolsa Família Management | -0.006 (0.008) | -0.002 (0.005) | Dropped | Dropped |
| Competitive Elections | 0.01 (0.03) | 0.02 (0.03) | 0.03* (0.01) | 0.02* (0.01) |
| Left-leaning Mayor | -0.02 (0.05) | 0.06* (0.02) | 0.02* (0.01) | 0.03 (0.03) |
| Per Capita Gross Municipal Product | 0.04* (0.02) | 0.03** (0.01) | 0.05* (0.02) | 0.03 (0.02) |
| Constant | 0.33 (0.58) | 0.28 (0.44) | 0.31 (0.51) | 0.27 (0.39) |
| N | 4,795 | 5,462 | 5,834 | 4,960 |
| Wald Chi ² | 242.30 | 291.77 | 235.48 | 319.05 |
| Prob> Chi ² | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |

* indicates significance at better than 0.05 (two-tailed test).

** indicates significance at better than 0.01 (two-tailed test).

In sum participatory institutions, federal social programs, public goods spending and economic growth act independently to reduce poverty in Brazil. Additionally,

participatory institutions interact with public goods spending to provide an extra boost to Brazilian municipalities' poverty reduction efforts. We argue that these interactive results reflect the importance of both the quantity and the quality of public goods provision. The percentage of the municipal budget devoted to health care and education represents a greater quantity of money spent on public goods, while the presence of voluntary policy councils represents greater oversight of public goods spending, which offers the potential for improving the quality of public goods.

Robustness Checks

We perform a variety of tests to assess the robustness of our results. First, our results in supplemental negative binomial and Poisson regressions with lagged dependent variables are similar to those in Tables I-III. This check addresses the prospect of serial autocorrelation driving the results in our models; in this case, the lagged dependent variables are statistically significant determinants of municipal development scores, but the central variables of interest all retain their approximate magnitudes, directions, and levels of statistical significance.¹³ Next, we use several different specifications in our models. For example, models that include per capita municipal spending instead of per capita gross municipal product produce results that are broadly similar to those in Tables I-III. Replacing the “left-leaning mayor” variable with a dummy variable for a PT mayor also produces similar results. Geographic dummy variables are sometimes significant determinants of poverty rates, especially the North and the Northeast compared to the South. However, the central explanatory variables retain their significance, magnitude,

¹³ The models we describe in this section all appear in the technical appendix, in Tables I-III(a-e).

and direction in models with geographic dummies, too.¹⁴

Next, we employ different poverty measures to assess the stability of our findings across different indicators. We use interpolated/extrapolated census data on the percentage of each municipality's population in the lowest quintile of national income distribution, the percentage that lives below the national poverty line, and the percentage below the extreme poverty line.¹⁵ The results of estimation using these data demonstrate consistent connections between voluntary policy councils and poverty in Brazil. The presence of voluntary policy councils is associated with decreases in all three measures of poverty, as is greater Bolsa Família coverage. The administrative quality of Bolsa Família management is not connected statistically to any of the alternative poverty measures.

We also account for endogeneity in our models in several different ways. Specifically, it is possible that previous levels of poverty influence municipalities' future choices surrounding institutional adoption, public goods spending, and service provision. For example, a municipality struggling with poverty due, in part, to a lack of job training, might have committed to education related policy councils, expanded *Bolsa Família* coverage to promote education, and increased education spending to address this problem. Macinko et al. (2006) address a similar endogeneity issue surrounding infant mortality and federal social programs through instrumental variable regression using the

¹⁴ These results appear in Tables I(f), II(f), and III(f).

¹⁵ Many studies exploring poverty in Brazil and tying the Bolsa Família program to poverty reduction use census data, which is collected at ten year intervals. These studies interpolate data for the intervening years between each census and/or extrapolate data beyond these years based on trends within the census timeframe (Soares 2012; Rocha 2008). This approximation is potentially suspect because poverty is likely to rise and fall in non-linear fashion and to do so with some annual volatility based on economic, political, and social conditions, not consistently with a fixed rate over the course of a decade. These data come from the Brazilian Institute for Applied Economic Research and are available here: <http://www.ipeadata.gov.br/>.

mayor's party as an instrument for *Bolsa Familia* coverage. However, previous scholarship connects the mayor's party directly to health care outcomes in Brazil (Touchton and Wampler 2014), which suggests that this variable violates the exclusion restriction for instrumental variables and would therefore be inappropriate to include as an instrument in our models (Wooldridge 2014). Instead, we use Arellano-Bond dynamic panel models to account for this potential concern surrounding our estimates.¹⁶ The Arellano-Bond models use the "system" generalized method of moments (GMM) with one lag of the dependent variable. The instruments used are the policy council variables, *Bolsa Familia* coverage, *Bolsa Familia* management, and the percentage of per capita municipal spending devoted to public goods, beginning with the second lag and going back as far in time as the data exists for each variable. The direction of the coefficients and the general levels of statistical significance are all similar to those in the primary models. We also use dummy variables for each year to ensure the assumption of no correlation across units holds. The results in Tables I (g), II (g), and III (g) of the appendix thus provide supporting evidence for Tables I, II, and III and emphasize the strong connection between participation, federal social programs, local public expenditure, and municipal development scores.

An additional, important consideration is that certain municipalities might simply be predisposed to assist the poor more so than other municipalities for some unobserved reason. These municipalities might then promote participatory governance, the expansion of federal programs, and greater spending on public goods as means to a poverty-reducing end, along with many other unobserved programs or policies. Any relationships

¹⁶ See Roodman, 2014 and Arellano and Bond 1988 for more information on this method.

between participatory governance, federal programs, state spending, and poverty could therefore only reflect municipal predispositions, as opposed to any impact from the specific institutions or programs. We find little evidence to support such a scenario; there are only low correlations between municipalities with voluntary policy councils related to poverty, social program coverage, and public goods spending programs.¹⁷ This may be surprising, but it suggests that municipalities do not tend to excel in all three areas simultaneously and that a commitment to participatory governance, social program coverage, and local social spending does not stem from an unobserved penchant for poverty reduction. Instead, this evidence provides some evidence for each area's independent role for improving well-being.

VI. Conclusion

Our research takes several important steps toward better identifying the causal mechanisms that promote improvements in social well-being. Our empirical tests provide strong evidence that three causal mechanisms—active use of participatory institutions, the expansion of technically sophisticated policy programs that are designed to reduce clientelistic exchanges, and the provision of public goods- are more important than elections in explaining the variation in improvements in social well-being. Our data does not allow us to identify precisely which aspect of municipal public goods provision is improving in Brazil. We argue that the presence of policy councils in areas surrounding poverty results in better oversight and better management of public goods delivery to better target vulnerable populations. Simultaneously, we argue that increasing public

¹⁷ Voluntary policy councils related to poverty are *negatively* correlated with Bolsa Família coverage at -0.31. All other correlations between primary independent variables are under 0.2.

goods spending creates an independent multiplier effect that also improves the lives of the poor. It is difficult to distinguish between these two mechanisms, but it is clear that participation, cash transfers, and public goods are all important for reducing poverty.

We argue that it is the establishment of a rights-based citizenship regime in Brazil, beginning with the expansion of civil society in the 1970s and 1980s, followed by promulgation of the 1988 “Citizens” Constitution, the adoption of a broad participatory architecture, and the implementation technocratic policy reforms in the 1990s and 2000s that generated significant improvements in social well-being. The extent to which municipalities adopt participatory institutions, expand social policy coverage, and improve public goods provisions conditions municipal governments’ ability to produce improvements in social well-being.

The second advance in this article is that we provide a systematic evaluation of Brazil’s participatory policy councils that covers all of Brazil’s municipalities over time (10 years) and across space (currently 5570 municipalities). Municipalities that make an independent commitment (either voluntary adoption or more frequent meetings in federally induced meetings) to policy councils tend to perform better than those that do not. The evidence strongly demonstrates that the presence of public management councils improve social well-being. Our results corroborate 20 years of single case or small-N case scholarship, which demonstrates that participatory institutions matter. Our results also build on a newer body of large-N work to more systematically demonstrate that the presence of participatory institutions matters (Gonçalves 2014; Touchton and Wampler 2014). Therefore, *municipalities that show a greater commitment to local democracy also improve their citizens’ well-being at greater levels than those municipalities that are*

unable or unwilling to invest in vibrant, council-based democratic institutions.

Third, we show that the extension of federal social programs across Brazil's municipalities is also important for well-being. Our work confirms previous research that demonstrates that the *Bolsa Família* reduces poverty (Soares et al. 2010; Hall 2006; Ferreira, Leite, and Ravallion 2010; Bither-Terry 2014).

Importantly, our results suggest that the expansion of council democracy and local public goods provision are mutually constitutive. We argue that the expansion of democratic institutions generates broader public debates, empowers community leaders, and fosters new working relationships among activists and public officials. The direction of local expenditure and citizens' well-being should both improve as a result of these democratic and policy advances. Building new democratic institutions that incorporate citizens have three inter-related effects. They begin by creating a more vibrant public sphere, thus empowering citizens and broadening policy debates. In turn, governments are motivated to engage citizens as voters and constituents, thereby creating an incentive for elected officials to craft policies that better reflect these citizens' demands. Finally, governments are then also motivated to improve the quality of public goods provisions, which improves social well-being.

Finally, our empirical tests provide little evidence for competitive elections as a factor driving improvements in social well-being at the local level.¹⁸ Although elections remain an important part of a broader democratic process that produces policy change, we argue that elections are more distant from policymaking and service delivery than are

¹⁸ See Gerring et al. 2015 for an argument that elections are more important than civil society at the national level.

the three pathways we identify in this article.

Lessons from the Brazilian democratic experience can produce insights for other emerging democracies. Many of these countries do not have all of the political and policy dynamics associated with Brazil's positive human development outcomes. Where should policymakers focus if that is the case? For instance, can nationally designed universal social policies overcome problems in low subnational administrative capacity? Can participatory practices press for socially progressive investments in political settings where politicians choose other policy priorities? More top-down bureaucratic approaches may be a more feasible alternative for policymakers and development practitioners to pursue, given that bottom-up, demand-driven, citizens' approaches may be hard to achieve and sustain in settings with low levels of local human development. *We show that these strategies all produce benefits independently of one another, but that the highest municipal development scores on income, employment, and inequality occur in settings with a combination of bottom-up participatory institutions, top-down social programs, and targeted public spending.*

In sum, the evidence and the argument presented in this article demonstrate that Brazil's reductions in poverty are strongly tied to the expansion of democracy and the increased public goods provision, in addition to economic growth. During the first two decades of the 21st century, the slow, difficult process of building democratic institutions, implementing innovative social welfare programs, and providing local public goods appears to be paying great dividends. These results support previous scholarship on the importance of building democratic "stock" (Gerring et al. 2012) over time, but also provide support for specific democratic institutions and programs' annual role. New

participatory institutions, in conjunction with better social policy provision, and high quality democratic public management all contribute to improving the quality of citizens' lives.

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