

The Politics of Deepening Local Democracy

Decentralization, Party Institutionalization, and Participation

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Though nearly all Latin American countries currently have democratic regimes, analysts widely agree that these democracies are “shallow.”¹ While scholars deplore the quality of national regimes, one detects increasing excitement about the potential of experiments in participatory government to deepen local democracy in a growing number of cities.² Dozens of concepts have emerged to interpret these experiments, but causal analysis of why some fail while others succeed remains underdeveloped. Nascent debates recall earlier studies of democratization, with attention given to context and institutional design yet little concern for linking the two to provide a complete explanation.

Three initially similar experiments that eventually yielded widely different results offer a more thorough explanation of success and failure of local participation programs in Latin America. Heading each experiment was a party on the left that won the mayor’s seat for the first time promising participatory reforms in order to deepen democracy: the Broad Front (FA) in Montevideo, Uruguay, from 1990 to the present; the Workers’ Party (PT) in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 1989–2004; and the Radical Cause (CR) in Libertador, the largest municipality in the metropolitan area of Caracas, Venezuela, 1993–1995.³ The core reforms created new institutions to give citizens influence over government spending, yet their ambitions were grander: revitalizing citizenship, opening local administration to public scrutiny, and responding to backlogs of demands for services. Only in Porto Alegre, with its participatory budgeting, was each objective achieved. This innovation has been adopted in some form by an estimated 250 cities worldwide, mostly in Brazil.⁴ The experiment in Caracas, by contrast, failed to advance either civic engagement or government responsiveness, though administrative transparency improved. Montevideo’s new participatory institutions aided transparency and service provision but did not generate sustained, widespread citizen activism.⁵

Two factors best explain these diverging outcomes: the degree of national decentralization of authority and resources to municipal government, and the level of institutionalization of local opposition parties. These conditions shaped the ability of progressive incumbents to design meaningful participatory institutions that could attract lasting citizen involvement. Only in Porto Alegre and Montevideo did city governments have this capacity, because only in Brazil and Uruguay had the central state devolved

sufficient jurisdiction and resources to the local level. Perhaps counterintuitively democracy deepened most in the context of weakly institutionalized opposition parties in Porto Alegre. There, autonomous community organizations pushed the incumbent to design an open participation program that allowed citizens to make decisions across a range of issues. Conversely, the strongly institutionalized opposition in Montevideo and Caracas derailed the incumbents' participation programs, forcing changes that yielded more regulated and restrictive designs, respectively, in which citizen input was limited and subordinated within formal, party-dominated structures. Strongly institutionalized parties have the potential to undermine decentralization's benefits for local democracy, even when dedicated political leaders make serious reform efforts in cities with active civil societies.

From Participation to Deepening Democracy

Critics of Latin America's shallow democracies increasingly point to expanding opportunities for citizen participation as a remedy.⁶ Expanding participation has become the virtual mantra of international agencies promoting both democracy and development and of development scholars.⁷ For its advocates, participation's benefits consist primarily of strengthening citizens and civil society (found in concepts like empowerment, participatory publics, and synergizing civil society),⁸ improving state responsiveness and accountability (cogovernance for accountability and redistributive democracy),⁹ or both (state-society synergy and empowered participatory governance).¹⁰ The concept of deepening democracy builds on these ideas, particularly those emphasizing participation's potential to mutually empower state and society.¹¹

At its core, democracy means that that government treats citizens equally and that citizens have equal rights to participate in government. Holding periodic elections for representatives is the established form of realizing these ideals. Deepening democracy requires further steps towards strengthening citizenship and democratizing the state. Strengthening citizenship means transforming residents from passive subjects in dependent relationships with particular politicians or parties into active citizens who know they have rights and can legitimately make demands on government. One way to discern strengthened citizenship in practice is to see if the number of citizens who regularly and directly participate in government decision making increases, which was the major goal of these experiments. A second way is examining changes in the strength of collective social actors, or civil society, to see if existing associations become more politicized and if new associations emerge. Democratizing the state also involves two dimensions: transparency and responsiveness. Improving transparency entails that the state's deliberations and actions are more public, with the expectation that corruption and clientelism recede if not disappear. Responsiveness may be conceived in terms of how well the state delivers on the demands emanating from the new participation programs. That is, given the desperate need and desire for basic services in the poor neighborhoods of Latin

American cities, and the demands of these services unleashed by the opening of participatory channels, one can ask whether the state delivers. The answer could count as evidence of state responsiveness, and thus of democratization of the state.

Deepening democracy does not entail participation by all citizens in all public decisions at all levels of government, nor does it mean that representative democracy is replaced. Rather, it implies that citizens have more opportunities to participate than the occasional election. The fundamental question that scholarship on participation fails to address systematically is why opportunities to participate only sometimes produce the assumed or desired effects of strengthening citizenship and democratizing the state.

Keys to Successful Deepening: Actors, Conditions, or Institutional Design?

Two debates about democratization reappear in studies on participation and democratic deepening. Which types of actors, state or society, play the most crucial role? And is clever institutional crafting all that is needed, or instead are certain propitious conditions necessary? The debate about actors is approaching resolution. Most agree that successful participation programs require a partnership between state and civil society actors.¹² Those who focus on one or the other alone miss the important points made by early observers that both are necessary and that while progressive politicians elected to local office seem “to play a decisive role . . . this itself could be the result of previous mobilizations by popular organization.”¹³ Differences remain concerning the relative importance of party versus social actors in instigating participatory institutions.

The predominant perspective views these reforms essentially as creations from above by progressive state officials or left parties holding subnational office.¹⁴ Typically, authors in this perspective cite the PT’s experience with participatory budgeting as a prime example. Others argue that the genesis and dissemination of participatory budgeting rest not with the PT but with civil society.¹⁵ The implication is that scholars should look below to “participatory publics” for other emerging democratic innovations.¹⁶ This challenge is welcome and necessary, as many overlook civil society’s importance in proposing and shaping participatory reforms. In the cases examined here, both civil society and party actors promoted participatory reforms and attempted to shape their design. Further, party and civic organizational membership often overlapped. The original discussions about participation occurred simultaneously in both organizational sites, and many city officials implementing reforms had dual membership.

Thus, determining the precise ancestry of institutions and exact contributions of individual actors is difficult. For example, participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre was the “product of multiple subjects,” not the PT or civil society alone.¹⁷ It was also not invented from scratch. Mayors from other parties had submitted budget matters to public discussion in several Brazilian cities previously. Both PT and community leaders knew of these experiments before negotiating the design of participatory budgeting. In a

document prepared for discussions with city officials in Porto Alegre, the Union of Neighborhood Associations (UAMPA) described eight municipalities with experiences of participation in budgeting.¹⁸ Social actors, including UAMPA, played vital roles in designing participatory budgeting but should not be attributed sole paternity or sole responsibility for its diffusion, as some suggest.¹⁹ Of the 140 Brazilian cities using participatory budgeting in the late 1990s, PT mayors governed seventy-three, and thirty-three had mayors from other left parties. In many of the rest the PT held the vice-mayor position.²⁰ Yet the PT governed only 115 of Brazil's 5000-plus cities. The critical role of left parties in propagating participatory budgeting is underscored by the fact that left administrations implemented similar institutions throughout Latin America, not only independently in Caracas and Montevideo, but also based partly on Porto Alegre's model in Mexico City, Rosario, and Cuenca, among others.

The debate over the importance of context versus institutional design for the success of participation programs is still incipient. Generally, scholars either provide lists of potentially relevant variables or attempt to extract lessons from one or more successful cases. The contextual and design features purportedly affecting success begins (and, for some, ends) with the existence of an incumbent party committed to participation, sometimes with the proviso that the party not be riddled with internal divisions, and the presence of a vigorous civil society.²¹ The former is seen as necessary to open and sustain attractive spaces for participation, the latter for filling them with activists. For some, an alliance between the incumbents and civic associations is key.²² Others suggest further enabling conditions: some degree of political or social equality among participants that encourages deliberation;²³ a sufficient level of government resources to ensure concrete results, sometimes linked to prior decentralization;²⁴ and an effective bureaucracy to inspire participants' trust.²⁵

The importance of these factors and their relation to institutional design are not always clear. Often, they drop out once attention turns to institutional engineering. One study of Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting concludes that crucial to success were its focus on "localized, immediate needs" and its central placement within city administration as a "hallmark."²⁶ Another highlights the institution's open format, which invites individual and group participation but neither privileges already organized groups nor allows leadership encrustation.²⁷ A review of successful programs found three common design features—devolution of power to local units, centralized supervision, and coordination, based on formal state institutions—as well as three general principles—practical needs orientation, grass-roots participation, and "deliberative solution generation."²⁸

This great variety of agential, contextual, and design requirements posited for successful participation programs may explain why so few existed until recently. Yet despite valuable individual arguments, problems emerge. First, a compelling framework that integrates actors, conditions, and design remains elusive. Second, the overuse of invariant models (with one case or only successful cases) makes generalization difficult. Third, the debate misses or deemphasizes opposition political parties. Since participation

programs may lure important constituencies to incumbents, one can not assume that opposition parties will passively accept their implementation. In turn, the tenacity of the opposition's reaction to participation programs should increase with the amount they have to lose and the organizational resources at their disposal. Parties with a long history of local power, strong social ties, and robust organizations should react more vigorously than lesser rivals.

In view of these lacunae, this article outlines an integrated explanatory framework that compares participation programs with contrasting outcomes and takes opposition parties into account. Specifically, the ability of progressive incumbents to design effective participation programs is linked to the extent of national decentralization and the level of institutionalization of political rivals. The design features that ultimately deepened democracy in Porto Alegre—high degree of participant decision-making power, wide range of issues under debate, and informal structure—were contingent upon a decentralized national state that afforded resources and responsibilities to the municipality and a set of weakly institutionalized local opposition parties that failed to resist forcefully. These three cities shared several traits scholars identify as potentially determining success. Their differences in terms of decentralization and opposition party institutionalization affected the incumbents' ability to design participation programs. Finally, the different designs—open, regulated, or restrictive—had significant consequences for the programs' ability to deepen democracy.

A Tale of Three Cities

The participatory experiments began in similar fashion in the early 1990s. The incumbents—the CR in Caracas, FA in Montevideo, and PT in Porto Alegre—had never held executive office in these cities, and none knew exactly how their programs would work in practice. However, they all started by dividing the cities into a roughly equal number of districts to hold public assemblies: nineteen in Caracas, eighteen in Montevideo, and sixteen in Porto Alegre. In the assemblies citizens were invited to make demands on the executive branch, bypassing the municipal council where opposition leaders remained prominent. The first year hundreds and sometimes thousands of citizens identified and prioritized public works projects for inclusion in the annual investment budget (representing between ten and twenty percent of each city's budget). In all three cities the new institutions eventually included occasional open assemblies involving direct volunteer participation and more frequent meetings of smaller district forums for which representatives were selected through an established procedure. All included measures to decentralize administrative functions.

At first glance, these programs bore a striking resemblance, sharing many design features scholars stress. However, within a few years participation rates in Porto Alegre's program jumped, foretelling its future success, while participation stagnated in

Montevideo and declined in Caracas. Current theories can not explain these differences. The cases were fundamentally similar concerning most elements that are emphasized: incumbent party, civil society, city development (which shapes equality), and municipal bureaucracy.

The CR, FA, and PT exemplify the ideological transformation much of the Latin American left underwent in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁹ They moved from viewing democracy as bourgeois formalism or an instrument to achieve power to adopting democracy as an essential value and deepening democracy as a permanent goal. Notions of an omnipotent centralized state gave way to calls for a transparent, decentralized state that would cogovern with society through regular mechanisms by which citizens could influence policy and monitor performance. Party and government documents proclaimed these ideals for each city almost indistinguishably, and each mayor showed personal dedication by attending assemblies throughout the city.³⁰ These new left parties also had in common division into factions with varying political tendencies, a membership base in union and community movements, a mostly middle and working class constituency, a lack of government experience, and local victory by a bare plurality due more to protest votes against national politicians than to votes for participatory reforms. No party had any inherent advantages, therefore, in implementing a participation program.

The situation of local civil society might inspire less optimism. Though each city housed hundreds of neighborhood associations and other community-based organizations, their history largely mirrors the regional pattern of a rise of such organizations in the 1970s and early 1980s followed by a decline in their numbers and influence by the end of the 1980s. The impetus of these movements partially reflects the regional deterioration of urban services in the 1970s. The movements' subsequent decline corresponds to the state's weakening ability to respond to demands during the debt crisis. For countries under dictatorship in the 1970s, like Brazil and Uruguay, community organizations were also often an outlet for opposition. Once democracy returned, this motivation disappeared. Both achievement of movement goals (restoring democracy) and failure (lack of improvements in living conditions) contributed to diminished interest in neighborhood activism by the late 1980s. Though in a different political context, Venezuela's neighborhood associations experienced a similar pattern, with success in achieving local rather than national democracy in 1989 and failure epitomized by the spontaneous rioting of the Caracazo that same year. Another source of declining activism, particularly in Caracas, Montevideo, and Porto Alegre, was the attempt by governments to use neighborhood associations to distribute benefits, especially subsidized milk. This domestication of community groups frequently resulted in residents' seeing them as state appendages rather than protest vehicles. Recognizing the pattern of rising and falling fortunes of community movements, scholars of Brazil, Uruguay, and Venezuela have separately analyzed them in terms of "protest cycles."³¹

Consistent with this pattern, once vibrant community organizations in Montevideo and Porto Alegre entered a disenchantment phase in the late 1980s and in Caracas by the early 1990s.³² Despite their decline in terms of the number of new groups, membership, level of activity, and political weight, several hundred neighborhood associations were registered in each city around the time the participation programs began: 427 in Caracas in 1994; 300 in Porto Alegre in 1988; and 626 in Montevideo in 1988, of which 436 were known to be functioning.³³ Dozens of cooperatives, soup kitchens, mothers clubs, and cultural and other groups also existed. Federations arose to coordinate demands for urban services and participatory reforms: FACUR (Caracas), MOVEMO (Montevideo), and UAMPA (Porto Alegre).

Each city possessed a relatively organized civil society, albeit not so dynamic as in the past. The protest cycle bequeathed an activist legacy, as thousands of citizens belonged to community organizations or had participated in them recently. Two other similarities merit attention. First, the continued activity of neighborhood associations was often due solely to the persistence of their presidents. Second, community-based groups held heterogeneous political views, particularly regarding relationships to parties. Some had strong clientelist or ideological ties to individual parties, and some sought balanced party representation in leadership positions, while others rejected party involvement altogether. The specific mix differed across cities, but in ways closely related to the type of local parties that had historically predominated.

Along with similar incumbents and stocks of social capital, these cities were also all profoundly inegalitarian. Geographic differences reinforced class and ethnic stratifications, separating citizens into distinct levels of worthiness. In each city, a binary categorization of neighborhoods, formal or informal, is strongly ingrained, marking an important social division. Such bifurcation relates to similar development patterns. Accelerated population growth of the mid twentieth century slowed in the 1970s, when downtown areas began to lose population to less developed peripheral areas. This centrifugal growth created difficulties for municipal governments. A prior pattern of service provision concentrated on the formal urban core and ignored illegal squatter settlements in the periphery. By the late 1980s these patterns combined. A sizable contingent of residents lived in the informal, peripheral areas and demanded improvements in urban infrastructure or inclusion in the legal city. The level of services and socioeconomic profile in the three cities were more alike than different (see Table 1).

The large majority of residents had essential services like water and electricity, yet often access was “informal” and unreliable. Other basic services—street paving, trash collection, public transportation, and lighting—showed clear deficiencies. In addition, a considerable minority of each city’s inhabitants lived in poverty, and unemployment rates had grown. The cities vary substantively on only two dimensions: Porto Alegre’s greater inequality and Montevideo’s lower rate of irregular housing. These differences

Table 1 Socioeconomic Indicators (Circa 1990)

	Caracas	Montevideo	Porto Alegre
<i>Population (1990)</i>	1,826,222	1,323,926	1,263,043
<i>Percentage of Households Below the Poverty Line</i>	28% (1990)	27% (1991)	24% (1991)
<i>Percentage of Labor Force Unemployed</i>	10% (1990)	9% (1991)	11% (1993)
<i>Percentage of Adults Illiterate*</i>	3% (1990)	3% (1985)	6% (1991)
<i>Gini Index (1990)</i>	.40†	.39	.59
<i>Infant Mortality, per 1000 Live Births</i>	21.4 (1990)†	20.3 (1990)	18.7 (1992)
<i>Percentage of Residents Living in Irregular Housing Areas</i>	41% (1993)	12% (1996)	34% (1991)
<i>Percentage of Domiciles With Water Supplied Internally</i>	92% (1990)†	93% (1996)	96% (1991)
<i>Percentage of Domiciles With Electricity</i>	96% (1990)†	99% (1996)	99% (1991)

*For Caracas, over 10 years old; for Montevideo, over 18; for Porto Alegre, heads of households. †Figures for the defunct Federal District, which included Vargas' population of roughly 280,000.

Source: Adapted from Goldfrank, 63, 71, 72, Tables 2.2, 2.4, 2.5.

seem less prominent than overall similarities, especially since most housing units in irregular areas have electricity and basic sanitation services. Further, Porto Alegre's greater inequality would suggest a lower likelihood for participation's success.

Finally, these cities' bureaucracies were a far cry from the Weberian model reformers might covet. They conformed, rather, to the patrimonial model described for most Latin American cities. Bloated payrolls, inefficiency, petty corruption, and failure to maintain government installations afflicted each administration.³⁴ Porto Alegre's newly installed PT officials complained of 4,000 "ghost" employees who did not work, and the CR and FA made similar accusations. Most municipal workers viewed reform proposals with suspicion; some resisted. Many Porto Alegre municipal employees "tried to

put the brakes on the new administration” by deliberately delaying administrative procedures.³⁵ In Caracas and Montevideo numerous city workers refused to perform tasks not listed in rigid job classifications. In the Caracas maintenance department, some workers only washed floors, some only windows. Strikes were also held in each city to demand wage increases and express rejection of reform.

In sum, in each city a newly incumbent left party installed participatory institutions in order to deepen democracy, expand its base, and appeal to community movement allies disenchanted with inequality, poor services, and unresponsive government. The parallel creation of participatory institutions did not generate parallel results, however, because of two crucial differences.

National Decentralization and Local Opposition Institutionalization

Consistent with a regional trend, national governments in Venezuela, Uruguay, and Brazil undertook decentralization reforms during the 1980s and 1990s, increasing local governments’ fiscal, administrative, and political authority. However, Uruguayan and Brazilian local governments historically enjoyed greater resources and responsibilities than local governments in Venezuela, and Brazil’s reforms went furthest.

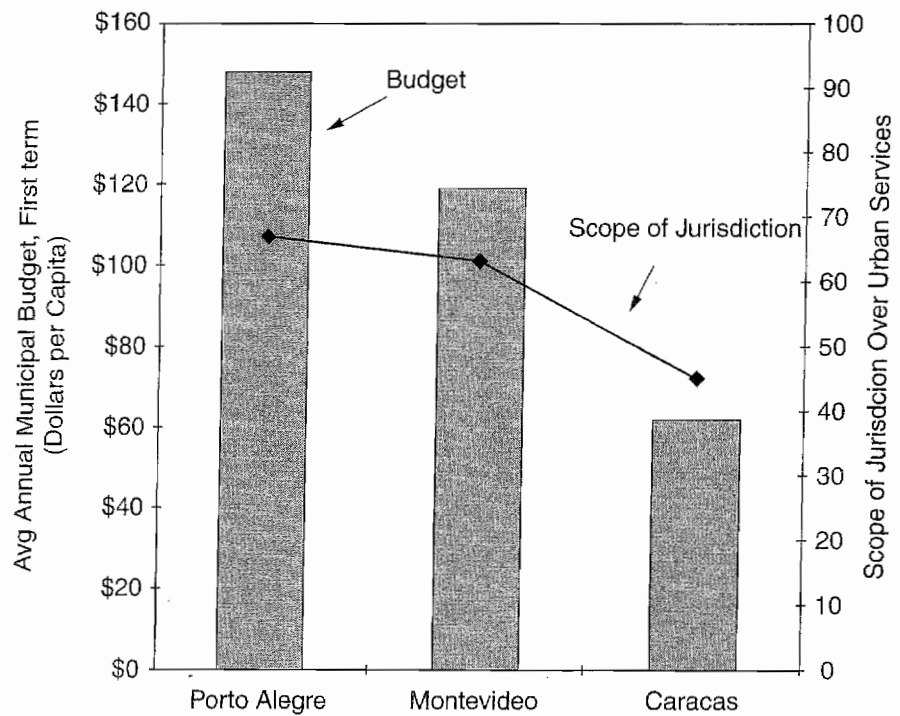
Until 1988 Venezuela was extremely centralized. National administration controlled most revenues, provided nearly all public services, and appointed state governors. City councilors were elected to run municipalities, but voters could choose only party slates, not individual candidates. Decentralization reforms of 1988–1989 established directly elected mayors, greater transfers of central resources, and new (but shared) responsibilities for subnational governments. New forms of citizen participation were introduced by creating districts (called parishes) with elected boards to serve as interlocutors between mayors and community organizations. In practice, however, municipal revenues increased only slightly (from 4.2 percent of total government revenues in 1989 to 5.7 percent in 1993), and the national government continued providing most services in most cities.³⁶ Caracas’ municipal government saw little improvement. Of the five metropolitan-area municipalities, Caracas City Hall had the lowest per capita budget in the 1990s, and urban services remained at the mercy of overlapping jurisdictions across different levels of government.³⁷

With a strong federal tradition dating back to 1889, Brazil had a long history of greater decentralization than Venezuela. Brazil’s 1988 constitution granted municipalities higher shares of direct transfers, more sources of revenues, more service responsibilities, and guaranteed autonomy. Municipalities nearly doubled their portion of total government revenues after the 1988 constitution.³⁸ The autonomy clause allowed municipalities to pass organic laws (similar to a city constitution) not subject to state or federal approval. In Porto Alegre municipal government revenues increased 82 percent from 1988 to 1992.³⁹

Uruguay, uniquely in Ibero-America, has only two levels of government: the national government and nineteen provincial governments, known as departments and headed by mayors (*intendentes*). The provinces have a long record of raising revenues providing services, and operating as outlets for political opposition. Following military rule, when mayors were appointed and taxation powers reduced, Uruguay reverted to elected mayors, transferred responsibilities downward, and enhanced local revenue and spending. Real per capita spending by provincial governments grew by 100 percent between 1985 and 1997.⁴⁰ However, the central government retained the power to override provincial taxation measures and denied Montevideo financial assistance granted other provinces.

The different national decentralization processes led to varying capabilities for municipal governments in Caracas, Montevideo, and Porto Alegre. Figure 1 compares each city's average annual per capita budget and scope of jurisdiction over urban services during the first term in office. Compared to Caracas City Hall, the Porto Alegre and Montevideo administrations could spend twice as much per person per year

Figure 1 Decentralization Indicators



Source: Goldfrank, 97, Figure 2.3. To measure jurisdictional scope, I examined 25 services provided by at least one (and usually two) of the city governments and coded them on a scale of 0 to 4, from no municipal role to municipal responsibility *de facto* and *de jure*.

Governments in Porto Alegre and Montevideo also had significantly greater responsibility over services, including at least shared responsibility over public housing, sewage, and water.

In Caracas the municipal administration lacked the jurisdiction and revenues necessary to address residents' most important needs. The CR attempted to overcome these limits by inviting service providers from other levels of government to collaborate with their participation program. However, since these entities were not committed to the CR's participatory project, participants usually could not convince them to pay attention to their requests. The program's design in Caracas thus included only a limited range of issues that citizens could meaningfully debate. Furthermore, the municipal government's nearly empty coffers made it difficult to respond to citizen demands, thus reducing the power of participation.

In Porto Alegre and Montevideo, however, incumbents benefited from an encompassing jurisdictional scope and a relatively large budget. Because of this combination, the design of the participation programs could theoretically allow participants input over a wide range of issues, and the municipal governments had resources to carry out decisions, which would give participants a taste of real power. Indeed Porto Alegre eventually followed this pattern, but not Montevideo. Decentralization goes a long way toward explaining the outcomes across cases but can not account for the differences between Montevideo and Porto Alegre. The role of opposition party institutionalization thus becomes important.

The concept employed here borrows from Huntington's original formulation and others' adaptations.⁴¹ Generally, parties are considered institutionalized the more they create ties of loyalty with members, voters, and interest groups and the greater their organizational complexity (multiple territorial or functional subunits, regular interactions, and independence from a single charismatic leader). Party longevity reflects and reinforces institutionalization. Most studies of party institutionalization focus on individual incumbent parties or entire party systems.⁴² The concern here is with local opposition parties for empirical and theoretical reasons. Empirically, the type of incumbent that introduces participation programs is generally the same, an unseasoned challenger seeking innovations to expand constituencies. Theoretically, the level of institutionalization of individual parties can vary both within a party system and within a single party across cities or states. Though national party systems were largely mirrored in Caracas, Montevideo, and Porto Alegre, with two strongly institutionalized parties in the former cities and several inchoate parties in the latter, the local incumbents did not fit the patterns. At the time they won local office, the CR, FA, and PT were all relatively weakly institutionalized, though the former two were less institutionalized than their rivals and the PT somewhat more.

Most important, the new incumbents in Montevideo and Caracas faced two historically dominant parties with roots in the early nineteenth and twentieth century, respectively, that had developed patron-client networks, deep partisan identification among

members and voters (creating distinct party cultures), and a custom of power sharing to exclude challengers. The historic parties had lost the mayor's seat but maintained several city councilors with strong ties to municipal bureaucrats, community organizations, and powerful national leaders. In Porto Alegre, by contrast, the newly incumbent PT represented just one more party within an array of weakly institutionalized parties. There were no historically dominant parties, but rather several parties founded within the past decade, displaying little internal coherence or discipline despite one or more popular leaders. The parties had not yet established stable alliances with each other or durable links to voters, community groups, and city workers.

Because of the differences in opposition party institutionalization, opponents of the CR and FA had more to lose from participation programs than did the PT's rivals and had more weapons. The opposition parties' resistance was thus much stronger in Caracas and Montevideo, and it prevented the CR and the FA from designing their participation programs as they originally intended. Opposition reaction in Porto Alegre was comparatively insubstantial, giving the PT more freedom to design participatory budgeting. Porto Alegre's community organizations also enjoyed greater autonomy from political parties. The most organized city districts constantly fought for an effective participation program, with greater decision-making power over an ever-expanding range of issues. Many community groups in Caracas, by contrast, had ties to rival parties and tried to sabotage the CR's participation program. Such groups' loyalties in Montevideo were split between the FA and the opposition and either timidly supported or rejected participation.

Caracas The CR's rivals in Caracas were not merely institutionalized. Since the 1960s Acción Democrática (AD) and Copei completely dominated the political and social arenas, leading scholars to label Venezuela a "partyarchy."⁴³ AD, particularly, had strong labor ties, and party membership surpassed two million in 1985.⁴⁴ AD's domination extended to Caracas. AD won the city's first mayoral race with Claudio Fermín who solidified AD's ties with the municipal workers' unions and neighborhood associations. He was helped in the latter by AD's national policy of distributing subsidized powdered milk through the associations and granting party leadership positions to association presidents.⁴⁵ By the early 1990s AD had significant clout in the city's neighborhood associations. A new municipal federation (Favemli), for example, had an AD-affiliated president and over 300 member associations. When the CR barely defeated AD in the 1992 Caracas municipal election, AD had many resources at its disposal from neighborhood associations to unions to its extensive, loyal membership. Before the results were announced, rumors circulated that AD would try to steal the election from the CR, and supporters of both parties clashed in the streets. This confrontation was a preview of AD's battle to retake Caracas during the next three years. This battle took on many forms and placed further constraints on the CR's ability to design and implement its participation program, called parish government.

Municipal workers' unions linked to AD constantly protested, starting with a month-long strike delaying all public works contracts. Workers also committed sabotage, destroying computers and city records and stealing municipal property, including tires from city buses. But given AD's control of unions and labor courts, Mayor Aristóbulo Istúriz had difficulty firing workers. It took Istúriz over a year to fire a municipal employee who had assaulted him; even then AD kept the worker as a union representative. AD's other main allies, neighborhood associations, joined the attack, refusing to attend parish government meetings or disrupting and ridiculing them. Furthermore, AD's and Copei's city councilors and local operatives fought the parish government proposal from the outset, arguing that its emphasis on direct citizen participation undermined representative democracy. When Istúriz tried to consolidate the parish governments through a city ordinance debated and designed in public assemblies, the opposition fought it until one month before the 1995 elections. The ordinance was approved in November; the CR lost the December elections; and the newly victorious AD immediately annulled the ordinance.

Montevideo Uruguay's two strongly institutionalized parties, the Colorado and National parties, jointly received over eighty percent of the vote until the 1973 coup. Through their "coparticipation" system, they distributed political and administrative positions proportionally, staffing national and provincial bureaucracies with their supporters with impunity. The Colorado stronghold was Montevideo, where it used the bureaucracy to cultivate and maintain political support. With minor exceptions (1958–1962 and 1983–1984), the Colorados ruled Montevideo consecutively from 1918 until 1989. The Colorados set up hundreds of "political clubs" across Montevideo, each with a neighborhood *caudillo* who was both public employee and political activist. Through these clubs, residents of poor and working-class neighborhoods sought out personal favors and sometimes public services. Even dictatorship did not interrupt Colorado domination; the elected Colorado mayor continued in his post until the military's last year. After winning the first postmilitary election (1984) in Montevideo and nationally, the Colorados resumed patronage politics, reestablishing the clubs and creating a new office (UAPE) to stimulate the growth of neighborhood associations by distributing food stamps. Over half of the existing associations in 1988 had been founded between 1985 and 1988, and 26 percent started the year UAPE was created, 1985.⁴⁶

When the FA Mayor, Tabaré Vázquez, took office in 1990, the Colorados attempted to use their links to neighborhood associations and municipal workers to obstruct his participation program. Colorado-linked associations were less likely to participate, and Colorado-appointed bureaucrats deliberately slowed down the processing of paperwork and pushed the municipal union to strike. These attempts were less successful than the united campaign by the Colorado and National parties to denounce the FA's program using city councilors, congressional leaders, and even President Lacalle (from the National Party). In more than 150 attacks in the press, they accused the FA of

borrowing tactics from the KGB and the Cuban Committees for the Defense of the Revolution; Lacalle called the FA administration "totalitarian."⁴⁷ The opposition also blocked revenues to the FA's municipal administration by cutting transfers, renegotiating contracts, and rejecting municipal tax increases. Critically, eleven opposition councilors exploited Uruguay's unitary constitution by appealing to the national congress to void Vázquez's municipal resolution establishing the participation program. When Vázquez invited the councilors to help design new participatory institutions, they stalled the negotiations for two years and insisted that party representatives play a central role in any local decision-making bodies. Overriding concerns voiced by some FA allies in community-based organizations, Vázquez eventually ceded to the opposition demands. The resulting reforms in the participatory institutions severely limited the decision-making power of citizen participants and privileged party actors.

Porto Alegre Brazil's notoriously underinstitutionalized parties stem partly from the permissive electoral rules the military regime reintroduced in 1979 in order to divide the democratization movement. Shortly thereafter, dozens of parties emerged, but none gained hegemony either nationally or in Porto Alegre. Eight parties gained city council seats in the 1988 election, and eight again in 1992. Alliances among parties encompassed strange bedfellows and changed frequently, but parties often ran alone. Five candidates competed in the 1985 mayor's race, and eight in 1988. That decade, voters never returned an incumbent party to municipal or state executive office.

Despite the general fragmentation and weakness of local parties, two might have developed enduring social linkages: the PMDB (Party of the Democratic Movement of Brazil) and the PDT (Democratic Labor Party). The PMDB formed out of the official opposition during the dictatorship and thus had a longer history than other parties. However, the PMDB did not have a municipal party organization in Porto Alegre.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the creation of new parties in the 1980s weakened the PMDB nationally as many of its leaders left to join other parties, particularly the PDT. The PDT was founded by Leonel Brizola, ex-mayor of Porto Alegre and ex-governor of Rio Grande do Sul. Though competing labor parties were founded in the 1980s, Brizola's PDT received the most support in Porto Alegre. In the first mayoral election in 1985 PDT candidate Alceu Collares won easily, and Brizola received overwhelming support in his 1989 presidential bid. Yet the PDT consisted mostly of Brizola, Collares, and a few other historic leaders. It failed to establish a strong party organization, despite attempting to create a network of neighborhood leaders during Collares' administration (1986–1988). Collares promised citizen councils linked to each administrative division but never implemented the proposal, which tarnished his image with activists.

By the late 1980s no political party in Porto Alegre had established enduring connections with voters or social organizations. Unlike in Caracas, the municipal workers union in Porto Alegre always had a plurality of parties in its leadership.⁴⁹ And unlike both Caracas and Montevideo, few neighborhood associations were subordinated to

single political party. It is not that clientelist associations did not exist. In fact, neighborhood associations were arenas of party competition. And both the PDT municipal government and the PMDB state government tried to cultivate relations with the associations, the latter through “milk tickets.” What differed in Porto Alegre was that many clientelist-style associations were mercenary. They developed only transitory relationships with politicians and parties or, more often, allowed multiple parties in so that none could dominate. UAMPA’s leaders, for example, came from multiple parties. Less formal, district-level coordinating groups, known as popular councils, also had multi-party leadership.

When the PT implemented participatory budgeting, local opposition parties had little to lose compared to AD in Caracas or the Colorados in Montevideo, and they lacked the organizational resources that would have enabled them to challenge the PT’s program effectively. Unlike in the other cases, the opposition in Porto Alegre offered no uniform, united reaction. The PMDB never discussed participatory budgeting when it began. The PDT was divided. Some city councilors and ex-mayor Collares tried to convince PDT members not to participate, particularly through their allies in UAMPA. Yet attacking participatory budgeting was not a priority, and lower party echelons did not always follow the Collares line. Even members of UAMPA-affiliated associations ignored PDT instructions not to participate. João Dib, an ex-mayor and veteran city councilor for the conservative PPB (Brazilian Progressive Party, an outgrowth of the dictatorship’s official party), argues that his party was the only one that resisted, and only because he did. Even then his colleagues did not always vote with him. Opposition leaders criticized the PT administration in the press but focused almost entirely on issues other than participatory budgeting.

The PT did face coordinated pressure from community organizations, especially the district-level popular councils, which led protests against the PT administration when it failed to carry out promised investments and constantly pushed for changes in the design of participatory budgeting. The administration acceded to several community demands: expanding the number of districts to increase access, creating an annual investment plan listing all projects and estimated costs, and dispersing investments across districts and neighborhoods according to local priorities, needs, and population size rather than focusing investments on a few “showpiece” neighborhoods. The eventual result was a more open, effective participation program than in Caracas and Montevideo.

Deepening Local Democracy

The degree of national decentralization and institutionalization of local opposition parties affected the incumbents’ ability to deepen local democracy in various ways. Most importantly, they shaped the incumbents’ ability to design the new participatory institutions.

Design varied along three axes: structure, including the method of choosing representatives and the periodicity of meetings and representatives' terms; range, or number of significant issues open to debate; and decision-making power, stretching from consultative power, such as receiving and providing information and/or opinions, to deliberative power, such as providing proposals, making nonbinding decisions, and making binding decisions. The design had particularly important effects on encouraging and sustaining citizen participation.

In Caracas nationally centralized authority and strong opposition parties led to restrictive program design. The restrictive design included a formal structure in which party leaders in parish boards (elected to three-year terms) and municipal bureaucrats in parish technical cabinets competed for power at the top while volunteer participants, those intended to play the central role, were often excluded. Given the minimal scope of jurisdiction granted municipal governments in Venezuela and the refusal of national and state organs to collaborate with the parish governments, the range of significant issues that participants could effectively debate was narrow. And, with few exceptions, participants lacked decision-making power. City residents offered suggestions, received and provided information, and made demands but did not, by and large, make decisions. In the budget process the parish governments create lists of demands, often in public assemblies, but party representatives drew up the parish's final priorities, and the mayor's cabinet decided how to allocate investment across parishes and municipal departments. As a result of the restrictive design, the original eagerness to participate shown by thousands of residents who attended assemblies in the beginning of 1993 went unmatched in the next two years.⁵⁰ When participants realized they could not effectively decide on the issues they cared most about, they gradually dropped out.

Montevideo's pattern of decentralized authority in the context of strongly institutionalized parties yielded a regulated program design. After beginning with a more informal structure without designated seats for political parties, the FA was essentially forced by the opposition to regulate participation. The structure is more formal than that of Caracas, but it similarly established competing legitimacies. Each district has a local board, with party-selected representatives from the incumbents and the opposition (for five-year terms), and a local council, where formal elections determine civil society representatives (for thirty-month terms). The districts also have a secretary, appointed as the mayor's delegate, and a director of the community service center. While the range of issues is fairly broad, the citizens' role in decision making is limited, as the local councils are legally subordinated to the local boards and designated only consultative powers. The budget process begins when the mayor's cabinet determines the amounts for each district and aspect of city government. The local boards and councils receive the resulting budget, detailing how much each district can expect for several types of spending, such as for public lighting and street paving. The boards and councils then agree on priorities for each category, with some input from residents through

public assemblies and suggestion boxes. As with all local issues, the board has the final word. In contrast to the residents' enthusiasm about taking part in the participatory decentralization program in the early 1990s, by mid decade participation had declined. Local council members frequently resigned and turnout at public assemblies diminished, leading to official concern for the "crisis of participation."⁵¹

Porto Alegre's weakly institutionalized opposition parties, combined with Brazil's high degree of decentralization, led to an open design. Participatory budgeting's informal structure is based on two premises. Anyone can participate in the annual budget assemblies, and everyone who does participate has the same rights to voice, to vote, and to be elected delegate to the district or thematic forums and the municipal budget council. Terms last one year, and delegates may recall councilors with a two-thirds vote. All meetings at each level are open to the public. No formal arena exists for official party representatives. The range of issues open to debate is also widest, not only because Porto Alegre controls more services but because participants demanded an ever-expanding role, such as input on investment priorities, municipal wages, and policymaking (for example, rules concerning qualification of daycare centers for government support and their management). Crucially, the participants' decision-making power is much greater in Porto Alegre. They can make real decisions. One set of decisions, the list of prioritized projects from the district assemblies, is binding on city government. Assembly participants select and rank these projects, the delegates vote on the final list, and neither the mayor nor the budget council may alter these priorities. Other decisions, particularly those of the budget council concerning broader policy issues, are subject to the mayor's veto. In practice, the mayor almost never uses the veto but attempts to negotiate until an agreement can be reached. Finally the mayor's cabinet uses the participants' deliberations to allocate spending across districts and city services. The accessible, society-dominated structure, wide range of issues under debate, and deliberative decision-making power all encourage participants. Consequently, only in Porto Alegre did participation increase over time. In 1990 fewer than a thousand people attended the two rounds of budget assemblies. Ten years later, nearly twenty thousand participated, a two thousand percent increase.⁵²

Deepening democracy can be seen in other dimensions—strengthening civil society and increasing state responsiveness and transparency—as well. Only in Porto Alegre did the participatory experiment reverse the trend of declining civic organizing. While neighborhood associations remained undemocratic in Caracas (dominated by a life-term president, often the sole active member) and declined in Montevideo (from 371 in 1991 to fewer than 300 in 1998), active associations in Porto Alegre increased from approximately 300 in 1988 to about 540 in 1998 and to 664 in 2001.⁵³ The associations' character changed from a more presidentialist to a more participatory style, with an increase in elections and regular meetings.⁵⁴ A survey of Brazil's six largest state capitals in 1996 shows that, while the membership rate in community organizations of various types fell in other state capitals after

1988, it increased in Porto Alegre.⁵⁵ Participatory budgeting's open design stimulates associational growth and democracy because key decisions are made in assemblies where large numbers count and because these assemblies provide arenas to demonstrate and evaluate leadership.

As for state responsiveness, both Porto Alegre and Montevideo have seen vast improvements since implementing participation programs. Advances in areas like housing, sewage connections, street paving, health care, transportation, and preschool education have been well documented and need no further details here.⁵⁶ In the less studied case of Caracas, the lack of resources and responsibilities and the disruption from AFL-affiliated unions made it exceedingly difficult for the CR administration to expand services and thus improve responsiveness. Newspaper reports, public opinion polls, and interviews, even with CR supporters and activists, all indicate that no dramatic expansion of services occurred during Istúriz' term.⁵⁷ Community leaders complained that the municipal government invested too little in public works projects to improve the neighborhoods and that the few projects undertaken were frequently delayed or never completed.

On the other hand, transparency improved over the prior administrations in each city. The very creation of participation programs forced governments to open decision-making processes to public scrutiny. The administrations all provided participants in public meetings with detailed information about the city budget and particularly how much money was available for investment. City officials also provided printed records disclosing the implementation of the previous year's budget. Clean government was a hallmark of the three administrations. By contrast, in both Caracas and Montevideo, previous mayors had been accused of corruption (one served jail time, while the other was forced to resign).

Conclusion

The design of participatory institutions reflects their national and local contexts. Specifically, variations in the experiments' design in the three cities reflected the greater degree of national decentralization in Uruguay and Brazil, which allowed the FA and PT more flexibility than the CR, and the strongly institutionalized opposition parties in Caracas and Montevideo, which forced the CR and FA to compromise on their original programs while the PT negotiated its program with independent community organizations rather than opponents. These same factors, through the program design mechanism or on their own, affected the quality of local democracy more generally. The open design of Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting produced a virtuous cycle that strengthened citizenship and democratized the state. Participants saw the extension of the services they had prioritized, participated again, and revitalized old civic associations or formed new ones. Further, the participants demanded greater transparency

and more decision-making power, supported higher tax rates, obtained greater service provision, and intensified their involvement, continuing the cycle. The parish government program in Caracas provides a sharp contrast. The program's restrictive design contributed to a short, vicious cycle, in which the participants' lack of decision-making power over important issues and the continued dominance of party representatives discouraged participation as well as formation of new associations. At the same time, the limited jurisdictional scope, paucity of municipal funds, and sabotage by AD-led municipal unions restricted the CR administration's ability to respond capably to citizen demands. Overall, democracy remained shallow in Caracas. Montevideo's participatory decentralization program helped improve responsiveness and transparency but was less successful in strengthening citizenship because, with the regulated program design, participants saw little connection between their attendance at meetings and actual policy outcomes. Without a direct link between the advances in service provision and participation, residents had little incentive to become involved in the program, either individually or collectively. Uruguay's high degree of national decentralization thus allowed for the FA's partial success in Montevideo.

Budget councilors in Porto Alegre say that any city could successfully replicate participatory budgeting, with some qualifications. "All you need is an organized community and a politician with the will to do it. And of course money. You need money. It's not enough to have the will if you don't have money."⁵⁸ This statement comes close to representing the scholarly consensus on participation programs, but it is incomplete at best. It helps explain the case of Caracas, where the small municipal budget presented a significant hurdle for the Causa Radical's parish governments. In Montevideo, however, despite hundreds of neighborhood associations, a committed progressive party in government, and a substantial city budget, the Frente Amplio's participation program did not achieve the kind of success found in Porto Alegre. Deepening democracy requires more than political effort, social organization, and money. The political context is important in shaping the effects of decentralization. In cities with strongly institutionalized parties, decentralization will likely result in elite capture and exclusionary politics. Even where new parties win office, established parties can debilitate institutional reforms. In cities with weakly institutionalized parties, however, decentralization's democracy-enhancing benefits are more likely to filter through.

Contrary to the generally negative assessments of the democratic prospects of Brazil's weakly institutionalized parties, this political context allowed the PT to create an effective channel of citizen participation and to deepen democracy in Porto Alegre. This finding echoes the conclusion of some studies of posttransition democracies that overinstitutionalized party systems often prevent new ideas from being implemented.⁵⁹ It also helps explain why other attempts by progressive parties to implement participation programs in some Latin American cities have met with such difficulties, and perhaps why participatory budgeting has succeeded most in Brazil.

NOTES

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