

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Reforming the Relationship between the State and Civil Society in Latin America

Maureen Donaghy

Rutgers University, US

mmd184@camden.rutgers.edu

This essay reviews the following works:

Enhancing Democracy: Public Policies and Citizen Participation in Chile. By Gonzalo Delamaza. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015. Pp. vi + 296. \$99.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781782385462.

The Politics of Local Participatory Democracy in Latin America: Institutions, Actors, and Interactions. By Françoise Montambeault. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. Pp. ix + 265. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780804795166.

Participatory Democracy in Brazil: Socioeconomic and Political Origins. By J. Ricardo Tranjan. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016. Pp. vii + 269. \$30.69 paperback. ISBN: 9780268042400.

Activating Democracy in Brazil: Popular Participation, Social Justice, and Interlocking Institutions. By Brian Wampler. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2015. Pp. xi + 297. \$39.00 paperback. ISBN: 9780268044305.

In 2012, Carole Pateman outlined the distinction between deliberative and participatory forms of democracy. While deliberative democracy provides citizens with the ability to voice opinions, come to consensus, and make decisions, Pateman argues that it still “leaves intact the conventional institutional structures and political meaning of ‘democracy.’”¹ Participatory democracy, rather, requires “reform of undemocratic authority structures” in order to “provide opportunities for individuals to participate in decision-making in their everyday lives as well as the wider political system.”² Pateman uses the example of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, to demonstrate the ways in which participation can become institutionalized and viewed as a right of citizens. Numerous studies on participatory budgeting attempt to explain why and how the process developed in this one city and the ensuing effects on democratic citizenship in Brazil.³ Since these early studies, researchers have begun to assess in greater depth the impact of participatory institutions, not just in terms of democratic citizenship but in the redistributive outcomes they produce for citizens. As participatory budgeting and other participatory institutions are replicated in cities around the world, researchers also try to refine the parameters around which participatory democracy arises and is sustained. The four books on Latin America reviewed here are integral to this shift toward understanding the variation in the creation, process, and outcomes of participatory institutions.

Reforms that institutionalize participatory practices are meant to reshape existing relationships between the state and civil society. In an era in which trust in government and disaffection among voters appear to be growing not only in Western democracies but also in newer democracies such as Brazil, Chile, and

¹ Carole Pateman, “APSA Presidential Address: Participatory Democracy Revisited,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 1 (2012): 10.

² Pateman, “APSA Presidential Address,” 10.

³ See, for example, Rebecca Abers, “From Ideas to Practice: The Partido dos Trabalhadores and Participatory Governance in Brazil,” *Latin American Perspectives* 23, no. 4 (1996): 35–53; Leonardo Avritzer, *Participatory Institutions in Democratic Brazil* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009); Gianpaolo Baiocchi, *Militants and Citizens: The Politics of Participatory Democracy in Porto Alegre* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Brian Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

Mexico, participatory democracy should have the power to reengage citizens, but only if they see the value in participating. For participation to be worthwhile, institutions must have real power devolved from the state and produce significant policies and programs that improve the lives of citizens. We need to know, then, where and why participatory institutions can reshape the relationship between citizens and the state.

It does not seem like hyperbole to claim that without greater citizen involvement in politics, the democratic experiment is set to fail. Participatory institutions, however, can only do so much to satisfy the interests of both government and civil society in terms of resource control and responsiveness of policies and programs. The key is to uncover what it is that participatory institutions can do, and how to create the greatest effect through institutional design. All four of these books address the fundamental question of why there is variation across countries in the advent and implementation of participatory democracy, and all four provide similar conclusions: participatory processes evolve from a very specific set of circumstances in which alignment of political elites and civil society unite toward the goal of inclusion.

In *Participatory Democracy in Brazil: Socioeconomic and Political Origins*, Ricardo Tranjan argues that Brazil was on course to develop participatory institutions for decades before they became reality. Through his story, Tranjan changes the narrative about how participatory democracy emerged in Brazil in the 1970s and 1980s. He contradicts conventional wisdom that participatory institutions resulted from the influence of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party, PT) and left-leaning civil society in the transition to democracy. He views participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre as the end result of three processes: incremental steps toward political participation throughout the twentieth century, an attempt to increase citizen participation in the 1970s and 1980s; and efforts to restrict direct citizen participation in the 1980s (3). Across Brazil, Tranjan argues that industrialization created new opportunities for political mobilization at the same time that historical exclusion of certain segments of the population coalesced in national movements for democratic institutional reform (4–5).

Tranjan investigates the roots of participatory democracy in Brazil through a historical analysis of three case studies: Lages in Santa Catarina, Boa Esperança in Espírito Santo, and Diadema in the metropolitan region of São Paulo. The cases represent geographic diversity and distinct participatory movements, but they are also purposefully chosen, successful cases in which participatory democracy emerged within municipal administrations in the 1970s and 1980s. Based on interviews and archival research, he finds that the Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB), which was the only legally sanctioned opposition party during the military rule, contained a faction of leaders who were committed to establishing participatory democracy at the municipal level in the 1970s. It would be inaccurate to say, then, that the PT was solely responsible for the development of participatory institutions in Brazil.

The implication of Tranjan's work is surely that scholars need to go back further in time to deepen our understanding of why institutions develop where and when they do. Current iterations of participatory institutions are the result of long-standing political coalitions, factions, and opportunities. A more comprehensive approach to how participatory institutions emerge, such as the stories told by Tranjan, serve to identify the variation in where these institutions exist, and further, to examine the interests of actors to ensure they endure and make a difference in generating participatory democracy. Tranjan's examination of the national-level political, institutional, and economic variables that contribute to local-level democratization also imply that single-city case studies, without reference to the national level, are missing large pieces of the story.

Two other books recently released, by Brian Wampler and Françoise Montambeault, expand on the ways in which civil society–state relationships are or are not transformed through participatory institutions. In his book, *Activating Democracy in Brazil: Popular Participation, Social Justice, and Interlocking Institutions*, Wampler picks up on the implementation of Brazil's new participatory architecture where Tranjan leaves off. Rather than the genesis of participatory democracy itself, Wampler seeks to understand the reasons behind the variation in implementation of institutions over time and across space. The main question he asks is how new participatory institutions have changed the manner in which citizens, civil society organizations (CSOs), political leaders, and government officials interact and promote a deeper form of participatory citizenship. While the new participatory architecture in Brazil provides ample opportunities to present policy proposals, publicly debate policy directions, and hold governments accountable to their promises, Wampler also explains the new burdens these institutions invoke for both civil society and state officials as the lines of control blur. He writes: "CSO leaders are expected to work closely with government officials to develop new projects and policies, but they are also expected to raise contentious issues and engage in oversight. Public officials are expected to work closely with citizens and CSO activists within participatory venues but are also

supposed to administer public policy programs for the wider public, which is not participating in the new intermediary institutions” (246).

These tensions affect civil society's use of participatory institutions, the ways in which institutional rules are carried out, and the extent to which officials extend power over resources to these bodies. The result is reflected in whether “a new participatory citizenship regime” takes shape. This new regime, as Wampler defines it, is one in which citizens have greater incentives to participate in the political process, where there is improved communication among citizens and public officials, where local knowledge adds to the responsiveness of the policy-making process, and where there is greater focus on issues of importance to low-income residents.

Wampler's book, which covers a span of ten years, from 2000 to 2010, is the first to use longitudinal and cross-sectoral analysis to examine the variation in participatory institutions in one city, Belo Horizonte. As he notes, Belo Horizonte serves as an ideal case study because of the magnitude of participatory processes in the city, which includes six hundred councils and over five thousand elected citizen positions. He uses surveys to complement elite interviews and participatory observation. In two favelas, he compares the multiple ways in which people engage with participatory institutions and other interactions with the state. From his detailed assessment of these favelas and four policy arenas across six participatory institutions, Wampler attributes variation regarding participatory citizenship to five factors: “1) state formation; 2) the development of civil society; 3) government support for voice and vote; 4) the source and level of public resources; and 5) specific participatory rules that regulate citizen participation, representation, and deliberation” (252). Critically, he demonstrates that though socioeconomic and employment status may no longer solely dictate access to political and social rights, a reformist and high capacity state is needed to enable the activation of the participatory citizenship regime. In line with many other analyses of Brazil's participatory institutions, Wampler also finds that an engaged, dense civil society—that involves great numbers of the poor, is concerned with a broader focus on the rights of citizenship, and has a stake in delivering public services—matters for the operation of the participatory citizenship regime.

Wampler argues that citizens have to “activate” their rights to participatory citizenship. Though these rights are guaranteed by the constitution, activation is a political process in which citizens surmount resistance that comes from “political rivals, unresponsive bureaucracies, short-term political alliances, and the difficulties of sustaining collective action” (4). The difficulties in activation mean that there is wide variation in access to rights and existing institutions across Brazil. In addition, though other analyses have focused solely on the party affiliation of the city's mayor, Wampler finds that the support or discouragement of mid-tier bureaucrats also matters for integrating participatory institutions within the broader policy environment.

In the book's final section Wampler details the reach of Brazil's participatory institutions across the country, from participatory budgeting processes to policy management councils and public policy conferences. He mentions another research project of his with Mike Touchton in which they use quantitative evidence to demonstrate the positive impact of participatory budgeting on social well-being.⁴ In a more recent, related project, Wampler, Touchton, and Natasha Borges Sugiyama also identify the relative strengths of the associations between participatory governance institutions, national social programs, and municipal administrative capacity.⁵ The implications of this work are to assess whether participatory institutions not only deepen democracy, but also improve the quality of citizens' lives. Taken together, this book and Wampler's subsequent research provide great evidence as to the practical effects of participatory institutions, while also recognizing the limitations of these institutions for transforming the relationship between civil society and the state.

In her book, *The Politics of Local Participatory Democracy in Latin America: Institutions, Actors, and Interactions*, Françoise Montambeault also takes up the question of why the process and outcomes of participatory institutions vary. Specifically, she asks why there is variation in the “success” of local participatory institutions and how we can even measure success across diverse contexts. Her work is based on the puzzle she observed across Mexico and Brazil that not all participatory processes have the same outcomes. Much like Wampler, Montambeault views success as the nature of the relationship between the state and civil society.

⁴ Michael Touchton and Brian Wampler, “Improving Social Well-Being through New Democratic Institutions,” *Comparative Political Studies* 47, no. 10 (2014): 1442–1469.

⁵ Michael Touchton, Natasha Borges Sugiyama, and Brian Wampler, “Democracy at Work: Moving Beyond Elections to Improve Well-Being,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (2017): 68–82.

The nature of the relationship is defined by four types: clientelism, disempowering co-optation, fragmented inclusion, or democratic cooperation. She arrives at these four types by characterizing state-society relationships across two dimensions: the nature of mobilization (individual and collective forms) and the level of autonomy enjoyed by participants (controlled and autonomous).

She examines four case study cities in Brazil and Mexico in the mid to late 2000s—Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, León, Recife and Belo Horizonte—each of which demonstrates one of the four types of state-civil society relationships. In Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, despite the implementation of new participatory channels, clientelism still results from long-standing weak civil society mobilization connected to patterns established under the PRI. Strong political competition in the city also encourages control of the participatory planning mechanism rather than devolution of power and resources to CSOs. In a similar participatory planning mechanism in León, the institutional design also encouraged individual forms of mobilization rather than coordination among CSOs, but there a lack of political competition led to partnership with civil society rather than restricted power. She labels the outcome in this case “fragmented inclusion.” Moving to Brazil, Montambeault examines participatory budgeting processes in the cities of Recife and Belo Horizonte. In Recife, she views the state-civil society relationship across two different administrations. Under the more conservative administration the relationship was strongly clientelistic, while under a Workers’ Party (PT) administration the relationship evolved into disempowered co-optation. Institutional changes in the participatory budgeting processes across these two administrations led to variation in mobilization and access by civil society, though strong political control remained constant. She regards Belo Horizonte as the most successful case of the four, categorized as “democratic cooperation,” in which the institutional design fostered collected organization for the common good and the sociopolitical context facilitated autonomy of civil society.

Montambeault concludes that since these four cities had similar histories of social mobilization, the institutional designs of each participatory institution were quite important in reinforcing or undermining past patterns of mobilization. Specifically, where there were low incentives for deliberation, fragmentation of participants, and low incentives for organization, these participatory processes were less likely to transform state-civil society relationships from clientelistic to cooperative. Political competition also led politicians to circumvent participatory processes, preferring instead to resort to traditional practices. She finds that the cooperative model, which includes collective mobilization and autonomous civil society, has the greatest potential for democratic deepening as defined by shifting traditional clientelistic relations toward equal cooperation between social and political actors. At the same time, Montambeault is realistic that participatory institutions are not a cure-all, particularly as participatory institutions cannot necessarily create civic communities that provide the social organization needed to sustain democratic citizenship (230). The question remains as to how these spaces may be designed to build community and social organizations for long-term democratic deepening.

Together, these two books by Wampler and Montambeault demonstrate the shortcomings of participatory institutions for fostering inclusive democratization, while at the same time defining the parameters that lead to their success. Both find that public officials must find participatory institutions to work in their interests, both as a mechanism for allocating resources and for securing political support. The motivations of civil society organizations and individual citizens are not much different. When institutions collectivize citizens’ interests in a way that generates substantial change, CSOs and individuals lend their support, but when people come to see these spaces as co-opted by government control, the incentive to participate is lost. Both conclude that institutional design, particularly that which provides real power to civil society in decision-making, matters for ensuring participatory institutions make a practical difference in citizens’ lives.

Providing a more cautionary tale regarding the viability of participatory institutions, in *Enhancing Democracy: Public Policies and Citizen Participation in Chile*, Gonzalo Delamaza provides clear evidence as to why participatory democracy has not emerged in Chile. He begins with the puzzle that though Chile is often seen as the most stable and successful democracy in Latin America, the country remains under the constitution created by the former authoritarian regime. Under democratic governance the country has attained poverty reduction and economic growth, but inequality is still high, civil society is fragmented, and participation in politics is low (3). Without political reform at the highest level, Delamaza claims that public policies have been the primary means of altering the relationship between the state and civil society, but he contends that these efforts have been “insufficient, for they are subject to an elitist model of democracy and restricted citizen participation and thus have only limited ability to produce democratic governance” (4). He continues that policies in Chile are shaped more by the goal of stability than transformational goals.

Not only does the primacy of stability limit participatory democracy, but the historical tradition, political culture, and state practices also restrict greater citizen participation. Delamaza argues that neoliberal economic policies, the unitary state, and the presidential state all discourage participation and are reflected in the tradition of top-down rather than bottom-up reforms. As opposed to Brazil, for example, Chile has had limited decentralization, which leaves municipalities with few resources for local control. Though the women's and indigenous movements have shaped social policies over the past few decades, the author still argues that their influence has not significantly changed the relationship between civil society and the state, especially at the very local level. Further, though Chile has implemented a number of specific government initiatives meant to foster participation, Delamaza finds these have had limited impact because civil society remains fragmented, without extensive networks or internal cohesion to support effective participation. Finally, he shows that though a number of civil society leaders entered the government bureaucracy after democratization, they have now become the political elite, with little connection to marginalized populations.

In sum, Delamaza finds that the political context during and after the transition, institutional design, weak public policy networks, and the reproduction of political elites all limit the transformation of the relationship between civil society and the state that would produce participatory democracy. Though significant resources in Chile have been dedicated to innovative social policies, these policies alone cannot change the nature of this relationship. The book ends with a description of demonstrations in 2011–2012, which Delamaza argues were not against the government itself but against “profiteering in education, centralism, approval of electric generation megaprojects with no prior consultation and other such grievances (268–269). These grievances, he contends, can only be remedied by new forms of citizen participation generated by reform of the initial design of the transition. He sees protest as a political opening to finally change the political system.

Both Tranjan's and Delamaza's explanations for the creation of participatory democracy generate questions about whether participatory institutions may be created without a long history of coalescing forces from across levels of government and a strong, committed, and mobilized civil society. Tranjan's aim may be to tell a new narrative about Brazil's experience with participatory democracy without further generalization to other contexts, while Delamaza's narrative is particular to Chile. In this regard, these books are of great interest to scholars of Brazil and Chile but may not be of practical application to other contexts experimenting with similar innovative democratic institutions. Alternatively, though Brazil and Chile's histories are of course unique in the details, it may be that one can identify political coalitions in diverse contexts that either would or would not support the creation of participatory democracy, thereby lending to the practical application of these books.

In conclusion, these four recent books on participatory democracy in Latin America suggest that a very specific set of circumstances enable institutionalized processes to reshape civil society–state relationships. First, public officials across levels of government must buy into the idea of participatory governance and must design institutions, from the constitution down to local-level mandates, to promote inclusion and power-sharing among representatives and citizen advocates. At the same time, civil society organizations cannot expect participatory institutions on paper to simply solve long-standing issues of marginalization, but rather they must fight for their implementation as relevant spaces of change. As Wampler deftly notes in his book, given Brazil's history and the seeming imperviousness of the country's structural and systemic problems, participatory innovations are perhaps surprising and provide optimism for the future of democracy. While Delamaza argues that Chile still has a long process of reform ahead to dismantle elite institutions left over from the Pinochet regime, the experiences in Brazil and Mexico provide examples from which to build effective institutions.

The collective research of these authors further contributes to our understanding of how to transform state-civil society relationships, and the roadblocks to expect along the way. For democracy to be participatory rather than simply deliberative requires long-term commitment to the inclusion of diverse voices as well as genuine power dispersed across actors within and outside of the state. The experiences of Brazil, Mexico, and Chile guide the future of participatory practices and research as scholars, officials, and activists search for increasing evidence of the benefits and challenges of participatory democracy.

Author Information

Maureen Donaghy is an associate professor of political science at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Her research and teaching interests focus on development and civil society with an emphasis on participatory governance, urban politics, and Latin America. She has conducted extensive research in Brazil

on the effect of participatory institutions related to housing policy. She is the author of *Civil Society and Participatory Governance: Municipal Councils and Social Housing Programs in Brazil* (2013, Routledge) and *Democratizing Urban Development: Community Organizations for Housing across the United States and Brazil* (2018, Temple University Press), and has published articles in both comparative politics and Latin American studies journals.

How to cite this article: Donaghy, Maureen. 2018. Reforming the Relationship between the State and Civil Society in Latin America. *Latin American Research Review* 53(2), pp. 388–393. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.620>

Submitted: 13 February 2017

Accepted: 03 April 2017

Published: 13 June 2018

Copyright: © 2018 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

LARR

Latin American Research Review is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Latin American Studies Association.

OPEN ACCESS 