

When does participatory democracy deepen the quality of democracy?

Lessons from Brazil

Brian Wampler

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Abstract: This article develops a theoretical framework to demonstrate how and where participatory institutions contribute to the deepening of democracy. The main argument in this article is that the substantial variation in the outcomes produced by participatory institutions is best explained by identifying the incentives of elected governments to delegate authority and the capacity of civil society organizations to use contentious politics inside and outside of these new institutions. The World Bank and United Nations advocate the adoption of participatory institutions as strategies to empower individuals, diminish corruption, and improve the quality of policy making. This article analyzes eight cases of Brazil's well-known Participatory Budgeting (PB) program to account for the wide range of outcomes produced. Two municipalities produced strong results and two other municipalities produced failed programs. Four municipalities produced PB programs with mixed, and somewhat contradictory, results. The findings suggest that failed participatory programs can have a pernicious effect on efforts to deepen democracy while the most successful programs are managing to improve the quality of local democratic processes.

Over the past two decades participatory institutions have been initiated throughout the developing world in order to deepen the quality of democracy. Local governments in countries as diverse as Brazil, India, Venezuela, South Africa, and Indonesia have experimented with participatory institutions to promote accountability, create active and knowledgeable citizens, and establish the conditions for achieving social justice.¹ The initial body of research on participatory democracy programs has largely extolled the positive benefits of these institutions, highlighting how participatory institutions have been able to produce specific social and political advances that deepen the quality of democracy.² According to this literature, social capital is being generated, citizens are being empowered, and governments are becoming more transparent.³

Despite a rich literature on participatory institutions in democratizing countries, we continue to lack a coherent theoretical explanation to account for where and when these participatory experiences are likely to be successful. Institutions as diverse as the World Bank, the United Nations, Brazil's leftist Workers' Party, and India's Communist Party currently promote the adoption of participatory institutions, which means that it crucial to develop a generalizable theoretical framework that will allow us to better explain a wide range of outcomes.

The absence of a generalizable theoretical framework to explain the divergent outcomes produced by participatory institutions has methodological and conceptual roots. Methodologically, most studies on participatory institutions are single case studies and have focused on the most successful cases.⁴ Although these studies have greatly advanced our understanding of how participatory institutions can deepen democracy, their theoretical findings are not generalizable because they select on the dependent

variable.⁵ A significant conceptual problem is that civil society has received the lion's share of scholars' attention while the actions of state officials has been downplayed despite the integral role they play in these participatory processes.

Participatory institutions have the potential to deepen the quality of democracy, through the actions of government officials and citizen-participants, by extending rights and benefits to individuals who were previously denied access. According to Ken Roberts, "the logic of deepening democracy is one of intensifying popular sovereignty in the political sphere, that is, moving from hierarchical forms of elitist or bureaucratic control to forms of popular self-determination by means of more direct participation in the decision-making process."⁶ Brazil's Participatory Budgeting programs represent an effort to build new institutional arrangements that create opportunities for low-income individuals to engage in collective decision-making in order to allow them exercise political rights as well as to grant them social rights and benefits that have not traditionally been provided to Brazil's lower classes. When citizens are able to exercise new rights, it is possible to confirm that democracy is being deepened.

However, but we must also recognize that participatory institutions also have the potential to undermine efforts to deepen the quality of democracy because citizens may be incorporated into state-sanctioned decision-making processes but not given meaningful levels of authority. Roberts reminds us that the "that strategies for the deepening of democracy have been obstructed by problems of collective action and political coordination that arise in the process of translating Latin America's popular social majorities into political majorities with the organizational strength required for the exercise of popular sovereignty."⁷

What explains why some participatory institutions succeed, some fail, and others produce mediocre results? This article helps to account for how actual, existing participatory democratic institutions affect democratic outcomes by analyzing the strategies and behaviors of governments and citizen-participants. The main argument is that the substantial variation in the outcomes is best explained by identifying the incentives of local governments to delegate authority in conjunction with the capacity of civil society organizations to use contentious politics inside and outside of new these institutions.

Participatory institutions complement representative democracy, which means that government officials must decide if delegating decision-making authority to citizens coincides with their own interests. Elected officials must determine if they can accommodate the demands presented by citizens in participatory institutions within their broader electoral, intra-party, governing, and policy agendas. As governments' willingness to delegate authority decreases, so too does the quality of the participatory program, which then limits efforts to improve the quality of local democracy.

When mayors are willing to delegate authority, citizens and civil society organizations must choose how they will make use of this new type of authority. Citizens must be willing to engage in intense cooperation with government officials; without cooperation, government officials have a diminished interest in supporting a participatory program. Yet, close cooperation can quickly led to co-optation. The presence of contentious politics provides a means for citizens to place pressure on the government that allows citizen-participants to avoid co-optation.

In this article, I draw from the most well known case of participatory democracy in the developing world, Brazil's Participatory Budgeting, to show how government officials and citizens have managed this balancing act. I argue that some Participatory Budgeting programs have been managed very skillfully (most notably the famous case of Porto Alegre), which contributes to the deepening of democracy. I also show that other Participatory Budgeting programs have *not* been managed similarly, producing weak and/or failed outcomes. This article draws upon nearly three years of field research, a citizen-participant survey, budgetary analyses, elite interviews, and hundreds of hours of participant observations to substantiate these claims.⁸

The article proceeds in the following manner. There is first a brief overview of Participatory Budgeting. This is followed by an introduction to *Strong Democracy* and a brief discussion of the burgeoning literature on participatory institutions in Brazil.⁹ The third section develops the argument. In the fourth section, I introduce a typology of four outcomes produced by eight cases, which is followed by an analysis of four cases.

What is Participatory Budgeting?

Brazil's federal system provides municipalities with nearly fifteen percent of all public spending, which helps to explain why civil society organizations and politicians have focused so much attention on budgets at the municipal level.¹⁰ Brazilian mayors enjoy considerable autonomy, allowing them to initiate new programs with only minimal interference from municipal legislative chambers.¹¹ Participatory Budgeting is an institution that emerged from direct negotiations between government officials and civil society leaders, as they sought to produce practical solutions to pressing needs.¹² These

programs are housed within the mayoral administration and complement the legal and political responsibilities of mayors and municipal legislators. Participatory Budgeting provides multiple opportunities for citizens to debate and vote on policy projects specific to their neighborhood and to the city more generally.

Participatory Budgeting is a year-long decision-making process through which citizens negotiate among themselves and with government officials in organized meetings over the allocation of new capital investment spending on public work projects, such as health care clinics, schools, and street paving. In the more successful cases, citizens have the authority to make policy decisions, which has the potential to alter the basic decision-making process in Brazilian politics. Citizens are mobilized to attend meetings during which they vote for public policies and elected community representatives. These programs combine elements of direct (i.e. direct mobilization of citizens in decision-making venues) and representative (i.e. electing representatives) democracy. They also pay increased attention to transparency and social justice, both of which are designed to change how local governments in Brazil have long functioned, which is often described as clientelistic and personalistic.¹³ Research on Participatory Budgeting in Brazil has demonstrated that the broad majorities of participants and elected delegates are low income and have low levels of education.¹⁴ Therefore, these programs have the greatest potential to affect the political behavior and strategies of individuals from historically excluded groups.

Participatory Democracy

Benjamin Barber's *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* calls for citizens and government officials to design institutions that will directly incorporate citizens into decision-making venues. Barber asserts that a fundamental problem of actual, existing liberal democracy is the lack of active participation, which limits the quality of democracy because so few citizens are actively engaged in contributing to decision-making processes that affect their lives. Barber was concerned about the lack of institutional innovation and re-design in the United States, but his call for *Strong Democracy* has been heard in developing world democracies as reformers have sought to overcome limitations associated with representative democracy. Barber lays out several basic criteria that would allow for the "viability and practicality as well as to the coherence of the theory" of *Strong Democracy*.¹⁵ Participatory institutions should:

be realistic and workable. For all practical purposes, this means that they ought to be a product of actual political experience.

complement and be compatible with the primary representative institutions of large-scale modern societies.

directly address liberal anxieties over such unitary propensities of participatory communities as irrationalism, prejudice, uniformity, and intolerance.

deal concretely with the obstacles that modernity appears to place in the way of participation: namely, scale, technology, complexity, and the paradox of parochialism.

give expression to the special claims of strong democracy as a theory of talk, judgment, and public seeing by offering alternatives to representation, simple voting, and the rule of bureaucrats and experts.¹⁶

Participatory Budgeting's basic set of rules meet Barber's criteria for *Strong Democracy*, suggesting that these programs offer the empirical means to assess how participatory

democracy might create active citizens who are involved in collective decision-making.¹⁷

Participatory Budgeting programs are designed to create active citizens but it remains unclear if the institutional structures in which they are embedded as well as the competing sets of interests among civil society organizations, citizens, and government officials will help to deepen the quality of democracy.

Theoretical debate on Participatory Budgeting

Researchers have proposed a range of explanations for Participatory Budgeting outcomes. Each of the works cited below has made a significant contribution to advancing our understanding of this pioneering participatory democratic experience. Abers' work on Porto Alegre's Participatory Budgeting program asserts that there is a "synergy" between governments and interested citizens, which helps to create the conditions for the expansion of civil society.¹⁸ According to Abers, municipal government officials worked with established civil society organizations to promote the direct incorporation of existing and new civil society organizations into this state-sanctioned participatory process. The local state was able to foster the growth of social capital, which then helped to improve the quality of Porto Alegre's local democratic processes. Abers' noteworthy insight is that a democratically elected local government and civil society allies shared interests that prompted them to work together to develop Participatory Budgeting as a legitimate decision-making venue as well as to foster the growth of social capital. The principal drawback to Abers' approach is that she doesn't sufficiently explain the political, electoral, and governance incentives for a government's involvement in Participatory Budgeting.

Nylen demonstrates that the majority of Participatory Budgeting participants are long-time civil society activists, thus suggesting that these programs may not generate new forms of social capital, but will rather allow activists to have new access points into the state. Most importantly, Nylen finds that Participatory Budgeting helps to “democratize democracy,” by opening up the state to individuals and groups that have been historically marginalized from public decision-making processes in Brazil.¹⁹ Nylen’s findings contrast those of Abers, which may have to do with the fact that Abers analyzed perhaps the most successful case (Porto Alegre) whereas Nylen looked at two cases (Belo Horizonte and Betim) that produced mixed results.

Avritzer and I argue that Participatory Budgeting programs developed within the “participatory publics” that emerged within Brazil’s civil society during the 1980s and 1990s. Many civil society organizations re-organized their internal processes in more deliberative and democratic fashions to exert more influence over state affairs, to create a vibrant and more inclusive public sphere, and to limit the pernicious effects that clientelism has on localized and low-income groups.²⁰ There was a strong emphasis on deliberation, public votes, and transparency. Institutional innovations were then incorporated into state-sanctioned institutions, such as Participatory Budgeting, as civil society activists and reformed-oriented politicians sought to transform basic state-society relationships by overhauling state institutions. However, the drawback to this approach is that it, like Abers, provides few clues about why governments would be willing to delegate authority to citizens.

Baiocchi draws from two years of fieldwork in three of Porto Alegre’s regional districts to show how deliberative decision-making venues are constructed in a contested

political arena.²¹ Conflict and tension are present in the analysis, as is close cooperation between government officials and participating citizens. Yet, the political and policy interests of the government, the politicians, and political parties are absent from the analysis. Baiocchi's sociological approach helps to show how and why individuals and groups engage in both cooperation and contestation, but, again, the clear drawback to his work is that the government is seemingly above the political fray.

Goldfrank, in a comparative analysis of participatory programs in Caracas, Montevideo, and Porto Alegre argues that variation in outcomes among these three cases are best explained by the interaction of two factors: The degree of decentralization afforded to municipal governments by the national state and the degree of party institutionalization.²² With regard to decentralization, Goldfrank finds that greater levels of authority provided to mayors will result in stronger outcomes. In the eight Brazilian municipalities studied here, the degree of authority afforded to mayors is held largely constant, which means that the degree of decentralization cannot explain different outcomes among Brazilian municipalities. With regard to party institutionalization, Goldfrank finds that a strongly institutionalized party system has a limiting impact on participatory institutions because politicians will have few incentives to reach out to civil society actors. Conceptually, this argument marks an important turn in the debate as it moves us away from a narrow focus on civil society to a broader focus on the political processes that envelop participatory institutions.

The scholarly debates on Participatory Budgeting have emphasized how civil society organizations contribute to these programs, how civil society has been transformed, and why some specific political moments are conducive to initiating

participatory democracy. Insufficient attention has been paid towards explaining how and why citizens and government officials pursue their own interests within these new institutions.

Explaining Participatory Budgeting Outcomes

The two most important factors that account for the wide variation in Participatory Budgeting outcomes are the level of mayoral support for the delegation of authority to citizens and the ability of civil society organizations to use contentious politics. In order to produce strong programs, it is necessary to have high levels of mayoral support for delegation and a civil society that can engage in both cooperation and contentious politics. As mayoral support drops, and as civil society organizations are unable to engage in both forms of political behavior, outcomes weaken. These two factors interact: An increase in contentious politics by civil society organizations often leads governments to delegate additional authority and resources but there is also the ever-present possibility that too much contestation will lead to a decrease in mayoral support. Conversely, the lack of contentious politics removes pressure that could have been placed on government officials, thereby reducing governments' responsiveness to citizens, which can then lead to a withdraw of support by mayors for the delegation of authority.

Mayoral support

Participatory Budgeting is a form of participatory democracy with direct and representative elements, but it is also falls within Brazil's historical legacy of mayoral

domination of municipal agenda-setting.²³ Ironically, mayors must first centralize authority in their own hands before they can hand the authority back over to citizens. For Participatory Budgeting programs to work well, mayors need to decentralize the municipal administration, create internal procedures to prepare information to allow citizens to make sense of complex policy issues, re-train staff and bureaucrats to work directly with citizens, and, perhaps most importantly, transform the process through which projects are “green lighted” towards implementation.²⁴ In Brazil, the principal focus of most of these programs is on new capital investment projects (discretionary spending). The implementation of this funding is at the discretion of the mayor, which helps to explain why mayors must be at the center of our analysis.²⁵

Why are some mayors willing to delegate authority? Mayoral interest is derived by analyzing four interactive factors: (a) Rewarding party loyalists; (b) Reaching out to interested constituents; (c) Branding the party-in-government as “democratic and participatory”; and (d) Linking top government officials to participatory public civil society organizations.

Rewarding party loyalists: Participatory Budgeting provides a means for government officials to allow their political base to “practice democracy” by having a direct role in governmental decision-making. The political base is able to exercise voice and vote in a state institution, thereby satisfying the basic demands of party activists to be directly involved in decision-making. Since the mid-1980s, Brazilian civil society activists, particularly those aligned with leftist political parties, have argued that that democracy can be deepened through the direct incorporation of ordinary citizens in decision-making venues. Although party activists are not necessary ordinary citizens due

to their high levels of political activity, the incorporation of low-income party activists allows participants and party officials to demonstrate that they have taken the first step towards the expansion of decision-making venues. When the party-in-government's base wants to be directly involved in participatory decision-making venues, there is a greater likelihood that the mayor will delegate authority.

Reaching out to interested constituents: Mayors delegate authority to citizens as a means to reach out to their municipality's most active civil society participants as well as to encourage the formation of new civil society organizations, which may become part of the government's base of support. Through Participatory Budgeting, mayors have direct access to community leaders, which means that it serves as a potential recruitment site of activists as well as a forum for government officials to discover their community's most pressing problems. Participatory Budgeting allows the mayoral administration to reach out to citizens and activists who were not initially part of the mayor's political coalition.

Elections are held every two years in Brazil. Presidential, gubernatorial and state and federal legislative elections are held at the same time (1994, 1998, 2002, 2006), while mayoral and municipal legislative contests are held in the "mid-term" years time (1996, 2000, 2004). Mayors and municipal legislators are nearly constantly campaigning, which means that these participatory processes provide mayors with close and constant access to the most active civil society leaders. This allows party officials to identify which civil society leaders do the best job at turning out their supporters. When there are robust numbers of citizens who can potentially be recruited into the mayor's electoral and governing campaigns, there is a greater likelihood that a mayor would support the delegation of authority.

Branding the local political party as democratic and participatory: Governments are more likely to delegate authority if they seek to develop a party brand that allows them to present the party-in-government as promoting change that will positively affect democratic processes while simultaneously helping to alleviate Brazil's intense social inequalities. This is an effort to demonstrate to voters, the vast majority of whom do not participate in Participatory Budgeting, that the government is engaged in substantial reform efforts. When the party-in-government seeks to brand itself differently, then there will be a weaker interest among government officials to delegate authority because they are more likely to spend scarce resources on other policy or political projects.

Linking top government officials and participatory public civil society organizations: Government leaders with stronger ties to "participatory public" civil society organizations (see discussion of Wampler and Avritzer in theoretical section above) will more likely support the deliberative and democratic processes embedded in Participatory Budgeting's rules.²⁶ The political leadership that came of age during the mobilized opposition to Brazil's military government in the 1970s and 1980s strongly supported the direct incorporation of ordinary citizens into state institutions as a means to empower these citizens and to transform how the Brazilian state functioned.²⁷ The political and ideological composition of the mayor and his/her closest advisors strongly conditions the extent to which mayors may be willing to gamble their political future on the delegation of authority. When the mayor or members of his or her inner circle (*núcleo duro*) have these links then there will likely be an increase in support for the delegation of authority.

Type of Civil Society Activity: Cooperation and Contestation

How do civil society organizations and individual citizens act inside and outside of Participatory Budgeting? What strategies do they pursue vis-à-vis government officials and their fellow participants? Civil society organizations and individual citizens must be willing to cooperate in a government-sponsored program while also being able, when necessary, to engage in contentious behavior.²⁸ Cooperation and contestation are both needed since there are deliberative and competitive decision-making components to Participatory Budgeting. Citizens must cooperate closely with government officials in order to gain access to technical, legislative, and budgetary information as well as to facilitate meetings and negotiation processes.

The cooperation that is a necessary part of Participatory Budgeting can easily breed co-optation, whereby the government's agenda supplanted the interests of citizens within participatory decision-making process. Contentious politics gives citizens the opportunity to vigorously defend their projects in the face of governmental doubts and potential indifference. The use of contentious politics is more likely when there is a broad base of civil society organizations, the presence of participatory public civil society organizations and the presence of a "right to have rights" movement during the 1980s and 1990s.²⁹

A broad plurality of civil society organizations enables the use of cooperation and contestation because a broader base of groups, with diverse sets of interests, increases the cost of co-optation for the government. Civil society organizations have a lower fear of reprisal because the government has a more difficult time punishing outspoken groups. Density, therefore, is important because it provides civil society organizations with a

wider range of possible political strategies. However, density by itself is not sufficient (see the case of Blumenau below) because citizens must be able and willing to engage in contentious politics to publicly pressure government officials.

A history of contentious politics in a municipality makes it easier for civil society organizations to use direct confrontation inside and outside of Participatory Budgeting. In these cases contentious behavior is not viewed as exceptional behavior, but as a legitimate means for citizens to express their political voice. In Brazil, the development of participatory public civil society organizations helped to create citizens who are able and willing to use both cooperation and contentious forms of politics inside and outside of state institutions. Similarly, the presence of a “right to have rights” movement during the 1980s and 1990s creates the political foundations from which citizens are more likely to act as rights-bearing members of their polity rather than as clients of the state.³⁰ When municipalities lack the presence of a “right to have rights” movement or participatory public civil society organizations, there is an increased likelihood that participants will utilize political strategies of accommodation that reproduces traditional elite-mass relationship rather than contentious politics.

There are three sub-factors that affect Participatory Budgeting outcomes, which will be briefly introduced here.³¹ First, variation in Participatory Budgeting’s internal rules affects policy and political outcomes. The specific types of decision-making authority delegated to citizens as well as the internal organization of citizens appear to matter most.³² When citizens have a clear understanding of the degree of authority that they are able to exercise, it becomes much easier for them to develop negotiation, deliberative, and voting strategies that allow them to use these new political rights to win

public works or policies for their communities. When governments have a clear implementation system in place, it becomes more difficult for citizens or government officials to manipulate the rules. In addition, when citizens exercise authority at regional and municipal-wide levels there is a greater likelihood that Participatory Budgeting outcomes will be positive. For example, the lack of a municipal-wide council *fragments* participants (Belo Horizonte) or the holding of too few meetings *stifles* deliberation (Rio Claro).³³

Second, mayoral-legislative relations are largely tangential to Participatory Budgeting outcomes, but acrimonious mayoral-legislative relationships in which mayors are unable to establish a stable voting majority can undermine these programs. Brazilian mayors are very strong and legislators have few legislative, policy or budgetary powers.³⁴ When Brazilian mayors enjoy stable voting majorities, they have the ability to delegate authority with few interventions from municipal legislators. When Brazilian mayors do not enjoy stable voting majorities, they must increase their side-payments to legislators, which has the affect of limiting the level of resources that mayors might otherwise dedicate to Participatory Budgeting.³⁵

Finally, mayors must have access to sufficient levels of new capital investments to allow the local state to implement projects that can substantially modify citizen-participants' neighborhoods. Municipalities with limited financial resources are unable to allow citizens to make meaningful decisions. Under these conditions, debates are more likely to be vacuous or focused on issues unrelated to Participatory Budgeting because citizens have limited authority. Due to space considerations, these three sub-factors will

not be analyzed in this article because they more weakly affect the outcomes than the two principal factors.³⁶

Eight Brazilian cases of Participatory Budgeting

Table 1, below, is a typology of four outcomes that have been produced by these eight Brazilian Participatory Budgeting programs. The two main components of the argument, the use of contentious politics by civil society organizations and mayoral support for delegation, form the basis for the comparison. The level of mayoral support for the delegation of authority and the presence/absence of contentious politics are measured in several ways. First, I draw from a survey (n=695) of Participatory Budgeting delegates in these eight municipalities. I present the averaged results of six questions that tapped into citizens' attitudes on their ability to exercise authority within Participatory Budgeting.³⁷ Second, I use the percentage of new capital investment spending that the government allows the delegates to negotiate between 2001 and 2003, which helps to demonstrate the extent to which government officials are willing to hand one type of authority (budgetary authority) to citizens. There are yearly fluctuations so a three-year average best captures the degree to which the governments delegate authority. Finally, I draw from participant-observation and more than 100 interviews over an eight-year period (1996-2004) to establish the basis for assessing mayoral support and the presence of contentious politics. I focus on one of the two municipalities from each box to provide sufficient detail to illustrate the contours of the argument.³⁸

Figure 1
Participatory Democracy Outcomes

		Use of Contentious Politics by CSOs	
		High	Low
Mayoral Support for Delegation Of Authority To Citizens	High	<i>Institutionalized Participatory Democracy</i> Porto Alegre Ipatinga	N/A
	Medium	<i>Informal and Contested Participatory Democracy</i> Recife Belo Horizonte	<i>Co-opted Participatory Democracy</i> Santo André São Paulo
	Low	N/A	<i>Emasculated Participatory Democracy</i> Blumenau Rio Claro

Source: Wampler, "Participatory Budgeting in Brazil."

Institutionalized Participatory Democracy

The box in the top left includes the most successful cases, Porto Alegre and Ipatinga. *Institutionalized participatory democracy* refers to a decision-making process in which citizens have the authority to make specific binding decisions regarding how the government will act.³⁹ Citizens carefully study the rules, which can only be modified by a citizens' oversight committee, in order to pursue their interests and contribute to the broader debates of the community. The government oversees or manages the participatory institution and follows the rules, both in spirit and in practice. Citizens are able to use contentious politics outside of Participatory Budgeting, as a means to pressure

legislators and media representatives and they directly contest government officials inside of Participatory Budgeting as a pressure tactic.

Porto Alegre is widely considered to be the most successful case of Participatory Budgeting and has been widely studied.⁴⁰ In Porto Alegre, the Workers' Party (PT) won the 1988 mayoral election with just 35% of the vote. The new government worked closely with an umbrella civil society organization and its own party activists to develop the basic set of rules associated with Participatory Budgeting; the rules allowed civil society activists and party loyalists to practice democracy.⁴¹ Porto Alegre grew from a small number of participants, just 976 in 1990, to an average of 35,000 a year between 2001 and 2004.⁴² The PT government invested heavily in mobilizing individuals to participate.⁴³ Participatory Budgeting became a crucial base of support to the PT as the party's candidates won mayoral elections in 1992, 1996, 2000, and the state's governor's office in 1998.

PT officials (such as Mayors Olivio Dutra and Tarso Genro) entered politics through their opposition to the military authoritarian regime; they sought to overhaul state-society relations, create a new path towards socialism, empower citizens and were well versed in the use of contentious politics.⁴⁴ Participatory Budgeting helped the local PT to brand itself as democratic and participatory. Importantly, this leadership had strong ties to the participatory public civil society organizations and the right to have rights movement that developed in Porto Alegre during the 1980s. Throughout the 1990s, participants engaged in contentious politics against opposition legislators and media outlets at key events such as the World Social Forum. Formal meetings also have basic aspects of contentious politics as citizens regularly criticized the government for

incompetence or indifference. The government did not dampen the debate, but allowed for the development of free flowing deliberative and accountability sessions.

In Porto Alegre, delegates decided 100% of new capital investment spending between 1991 and 2004. The government successfully implemented a broad number of projects selected through Participatory Budgeting, valued at over US\$400 million between 1996 and 2003, which contributed to a positive assessment of Participatory Budgeting by participants.⁴⁵ Seventy-two percent of the survey respondents say that they are “always” or “almost always” able to exercise authority. The majority of the survey respondents are low income, which suggests that authority is being transferred to representatives of Brazil’s historically excluded and marginalized lower classes.

The high levels of mayoral support has helped to institutionalize participatory democracy in Porto Alegre and Ipatinga, while the active use of contentious politics by citizens allows them to avoid co-optation. Collective decision-making between 1989 and 2004 was transformed as low-income citizens made the majority of allocation decisions regarding the distribution of scarce resources. These two Participatory Budgeting programs have been successful because government officials and citizens pursue their interests within the new institution. Government officials don’t bypass the rules and citizens were rewarded for their efforts to work within the new rules. This represents a significant change in local politics in Brazil, where officeholders often manipulate the rules. Citizens use contentious politics inside and outside of Participatory Budgeting to pressure government officials to adhere to the basic rules of the game.

Emasculated Participatory Democracy

The bottom-right box, *emasculated participatory democracy*, includes the least successful cases, Blumenau and Rio Claro. Neither mayoral administration was deeply invested in this new participatory decision-making format and have citizens been unable to use contentious politics to press their claims, which neutered the programs. If there is no pressure emanating from civil society, then there is no need to expand the level of authority delegated to citizens.

In Blumenau, the PT government was first elected in 1996 during a local economic downturn, a corruption scandal among Blumenau's leading politicians, and a political split between the municipality's two principal parties. The PT government had no mandate to embark on serious reform and the leadership was not driven by a political or ideological commitment to dramatically reshape local decision-making processes. The PT government initiated Participatory Budgeting in 1997 at the behest of two internal factions: A political group affiliated with the local university as well as politically progressive civil society organizations that had ties to similar organizations in municipalities that already had comparable participatory programs.⁴⁶ Participatory Budgeting was implemented to satisfy these groups and to allow them to practice the participatory democracy that the PT had preached for so long.

Blumenau's Participatory Budgeting enjoyed high participation rates, with nearly 10% of the adult population involved in meetings, which could have meant that the mayor would see a political opportunity to invest heavily in rewarding citizen participation. However, opposition politicians (most notably, the PFL, a conservative, neo-liberal party) captured control over nearly half of the regional districts.⁴⁷ Thus, it was not in the mayor's interest to delegate decision-making authority to a participatory

institution that was partially captured by political opponents and when the mayor's own political base of support was not heavily invested in practicing democracy. As a result the mayor allowed citizens to negotiate just 15% of new capital investment spending, which is just over 1% of the total municipal budget, indicating that the mayor was not interested in taking the political risk necessary to create a vibrant participatory program.⁴⁸ In Blumenau, 38% of the respondents say that they are "always" or "almost always" able to exercise authority, which is the second-lowest response rate among the eight municipalities studied. Only in Rio Claro were delegates more pessimistic about the authority they purportedly exercised (20% say that they are "always" or "almost always" able to exercise authority).

Of course, citizens in Blumenau could have led protests against the government to pressure it to focus more energy, time, and resources on Participatory Budgeting. Blumenau has a very dense civil society, with high levels of participation in its Participatory Budgeting program, but political accommodation is the preferred method of reaching political decisions.⁴⁹ There is no tradition by civil society organizations of using contentious politics. The 1980s and 1990s were not a time renewal in Blumenau's civil society. Furthermore, civil society organizations receive a series of benefits from the government outside of Participatory Budgeting, so they are unwilling to directly confront the government over the program's failings.⁵⁰ Blumenau's Participatory Budgeting failed because the government lacked any substantial interest in promoting it as a new institutional decision-making venue and citizens had little interest in pressuring the government to make it the center of a new governing process.

“No contestation, no delegation,” is a key lesson to be drawn from the experiences of Rio Claro and Blumenau. Without contestation, it is impossible to use this form of participatory democracy as a means to deepen democracy because citizens have few other ways to hold government leaders accountable for their actions. The low levels of mayoral support for the delegation of authority neutered the participatory programs in Rio Claro and Blumenau, creating emasculated participatory democracy. Citizens were unable to use on contentious politics to pressure the government to dedicate more time, energy, and resources to Participatory Budgeting. The overall impact of Participatory Budgeting on civil society organizations was largely negative because the most active leaders invested a considerable amount of time and energy in these processes only to have to government brush aside their efforts. In this case, emasculated participatory programs undermined the credibility of local civil society activists who had mobilized their followers to participate in a state-sanctioned policy-making process in which they were supposed to make meaningful decisions. The local state formally expanded collective decision-making to allow interested citizens to exercise new political rights, but the program did not allow citizens to exercise new rights.

Co-opted Participatory Democracy

The middle right box, *co-opted participatory democracy*, has two cases, São Paulo and Santo André, where PT governments discouraged the use of contentious politics and instead emphasized unity between civil society organizations and party officials. These Participatory Budgeting programs were not used as instruments to transform traditional policy-making processes. Rather, they were used to legitimize the

governments' policies, allow their most active followers to engage in minimal levels of decision-making, and show potential voters that the governments were democratic and participatory.

When Mayor Marta Suplicy (PT) took office in January 2001, the political group around her had very weak links to participatory forms of decision-making. Mayor Suplicy sought to recast the PT's brand in São Paulo by showing that the PT could develop complex, major projects that could alleviate poverty while also attending to the basic needs of the city's large middle class. It was crucial for the PT to re-brand itself because the party was in an intense political struggle to help elect the PT's presidential candidate in 2002 (PT candidate Lula won) and the 2004 re-election campaign of Mayor Marta Suplicy (she lost). With regards to Participatory Budgeting, a small, left wing faction within the PT used its limited political space within the government to ensure that Suplicy would implement it. São Paulo's Participatory Budgeting allowed a minority faction of the PT to try to reach out to São Paulo's organized civil society.

Suplicy's weak support for Participatory Budgeting is demonstrated by the fact that citizens were able to negotiate between 15-30% of new capital investments between 2001-2004.⁵¹ Although this appears to be a fairly robust level, upwards of 70% of this funding was based on projects initiated by the upper echelons of the government.⁵² Quite simply, Participatory Budgeting became an instrument to legitimize the policy initiatives of the government rather than allowing citizens to deliberate over the crafting of public policies. Authority was only partially extended to citizens because the mayor was unwilling to risk her political future on one the delegation of authority to citizens. As

might be expected, just under half of the respondents (49%) say that they are able, “always” or “almost always,” to exercise authority.

São Paulo has a long history of union and social movement organizing, which could have allowed participants to use contentious politics to demand the creation of a robust program.⁵³ Instead of contentious politics, São Paulo’s government was able to co-opt citizens. The government discouraged contentious politics because they were working to establish the necessary political momentum to elect Lula and re-elect Suplicy. To illustrate this point, the arguments of a government official and an elected delegate are telling. In a meeting on October 10, 2003, the Participatory Budgeting administrator, Felix Sanchez, grew increasingly upset as elected delegates leveled a series of complaints based on the mayor’s weak support of Participatory Budgeting. Sanchez sharply rebuked delegates’ criticisms, yelling at the delegates, “no party has ever done more for São Paulo than the PT.” Sanchez berated the delegates who “dared” to criticize the hard work of the PT government. It was a stunning outburst that indicated that contentious politics would not be tolerated.

In addition, civil society activists did not want to embarrass the PT because there were larger political issues at stake, namely the 2002 and 2004 elections, which came up repeatedly during focus groups and informal conversations. Many delegates believed that they shouldn’t take actions that might be detrimental to Mayor Suplicy. As one delegate stated, “Look, we think that Participatory Budgeting is the best thing that has happened to us. We can participate. We are learning how to do this. But, we must re-elect Marta [Mayor Suplicy]. There are many other programs that we would lose if she loses.”⁵⁴ Participants ceded one of their few extra-institutional sources of influence to help the PT

in the electoral arenas, which indicates that government officials and civil society leaders were both calculating that it was not in their interests to expand the authority exercised by citizens within Participatory Budgeting.

The PT governments in São Paulo and Santo André managed Participatory Budgeting programs that became vehicles for PT party officials to work with the most active civil society participants to build the PT and to improve their electoral results. Civil society leaders were discouraged from entering into direct conflict with the government, and government officials were quick to remind the participants how much the government had done for them. Winning elections, rather than participatory decision-making was the central issue of both governments' agendas.

The process of co-optation has obvious negative influences on efforts to deepen the quality of democracy. The most active citizens were drawn out of their community organizations and into political institutions that became an instrument for local governments to pursue their electoral interests. This created a leadership and representative vacuum at neighborhood and community levels. The interests of civil society organizations and citizens became secondary to the electoral interests of the incumbent parties. This has a contradictory effect on the deepening of democracy. Citizens and civil society organizations are able to express their voice in a state-sanctioned public institution, which is a noteworthy advance, but participants' demands were ultimately secondary to the government's electoral interests. This increases the risk that the most active members of civil society will become disenchanted with institutionalized participatory policy-making processes because electoral politics trumped citizens' and civil society organizations' demands.

Informal and Contested Participatory Democracy

The middle-left box, *informal and contested participatory democracy*, includes two municipalities, Recife and Belo Horizonte, which are noteworthy for wide fluctuations in the level of mayoral support for Participatory Budgeting. Recife and Belo Horizonte's programs are best characterized as "informal and contested" processes because there is a high degree of informality in how these governments administer Participatory Budgeting and respond to pressures emanating from civil society. Citizens are able to pressure the government outside of the formal confines of Participatory Budgeting, making effective use of public demonstrations to draw the government's attention to problems in these programs.

In Recife, mayoral support has been as low as in the cases of Blumenau and as high as the level in Porto Alegre. Recife's Participatory Budgeting was initiated in 1994 by Jarbas Vasconcelos (PMDB-a centrist, catch-all party), a charismatic mayor linked to Recife's participatory public civil society organizations.⁵⁵ The program was then overseen by a mayor (1997-2000), from the conservative PFL who formally maintained it due to an electoral alliance with Vasconcelos but gutted the program. In 2001, a PT mayor assumed office and dedicated more resources, time, and energy to the program. The result of having three mayors from three different parties administer Participatory Budgeting was that there were wide fluctuations in how it has been managed.

Mayor Vasconcelos dedicated just 10% of new capital investment spending to Participatory Budgeting, which was roughly 1% of the total municipal budget, although

he did manage to implement 86% of the projects.⁵⁶ Between 1997 and 2000, delegates were able to negotiate 10% of new capital investment spending, but few projects were actually implemented by the disinterested PFL mayor. In 2001, the new PT mayor increased the amount of resources that could be negotiated to nearly 100% of new capital investment spending but also created a new set of rules that made it confusing for participants to clearly understand which projects would be implemented. Just under half of the respondents (46%) say that they are “always” or “almost always” able to exercise authority. The fluctuations in resources available for citizen to negotiate over led to considerable institutional instability because it was not clear, from year to year, to participants and government officials alike, if the participatory process would be valued by the mayoral administration.

Vasconcelos initially used Participatory Budgeting as a means to reward an active base of civil society leaders by creating a rule system in which half of the delegates were appointed by civil society organizations and the other half were directly elected by participants. This was a strategy to reward party loyalists and civil society activists rather than as potential recruitment site for new followers. When PT Mayor João Paulo Lima took office in 2001, he helped to restructure the rules to create new ties to civil society leaders and to reach out to poorly organized communities. João Costa, Participatory Budgeting’s chief administrator, argued that the majority of elected delegates were allied with Jarbas Vasconcelos when the PT took over in 2001. Costa stated, “When we were elected, we wanted to break the associative tradition that induced civil society leaders to be the political operatives of Jarbas [Vasconcelos].”⁵⁷ The newly elected PT government increased the number of delegates to 6,000 from 550 in order to create new bases of

support, which gave the PT government direct contact with citizens, but made it difficult to create clear negotiation and decision-making processes.

In Recife, the use of contentious politics has been an actively used political resource since at least the 1940s; the 1980s were a time of political renewal in Recife as civil society organizations developed new forms of contentious politics. Government officials must address contentious forms of politics because there was a real risk that civil society organizations would withdraw their support for the party-in-government. In the context of Participatory Budgeting, the use of extra-institutional protests pressured governments to privilege the projects of the most active civil society organizations to ensure that there is not widespread dissatisfaction among the most active and organized members of civil society. Yet, the use of contentious politics has a potentially negative effect: When well organized and politically astute civil society organizations engage in contentious politics, governments circumvent Participatory Budgeting rules to respond to these demands, which helps specific groups but undermined efforts to institutionalize implementation processes.

Recife and Belo Horizonte's Participatory Budgeting programs are best conceptualized as informal governmental decision-making processes, through which government officials, citizens, and civil society organizations pursue their interests. When the rules were not working, the governments changed them. When project implementation was slow, the governments took advantage of uncertainty in the process to reward groups that they were aligned with or groups that could potentially embarrass them. The best organized civil society organizations were able and willing to use contentious politics to take advantage of the informality of the process to secure the

implementation of projects selected through Participatory Budgeting. But this meant that groups that followed the rules of the game were less likely to secure the implementation of projects. This, in turns, means that Participatory Budgeting has not dramatically transformed state-society relationships, but has provided new venues for government officials and citizens to negotiate over the distribution of scarce resources.

Fluctuations in mayoral support for the delegation of authority differentiate Recife and Belo Horizonte from the other six cases. Participants had to actively engage in contentious politics to persuade the governments to fulfill their commitments. This creates a central paradox for these two experiences: Contentious politics by a small number of organizations encouraged the government to respond to their demands thereby reinforcing informality into the decision-making process. In Recife and Belo Horizonte, the rules are followed at the first stage—policy selection—but not necessary for the second stage of policy implementation. The effect on the deepening of democracy is therefore paradoxical as citizens are rewarded for engaging in a rule-based decision-making body *and* for moving outside of these rules to secure resources.

Conclusion

In this article I developed a theoretical framework that advances our understanding of the political impacts that the burgeoning numbers of participatory experiences have on efforts to empower citizens, clean up government, and promote social justice, which are part of efforts of deepening the quality of democracies in both new and old democracies.⁵⁸ Participatory Budgeting programs are living examples of *Strong Democracy*, suggesting that there is great potential for these programs to foster the

active participation of citizens in state-sanctioned deliberative and policy-making processes. It is important to reiterate that these forms of *Strong Democracy* are embedded in political processes and state institutions shaped by representative democracy. It is vital that scholars, policymakers, and activists be attuned to the multi-faceted interests of governments, civil society organizations, and citizens within participatory processes.

If and when governments are *unwilling* to delegate real authority to citizens, participatory programs are more likely to be formal shells with little policy or democratic content. Through Participatory Budgeting, participants have the opportunity to make decisions in state-sanctioned venues, which can theoretically raise the profile and prestige of government officials and civil society leaders in local communities. But when local governments are unable to deliver on their promises to implement the selected public works, civil society activists are likely to be discredited within their local communities because they mobilized their followers to participate in a decision-making venue that ultimately produced few tangible benefits. This produces cynicism and disillusionment among civil society's most active participants, which can have negative effects as these activists may choose to exit formal institutionalized processes. The local state induces civil society activists to participate in a state-sanctioned venue based on the promise of sharing authority, but governments' unwillingness to transfer meaningful authority to citizens undermined efforts to expand collective decision and deepen the quality of democracy.

However, it is worth bearing in mind that even when Participatory Budgeting programs produce weak outcomes the introduction of new deliberative processes may leave residual effects (such as public learning, or helping individuals to conceptualize

themselves as rights-bearing citizens) that may be employed by activists in other political arenas as well as during future political struggles.⁵⁹ We lack a clear understanding if gaining access to deliberative processes (voice) is a sufficient reason to continue to promote the adoption of participatory programs in developing world countries; further research is necessary to gauge the impact that failed programs have on citizens, civil society organizations, and democratic processes.

If and when governments are *willing* to delegate authority, whereby participants engage in binding decision-making processes, basic state-society relationships are being transformed, thereby allowing for new types of power to be exercised. Government officials are more willing to delegate authority when their party loyalists demand to practice democracy, as a strategy to reach out to interested constituents, when they seek to brand their local party as democratic and participatory as well as when they have deep links to participatory public civil society organizations. The deepening of democracy through participatory democratic institutions is most likely to occur when government officials' and civil society organizations' have complementary interests that favor the extension of new political and social rights for low-income citizens. This finding should give us considerable pause that the deepening of democracy can be enhanced when participatory projects are implemented in a top-down fashion by governments or principally driven by the energy of civil society activists.

The ability of participants to avoid co-optation is based on their capacity and willingness to use contentious politics inside and outside of Participatory Budgeting. Participants must not present themselves meekly or as clients of the state, but as citizens.⁶⁰ Acting as rights-bearing members of the polity strengthens participatory

programs because participants carve out their own political spaces within the institution rather than having the government dictate outcomes. Citizens must have, at a minimum, the threat of public demonstrations against the government or, in a more active fashion, the willingness to take to the streets to denounce government actions. Governments are more willing to delegate authority and honor their commitments when they face a potentially embarrassing political situation, such as public demonstrations in the run-up to elections. The direct incorporation of citizens into participatory venues as a means to allow citizens to exercise political rights to win social rights is most appropriate when there are pre-existing conditions in civil society that allow citizens to act as rights-bearing members of their community or to use contentious politics to pressure government officials

Of course, Participatory Budgeting programs can and do act as incubator of rights, but when public learning about rights and governance-related issues is the primary goal, we should not expect participatory democracy to flourish in the short term. The deepening of democracy is more likely to occur when participants can already utilize a broad range of practices. If participants are unable to simultaneously engage in cooperation and contentious politics, it becomes far less likely that the quality of democracy will be deepened. Therefore, when participatory processes are implemented in places where few individuals conceptualize themselves as citizens or when there is a limited history of contentious behaviors by civil society activists, it might be better to evaluate the participatory programs' impact over the course of decades rather than during a four or eight year period. For government officials perpetually engaged in electoral campaigns, and for funding agencies with their own set of metrics to evaluate program

impacts, this finding is rather sobering because it suggests that these programs will not, in the short term, successfully expand collective decision-making and deepen the quality of democracy in places with a narrow range of civil society activity.

In conclusion, understanding the outcomes produced by a burgeoning number of participatory institutions requires that we analyze governments' willingness to delegate and civil society organizations' capacity and willingness to publicly contest the policies and actions of the government officials. By focusing on these two factors, we will greatly expand our understanding of the impact that participatory democracy may have in deepening the quality of democracy.

Endnotes

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³¹ For an in-depth analysis of all five factors in eight PB cases, see Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil*.

³² Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil*, see chapter 8 for a more complete explanation.

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³⁸ For a full discussion of all eight municipalities please see Wampler, *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil*.

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