



Does Pa c, a G e a ce Matter



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Brian Wampler
Stephanie L. McNulty



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Executive Summary

On May 9-10, 2011, twenty scholars and practitioners from seven countries gathered at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars to assess what scholars and policymakers have learned after nearly three decades of the widespread adoption of participatory governance institutions. e

can be applied from the urban centers of India and Brazil to the rural highlands of Peru and Indonesia to suburbs of the United States and Germany, our research project will gather data on the impact of participatory governance in five areas: citizen capabilities, civil society publics, state reforms, representative democracy, and public policy outcomes.

This workshop sets out an ambitious agenda that will reshape how scholars and policymakers understand the role that participatory institutions can play in improving our democracies and public life.

In addition to thanking the workshop participants, the authors would like to thank Blair Ruble of the Wilson Center and Dean Melissa Levitt for their support of this project. Their generous support has been vital to our establishing a new research agenda. We also wish to thank Allison Garland for her excellent organizational skills not only as we prepared for the workshop but also as we wrote this current publication.

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Introduction

A significant innovation during democratization's "third wave" has been the widespread incorporation of citizens' voices into complex policymaking processes. Participatory governance brings new actors into incremental decision-making processes; citizens deliberate over and vote on the allocation of public resources and the use of state authority. The adoption of participatory governance is often based on the perception that representative democracy is unable,

on participatory governance, to policy debates on which types of programs can be effectively adopted, and to political discussions on the merits of adopting new institutions.

This paper also represents a call for cautious optimism about this wave of innovation sweeping the world. What makes participatory institutions a rich as well as complex topic for analysis is that the range of potential impact is vast. The changes that are generated can be quite profound because citizens and government officials are interacting with each other in new ways. New forms of political engagement are being generated, new networks and relationships are being forged. Further, participatory institutions can act as generators—they link citizens to each

What is Participatory Governance?

Participatory governance consists of state-sanctioned institutional processes that allow citizens to exercise *voice* and *choice*, which then results in the implementation of public policies that produce some sort of changes in citizens' lives. Citizens are engaged in public venues at a variety of times throughout the year, thus allowing them to be involved in policy formation, selection, and oversight. The inclusion of citizens in state-sanctioned venues means that they are now in constant contact with government officials. These institutions thus generate new forms of interactions among citizens as well as between citizens and government officials.

How does participatory governance differ from more well-known alternatives of direct democracy or deliberative democracy? Direct democracy in the context of the United States has long been associated with state-level recalls and referendums, which allow citizens to express only a binary choice with very little opportunity to engage their voice (Bowler and Donovan 2002); modern forms of direct democracy commonly deployed in the United States were crafted to limit the power of party elites and to increase access of excluded groups. They were not designed to allow people to be involved in ongoing policymaking processes. Deliberative institutions, with *Deliberative Polling* being the most well known, often allow citizens to exercise voice but do not link participants' vote to binding decisions that require government officials to act in specific ways (Fishkin 1991). Participatory governance institutions do not divorce participants from their local political environment; rather, these programs are specifically designed to give interested citizens the right to reshape local policy outcomes.

After more than two decades of experimentation, it has become clear that there are a broad number of experiences that fall under the rubric of participatory governance—from the “Right to Information” campaigns initiated in Northern India to Indonesia’s World Bank-sponsored Community Driven Development

program to Uganda's participatory constitution-making process to Brazil's participatory budgeting and to federally-mandated citizen participation programs in the United States. A common thread among these forums is that citizens and/or civil society organizations (CSOs) are actively engaged in state-sanctioned policymaking arenas in which actual decisions regarding authority and resources are made.

Box 1. **B a**

Participatory budgeting has its roots in Brazil during the country's political opening in the 1980s that led to

State of the Debate

The best documented and most well-known experience of participatory governance is Porto Alegre, Brazil's participatory budget process (see box 1). This case has generated the most research on the impacts associated with participatory governance, ranging from participants' improved sense of efficacy and improved skills in deliberation to an increase in associationalism (Abers 2000; Baiocchi 2005; Wampler 2007). All scholars present at the May workshop agreed that we need to move beyond this paradigmatic case and expand our knowledge regarding a broader number of studies and forms of participatory institutions, as well as continue to document impact in a much more systematic way.

We also know that people are responding to these initiatives. When measured in quantitative terms, the research that exists shows that participation is significant and often increases over time (World Bank 2008, 2010; Wampler and Avritzer 2004; Wampler 2007). This is especially compelling as scholars of participatory institutions have identified several costs of participation, including transportation costs, time commitment, and absence of work during these periods. Many agree that, given these costs, when people *do* participate in these institutions, we should take note (Abers 2000; Van Cott 2008).

After more than two decades of academic research on participatory governance institutions during the "third wave" of democratization, there is now a general consensus in the literature regarding the key explanatory variables that account for why they emerged, how these institutions function, and why they vary in implementation. The principal variables employed by researchers to explain how these institutions function include: 1) the political interests of government officials; 2) the configuration of civil society; 3) institutional rules; 4) resources available; 5) the local party system; and, 6) interactions between executive and legislative branches (Abers 2000; Baiocchi 2005; Wampler 2007; Heller 2000).

Thus, the academic debate has advanced our understanding of what accounts for the variation in how these programs work. The challenge is to determine the degree to which we can assess impact. It is also generally understood, although

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sometimes overlooked in the literature, that these are dynamic and ongoing processes that are rooted in very specific and complex historical processes.

The two-day conference made a conscious effort to push this debate forward, specifically calling for a more systematic way of thinking about *impact*. During the two days of discussion, it became clear that our understanding of any type of impact should be grounded in four areas: 1) the structural context; 2) modalities of adoption; 3) rules, forms, and design; and 4) the nature of participation. The next section discusses them in turn.

The Unfolding Agenda

1. STRUCTURAL CONTEXT OF PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

We should begin our analyses of these institutions by studying their broader environment. Too often they are “ring-fenced,” as Paul Smoke noted, meaning they are studied in isolation from the context into which they are embedded. There are at least three macro-structural areas that must be analyzed: state formation; civil society configuration; and, the economic environment.

State formation

developing countries that have far more robust and effective states than many of their neighbors. Conversely, when local governments are weak, it would be prudent to lower our expectations regarding the outcomes that can be produced.

Thus, researchers and policymakers must be adept at analyzing the configuration of the state and then they must be able use different criteria to assess impact. In some environments, merely holding meetings and explaining state policies to citizens may be a critical first step to engage citizens. This is likely true for post-conflict areas or extremely poor regions. In other environments, a fairly well-functioning state means that they have a much greater capacity to implement public policies, which means in turn that we should have greater expectations for what can be achieved.

The level of state fragmentation must also be considered to better understand participatory governance outcomes. States can experience varying degrees of fragmentation along vertical, horizontal, regional, and longitudinal axes. State authority shifts across vertical lines not just over time but also from agency to agency as well as within regions of the same state. For example, a participatory institution in the state of São Paulo may work fairly well, but a similar institution in a different Brazilian state may founder. Or, if a rival political party wins an election, the same participatory institution may then have fundamentally different impacts.

A final point is that there is often considerable distance between the formal, legal codification of law and the way that laws are used and experienced on a day-to-day basis. A well-known feature of many countries with weak institutions

Economic environment

The economic environment in which participatory governance is formed and implemented influences the internal workings of the participatory institutions and also sets the parameters for the potential impact of the institution. At the core of many participatory institutions is determining how to use scarce public resources to solve public goods provision problems, often in poor or underdeveloped communities. When a large percentage of the population is living in deep poverty, it becomes much more difficult to manage the number of demands. The challenge is compounded by a very low tax base due to the high numbers of people who are unable to contribute to generating revenue streams.

Is there an economic threshold at which participatory governance experiences emerge and/or function better? While most of these experiments are taking place in the developing world, we see many more examples, especially in the areas of participatory budgeting and planning, starting to take hold in Europe, Canada, and the United States. The variety of economic environments that are now hosting and influencing participatory governance around the world suggests an important area for future research.

Are some participatory formats better suited for specific economic contexts? This is a question of paramount concern to policymakers, activists, and reformers but we continue to lack systematic knowledge about which types of institutions are best suited for different economic environments. Given the limited resources available to most countries for institution-building, it is vital to know if there are certain types of programs that are more likely to produce positive effects in specific contexts. For example, there has been considerable world-wide diffusion of participatory budgeting based on successful programs located in Brazil, Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte. However, these cities are not necessarily representative of most urban areas in the developing world. The problem is that we do not know if their unusual characteristics (e.g., wealth, union organizations, social movements, strong leftist parties) would make it difficult to replicate in other cities.

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grams we can generate hypotheses for future research. We would expect, for example, that communities with more capable or stronger governments, with denser and more active civil societies, and with a stronger tax base would be much more able to support participatory governance than those societies with weaker states, less active civil societies, and weaker tax bases. Future research will need to develop additional hypotheses and then test them systematically in order to better understand how these structural factors interact with the various forms of participatory governance.

2. MODALITIES OF ADOPTION

As noted, in many countries, participatory institutions are viewed as potential fixes to illiberal, poorly performing democratic systems (Baiocchi et al 2011; Smith 2009). Workshop participant Archon Fung referred to these participatory experiments as “aspirational,” where reformers aspire to fix the “democratic deficits” that occur in electoral democracies. Participatory mechanisms are valued because they are viewed as a part of the solution to other institutional failures.

In many cases, as Paul Smoke pointed out, participatory institutions are adopted in response to some sort of economic or political crisis, such as civil war, a nationwide corruption scandal, a transition to a democratic regime, or a financial crisis. A “critical juncture” leads CSOs and political elites to redraw democratic and policymaking institutions (Collier and Collier 1991). In Peru, Uganda, Brazil, and Kenya, just to cite four examples, the redrafting of the national constitution included explicit articles and language that either *encouraged* or *mandated* citizen participation in local decision-making venues (Ostrom 1990). Thus, in the middle of a crisis, participatory institutions were adopted as part of broad constitutional reforms.

Embedded in these participatory institutions are political agendas that reflect the designers’ public and private interests. Leaders mold institutions and then new institutions mold the leaders (Putnam 1993). Thus, the rule structure embedded in the new participatory institutions reflects the interests of their designers. For example, the stated objectives of Bolivia’s Popular Participation Law are to: “(i)mprove the quality of life for Bolivian men and women through the just distribution and improved administration of public resources; strengthen the political and economic instruments necessary to perfect democracy; facilitate citizen participation; and guarantee equal opportunities in all levels of representation...”¹ But we must be cognizant, as Kathleen O’Neill (2005) notes, that the national-level designers of the Popular Participation Law produced a process that strengthened municipal governments and weakened potentially rivaling regional governors’ powers. This system empowered new actors and in some ways helped Evo

Box 3. **Pe**

Facing a political crisis after Alberto Fujimori fled the country in disgrace, in 2002 Peru's congress passed a comprehensive decentralization reform that both transferred new powers to subnational governments and formalized civil society participation at the regional and local levels. A goal of the reform, in addition to devolving political power and resources, is to increase civil society's participation at the local level in an effort to strengthen

3. RULES, FORMS, AND DESIGN

When we examine an ever increasing number of participatory institutions, it becomes immediately clear that the rules, procedures, and processes are varied. This leads us to consider an additional aspect of participatory governance

Box 4. **Ge** **a**

In an effort to address the failure of political parties to engage citizens, citizen apathy, and financial pressures, several municipal organizations decided to set up participatory governance experiences. For example, in

vational problems continue to constrain participation. Thus, we should avoid seeing these institutions as a panacea that helps us to solve basic participation problems; rather, we should think of them as improving how citizens participate.

Research on Brazil's participatory budgeting shows that a significant percentage of the population does attend participatory budget meetings, and that the poor are relatively well represented (Abers 2000; Wampler and Avritzer 2004). A World Bank (2010) evaluation of the participatory budget experience in Peru deemed that a majority of participants are members of grassroots organizations that promote a pro-poor social agenda.

Although research from Brazil shows that the poor participate, Abers (2000) suggests that the extremely poor do not. Little reliable data are available, but we suspect that indigenous and other ethnic minority groups are less represented as well. Finally, findings are mixed in terms of gender equality. A World Bank (2008)

support to help citizens organize themselves and work through confusing policymaking processes. For example, when studying co-governance of Brazil's watershed management, Margaret Keck finds that local universities play a key role in providing the technical leadership needed to keep these institutional venues active.

Conversely, citizens may choose not to participate due to low levels of trust. Or citizens may be unable to sustain mobilization due to unfamiliarity with the new process. Other citizens may seek to use their access to government officials to push for clientelistic exchanges. As Rao argued, weak and scattered CSOs may limit participatory governance because government officials and international funding agencies do not have capable partners.

Insights from the workshop focused on areas that structure new forms of participatory governance and affect their potential impact. This brings us to the central questions driving the two-day debate: do participatory institutions matter? If so, how do they matter? What criteria should be employed by scholars and policymakers to assess their overall impact?

NOTE

1. See Law 1551, located at [.e.ac.c.a.th.b](#)

Box 5. Uga da

After decades of increasingly centralized rule under Idi Amin and Milton Obote's dictatorial regimes, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) implemented a decentralization reform aimed at institutionalizing participatory democracy at the local level. Led by President Museveni, the NRM set up a tiered system

Impact

After more than twenty years of increased implementation of these programs during the “third wave” of democratization, we continue to have only a very preliminary understanding of the range and intensity of their effects. This line of inquiry is of vital importance because billions of dollars are being spent on these projects. People are investing their precious time, energy, and resources in the hopes that participatory institutions will improve the quality of ordinary people’s lives.

When thinking about impact, an important place to start is identifying the expectations for what these institutions can accomplish. The hopes of the public are often quite high as new programs are announced, because people assume, quite reasonably, that the implementation of a new program with their participation will lead to improvements. Managing expectations for the outcomes associated with the participatory experiences is crucial. We need to be aware of what expectations exist and what outcomes are reasonable.

We must remember to not hold participatory institutions to a higher standard than we hold representative democratic institutions or non-democratic state reform efforts. Rather, we should recognize that these institutions have the potential to influence a broad range of interactions but they are not some sort of magic bullet that will overcome the limitations of representative democracy. These institutions disrupt the normal, everyday working of the state and representative democracy because they insert citizens directly into state-sanctioned spaces. Citizens are attempting to exercise rights and be involved in ways not possible under authoritarian or exclusionary democratic regimes. These interactive processes generate “new repertoires” of action, not just in civil society but also in how CSOs engage the state.

When assessing impact, there is an inherent normative positioning. After all, we are suggesting that some programs and policies have positive or beneficial outputs whereas other programs have a more limited, or even a negative, impact. We need to carefully think about the meaning of success and failure. How should we handle the fact that many participatory governance programs will produce very

limited results or that they might actually fail? By failure, we mean that they were unable to produce tangible and measurable outputs, over a period of time, which may generate negative political fallout for the programs' advocates. It might be hard for government officials to demonstrate concrete achievements to constituents and funding agencies. However, we need to remember that failure is to be expected and is part of a broader learning process.

An important distinction to be made in terms of impact is that of process and outcome. Some argue that the process itself can lead to important changes. For example, regardless of the outcome, if a person emerges from a participatory forum more interested in politics and confident in his or her opinions, this is an important procedural impact. On the other hand, others might argue that what matters is the outcome as defined by the project's designers, measured by changes in how the government acts. Are better policies and more inclusive democracies emerging as a result of the stress on participation?

Given the complexities and normative minefields inherent in attempting to measure the quality and impact of participatory governance, it is best to start with six key analytical areas:

- 1) Individual-level capabilities
- 2) Civil society publics
- 3) State reform
- 4) Democracy

the empowerment of citizens. As Giovanni Allegretti noted, participatory institu-

added that resources are a necessary component to these programs because states need resources to implement public works.

Representation

2. When attempting to develop “top-down” or “induced” participatory governance programs, never underestimate the importance of government officials’ real commitment (i.e., political will) to these programs. What are the policy and political incentives for government officials to invest their scarce resources and limited authority into these new governing arrangements? A participatory institution that is induced from above will also depend directly on the political will of officials working in lower levels of government to implement and support these institutions on a day-to-day basis.
3. When participatory governance programs emerge from the bottom-up as organic experiences, reformers will need to take into account the issue of sustainability. Generally, these experiences emerge under committed leaders and or political parties. Yet, what happens when these leaders and/or parties are defeated at the polls? One strategy to ensure sustainability is to codify them in law, although there is an enormous problem of the disjuncture between formal law and actual governing practices. Policymakers should think about promoting coalitions of political reformers and civil society activists who share common interests in the mobilization of ordinary citizens. Clear and strong political incentives can motivate government officials to promote vibrant institutions.
4. When designing and analyzing these institutions, always think about the broader environmental factors that affect their implementation. Structural issues such as state formation, the nature of civil society, and the economic environment must be understood so that expectations and rules can be tailored accordingly.
5. Avoid “cutting and pasting” programs. Precisely because each context is unique, it is impossible to import participatory governance design and rules. While we can offer “best guiding principles,” we also need to encourage creativity and ingenuity from all actors involved in the experience.
6. Ensure inclusive institutions. To enhance the legitimacy of participatory institutions, it is important to engage a diverse group of organizations as well as participants. Participation must move beyond the small circles of elite organizations (e.g., parties, NGOs) and historically empowered citizens. Governments must reach out to organizations and citizens who are traditionally marginalized from decision-making venues. Issues such as child-care, the time of the day that meetings are held, and location can increase the likelihood that women, the disabled, and youth will attend events.

7. Educate all involved. To work, all actors involved must know about and

rush to declare it “failed” and do not think about the implications of this experience. As we experiment and innovate, some programs will clearly

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