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Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Local Governance and Citizen Participation: Social Capital Formation and Enabling Policy Environments

Jonathan Fox

N THEORY, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOOD LOCAL governance and citizen participation is clear. In practice, however, it is difficult to sustain generalizations about the causal relationships between the two processes. The "causal arrow" does not simply run straight from "more citizen participation" to "better government." Looking at the process from the other direction, if responsive government makes citizen participation more effective, then one can say that the arrow may go the other way, with good government leading to more citizen involvement. Then there are the important differences between more- and less-institutionalized forms of participation: some protest movements can lead to hypermobilization and paralysis of government, while others encourage greater accountability and provoke the creation of new channels for citizen participation. Yet once achieved, more-institutionalized citizen participation may or may not have any influence over public policy, especially if one looks beyond the most local levels. With so many possible causal relationships, it is useful to reframe the question of the relationship between governance and participation in less open-ended ways. *When* and *how* does citizen participation contribute to good governance? When is citizen participation a cause of more accountability and responsiveness, and when is it an effect?

From an academic point of view, the complexity of the social and institutional processes that drive the construction and diffusion of "good governance" is very inconvenient: these processes don't fit linear social science models of causality. Instead, *reciprocal causality* may be at work: proparticipation forces in civil society encourage more accountable governance, while proaccountability elements within the state encourage more participation. This process of dynamic interaction requires analysis of both the state and society, focusing on how proreform coalitions grow and spread.[1]

This approach rejects zero-sum models of state-society relations, where the stronger the state, the weaker the civil society, and vice versa. Many

would probably agree that effective governance often depends on partnerships between civil societies and states that are *both* strong.[2] At the most general level, societies need to be strong to be able to hold states accountable, while states must be strong to have the capacity to respond to societal demands.

This essay begins with an analysis of two recent studies of the role of participation in explaining local government performance. The first is a well-known academic study of a European case; the second is a cross-national comparison of decentralization and participation in South Asia and West Africa prepared for Britain's official development aid agency. In spite of such dramatically different settings, the two studies agree that effective local governance depends largely on the strength of democratic practices and civil society. I will then present a conceptual discussion of some of the characteristics of public environments that can *enable* effective citizen participation, concluding with some more specific propositions about how to strengthen civil society's capacity to push for more accountable and responsive governments.

Explaining the Impact of Civil Society on Local Governance

The first study focuses precisely on the question of what determines effective decentralized governance. Robert Putnam's widely acclaimed study of Italian decentralization, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, explains the divergent performance of regional governments and economies in terms of the different underlying webs of local associational life in civil society.

In spite of the fact that the book deals with a European experience, it is remarkably relevant to the study of developing countries because of its emphasis on contrasting wealthier versus poorer regions of the same country, complete with pronounced regional-cultural differences. Putnam's cross-regional comparative approach is useful because it goes beyond the usual homogenizing nationwide generalizations to look for potentially generalizable frameworks that can account for sharp *subnational* differences in governance patterns.[3] Explaining subnational variation is key for understanding the prospects for the broadening and deepening of good government practices throughout entire societies, beyond a few potentially isolated islands of success.

First I will briefly summarize Putnam's two main arguments about the causes and effects of "social capital," the stock of horizontal networks and norms of reciprocity within civil society, or what one could call "thick civil society." The concept of social capital includes the societal networks and organizations that sociologists have long urged political scientists to take into account, but it also adds the useful image of "stocks" that can be "accumulated," with positive multiplier effects.

As background, it is important to mention that one of the most remarkable aspects of Putnam's work is that it has become a political phenomenon and has been welcomed across the entire political spectrum, at least in the United States.[4] Conservatives find that Putnam reaffirms the incapacity of the public sector to take constructive action to attack social problems and the centrality of private self-help. From the liberal-left end of the spectrum, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) echo Putnam's findings that dense, horizontal associational links among citizens in civil society contribute directly to both good governance and economic development. In the political center, Putnam supports President Clinton's Americorps program to encourage nonpartisan civic virtue in individual citizens.

Politically, *Making Democracy Work* has turned out to have a fascinating capacity to be all things to all people, but it is not quite obvious why. Are some people misreading it or taking key points out of context? I don't think so. The book has found such a broad echo for at least two reasons. First, decentralization has always been normatively appealing across the ideological spectrum, including both right and left (just as centralization once was). But the book's far-ranging appeal is not just normative, it also has to do with its actual findings and explanations. While some treat it as a seamless analytical package, the book actually combines at least two logically distinct arguments.[5] In other words, one reason that there is something for everyone is that the book weaves together two logically and empirically *different* causal arguments. One turns out to be much more relevant to encouraging the spread of good local governance than the other.

Vicious and Virtuous Circles

Italy's institutional experiment with decentralization is now more than two decades old, and Putnam looks at the varied performance of the diverse regional governments. First he takes these new institutions as an independent variable, exploring their impact on political life and economic development. Then he treats the regional governments as a dependent variable, arguing that institutional performance is determined by historical legacies inherited from medieval times. The link between these two steps is the emphasis on *the social context* within which public institutions operate. Putnam finds that, while the same decentralized governments were created throughout Italy, their prior social context determined how they actually operated. Relative levels of institutional performance were determined not by the actions of political elites, mass protest, reform strategies, or levels of economic development. Instead, Putnam finds that the most powerful explanation of varied performance of regional governance is the prior density of hori-

zontal associational life in society. Putnam proposes the concept of "civicness," meaning civic engagement, political equality, trust, and tolerance.

Putnam's emphasis on civicness draws directly from Tocqueville, stressing that associational life produces public goods in terms of widely shared practices and values, such as solidarity, trust, and public-mindedness. The denser the horizontal networks, whether they are choral societies, rotating credit associations, or soccer clubs, the more likely that citizens will be able to cooperate for mutual benefit more generally—including empowering citizens to hold governments account-able. The concept of social capital, the "stock" of "norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement," helps to explain how citizens over-come the classic textbook obstacles to collective action.

To measure regional differences in civicness, Putnam developed a composite quantitative indicator that includes voter turnout in refer-enda, rates of "preference voting" (an Italian proxy for clientelism), rates of newspaper readership, and density of membership in sports and cultural associations.[6] He sees more overt forms of public organization, such as political parties or trade unions, as mere byproducts of deeper patterns of associational life, such as rates of choral society member-ship. High rates of civicness are found in northern Italy, especially in the best-governed regions, with low rates in Italy's south, which has persis-tently low participation in horizontal associations and which remains dominated by more vertical, patron-client power relations, typified by the Mafia.

Putnam also uses a composite set of quantitative indicators to mea-sure good governance, including service delivery outputs as well as political practices, such as cabinet stability, willingness to compromise, level of polarization among regional political leaders, and bureaucratic responsiveness to citizens. Using persuasive statistical evidence, the regional comparisons both across and within the North and South show that this link between societal density and good governance holds up very well when other key variables are held constant. The argument then goes further, with the arrow running directly from strong society to *both* good government and economic development. The regional corre-lation between high government performance and economic develop-ment is very important because the classic modernization theory view would argue that the causal arrow runs the other way, with economic development leading to good governance. Comparing the late 19th and early 20th centuries for both associational activity and regional economic development, Putnam argues that a regional legacy of civicness from a century ago is *more* correlated with contemporary economic performance than the regional level of economic development a cen-tury ago. That's why his causal arrow runs from civicness to economic development, and not the other way around.[7]

The argument about the impact of civicness on both governance and economic development is convincing (although there is an unresolved puzzle about why fascism emerged in the same Italian provinces that Putnam's data show are the most civic).[8] If social capital has these powerful effects on governance, then the question of how social capital grows and spreads becomes crucial. Here the explanation is historical, going back to the 12th and 13th centuries to compare the different ways in which northern Italian city-states organized themselves in terms of local voluntary corporations versus the way feudal autocrats dominated southern Italy. In this view, northern society started out "horizontal" and participatory while the south was "vertical" and authoritarian.[9]

In this view, stocks of social capital grow as they are used and trust and reciprocity beget more trust and reciprocity, leading to *virtuous circles* of capital accumulation. Similarly, where societies are dominated by vertical power relations, authoritarian clientelism, and widespread mutual mistrust in society, one finds *vicious circles* that prevent the accumulation of social capital.

These circles lead to two *equilibrium* scenarios for high and low civicness, each one caused by their respective historical legacies. Putnam concludes: "As with conventional capital, those who have social capital tend to accumulate more."[10] To sum up then, Putnam makes two logi-cally distinct arguments: social capital as cause of good governance and economic development, and social capital as the *result* of path-depen-dent historical legacies. The great irony is that this analysis shows that strong civil societies lead to good governance but then offers no lessons as to *how* weak civil societies can become strong.

If we step back and frame Putnam's approach in terms of state-soci-ety relations, it is a strictly society-driven explanation. The distribution of power in civil society determines whether virtuous and vicious circles dominate regional governance patterns. The logical corollary—which Putnam acknowledges—is that there is little that policymakers can do to promote more effective and accountable governance, especially at the local level. You either have social capital or you don't, and there is not much that societal action, government, or NGO initiatives can do to change things. If this were true, however, then none of us would be here today.

We know that, in most societies, associational life does not unfold in a vacuum: policymakers can influence the balance of power in civil society in either democratic or authoritarian directions. Specifically, both state and societal actors, such as nongovernmental organizations, can provide positive incentives or negative sanctions for the growth and spread of social capital. There may well be limited room for policymakers' positive contribution to social capital accumulation, but not enough attention has been paid to the potential state role in *undermining* social capital. Many state actors still actively try to dismantle horizontal

associations in society. Because of the often underanalyzed role of fear in constraining participation, especially by the politically weakest citizens, those political actors that try to prevent state-sanctioned repression make an especially important contribution, whether they are competing actors within the state, opposing political parties, or nongovernmental organizations.[11] It is sometimes difficult to assess the outcomes of such conflicts, since democratic opposition to state-sanctioned repression has impact when blood is not shed—which raises the counterfactual problem of just how violent authoritarian elites would have been in the absence of democratic pressures. The main point here, however, is that political conflict over whether states can use violence with impunity is crucial for understanding the conditions in which citizens decide whether and how to participate—even if that conflict unfolds at national levels while citizens are participating at the grass roots.[12]

The Missing Links: Social Energy and the Rule of Law

To follow up on this point that the state can offer positive or negative incentives for collective action and society-building, I'd like to highlight two missing factors *in between* Putnam's historical legacies (which certainly are crucial background factors) and the uneven contemporary development of social capital that is so important for promoting good governance.

The first missing link is the dynamic role of actors and ideas in the process of society-building, and to spell it out I'll draw on Albert Hirschman's Principle of Conservation and Mutation of Social Energy.[13] Like Putnam, he also tried to explain the consolidation of social capital, but he takes a much more actor-oriented, dynamic approach. Like Putnam, his premise is that *most* of the time, failed efforts at collective action lead people to turn away from public life—the low civicness equilibrium. But since Hirschman is more interested in explaining collective action than its absence, he looks for the exceptions. First he stresses the role of external aggression in provoking resistance, which is well known, but then he turns to cases where such unifying factors are not present. After studying a wide range of community development groups in Latin America, he found that many of them "shared one striking characteristic: when we looked into the life histories of the people principally involved, we found that most of them had previously participated in other [usually more 'radical'] experiences of collective action, that had generally not achieved their objective, often because of official repression. It is as though the protagonists' earlier aspiration for social change, their bent for collective action, had not really left them even though the movements in which they had participated may have [aborted or] petered out. Later on, this 'social energy' becomes active again but is likely to take some very different form."[14]

Though the usual response to failed collective action is demobilization, it turns out that those initiatives that people manage to sustain in inhospitable environments are *also* often responses to past failures. For Hirschman, success can come from previous failure, whereas for Putnam only past success explains success. Putnam's approach explains the dominant patterns but not the exceptions. But why does the failure of civic action lead to frustration and powerlessness in some cases, while past social energy is "conserved and mutated" into constructive directions in other cases? Here Hirschman suggests a general approach rather than a clear answer: focus on the dynamics, the ideas, and the texture of the collective action. Look beyond the quantitative indirect indicators at the social capital*ists* themselves, and their capacity to sometimes turn defeat into success. Actors—their ideas, motivations, and strategies—can matter.

The second missing link in Putnam's explanation of social capital formation is the role of the state and the administration of justice. Specifically, the state's willingness and capacity to constrain the use of repression by public or private sector elites determines the context within which people decide to risk collective action and society-building. Respect for freedoms of association, expression, and assembly are necessary conditions for the thickening of civil society (though not sufficient—that's where ideas, action, and social energy come in). In other words, the degree of impunity for human rights violators is crucial for explaining the degree to which social capital can be accumulated.[15]

To summarize this critique, the thickness of civil society does help to explain good governance, but one needs to explain first why some "social capital*ists*," so to speak, are able to overcome historical constraints while most do not, and second, how public institutions that defend democratic rights manage to overcome authoritarian legacies.

Participation and Accountability

Turning from a cross-regional longitudinal study to a cross-national comparison, British researchers Richard Crook and James Manor carried out extensive fieldwork on democratic decentralization in four very different developing countries: India's state of Karnataka, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana. In each of these cases, power was decentralized in the 1980s to elected local or regional councils standing somewhere above the village level. In spite of the vast differences in cases and methodologies, Crook and Manor are interested in the same question as Putnam: what exactly are the linkages between patterns of citizen participation and the institutional performance of decentralized governments? Their indicators of institutional performance are also similar to Putnam's, including service output, responsiveness, and due process dimensions,

though their indicators of participation are more focused on the actual institutions of government, including not only electoral participation but also pressuring activities and direct citizen participation in decentralized governmental bodies. Like Putnam, they are also concerned with explaining change over time, comparing periods before and after the decentralizing reforms. Rather than focus on their vast and impressive empirical findings, however, Crook and Manor's conceptual contribution is most relevant here.

Their analytical framework stresses the links between participation and accountability, first in terms of the relations between the public and their elected representatives to decentralized bodies, and then in terms of the relations between the elected leaders and the rest of the state—local bureaucrats and higher levels of government. The distinction between these two different dimensions of accountability is important, because it situates decentralization in the context of the broader political system.

Crook and Manor find that in all cases participation went up during the decentralization process, but the impact on institutional performance and responsiveness was quite uneven. India's state of Karnataka ranked the highest, with Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, and Ghana all far behind. Their explanation stresses the interaction between participation and other institutional factors, including the level of resources actually devolved to the local councils, the degree of accountability of elected representatives to the electorate, and "the mechanisms of institutional accountability which determine the ability of elected representatives both to influence policy and to hold bureaucrats and executive authorities accountable for implementation." They argue that improved performance of government depends on all of these factors working together: "enhanced popular participation alone does not guarantee good institutional performance."[16] They go further to suggest that the two dimensions of accountability—what they call popular and institutional—are possibly more important than citizen participation for local government performance. They suggest that the accountability of decentralized institutions depends on what they call "a supportive social and political context," echoing Putnam's findings without realizing it. They conclude by warning that the conditions that encouraged successful citizen participation and performance of decentralized institutions in the state of Karnataka are not easy to reproduce, including relatively low levels of landlessness, a solidly democratic two-party system, a well-established free press, a bureaucracy already subordinated to elected leaders, and the rule of law. As a result, Crook and Manor conclude with a series of warnings that many—especially in international development agencies—bring unrealistic expectations to the process of decentralization. They coincide with Putnam as they warn about the danger of a "vicious circle of poor government performance inspiring cynicism which then dooms subsequent attempts to improve the

performance of new local government institutions."[17]

Crook and Manor's argument that institutional accountability is more important for performance than participation is quite plausible. Indeed, accountability is the logical link between participation and government performance. This causal arrow goes from citizen action and pressure to public sector response and greater accountability. But this chain does not suggest that participation is the *only* possible factor leading to greater accountability. As Samuel Paul's work has shown, a variety of citizen "exit" options can be effective as well, especially if used in conjunction with "voice."[18] This is clear conceptually, but in practice, where does institutional accountability come from? If the actual impact of citizen action is highly uneven, how can we generalize about when participation leads to more government accountability? Is institutional accountability simply an inherited historical legacy, like Putnam's social capital?

Unfortunately political science has shed remarkably little conceptual light on the broad question of how public institutions become more accountable. The rich conceptual literature on transitions to democracy does not focus specifically on accountability. Political democracy may be necessary for public accountability, but the recent experiences of Italy, Japan, and the United States suggest that it is far from sufficient.[19]

Enabling Environments for Social Capital Accumulation

The two studies reviewed here reinforce the message from the broader literature on decentralization and participation—it is very difficult, from the top down, to encourage genuine participation where social capital is weak. But that does not mean that there is nothing that policymakers can do. Indeed, many analysts concur that the "political opportunity structure" is crucial for explaining participation. As Tarrow put it, collective action emerges largely in response to "changes in opportunities that lower the costs of collective action, reveal potential allies and show where elites and authorities are vulnerable."[20] This approach recognizes that participation involves costs, and often risks as well, and both individuals and groups weigh these costs, explicitly or implicitly, against their perceived impact. In other words, all but the most ideologically committed potential citizen-participants continually ask themselves and each other: Why bother? What difference will it make?

The political opportunity structure approach suggests that policymakers can create public environments that *facilitate* citizen participation. The focus here is on the institutional *context* for participation because of the mixed results of many government efforts to induce community participation more directly. Governmental claims to promote "direct democracy" from above often lead to broad mobilization but rather shallow participation, as in the case of Sandinista Nicaragua's revolutionary

corporatism.[21] Direct government initiatives to induce citizen participation can also lead to new forms of electoral clientelism, as in the case of Mexico's National Solidarity Program.[22] Even where civil society is more autonomous from the state and democratic governments are in power, there have been few successful experiences of sustained, direct citizen participation in the policy process (beyond the normal electoral calendar). Brazil has pursued Latin America's most ambitious, successful, and widespread initiatives in broadening citizen participation. The channels created for direct democracy often fell short of high expectations, but many had significant results in improving specific services, such as health and transportation. Perhaps Brazil's most notable innovation in local governance is the democratization of the municipal budget process in several large cities, most notably Porto Alegre.[23]

Many would agree that institutional channels for direct community participation are most likely to work best where citizens are already well organized. The problem is that there is no guarantee that spillover effects will benefit the majority who usually remain unorganized.[24] Moreover, if successful channels for direct participation are usually limited to areas where citizens are already well organized, then the determining factor is prior societal organization rather than new institutional structures. This brings us back to the importance of broadening and deepening social capital. How, then, can governance innovations broaden citizen involvement without falling into the classic trap of promoting mobilization without participation?

In contrast to direct governmental efforts to promote participation, "enabling public environments" change the broader context within which citizens decide to participate, and could encourage the formation of more autonomous, long-lasting citizens' organizations. In theory, enabling environments lower the costs of collective action while increasing the payoffs. In practice, this involves two different kinds of policy initiatives.

Shore up the Democratic Floor

Governments can reduce important disincentives for participation by ensuring that access to fundamental civil and political rights extends to the entire population. Exclusionary political practices persist in many societies with elected governments, where authoritarian clientelism remains entrenched, freedom of expression remains limited, and justice is administered unfairly or not at all. This problem is not a mere legacy of past authoritarian rule and the inherited citizen passivity associated with it—the issue here is the persistence of authoritarian enclaves where people are punished for attempting to exercise their democratic rights. The result is that members of underrepresented and vulnerable groups— poor people, women, and ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities— often fear retribution for engaging in peaceful collective action. In re-

gimes where authoritarian enclaves persist, it should not be surprising that representative democratic processes often produce rather unrepresentative outcomes. Once the rule of law effectively covers the entire citizenry, however, the costs of collective action are reduced. In other words, the challenge is to fix the holes in the "democratic floor."

Open More Democratic Doors

Governments can bolster the positive incentives for participation by encouraging both the reality and the perception that citizen action can actually influence important governmental decisions. For example, policy transparency at the local level is helpful, but transparency of the entire policy process is a crucial precondition for fully informed citizen participation. Even so, transparency is still not sufficient for accountability. Abuses of power are often quite transparent, yet citizens remain unable to hold officials accountable. Transparent "democratic windows" are key, but the "doors" to the decisionmaking process must be open as well; otherwise citizens will remain on the outside looking in. Official channels for local participation are often limited to the implementation of decisions that are already made at higher levels. Citizens would have more incentive to participate if governments opened more democratic doors to the rooms where the major decisions are made, as in the case of Brazil's participatory municipal budget process.[25]

Propositions for Discussion

The concept of enabling environments for the accumulation of social capital includes many of the concrete institutional innovations that are on this meeting's agenda. Here are two broad propositions for discussion. On the civil society side: Local citizen organizations will be limited to local influence unless they can "scale up" into more powerful horizontal networks. On the state side: Direct citizen participation will be encouraged if representative democracy is made more representative and decentralization is further decentralized. In principle, these broad propositions are mutually reinforcing, and they suggest the following interlocking reform strategies for nongovernmental organizations and policymakers:

On the Civil Society Side

Vertical and Horizontal Information Access
Makes Participation More Meaningful
Public transparency is widely accepted in principle, but the simple release of official data about government performance is not sufficient. Informed participation is greatly facilitated by watchdog institutions in

civil society that can both interpret government data and generate independent evaluations of public performance. Because of the specialized nature of these tasks, independent research institutions are needed to bolster the media's role (such as the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities in the United States).[26] In addition to information about the state, flowing vertically from the top down, informed participation also involves horizontal exchanges within society. Without forums for the horizontal exchange of experiences and opinions, local groups will never know whether their concerns are strictly local or whether they are widely shared.[27]

Horizontal Networking among Local Associations Encourages Social Capital Accumulation

Local citizen participation does not automatically scale up to generate larger organizations with greater capacity to encourage public accountability. Gatherings that bring together diverse local groups are not only important for imparting "facts," such as how to understand the budget process or how to assess public sector performance. Exchanges among local leaders from different neighborhoods or villages can also contribute to the process of overcoming barriers to the perception of shared problems. If local organizations are able to come together across territorial, ethnic, and other boundaries, they can discover where they share potential allies and opponents elsewhere in the political system. This kind of horizontal exchange is especially important for articulating and defending the interests of social, cultural, or ethnic groups that may be underrepresented in public life.

Independent nongovernmental organizations can play key roles as relatively disinterested facilitators, contributing to the accumulation of social capital by bringing together local citizen leaders for training and exchanges, creating the opportunity to "agree to disagree" about some issues while finding common ground on others.

Linking Information Access to Horizontal Exchanges Encourages Scaling Up

If diverse local organizations gain increased access to information about the policy process, as well as knowledge about the views and experiences of other local organizations, they have the opportunity to make informed decisions about whether and how to coordinate strategies and tactics to increase citizen bargaining power. Without independent access to their counterparts, local organizations must rely on external allies, such as political parties, that may or may not share their priorities. The accumulation of social capital involving the "scaling up" of citizen organizations is necessary to go beyond neighborhood influence to have citywide clout, or to go beyond the village to influence an entire district or region. Scaled-up representative organizations are especially important in areas where respect for basic freedoms is not guaranteed.

Sector-Specific Citizen Participation Is Necessary but Not Sufficient; Representative Political Parties Are Also Fundamental

When is the whole of citizen participation greater than the sum of the parts? In other words, the sum total of many sectoral and local neighborhood-specific movements may or may not add up to a policy process that serves the common interest, as Paul Singer pointed out in his essay. First, only a minority of citizens may be vocal and organized, leaving the unorganized underrepresented in the resource allocation process. Second, even among those organized, how do they come together to debate the difficult trade-offs between health, education, water, and other services, not to mention between different neighborhoods? There is no single, obvious "citizen interest" waiting to be articulated. This is where the role of elected executive authorities is crucial—balancing of contending interests while attempting to provide broadly accessible public goods. Indeed, the textbook role of political parties is precisely to articulate distinct sectoral and territorial interests under the banner of a broad vision of how to govern. Yet few political parties manage to overcome the ever-present threat of the "iron law of oligarchy," the tendency to lose touch with the base and to serve the interests of the party apparatus. Even political parties committed to democratizing local government include diverse approaches, as the experience of Brazil's Workers' Party (PT) shows. For example, the PT mayor of Porto Alegre showed both what is possible in terms of institutionalizing citizen participation in the municipal budgeting process and, by comparison, how most of his colleagues did much less in this area. The most general point about citizens' movements and political parties is that local movements need parties to actually govern, while even "good government" parties need citizens' movements to hold them accountable.

Where Representative Organizations Have Scaled Up, the Threat of Mobilization Can Sometimes Be Sufficient to Encourage Accountable Governance

One of the major challenges facing advocates of citizen participation is that it poses often significant costs on participants. Because of these costs, levels of participation will necessarily ebb and flow, which underscores the importance of institutionalizing accountability mechanisms, so that they do not depend on sustained, high levels of citizen mobilization. In this context, if enabling environments make it relatively easy for citizens to participate when they deem it important, and if citizens have access to adequate information about how they are being governed, then those in power face the permanent threat of citizen action. While accountability-building often requires political conflict between ruling politicians and civic or partisan opposition groups, such cycles of protest can create a set of expectations that can encourage better government. For ruling politicians, fear of conflict can sometimes be as important as conflict itself. This form of potential citizen power is

inherently difficult to measure, in part because it may not be public when the threat of protest ends up vetoing "not-such-good-government" actions. The measurement problems do not make this form of indirect veto power any less important, however, in the process of encouraging good government.

On the State Side

The Equitable Administration of Justice May Require
the Intervention of Central State Power
Decentralization often encourages responsiveness to local concerns, but in areas dominated by local elites, decentralized administration of justice may reinforce authoritarian domination rather than accountability. For "law and order" to become a force for democracy rather than authoritarian rule, central state power may need to intervene to end the official use of coercion with impunity (as in the Southern United States in the 1960s). This may involve the active extension of culturally appropriate legal advocacy services to underrepresented groups.

Exclusionary Electoral Procedures Are Often
neither Obvious nor Easy to Eradicate
Exclusionary electoral practices are not limited to classic kinds of fraud, such as ballot stuffing. Many electoral systems fail to guarantee fully free and fair ballot choices to all their citizens. The "formalities" of formal democracy are often most important to the politically weakest citizens because they are the ones most vulnerable to reprisals for "voting the wrong way." For example, ballot secrecy may not be guaranteed for all citizens, reinforcing the power of clientelistic vote-buyers. Basic electoral information may not be available in minority languages. If the voting process involves writing candidates' names, then less-than-literate citizens are at a major disadvantage. The registration process may fail to include the entire electorate, as in the United States. While the specific problems vary greatly, the general point is that electoral authorities require significant resources and political authority to make fair voting fully accessible, and they often need the support of local civic watchdog groups to monitor persistent threats to the democratic process.

Representative Processes Shape Representation Outcomes
While all representative democracies presumably produce some version of majority rule, in practice they are organized according to many different institutional arrangements. Some are presidential while others are parliamentary—at local as well as national levels (for example, a strong mayor versus a city council–led system). Some systems promote strong central authorities with "first-past-the-post" elections, while others induce coalition formation with proportional representation. Some sys-

tems encourage strong parties by limiting voting options while others encourage more diversity by allowing ticket-splitting. Some systems limit ballot access only to political parties with national organizations, while others are more open to local, more decentralized political organizations. District voting versus at-large elections can also make a major difference, especially for geographically concentrated minorities. Then there is the question of who decides how to draw electoral district boundaries.

Political scientists agree that these many different systems of representation are not neutral with respect to outcomes. In other words, institutional formulas shape who gets represented and to what degree, in ways that depend on the special characteristics of each political system. However, the biases inherent in different systems of representation are often not obvious or known to most citizens. Independent research organizations can therefore contribute to making political systems more transparent by documenting the ways in which different arrangements over- or underrepresent different groups and by exploring the advantages and disadvantages of alternative systems.

Decentralization Can Often Be Further Decentralized
Many processes of decentralization stop at levels of government that are actually far above where most citizens are represented. For example, the devolution of power to large cities does not necessarily encourage the empowerment of local neighborhood councils.[28] In rural areas, the strengthening of municipal governments may well centralize power in small town centers, to the disadvantage of outlying rural areas (as in Chiapas, Mexico).[29] Formally, the lowest level of government is often the municipality or district, but it may not be the lowest level of government in practice, since local communities often have their own informal webs of representation.[30] Even where decentralization devolves some degree of decisionmaking to submunicipal levels, such as local neighborhoods (in urban areas) and villages (in rural areas), local power is usually limited to the most local issues. This often confines even autonomous and democratically organized local communities to deciding how to implement decisions already made at higher levels. Where community representatives are able to participate in city- or districtwide decisionmaking, the opportunity to influence larger issues may well encourage direct participation back at the local level.

For decentralization to shift power over larger issues of city- or districtwide importance, organs of local representation need mechanisms for horizontal coalition-building. Otherwise they will lack bargaining power vis-à-vis the local executive authorities. Indeed, this is what district-based city or regional councils are supposed to do: represent communities in a local legislature as a counterweight to local executive power. Nation-states often include a wide range of different patterns of these

local-level vertical and horizontal power relations, whether formal or informal. In this context, independent research organizations can contribute a great deal by documenting these patchwork quilts of different submunicipal systems of governance.

These are just a few of the kinds of reform strategies that can encourage the creation of a policy environment that favors greater citizen participation and accountability.

Concluding Remarks

No discussion of good government would be complete without acknowledging the political dynamics of reform. The capacity of state-society partnerships to carry out reform strategies successfully depends as much on political conflict and cooperation as on institutional formulas. Successful reform efforts often require coalition-building. By definition, coalition-building involves bringing together actors with different ideas and interests around a common goal. This means that one needs to take the political motivations of diverse actors into account and think about why they might favor citizen participation, the rule of law, or more accountable governance.

For the ideologically committed "small d" democrats, citizen participation is inherently good, whether or not it contributes to good governance. The very term "citizen" suggests the *right* to participate in public decisionmaking. For others, participation is a means rather than an end in itself. For the more technocratically minded, local participation is usually limited to implementing decisions rather than making them and is worthwhile only if it contributes directly to effective governance without risking overt conflict. Most practical politicians, across the ideological spectrum, are similarly instrumental about participation. They tend to prefer controlled mobilization, since active participation can be unpredictable and institutionalized accountability is not always convenient for those in power. Elected leaders tend to see participation as useful only insofar as it strengthens their supporters and weakens their competitors. Seen from below, many citizen participants themselves are similarly instrumental, investing their time and energy only when tangible results are likely, while for others the right to participate is a matter of principle worth risking their lives. The difference between means and ends helps to understand the opponents of reform as well. Some enemies of accountability will resist out of principle, while others find it convenient to concede to broad-based reform pressures—though they may retreat only to fight again another day.

Reform strategies need to take into account the diverse motivations of both potential allies and opponents. In the abstract these differences can seem insurmountable, especially in an electorally competitive or

ideologically polarized context. But when faced with a broad-based, practical, and innovative reform alternative, however, a shared goal can overcome political differences. Successful proparticipation efforts may well require coalitions between those who see participation as a useful means and those who fight for the principle as an end in itself. Each can provide important resources. The ideologically committed offer consistency, keeping the fight going when prospects for success seem bleak, while pragmatic coalition partners broaden the base, providing the political capital needed to offset entrenched opponents of citizen participation. Recognizing the plurality of proaccountability actors is the first step toward building unity among them—a diversity well represented in this workshop.

Notes

1. For theoretical background, see Fox, *The Politics of Food in Mexico*, chapter 2.

2. Even the World Bank, after a decade of promoting the rollback of the public sector, now speaks of "rebuilding the state." See Burki and Edwards, p. 1.

3. The subnational political differences within many Latin American countries are so great that one can speak of subnational regimes, where authoritarian and democratic regions coexist under elected national governments. See Fox, "The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship," and Fox, "Latin America's Emerging Local Politics."

4. Putnam is also working on the decline of social capital in the United States. See his "Bowling Alone."

5. Even Morlino's thoughtful review presents the book's argument as a single hypothesis: "Differences in the present-day institutional performance of the various regions of Italy can be traced to differences in patterns of civic engagement that extend back to the early Middle Ages." See "Italy's Civic Divide," p. 173.

6. See Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, pp. 91–120.

7. Note that Morlino raises questions about the reliability of some of Putnam's historical indicators, since two of the five were limited to the 1919–21 period, a phase of unusually high mobilization that led to fascism. See "Italy's Civic Divide," pp. 175–76.

8. Indeed, social capital shows its "dark side" when dense horizontal associations use coercion to prevent other groups from sharing power in society (as in the classic case of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States). Like other kinds of capital, social capital can be destroyed as well as accumulated, as in the case of civil wars.

9. The study then jumps to the late 19th and early 20th century, when associational life flowered in northern Italy. Cooperatives and peasant leagues spread, inspired by socialist and liberal catholic ideas. According to Putnam's indicators, these historical patterns turn out to correlate with variations in regional levels of associational density in the late 20th century. Fellow Italy specialist Tarrow points out, however, that north-

ern Italy experienced a significant period of authoritarian rule between the 12th and 19th centuries, complicating Putnam's historical argument (see "Bowling Alone"). Tarrow suggests a less predetermined interpretation, highlighting the role of political actors, ideas, and conflict rather than immutable historical trends.

10. At times Putnam puts this path-dependent argument less strongly, when he says "history smooths some paths and closes others off." But his conceptual framework offers no other explanation of the emergence and accumulation of social capital, so if one asks how regions of low civicness might try to build up their social capital, the only answer is that there is nothing they can do. The result is an intriguing conflict between Putnam's normative views and his analytic framework. He is a strong advocate of the dramatically positive effects of social capital, yet his framework has no lessons to offer those concerned with encouraging social capital formation. As he concludes: "Building social capital will not be easy, but it is the key to making democracy work."

11. To take an extreme case, the Guatemalan military has long been concerned about the prodemocratic spillover effects of apparently apolitical horizontal local organizations. For four decades the Guatemalan military has treated any kind of horizontal associational activity as potentially prodemocratic and therefore subversive. In other words, they implicitly understood Putnam's argument long before he made it. This meant that if someone organized a bible study group or a tree-planting committee or a chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous in the early 1970s, ten years later it was likely that person had been murdered by the army, along with a hundred thousand other civic-minded civilians. It is therefore difficult to explain the accumulation of social capital without taking into account whether or not repression can be used with impunity to destroy it.

12. For example, even less-than-democratic national electoral competition can sometimes create political space for local citizen participation (as in the cases of the Philippines and El Salvador in the middle and late 1980s).

13. See Hirschman.

14. Ibid., pp. 42–43.

15. For an explanation of the political construction of access to the right to associational autonomy, see Fox, "The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship."

16. See Crook and Manor, p. 214.

17. Ibid., p. 216.

18. See Paul.

19. The reference here is to the recent revelations of decades of entrenched corruption at the highest levels of the Italian and Japanese political systems, as well as the lack of accountability revealed by the outcomes of the Iran-Contra and savings and loan bailout scandals in the United States.

20. See Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, p. 18.

21. See, for example, Quandt, as well as regular coverage in *Envío* in the 1980s.

22. See the discussion of "semi-clientelism" in Fox, "The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship," and Cornelius, Craig, and Fox.

23. On Brazil's Popular Councils, see the special issues of the journal *Proposta*, no. 45, August 1990, and no. 54, August 1992 (published by FASE); Da Motta Filho; Doimo; IBASE; Jacobi; Villas-Boas and Telles; and Villas-Boas. In Spanish-speaking South America, Peru's Villa El Salvador is an unusual success story of direct citizen participation in urban government (see Burt and Espejo). For English-language overviews of Latin America's institutional experiments in local government, see Reilly, Schonwalder, and the forthcoming July–August 1995 issue of *NACLA Report on the Americas*.

24. This appears to be the result of the Brazilian experience so far and is also consistent with a study of the most participatory urban governance structures in the United States (see Berry, Portney, and Thomson).

25. Even in the Brazilian case, as Carlos Morales (POLIS) asked in the workshop, why do relatively few citizens choose to participate even when the democratic doors are open. Morales pointed out that Brazil's municipalities only control about 15 percent of the national budget and, even in those cities that have tried to democratize the budgeting process, only about 5–6 percent of those budgets are open to public input.

26. For a useful discussion of the democratization of policy expertise, see Fischer.

27. This involves, for example, broadening linguistic access to the media (more systematic translation of national and international materials into local languages), as well as technical access (e.g., broadening public linkages to computer communications, converting radios in local languages from shortwave to AM, increasing transmitting power, and extending the social and geographic distribution of printed materials).

28. Even where laws allow cities to institutionalize direct neighborhood participation, they often do not carry it out. As Andrzej Porawski pointed out in the case of Poland, only the city of Poznan implemented the neighborhood representation law successfully.

29. This turned out to be a key issue in Mexico's Municipal Solidarity Funds, a community development block grant program designed to benefit the rural poor. One key factor that determined whether or not the rural poor actually benefited was the balance of power between the municipal centers and the outlying villages and hamlets. The program largely worked in the state of Oaxaca because the outlying areas had longstanding autonomous representation vis-à-vis the municipal centers. The program largely failed to benefit the rural poor in the similarly poor and indigenous neighboring state of Chiapas because the mayors reproduced "presidentialist" centralization on the local level, denying autonomous representation to the outlying areas. See Fox and Aranda.

30. The complex interface between formal and informal structures of authority and representation is especially important in Africa, as Dele Olowu pointed out.

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