

Part I

The Rise of Participatory Governance

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Introduction: The Promise of Participation

In the late 20th century, “participation” became a buzzword across the social sciences. Participation appeared in almost everyone’s list of solutions to almost everyone’s list of social ailments. Where democracy was procedural and insufficiently inclusive, participation could make democracy embrace new voices. Where citizens were too cynical, participation could help them appreciate government efforts or obtain tools to change the status quo. Where markets excluded small producers and buyers, expanding participation in resource mobilization (through microcredit) and enterprise formation (through cooperatives) could ameliorate market failures. Where development projects ignored local conditions and needs, more participation could create ownership among project beneficiaries, and, thus, greater sustainability. And if governance was too top-down, participation offered the promise of expanding the channels of communication between state officials and citizens.¹

In this book, we posit that civic participation can be stimulated and can even produce “spillover effects”—changes in behavior that produce greater civic and political engagement beyond the participatory arena itself (Barber 1984; Fox 1996; Mansbridge 1999; Pateman 1970). Our evidence comes from quantitative and qualitative research of community-managed schools (CMS) in Honduras and Guatemala. CMS are public primary schools in which parents, rather than the state or private owners, take on most management and administrative duties. These schools serve as examples of participatory governance (PG), defined as government-fostered initiatives that grant ordinary citizens decision-making authority through local forums (Fung and Wright 2003, 23–25).

Studies of participatory initiatives have offered mixed results. Baiocchi (2005), Avritzer (2002), and Souza (2001) find positive outcomes in Brazilian participatory budgeting programs (political learning,

deliberation, oversight and mobilization, and reduced elite capture), and Heller et al. (2007) report similar outcomes in the People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning in Kerala, India (democratic ethos, more associational life). Other studies, however, are less encouraging. For example, Nylen (2002) concludes that participatory budgeting in Belo Horizonte and Betim, Brazil, has less of an impact on the civic and political behavior of previously disengaged participants, suggesting that certain participatory initiatives fail to shift dynamics of participation and intra-community power relationships. Wampler (2004) outlines several cases where participatory budgeting forums become dysfunctional and participants maintain little more than a consultative role, as well as instances of conflict between participatory arenas and other political institutions (Nylen 2003). Even Souza (2001) and Heller et al. (2007) find that participatory programs can fall prey to patronage politics and co-optation by local officials.

Many studies of PG, however, are based on a small sample of cases, statistical analysis of data with limited geographical scope, or anecdotal evidence. Our study marks an important departure, as it draws from data that cover all of rural Honduras and the entire Guatemalan region of Alta Verapaz, which had the most CMS (roughly 20 percent) in the country. To our knowledge, no comparable national and cross-country survey of PG initiatives has ever been done before.

Furthermore, whereas many surveys of PG focus on urban and semi-urban regions, ours explicitly targets remote communities. Both rural Honduras and Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, are among the poorest areas in each country, and arguably among the poorest in the Americas. They are prime examples of "brown areas" (O'Donnell 1993): geographic zones that lack basic services and ready access to state institutions. Political scientists have long noted that brown areas suffer from democratic deficits, but few have explored whether these areas—particularly rural ones—can benefit from PG.

Our research indicates that, once initiated, participation in a CMS council can fortify democracy through increased civic participation. Not only do the majority of CMS participants acquire the skills necessary to participate in other activities, but a non-trivial minority go on to apply these skills to other civic organizations. This suggests that the supply of participation can be stimulated, even where one least expects it.

What are community-managed schools?

CMS programs represent one of the most radical educational experiments in Latin America since the 1990s. By the mid-2000s, these

programs covered roughly 8 percent and 20 percent, respectively, of Honduras and Guatemala's rural primary education system (PREAL 2005; PREAL and CIEN 2008; World Bank 2009).

CMS programs are distinctive, in that they delegate significant management and administrative responsibilities to parents. Parents hire, monitor, authorize payment for, and can even fire teachers. While opponents—such as teachers' unions—denounce these schools as a form of privatization, CMS programs are, in fact, funded and owned by the state. The key difference is that school councils, rather than state officials, act as management.

In Guatemala and Honduras, CMS programs emerged as a direct response to serious gaps in access to education in rural areas. In Honduras and Guatemala in the late 1990s, 25 percent and 40 percent of rural school-age children, respectively, lacked primary education access (PREAL 2002, 2003). To address these deficits, state officials in both countries, with support from the World Bank and assistance from international consultants, established their own CMS programs—respectively, PROHECO (*Programa Hondureño de Educación Comunitaria*, Honduran Community Education Program) and PRONADE (*Programa Nacional de Autogestión para el Desarrollo Educativo*, National Program of Educational Self-Management).

PROHECO and PRONADE were also created with a second goal in mind: to fortify democracy through participation. In Guatemala, PRONADE proponents argued that parent management would expand parent action and consciousness outside the school (Castañeda and Méndez 1998). The Minister of Education during PRONADE's initial expansion explained it this way: “the second reason that we became excited to define PRONADE was that—still concluding a war, with a people that had been subjected for life—we wanted them to have a voice, even if it was just in the education of their children.”² In Honduras, CMS proponents similarly argued that PROHECO also created “state-civil society” synergy to improve development outcomes and strengthen rural civil society (Reyes and Meza 2000). One CMS proponent, John Durston (1999), argued that as parent councils became solidified, communities would gain formal organizations with constructive relationships with state actors, strengthening civil society. Durston argued that community leaders could then come together to form regional alliances, ultimately “strengthening democracy” (*ibid.* 15–17, 24).

While most scholarship on CMS focuses on the first goal—the programs' impact on education—we focus instead on the second and examine the question of whether these programs can stimulate larger civic participation.

Rural Guatemala and Honduras as brown areas

Both Honduras and Guatemala are examples of low-quality democracies. Despite leaving behind authoritarian regimes, citizens still confront pervasive (albeit different) authoritarian and illiberal legacies that undermine civil society organizations (Honduras) and exclude indigenous communities from decision-making forums (Guatemala). Pervasive impunity and rampant crime thrive due to the weakness of the rule of law, and access to justice and state institutions remains a privilege of the few. Clientelism and corruption are also widespread, contributing to unprecedented numbers of citizens who report dissatisfaction with politics and distrust of democratic institutions, and who no longer see the benefits of democracy over authoritarian rule (Azpuru 2008; Coleman and Argueta 2008). Even before Honduras's 2009 coup, scholars warned that the country had reached a dangerous political precipice (Coleman and Argueta 2008; Ruhl 2010; Seligson and Booth 2010). The picture was similar in Guatemala, leading observers to note that these two democracies are arguably more fragile than any in Latin America (Azpuru 2008; Seligson and Booth 2010).

Within these countries, remote rural areas constitute democracy's most obvious brown areas (O'Donnell 1993). And, though intra-community trust and informal cooperation often remain high in these communities, formal organizational life lags far behind (Anderson 1994; PNUD 2006). These rural sites, then, present one of the greatest challenges to the goal of inclusive liberal democracy. They present analysts and policy-makers with a critical problem: how to develop a rural civil society capable of expressing citizens' needs and demands and engaging effectively with political institutions.

Our choice of rural Honduras and Guatemala was deliberate; we chose to study the promise of participation precisely where one would least expect it—in some of the brownest areas on the planet. In Honduras, our sample covers virtually the entire territory. In Guatemala, a larger country, only one region was selected, mostly for funding reasons. We chose Alta Verapaz, one of the poorest and most indigenous departments in Guatemala. To our knowledge, our study is the broadest study on participatory governance in a non-urban setting in the Americas.

A political capabilities approach

Taking critiques of participation and the existing literature on civil society into consideration, this book follows Glyn Williams (2004a) and

identifies political capabilities—rather than social capital—as the optimal gauge of PG initiatives’ potential for improving the quality of democracy. Williams, following Whitehead and Gray-Molina (2003), argues that participatory initiatives must center on the ability of citizens to advocate for their rights and needs. PG initiatives should therefore be judged by whether they help expand poor people’s ability to advance their interests politically, which Booth and Richard (2012), using the term “political capital,” define as the ability to “influence or constrain the political system in general—the state, incumbents in government, social groups, and citizens as such” (2012, 38).

Adopting this political capabilities approach, Williams (2004a, 568) poses three questions for evaluating PG initiatives:

1. To what extent do participatory development programs contribute to processes of political learning among the poor?
2. To what degree do participatory programs reshape political networks?
3. And lastly, how do participatory programs affect existing patterns of political representation, including changes to the language of political claims and competition?

These questions allow us to focus on the combination of skills, experience, and knowledge (political learning); the ways in which people engage and come together (political networks); and how leaders and communities represent themselves or others (political representation). This scaled framework enables us to more subtly evaluate an initiative’s impact on political capabilities.

This study applies Williams’ framework to analyze CMS programs in Honduras and Guatemala, conceiving of increases in political capabilities as a specific type of spillover effect. Throughout this text, spillovers refer to those changes in participants’ behavior consistent with this framework. Such an analysis must also identify a context-specific set of outcomes associated with learning, networks, and patterns of representation, a task undertaken in subsequent chapters.

This approach offers the advantage of seeing state/civil society relations both from the “top-down” and the “bottom-up.” A political capabilities analysis can trace how national political context affects dynamics of community participation (top-down) and also highlight how experiences within communities can change how individuals and communities engage with each other, other communities, and the state (bottom-up). This book offers both of these perspectives in its exploration of PROHECO and PRONADE.

To undertake this type of political capabilities analysis, this study follows a mixed-methods strategy, combining analysis of elite interviews and program records, survey data, and community case studies. Elite interviews and reviewing records enable an analysis of the macro-level dynamics of CMS programs, including the origins, aims, and political obstacles at the national level. Surveys of over 2,000 parents in PROHECO ($n = 1252$) schools across the country and PRONADE schools ($n = 819$) in Alta Verapaz offer a quantitative analysis of the incidence of individual-level changes on a broad scale. We combine this with qualitative analysis based on eight community case studies (four in each country). Case studies permit the examination of variables absent from the surveys, as well as the community-level effects of CMS programs. They also allow for a qualitative analysis of the meanings of these changes within and between communities. Including elite interviews, the study uses data from 320 (mostly one-on-one) interviews, conducted over ten months from 2007 to 2010. Additional methods, including community-mapping exercises and group discussions, were also employed. Further detail on the methods used for this study, including case selection and control groups, is provided in Chapter 2.

Conclusion

In summary, this book demonstrates how, through one type of PG initiative, states can stimulate participation and produce changes in individuals' civic and political behaviors. Our findings indicate that participation holds significant promise, even in rural areas of extreme poverty. At the same time, we recognize that the progression from changes in individual behavior to rural community engagement is not without its challenges. Legacies of state and party dominance over civil society, radical exclusion of rural citizens, and the lack of technical support from state programs can all act as roadblocks to civic participation. Recognizing that the autonomy and scope of action of new participants is limited, our optimism regarding the promise of participation therefore remains cautious.