

PARADOXES OF DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP IN BRAZIL

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- Participatory Institutions in Democratic Brazil.** By Leonardo Avritzer. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009. Pp. xiv + 205. \$49.95 cloth. \$24.95 paper.
- A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro.** By Brodwyn Fischer. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008. Pp. xiv + 464. \$65.00 cloth. \$24.95 paper.
- Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil.** By James Holston. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008. Pp. xvii + 396. \$27.95 paper.
- Democratic Brazil Revisited.** Edited by Peter R. Kingstone and Timothy J. Power. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008. Pp. xiv + 342. \$65.00 cloth. \$26.95 paper.
- Judging Policy: Courts and Policy Reform in Democratic Brazil.** By Matthew M. Taylor. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008. Pp. xv + 227. \$55.00 cloth.
- Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Contestation, Cooperation, and Accountability.** By Brian Wampler. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007. Pp. xvi + 312. \$56.95 cloth. \$28.00 paper.

Democracy in Brazil has now endured for more than a quarter century. It is solid and mature, with several presidential successions and no extraconstitutional threats to the regime; suffrage is universal; and political institutions function as well as they ever have. Yet nettlesome questions about the quality of Brazil's democracy remain. Brazil has long been known as a "democracy with adjectives," in no small part because of its elitist qualities, most notably, the inequality of economic advantage, life's chances, and access to law and justice.¹ Even today, as Brazil leads South America's democracies on the world stage in international politics and trade negotiations, and as economic stability and growth have brought greater social progress in the past fifteen years than at any time in Brazil's history, its democracy engenders deep ambivalence among scholars and citizens, principally because of the apparent inability to escape the weighty legacy of unequal citizenship.

1. David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (1997): 430–451.

Brazil is not unique in its inability to guarantee T. H. Marshall's famous trilogy of civil, political, and social rights.² Demands for social rights have almost everywhere far outstripped the responses of governments to deliver them. Less commonly, in Brazil, not only has the long road to securing the rights of citizenship traveled by every modern democracy been blocked and even plagued by reversals, with repeated lapses into authoritarianism and restricted democracies violating the elemental political rights of citizenship, but also it has been marked by a high degree of unevenness. Income inequality, which long defined voting rights and workplace protection, still differentiates legal rights, property rights, and even personal security. Citizenship has expanded, but not for everyone—at least not the same citizenship. Even in a continent with a legacy of grotesque inequality, perhaps in no country have rights been so unequally distributed, conceded in such an out-of-sequence patchwork, and so contested in the daily struggles of ordinary people and in large-scale and sustained mobilization as in Brazil.

The debate about the performance of Brazil's democracy, and even whether citizenship is deepening or remains deeply flawed, has heretofore stalled, as Peter R. Kingstone and Timothy J. Power rightly point out, because answers have all too often depended on who presents them and what the presenters are looking at: rising growth rates and institutional performance or limited progressive reform and degenerating public security. More subtly, improving outputs for citizens buoy some scholars, whereas others decry the continuing poverty of citizenship, which makes any gains for the poor only tenuous at best. The debate also hinges on where one looks—at the halls of Congress and the Supreme Court or at the neighborhood councils, police precincts, and land courts that constitute spaces of civic and political engagement, where everyday battles to extend and deepen rights and citizenship are fought, as Alberto Carlos Almeida pithily puts it, "on the 364 days a year when citizens are not voters" (Kingstone and Power, 233).

An impressive collection of recent books opens a remarkable window onto Brazil's march along multiple avenues toward a genuinely democratic society and polity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Running through these disparate works is a set of common threads: Brazilian democracy is plagued by a series of paradoxes deeply embedded in a past that it cannot escape; because of and despite its vastness, arcane land laws make Brazil "a land without people, and a people without land" (Holston, 112); citizenship advances for some but erodes for others; democracy brings greater equality, yet also more incivility and violence. These books nevertheless point to important sources of change and, if we invert Brodwyn Fischer's powerful observation that, after more than two decades of military rule, "citizenship became a vessel for every imaginable hope, and its lack became the explanation for every ill" (36), we may yet recognize that, if citizenship in Brazil is a recurring problem, a glaring manifestation of an imperfect and incomplete democracy, it is also the equally permanent hope of a solution. Collectively, the works under review move us forward by showing the

2. T. H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 1–85.

ways in which the transformation of citizenship and politics is challenging Brazil's paradoxical democracy.

RIGHTS AND CITIZENSHIP IN DEMOCRATIC BRAZIL: THE STATE OF THE DEBATE

Kingstone and Power begin *Democratic Brazil Revisited*, an impressive reexamination of the state of Brazilian democracy, with the same question that sparked their *Democratic Brazil* ten years earlier: is Brazilian democracy still standing, or standing still?³ Although the present work includes a broader array of topics than the earlier work, as well as strong contributions by leading Brazilian and North American scholars, they conclude that "the passage of time has not pushed Brazilian democracy clearly in one direction or another" (3).

The volume dutifully praises the accomplishments of Brazil's democracy and democratic regime these past ten years. But the editors are circumspect, even pessimistic, about democracy in Brazil at precisely the moment of what is arguably its greatest triumph, mainly because the election of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) did not rescue Brazil from a legacy of corruption, inequality, and violence. This perspective reflects a general scholarly malaise. After decades of dysfunction, Brazil has achieved fiscal discipline, well-functioning legislative institutions, and disciplined political parties (superbly demonstrated by Fabiano Santos and Márcio Grijó Vilarouca), but these nontrivial accomplishments do not impress PT militants and social movements, who feel betrayed (as the chapters by Wendy Hunter and Kathryn Hochstetler show). To the contrary, not only has mass democracy and even a government of the left not solved such intractable problems as unemployment and crumbling infrastructure; they have brought new ones.

Among the most glaring problems recounted in the volume are rampant crime and lawless violence. Perpetrated on a grand scale by drug trafficking and criminal gangs, crime and violence have claimed as many as forty-five thousand lives per year. Despite increasing public pressure, the Brazilian state has been unable to institute effective policies to prevent and investigate crime, as Anthony Pereira's fine chapter contends, because of the fragmentation of public security enforcement among federal units, civil and military police, and police forces and prosecutors, as well as the politicization and privatization of the agencies and actors charged with its provision. Security forces, moreover, become part of the problem when—buoyed by the public perception (which they helped create) that human rights organizations care more about the rights of bandits than about decent, hardworking people (and the lives of police officers)—police kill suspects rather than taking them into custody. In 2006, police in Rio de Janeiro killed 1,063 persons, three times the number killed in that year by all police forces in the United States. Not surprisingly, as the chapter by Janice Perlman shows, citizens in the same favelas that she made famous forty years ago distrust the police today

3. Peter R. Kingstone and Timothy J. Power, eds., *Democratic Brazil: Actors, Institutions, and Processes* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

nearly as much as the drug lords.⁴ The crisis of public security is a challenge not merely to policy but also to democracy itself. As James Holston observes, even as the urban poor have democratized urban space and created unprecedented access to its resources, urban areas have become uncivil. All too often, “dangerous” public space has been abandoned, residences have been fortified, the poor have been criminalized, support for police violence has grown, and the public sphere undeniably broadened by novel popular participation has also eroded. Democracy has been debilitated, with Brazilians experiencing a democratic citizenship that “seems simultaneously to erode as it expands” and “a democracy at times capable and at other times tragically incapable of protecting the citizen’s body and producing a just society” (271).

In Brazil’s paradoxical democracy, each step forward seems to imply another one backward, thus creating a trap for scholars who look past one another at different issues and places. To escape this trap, we must unite the disparate threads of our scholarly conversation. We begin by identifying the sources of what Holston calls Brazil’s “differentiated citizenship,” and the efforts of ordinary Brazilians to overcome it.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF BRAZIL’S PARADOXICAL DEMOCRACY

The uneven application of the rights of citizenship in Brazil was deeply embedded in a centuries-long tradition that survived the collapse of empire and the construction of modern cities, labor systems, and formally democratic institutions. Two extraordinary books, Fischer’s *A Poverty of Rights* and Holston’s *Insurgent Citizenship*, look to Brazil’s imperial and early republican past to trace the roots of the systematic exclusion of the urban poor in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, respectively, from land, justice, and citizenship. They also chart the decades-long struggles of the poor for security of home ownership, work, and rights. As the opening passages of *Insurgent Citizenship* remind us, citizenship everywhere is defined by formulations of equality and inequality, as even most democracies experience conflict over the terms of national membership and the distribution of rights. Holston’s careful reading of arcane legislative debates from colonial and early republican history and his sharply told story of social exclusion set forth the particular terms of Brazil’s differentiated citizenship, in which, paradoxically, everyone was a citizen but not all citizenship was equal. Although republican Brazil differentiated among citizens from the outset, it was in the mid-twentieth century that the tumor of unequal citizenship metastasized from its rural core to the new urban centers of a modernizing society.

A Poverty of Rights chronicles the multiple ways in which the poor of Rio de Janeiro were systematically denied the fruits of citizenship and how the foundations

4. Janice Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). One of the most important books ever on the urban poor in Latin America, this study exploded the myth that the residents of favelas and illegal subdivisions are marginals, bandits, and rogues and demonstrated they were just ordinary, hardworking people who served critical functions in support of the urban economy.

of an unequal and exclusionary system laid in the mid-twentieth century served to constrain the future extension of rights and contributed to the reproduction of inequality. Fischer's work, organized around the themes of urban planning, the workplace, police stations and courts, and land battles, weaves a seamless narrative about the impoverishment of rights for the heterogeneous urban poor.

Fischer's narrative begins with the surreal policies of Rio's urban planners in the early twentieth century. These put laws, building codes, and sanitary measures on the books that were impossible to enforce, thereby making favelas, subdivisions, and inner-city tenements that housed poor migrants illegal from the get-go and creating a "legal and social paradox that would shape the city for decades to come" (30). During the era of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1954), not only did building codes bring more of the same, but a set of new, radical, and wide-ranging laws on labor, social security, and social welfare expanded political and social rights for those who fit certain categories of employment and even family status. At the same time, civil rights eroded for those who did not. The new protections applied to workers who had a signed work card, a passport to citizenship that conferred access to health care and pensions, as well as legal protection. Cards insulated their bearers from arbitrary arrest, certified the accused as upright, and could be used as a bond when all else failed. With them, conviction was more difficult; without them, the accused was certain to face jail time, as evidenced by Fischer's meticulous data set of hundreds of cases drawn from two samples: the first of criminal trials in Rio from the late 1920s through the early 1940s, and the second of trials from the 1950s and early 1960s. For rural workers, domestic workers, and any worker in the informal sector—all of whom had no hope of ever obtaining work cards—the absence of a card meant exclusion from citizenship.

This uneven regime of citizenship carried profound and enduring political consequences. As defined by Vargas-era laws, citizenship was not a birthright, or even a reward for patriotism, hard work, or familial duty, but a privilege won through narrowly circumscribed forms of labor, morality, and bureaucratic agility. Discretionary citizenship afforded petty politicians the opportunity to turn rights that should have been universal into a source of patronage and personalistic political bargains. At the top of the pyramid was Vargas, the "father of the poor" (92, 98) and their defender against capitalists and landlords. The barely literate made thousands of desperate, poignant appeals to Vargas (most of them hand delivered to the presidential palace) to stop scheduled evictions and even the razing of entire favelas.

A Poverty of Rights is a masterpiece that revises our received wisdom about Brazil's "regulated" twentieth-century citizenship.⁵ True enough, vulnerability and weak access to legality, rather than political values, prejudice, and discrimination, were the source of the poverty of rights, but legal norms built around the system of occupational stratification were themselves violated. Moreover, real advances, not just in social rights but also in civil and political rights, and the tenacious participation of the poorest Cariocas in Rio's "land wars" of the late 1940s and

5. Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, *Cidadania e justiça: A política social na ordem Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Campus, 1979).

1950s, belie the notion that the precocious state concession of (albeit selectively distributed) social rights truncated civil and political rights and resulted in a passive and powerless citizenry.⁶

By calling attention to the fact that, in the twentieth century, “nearly every advance in the rule of law was accompanied by—and often depended to some degree on—the persistence of extralegal realms” (310), Fischer also illuminates the source of the present despair that Brazil will ever be a republic of laws. Rights were impoverished because of the creation and tolerance of informal spheres, without which Carioca society could not function. The Morro of Santo Antônio was razed in 1954, but favelas mushroomed nonetheless as municipal officials realized that they could not afford to house the poor. Politicians rapidly learned that the ability to distribute services and legal tolerance (and the selective nonenforcement) of municipal laws and codes as favors, rather than entitlements, could be a source of enormous political power. For the poor, informality was the prerequisite of citizenship, as well as its antithesis.

Fischer’s narrative leaves us with two questions: how did popular mobilization reemerge decades after the military snuffed it out, and how might the poor break the web of informality to gain equal citizenship? Holston’s eagerly awaited book gives insight into both issues, drawing on two decades of ethnographic research in two São Paulo neighborhoods (Jardim das Carmélias and Lar Nacional), where he interviewed residents and their clumsy and clever lawyers, attended meetings, and even researched residents’ land titles and accompanied them to court.

Unlike political scientists accustomed to think about democratization as a quintessentially political process that advances political rights, Holston emphasizes its spatial dimension, looking in particular at urbanization. He explains that Brazil’s transformation in just two decades into an urban nation from a land in which two-thirds of the population was illiterate, disenfranchised, and lived in rural isolation and poverty was the most important factor in creating the possibility of citizenship. But the route to citizenship was not automatic, and what would otherwise be a familiar story of socioeconomic modernization—in which the poor scratch out a living in sprawling cities, acquire literacy, and even abandon deference—becomes a searing read in Holston’s deft hands. He recounts the ways in which ordinary men and women, shut out of the formal economy, the legal system, and even the right to shelter, “autoconstructed” homes and communities on the city’s periphery in places thrown away by the privileged (as chronicled in stark black-and-white photographs taken by the author and by Teresa Caldeira two decades earlier), and then mastered the details of a contorted legal system to defend their homes and communities from land swindlers, the city elite, and local government. Through this struggle, a new form of citizenship, an “insurgent citizenship,” was defined and created.

Insurgent citizenship paradoxically has its origins in the authoritarian curtailment of rights that existed under Vargas. When the military harshly repressed the privileges and institutions of citizenship, principally the labor unions of the “of-

6. José Murilo de Carvalho, *Cidadania no Brasil: O longo caminho* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2001).

ficial" working class, it unwittingly relocated civic association to neighborhoods, where the urban poor were free to invent alternatives. Yet even as residents of these areas (who were apparently more deeply influenced by the process of drafting the 1988 constitution than by the result itself) incorporated new understandings of text-based rights into their new brand of citizenship, they did not discard the old models of rights-as-privilege and contributor rights. Rather, they built on the notion that they could earn citizenship through work, home building, and community service, and they clung to the centuries-old Brazilian idea that the law should compensate inequalities of privilege by legalizing more privilege. In an ironic twist, the poor became advocates of Rui Barbosa's maxim: "Justice consists in treating the equal equally and the unequal unequally according to the measure of their inequality" (Holston, 258).

In emphasizing the paradoxes of Brazil's idea of citizenship, Holston instructs us not only that laws were not enforced—opening up public administration and justice to political patronage, as Fischer notes—but also that they were unevenly applied as a matter of principle because legal codes and jurisprudence built on the notion of difference. Like Fischer, Holston inexorably points us to the conclusion that the weak foundation of the rule of law in Brazil, and its undemocratic nature, vitiated the universality of citizenship.⁷

LAW AND CITIZENSHIP IN DEMOCRATIC BRAZIL

Democratization has undoubtedly strengthened the rule of law in Brazil. Courts have gained more independence, and legal professionals have worked assiduously to ensure that the promises of the 1988 democratic constitution are upheld. At the same time, the legal system still promises more than it can deliver, access to it remains uneven, and deep contradictions have surfaced between the courts as guarantors of the rule of law and as checks on initiatives by the democratic majority.

Matthew Taylor's fine book *Judging Policy* focuses on the court's role in making policy or what many have referred to as the judicialization of politics, the tendency of opponents to use the judiciary to achieve their policy objectives. The Brazilian constitution gives certain social and political actors with proper legal standing—political parties, professional unions, the Ministério Público, federations and associations, state governments, and the Organization of Brazilian Lawyers (Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil, OAB)—the right to challenge the constitutionality of pending and approved legislation through the Ação Direta de Inconstitucionalidade (ADIN). The use of this instrument has been impressive: ADINs have been brought by litigants to contest the privatization of the state mining behemoth, the Rio Doce Valley Mining Company; limits on compensation for land expropriated

7. See also Guillermo O'Donnell, "Polyarchies and the (Un)Rule of Law in Latin America: A Partial Conclusion," in *The Rule of Law and the Underprivileged in Latin America*, edited by Juan Méndez, Guillermo O'Donnell, and Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 303–337.

under the Agrarian Reform Law; and the taxation of civil service pensions. In all, the Brazilian Supreme Court debated the constitutionality of more than one thousand federal laws in fifteen years and altered more than two hundred on constitutional grounds.

The migration of policy disputes to the judicial branch has had the effect of preserving some rights while impinging on others. On one hand, the judiciary has become a resource for checking potential abuses of power by the executive (and legislature), and hence an important institution of horizontal accountability. On the other hand, ADINs have allowed powerful actors who would bear concentrated costs to slow and even veto reforms produced by a democratic process that forged supermajorities of elected representatives after a broad public evaluation of the costs and benefits of policy alternatives.

Why this should be problematic is not self-evident if courts are merely enforcing and holding the government accountable to the basic charter. In Brazil, the judicialization of politics is worrisome because only wealthy and legally privileged litigants can take their fight to the high courts, and as Taylor demonstrates formally and empirically, these key actors (of which the OAB is the most successful) can move policy toward their preferred outcomes. Ordinary citizens have recourse only to lower courts, where dockets are so backlogged that they are condemned to a lengthy appeals process, there is little hope of timely action, and justice is slow. Lower courts have allowed policy to stall because they accept as many as half a million cases against the federal government every year, many with little legal foundation but instead intended to advertise a party's message to the electorate. Thus, the problem is not that courts "are one of the strongest forces operating in favor of the 1988 Constitution's 'demos-constraining' effects" (163)—courts in all liberal democracies appropriately demonstrate an antimajoritarian bias to protect the rights of political minorities—but that in Brazil this effect "often operates in ways that privilege specific organized policy actors and political groups," and "effectual legal remedies, including . . . against public policy . . . are beyond the reach of most citizens and unequally distributed among policy actors" (164). In such an institutional environment, even access to political representatives with standing does not offer much promise of broadening citizen representation, and the most brilliant arbitration of constitutional conflicts will not deepen democracy.

Taylor thus joins Fischer and Holston in intimating that every advance of Brazilian democracy cruelly generates its own paradox. If strengthening the rule of law has not allowed Brazilian democracy to escape the paradoxes of its birth defects, then what can? The next set of works turn to politics.

THE POLITICS OF EQUALIZING CITIZENSHIP: PARTICIPATORY EXPERIMENTS IN DEMOCRATIC BRAZIL

Disappointed with the quality of citizenship during decades of representative democracy in Brazil, activists and scholars seized on the hope that participatory democracy would foster better public policy in the service of a more just society, as well as deepen a merely formal democracy and infuse it with meaning. In

short, they hoped that participatory democracy would create citizens able to assert their rights and exercise their responsibilities. Brian Wampler's *Participatory Budgeting in Brazil* explains why participatory institutions do and do not work, and Leonardo Avritzer's *Participatory Institutions in Democratic Brazil* thoughtfully tells us how they arise and can be a force for equalizing material and political inequalities.

During the period of Brazil's democratization (1974–1988), there was an increased propensity in major cities to associate; there were more associations, as well as new associations for claiming material benefits and addressing broad nonmaterial claims. Antiauthoritarian mobilization propelled the emergence of many of these voluntary associations, but as Avritzer tells us, "the ones that grew the most were those that thrust the poor into politics" (28). Poor peoples organized themselves to claim access to public goods after the state intervened into their lives by removing slums from the central areas of cities and encouraging a huge migration from the countryside to cities, without providing adequate health care, education, or infrastructure for the poor.

The most effective avenue for these associations to claim resources—and in the process, to advance democratization—was to connect neighborhood associations to political society in the spaces of local government. The most famous was *orçamento participativo* (participatory budgeting, or PB), which originated as a PT-sponsored experiment in the city of Porto Alegre in 1989. The idea behind participatory budgeting was simple: to allocate a share of public resources to districts, taking into account the size of their populations, the status of specific public services, and local priorities defined directly by citizens and not by the political criteria of a notoriously clientelistic political system. Toward that end, hundreds of thousands of citizens would meet in a series of open public assemblies before the start of each legislative budget cycle to establish priorities for public spending. Citizens would then elect delegates to debate and vote on the priorities, negotiate the budget with state bureaucrats, and monitor the previous year's spending and continuing investment priorities. The attraction of PB lay in its promise of better-informed public policy, a transparent budgeting process in a country in which politicians all too often governed through backroom deals, and accountability. These experiments in citizen partnership with elected officials soon spread across Brazil; they were extolled by international agencies such as the World Bank and UN Habitat, and they were emulated around the world. Students of democracy made even bolder claims: that deliberation in neighborhood- and citywide assemblies encourages popular participation (particularly among the poor), strengthens civil society, and ultimately deepens democracy by serving as a crucible of citizenship.

Initial assessments of participatory budgeting experiments were very promising. In Porto Alegre, where they began, both policy and the quality of democracy appeared to improve. When local officials made 20 percent of the public budget available for publicly determined investment in 1994 (up from 2 percent in 1989), running water and sewerage were quickly extended to 98 percent of all city residences. A genuine process of deliberation, in which residents were able to situate

arguments driven by self-interest in a broader debate about state responsibility and the public good, served as a means not only to signal policy priorities to government officials but also to influence fellow citizens. Wampler's exhaustive research—which draws on original surveys of hundreds of members, dozens of interviews with the principal actors, and participant observation in many meetings in eight large Brazilian cities—confirms that in Porto Alegre (as well as in Ipatinga, a steel town in Minas Gerais) the poor do participate in impressive numbers in the process of deciding priorities, and as a result, they become better informed about public policy; municipalities do dedicate a substantial portion of the budget to participatory budgeting projects; and the latter projects are in fact funded. But he also shows convincingly that participatory budgeting has not necessarily worked as well elsewhere. At best, in other cities, it has been used as a signaling device when, after determining its priorities, a city administration sets aside funds for investment and major capital projects, and then lets communities decide where to put the streetlights. At worst, it has also been twisted into an electoral asset for incumbent parties.

It would stand to reason that a strong civil society should be some sort of prerequisite for effective PB, but it is not enough to explain why some experiments with PB were so successful and others far less so. For Wampler, participatory budgeting operates best (1) when there is a density of civil society organizations willing to resort to contention and accommodation in confronting municipal governments; (2) when the rules governing PB are propitious; (3) when mayors support the PB process and (4) enjoy a comfortable majority in the municipal council; and (5) when municipalities have sufficient resources to distribute. Where mayors did not support participatory budgeting and civil society organizations were weak or unwilling to engage in contention, as was the case in the municipalities of Blumenau (Santa Catarina) and Rio Claro (São Paulo), the effectiveness of PB was limited. In São Paulo and Santo André, civil society, though well organized, was co-opted by municipal governments that, forced to wrangle with opposition majorities (and often to trade resources that might have been allocated by public debate for political support), subordinated the interests of PB councils to greater party goals.

Does this mean that the promise of participation and participatory democracy has been exaggerated? Yes and no. If success is measured by the lofty, perhaps impossibly high standard of securing rights via the policy process and developing citizenship by empowering participants, then shady mayors who either circumvent participatory budget institutions to broker deals with recalcitrant municipal councilors or upend citizen priorities to produce tangible projects for their party's next electoral campaign do undermine the potential of participatory democracy. But if we judge local experiments in participation by the more limited standard of texturing the process of political representation, providing citizens information about public policies, and expanding the avenues through which they can influence them, we need not despair if all the stars do not align.

In fact, Avritzer's wonderful book shows that other participatory institutions can work. If PB or, more generically, bottom-up designs require a strong civil so-

ciety and a political society supportive of the devolution of some real authority to citizens to be successful, this is not so with power-sharing designs, such as municipal health councils, and ratification designs, a category into which city master plans fall. More specifically, Avritzer shows, where civil society is strong but political society is not eager to implement participatory policies, health councils can produce better deliberative and distributional effects than bottom-up designs, as seen in the experience of São Paulo. Moreover, where civil society is weak, as in Salvador da Bahia, ratification designs, though far from ideal, grant citizens an effective veto with which to prevent backroom deals that hand urban land over to private developers. These institutional designs evolved from the purposes and actions of citizen groups themselves. Urban housing movements, for example, sensing that they could not win much more, accepted the limited role of being able to veto land usage that would be difficult to undo later. Avritzer wisely counsels us to let go of the bias that designs must be perfectly democratic from the outset, to be patient, and to watch for the evolution of these participatory institutions.

If Avritzer joins Holston and others in showing that the origins of insurgent citizenship lie precisely in the inadequacy of the Brazilian state and the inequality of Brazilian citizenship, he does not succumb to the temptation of inevitability, of *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Where other authors see the promise of civil society associations dashed by a corrupt political class, Avritzer sees changes in civil society matched by changes in political society, as exemplified by the emergence of the Partido dos Trabalhadores. Here, the point is not whether the PT has distributed land or engaged in stimulus spending but that it united three new currents—new unionism, the progressive Catholic grass roots, and new social movements—that in turn created its identity as a modern party that broke with “the tradition of elitist democracy,” and enabled it to introduce new participatory institutions (48). From this perspective, each advance of citizenship is not accompanied by a new paradoxical limit; rather, participatory institutions hold out the possibility of leveling the playing field and making democracy work.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND PARADOXICAL DEMOCRACY

The first conclusion we may draw from the works reviewed here is that the state of the debate about Brazil’s democracy should not revolve around the pace of change—after all, poor Brazilians have waited centuries for a nonparadoxical democracy and citizenship. Rather, our debate should be about the nature of change. And in this, there is cause for optimism. Even as violence is ubiquitous, social and racial disadvantage remain deeply ingrained, and successive governments focus not on the demands of the social movements that helped put them in office but on the money supply, there is evidence of political change that might make the fundamental right of citizenship to choose a government more meaningful.

Along with Avritzer’s hopeful message of a denser civil society engaged in new forms of political participation with significant distributive and also deliberative effects, several chapters in *Democratic Brazil Revisited* uncover other promising signs. Drawing on voter surveys in two cities, Juiz de Fora and Caxias do

Sul, Andy Baker, Barry Ames, and Lucio R. Rennó show us that Brazilian voters are more knowledgeable, sophisticated, and issue oriented today than they were thirty-five years ago,⁸ when local races, whose outcomes were dependent on the provision of patronage and clientelism, determined national elections, a phenomenon that Ames once called the “reverse coattails effect.”⁹ This transformation has perhaps been abetted by advances in education, which, Almeida argues based on ample evidence from surveys, are undermining Brazil’s elitist political culture (Kingstone and Power, 238–248). Given the expansion of education in the past fifteen years, time may, for once, be genuinely on the side of Brazilian democracy. At least as consequential is the redesign of systems to deliver education and other social services. Marcus André Melo’s heartening news is not merely that the outputs of social policy have dramatically improved—there are more children in school than ever before and Brazil’s astronomical Gini coefficient of inequality is declining—but also that conditional cash assistance and other programs that made these gains possible have eroded political clientelism and the distribution of rights-as-privilege. In a very real sense, these policy reforms of the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira and PT governments were quintessentially political reforms that disjoined the social rights of citizenship in Brazil from urban residence, employment in the formal economy, and even political connections, privilege, and patronage and have made them increasingly universal.

By so clearly identifying the paradoxes of Brazilian democracy, the books under review instruct us (at times against their will) that despite and because of its uncertainty and messiness, politics can intervene in the *longue durée*. The struggle for rights everywhere is a fundamentally political one that depends on the distribution of power and the ability of the poor to use politics to overcome disadvantage, and Brazil is no exception. If we look deeply at the burst of democratic innovation at the grass roots, at citizens fighting swindlers and landlords in court and asserting themselves in meetings about public policy—as well as the advances made by citizens in the realm of political society, such as gaining confidence in their ability to choose leaders and endeavoring to make democracy cleaner, more representative, and ultimately accountable—then we may conclude that Brazil is gaining on its past. If some politicians benefited from informality and the selective enforcement of rights, then why can’t others, squaring off against them in competitive elections, stand to gain by overthrowing this shady system? Even if citizens are voters only one day every four years, elections have consequences. Political rights can be used to conquer civil rights as well as social rights, and Brazil’s out-of-sequence parade of rights need not assume the quality of a Greek tragedy. One day, in the not-so-distant future, Brazil may yet achieve a democracy without paradoxes.

8. Brazilian political scientists studied voters in these same cities in 1974. See Fabio Wanderley Reis, ed., *Os partidos e o regime: A lógica do processo eleitoral brasileiro* (São Paulo: Símbolo, 1978).

9. Barry Ames, *The Deadlock of Democracy in Brazil* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001). Also see Flavio Eduardo Silveira, *A decisão do voto no Brasil* (Porto Alegre: Editora Universitária da PUCRS, 1998).