



The Politics of Local Participatory Democracy in Latin America: Institutions, Actors, and Interactions

Françoise Montambeault

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Participatory democracy innovations aimed at bringing citizens back into local governance processes are now at the core of the international democratic development agenda. Municipalities around the world have adopted local participatory mechanisms of various types in the last two decades, including participatory budgeting, the flagship Brazilian program, and participatory planning, as it is the case in several Mexican municipalities. Yet, institutionalized participatory mechanisms have had mixed results in practice at the municipal level. So why and how does success vary? This book sets out to answer that question.

Defining democratic success as a transformation of state-society relationships, the author goes beyond the clientelism/democracy dichotomy and reveals that four types of state-society relationships can be observed in practice: clientelism, disempowering co-optation, fragmented inclusion, and democratic cooperation.

Using this typology, and drawing on the comparative case study of four cities in Mexico and Brazil, the book demonstrates that the level of democratic success is best explained by an approach that accounts for institutional design, structural conditions of mobilization, and the configurations, strategies, behaviors, and perceptions of both state and societal actors.

Thus, institutional change alone does not guarantee democratic success: the way these institutional changes are enacted by both political and social actors is even more important as it conditions the potential for an autonomous civil society to emerge and actively engage with the local state in the social construction of an inclusive citizenship.

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