



SPOTLIGHT ON PUBLICATIONS: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN LATIN AMERICA



Citizen participation in governance at the local level has long been acknowledged to play a role in improving public policies. It is seen as enhancing policies' responsiveness to the population's needs and their quality, as citizens make creative and innovative proposals to solve development challenges. Furthermore, these local-level mechanisms create a space for the participation of often marginalised groups, while also supporting democratic deepening overall. In the last two decades, many countries in Latin America have experimented with new mechanisms to foster citizen participation. The following publications analyse the experience of Latin American countries in implementing these participation mechanisms at the local level.

► [Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico](#)

This book brings together a series of the author's research projects addressing the question of accountability in the Mexican context. Among them, the author deals with citizen participation at the local level, especially in rural settings. Several chapters of this book will be relevant to those interested in citizen participation, in particular those that concern the political construction of social capital, democratic rural development and regional peasant organisations, and Mexico's Regional Rural Development Councils. These chapters will be of benefit to policymakers and CSOs looking for an in-depth understanding of the Mexican experience with citizen participation, especially at the rural level.

Full citation: Fox, J. 2007. *Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico*. Oxford University Press, New York.

► [Citizen Participation in Municipal Meetings](#)

The *Insights* series of the [Latin American Public Opinion Project](#) publishes short briefs on specific policy issues based on the results of the *AmericasBarometer*, a regional public opinion and perception survey carried out with citizens of Northern, Southern and Central American countries. This particular Insight report analyses answers to the following survey question: "Have you attended a town meeting, city council meeting or other meeting convened by the mayor in the past 12 months?" It demonstrates differences across countries in participation and discusses some of the possible demographic, political or economic factors, including individuals' past negative experiences with their governments, such as corruption, that seems to impact whether or not citizens get engaged and participate at the local government level.

Full Citation: Montalvo, D. 2008. Citizen Participation in Municipal Meetings. *AmericasBarometer Insights* N°4.



▶ [Democratic Innovation in Latin America: A First Look at the Democratic Participatory Project](#)

This article highlights a variety of participatory experiences in local governance that have been carried out in Latin America, such as participatory budgeting and public management councils in Brazil, regional coordination roundtables (*Mesas de Concertación*) in Peru and self-management councils in Mexico, to show a diversity of alternative forms of citizen participation politics that are possible. The article seeks to explain what is understood as a 'democratic participatory project' and how it has been implemented in the different national contexts of the region. The publication could be of interest to policymakers and civil society organisations (CSOs) considering how to improve citizen participation at the local level.

Full citation: Dagnino, E., Olvera, A., Panfichi, A. 2008. Democratic Innovation in Latin America: A First Look at the Democratic Participatory Project. In: Raventos, C. (ed). 2008. *Democratic Innovation in the South: Participation and Representation in Asia, Africa and Latin America*. CLACSO, Buenos Aires.

▶ [Does Participatory Governance Matter? Exploring the Nature and Impact of Participatory Reforms](#)

This publication reports on the discussions and findings of a recent workshop of researchers and policymakers that reviewed how and if participatory institutions are yielding their intended benefits, and how scholars and policymakers understand the role that these institutions can play in improving democracy and public life. It presents examples of both top-down and bottom-up processes that created participation mechanisms at the local level, including participatory budgeting, coordinated councils and health and education councils. Though not focused only on Latin America, it includes cases from the region and others, and will therefore be of interest to policymakers and CSOs seeking to understand trends in local participatory governance across countries.

Full citation: Wampler, B., McNulty, S. 2011. *Does Participatory Governance Matter? Exploring the Nature and Impact of Participatory Reforms*. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC.

▶ [Gender and Community Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

For community participation to have the positive democratising effects it is assumed to bring, it is vital that the different groups in the community have the same opportunities to participate and to be heard. Using 2010 data from the [AmericasBarometer Survey](#), a regional public opinion survey comparing 22 Latin American countries, this short report addresses the question of women's participation in community activities in Latin America and the Caribbean. It seeks to find innovative answers to the differences of participation between men and women that are found in the survey. The report will likely be of interest to CSOs and policymakers seeking to understand constraints to women's participation in their communities, and as they try to develop and implement local participation initiatives that facilitate equal participation across different groups.

Full Citation: Batista, F. 2012. Gender and Community Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean. *AmericasBarometer Insights* N°78.

▶ [Social Capital in the Americas: Community Problem-Solving Participation](#)

Using 2008 data from the Democracy Survey of the [Latin American Public Opinion Project \(LAPOP\)](#), this short report – another in the [Insights](#) series - addresses country responses to a survey question about an interesting aspect of participation: the extent to which citizens work collectively to solve community problems. It analyses different social and economic characteristics to help explain the differences found across countries. Using the Latin American experience, this publication might be useful for those who want to understand some of the underlying economic or political variables influencing citizen engagement in participatory mechanisms.

Full Citation: Cruz, J. 2008. Social Capital in the Americas: Community Problem-Solving Participation. *AmericasBarometer Insights*.



▶ [Participation vs. Representation? The Experience of the Neighborhood Assemblies of Buenos Aires, 2001-2003](#)

Using individual interviews, this paper sheds light on the experiences and perspectives of participants of Argentinean Neighbourhood Assemblies, local governance participation spaces that emerged at a time when the country's citizen representation systems had begun to be weakened. The aim of the paper is to examine the assemblies' practices and members' understanding of the concepts of representation and participation and their perceptions of how these concepts should be implemented in practice. The participant responses assessed in the publication highlight interesting issues such as whether the assemblies should exist as counterparts or as alternatives to governance spaces, the relation between the assemblies and representative institutions, and on their description and interpretation of the deliberation and decision-making processes that take place within the assemblies.

Full citation: Pousadela, I. 2008. Participation vs. Representation? The Experience of the Neighborhood Assemblies of Buenos Aires, 2001-2003. In: Raventos, C. (ed). 2008. *Democratic Innovation in the South: Participation and Representation in Asia, Africa and Latin America*. CLACSO, Buenos Aires.

▶ [Where is Local Government Going in Latin America? A Comparative Perspective](#)

This paper attempts to assess how decentralisation has impacted local governance in Latin America. The paper sets out a framework dividing local government systems into two types – managerial and governmental – then does a comparative analysis of different Latin American countries, examining where they fit along the continuum. It also highlights the extent to which their local governance system allows for citizen participation. The paper might be of interest to local and national-level policymakers, academics and CSOs hoping to get a better understanding of the differences and similarities across Latin American countries.

Full citation: Nickson, A. 2011. *Where is Local Government Going in Latin America? A Comparative Perspective*. Working Paper No. 6. Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy, Visby.

CONTACT [FUNDAR](#)

To learn more about these publications or about citizen participation in local governance in Latin America, contact Janet Oropeza Eng, ELLA Project Coordinator, janet@fundar.org.mx, or Marine Perron, ELLA Researcher, marine@fundar.org.mx.

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To learn more about the region's efforts to increase citizen participation in local governance, read the [ELLA Brief: Latin America's Local Citizen Councils](#). To learn more about other aspects of citizen participation in Latin America, read the [ELLA Guide](#), which has a full list of the knowledge materials on this theme. To learn more about other ELLA development issues, browse other [ELLAThemes](#).



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