

The Crooked Line: From Populist Mobilization to Participatory Democracy in Chávez-Era Venezuela

Gabriel Hetland

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Abstract This article challenges the widely held view that populist mobilization and participatory democracy are incompatible. Ethnographic data from Chávez-era Venezuela show that while populist mobilization cannot directly generate participatory democracy, it can set in motion a process that indirectly leads to this result: By creating but failing to fulfill expectations for participatory democracy and falling short in other ways, a poorly performing local populist regime can precipitate a grassroots backlash that, under certain circumstances, can lead to the election of a post-populist regime with the interest and ability to successfully implement participatory reform. My data show that this can occur in municipalities led by the Left or Center-Right, complicating the idea that successful participatory democracy requires a Left party.

Keywords Participatory democracy · Populist mobilization · Venezuela · Left · Right

If there are obstacles, the shortest line between two points may be the crooked line.
- Bertolt Brecht

Populist mobilization and participatory democracy make strange bedfellows. The two processes seem simultaneously quite similar yet radically distinct. Both are forms of political participation that privilege regular people (i.e. non-elites). But populist mobilization is often associated with personalistic control over decision-making, electoral instrumentalism, politically discretionary resource distribution, and state control over society. Participatory democracy, by contrast, is frequently associated with popular control over deliberative decision-making, politically universalistic resource distribution, and social control of the state. Few places exemplify the tensions between populist mobilization and participatory democracy as well as Chávez-era Venezuela.

During Hugo Chávez's 14 years in office, Venezuela was subject to fierce controversy. To critics, Chávez was an authoritarian demagogue who duped the masses with empty rhetoric and unsustainable spending. Far from deepening democracy, these

G. Hetland (✉)
University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, CA, USA
e-mail: ghetland@berkeley.edu

critics portray Chavista populist mobilization as profoundly threatening to democratic norms (Brewer-Carías 2010; Sanchez Uribarri 2008). This strand of scholarship reflects the prevailing scholarly view that, regardless of any superficial similarity, populist mobilization and (participatory) democracy are distinct and incompatible (Arendt 1951; Sandbrook et al. 2007; Castañeda and Morales 2008; Canovan 1999, 15).

Scholars sympathetic to Chávez counter that his administration significantly reduced poverty and empowered the poor by supporting “participatory and protagonistic democracy” (Weisbrot et al. 2009; Spronk and Webber 2011). This strand of scholarship does not view Chávez as a hero, but instead seeks to understand “the paradoxes of state-sponsored participatory democracy” (Smilde 2011, 25), meaning the contradictions and possibilities of Chávez’s top-down efforts to foster bottom-up forms of “popular power” (Ellner 2008, 183; Fernandes 2010, 85; García-Guadilla 2011). This article takes a similar approach in putting forth the argument that the prevailing view of the relationship between populist mobilization and participatory democracy—the incompatibility thesis—is inadequate for understanding Chávez-era Venezuela.

Drawing on ethnographic data from two quite distinct Venezuelan municipalities, I argue that populist mobilization cannot lead directly to participatory democracy but can set in motion a process that indirectly facilitates this outcome. I refer to the sequence of events through which this occurs as the “populist mobilization to participatory democracy” (or PM-to-PD) path. My data suggest that three conditions make this path both possible and also more likely: a specific form of populist mobilization combining participatory rhetoric and extensive state-led mobilization and organization of the popular sectors, a competitive electoral environment, and an opposition party employing a counterhegemonic strategy. The key mechanism of the PM-to-PD path is the creation of unfulfilled expectations for participatory democracy, which can alter the “rules of the game” of local politics such that participatory democracy becomes “the only game in town,” meaning there is a higher than normal likelihood that *any* party seeking local office, in a given context, will utilize participatory rhetoric and institutional forms regardless of ideology or partisan affiliation.

This article has three implications for scholarship on participatory democracy (as well as populism and Chávez-era Venezuela). First, it provides evidence suggesting that populist mobilization and participatory democracy are less incompatible than often thought. Second, by showing that participatory democracy can emerge as an unintended consequence my analysis differs from accounts portraying participatory democracy as the direct result of an intentional effort. Finally, by presenting evidence that a Center-Right party can successfully implement participatory reform, this article complicates the idea that successful participatory democracy requires a Left party.

Populist mobilization and participatory democracy: The incompatibility thesis

Scholars of Latin America have long debated the relationship between populism and democracy. Many see populism as the antithesis of democracy (Kornhauser 1959; Lipset 1960; Corrales and Penfold 2011), some as integral to democratic politics (Laclau 2005), while others highlight the ambiguity between the two (Conniff 1999; Drake 1999; Horowitz 1999; Stein 1999; Basurto 1999; Ellner 1999, 2003; Collier and Collier 2002; de la Torre 2010). I

seek to further this debate by examining the relationship between populist mobilization and participatory democracy.¹

I define populist mobilization as a political strategy combining personalistic leadership, state or party-led mobilization of the popular (and middle) classes, politically discretionary resource distribution,² and rhetoric valorizing regular people (Weyland 2001; Jansen 2011). The term “populist regime” denotes a political regime that garners support through populist mobilization. My analysis highlights the contradictory character of populist regimes, due to the tension between managing state institutions while simultaneously mobilizing support through “anti-institutional” rhetoric and practices. The term participatory democracy refers to state-sponsored institutions giving average citizens control over political decision-making. Frequently, this occurs through public discussions with a direct, potentially binding, effect on state decision-making at the local level (Abers 2000; Baiocchi 2005). This article examines participatory budgeting, a well-known example of participatory democracy giving residents (greater) control over budget decisions in an estimated 1,500 cities worldwide (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2014, 30).

Populist mobilization and participatory democracy are similar in two ways. Both processes are linked to but stand in tension with electoral democracy. And both privilege “regular people.” This phrase, which is used interchangeably with average citizens and local residents, highlights the non-elite and multi-class character of the social sectors involved in populist mobilization and participatory democracy. As used herein, these phrases encompass non-unionized urban informal workers, largely unionized public sector, industrial and agro-industrial workers, mostly non-unionized agricultural laborers, rural petty commodity producers, small shop owners, teachers, and urban professionals.

Notwithstanding these similarities, most scholarship on populist mobilization and participatory democracy supports the thesis that the two processes are incompatible. Autonomy is the key issue. Even scholars viewing populist in ambiguous (versus monolithically negative) terms have a near consensus that, whatever benefits it provides them, populist mobilization inhibits the autonomy of the popular sectors (Collier and Collier 2002; Oxhorn 1998). Scholars of participatory democracy, however, argue that popular control over political decision-making is impossible without such autonomy, with autonomy understood not as the absence of contact with the state but as the popular sectors’ capacity for self-organization and mobilization (Baiocchi et al. 2011, 34).

Populist mobilization and participatory democracy in Chávez-Era Venezuela

Populist mobilization and participatory democracy are both integral to Chavismo, making Chávez-era Venezuela a particularly illuminating place to examine the challenge of reconciling the two. Compared to other cases of populist mobilization, two features of Chavismo stand out: the rhetorical, institutional, and legal centrality of participatory democracy,³ and the state’s

¹ I focus on populist mobilization to (1) highlight the dynamic character of the phenomena I analyze and (2) avoid the conceptual morass associated with the term populism, which as Ruth Berins Collier (2001) notes has been taken to mean everything from “authentic reform movements from below” to “demagoguery.”

² As Jansen (2011) notes, populist mobilization and clientelism—a politically discretionary form of resource distribution whereby “patrons” provide their “clients” privileged access to state resources in exchange for political allegiance—are analytically distinct, though often found together in practice.

³ This centrality can be seen in numerous ways: the 1999 constitution’s promotion of “participatory and protagonistic democracy;” laws establishing nationwide participatory democracy and other forms of direct democracy; and Chávez’s, and other Chavista officials’, constant use of participatory rhetoric.

extensive mobilization and organization of the popular sectors.⁴ The term *participatory populist mobilization* denotes this combination of features.

The emergence of participatory populist mobilization in Venezuela can be traced to four factors: the nature of the political system preceding Chavismo, the economic and political crises that ended this system, the class-based political conflict that Chávez's rise unleashed, and Venezuela's oil-based economy.

From the 1958 restoration of democracy until Chávez's 1998 election, Venezuela had a limited system of "pacted democracy" (Karl 1997). Oil revenue and generous social spending undergirded this system, which gave Venezuela stability when much of Latin America was mired in military dictatorships (Dunning 2008). By the 1980s, falling oil prices and the Latin American debt crisis exposed the material and political limits of this system and Venezuela entered a two-decade economic-cum-political crisis (McCoy 2004). In 1989 hundreds were killed in the *Caracazo*.⁵ This was followed by two coup attempts in 1992, the first led by Chávez. In May 1993, the president was impeached, and in December 1993 a candidate who was not from *Acción Democrática* or *COPEI* (*Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente*), the two parties that dominated post-1958 Venezuelan politics, was elected president for the first time since 1958.⁶ Scholars interpret these events as symptoms of a crisis of democracy, marked by decreasing support for parties and increasing distrust of representative democracy (Coronil 1997, 379). This crisis was manifested in various ways: popular support for Chávez's 1992 coup; demands for political decentralization and constitutional reform; several local-level participatory democratic experiments during the 1990s (Goldfrank 2011a); and Chávez's 1998 election as an "anti-institutional" populist (Roberts 2007).

Chávez did not introduce participatory democracy to Venezuela. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Catholic Church, and certain Catholic organizations, such as the Caracas-based Centro Gumilla, promoted participatory democracy.⁷ In the 1970s and 1980s, COPEI youth activists and certain party leaders, including Luis Herrera Campins (Venezuela's president from 1979 to 1983), took the lead in promoting participation. Participatory democracy was a central aspect of several (largely unsuccessful) attempts to reform Venezuela's political system in the 1980s and 1990s. Left parties, such as the MAS and La Causa R, were also advocates and practitioners of participatory democracy; in the early 1990s several Causa R mayors, including Clemente Scotto in Puerto Ordaz and Aristóbulo Istúriz in Caracas, implemented participatory budgeting.

Several factors account for why Venezuela provided "fertile soil" for participatory democracy (López Maya and Lander 2011, 59). Venezuela's lack of authoritarian rule in the late twentieth century allowed a stronger critique of representative democracy to develop on the Left (*ibid.*). The inability of Venezuela's representative institutions to solve the nation's mounting crises in the 1980s and 1990s, in turn, made ideas about participatory democracy more appealing. Chávez deftly exploited this opening, making participatory democracy a central part of his discourse and policies. Chávez's election marks a key moment in the history of participatory democracy in Venezuela. According to Margarita López Maya and Luis

⁴ There are numerous examples of this, including the PSUV (2007) and, on the civic front, Bolivarian circles (2001), local public planning councils (2002), urban land and health committees (2003), communal councils (2006), and communes (2009). The state has given these organizations massive resources; Torres officials say communal councils received *four times* the resources going to the municipal budget by 2010.

⁵ This was a nationwide uprising provoked by IMF austerity policies imposed by a president who had campaigned against austerity months before. The spark was a rise in bus fares linked to a gas price hike.

⁶ Rafael Caldera was one of the founders of COPEI but left the party to win the December 1993 election.

⁷ This section draws on Margarita López Maya (*forthcoming*).

Lander (2011, 59), “it was with the hegemonic shift to the Bolivarian forces that these ideas [about participatory democracy] prospered.”

Chávez did more than promote the idea of participation. Through numerous laws and state-sponsored organizational forms, “participatory and protagonistic democracy” and “popular power” became central strands within the institutional fabric of Venezuelan politics. This extensive state-led organization and mobilization of the popular sectors is the second key distinguishing feature of Chavismo. This process primarily occurred from 2002 on and can be understood as Chávez’s response to elite’s efforts to remove him from office through a 2002 coup, a 2002–2003 oil strike and a 2004 recall referendum.

Chávez’s critics argue that he undermined democracy in numerous ways, including limiting civic autonomy (Hawkins and Hansen 2006), eroding pluralism (Corrales and Penfold 2011), and fomenting polarization (Hawkins 2010). Scholars sympathetic to Chávez acknowledge the imperfections of the “Bolivarian Revolution” but argue that Chavista policies and practices provided Venezuelans many benefits, including greater opportunities to directly participate in political decision-making (Wilpert 2007; Azzellini 2010). These contrasting interpretations can, in part, be seen as a reflection of the contradictions of Chavismo, which is a heterogeneous socio-political movement that encompasses multiple social and political sectors (e.g., military officers, business elites, bureaucrats and government employees, and grassroots activists) with different material interests and contrasting political-ideological agendas (Gates 2010; Ciccariello-Maher 2013). The contradictions of Chavismo are reflected in the internal divisions of the ruling party—the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) and, from 2007 on, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)—which includes moderates, radicals, and traditional politicians, some of whom have been seen as quite corrupt (Ellner 2008).

In recent years some scholars have sought to move past the pro/anti-Chávez dichotomy by examining “the relational contexts in which politics occurs in everyday social life” instead of “so called big politics” (Smilde 2011, 2; Schiller 2011). For the most part this research has not directly addressed the relationship between populist mobilization and participatory democracy.⁸ But by destabilizing certain assumptions—especially the notion that contact with the state inevitably equals “cooptation”⁹—this work opens up analytical space to rethink this relationship.

Benjamin Goldfrank’s (2011b, 168) argument that Chavismo led to “participatory clientelism” is useful for this task. This term seeks to make sense of how Chavismo combines aspects of clientelism and participatory democracy. Participatory clientelism is “participatory” because it operates through collective processes of mobilization and deliberation but “clientelistic” because access to state resources is contingent on political allegiance.¹⁰ My data confirm that Chavismo can lead to participatory clientelism. But I view participatory clientelism as an intermediate point within a dynamic process that, under certain conditions, can lead to participatory democracy. My argument (presented in detail below) on how this can occur is as follows: Participatory populist mobilization creates but fails to fulfill expectations for participatory democracy, leading to participatory clientelism. Voters dissatisfied with an incumbent participatory populist regime that has performed poorly, in various ways, may vote this regime out of office and replace it with a “post-populist regime,” meaning a non-populist regime elected following a populist regime. To maintain or increase its support, this post-populist regime may employ a counterhegemonic strategy. By this I mean a political strategy in which an opposition party seeks to refashion the discursive and institutional “building

⁸ But see García-Guadilla 2011 and López Maya and Lander 2011.

⁹ Other scholarship on participation challenges this assumption: e.g. Baiocchi 2005; Baiocchi et al. 2011.

¹⁰ Handlin 2013 makes a similar argument about how Chavismo links resource distribution to mobilization.

blocks” of the national (or local) ruling party. This differs from a “rejectionist” strategy, wherein an opposition party rejects the ruling party’s discourse and institutional forms. If a newly elected post-populist regime employs a counterhegemonic strategy and also possesses institutional coherence (the ability to formulate and implement a programmatic agenda),¹¹ there is a (significantly greater) likelihood that it will have the political interest and administrative capacity needed to successfully implement participatory reform.

A tale of two cities

In many ways, the two municipalities chosen for this study could not be more different. Torres is a geographically sprawling municipality of 185,275, located in the central-western Venezuelan state of Lara.¹² Torres’ population is considerably more rural than Venezuela’s. Whereas 94 % of Venezuelans live in cities,¹³ 62.6 % of *Torrenses* are urbanites (most live in Carora, Lara’s second-largest city, though Torres also includes several smaller urban areas) and 37.4 % live in rural areas (Alcaldía de Torres 2011, 29). Industry is scarce in Torres, with agriculture constituting a key economic activity (Alcaldía de Torres 2011,33). For centuries Torres was marked by stark inequality and a rigid class structure, with feudalistic practices continuing through the 1950s (Harnecker 2008). The agrarian elite constituted a separate “caste” (Cortés Riera 2007) that dominated local politics through the late twentieth century with Church support. Since 2004, two radical Left mayors, linked to various popular class social movements, have challenged the local elite’s power.

Sucre is a densely populated, industrialized urban center in eastern Caracas with different sources putting its population at 600,000 to 1.5 million.¹⁴ While class relations are arguably less stark and rigid than in Torres, Sucre is visibly marked by inequality and exclusion: concrete walls, topped with barbed wire, and punctuated by private entrances manned by armed guards, separate upper-middle-class apartment complexes from the *ranchos* (self-constructed houses) of Petare, one of Latin America’s largest working-class barrios. Since 2008, a Center-Right opposition mayor has governed Sucre with a heterogeneous class base of middle and upper-middle-class professionals and a modest-but-growing sector of the popular classes, who constitute a majority in Sucre and have maintained a considerable, but declining, degree of loyalty to Chavismo.

Despite these historical, socioeconomic, demographic, and political-ideological differences, officials in Torres and Sucre have pursued similar policies in recent years. In both cases, participatory budgeting (PB) has been implemented in a relatively robust manner, giving residents substantial control over local budget decisions. What accounts for this surprising similarity? This is the key empirical puzzle I seek to unravel.

While my analysis focuses primarily on explaining this unexpected similarity, I also examine the differences in the design and implementation of participatory reform in Torres and Sucre. To make sense of these differences, which I argue stem from the distinct ideology

¹¹ This is likelier when voters have shown a willingness to punish parties *lacking* institutional coherence.

¹² Population figures come from Venezuela’s 2011 census, available at www.ine.gov.ve

¹³ This is according to 2012 World Bank data: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>

¹⁴ The INE’s 2011 census lists 600,351 inhabitants in Sucre. A government official in Sucre told me there were 1.5 million residents as of 2010–11. Wilpert (2007, 57) cites a figure of 1.2 million residents. Sucre’s population is 99.83 % urban (http://www.alcaldiamunicipiosucre.gob.ve/contenido/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/Informacion_Demografica.pdf). Manufacturing is important in Sucre, and the greater Caracas area, which is seen as being “the country’s primary urban manufacturing center”: <http://www.ine.gov.ve/documentos/Demografia/CensodePoblacionyVivienda/pdf/miranda.pdf> (9).

and class base of the post-populist regime in Torres and Sucre, I distinguish between two types of participatory democracy. I classify Torres as a case of *effective participatory democracy* since its PB is highly deliberative and gives citizens binding control over a broad range of decisions. Sucre is classified as a case of *attenuated participatory democracy* since its PB does less to foster deliberation and gives citizens a limited degree of power over a narrower range of decisions. Despite its limitations, I view Sucre's PB as a genuine form of participatory democracy since, unlike a "participatory consultation" (Goldfrank 2011a, 31), it vests citizens with real decision-making power.

My characterizations of Torres and Sucre are based on an examination of the following indicators in both municipalities (with Table 1 summarizing the similarities and differences between the two):

- *Scope*: the extent of popular control over local political decisions, as measured by (a) the percentage of the investment budget subject to PB and (b) whether non-budgetary issues are subject to popular control.
- *Control*: who has control over decisions within PB, as measured by whether participants or officials have final say on project approval.
- *Decision-Making*: the extent to which decision-making is deliberative, in the sense of being based on open discussion in which opposing views are voiced and justified through reason-based arguments, or made through non-deliberative forms of decision-making (e.g. command and control, aggregative voting, and strategic bargaining) that do not involve open discussion or reason-based justification of views.¹⁵
- *Facilitation*: the degree to and consistency with which officials foster deliberation and popular control over decision-making in PB fora.
- *Inclusivity*: the extent to which there is political pluralism amongst participants in decision-making fora and the distribution of state resources.
- *Turnout*: the number of people attending PB-related events.

Research design

This study was designed to examine the similarities and differences of participatory reform in municipalities governed by the Left and Right. Torres and Sucre were chosen for their political-ideological differences (Torres' radical Left mayor vs. Sucre's Center-Right mayor) and because preliminary research showed that an effort to implement participatory reform had taken place in both. Based on existing scholarship I expected to find some degree of successful participatory democracy in Left-led Torres and a manipulative use of participatory rhetoric and institutions in Center-Right-led Sucre. The fact that I found relatively successful participatory budgeting in both cases, and that this was preceded by participatory populist mobilization in both, was unexpected and led me to develop my conceptualization of the PM-to-PD path. Since this argument is counterintuitive and based on a small N the fact that it has been derived

¹⁵ The literature on deliberative democracy is voluminous. Habermas' *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989) is a key work. Fung and Wright (2003, 17) write, "The essential feature of genuine deliberation is that participants find reasons they can accept in collective actions, not necessarily ones they completely endorse or find maximally advantageous." Fung and Wright also discuss non-deliberative decision-making forms (18–20). See also Cohen and Fung (2004).

Table 1 Comparing Torres and Sucre

Background differences		
	Torres	Sucre
Socioeconomic structure	Semi-rural/agrarian	Urban/industrial
Political ideology	Left (Socialist)	Center-right (Neoliberal)
Social class base	Popular	Middle/upper
Participatory Outcomes		
Type of participatory democracy	Effective	Attenuated
Institutional design	Expansive PB	Limited PB
Scope (PB as % of budget)	100 %	30/40 %
(Non-budgetary issues?)	Yes	No
Control	Participants have binding control	Participant decisions not binding but rarely altered
Decision-making	Deliberation	Deliberation/command
Facilitation	Consistently high	Lower/inconsistent
Inclusivity	Inclusive	Inclusive
Turnout	High (sustained)	Modest (increasing)

from two very distinct cases is quite important methodologically: If the argument functions in cases differing so dramatically, a stronger case can be made about its generalizability. In seeking to explain why a (relatively) similar outcome occurred in two very different contexts, this article approximates a “most different systems” design.¹⁶

Method and data

Ethnography facilitates understanding complex and/or counterintuitive social processes (Baiocchi 2005) and was my primary method of data collection. I spent five months in Torres and three in Sucre on multiple visits between 2007 and 2011. To operationalize the outcome I seek to explain—successful local participatory democracy—I focused on the municipal budget process, attempting to trace the entire “chain of sovereignty” (Baiocchi et al. 2011) from the first articulation of demands to binding budgetary allocations. To do this, I examined the actions and interactions of four sets of actors: the municipal executive, focusing on municipal institutions involved with PB and community-state relations more broadly; citizens involved, and not, with PB; leaders and members of civic associations, especially communal councils and neighborhood associations; and leaders and members of pro- and anti-Chavista parties.¹⁷ I also collected data from national government institutions, NGOs, academics and local journalists.

In both cities, I attended many communal council and other civic meetings where neighbors discussed collective priorities. I also observed numerous district and citywide assemblies

¹⁶ As Przeworski and Teune (1970,35) discuss, this design treats ‘systemic’ factors as largely irrelevant if a relationship between a given independent-dependent variable is found to hold in quite different contexts. Becker (1998,252) discusses this issue as well using different language. My research design could also be understood as an example of Mill’s method of difference.

¹⁷ Communal councils are civic associations that include 200–400 families in urban areas and 20–40 families in rural areas.

where municipal officials and ordinary citizens discussed and voted on PB proposals. In Torres I attended 12 of 17 parish assemblies during the 2009 PB cycle. I spent a month shadowing social workers from Torres' Office of Citizenship Participation, which helps form communal councils and provides technical assistance for PB and non-PB activities. I attended Local Public Planning Council meetings during several phases of Torres' PB, including a year-end meeting where the budget was approved (without significant changes). In Sucre, I observed 21 PB assemblies and PB-related meetings during the 2010 and 2011 PB cycles, a weekend PB reflection retreat with over 100 citizens, civic leaders, and officials, and various non-PB-related community meetings and trainings. I also spent several weeks shadowing zonal coordinators from Sucre's Office of Community Affairs, which supports communal councils, neighborhood associations, and other civic groups. I met officials from Fundacomunal and other national institutions in both cities, and attended communal council and commune workshops.

In both cities, I observed numerous political party activities. In Torres, I attended weekly PSUV meetings for several months, and many party mobilizations, parades, and other events. I also observed assemblies bringing officials, activists and civic leaders together (e.g., a 2010 assembly on raising bus fares). I met a number of opposition leaders, activists and opposition-identified journalists.¹⁸ In Sucre, I attended *Primero Justicia* and PSUV meetings and events in *Chavista Salas de Batalla*¹⁹ and at a *Chavista* radio in Petare. I also participated in *Chavista* and opposition campaign events during the 2010 National Assembly election in Petare.

A central concern of my research was figuring out how PB actually worked in both cities. In addition to attending official PB events, I spoke with many participants and ordinary citizens (some uninvolved with PB) to get multiple perspectives and check the veracity of officials' and civic leaders' statements. I took extensive field notes following each meeting or event I observed and after each conversation or taped interview. These notes are the primary basis for the material presented. Quotations are always first-hand, but not necessarily verbatim. Double quote marks indicate verbatim quotes and single quotes indicate non-verbatim quotes. My observational data is supplemented with 90 interviews with residents, local and national officials, leaders and members of parties and civic associations, and academics.²⁰ I also use primary documents, such as newspapers and government reports and data (electoral and demographic), and secondary sources.

Torres: Effective participatory democracy

Between 2000 and 2003, participatory populist mobilization in Torres led to the creation of participatory institutions that the mayor and dissident members of his staff, in conjunction with organized communities, struggled to control. Participatory clientelism ensued. In 2004 a grassroots anti-populist backlash propelled a radical Left mayor to office. With support from popular movements, this Left post-populist regime implemented an expansive participatory budget.

¹⁸ Journalists play an important political role in Torres since local opposition parties are weakly organized.

¹⁹ Literally "battle rooms," the Salas are *Chavista* spaces bringing together multiple communal councils.

²⁰ Roughly half of these interviews were informal, and most are not cited due to space constraints.

From participatory populist mobilization to effective participatory democracy

In 2000, the MVR's desire to expand its local power base led to an unlikely endorsement for mayor: Javier Oropeza, a rising media baron from a wealthy landowning family who was a former COPEI supporter and uncommitted to official MVR goals like participatory democracy. Oropeza was, however, subject to national laws and pressure from the MVR. In 2002, Oropeza established a local public planning council (CLPP) in accord with a law mandating nationwide PB. Due to pressure from leftists in the MVR, Oropeza appointed Myriam Gimenez, a committed Chavista and veteran activist, as his director of social development and tasked her with organizing Torres' CLPP.

Oropeza's support for the CLPP was highly ambiguous.²¹ Gimenez says, 'Javier called a meeting and told us, "Look we have to form a planning council, if you don't I'll be fined 14,000 *bolivares* and I don't have the funds, so just go ahead and do it. And make sure you put our people in there.'" Gimenez told Oropeza, "'I'm going to need vehicles and personnel,'" and says, 'He gave us everything we needed.' According to Zoila Vasquez, a member of Gimenez's staff who became the CLPP secretary general from 2004 to 2011, with these resources Gimenez's team 'traveled to every corner of the municipality' holding PB assemblies. Defying Oropeza's directive to 'put our people in there,' Gimenez made sure CLPP community delegates were chosen in popular assemblies and outnumbered elected officials, as the law mandated. Gimenez also resisted Oropeza's attempts to control the process by 'having people from his ex-party, COPEI, go to assemblies to try to make sure they could run things.' Things came to a head when Oropeza 'refused to recognize the results of the Participatory Budget,' leading Gimenez to offer her letter of resignation (which Oropeza rejected). During this period (2002–2003) Oropeza's relationship with the MVR deteriorated. 'There were rumors the mayor and his friends celebrated Chávez's fall' during the April 2002 coup, says Gimenez. In 2003, Oropeza joined the opposition and Gimenez resigned for good.

In addition to clientelist practices, Oropeza's time in office was marred by allegations of corruption; according to a former Oropeza official, a practice known as *el diesmo*, wherein municipal officials approve contract bids in exchange for a 10 % commission, was widespread during Oropeza's tenure. These allegations, and Oropeza's defection from the MVR, seem to have opened up Torres' 2004 mayoral election. The three-way race pitted Oropeza, supported by the agrarian elite and commercial media, against Walter Cattivelli, a contractor backed by the MVR, and Julio Chávez, a little-known rabble rouser supported by social movements and the PPT (Fatherland for All), a radical Left party that grew from a split in *La Causa R* in 1997 and often allied with the MVR at the national level.²² Chávez (who is of no relation to Hugo Chávez) identified closely with the "Bolivarian Revolution" but for the second time in four years he ran against the Chavista establishment, having been soundly defeated by Oropeza in 2000. In 2004, Chávez overcame what he describes as fierce opposition from the agrarian elite, the MVR, the Catholic Church, and local commercial media to secure a razor-thin victory with 35.6 % of the vote.²³ Chávez's long shot campaign could not have succeeded without significant support from Chavista voters, who felt uninspired by Cattivelli (whom one local

²¹ This leads me to characterize the Oropeza regime as an example of participatory populist mobilization.

²² The relationship between the PPT and MVR/PSUV has been on-again-off-again in Torres and nationally. Chávez faced hostility from the MVR in his first 2 years as Torres' mayor, but things then improved. In 2007, most of the PPT's leadership, including Chávez, joined the PSUV. In 2010, the PPT adopted a "third way" position between the PSUV and opposition. Later a sector of the PPT went to the opposition and the PPT was internally divided for a time. Currently the "official" PPT seems to again be allied with the PSUV.

²³ All vote totals cited herein come from Venezuela's *Consejo Nacional Electoral* (www.cne.gov.ve).

Chavista told me, ‘was an Adecó [supporter of Acción Democrática] his whole life’) and were still reeling from Oropéza’s betrayal.

Despite facing considerable opposition from the Chavista establishment during and after his campaign, Chávez made extensive use of Chavista rhetoric, laws, and institutional forms. Chávez says, “My only campaign promise was to build popular power.” During one of several interviews, Chávez explained that he sees participation as central to “Twenty-First Century Socialism”:

All expressions of socialism should be based on the people’s participation, a participation that impedes bureaucratism...socialism should start with the idea of constructing popular power...[and be based on] projects that make visible the process of governing *with* the people, not *for* the people, so that decisions, big decisions, are taken by the people, in a pedagogic and liberating process.

Like his radical views, Chávez is very clear about his class sympathies. As mayor, Chávez clashed regularly with the “rancid oligarchy” (as he calls the agrarian elite), local commercial media, and the Catholic Church.²⁴ Chávez also pushed the National Land Institute to expropriate several large haciendas in Torres and increased support to small and medium farmers, reversing past administrations’ bias towards large farmers. This has continued under Edgar Carrasco, Chávez’s chosen successor who became Torres’ mayor in 2008, whose administration has pledged “unconditional support to small and medium [agricultural] producers” (Alcaldía de Torres 2011, 9).

Upon taking office, Chávez convoked a municipal constituent assembly, modeled after Venezuela’s 1999 constituent assembly. This process lasted 3 months and was highly participatory. According to Miguel Medina, a municipal *constituyente* who served in Chávez’s administration, delegates were chosen in popular assemblies, deliberations covered all aspects of municipal governance, and the results were discussed and voted upon in assemblies held throughout Torres. Chávez views these actions as part of the Bolivarian Revolution, but says ‘the MVR viewed this as anarchy. They said that it could never work.’ Medina says the MVR governor of Lara, ‘[Luis] Reyes Reyes never forgave Julio for beating his candidate’ in 2004. According to Medina, Reyes Reyes punished Chávez by establishing a ‘parallel City Hall,’ through which he funneled thousands of dollars to an MVR municipal councilor (allied with Reyes Reyes) while denying Chávez’s requests for state funds.²⁵ In response to the MVR’s efforts to block his agenda Chávez mobilized his supporters, who occupied City Hall on several occasions until their demands (council approval of the municipal constituent assembly and the PB) were met.

The opposition-controlled local commercial media portrayed Torres as chaotic and disorderly under Chávez (and his successor), but evidence suggests Chávez (who is an engineer) was a capable administrator. In addition to social movement leaders, Chávez’s administration was staffed with numerous engineers and professionals. The heads of technical departments—such as engineering and an office called the “Situation Room”—say they felt fully supported by Chávez and never felt the need to compromise technical standards for “political” reasons. On visits throughout Torres I asked numerous residents about Chávez’s administration. Almost all expressed a high degree of confidence. Several recounted how they had initially viewed

²⁴ Chávez says one of his first acts in office was to rescind the lifetime pension provided to the head of the local Church. According to Chávez, his administration instead “gave this money to destitute old men.”

²⁵ Chávez says, “Things were undoubtedly rough during the first two years” of his term. He sees this as connected to the fact that, “We didn’t just defeat the opposition; we also defeated the President’s party.”

Chávez's promises with suspicion but came to trust the mayor after seeing concrete results year after year.²⁶

The administration's most impressive accomplishment was the implementation of an ambitious participatory budget giving residents decision-making power over 100 % of the municipality's investment budget.²⁷ The expansive design of Torres' PB stems from Chávez and others' socialist views; the administration's institutional coherence and links to a mobilized popular class base allowed it to successfully implement its radical agenda.

Torres' expansive participatory budget

Torres' PB gives residents binding control over the municipality's full investment budget, which totaled 14,625,564,113 *bolívares* (6,802,588 US dollars) in 2006.²⁸ The process begins with "participatory diagnoses" where volunteers from Torres' 560 communal councils map out their resources and needs.²⁹ Residents then discuss and vote on their priorities in community assemblies, where they also elect delegates to two rounds of parish assemblies (held in Torres' 17 parishes). Decisions made in parish assemblies are binding.³⁰

The expansive design of Torres' PB, and extensive support from Torres' Office of Citizenship Participation and CLPP, have generated high turnout for PB. While municipal officials lack an official count, a conservative estimate suggests upwards of 15,000 people (8 % of Torres' population) have annually participated in PB in some way (e.g. attending a PB-related communal council or parish assembly) in recent years.³¹

Decision-making in Torres' PB is highly democratic and deliberative, as the following description of a parish assembly I attended in November 2009 illustrates.³² Numerous projects were discussed in the assembly, with decisions made after lengthy exchanges involving multiple, opposing viewpoints. Several participants wanted to fund an aqueduct, but others expressed doubt based on the project's cost. Zoila Vasquez, the CLPP secretary general, who ran the assembly, said the project could not be partially funded: 'It's all or nothing.' A woman remarked, 'It's not worth it if it's not funded all the way.' Another participant suggested funding a school. A man commented, 'This should be financed with another source.' A woman asked, 'Like what?' Another added, 'The municipality is the only secure source that we know we have,' prompting a discussion of government financing. A teacher suggested funding a

²⁶ I have been unable to get data on Torres' project execution rate (i.e. the percentage of approved projects that have been completed). But residents appeared satisfied that projects approved via PB (i.e. all projects in Torres) had been, were being, or would be executed. For the 2009–2012 period Torres' Alcaldía reports 1,204 projects executed, 76 % directly by communal councils. See <http://notasdetorresycarora.blogspot.com/2013/03/alcalde-de-torres-edgar-carrasco.html>

²⁷ The 100 % claim was repeatedly made in Torres; see also <http://www.aporrea.org/regionales/n81667.html>

²⁸ <http://www.salasituacional.org/1/alcaldeTorresLara.htm>. The USD amount listed was converted at the official rate of 2,150 *bolívares*:1 USD. At the black market rate of 2,700:1 this figure would be \$5,416,876.

²⁹ According to Torres' Alcaldía there are "over 560 active communal councils" in Torres (Alcaldía de Torres 2011, 48).

³⁰ Chávez told a 2007 student delegation, that I was on, 'The mayor can't even veto these decisions.' Chávez and Zoila Vasquez both told me 10 % of projects in Torres' first PB were for churches. Both of them did not like this but could not change it.

³¹ This estimate comes from multiplying the number of communal councils by the number of people likely to have attended a PB community assembly in a given year. Using conservative estimates of 500 communal councils and 30 participants/assembly=15,000. The actual figure is likely higher since (1) in the many non-PB communal council meetings I attended the minimum number of attendees was 30 and the max was 200–300, (2) attendance at PB-related community assemblies, which are likely seen as more important than "normal" meetings, was likely >30; and (3) Torres' Alcaldía reports 560 (>500) active communal councils.

³² This assembly, one of twelve I attended, was far from exceptional and chosen for illustrative purposes.

medical center in his community. A shy young man asked, ‘What about other communities?’ noting that some communities had never received PB funding while others had received multiple projects. Before ending, the assembly funded two health centers and smaller projects in several communities.

Residents and current and former officials say PB has significantly reduced clientelism in Torres. A 2011 report issued by the mayor’s office characterized the relationship between neighborhood associations and government officials in the 1980s and 1990s as follows: ‘Demands were made through written or oral requests oriented towards resolving problems of access to basic services, like water, electricity and roads, amongst others. Solutions had a strong discretionary bias geared towards the political-party interest of the government in power’ (Alcaldía de Torres 2011:47). Myriam Gimenez, who was very active with neighborhood associations in the 1980s and 1990s, concurs with this assessment, saying, ‘When the Adecos ruled, everything went to the Adecos; when the Copeyanos [Copei followers] ruled, everything went to the Copeyanos.’³³ Evidence suggests Torres’ PB has helped reduce clientelism. In various assemblies, Office of Citizenship Participation officials made comments such as: ‘You can’t divide the council based on political beliefs...everyone has to be welcome in the communal council or it won’t work.’ On multiple occasions, communal council members, including non-Chavistas, told me, ‘We don’t discuss politics in the communal councils.’ Following a parish assembly, a delegate told me, ‘It doesn’t matter what party or color you have, if you’re blue or green or what.’ In this and other parish assemblies, Chavistas and non-Chavistas were present; while Chavistas predominated, non-Chavistas were not shy and seemed quite comfortable participating.

A conversation I had following a parish assembly illustrates how Torres’ PB seems to have changed local state-society relations. I asked a delegate, ‘Why not just leave the budget to the mayor?’ He responded, ‘Why not? I’m equal to the president of the United States. If he can make decisions, why can’t I?’ Another man chimed in, ‘In the past, government officials would stay in their air conditioned offices all day and make decisions there. They never even set foot in our communities. So who do you think can make a better decision about what we need, an official in his air conditioned office who has never even come to our community, or someone who is from the community?’³⁴

Torres’ PB appears to have brought impressive electoral benefits to the politicians behind it. Julio Chávez, who was with the PPT until 2007 when he and most of his followers joined the PSUV, received 35.6 % in the 2004 election. Edgar Carrasco, Chávez’s handpicked successor, obtained 48.3 % in 2008 and 54.7 % in 2013, running as a PSUV candidate both times. Chávez, whose image is closely linked to Torres’ PB, won a seat in Lara’s state assembly in 2008, and in 2010 was elected to the National Assembly with 55.6 %, one of the highest totals for a PSUV candidate that election.³⁵

Sucre: Attenuated participatory democracy

Participatory populist mobilization in Sucre led to the creation of participatory institutions from 2000 to 2008. As in Torres, a struggle ensued between the mayor and members of his

³³ Gimenez had a tense relationship with Julio Chávez, partly because she worked for Javier Oropeza. The similarity of her and the Alcaldía’s portrayal of Torres’ clientelistic past is therefore significant.

³⁴ I heard similar views in all the parish assemblies I attended and also from other Torres residents.

³⁵ Chávez and Carrasco’s success within the PSUV illustrate the party’s non-monolithic character. The PSUV’s radical Left current pursues policies that go far beyond (participatory) populist mobilization.

staff and organized communities, resulting in participatory clientelism. A strong grassroots backlash in 2008 facilitated the election of a Center-Right mayor backed by middle and upper-middle-class professionals and a minority-but-growing segment of the popular sectors. This anti-Chavista post-populist regime has used Chavista rhetoric, institutional forms and practices to robustly implement a limited PB.

From participatory populist mobilization to attenuated participatory democracy

In 2000 Sucre elected a Chavista mayor, Jose Vicente Rangel Avalos.³⁶ The administration's first effort to implement participatory reform was led by Carlos Molina, a committed participatory democrat whom leftist MVR leaders recruited to head Fundasucre, the agency in charge of social development in Sucre. From 2000 to 2002, Molina established 15 Community Development Councils (CDCs) to facilitate participatory planning related to education and housing. Molina says,

We were intermediaries between communities and many national government institutions that we helped communities approach to get resources...this generated a process amongst the people that was not directed from above, but was horizontal...this was not a tutelage process, but generated self-capacity in the communities.³⁷

Molina says Avalos paid no attention to the CDCs until President Chávez praised them on his weekly television show. According to a former Molina aide, the Mayor was scared that Molina was becoming more popular than he was, and that he would run for mayor himself' (which Molina did in 2008). Molina says Avalos was also upset by the political pluralism of the CDCs: 'In the barrios, there were Copeyanos, Adecos and we worked with all of them. But Jose Vicente [Avalos] didn't accept that they were there. He said, "Carlos Molina is putting Copeyanos into the CDCs." He [Avalos] wanted to have only people from the MVR in the CDCs.' In 2002, Molina and several CDC leaders introduced a municipal ordinance to expand the CDCs throughout Sucre.³⁸ According to Molina, this frightened Avalos, prompting him 'to ask for my letter of resignation.'

This led to the end of the CDCs, but in 2005 Avalos initiated participatory budgeting, holding assemblies across Sucre over the next several years. Photographs, which officials who helped organize these assemblies showed me, reveal that hundreds, possibly thousands, of residents attended. But there appears to have been little follow-up. Officials who organized these PB assemblies told me Sucre's Public Works department processed the demands generated therein. But when I asked the Public Works officials who had supposedly done this they were puzzled and said, 'What participatory budget? There was no participatory budget under Avalos?'³⁹ Local Chavistas said the same thing. According to Griselda, a Chavista active with the CDCs and communal councils during and after the Avalos years, 'There was no PB in which we could decide on projects.'

Opposition officials and local Chavistas both say that Avalos' legacy was not participatory democracy, but clientelism and corruption. Sucre's current mayor filed a 2009 lawsuit alleging

³⁶ Avalos' father is Jose Vicente Rangel, a famous journalist and Venezuela's vice president from 2002 to 2007.

³⁷ Griselda, a resident active in the CDCs, gives a similar account: "The goal was to work with communities and eliminate neighbors' associations [seen as vertical/clientelistic], to put something that was horizontal." Griselda says the CDCs were very inclusive, with "no distinction made on the basis of political colors."

³⁸ For another account of the CDCs see <http://www.cibersociedad.net/congreso/comms/c08este-et-al.htm>.

³⁹ I spent several weeks tracking down several Public Works officials who worked under Avalos (and then Ocariz) and had detailed knowledge of the department's workings. These officials said none of the demands the department handled during Avalos' time in office had come from a PB process.

that Avalos and members of his administration had engaged in widespread corruption.⁴⁰ Most Chavistas I met in Sucre refused to defend Avalos: Upon hearing his name many grimaced and recounted rumors that the mayor's wife had illicitly enriched herself; others said Avalos favored his "friends" in distributing resources.

The discontent Avalos created amongst grassroots Chavistas almost surely contributed to the PSUV's loss in the 2008 election, which Carlos Ocariz, of the opposition party *Primero Justicia*, won with 55.6%.⁴¹ On various occasions local Chavistas called Ocariz's victory, 'the price we pay for Avalos' mistakes.' Ocariz also seems to have benefitted from (what some Chavistas in Sucre describe as) the lackluster campaign of Jesse Chacon, the PSUV's candidate. Chacon, who was a confidant of Hugo Chávez, defeated Carlos Molina in the PSUV's 2008 primary,⁴² but appears to have struggled to excite grassroots Chavistas. Chavistas in a Sala de Batalla in Maca (a PSUV stronghold in Petare) expressed disappointment that Chacon 'didn't come to the barrios.' While some Chavistas may have supported Ocariz, many stayed home rather than vote for Ocariz (or Chacon). Electoral data reveal a 27% decline in the Chavista vote in 2008 (compared to the 2006 presidential election), with the opposition vote increasing by a relatively modest 6.7%; this 20% gap in turnout accounts for Ocariz's clear victory.

Upon taking office in 2009, Ocariz implemented participatory budgeting, giving it significant resources; each year dozens of staff attend hundreds of PB-related assemblies, meetings, and technical sessions.⁴³ The presence of many well-educated professionals seems to have given the Ocariz administration the institutional coherence needed to successfully implement PB.⁴⁴ In its 2011 year-end review, the Ocariz administration reported that 95% of projects approved in 2011 were executed (55%) or in progress (40%), and that all projects approved but not completed in 2010 were finished in 2011.⁴⁵

Since Ocariz comes from an anti-Chavista Center-Right party, with strong support from the middle and upper-middle classes, his decision to make PB a centerpiece of his administration appears, at first glance, surprising. The ideological differences between Ocariz and Julio Chávez are clear. Chávez links PB to socialism. Ocariz is pro-market and frames PB in neoliberal terms: for example, in September 2010, while inaugurating a PB-funded community-run daycare, Ocariz said, 'We believe the state should be smaller and civil society should be bigger, that's why we're handing this over to the community to run.' Electoral data show *Primero Justicia* received roughly a third (or less) of the vote in Sucre's working-class barrios in the 2008 and 2013 municipal elections and the 2010 National Assembly election. Party officials acknowledge that Ocariz 'lost in the popular zones' in 2008, and 'won on the basis of high turnout in middle-class communities.' These officials expressed hope Ocariz's outreach in popular barrios would pay off electorally. Electoral data suggest this is the case, with *Primero Justicia* increasing its support in popular zones, in some cases quite substantially, in 2010 and 2013, although the PSUV continues to win 60% or more

⁴⁰ For information on this allegation see <http://www.talcualdigital.com/movil/visor.aspx?id=88375>.

⁴¹ Term limits (removed in Venezuela in 2009) prevented Avalos from running for re-election in 2008.

⁴² http://www.cne.gov.ve/divulgacion_psu2008/resultado_nacional.php?e=13&m=09&p=&c=&me=&ca=3

⁴³ A report lists 965 tech assistance sessions and 30 community encounters in 2011: <http://www.alcaldiamunicipiosucre.gov.ve/contenido/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Rendicion-de-Cuentas-2011.pdf>

⁴⁴ Ocariz's economic development director has a planning PhD from MIT, several staff went to Columbia University, and other staff attended the UCV and other well-regarded Venezuelan universities.

⁴⁵ <http://www.alcaldiamunicipiosucre.gov.ve/contenido/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Rendicion-de-Cuentas-2011.pdf>

in most popular zones.⁴⁶ These data indicate that Ocariz has expanded his support amongst the popular classes but that his core support remains with middle and upper-middle-class professionals, some (but not all) of whom are quite wary of “Chavista” ideas about “popular power.”⁴⁷

Ocariz’s ideology and class base raises two questions: Why has he implemented PB in a seemingly robust manner? And has this led to genuine participatory democracy? Part of the answer to the first question is that Ocariz is simply following the 2002 Law of Local Public Planning Councils, which made municipal-level participatory budgeting a requirement throughout Venezuela. This, however, is insufficient as an explanation for why Ocariz, and a few other mayors, such as Julio Chávez, have implemented PB in a *robust* fashion. Many mayors, like Javier Oropeza and Jose Vicente Rangel Avalos, flouted the spirit (if not the letter) of the law. One reason Ocariz did not is his longstanding commitment to participatory democracy, which dates to the late 1990s when Ocariz promoted participation as president of the Foundation of Social Development of the State of Miranda during the administration of Enrique Mendoza of COPEI (showing COPEI’s continuing interest in participatory democracy through the 1990s).⁴⁸

Another key factor is the context Ocariz found himself in as mayor of Sucre. Ocariz’s director of public works, who dislikes PB, says the mayor did PB ‘because it’s politically necessary.’ A PB facilitator said he had ‘no doubt [Ocariz was doing PB] because of the context.’ These comments point to the fact that Sucre is not a typical opposition municipality. The wealthier opposition-controlled municipalities in greater Caracas—Chacao, Baruta and El Hatillo—have never elected a Chavista mayor.⁴⁹ Sucre, by contrast, had a Chavista mayor from 2000 to 2008 and in the eyes of many local Chavistas remains “Chavista Territory.”⁵⁰ Since 2008, Primero Justicia has won every major election in Sucre. But the PSUV remains a formidable force, as demonstrated by the party’s electoral dominance in three of Sucre’s five districts, and strong showing in a fourth, in every major election between 2006 and 2013.⁵¹ As an opposition mayor in a “Chavista municipality,” Ocariz must work to expand his base in poorer barrios where Primero Justicia has fared less well. PB was one of the ways Ocariz could do this.

The final piece of the puzzle (of why Ocariz has robustly implemented PB) relates to the fact that Primero Justicia is not a typical opposition party. The party’s economic and social positions (e.g. the need to reduce the state, promote business, respect private property, and protect the family), and ties to the US government and radical sectors of the anti-Chávez

⁴⁶ CNE results show that support for Primero Justicia doubled in some popular barrios during this period, and in many other barrios, Ocariz substantially increased his support from 2008 to 2013. A look at electoral results from these elections shows, however, that the PSUV received over 60 % of the vote in many popular barrios, with Ocariz winning in just a few barrios, while taking 80–90 % of the vote in wealthier areas of Sucre. For unclear reasons, Ocariz’s support amongst elites appears to have dropped in December 2013.

⁴⁷ I attended a standing-room only PB assembly in a middle-class apartment building in Fall 2010, an indication that some middle-class sectors are willing to participate in “popular power” experiments.

⁴⁸ <http://www.alcaldiamunicipiosucre.gob.ve/contenido/alcaldia/biografia-del-alcalde/>. The seemingly disparate elements of Ocariz’s worldview (e.g., reducing the state, promoting private enterprise, fostering citizenship participation) indicate that his ideology is best described as “revisionist neoliberalism,” which differs from orthodox neoliberalism in the importance given to participation and empowerment, alongside a concern with free markets and economic efficiency (Mohan and Stokke 2000).

⁴⁹ All of these municipalities (and many others in Venezuela) have PB, but research is needed to assess (1) how seriously PB has been pursued and (2) if this has led to popular control over political decision-making.

⁵⁰ This phrase appeared on PSUV posters throughout Sucre during the 2010 National Assembly election.

⁵¹ In this period, the PSUV won by 10–60 % in the parishes of Caucaguita, La Dolorita and Filas de Mariches. The PSUV won in Petare, Sucre’s largest parish, in some years and lost by a relatively low margin in other years (e.g. 8 % in December 2013).

opposition place it on the Center-Right of Venezuela's political spectrum.⁵² But it is important to note that Venezuela's political spectrum has historically been further left than most of Latin America, as shown by COPEI's support for social welfare policies and (at times) participatory democracy. After Chávez's election, Venezuela's political spectrum shifted much further left. Most opposition parties responded to this in a purely negative manner, by criticizing Chávez's "authoritarianism," orchestrating a (strategically disastrous) boycott of the 2005 legislative election, and ignoring the popular classes. Primero Justicia, by contrast, has adopted a counterhegemonic strategy, using Chavista laws, organizational forms, and rhetoric to reach out to the popular classes.⁵³ Primero Justicia has encouraged its members to form communal councils. And party leaders have conspicuously utilized Chavista language; at a 2011 PB assembly, Ocariz said, 'This is popular power, we don't just *believe* in popular power, we're *doing* popular power.' Primero Justicia's interest in the poor is not entirely new; some party leaders, including Ocariz, have worked in the barrios of Petare since the late 1990s.

A number of indicators, detailed below, suggest Sucre's PB has led to genuine, albeit attenuated, participatory democracy: participants have real (if non-binding) decision-making power over a substantial, and increasing, amount of Sucre's budget; Ocariz has devoted significant resources to administering PB; and turnout for PB, while modest, has increased, particularly amongst Chavistas.

Sucre's limited participatory budget

Since 2009, Sucre's residents have had significant decision-making control over 30 % (and since 2010, 40 %) of the municipality's investment budget. In 2010, this amounted to 123,089,879 *bolivares fuertes* (28,625,550 US dollars).⁵⁴ Fundasucre coordinates Sucre's PB, which begins with zonal assemblies ("Community Encounters"), in Sucre's 38 zones, bringing together officials, civic leaders, residents and a zonal coordinator. In the five zonal assemblies I attended in 2010 and 2011 there were usually 30–80 participants and 10–20 municipal officials.⁵⁵ After officials outline the process, participants self-select into thematic worktables relating to security, infrastructure, culture, sports, etc. Each worktable produces a list of 10–20 projects. "Technical Assistance" sessions are held the following Monday–Thursday nights. In each of the 16 Technical Assistance sessions I attended in 2010 and 2011, around 3–6 officials and 20–30 citizens transformed proposals into structured projects listing technical details, budget estimates, and social benefits.⁵⁶ Completed projects are submitted to Fundasucre, which has final approval on projects, though Fundasucre officials and participants both say projects approved in technical assistance sessions are rarely rejected.

Turnout for Sucre's PB has been modest compared to Torres but seems to have grown over time. 1,200 people participated in Sucre's PB in 2009. 1,750 participants were reported

⁵² Primero Justicia's statutes: http://www.primerojusticia.org.ve/cms/index.php?option=com_flexicontent&view=item&cid=81&id=12551&Itemid=528. On ties to US see <http://venezuelanalysis.com/analysis/10388>

⁵³ The reason Primero Justicia has adopted a counterhegemonic strategy is likely due, in part, to the relative youth of its leadership. As a result the party is (1) less bound to, and more able to critique, the pre-Chávez past, (2) more willing to use opportunities provided by Chavismo, and (3) more willing and able to adapt in the face of the failed opposition strategy, of intransigent rejection of Chavismo, pursued from 2002 to 2005.

⁵⁴ These figures come from a 2010 Transparencia Venezuela report (http://transparencia.org.ve.previewdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Transparencia_Presupuesto_Participativo_i-1-Alca.pdf), which gives a good overall description of Sucre's PB process. In 2010 4.3 VEF were equal to 1 USD (at the official rate).

⁵⁵ In a make-up assembly I attended there was only 1 official, but usually 10 or more officials were present.

⁵⁶ A few Technical Assistance sessions I attended had less officials and/or participants.

through June 2010 (halfway through the 2010 PB cycle).⁵⁷ At an April 2011 PB assembly Ocariz said, “More than 2,500 neighborhood leaders have represented their neighbors in these discussions.”⁵⁸ Attendance at zonal assemblies I observed in early 2011 was considerably higher than it had been in late 2010 (70–80 participants in 2011 vs. 20–30 in 2010), suggesting an upward trend in attendance.

The comparatively lower turnout in Sucre’s PB stems, in part, from design: Unlike Torres’ PB, which begins with a participatory diagnosis, Sucre’s PB lacks a community-level phase. In addition to involving less people in PB, this has generated quality control issues. Prior to a 2010 zonal assembly in Caucaguita, Maribel, a lead PB facilitator with Fundasucre, told me why she thought this was important:

If we’re having a meeting on a Saturday, the community should get together beforehand and decide about the needs they have, and their priorities...The need that I might put forward is not the same as the need that you’ll put forward...I might, for instance, say that I want to have handrails on the sidewalk stairs in my neighborhood, owing to my physical disability [Maribel has a noticeable limp due to a problem with her left foot], but this might not be what the whole community wants, which might be a road.

Maribel said that as a result of the lack of a community diagnosis phase, the priorities put forward by some would not necessarily represent what others want: ‘If you don’t talk to anyone else, then you’ll just think that they agree with you’ even though this is not necessarily the case. According to Maribel, Fundasucre tried to get communities to do diagnoses during the first several meetings of the 2010 PB cycle but abandoned this plan because communities failed to carry out the diagnostics.

Decision-making in the PB meetings I attended in Sucre consisted of a mix of deliberation and command-and-control. Participants have (near-total) control over project ideas, but, unlike Torres, the number and budget amounts of projects (per thematic area) are fixed in advance. To illustrate the mixed quality of decision-making in Sucre’s PB I draw on observations from a May 2011 zonal assembly (which was similar to what I saw in other assemblies). I observed several worktables during the assembly. Oscar, a Fundasucre official who seemed to have little experience with or interest in popular participation, facilitated the “Social Equipment” worktable.⁵⁹ Oscar struggled to keep order during the process of choosing 10 of 21 proposals. After a period of confusion and indecision, another Fundasucre official, who had been observing, took charge. This official decided which projects would be included, saying, ‘I was here last year and I know that these communities [the ones she had written on a list] didn’t receive anything.’ A scramble ensued as participants sought to get on the list. Several participants protested that the selection process was unfair. One participant shook his head and said, ‘I don’t agree with this.’ Maribel, who had worked for the Hugo Chávez administration for several years and has much greater respect for and interest in participation, facilitated a different worktable. Maribel’s worktable ran quite smoothly: each participant was given the opportunity to present a proposal, there was discussion of the merits of different proposals, and participants decided which proposals to include. The contrast between these two worktables is indicative of the inconsistent quality of facilitation in Sucre: officials like Maribel fostered deliberation and popular control over decision-making; officials like Oscar did not.⁶⁰ In Torres,

⁵⁷ These figures are provided in the *Transparencia Venezuela* report cited above.

⁵⁸ http://www.alcaldiamunicipiosucre.gob.ve/contenido/2011/04/30/7816_arranco-en-sucre-el-presupuesto-participativo-2012/. Ocariz likely meant annual, not cumulative, turnout, though this is not clear.

⁵⁹ This assessment is based on conversations with and observations of Oscar during several PB events.

⁶⁰ Maribel and Oscar represent the extremes of Fundasucre’s PB team. Of the 20-odd officials I met most had more interest in, and sometimes more experience with, participation than Oscar but less than Maribel.

most PB facilitators approximated Maribel, in the sense of consistently fostering deliberation and popular control over decision-making.

Between 2009 and 2011, Sucre's PB became much more politically inclusive, a notable accomplishment given Sucre's intense polarization.⁶¹ Fundasucre officials and Chavistas told me Chavistas had boycotted, and in some cases sabotaged, Sucre's PB in 2009 (and to a lesser extent 2010).⁶² Some Chavistas participated in the 2010 PB.⁶³ In the first six 2011 PB assemblies, 50–80 % of *all* participants were Chavistas.⁶⁴ This shift can be attributed to two factors. Chavistas I spoke to in PB assemblies emphasized their desire to obtain benefits for their communities, which outweighed any reluctance they may have felt about associating with Ocariz due to certain national-level state directives to avoid doing so.⁶⁵ Sucre officials also worked hard to make sure PB was open to all, regardless of political views, partly due to the electoral benefits this could bring.⁶⁶

Electoral data from the 2010 legislative and the 2008 and 2013 municipal elections suggest PB helped Primero Justicia reach voters in typically Chavista barrios. Primero Justicia's candidate won the 2010 election—which, though national, was viewed by the PSUV and Primero Justicia as a referendum on Ocariz (PSUV 2010)—with 59.7 %, a four percent increase from what Ocariz obtained in Petare in 2008. Precinct results show Primero Justicia increased its vote (but generally still lost) in nearly all “Chavista” barrios.⁶⁷ Ocariz's vote total, and margin of victory, decreased in the December 2013 election, which he won with 52.79 %. But precinct results show Ocariz increased his support in a number of important popular barrios, suggesting that Primero Justicia's outreach to popular barrios (in part through PB) has paid off electorally.

The path from populist mobilization to participatory democracy

The narrative analyses presented above show that a strikingly similar sequence of events, leading to a relatively similar outcome, occurred in Torres and Sucre. In both cases a Chavista mayor was elected, leading to the creation of participatory institutions; these institutions were subject to struggle between the mayor, who sought to use them for his own personal and political ends, and certain officials and activists, who sought to use these institutions to establish popular control over political decision-making; the mayor prevailed, leading to participatory clientelism; popular discontent, due to various factors, including (allegedly widespread) clientelism and corruption, helped fuel the election of an opposition mayor in a

⁶¹ Sucre may be more polarized than Venezuela overall due to its importance to the PSUV and opposition.

⁶² Fundasucre officials showed me a video in which Chavista activists disrupted a PB assembly in 2009.

⁶³ I met some Chavistas at 2010 PB events. Fundasucre officials also say Chavistas participated in 2010.

⁶⁴ I counted the number of Chavistas in the three assemblies I attended. A Fundasucre staffer provided counts from three additional assemblies. These assemblies did not seem noteworthy in any way, making it likely this trend of greater Chavista participation continued through 2011 (a non-election year with less polarization).

⁶⁵ Two officials from Fundasucre told me they would deny resources to communal councils participating in Sucre's PB. Chavistas mentioned this, as did Sucre officials. But Chavista activists said they had participated in Sucre's PB without encountering any problems, and some cited President Chávez's comments that they should seek resources in opposition-controlled governments since “it's our money.”

⁶⁶ Fundasucre leaders were very interested in fostering Chavista participation. In Sucre (and Torres) some low-level staff favored exclusion, but conversations with staff in both cities suggest this was rare and something higher-level officials sought to fix. Of the dozen zonal coordinators I spoke with in Sucre (out of 38), about a third favored excluding Chavistas. Fundasucre leaders said they knew and wanted to stop this.

⁶⁷ I learned this by examining precinct results with the gleeful head of Sucre's Office of Community Affairs a few days after the election. It is unlikely this increase was due solely to PB. But PB definitely helped Primero Justicia reach Chavista voters, which Ocariz/Primero Justicia officials knew and were happy about.

subsequent election; this mayor drew on Chavista rhetoric and institutional forms to implement participatory budgeting in a relatively robust fashion.

My argument about the populist mobilization to participatory democracy path is an attempt to make sense of this similarity in sequence-of-events and outcome, which is quite surprising given the substantial differences between Torres and Sucre (see Table 1). Abstracting from the two cases leads to the proposition that populist mobilization cannot lead directly to participatory democracy but can indirectly facilitate this outcome. In theoretical terms the sequence-of-events through which this occurred in Torres and Sucre (via the PM-to-PD path) can be conceived as follows: (1) a populist regime generates unfulfilled expectations for participatory democracy and, more generally, is unresponsive to voters' needs (due to clientelism, corruption, inefficient administration, etc.), (2) precipitating a grassroots backlash that facilitates the election of a post-populist regime that (3) for a combination of ideological and political-electoral reasons, seeks and is able to successfully implement participatory reform, fulfilling (to some extent) the unfulfilled expectations for participatory democracy generated by its populist predecessor.

During the Chávez era, participatory reforms were initiated throughout Venezuela due to various laws. It appears most mayors managed to avoid fulfilling the 2002 CLPP law mandating nationwide participatory budgeting (Wilpert 2007, 57–8; Ellner 2008, 183). This raises the question: Do Torres and Sucre share certain features that explain why PB was successful in both when it seems to have failed in most Venezuelan municipalities? Put differently: Are there certain conditions that facilitate the PM-to-PD path?

My analysis suggests three conditions made the PM-to-PD path possible in Torres and Sucre. The first is participatory populist mobilization, which sets the PM-to-PD path in motion by generating (unfulfilled) expectations for participatory democracy that exist not only at the level of consciousness (“in people’s heads”) but in institutionalized practices (e.g. Torres’ CLPP and Sucre’s CDCs). During the Chávez era, participatory populist mobilization was nationwide. This highlights the importance of two additional conditions found in Torres and Sucre: a competitive electoral environment, and an opposition party employing a counterhegemonic strategy. An electoral environment is competitive when there is a reasonable chance the incumbent party could lose.⁶⁸ This is most likely when an incumbent party performs poorly in office and there is a well-organized alternative party.⁶⁹ A competitive electoral environment is important to my argument in two ways. First, in an uncompetitive environment, where an incumbent populist regime is quite unlikely to lose (because it has performed well and/or there is no well-organized alternative), it is hard to imagine how a post-populist regime could come to office. Second, if and when a post-populist regime takes office, a competitive electoral environment (in which the outgoing incumbent party remains well organized, as was the case in both Torres and Sucre) puts pressure on this post-populist regime to perform well to maintain or increase its support base and avoid being voted out of office in the next election. The third condition for the PM-to-PD path is an opposition party employing a counterhegemonic strategy that utilizes the rhetoric and institutional forms of the national (and/or outgoing local) ruling party. In both Torres and Sucre, this condition provided the link between the unfulfilled expectations generated by participatory populist mobilization and the (partial) fulfillment of these expectations by a post-populist regime.

Figure 1 diagrams various outcomes that participatory populist mobilization can lead to. The presence or absence of a competitive electoral environment and/or an opposition party

⁶⁸ Past elections can be categorized as competitive if (1) the incumbent party lost and/or (2) the margin of victory was <10 %. Both criteria hold for Torres’ 2004 election; the first holds for Sucre’s 2008 election.

⁶⁹ Both of these conditions were present in Torres’ 2004 and Sucre’s 2008 mayoral elections.

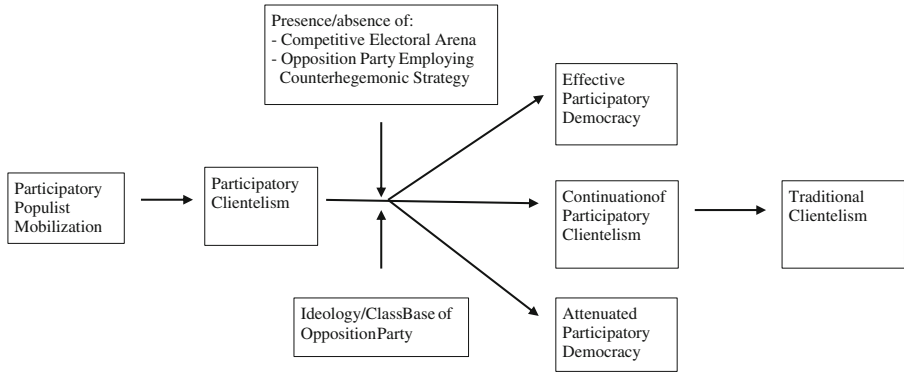


Fig. 1 From populist mobilization to participatory democracy

employing a counterhegemonic strategy helps determine whether participatory clientelism will continue (and possibly turn into traditional clientelism at a later point) or participatory democracy will emerge. An opposition party's ideology and class base shapes the type of participatory democracy that may emerge.

Beyond Torres and Sucre?

Venezuela has 335 municipalities, which vary along numerous dimensions, raising the question of whether the PM-to-PD path has occurred or could occur elsewhere in Venezuela. This question is theoretically significant since it speaks to the generalizability of my argument about the PM-to-PD path. There are both logical and empirical reasons to think the PM-to-PD path is not limited to Torres and Sucre. To start, the fact that such a similar sequence-of-events and outcome occurred in two cases that are so different (in ways scholarship suggests matter for participatory reform) implies that the PM-to-PD path did not occur in Torres or Sucre for purely local or idiosyncratic reasons.

There is evidence suggesting that the three conditions that facilitated the PM-to-PD path in Torres and Sucre are likely to be present in other Venezuelan municipalities. As stated, participatory populist mobilization has been widespread in Chávez-era Venezuela. What about competitive electoral environments and opposition parties employing counterhegemonic strategies? A quick scan of results from Venezuela's 2004, 2008 and 2013 mayoral elections suggests competitive electoral environments (defined as elections with a margin of victory of 10 % or less) exist in a third to half of Venezuelan municipalities.⁷⁰ 25 % of mayors elected in 2004, 17 % in 2008, and 22 % in 2013 were from opposition parties.⁷¹ Field research would be needed to determine which of these mayors employed counterhegemonic strategies. But this would seem most likely in opposition-controlled municipalities that recently switched from Chavismo to the opposition and/or where the MVR/PSUV is active and well organized.

Several important municipalities went from PSUV to opposition control in December 2013, including Valencia and Barquisimeto. In both cases, the opposition's margin of victory was under 10 %, suggesting the PSUV remains well organized locally. It is too soon to fully

⁷⁰ This estimate is based on a random sample of CNE results from around 150 mayoral races in these years.

⁷¹ For 2004 and 2008 see <http://www.saber.ula.ve/bitstream/123456789/37710/1/articulo5.pdf>. For 2013 see <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/13/us-venezuela-election-idUSBRE9BC0XT20131213>

evaluate the governing strategies of the new mayors of Valencia (Miguel Cocchiola) and Barquisimeto (Alfredo Ramos). Thus far, it appears Cocchiola has not employed a counterhegemonic strategy, while Ramos, who campaigned on a promise to implement participatory budgeting, may have.⁷² This evidence is obviously preliminary but suggests that the PM-to-PD path may not be limited to Torres and Sucre.

Another reason to think this is the “modular” importance of Torres and Sucre: Officials from both municipalities have promoted their experiences as models that can, and should, be copied elsewhere.⁷³ Julio Chávez has spoken about Torres’ PB and municipal constituent assembly throughout Venezuela and in Ecuador, Guatemala and the US (Aporrea 2006). Chávez and other Torres officials have worked with officials from Caicara de Orinoco, Acarigua, and Simón Bolívar (also known as Yare) interested in implementing Torres-style participatory reform. Yare is particularly interesting since its path to participatory reform appears to closely approximate what occurred in Torres. Like Torres, Yare elected a mainstream Chavista mayor in 2000, and another, Justo Hernandez, in 2004. Hernandez received just 18.2 % of the vote in the PSUV’s June 2008 primary, suggesting he disappointed grassroots Chavistas. An upstart candidate, Saul Yanez, won the PSUV primary with 20.6 % of the vote,⁷⁴ and then won the November 2008 election by a landslide. Once in office, Yanez convened a municipal constituent assembly, modeled on Torres. Torres’ Miguel Medina traveled to Yare to help with this constituent assembly, and says Yanez is strongly committed to implementing PB in a radical way.⁷⁵ Yanez won re-election in 2013 with 63.1 %, suggesting a high level of approval for his policies.

Officials from Primero Justicia have sought to extend their success in Sucre. One of the party’s main expansion targets is the strategically important municipality of Libertador (Caracas). Like Sucre, Libertador has numerous large popular barrios (e.g. 23 de Enero) that have provided Chavismo strong but not unconditional support (Ciccariello-Maher 2013). In party meetings in Fall 2010, Primero Justicia officials discussed ways to increase their outreach in these barrios, through, e.g., free health clinics and movie screenings. These efforts have not yet succeeded but indicate Primero Justicia’s efforts to use a counterhegemonic strategy to win over additional “Chavista” municipalities.

⁷² A google search of “Cocchiola presupuesto participativo”, and an examination of the Valencia Alcaldía’s website and other sites (an admittedly crude research strategy), turned up nothing participation-related for Cocchiola. For Ramos see <http://sunoticiero.com/index.php/lara-not/20716-alfredo-ramos-dividir-a-barquisimeto-en-tres-grandes-bloques>. Ramos’ use of a counterhegemonic strategy is almost surely linked to his political association with Henri Falcon, a Chavista-turned-opposition politician who, like Primero Justicia leaders, has long been a proponent of a counterhegemonic strategy. This suggests that a promising research strategy, to see if the PM-to-PD path can occur more widely, is to focus on municipalities that have switched from the MVR/PSUV to opposition parties that have embraced counterhegemonic strategies, such as Primero Justicia, Avanzada Progresista (Falcon’s party), and the PPT.

⁷³ This is analogous to what occurred in Brazil following the success of Porto Alegre’s PB, which was copied (often literally) in hundreds of cities in Brazil and across the globe (Baiochi and Ganuza 2014:30).

⁷⁴ See http://www.cne.gov.ve/divulgacion_psv2008/resultado_nacional.php?e=13&m=15&p=&c=&me=&ca=3

⁷⁵ On the constituent assembly see: <http://guerrillacomunicacionalsocialista.blogspot.com/p/constituyente-municipal.html>. On PB in Yare see: <http://www.diariolavoz.net/2013/09/19/vecinos-y-clpp-de-simon-bolivar-discuten-plan-de-inversion-comunal-2014/>

In both cases, these promotional efforts have paid off. Torres has been seen as a model by many within the radical Left of Chavismo due to the success of its radical PB.⁷⁶ Leaders of the anti-Chávez opposition have, in turn, viewed Sucre as a model due to the success of its PB.⁷⁷

Beyond Venezuela?

Close examination of the sequence of events preceding the emergence of Porto Alegre's famed Participatory Budget suggests the PM-to-PD path may not be limited to Venezuela. It is well known that the Workers' Party (PT) 1988 victory led to the establishment of PB in Porto Alegre. It is less well known that Alceu Collares (of the PDT), whose administration approximates a participatory populist regime, instituted participatory reform in Porto Alegre just before the PT came to power, setting off a chain of events that in certain respects appears quite similar to the PM-to-PD path.

Collares' "1986 victory came with a promise to institute popular participation;" once in office, Collares "proposed municipal councils to operate in tandem with city departments" as a means of institutionalizing popular participation in the municipal budget (Baiocchi 2005, 31). As with Javier Oropeza and Jose Vicente Rangel Avalos, Collares' ambiguous support for participatory decision-making led to struggle over the use of the participatory institutions his administration created. As in Torres and Sucre, this struggle led to participatory clientelism:

These councils faced legal obstacles, and...the administration switched tactics to the selective recognition of demands by politically sympathetic associations. Community leaders were already suspicious of these institutions, because they afforded little meaningful decision-making power to civil society....UAMPA [the Union of Neighborhood Associations of Porto Alegre] called instead for a participatory structure where the investment priorities of each district would be discussed with local community leaders. (Baiocchi 2005, 31)

A grassroots anti-incumbent backlash facilitated the PT's narrow victory in 1988 (ibid.). Community activists' frustrations with the unfulfilled expectations created by Collares led them to seek a more genuine form of popular control over the local budget, which (was one of the factors that) pushed the PT to implement PB in a serious way (ibid.).

This sequence-of-events and outcome (a participatory populist regime generates participatory clientelism and unfulfilled expectations for participatory democracy; discontent with this regime leads to a grassroots backlash; this facilitates the election of a post-populist regime, which successfully implements participatory budgeting) resembles what occurred in Torres (especially) and Sucre. It is notable that each of the factors that facilitated the PM-to-PD path in Torres and Sucre (participatory populist mobilization, a competitive electoral environment,

⁷⁶ In 2006, Torres' Julio Chávez became the only mayor named to Hugo Chávez's Presidential Commission on Popular Power. In 2008 Marta Hamecker, a leftist writer prominent within/outside Venezuela, wrote a book on Torres. Chávez was praised by national Chavista leaders following the success of Torres' PB. In 2007 then-vice president Jorge Rodríguez called Chávez a "deluxe mayor" (<http://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n90752.html>). Finally, radical Left activists I met traveling throughout Venezuela during my research, including some in Sucre, told me they knew of and admired Julio Chávez for his work in Torres.

⁷⁷ Sucre's PB is prominently featured in a local government strategy document of the Mesa de Unidad (the united opposition political body), which argues that other opposition-run municipalities should follow Sucre: <http://www.unidadvenezuela.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/MUD-Lineamientos-Municipal.pdf>. Opposition activists in Torres also told me they were impressed with what was happening in Sucre.

and an opposition party employing a counterhegemonic strategy) appears to have been present in Porto Alegre.

In conjunction with Latin America's recent "left turn," participatory democracy and populist mobilization have (re)emerged as important processes in numerous countries in the region. This raises the question: Could the PM-to-PD path occur in other Latin American countries? Ecuador, Bolivia and Argentina—which, like Venezuela, are frequently labeled populist (Kaufman 2011; Levitsky and Roberts 2011)—would seem the most likely possibilities. Rafael Correa's administration approximates a participatory populist regime: Participatory democracy is central to Correa's discourse (Harnecker 2011, 196; Conaghan 2011, 275), and interview data from top Correa officials indicate the state's commitment to fostering popular organization.⁷⁸ The Correa administration's allegedly "top-down" nature (de la Torre 2010) suggests that participatory democracy may be more likely to emerge indirectly (via something like the PM-to-PD path) than directly. It seems unlikely examples of the PM-to-PD path will be found in Bolivia; as Roberts (2006, 14) notes, Evo Morales' bottom-up roots distinguish his government from a populist regime. It also seems unlikely the PM-to-PD path will be found in Argentina. The Kirchners have mobilized the popular sectors (Etchemendy and Garay 2011, 301), but participatory democracy has not been central to their discourse.

Discussion

Scholars have argued that participatory reform is most likely to succeed when it results from an intentional effort led by a non-populist Left party linked to autonomous social movements (Heller 2001; Wampler 2007; Williams 2008). The two cases analyzed in this article depart from this model. In both, a local populist regime—linked (in the case of Sucre quite closely) to a national populist regime led by a highly charismatic leader who exercised considerable personal influence over national and (at times) local politics—introduced, but sought to control, participatory reform. Instead of facilitating popular control over political decision-making and fostering the growth of a mobilized and autonomous civil society, this led to participatory clientelism, placing civic associations in a position of dependency vis-à-vis the state. Surprisingly, in both cases participatory clientelism seems to have paved the way for the subsequent successful implementation of participatory budgeting. This outcome is particularly surprising in Sucre, where a Center-Right party implemented participatory budgeting (and did so in a robust manner).

This article has sought to explain how this occurred. My argument focuses on the unintended consequences of the particular type of (participatory) populist mobilization found in Chávez-era Venezuela. I have shown that, in both Torres and Sucre, participatory populist mobilization led to unfulfilled expectations for participatory democracy and, more generally, appears to have left a significant number of voters dissatisfied, due to the incumbent local populist regime's clientelism, (alleged) corruption, and seemingly poor performance in office overall. In both cases, popular discontent led to a grassroots anti-incumbent backlash that facilitated the election of a post-populist regime. For a combination of ideological and political-electoral reasons, this post-populist regime sought and managed to successfully implement participatory budgeting (with Torres' expansive participatory budget doing more to foster deliberation and popular control over political decision-making). My analysis suggests that, in addition to participatory populist mobilization, two other conditions made this

⁷⁸ A Correa official told Harnecker (2011, 157), "Itinerant cabinets [allow the government to] achieve a much closer dialogue with [local] authorities...[and] establish a political dialogue with the citizenry."

sequence of events and outcome—conceptualized as the populist mobilization to participatory democracy (or PM-to-PD) path—possible and more likely: a competitive electoral environment and an opposition party employing a counterhegemonic strategy.

Scholarship on Venezuela suggests the PM-to-PD path may be relatively uncommon. But there are three reasons to think this path is not unique to Torres and Sucre: first, a similar sequence-of-events and outcome occurred in two municipalities that differ in critical ways; second, evidence suggests that there are other municipalities inside and outside Venezuela where a similar sequence-of-events and outcome has or may have occurred and/or in which the conditions that facilitated the PM-to-PD path in Torres and Sucre appear to be present; and third, Torres and Sucre officials' efforts to replicate their experiences within and beyond Venezuela.

The processes analyzed in this article are worthy of attention not only or primarily because they could (have) occur(red) elsewhere, but for theoretical reasons. My main finding, that there is a “crooked line” that can link populist mobilization to participatory democracy, suggests that scholars should re-examine the notion that these processes are incompatible. This, in turn, implies the need to rethink certain assumptions about the relationship between the state and civil society. Many social scientists are suspicious of the idea that populist mobilization can give “power to the people.” The reason is because populist mobilization seems to be indelibly linked to personalistic political leaders whose desire for power and control renders them incapable of “making space for civil society,” which scholars see as critical to participatory democracy (Baiocchi et al. 2011).

The analysis presented in this article complicates this view. On the one hand, the populist politicians discussed above (Torres' Javier Oropeza, Sucre's Jose Vicente Rangel Avalos and Lara governor Luis Reyes Reyes) clearly fit the image of personalistic leaders unwilling to give up their power and control. But, by examining the unintended consequences of these leaders' words and actions—as a result of the actions of dissident officials, the disgruntled fraction of the populist base, and alternative political leaders—my analysis shows that there is more to populist mobilization than power-hungry demagogues riding roughshod over their hapless followers. In showing that populist mobilization can (indirectly) facilitate participatory democracy, my analysis demonstrates that successful participatory reform is possible even when the conditions seem less than propitious, in the specific sense of civil society lacking what many scholars would view as the requisite degree of autonomy from the state needed for this to occur.

The question of civic autonomy vis-à-vis the state looms large in the literature on Chávez-era Venezuela. Many scholars argue that the close links between the Venezuelan state and popular-sector organizations (e.g. communal councils) precludes the type of autonomy needed for democracy (of any kind) to flourish. This article shows that popular-sector organizations in contemporary Venezuela have struggled to assert and maintain their autonomy vis-à-vis the state and political parties (both pro- and anti-government). But, in line with the work of certain scholars, my analysis suggests that popular empowerment and contact with the state have not been mutually exclusive in Chávez-era Venezuela.⁷⁹ Like these works, this article shows that the messiness and contradictions of contemporary Venezuela cannot be understood by focusing solely on Hugo Chávez, or other national and local political leaders, such as Nicolás Maduro, Javier Oropeza or Jose Vicente Rangel Avalos. Analysts should not ignore such leaders, but must examine their interactions with a variety of actors, including other

⁷⁹ See, e.g. Ellner 2008; Fernandes 2010; Smilde 2011; Goldfrank 2011b; García-Guadilla 2011; López Maya and Lander 2011; Ciccariello-Maher 2013; Handlin 2013.

government officials, grassroots movements, civic associations linked to the popular and middle and upper-middle classes, average citizens, and pro- and anti-government political parties.

For many scholars, the most surprising finding of this article is likely to be that participatory reform can succeed when implemented by a Center-Right party. Researchers have noted that centrist and conservative parties can and have implemented participatory reform (Wampler 2009, 586; McNulty 2011, 128; Baiocchi and Ganuza 2014, 31–32).⁸⁰ But the idea that *successful* participation requires a left-of-center party seems to be implicit in numerous leading works on the subject (cf. Heller 2001; Fung and Wright 2003; Baiocchi 2003, 2005; Chavez and Goldfrank 2004; Baiocchi et al. 2011; Goldfrank 2011a; Baiocchi and Ganuza 2014, 32).⁸¹ In addition to playing a critical role in the process of deepening democracy, Left parties (in alliance with working-class movements) have been critical to the establishment of formal democracy in numerous historical and geographical contexts (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). It is thus understandable why scholars would be skeptical that Right-of-Center parties—which have historically been closely tied to the upper classes and have a dubious record of support for democracy (particularly in Latin America)—would have the interest or ability to implement participatory reform in a manner that genuinely empowers subordinate classes, in the sense of providing them decision-making power over a politically- and economically-significant resource (e.g. a large municipality’s investment budget).

I have shown that this occurred in Sucre municipality. Carlos Ocariz, a mayor from a Center-Right party with a predominantly middle and upper-middle-class base, robustly implemented participatory budgeting. Despite its limitations, Sucre’s PB has given residents, many (and from 2011 on, perhaps most) from the popular classes, substantial decision-making power over significant resources (\$28.6 million in 2010). My analysis suggests this was possible because of three interrelated factors: Ocariz’s longstanding commitment to participatory democracy, which connects to a longer history of Center-Right support for participation in Venezuela; the national and local context, i.e. Venezuela’s shift left under Chávez and the fact that Ocariz is an opposition mayor in a “Chavista municipality;” and third, the unusual nature of Primero Justicia, as an anti-Chavista party that has utilized Chavista tools to actively reach out to the popular classes.

These three factors underscore a theoretical point: the importance of historical context in explaining political party behavior. The worldwide ascendance of market ideas in the wake of the “neoliberal counter-revolution” of the 1980s led Left and Center-Left parties around the world to embrace ideas and policies (e.g. privatization, deregulation, austerity) they previously rejected and that were historically associated with the Right. Examples abound: the Labor Party (UK), the African National Congress (South Africa), the Democratic Party (US), and numerous parties in Latin America, such as Bolivia’s MNR, Peru’s APRA, and Venezuela’s Acción Democrática and MAS. Primero Justicia’s (and, at an earlier time, COPEI’s) embrace of participatory democracy shows that the opposite process, wherein Right-of-Center parties embrace ideas historically associated with the Left, can occur in contexts where Left-of-Center ideas and policies hold sway.

⁸⁰ The question of whether such reforms have *succeeded* has rarely been addressed. Amongst the few exceptions are Wampler (2009, 586), who finds that participatory budgeting failed when implemented by centrist and conservative parties in Recife, Brazil, and McNulty (2011, 128), who, to my knowledge, is the only scholar who has documented a case of successful participation implemented by a “right-leaning party” in Cusco, Peru. McNulty argues, however, that “political party” has “no explanatory power” (139), and refers to the politician who oversaw this successful participation as an “ex-leftist” (131).

⁸¹ Heller (2001, 133) comes close to explicitly saying a Left party is needed for successful participation. Heller and many of these authors argue that an autonomous and mobilized social base is also critical.

Taken together this article's key findings (that populist mobilization can indirectly facilitate participatory democracy, and that this can occur in municipalities led by the Left or Center-Right) are significant because they provide support for the idea that *successful participatory reform may be possible in a significantly wider range of circumstances than previously thought*.⁸² This means the benefits associated with participatory reform—increased transparency and accountability of state institutions, a more active citizenry, and an increase in the organizational and mobilizational capacity of civil society, to name a few—may also be more widely available than previously thought.

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⁸² My comparison of Torres and Sucre suggests, however, that participatory reform is likely to be most successful in a relatively narrow and uncommon set of circumstances, where a non-populist Left party controls the municipal executive and is closely linked to a mobilized popular class base.

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Gabriel Hetland is a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. His research focuses on participatory democracy, the state, political parties, social movements and labor in Latin America and the United States.