

#07

RESEARCH DESIGN
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MEASURING ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BRAZIL

Measuring Economic Inequality and Political Participation in Brazil

This research proposal seeks to distinguish to what extent and how income inequality affects political participation in Brazilian cities. Political participation is a necessary aspect of democracy and exists in a variety of forms that translate into cognitive-effective orientations, attitudes, and behaviors (Almond and Verba 1963); however, there is often unequal access to resources that prevent an even playing-field of participation. Participation facilitates increased awareness of government practices and demand for effective government programming; this, in turn, creates a balance between citizens and the state, a check on the government, and sense of community action. (Bergh, Menocal, and Takeuchi 2014; Inglehart and Welzel 2009; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1999). These aspects are essential in creating a well-functioning and democratic government that is responsive to citizens' needs. However, this can be challenging when citizens feel that they do not have the resources, free time, and civic skills to engage with their government (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1995).

Brazil offers a unique sample case in terms of political participation since voting is compulsory. When measuring political participation, we seek to explore the ways in which citizens make an effort to feel more actively engaged in democratic culture. Therefore, in our research design model, voting will not be considered a measure of political participation, but in place of voting we will measure willingness to vote. We believe that in cities with higher levels of economic inequality that there will be an overall decrease in political participation, as supported by the general literature (Solt 2008; Solt and Ritter 2019; Anderson and Beramendi 2008).

This research design will have three parts. Part 1 consists of a literature review that goes over critical themes and arguments. Part 2 is our hypothesis, and part 3 details our research design and methods. Section 3 is divided into three subsections that address the various alternatives for carrying out the research implementation. We are open to and welcome suggestions, comments, and critiques.

Literature review

There exists substantial literature on how economic level affects political participation; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady (1999) note that wealthier citizens are more likely to work for political campaigns and communicate with government officials. Lerner (1958) and Inglehart and Welzel (2009) find a positive correlation between economic development in a region and political development, as urbanization leads to variables that allow for more robust political participation, such as improved education, self-expression, and an abundance of social networks.

More recently, studies have shown that not only wealth level affects political participation, but overall income inequality does as well. Regions with higher income inequality reveal a lower rate of participation (Solt 2008). Chong and Gradstein (2004) also find strong causal evidence that income inequality leads to poorer institutions, further inhibiting people from achieving economic mobility, and subsequently hindering political participation. This is a key aspect of understanding why economic inequality deters political participation; aspects such as education, access to resources, and disposable income all affect the knowledge and methods essential to democratic participation. In Brazil, this might be even more the case, since there is a strong association between income and access to education.

Additionally, relative power theory indicates that greater inequality allows wealthier members of society to shape politics to their own advantage; they use their position and money to exclude issues that more directly affect poorer citizens, and their amplified voices are able to debate issues among themselves, this may exclude the lower class (Ritter and Solt 2019). The exclusion of issues that do not divide the wealthy ultimately make politics less impactful to everyone, regardless of income. Since the upper-class opinions aren't being threatened, the lower class may feel voiceless (Ibid; Anderson and Beramendi 2008). Therefore, high economic inequality results in decreased political participation regardless of where an individual falls on the wealth spectrum. In Brazil, high socioeconomic inequality is a prevalent issue; Oxfam (2017) indicates that Brazil has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the world. Level of political knowledge translates into political participation: Brazilians with a high level of education, compared to those with less education, are much more likely to voice their opinion and venture into the political sphere (Galston 2001; McDonough 1982).

HIGH ECONOMIC INEQUALITY RESULTS IN DECREASED POLITICAL PARTICIPATION REGARDLESS OF WHERE AN INDIVIDUAL FALLS ON THE WEALTH SPECTRUM

State-funded programs, such as welfare and social security, often have a more direct impact on people of lower classes, however lower-income citizens are less likely to engage in traditional political activities (Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1995). Poor education limits understanding of government and political processes. People of lower income do not donate money due to financial restraints, and often live in neighborhoods where solicitors may not request campaign contributions (Lawless 2001). In addition, lower perceived social class can drive individuals to participate less in political activities because the negative self-perception can generate feelings of lack of personal control, especially in political contexts (Krauss 2015).

Hypothesis

We hypothesize, *ceteris paribus*, that areas with high income inequality in Brazil will have lower levels of political participation.

Methods

This part will include potential alternatives for measuring income inequality, political participation, and length of the study. This research design suggests two possible alternatives each for measuring income inequality, political participation, and study length.

3.1 Measuring Income Inequality

Our method for measuring income inequality will employ the Gini coefficient of the disposable household income per equivalent adult. The Gini Index indicates the range of income distribution; a score of 0 indicates perfect equality where all national income is evenly distributed among households, and a score of 1 indicates perfect inequality, where one household receives all of the national income. While acquiring information on specific Gini indexes of cities in Brazil can be challenging, the Brazil Atlas of Human Development has substantial recent and comprehensive municipality-wide Gini indexes that it draws from Brazil's most recent census (2010). Another alternative to the Atlas includes DATASUS, a database that comprises an index of economic inequality from Brazil's Ministry of Health. Control variables we would employ include education, sex, age, and occupation. The following alternatives are possible modes for comparing city-wide information.

Alternative 1: Comparing cities of similar sizes in Brazil. Using population data, cities will be selected based upon their population size. OECD classifies cities by the following scale: large metropolitan areas are those with 1.5 million people or more, metropolitan areas have between 500,000 to 1.5 million people, medium-sized urban areas have 200,000-500,000 people, and small urban areas have a population of 50,000 to 200,000 (OECD 2019). Cities

within the same indicator (large metropolitan, metropolitan, medium-sized urban, small-sized urban) will be compared against each other. In addition, there should be an even amount of cities with a high Gini index and a low Gini Index in this model (ex. 5 cities with an index of 0.8 and 5 cities with an index of 0.4). Through this approach, we would ensure that large varying city size is not skewing the data. Using cities with low economic inequality would reveal the other side of our hypothesis; i.e. whether low inequality correlates with higher levels of political participation.

Alternative 2: Comparing an even number of cities with high Gini index vs those with a low Gini index (regardless of population size). Cities examined would range from the highest level of inequality (Gini index approaching 1) and the lowest level of inequality (Gini index approaching 0). There would be one city for each degree of inequality, starting at the lowest level of inequality, up to the highest level of inequality. This approach would allow us to see a general scale of whether political participation is decreasing as economic inequality is increasing.

3.2 Measuring Political Participation

Voting is an integral part of a functioning democracy, therefore it is often regarded as a common means of defining democratic membership and measuring political participation (Dahl 1998; Pateman 1970; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 1995). However, countries where voting is mandatory pose a unique challenge: should voting be considered participation if it is not voluntary? Some scholars, such as Jan van Deth, argue that actions of political involvement that are not voluntary should not be considered political participation, so in this sense voting would not be considered political participation. (van Deth 2014). However, we acknowledge that other authors such as Joan Nelson argue that coercion to participate is inherent in many forms of political participation, such as economic manipulation, and therefore cannot be separated from participation itself (Nelson 1979). However, we think that this argument could render most political participation mute, so we take a stricter position (following van Deth) on political participation being qualified on whether it is compulsory or not. Ultimately, voting is a very necessary form of participation for a democracy to function, but the question of the compulsory nature is subject for discussion among authors.

For defining political participation in our model, we employ a synthesized version of political participation from van Deth (2014) and Dalton (2008). In this sense, the basis of political participation consists of a voluntary action done by a citizen in regards to government, politics, or the state (van Deth 2014). From this point forward, there are other steps that narrow down political participation, such as whether the activity is targeted at a specific sphere of government/state/politics, if it is aimed at solving collective or community problems, and then whether the activity is used to express political aims and intentions of participants (Ibid). However, Dalton (2008) highlights that it is essential to note political participation in terms of style and not just intensity. Therefore, Instituto Sívís's local democracy index breaks down participation into the strict (electoral) sense and the latent (participatory) sense. The strict sense encapsulates electoral forms of participation, which are the basis of a democracy, such as willingness to vote, political party affiliation, and attending rallies for a political candidate. The latent sense represents the more expressive and participatory side of political participation, such as demonstrations, civil society associations, and virtual media participation. Additionally, our research design seeks to capture both the intensity of participation and the distribution of individuals that are participating.

Alternative 1: Examining political participation based on city-wide indicators of collective participation. This alternative would consist of data collection on political participation, such as number of political organizations in a city, membership levels of those organizations, number of organized protests, attendance at those protests, etc. In order to accomplish this, we would need to generate a comprehensive measure of political participation for collective action, and then examine existing city-wide indicators data on political participation. The measure would need to encapsulate indicators that include the strict sense (electoral aspects) and the latent sense (participatory aspects). This would allow us to measure the frequency of political participation in a city, although it would be difficult to grasp who is participating and how intense those individuals participate personally in politics. Another challenge with this method is to capture other aspects of the electoral sense, such as willingness to vote.

Alternative 2: Individual political participation survey. We analyze political participation from the data gathered by Instituto SIVIS's Local Democracy Index. These questions are generated to capture both strict sense (willingness to vote, support for political parties, affiliation with a political party) and the latent sense (whether you have attended a protest, public hearing, signed a petition, participated in a boycott, etc.) They would further be broken down into what component of participation is being addressed, and then the specific topic within that component. Examples of questions include "If voting were not obligatory, would you vote?" or "How frequently do you participate in institutionalized political activities such as municipal councils, plebiscites, public hearings, among others?". This allows for measuring how frequently and intensely certain individuals participate in government, and would give a clearer sense of participation across all incomes. Of course, self-reporting survey bias is always a factor to consider.

3.3 Length of the Study

Finally, there are a variety of ways to carry out the implementation of this study. This section lists possible alternatives for how long this study could last and possibilities for execution. One current challenge with this study is that there is a lack in yearly information for the Gini coefficient of individual cities. Current information on city Gini coefficients are based off of the 2010 Brazilian census.

Alternative 1: Year-based multi-city study. This alternative would comprise the following steps: (1) Conduct measure of political participation simultaneously with the 2020 Brazilian census. (2) Use the Gini index of each city for that year, based upon results from the census. (3) Correlate city Gini index with that year's level of political participation. (4) Compare it against other cities of that year. One challenge with this format is whether it would truly capture enough data to prove at the minimum correlation between income inequality and political participation, but also ideally causality.

Alternative 2: Longitudinal study. Using the model above, implement the same strategy but over multiple decades. Review how has the Gini index fluctuated between decades and if there is a correlating fluctuation in political participation. One challenge is the length of this study; it would take decades to fully implement. However, it would provide a more holistic view of the changes in participation and economic inequality.

Conclusion

Understanding citizens' desire to participate in government is a necessary part of comprehending greater democratic culture. However, barriers generated from economic inequality hinder the development of an informed and passionate polity. Part of Instituto Sívís's mission in promoting democracy includes understanding how certain factors create unequal participation, and from that understanding working towards improving those flaws. Because general literature suggests that economic inequality is tied to levels of political participation, we seek to understand how that has a direct impact on localities, firstly in Brazil, and then beyond.

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