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Introduction

On Election Day in Bolivia the roads are full of people making their way to polling places, sometimes walking for hours in the blazing sun along the dusty roads of the high Andean plateau, or along muddy paths in the Amazon lowlands. Driving is prohibited for the duration of voting and the normally busy roads are strangely quiet without the usual din of motorized traffic. Occasionally official vehicles from the national electoral court or international observer groups fly by in a cloud of dust. People sell food and drinks by the side of the road, but most businesses are closed for the day. At polling places, people wait in line to vote, then spend time talking with friends and family before the long walk home. Despite the festival atmosphere of Election Day and relatively high voter turnout there are a number of reasons to suspect that elections are not living up to expectations in Bolivia.[1] Although Bolivia has held regular elections since the 1982 transition to democracy, political parties are weak and inconsistent, accusations of fraud are common, and corruption is pervasive. Public confidence in elections is low, and in many districts there is little or no real political competition.

In sharp contrast, protests in Bolivia have proved surprisingly effective at achieving political aims. Since 2000, protests have resulted in changes to tax policy and policies on subsidies, a reversal of a controversial plan to privatize water in one of the larger cities, and, most dramatically, the resignation of a democratically elected president. Protests have also been central to the political movement that ushered in widespread legislative and local electoral victories for the leftist political party *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) and the election of Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales, in 2005 and again in 2009.

[1] This description is based on the author's observations of the 2004 referendum election in La Paz and the 2009 general election in Potosí.

Protest has become a common and effective form of political participation in recent years in Bolivia.

In this context of poorly performing – yet nominally democratic – institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a puzzling role in mobilizing people for participation in both elections and in protest movements. NGOs are often credited with promoting democracy at the local level by encouraging political engagement, educating voters, and by strengthening the capacity of democratic institutions through advice and training. In Bolivia, however, it is clear that NGOs have also played key roles in mobilizing and organizing political protest movements. NGOs directly facilitated the first large-scale indigenous protests of the early 1990s, including the dramatic month-long march to the capital in 1990 (the "March for Territory and Dignity"). NGOs also helped organize protests surrounding the privatization of water in Cochabamba in 2003 (the "Water War"). More recently, NGOs were often involved in the wave of protests and blockades against the government of Sánchez de Lozada that culminated in the violent confrontations of the "Gas War" in La Paz and El Alto in 2003. These events marked a major turning point in Bolivian politics as the high levels of social mobilization and frequent street protests helped carry Evo Morales to an unprecedented electoral victory in the 2005 presidential elections. Morales became Bolivia's first indigenous president, and the first president to win more than 50 percent of the vote.

For many NGO advocates, these events in Bolivia represent a compelling story of change. NGOs, many with substantial international funding, have been working in Bolivia for decades, bringing resources to impoverished communities and empowering the poor, women, and indigenous people to participate in politics and make demands for a more responsive government. As a result, through very direct and contentious confrontation with the state, a project of major social change was initiated. For some proponents of NGO work, however, the close link between NGOs and protest movements represents an alarmingly contentious way to pursue the aims of social justice. For all the rhetoric in the foreign aid community praising local NGO activity, there is very little reference to protest or direct confrontation. Instead, NGOs are praised for strengthening democracy at the local level through education, citizen training, and dialogue – not through violent protest.

These events and debates in Bolivia are representative of larger issues across the developing world. What role do NGOs in developing democracies play in promoting political participation? And what does their impact on political participation mean for democracy? Bolivia is an instructive starting point for this discussion because it is a case of very high NGO activity, weak democratic institutions, and high levels of social mobilization and protest. In Bolivia these forces are shaping and defining political life, but the dynamics at play exist in all democracies in the developing world. The role that NGOs are increasingly playing in developing world democracies extends to democracies across Latin America and other regions of the developing world. In all of the newer

democracies of the developing world, NGOs have taken on service delivery and advocacy roles, which have changed the ways in which ordinary people associate and participate in politics.

Is NGO activity strengthening democracy in developing countries? Or are NGOs threatening democracy by helping give voice to demands that resource-poor governments are ill-equipped to handle? To assess the role that NGOs play in newer democracies, this book focuses on two related questions about how NGOs influence political participation in developing democracies. First, under what conditions do NGOs encourage voting versus protest? And, second, what does protest resulting from NGO activity mean for weakly institutionalized democracies? Specifically, under what conditions is NGO activity likely to result in protest that is compatible with support for a democratic political system versus protest that is antisystem? The idea that NGOs might be encouraging political protest runs counter to much of the conventional wisdom on NGOs, which focuses on their role in training citizens to participate in democratic processes, bringing new resources to poor communities, or grassroots problem-solving. This book presents strong evidence that NGOs do facilitate political protest and contentious politics in almost every country in Latin America and in developing-world democracies outside of Latin America. There is little evidence, on the other hand, that protest is incompatible with support for a democratic political system. In fact, in nearly every country in Latin America, individuals who have protested report similar levels of support for democracy as non-protesters.

These questions address important unresolved tensions in both the NGO literature and the literature on political protest concerning the threshold at which political engagement crosses over into something more threatening. On the one hand, NGOs are praised for encouraging democratic political engagement at the local level by training democratic citizens and modeling productive, democratic conflict resolution techniques.[2] They are also praised for mobilizing activism on a wide range of social justice issues including the environment, human rights, economic policy, and many others.[3] On the other hand, NGOs have attracted criticism for many of the same activities, including activism that becomes disruptive or violent. For example, the violent protests in Seattle in 1999 led by NGOs protesting globalization attracted both supporters and detractors – some activists were energized by the high profile of the clashes and the media attention they received, but others were dismayed by the violence and confrontational tactics employed. Implicit in these analyses is the idea that

[2] For example, Bratton lauded NGOs as bolsters to civil society because they are often democratic and participatory (1989). Others more directly make the claim that NGOs train good democratic citizens (Reilly 1995).

[3] Keck and Sikkink pointed out this more contentious role for NGOs in attracting international attention to domestic political struggles, an idea that has greatly influenced both practitioners and scholars (1998).

at some point NGOs can go too far. That is, mobilization may generally be a good thing, but at some point it crosses over into the realm of unreasonable demands, violence, or instability.[4]

This divide is not just between moderate and radical observers of NGO activity. It points to a fundamental tension in the role that NGOs are thought to play in democracies in the developing world. NGOs – and civil society more broadly – help people mobilize and articulate their interests and demands to the state. NGOs build capacity for participation among the poor and traditionally excluded so that they can pressure governments in the developing world to be more responsive and more accountable. On one hand, this activity is thought to be good for democracy as it encourages participation and holds the government to account. But on the other hand, NGOs give voice to deep-seeded and widespread discontent that poor governments in the developing world may be ill equipped to address. By pointing out the failures of government, are NGOs strengthening democracy or undermining it?

The literature on political protest holds a similar tension. Some scholars see protest as a process through which oppressed people shake off their shackles and creatively and contentiously make demands on the state, something seen as essential for democracy to work. Protest is both an expression of important democratic freedoms and a sign that those freedoms are protected sufficiently that people are able to participate. For others, however, protest is seen as a precursor to wider conflicts, including violence, civil wars, and general political instability (Huntington 1968; Rose and Shin 2001). Again, implicit in these very different ways of thinking about contentious political engagement is a threshold. Up to a certain point, protest may be an important way of voicing previously excluded interests. Beyond a certain point, however, protest is viewed as a menace to political order, a dangerous burden putting strain on weak institutions. These different visions of the role of civil society mobilization in democracy represent fundamentally different conceptions of democracy. In one vision, democracy is essentially a set of rules for settling disputes, adjudicating disagreements peacefully, and establishing clear winners and losers through formal elections. In the other, democracy is essentially a contentious process of voicing political opinions.

This book addresses these debates by exploring how civil society mobilization works in newer democracies. Specifically, it seeks to identify the conditions

[4] The literature on civil society also shows this tension between contentious and moderate visions. For example, many of the seminal works on social cleavages and political parties saw parties as necessary for containing the unruly and polarizing forces of political engagement into more controlled interactions (Sartori 1976). Others characterized strong civil society as dangerous to effective policymaking or political stability (Almond and Verba 1963; Hirschman 1970; O'Donnell 1973). These authors rarely use the terminology "civil society" but are essentially talking about many of the same concepts of membership in organizations, and collective political behavior. See Bermeo (2003) for further discussion of how these early works inform the contemporary debates over civil society and participation.

under which NGOs are likely to promote protest versus voting, and some of the limits of where we should expect NGOs' facilitation of protest to be supportive of – or compatible with – a democratic political system. I argue that the critical factor that shapes the impact of NGO activity on political participation is the quality of democracy – in particular the degree to which elections are free and fair and offer opportunities to choose between political parties or candidates that reflect important issues and interests in society, and the overall confidence of ordinary people in elections as a tool for participation. Under conditions of poorly functioning elections, weak political parties, and low confidence in elections, NGOs encourage political protest. In other words, as the formal mechanisms for democratic political participation perform worse and worse, NGOs have an increasing effect on protest and a declining effect on voting. The inverse is also true. As democratic institutions perform better, NGOs have a larger effect on voting than on protest.

What does this protest mean for weakly institutionalized democracies? Even in cases of frequent protests, protest need not be incompatible with a democratic political system. In fact, in most countries that are at least minimally democratic, protest can be an important way of keeping electoral losers and others who are dissatisfied with the government as part of the policy debates as policymakers are forced to respond to protesters' demands. At some critical point, however, democratic institutions may perform so poorly that political protest is unlikely to continue being system supporting. There is real and important variation in the quality of democratic institutions between countries that qualify as minimally democratic. I argue that this variation in the quality of the process and performance of democratic institutions – especially the fairness of elections, the strength and coherence of political parties, and the degree of political competition – is the most important factor that shapes how NGOs influence political participation and the effect new political participation will have on support for a democratic political system.

WHY THIS BOOK?

The central finding of the book is that NGOs promote moderate political participation through formal mechanisms such as voting *only* in democracies where institutions are working quite well. This is a radical departure from the bulk of literature on civil society that sees NGOs and other associations as playing a role in strengthening democracy wherever they operate. Instead, I find that where democratic institutions are weak, NGOs encourage much more contentious political participation, including demonstrations, riots, and protests. Except in extreme cases of poorly functioning democratic institutions, however, the political protest that results from NGO activity is not generally antisystem or incompatible with democracy – again, as long as democracy is functioning above a minimal level.

This book offers an answer to the deep-seeded debate started by Huntington (1968) over whether the mobilization of civil society is a danger to stability and democracy (as Huntington suggests), or whether civil society is the necessary precondition for "making democracy work," as Putnam famously claimed (1994). By focusing on NGOs, which are newer actors that have changed the civil society scene in most developing countries, this book lays out the conditions under which civil society mobilization strengthens democracy and when it weakens it, which I argue is shaped by the quality of democratic institutions for participation.

I demonstrate that both Huntington and Putnam are wrong: Huntington for seeing civil society mobilization primarily as a threat to stability and to democracy and Putnam for seeing civil society as mainly fostering cooperative, moderate collaboration with the state. Instead, civil society in new democracies often facilitates contentious mobilization *at the same time* that it serves to legitimate support for democracy. But we can expect this relationship only in countries that are already democratic. Although NGOs are more likely to promote protest in countries with poorly functioning elections, they are rarely associated with antidemocratic attitudes as long as the country is above a minimal threshold for democratic performance.

The book offers a sharp contrast to the dominant view that civil society encourages moderate participation along the lines of peaceful activism, increasing voter turnout, and community problem solving – all of which should have a positive net benefit for democratic consolidation (Diamond 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996). International organizations and foreign aid donors have clearly accepted the premise that civil society is important for democracy: For example, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) website states that the agency seeks to strengthen civil society so that individuals can "associate with like-minded individuals, express their views publicly, openly debate public policy, and petition their government" (USAID 2009). Similarly, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) describes civil society as important for promoting democracy because it "includes aspects such as tolerance, pluralism, social capital and trust, as well as respect for the opinions and desires of others" (SIDA 2007, 6).

Although there is a small and growing group of scholars who are much more skeptical that NGOs or civil society always play this role in the developing world, this project is one of the first to address explicitly the conditions under which NGOs in newer democracies strengthen institutional participation and when they are more likely to result in contentious behavior. Other work has pointed out that civil society is not always a pro-democracy force in authoritarian countries (Jamal 2007; Jamal and Nooruddin 2010; Rossteutscher 2010), but this book is the first to evaluate systematically how the quality of democratic institutions shapes the role of NGOs and civil society organizations in newer democracies.

The finding that the effect of NGOs on participation is shaped more by the larger context of institutional quality than by the specific actions of NGOs is also controversial. The vast majority of work on NGOs focuses on the individual organizations and how they operate, including attention to resources, local knowledge, capacity, and the type of activity in which the NGO is engaged. Although variation in the type of NGO may be tremendously important for some outcomes (ability to deliver services, for example), I find that NGOs also have large unintended consequences for participation that are influenced more by the context in which they are operating than by their specific activities. Although NGO scholars may certainly recognize the importance of context, the focus of the vast majority of work on NGOs has been at the level of the organization.

Similarly, much of the recent work on civil society in developing countries has focused on the type of organizations involved and how democratic they are. My work, in contrast, suggests that it is not enough to know how strong, or how democratic civil society is in a country to know if it will foster active engaged voting, or if it will encourage contentious political protest, or both. It is also essential to know what the institutional mechanisms for political participation are like.

Finally, this book offers a new and rigorous methodological approach to these questions. Both the literatures on NGOs and civil society have long been dominated by theory that has rarely been tested systematically. This book is the first to my knowledge to evaluate systematically the impact of NGOs and civil society organizations on participation in varying contexts of democratic quality.

THE SCOPE: DEMOCRACIES IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

This book focuses on nominally democratic countries in the developing world because of the tremendous variation in the quality of the institutions that are called democratic and because it is unclear what the role for political protest is under these varying conditions. In 1978 nearly every country in Latin America was governed by an authoritarian regime. In a little more than a decade, by 1990, nearly every country in the region had competitively elected governments and could be considered democratic or semi-democratic. Similarly in other regions of the world, a move toward electoral democracy has been documented since the 1970s. In 2010, out of 194 countries and territories Freedom House considered 116 electoral democracies. The younger democracies in this group face some formidable challenges, including high economic inequality, high rates of poverty, deep social divides, and relatively weak political institutions compared to the older, wealthier democracies of Europe and North America. It has also become clear that transitioning to democratic government does not signal the end of contentious politics in the developing world. Instead,

political protest and demonstrations continue to play a role in the politics of most democracies in the world.[5] Since Samuel Huntington first voiced concern over the stability of weak political institutions in the face of rapidly changing societies in *Political Order in Changing Societies,* there has been a fear that social mobilization may prove too much for young democracies (1968). Can young democracies with weak political institutions withstand the pressures of changing, politically mobilized societies? What happens to the dynamics of civil society when the state is unable or unwilling to respond to participatory pressure from civil society?

In many countries in the developing world, however, democracy has proved surprisingly stable even in the face of contentious political activity. In India, for example, stable democratic governance at the national level coexists with frequent ethnic riots at the local (Varshney 2003; Wilkinson 2006). In Latin America, democracy today is more durable and more extensive than ever before in the region (Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005), in spite of increasing political protests (Arce and Bellinger 2007; Bellinger and Arce 2010). And democracy has remained relatively stable in the face of new social movements organized in part around indigenous identity and social inclusion for the poor in Mexico, Bolivia, and Ecuador (Yashar 2005). Democracy has also persisted in the face of high levels of political protest in Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Colombia. Even the countries that have experienced government instability have rarely seen the type of regime breakdown associated with instability before this current era of democracy (Pérez-Liñán 2007). In wealthy, established democracies political protest is rarely criticized as a threat to the regime, or as a threat to democracy. Rather, political protest is more often characterized as one of many ways that citizens make their opinions known and press for policy responsiveness. At the extreme, when protests turn violent and destructive, they are seen as a police problem – but rarely as a threat to the fundamental institutional order of democracy. In fact, protest is seen as a sign of confidence in the protections democracy guarantees for individual human rights and the lack of state repression that might discourage people from taking to the streets. In younger democracies, however, protest is frequently characterized as much more threatening, a sign of things falling apart, or a worrisome provocation for military intervention. At the very least, there is a recognized tension between participatory mobilization and stability of institutions (Rose and Shin 2001). Now that the "third wave" democracies are no longer in their infancy, it is becoming clear that protest is not always a sign of institutional breakdown in developing countries any more than in

[5] In 1981, 14.15 percent of respondents to the World Values Survey in developing countries claimed to have participated in demonstrations. In the second wave (around 1990), 18.37% reported demonstrating. In the third and fourth wave (around 1995 and 1999, respectively) those figures dropped to 13.48 percent and 11.06 percent. In the most recent wave (2005), the number has stayed at 11.03 percent.

developed ones.[6] There is, however, very little systematic empirical work investigating the conditions under which protest is compatible with support for a democratic political system.

THE ARGUMENT IN BRIEF

I argue that the organization of associational life (including membership in voluntary organizations, community groups, neighborhood associations, and contact with NGOs) – *combined with the larger context of how well electoral institutions work for ordinary people* – determines how people participate in politics and their attitudes toward democracy. NGOs, because of their growing presence in civic life in developing countries, play a crucial role in mobilizing people to participate in younger democracies, including promoting contentious politics that take unresponsive governments to task. This role is shaped by how well the formal institutions of participation and representation are working in a country, growing more contentious the worse formal institutions are. Because civil society organizations and NGOs help facilitate participation that is rooted in social issues, even very contentious political action that results often builds support for democratic systems as long as the system is reasonably democratic (and not systematically repressive). This participation, however, often takes a much more contentious form than advocates of NGOs and civil society have anticipated.

First, I explore the mechanisms through which individual involvement with NGOs and civil society organizations influence the decision to engage in political life. In practice, NGOs in the developing world do many of the same things that other voluntary associations do, but often with greater financial resources because they are more likely to be supported by international donors (Hulme and Edwards 1997). NGOs work in service provision (health care, sanitation, education, etc.) and they can work in advocacy (providing education, legal services, or directly lobbying the government). NGOs also often target their activities toward needy communities, bringing new resources to historically excluded populations. NGOs, by virtue of being problem-oriented organizations, also create new opportunities for association. Sometimes this happens directly, as when NGOs organize workshops and forums for communities to discuss issues, but it can also happen indirectly as people wait in line to get vaccines for their children, or obtain a driver's license, or any of the quotidian activities that occupy everyday life. Both the resources NGOs provide and the opportunities for association facilitate political participation much in the same way membership in other types of community organizations or voluntary associations is thought to: people who know each other, trust each other, and have some recognition of shared problems are more likely to decide to engage in political action.

[6] The term "Third Wave" comes from Huntington (1991) and refers to the spread of democracy in the developing world beginning in the 1970s.

Second, I show that the form participation is likely to take is more a function of larger contextual factors than of the individual ones. That is, I argue that a rich associational life facilitates political participation, but whether that participation takes the form of voting or the form of protest is shaped more by the context of how well democratic political institutions – especially elections – are functioning. People who are motivated to participate are more likely to vote when there is little fraud or corruption in the electoral process, when political parties represent meaningful choices, when there is real political competition, and when reasonable people have confidence that participating in elections might affect outcomes they deem important. These conditions are not fully met in any election, even in "advanced" democracies, but there is real variation in each of these factors that influences the likelihood individuals see voting as a meaningful activity. And, where elections are failing on some or all of these counts, a motivated person views contentious political action favorably.

I also argue that dissatisfaction with formal mechanisms of participation is not only a function of electoral fraud or corruption; it can also be a function of electoral outcomes. More specifically, failures of democratic governments to respond to the needs or interests of constituents can channel political participation into nontraditional and contentious forms of participation. For example, widespread dissatisfaction with formal voting can occur when elections are technically working fine but people have little confidence that electoral participation will produce substantive benefits. In fact, in some cases, the formal mechanisms of democratic governance may be functioning quite well, but the government is performing poorly in terms of meeting the real needs of citizens, or offering choices on issues that concern most people.

Based on this argument, this book explores four main hypotheses about how NGOs influence political behavior and attitudes toward democracy:

1. In minimally democratic contexts, I expect contact with NGOs to boost all types of political participation (voting and protest).
2. As the quality of democratic institutions declines, I expect NGOs to have an increasing effect on political protest.
3. As the quality of democratic institutions improves, I expect NGOs to have an increasing effect on mobilizing voter turnout.
4. Except in extreme cases of poorly functioning democratic institutions, the political protest that results from NGO activity is not generally anti-system or incompatible with democracy.

There are a number of possible alternative stories to the one I present here. For example, more active, politically interested people might simply be more willing to vote, protest, and contact NGOs. Similarly, it is possible that NGOs choose to locate in areas with high levels of need and high grievances, making it more likely that we would observe a relationship between NGOs and protest even if NGOs did little to mobilize protests. Although in some cases these alternatives may hold, overall NGOs have a robust independent effect on protest, even taking issues of selection and endogeneity into account. These issues of