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

**Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico**

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


**Citizen Participation in Municipal Meetings**

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

Full Citation: Montalvo, D. 2008. Citizen Participation in Municipal Meetings. *AmericasBarometer Insights* N°4.
Democratic Innovation in Latin America: A First Look at the Democratic Participatory Project

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


Does Participatory Governance Matter? Exploring the Nature and Impact of Participatory Reforms

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


Gender and Community Participation in Latin America and the Caribbean

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

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

Social Capital in the Americas: Community Problem-Solving Participation

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

Full Citation: Cruz, J. 2008. Social Capital in the Americas: Community Problem-Solving Participation. AmericasBarometer Insights.
Participation vs. Representation? The Experience of the Neighborhood Assemblies of Buenos Aires, 2001-2003

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


Where is Local Government Going in Latin America? A Comparative Perspective

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


The Politics of Deepening Local Democracy. Decentralization, Party Institutionalization, and Participation

Why do some cities succeed in stimulating citizen engagement and in establishing effective participatory governments while others fail? This paper reflects on this question by analysing different experiences from cities that have created spaces for citizen participation. It studies three experiences in particular –the Broad Front Party in Montevideo, Uruguay, the Radical Cause Party in Caracas, Venezuela and the Worker’s Party in Porto Alegre, Brazil – and concludes that differences in levels and effectiveness of citizen participation are affected by two key elements: the degree of national decentralisation and the level of institutionalisation of opposition parties. This paper will be very useful for practitioners interested in understanding the elements that facilitate or impede citizen participation initiatives.

‘Participatory Governance?’ Gender and Participation in Peru’s Local Institutions

This paper raises the issue of citizen participation in local institutions and analyses whether, in particular, participatory budgets (PBs) are inclusive. The author does so by assessing participation levels of women in PBs in Peru. First, the paper examines the participatory potential of Peruvian PBs and compares men and women’s participation levels. It then provides an assessment of the factors leading to the differences observed and makes recommendations for increasing women’s and other marginalised group’s participation in PBs. This paper will be useful for those wishing to improve the inclusiveness of local institutions and use PBs as tools for participatory democracy.


Citizens in Charge. Managing Local Budgets in East Asia and Latin America

This book describes citizen participation experiences in the context of fiscal decentralisation processes in Latin America and East Asia during the nineties. In particular, chapters 5, 9 and 12 present and analyse different citizen participation experiences from local governments in Latin America, including, for example, citizen participation for reducing poverty in Brazil and for local council planning and budgeting in Peru. This book will be of interest to public servants and civil society organisations that want to learn more about the opportunities and challenges they may face while trying to increase public participation in local government.


Introducing Accountability and Transparency to Water and Sanitation Services in Honduras through Enhanced User Participation

This case study demonstrates how national reforms in the water and sanitation sector in Honduras helped improve transparency and accountability of these public services. In particular, these reforms led to the establishment of consultation processes that successfully included service users in decision making, control and oversight. Similarly, the reforms strengthened the transparency of the Management Board via several strategies including dissemination of information. This note provides practitioners and civil servants with an interesting assessment of the different citizen participation and accountability mechanisms used in Honduras, as well as a short analysis of the results, impacts, constraints and difficulties of these processes.

Full Citation: Cotlear, B., Urbina, D. 2010. Social Accountability Notes: Introducing Accountability and Transparency to Water and Sanitation Services in Honduras through Enhanced User Participation. World Bank Institute, Washington, DC.
**Impact Case Studies from Middle Income and Developing Countries: New Technologies**

This publication analyses seven examples of technological interventions that have successfully enhanced accountability in public and private entities in Latin America, African and Europe. The case of [Cidade Democrática](#), in Sao Paulo, Brazil, is particularly interesting as it shows how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can help to increase the active involvement of citizens in local problem solving. The authors identify common characteristics between the case studies and identify key lessons on using ICTs to improve transparency and accountability, such as building capacity and motivating users. This publication will be useful to civil society organisations and local governments seeking to increase the accountability of public and private organisations using technological strategies.


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**CONTACT FUNDAR**

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**FIND OUT MORE FROM ELLA**

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

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