Democratic government is not the same as innovation in government. Government is an important component of democratic theory in the ways in which it relates to the polity as a whole and implements demands made by the people. However, government in classical democratic theory is not seen for its capacity to innovate. In this essay, the issue of innovation is approached through the idea of interfaces between the government and civil society. The author analyzes participatory budgeting, councils, and national conferences in Brazil from the perspective of innovations which have create new interfaces between civil society and the government.

Keywords: Democratic innovation, civil society, participatory budgeting, national conferences.

Democratic government is not the same as innovation in government. Government is an important component of democratic theory in the ways in which it relates to the polity as a whole and implements demands made by the people. However, government in classical democratic theory is not seen for its capacity to innovate. The authors of classical democratic theory approached the formation of government only from the point of view of its relation to the development of political will. From the perspective of political sociology, government has been seen more from the viewpoint of stability and predictability than from its capacity for innovation.

Max Weber could be considered the pioneer classical author on the predictability of forms of government. For him, bureaucracy and predictable

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rules were the main components of government, which fostered the possibility that rational individuals could achieve their aims. Thus, bureaucracy and government for Weber were understood in terms of their capacity to produce “precision, constancy, stringency and reliability of its operations... .”3 To be sure, Weber also knew that bureaucracy and government were in tension with political will. However, he thought that nothing could be done in modernity to alleviate this tension, which was a result of modernity itself.4 Thus, for Weber, innovation was not among the desirable characteristics of government.5

The new institutionalism tradition also has dealt with the problem of innovation in government. New institutionalism emerged with the aim of stressing symbolic and normative systems which affect and constrain organizational choices.6 Cultural and normative systems were addressed by new institutionalism as determining, facilitating, or constraining choices made by individuals within political institutions. The result of these constraints was seen in a similar way as Weber saw “political institutions,” namely “as stable patterns for sequences of activities that were routinely enacted.”7 Again, we see within political science a tendency either to oppose or to ignore institutional innovation, due to the fact that rules are needed to generate predictability or constancy, a central element in the concept of institutionalization. However, not all new institutionalists adopt the same conception of the relation between rules and predictability. Hall and Taylor describe three different conceptions of rule behavior within new institutionalism, and they show, particularly within historical institutionalism and sociological institutionalism, that changes in actors and actor behavior also produce changes at the institutional level: “Organizations often adopt new institutional practices, not because it advances means-ends efficiency of the organization but because it enhances the social legitimacy of the organization and its participants.”8 Thus, we have a two-pronged understanding of institutional life: one, according to which the role of institutions is to give predictability to social actors. This is the conception

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5 It should be noted that Weber proposed a solution to this problem through the charismatic leader. See Weber, Economy and Society.
of rational choice institutionalists. The second approach sees institutions as producing a pattern of political continuity, but also as incorporating elements for political change due to changes at the societal level. This is the trend which will introduce concern for institutional innovation at the political science level.

During the last decade, a few important works on institutional innovation emerged. Goodin inaugurated a trend of new work which deals with innovation in democracy. For Goodin, innovation is linked to what he calls the “deliberative turn” in democracy. Smith, in a similar vein, also stresses the importance of innovation, calling attention to “institutions that have specifically been designed to increase and deepen citizen-participation in the decision-making process.” I will draw on both authors to propose a concept of innovation in government. I define innovation as the capacity of government to express in several formats political will and the input of civil society. Usually, such input is linked to the introduction and/or implementation of public policies through which civil society and the state interact in order to democratize the state itself. Policies of income distribution, democratization of access to urban land, environment, gender inclusion, and racial integration all qualify as innovation.

Innovation takes place through the introduction of interfaces between government and society. Hevia and Izunza proposed to analyze this issue in terms of interfaces of different types: mandatory interfaces, which are interfaces through which the states or the political system renounces its capacity to make a decision and transfers it to civil society or to the population as a whole. The most important of these interfaces are the forms of direct democracy that emerged in the early twentieth century, such as the referendum and the recall. I will come back to this point below. The second interface linked to innovation in government is that concerning transparency.

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11 Smith, Democratic Innovations.
12 In his late work, Habermas proposed a definition that resembles the idea of interfaces, but does not go far enough. He proposed a system of communication between civil society and the state. See Jurgen Habermas, On the Pragmatics of Communication (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).
13 Felipe Hevia and Ernesto Isunza, “A perspectiva de interface aplicado às relações com a sociedade civil no México” [Interfaces applied to state and civil society relations in Mexico]. Constrangimentos institucionais e colonização política das instituições que garantem direitos e participação cidadã no Mexico [Institutional constraining and the colonization of political institutions in Mexico], CIESAS-UV, Espanhol (2010): 64.
14 Ibid., 61, 130.
Fung, I point out that transparency has three elements: disclosure, information, and enforcement mechanisms. Disclosure is the process through which the government reveals information and/or decision-making procedures to the public. The nature and the role of information in the relationship between civil society and the state is the second important step in the construction of transparency. And third, government in an adequate transparency policy should have targets or mechanisms through which it reveals information to the public. Transparency is not an interface through which civil society mandates decisions. Rather, it is a mechanism for disclosure. However, innovation may take place through the mechanism for providing information to the public or through the enforcement procedures introduced. Innovation in government through specific transparency procedures is analyzed below.

The last interface discussed by Hevia and Isunza is what they call “interfaz de co-gestion,” which I call “co-deliberation interface.” Co-deliberation interface is the most recent but also the most discussed interface between government and civil society. Usually, state and civil society actors share a public procedure for deliberation, particularly in the area of public policy. Co-deliberation interfaces are bottom-up in the way they structure co-deliberation. They involve the organization of assemblies or councils at the local level which interact with the state, and decisions are made through some joint mechanism, such as the councils, participatory budgeting, or national conferences in Brazil, and are later implemented by the state.

Thus, we have three different degrees of innovation within the state: the first format, which I call mandatory, is typical of early twentieth-century debates on the limits of representation. It involves mechanisms of direct democracy that proliferated in the American West during the early twentieth century. The second innovation in government is transparency. Innovations linked to transparency are related to the fact that government cannot become completely independent from civil society. Different from referendum and recall, transparency is not a category that originated in the political system. Transparency migrated from the market to the system of government. However, today, it is very much practiced within government.

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17 Archon Fung, Full Disclosure (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Fung showed the marked origins of transparency at the market level. The stock was the first place where transparency was introduced in the United States during the 1930s. For the authors, transparency has been imported from market to state relations.
The third innovation, which is the only one with which I will deal in this essay, is co-deliberation, a bottom-up interface between civil society and the state. Different from the two previous interfaces that originated in separate political crises in the early twentieth century and the 1930s, co-deliberation interfaces have their origins in the processes of democratic deepening of late democracies, such as Brazil and India. I will analyze participatory budgeting, councils, and national conferences in Brazil from this perspective.

**Participatory Budgeting as a Democratic Innovation**

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a process of public deliberation on the allocation of budget resources first introduced by the Workers’ Party in Porto Alegre in 1990 and in Belo Horizonte in 1993. Participatory budgeting qualifies as an innovation because it changes administrative and political practices in order to better integrate citizens into the budget decision-making process. During the authoritarian period in Brazil, there were some attempts to remove the poor from central areas of Porto Alegre and relocate them to the outskirts of the city, an area without any public services or facilities. Until the early 1970s, no utilities were extended to such areas, creating an abyss between the formal and the informal city.

The case of Belo Horizonte is very similar. Despite the fact that it is a planned city created a hundred years ago, the area allocated to the poor population soon became insufficient and different forms of occupying urban land followed. In 1960, the city already had seventy slums, accommodating 25,000 people. During the authoritarian period, many slums were cleared and their inhabitants relocated to areas with precarious infrastructure. Only in the 1980s, with the reorganization of Brazilian civil society and the formation of neighborhood associations, did illegal occupations of urban land begin to be regularized. In the early 1980s, a program called *pro-favela* was created, allowing the legalization of property in occupied lands and the incorporation of these areas into the urbanization process.\(^{18}\)

Participatory budgeting is a local participatory policy which responds to the plight of the poor in major Brazilian cities. It includes social actors, neighborhood association members, and common citizens in a process of negotiation and deliberation, which takes place in two stages: a participatory stage, in which participation is direct, and a representative stage, in which participation takes place through the election of delegates and/or councilors. The processes in the two cities, being significantly different, are described separately.

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\(^{18}\) Ibid.
The PB in Porto Alegre

The PB in Porto Alegre involves two rounds of regional assemblies, one round of intermediary meetings, and the year-round operation of a councilors’ body called the PB council. The process begins every year in April, when the first round of district assemblies takes place. In this first stage, the population attends an assembly in each of the regions. Every first-round regional assembly is attended by the mayor, and a short account-settling process begins, with a description of the administrative implementation of the decisions made in the previous year. The floor is open for about an hour, during which citizens express themselves about what has been taking place, about possible disagreements with the administration, and about what should be done in the region in the coming year. Participation in these meetings is crucial because it constitutes the basis for participation in the remaining parts of the process. Participation in these meetings is on a personal basis, but individuals throughout the registration process are required to demonstrate membership in voluntary associations. In 1999, about two-thirds of participants were involved in regional associations. Delegates are elected at the end of the first round of regional assemblies, based on two criteria. The first is the total number of people attending the assembly. The formula to determine the total number of delegates in Porto Alegre is as follows: for “up to 100 people attending—one delegate for every ten people; from 101 to 250 attendees—one delegate for every twenty; from 251 to 400 attendees—one for every thirty; from 401 on—one for every forty.” For instance, in 1999, the first round of regional assemblies in the center of Porto Alegre was attended by 520 people; thus, the region had twenty-six delegates (ten for the first one hundred people, eight for the next 150 people, five for the next 150, and three for the remaining 126 people who attended the meeting). The second criterion is the number of people registered as members of a particular neighborhood association. Thus, in the center region of Porto Alegre, forty-seven people declared themselves to be members of the associação dos moradores do centro, entitling the association to two delegates.

The second stage of the PB is the intermediary meetings, having two responsibilities: ranking thematic priorities and deliberating about which public works the region will claim. Ranking is a process through which five of twelve types of public goods (pavement, sewage, legalization of urban property, organization of the city, housing, education, health and social assistance, transportation and circulation, leisure, sports, economic development, and culture) are selected as priorities. It involves two processes carried out earlier by the public administration: the evaluation of the population’s previous access to public goods and the classification of each of the city’s regions according to its population. Thus, two criteria are used in ranking: the first is previous access

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(and therefore present need). A table for classifying priorities assigns grades in inverse relation to previous access to a particular public good. According to the 1999 criteria, previous access to a public good of up to 80 percent leads to grade 1; up to 60 percent previous access, grade 2, and up to 20 percent, grade 5. The second criterion is the population of the region, and the third, the community’s own ranking of its priorities, again on a scale of 1 to 5. At the end of this process, a region can amass up to fifteen points if it previously had less than 20 percent access to a public good, chooses this good as a top priority, and has more than 120,000 inhabitants.

In the second round of regional assemblies, the region elects delegates to the PB council. This process, which takes place in June, leads to the formation of a council composed as follows: two councilors from each of the sixteen regions (thirty-two councilors), two from each of the five thematic assemblies (ten councilors), one councilor from the UAMPA—the umbrella organization of neighborhood communities—and one from the public service trade union. The PB council thus has forty-four members.

**Thematic Meetings**

The second Workers’ Party administration (1993-1996) introduced “thematic oriented meetings.” They grew out of a process called “constituent city,” which aimed to incorporate into the PB social sectors that still stood outside of the process. The result was the introduction of five thematic assemblies on the following issues: city organization and development; health and social assistance; economic development and tax systems; transport, circulation, and education; and culture and leisure. The cycle of the thematic meetings parallels that of regional meetings, and participants are entitled to elect ten delegates to the PB council.

**The PB Council**

The PB council is inaugurated each July. It creates a budget proposal based on the rankings and decisions which took place in the intermediary meetings. The PB council then revises the final budget proposal elaborated by the Gaplan (the planning agency, detailed below) and mayor’s cabinet. In September, a final budget proposal is in place. The council also monitors the implementation of its decisions by the city’s administrative agencies during the year.

**The PB in Belo Horizonte**

The PB has been in practice in Belo Horizonte since 1993. It involves three rounds of regional assemblies (to be reduced to two rounds) which lead to a regional forum of priorities. The first round of regional assemblies is similar to its counterpart in Porto Alegre, although it is more argumentative and less deliberative. The administration opens each assembly with a statement of what was decided in the previous year and an accounting of the current state of the implementation of previous decisions.
It is in the second round of regional assemblies that the PB becomes more deliberative. In the second round, the administration points out the resources available for public works in the areas of pavement, sewage, and housing. The decision-making process is also different from that used in Porto Alegre. The administration announces the resources available for each region, using a formula which assigns resources in direct proportion to population and in inverse proportion to average income:

\[ PVR = \text{Pop} \times e^{(1/Y)} \]

Fifty percent of the PB’s resources is evenly divided among the regions, and 50 percent is allocated according to this formula. Also in the second round, the main proposals for public works in each subregion (Belo Horizonte has thirty-seven subregions) are presented, initiating a process of negotiation among the communities.

The third round of regional assemblies involves the election of delegates who will vote on the public works to be included in the city budget. Delegates were elected in 1998 according to the following criteria: from one to two hundred participants, one delegate for every ten people attending the assembly; from 201 to 410 participants, one delegate for every fifteen attendees; above 410, one for every twenty. In addition, each region is entitled to one delegate per legally constituted voluntary association within its boundaries.\(^1\) Once the delegates are elected for the forum on regional priorities, negotiation begins.

**Priorities Caravans**

“Priorities caravans” are a stage within the region in which members of the subregions negotiate among themselves regarding their different proposals. Each community which has proposed a public work to be included in the city budget visits other communities in order to evaluate their level of need. At the same time, different communities start to support one another’s claims, forming coalitions which will be decisive in the deliberative process.

**The Forum of Regional Priorities**

At this stage, the delegates from each subregion, having already visited other subregions, negotiate on the final format of the budget. Unlike in Porto Alegre, the final decision in Belo Horizonte takes place through the formation of tickets

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\(^20\) Since outcome is proportional to population and inversely proportional to income of the locality, the formula can be written as follows: Outcome = Population \times e^{(1/Income)}, where \(e\) is a constant, which has a value of 2.7182818. If Outcome = PVR, Population = Pop, \(e=\text{constant}\), \(Y=\text{Income}\), then the equation can be rewritten as follows: PVR = Pop \times e^{(1/Y)}\).

\(^21\) Belo Horizonte, Prefeitura Municipal [City Hall, Belo Horizonte], Diário Oficial do Município [Official diary], 1999.
with coalitions of proposals from different subregions. Also unlike Porto Alegre, the decisions of the regional fora are final. The public works approved by the delegates are integrated into the budget proposal. Twenty percent of the delegates present at the regional fora become members of the Comforças, a monitoring body which follows the process of bidding for public works and can negotiate substitutions in case of technical problems.

**Evaluating the Process of Institutional Innovation within PB**

There is a general consensus in Brazil that the PB works better than the traditional method of creating the budget. Yet, there is no consensus on why it works better and how its main features were introduced. Some analysts attribute the success of the PB to the original participatory proposal introduced by the Workers’ Party; others consider it to be a product of many sources, tracing it to the actions of social movements. 22 In this section of the essay, I analyze the origins of the PB and argue that its design is, in fact, a combination of different proposals which emerged both from social movements and from the local level.

The centrality of budget making within the distribution of public goods began with UAMPA—the federation of neighborhood associations—in Porto Alegre in the late 1980s. Neighborhood movements have been strong in Porto Alegre since the beginning of democratization. 23 During the first popularly elected administration in Porto Alegre, led by the left-populist Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT) party, members of neighborhood associations demanded the right to monitor the activities of the local administration. In a 1986 meeting called to discuss the participatory policies proposed by the Collares administration, UAMPA’s deliberative council issued a document on popular participation in the city. This statement had three main points: (1) the identification of participation with “control of the definition of the city budget”; (2) the identification of budget making with the discussion of investment priorities in each neighborhood; and (3) the control and monitoring of budget implementation. 24 Yet, specifically how the budgetary process was to be democratized was not clear for UAMPA.

The Workers’ Party was part of the movement for the organizational autonomy of labor from the state and, at the same time, advocated an idea of participatory democracy more inspired by the Marxist conception of labor

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23 Ibid.

councils than by the trajectory of social movements in Brazil. Its program was a defense of local councils, which would generate city councils and furnish a worker-based form of parallel administration. The party had its first important victories in the local elections of 1988, when it elected the mayors of São Paulo and Porto Alegre, among other cities; in some cases, like that of São Paulo, it decided to practice something very similar to its workers’ councils proposal. Even in Porto Alegre, the conception which prevailed during the first year of Workers’ Party administration was deeply influenced by the idea that politics always involves the representation of particular interests and that the Workers’ Party should change only which particular interests prevailed within the local administration.

The political decisions on participatory budgeting were made in an overlapping way during the first two years of Workers’ Party rule in Porto Alegre. From its inauguration, the Olívio Dutra administration tried to increase participation at-large. In the first year, most of the secretaries introduced some participatory elements in their health, education, and planning proposals. At the same time, in its first thirty days, the Olívio Dutra administration made the crucial decision to make the Coordination of Relations with the Community (CRC) responsible for centralizing all of the community’s claims. The CRC thus became central to the PB process. Although it had existed prior to 1989, the CRC’s role had been to provide city associations with tax exemption certificates (atestado de utilidade pública). Thus, four steps toward participatory budgeting overlapped in the beginning of the Dutra administration: the concern of urban social movements with budgetary control and with direct participation at the local level; the emphasis the Workers’ Party placed on participation and councils; the decentralized initiative of several secretaries, including the planning secretary, to encourage popular participation; and the idea, which emerged in the first thirty days, to centralize participation in the CRC. This combination contradicts a posteriori explanations that PB was planned in advance. Table 1 below summarizes the initiatives which led to the introduction of the elements of participatory budgeting.

25 It is beyond the aims of this work to analyze the formation and evolution of the Workers’ Party. For an analysis of the movements which claimed labor autonomy in Brazil during the democratization process, see Leonardo Avritzer, Democracy and the Public Space in Latin America (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2002). For an analysis of the formation of the Workers’ Party, see Margaret Keck, PT a logica da Diferença [Workers’ Party: The logic of difference] (São Paulo: Atica, 1992).


The consolidation of the PB also involved an important administrative reform, which led to the creation of the Gaplan. At a critical moment, the administration’s planning secretary resigned in response to the reduction of his prerogatives. Gaplan, the planning agency in charge of budgeting, was created as a result, and the budgetary process was centralized in the mayor’s cabinet.

The PB’s institutional design allows it to cope with administrative problems within the specific political culture of urban Brazil—a culture divided among clientelist and nonclientelistic, hybrid, and deliberative elements. Abers showed how the Extremo Sul neighborhood in Porto Alegre, which was dominated by clientelist politicians, found in the PB an incentive to move to more autonomous ways of claiming public goods.28 By her account, in the first year of the PB, Extremo Sul made a very long and disorderly list of demands, which consequently went unsatisfied.29 However, one improvement made in the neighborhood through the PB had a demonstration effect, leading the neighborhood to inquire about how to participate. Its increased willingness to do so led to a change in leadership. Neighborhood assemblies in Extremo Sul used to gather around eighty people; in the year after the change in leadership, the neighborhood assembly attracted 569 people and city investments started to pour into the area. The experience of the Zila Spósito neighborhood in Belo Horizonte was similar. The neighborhood was formed when the construction of a new avenue made it necessary to relocate part of the population of another

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Original Proposal and Final Design of the PB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original Proposal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers’ Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Administration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28 Abers, “From Clientelism to Cooperation.”

29 Ibid., 520.
neighborhood. As the people arrived, water supply was irregular and there was no sewage or paved roads. In the first year of the Belo Horizonte PB, a few community leaders demanded sewage and pavement. They did not know how to proceed and thus failed to convince other participants of the priority of their claims. A change in the neighborhood association and the selection of new leadership led them to much better organized participation in the next year, and their claims were included in the city PB plan for 1995. The examples in both Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte show how institutions designed for public deliberation can have a positive effect in situations of previously existing deliberative inequalities: in Porto Alegre, inequality stemmed from the existence of clientelism in the neighborhood; in Belo Horizonte, it was the result of poor organizational skills. In both cases, a participatory design led the population to move from a situation of deliberative inequality to one in which they became equal members of a deliberative process. The PB thus helped to overcome two traditional mechanisms: hierarchical relations derived from the favor culture, and the practice of claiming goods through mediators, both replaced by associational interaction and free expression.

**National Conferences and Innovation at the National Level**

The inauguration of the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva marked a change in the pattern of participation at the national level in Brazil. In January 2003, during his first day in office, Lula showed his willingness to assign a larger role in government to participation when he issued a decree changing the role of the general secretary of the presidency. The general secretary, historically an agent of negotiation with the Congress, started to help the president “to consult with civil society associations and to elaborate tools of direct consultation and participation...” In his first two years in government, Lula pursued three main participatory policies. The first was participation in the elaboration and implementation of the Pluri-annual Investment Program (PPA). Participation in the PPA was organized in partnership with ABONG, a Brazilian nongovernmental organization (NGO). It took place in all the states and was a participatory format, which included associations at the state level; 2,170 associations and 4,738 people participated in the PPA, which was initially considered successful. The second important participatory policy

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32 Antônio Moroni, O direito à participação no governo Lula in: Experiências nacionais de participação social [The right to participation in Lula’s government] (São Paulo: Cortez, 2010).
was the strengthening and increase of the number of national councils. Brazil had had sixteen national councils, and Lula’s government created fifteen new councils during his two administrations, almost doubling the number of national councils in Brazil. The third contribution to participatory policies was at the level of the national conferences, where one can see the focus of the participatory policies during Lula’s two mandates.

Lula governed Brazil for two consecutive mandates (2003-2006; 2007-2010) and established a new pattern of participation at the national level in Brazil. Among the 115 national conferences that have taken place in Brazil since 1941, seventy-four took place during Lula’s administration. Lula’s government standardized national conferences: they were all called by one of the ministries through an administrative act (*portaria*); they all involved debates at the three levels of government, city, state, and national; all conferences engaged in deliberations and made recommendations to the government; and all conference decisions became laws signed by the president. In many cases, conference decisions also became law projects or legal initiatives under the federal government.

There are two characteristics of the national conferences: (1) their pattern of participation, that is to say, how one can compare who participates and the nature of that participation at the local and national levels, and (2) the conferences’ deliberative impact on the decision-making process at the federal level. Participation in the national conferences in Brazil has been very high.

### Table 2. Have you participated in a national conference, and at what level?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Avritzer, 2011.

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33 There have been conferences that took place only at the national level; for the purposes of this work, we have not included them in the number above. They are: conferences of the A. P. L.; science and technology; professional learning; Brazilians abroad; and two human rights conferences (the eighth and the tenth).

34 Lula signed into decree most of the decisions of the national conferences, which does not mean that all these decisions became law. Most of the decisions in the area of public policies required law projects, and, in many cases, decisions contradicted existing laws. Abortion could be the best example: it was approved in the national conference on human rights in 2010 but it was rejected in the national conference on health. In both cases, it was signed by Lula.

35 Thamy Progrebinschi, *Conferências nacionais, participação social e processo legislativo* [National conferences: Social participation and legislative process] (IESP/Ministério da Justiça, 2010).
In a survey of a national sample conducted in partnership with Vox Populi, an important polling institute in Brazil, we have discovered that 6.5 percent of the Brazilian population has participated in national conferences, or close to six million adults.

Participation in the national conferences has had an interesting pattern at the socio-economic level: it strongly has resembled participation at the local level in at least three aspects: income, education, and gender. The average participant in a national conference is a woman (51.2 percent of the cases), with four years of elementary education (26.9 percent of the cases), and with an income between one and four minimum wages (or 200 and 800 dollars). It is worthwhile to compare these statistics with an average participant in participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, particularly in regard to income and gender. Table 3 below shows a very similar pattern of popular participation between participatory budgeting and the national conferences.

Table 3. Income, Education, and Gender in Brazilian Participatory Processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in PB and National Conferences</th>
<th>Average Income of the Participants</th>
<th>Average Education of the Participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre (1998)</td>
<td>Average income is 2 to 5 Brazilian minimum wages (around 300 U.S. dollars) (34.4%)</td>
<td>Up to 8 years of education (46.1%)</td>
<td>51.4% of the participants were women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Conferences (2010)</td>
<td>Average income is 1 to 4 minimum wages (52.2%)</td>
<td>Up to 8 years of education (38.1%)</td>
<td>51.2% of the participants were women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Profiles of the participants in participatory budgeting and national conferences.

It is also important to see in which areas there is social participation in the national conferences. Social participation in Brazil traditionally has been linked to certain areas and themes that were organized during democratization. The health movement was very important during this period in the city of São Paulo. The social assistance movement also was organized during the same period, as well as the movements for urban reform and landless peasants.

36 The sample involved 2,200 respondents and also was representative for all regions of Brazil. The sample was a cota sample which reflected income, education, and gender for Brazil as a whole.

37 Emir Sader, Quando novos personagens entram em cena [When new actors join the political scene] (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988).

More recently, third-generation movements have emerged, such as the feminist movement and the movement for affirmative policies based on race. Other material movements such as “ação da cidadania,” which had played a key role in minimum income policies, also emerged following democratization. When we see the themes in which social actors have participated (see table 4 below), we discover a mix between two phenomena. On the one hand, the new areas which have mobilized social actors appear initially as those in which participation historically has been high. On the other hand, the new areas which have mobilized social actors appear initially as the ones in which participation recently has been stronger. Thus, policies for women rank first in terms of participation, and human rights ranks second. Only after these new arenas for participation were introduced, was it possible to identify the traditional areas for social participation, such as social assistance. However, as we move from participation to intensity of participation, we can note a different phenomenon, namely, the continuous relevance of the areas in which participation is more

Table 4. Participation in the National Conferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you participated, and in which area?</th>
<th>Among the conferences in which you have participated, in which one did you participate most actively?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies for women</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social assistance</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public safety</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth policies</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban policy</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food security</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of respondents</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Avritzer, 2010.
traditional (see table 4 below). Our explanation of this two-pronged tendency of participation in the national conferences is that traditional participants are an important part of the core group that attends the conferences, moreover, these individuals have participated in more than one conference. However, the main area of interest of this core group still is in one of the original areas of social mobilization of the democratization period, namely, health and social assistance.

Thus, it is possible to understand the new pattern of participation that is emerging at the national level in Brazil. It is a pattern through which social actors who have been participating in local policies acquire representation in social policies at the national level. At the same time, they take advantage of new venues for participation in new areas that were established or strengthened by the P. T. (Lula) administration. However, a question can be posed in regard to the effects of participation at the national level: How deliberative has this kind of participation been and what type of effect did it have on Lula’s administration?

The first question that is important to raise in order to check the effectiveness of national conferences is whether the decisions made in the conferences played a role in the organization of the government’s decision-making system. The answer to this question can be found at three different levels: the level of social actors’ opinions, the level of the decision making in Congress, and the level of the organization of government. As researchers, we started to discuss this question at the level of the opinion of social actors. In the survey regarding national conferences, we asked how effective respondents thought the decisions made at the conferences were. The answers shown in table 5 below are a good starting point in this debate. On the one hand, the results show that, even among the actors who participated in the national conferences, only 5.6 percent thought that all deliberations were implemented and only 16.1 percent thought that most of the deliberations were implemented, if we aggregated the first and the second answers. There is no doubt that this corresponds to the reality, since many decisions required changes in laws and/or administrative processes.

Table 5. Regarding the implementation of decisions would you say that,

| Government always implements conference decisions | 8  | 5.6 |
| Government implements most of the decisions     | 15 | 10.5|
| Government implements an average number of decisions | 28 | 19.6|
| Government implements a small number of decisions | 26 | 18.2|
| Government does not implement conference decisions | 13 | 9.1 |
| NR                                              | 53 | 37.1|
| Total                                           | 143| 100.0|
The most important innovations introduced by the national conferences are:

1. They created a common agenda between civil society and the state that is publicly articulated. Brazil, like many other countries, has the problem of how to make the executive and congressional agendas more public. National conferences opened new venues of publicity and helped the government to pursue its agenda in Congress with the support of civil society. There are many examples of common agenda between the state and civil society that have emerged from the national conferences. *Sistema nacional de assistencia social, SUAS,* is one of the best examples.

2. National conferences also have influenced the process of the organization of state bureaucracy. Among the most important 350 programs of the federal government, if we single out programs in areas of public policy, 40 percent among them take into account decisions made at national conferences. In addition, in an interview with managers of these programs, they pointed out the important role of participation in helping to pass national programs at the state level.

Thus, we can see that national conferences have started to influence the national government in two important ways: in the way it organizes its relationship with civil society actors, and in the way it changes the operation of government and its relationship with Congress. Lula’s government had two very clear and distinct phases. The first was the phase in which it did not engage participation and instead tried to pursue its agenda through Congress. This phase ended with the disaster of the vote-buying “mensalão scandal,” which threatened to bring down the Lulu government in 2005. In the second phase, the government pursued its agenda in Congress with the help of civil society and through the major national conferences. This was one of the keys to Lula’s success in his second mandate.

**Conclusion: Innovation in Government and Citizens’ Participation**

Innovation in government is still poorly understood by most scholars. Some authors think that government is mainly about stability and administrative continuity. The problem of state building has been approached through these lenses.39 In the developing world, the literature that has been most influential is

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39 Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
that about bureaucratic insulation and not the literature on participation.\textsuperscript{40}

In the last twenty years, many new experiments of participation have emerged in Brazil, as well as in other places in the developing world. These new experiments, particularly participatory budgeting and national conferences, point out how innovation tackles issues that have not been addressed previously by political institutions. In the case of participatory budgeting, larger access of the poor to public goods through a local process of negotiation allowed the government to better address the unequal distribution of public goods. However, local institutions, such as the caravans in Belo Horizonte and the CRC in Porto Alegre, have been key in reaching this goal. Thus, innovation is not about continuity but rather, as I showed in the introduction to this essay, a way of creating new interfaces between state and civil society on specific policy issues. These interfaces generate new ways of addressing policies.

The national conferences carried out by Lula’s government between 2003 and 2010 express a second dimension of innovation that is also very important to bear in mind. They introduced civil society actors into the process of agenda setting. More than six million people participated in national conferences, and important government policies were passed by civil society actors and sent to Congress. Today, close to 7 percent of the legal initiatives in the Brazilian Congress are related or overlap with decisions made at national conferences. This overlapping shows a second dimension of participation that has created places for common ground between the executive and the legislative branches on the government’s political agenda. Again, the national conferences have been important in the creation of new interfaces.

Democratic participation in Brazil points toward the renewed importance of innovation in democratic theory. Innovation was on the agenda in the United States during the end of the nineteenth century, sponsored by progressivism and involving the introduction of mandatory interfaces.\textsuperscript{41} However, the progressive agenda moved from participation through recall and popular initiative to the issue of government agencies.\textsuperscript{42} The U. S. model, which has worked well for many decades, subordinates democratic innovation to administrative proposals within government, which insulates an administration from politics. Brazil, as well as many developing countries, is showing the relevance of innovation as a form of broadening participation in government. This is a key development in democratic theory that should be part of a new tradition of democratic thinking from the double perspective of new practices in both old and new democracies.

\textsuperscript{40} Edson de Oliverira Nunes, \textit{Bureaucratic Insulation and Clientelism in Contemporary Brazil: Uneven State Building and the Taming of Modernity} (Ph.D. diss., Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley, 1984).
