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Community Participation, the Environment, and Democracy: Brazil in Comparative Perspective

Jamie Elizabeth Jacobs

ABSTRACT

Grassroots environmental activism among Latin America's poor has altered the debate over environmental policy, social welfare, and citizenship. Yet the question remains whether this social mobilization of the poor is part of a larger trend toward broader environmental concerns and democratic political participation, or a short-lived movement susceptible to the same pressures that have dissolved community mobilization in the past. This article compares Brazil with other Latin American and European countries in surveys of environmental awareness, concerns, and reported behavior. It finds that Brazilians residing in the urban periphery link their own local environmental concerns to more global considerations, and that concern for and activism on environmental issues is positively related to wider community involvement.

The expanding worldwide emphasis on the environment and environmental politics presents grassroots organizations around the world with opportunities and challenges. They engage political systems and attempt to mobilize civil society in pursuit of an ecologically as well as socially just society. For these groups, a just society would not only include environmental protection as one of its primary goals, but would also support the goal that environmental inequality would not leave the poorest sectors of society in a precarious environmental condition. In this context, environmental action in countries that have ended authoritarian government in recent decades is part of a broader phenomenon of civil society reengaging the political arena and attempting to reinforce democracy in the process.

In Brazil and other Latin American countries attempting to strengthen democracy, the mobilization of civil society forms a widely recognized part of that democratization. Part of this mobilization may be participation in ecological movements and other social movements and civic organizations. Though environmentalism cannot be relied on as a driving factor for democratization in general, it can be seen as an important component of the changes taking place in the politics and society of transitional democracies (Hicks 1996). Political participation and interest in environmental policy at the grassroots involves people in the

struggle for citizenship, rights, and government accountability in the democratic process.

This article focuses on several aspects of the link between environment, community, and citizenship in Latin America, specifically in low-income metropolitan areas of Brazil that face grave environmental and social challenges. What is it that leads the residents of Brazil's urban periphery to think and act in ways that defy our expectations about environmental activism? How is it that the environment assumes importance on the political agenda when such issues are seemingly beyond the scope of limited political resources? How do low-income communities maintain levels of involvement sufficient to achieve their goals? And is there a relationship between participation in environmental arenas and the strengthening of citizenship?

Through comparative surveys of Brazilian and European respondents, this study attempts to uncover some of the roots of the awareness and activism on environmental issues encountered in areas of the urban periphery in Brazil. The conclusions suggest that this type of activity is related to a broader phenomenon of community-level participation; specifically, that higher levels of community participation are associated with environmental participation.

THE ENVIRONMENT, PARTICIPATION, AND CITIZENSHIP

Central to most recent discussions of the wave of transitions to democracy in Latin America is the challenge of democratic consolidation and institutionalization. Of perennial concern to students of democratic theory and practice in the region are democratic accountability and civilian control of both the government and the military. Citizens' reinvolvement with legitimate democratic practices after decades of authoritarian rule and manipulated electoral procedures was especially significant throughout the region. Of additional concern throughout the reinvolvement process is the incorporation of popular sectors in meaningful and stable participation.

Brazil, in particular, faced dramatic trials to democratic consolidation with the impeachment in 1992 of President Fernando Collor e Mello, the first popularly elected president since the end of the military regime. The questions of whether the newly democratized government would be accountable to popular control and could successfully navigate the crisis while maintaining its path to institutional consolidation once again focused public attention on the nexus of participation and democratic governance in Brazil. Beyond the impeachment crisis, broad accountability in the new Brazilian republic was of greater concern because of the history of limited meaningful participation by—and polit-

ical exploitation of—the mass public. Although mass mobilization was central to democratic transition in Brazil (the *diretas já* movement, for example), long-term integration of popular sectors into a wider range of political action—not just popular mobilization or mass protest—has been problematic.¹

Linz and Stepan (1996) specifically address the relationship of poverty and democracy in the search for stable democratic government in Latin America. They find that Brazilians of all social classes express “ambivalence” about democracy, most strongly the poor; and they suggest that the ability of the poor both to articulate and to aggregate demands is essential to expanding access to citizenship and democratic decisionmaking (187). While increasing political participation at the grassroots is only part of the process of generating democratic accountability, such involvement and willingness to take part in the political system may provide a foundation for expanding democratic engagement. Expanded civilian participation in decisionmaking would mean not only a renewed commitment to democracy and its institutionalization but a way to defuse potential dissatisfaction with the pace of change.

The involvement of the mass public in the democratic consolidation of Brazil overlaps with the struggles of the environmental movement. As Keck and Sikkink (1998) indicate, democratization created circumstances for the growth of many kinds of movements in Brazil, particularly environmental and nongovernmental organizations (129–30).

With the return to democracy and competitive party politics, mass movements and grassroots participation in Brazil have faced new challenges to their identification as the engines of democracy, built during the early stages of the transition from authoritarian rule. In the arena of environmental politics, Guimarães (1991) points hopefully to the changing nature of mass mobilization in Brazil, from class-based to broad societal coalitions. He also emphasizes that environmental groups tend not only to participate in the broader project of democracy building but to forge connections beyond socially stratified groups and to embrace goals broader than a narrow environmental agenda.

Rather than concentrating on particular, strictly environmental problems, [the environmental movement in Brazil] seems to emphasize the interconnections between these issues and a different style of development for Brazil. . . . This particular mode of integrating issues that cut across different social groups may prove to be the surest way to formulate an environmental policy that truly reflects the relationships between development and the environment. (Guimarães 1991, 219–20)

Cable and Cable (1995) identify democratic ideology as a mechanism for the transformation of individuals into active citizens in the battle against environmental injustice, a position not unfamiliar to the

residents of the urban periphery of Brazil, who seek to extend citizenship rights to participation in decisionmaking concerning other issues beyond the environment. "Democratic ideology becomes the activists' instrument of politicization and transformation from passive petitioner to active citizen" (104). This is particularly relevant in the case of Brazil, where popular sectors in the urban periphery confront not just environmental injustice but the absence of full social and political inclusion. According to one organizing group,

Brazilian popular struggles in defense of the environment, of the quality of life and of civil rights, are interlinked and have been characterized by existing as a space for the construction of citizenship, and as a call for participatory democracy. (Forum de ONGs 1992, 151)

A more important feature of such struggles may be that the environmental problems encourage links across diverse socioeconomic groups. The pollution of Brazil's urban beaches, for example, links poor communities with concerns about sewage and public health, middle-class neighborhoods concerned about urban planning and access to recreational facilities, industrial polluters and the tourism industry that suffers from pollution. The explicit desire of environmental organizations to encourage democratic citizen participation provides a special opportunity for previously excluded groups to contribute to the political debate.²

In the attempt to broaden participation, social movements and non-governmental organizations continue to proliferate but must share the spotlight with formal political institutions. They must also compete with each other for resources and space on the political agenda. In contemporary Brazil, NGOs may raise contentious issues; institutional sectors may perceive them as attempting to bypass governmental authority through parallel initiatives. They may also redirect popular attention to social demands at a time when such demands further stretch already taxed government resources. Regardless of their political volatility, however, the number of NGOs and registered civil society groups in Brazil and generally in Latin America has mushroomed over the past two decades.

Local and national participation focuses on changing governmental responses but also on changing society and the community, creating local alternatives to traditional politics and links to international networks. The type of behavior that links the grassroots with state, national, and global organizations fits into a pattern of what some describe as world civic politics that "define and shape public affairs" at all levels (Wapner 1995, 313). The groups involved in the diverse networks of organizations, moreover, themselves begin to change through the process of interaction and communication (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 179).

NATIONAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXTS

To understand the results of this study, it is first necessary to set the global stage of environmental awareness. Recent decades have shown a marked increase in awareness of the environment and support of efforts to protect it worldwide. Yet despite the global advance of environmental norms and the greening of the political landscape, widespread awareness of and participation in environmental politics remains a distant goal for activists. Among lower socioeconomic sectors and in periods of economic crisis, such participation is even more limited.

The first portion of the research on which this article is based compared reported political activity and environmental awareness across Latin America and Europe in an effort to place Brazilian and Latin American experiences in a global context, and to compare environmental participation in reemerging democracies against the "toughest case" of more established democratic participation. In contrast to the Brazilians surveyed, as well as to Latin Americans in general, the Europeans surveyed generally fell into the group that the political science literature designates as most likely to be active and interested in politics. Though the expected result should be wide differences between the European and Latin American groups, in many cases there was little variation.

The levels of participation related to environmental issues and involving grassroots activism in the developing world present students of political participation with a puzzle. Individuals and organizations involved in environmental politics in these areas do not fit the major explanations of participatory behavior. In Brazil, for example, poor residents of the urban periphery have begun to organize sustained movements to protect the environment and affect environment-related policy, particularly in environmental education. The classic literature on political participation would predict low participation by those members of society who have low socioeconomic status, such as these urban poor. The historical presence of clientelism in Brazilian politics, furthermore, would predict low levels of meaningful political participation for peripheral communities outside those structured relationships.

According to the criteria suggested by postmaterialist values, furthermore, the relationship between values and support for environmental protection in countries like Brazil should be weak, because support stems from objective stimuli rather than value shifts to postmaterialism (Inglehart 1990, 1995). In addition, what support does exist should come from those sectors with higher socioeconomic status. According to the postmaterialist profile, furthermore, the characteristics of support for the environment in developing areas would not be global or oriented toward financial participation as a remedy. Instead, attitudes would reflect limited support, based on reaction to specific conditions,

not the more generalized support for environmental protection (and concomitant taxation) that this survey reports. In Brazil, the popular sectors are not only aware of and active on environmental issues, but they incorporate this participation into their conceptions of citizen and political rights. The strict theoretical placement of issues like the environment as a "postmaterial" or "postindustrial" concern also leaves out the residents of Brazil's urban periphery, who combine their concern for the environment with struggles for material well-being and citizenship.

An alternative means to understand the emergence of environmental politics in developing areas has been the study of local, national, and transnational social movements. Social movements have been the object of considerable study around the world, from varying perspectives and theoretical frameworks. Throughout the 1980s and the transition to democracy in Brazil, the role of national social movements was recognized as being especially crucial (see, for example, Mainwaring 1989). Social movement organizations increased in visibility in the 1990s, particularly after the Earth Summit of 1992, a United Nations-sponsored conference held in Rio de Janeiro.

As communities across the globe link their struggles for change to the broader message of environmental protection and rehabilitation, they engage not only the political system but national and transnational organizations more explicitly recognized as environmental or ecological. By adapting to changes in the political arena, in which the definition of "what counts" as an environmental problem has been expanded, communities and their organs of political and social expression reach farther than just their locally elected representatives.

This involvement of the nongovernmental sector of society creates a greater role not just for the grassroots organizations, but for groups populated by long-term environmental activists. "The reinterpretation of longstanding struggles for social justice through an environmental lens has had profound implications for the resources and strategies available for their protagonists" (Keck 1995). Grassroots organizations in the urban periphery of Brazil bridge the gap between new and old social politics and involve members of the popular sectors with environmental causes. As with the rubber tappers in the Amazon described by Keck (1995), the links to the environmental movements for residents of the urban periphery brought "new allies and new institutional arenas in which to wage their fight" (Keck 1995, 410).

The concept of framing is crucial to the evolution of the environmental movement in Brazil, and particularly to the attempt to broaden its spread across social sectors via its appeal as an umbrella movement. The ability to frame the issue or goal of a movement is a way to control the meaning of the movement not only for participants, but for opponents and others in the political arena (Snow and Benford 1992,

136). Early social movement entrants into the political arena have an especially important role in shaping the future of not only the political debate but also the avenues open to their organization and those that form later. As movements try to “attract and shape media coverage, win the support of bystander publics, constrain movement opponents, and influence state authorities, insurgents depend first and foremost on signifying work” (McAdam 1996, 340). While opportunity structures and the individual calculus of the value of participation shape the ability of a social movement to emerge, its long-term viability and appeal depend heavily on its ability to frame its actions in a way that reaches throughout the political system.

The reframing or merging of social issues in the context of environmentalism has not only helped reposition these issues in the Brazilian political arena, but has opened new avenues for grassroots participation. Particularly since the early 1990s and the growing awareness of the human dimension of environmental degradation, the environmental movement and environmental groups in Brazil have tried to link their message to the struggles of popular sectors. Environmental and grassroots organizations developed a new frame: *socioambientalismo*, or social environmentalism. This change reflects an awareness among elite social movement groups that environmental preservation is linked with social struggles of the popular classes, and an awareness in grassroots organizations that the explicitly environmental movements potentially offer alternatives to their problems, not to mention sources of activists, technicians, funding, and publicity. Neighborhood associations in favelas, or shantytowns, the periurban communities that often lack basic sewer and water services, have always attempted to make their demands heard; but with the “greening” of the political discourse, these demands more and more often are couched in terms of environmental protection.

In a metropolitan area rapidly approaching 13 million inhabitants, with a historically personalistic party system largely closed to meaningful participation by the poor, individuals have reported high levels of participation in both community and local politics (see, for example, Mainwaring 1992–93). Historically, mobilization has occurred around issues of importance to the community, like construction of roads and installation of electrical service; but this type of participation has not generally led to lasting political organization once the specific issue has been resolved.³ Attention to political concerns such as the environment, furthermore, has been seen as beyond the range of political activity by the poor, or as exclusively within the territory of those who live in advanced industrial societies or inhabit the elite strata of countries like Brazil. On these terms, comparing respondents from Latin America, and especially residents of urban peripheries, to Europe should provide a sharp contrast.⁴ That is, based on the expectations about resources and

attitudes, comparing impoverished residents of the periphery to environmentally conscious and politically active Europeans should show wide differences.

AT THE GRASSROOTS IN THE METROPOLITAN PERIPHERY

Though scholarly attention has focused on the growth of the environment as a political issue in Brazil, systematic exploration of the environmental profile of the communities that suffer what are arguably the worst environmental conditions has not been an area of primary emphasis.

The study is based on two surveys. The Brazilian sample (N = 298) was collected by the author in the latter part of 1994; the other is the 1992 Euro-Barometer: 37. When the Brazilian survey questionnaire was constructed, some items regarding the environment were translated directly from Euro-Barometer questions, where applicable. The result was a series of items on environmental awareness and reported participation that matched for all countries used in the analysis.

This study specifically targeted three poor communities in three different areas of greater Rio de Janeiro: Rocinha, Anaia Pequeno, and São João de Meriti. Rocinha may be the one of largest favelas in Brazil and even in Latin America; its population is approximately two hundred thousand, although some estimates range much higher.⁵ Situated on a hillside in the city's South Zone that was once Atlantic coastal tropical forest, it faces erosion resulting from deforestation, landslides in times of heavy rains, and the problems of waste disposal and treatment.

Anaia Pequeno lies across the Bay of Guanabara in the municipality of São Gonçalo. It has been caught in the transition from semirural land to urban periphery, and it struggles with issues of health and sanitation, in addition to the pollution from local industry of silica dust and effluents in local streams. São João de Meriti lies in the Baixada Fluminense, a vast lowland area bordering Guanabara Bay, and houses approximately 2.5 million people.

Most of the region has little access to public services; the primary environmental problems are industrial pollution and inadequate sewage collection and treatment, a situation that recently has resulted in dangerous flooding. These communities and regions were selected because they offered diverse geographic and environmental conditions while at the same time they offered a consistent socioeconomic profile of lower- and working-class Brazilians. All struggle with the persistent problems of the urban periphery; in addition to social services, these include violence and integration into the metropolitan area.

In each of the communities, the author and a team of research assistants conducted door-to-door interviews. Local maps provided a general

outline of the neighborhoods and divided communities into canvassing areas. Researchers approached every fifth house per street and interviewed the resident who would have the next birthday and who was over 16 years of age (the legal voting age in Brazil).⁶

ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTIONS

While the “Marvelous City” of Rio de Janeiro was recognized for many years as a tropical paradise, the reality of urban life there contrasts starkly to that image, especially for the masses of socially and economically marginalized Brazilians in its slums. Marginal and squatter communities without access to public services, on land that is degraded by the manner in which it has been occupied, are subject to innumerable challenges. Many residents of the urban periphery earn well below the \$2,770 per capita income reported by the World Bank as the average for all Brazilians in the early 1990s (World Bank 1994). Survey respondents’ average education was six years, and many reported being either unemployed or employed in the informal market.

These indicators of poverty and misery would lead many political scientists, on the basis of prior research on political participation, to expect low levels of awareness and political participation—especially related to environmental issues—among these slum residents. In general, however, the respondents exhibit a comparatively high level of political awareness and activity, even on environmental issues that are generally viewed as the province of wealthier and more educated members of society.

Similarly, the political participation literature would not predict involvement by poor Brazilians because they lack the resources to engage the political system. In a metropolitan area of more than 10 million inhabitants and a party system largely closed to meaningful participation by the poor, this study found high levels of participation and interest in both community and local politics. In the 1990s, moreover, neighborhood associations in urban areas began to participate in politics using environmental arguments, a phenomenon described by Pádua (1991) as “indirect environmentalism.” Longstanding issues of public health, social welfare, and other concerns led communities to seek links with environmental causes, even though environmental concerns may not have motivated them at first.

These high levels of participation and awareness also contradict the expectations by the conventional literature on social movements. Much of this literature places environmentalism among “quality of life” issues and postindustrial politics, not in the sphere of poor people in developing countries, though this trend has begun to change in the last decade (see, for example, Broad 1994; Peluso 1992).

An initial examination seems to confirm that Brazilians of lower socioeconomic status are less interested in environmental issues than their European counterparts. In an example of wide divergence, they rank close to last when compared to all the countries included in the Euro-Barometer survey, on measures of interest in new and different environmental issues (see table 1).⁷

Beyond attitudes about willingness to receive information, reported behavior among the Brazilian groups produces mixed results. The mean score of Brazilian respondents on scales of environmental activity differ significantly from the European respondents. Table 1 shows that this difference is in the expected direction for individual environmental activity, such as recycling and water conservation.

This is not surprising, given the limited availability of recycling programs in Brazil, as well as the lack of environmental education about this type of behavior. This is not to say that individual activity does not take place in poor communities, because reuse of materials and conservation of scarce resources is common, though not part of what might be understood in other contexts as environmental. In some ways, the idea of recycling programs is redundant and foreign. It is therefore not surprising that individual Brazilians rank below the mean for the European sample and most of the countries taken separately (see table 1), because recycling in more developed countries is based on a consumer culture that does not exist for the urban poor of Brazil.

While the concept of limiting waste generated by consumer products, packaging, and household habits is not completely unrecognized in the metropolitan region, the prerequisite affluence for performing these actions does not reach the urban periphery (except for a few locations in the affluent Barra da Tijuca neighborhood and at the "ecological store" in Botafogo.) Therefore the individual actions taken by residents of the urban periphery do not correspond well with individual environmentally friendly behaviors more commonly recognized internationally. Likewise, actions that an outside observer might recognize as environmentally conscious individual behavior (for example, conserving water) may rest heavily on other considerations, such as scarcity.

In contrast to the low levels of reported individual environmental activity, the surprising finding is that the low-income Brazilian respondents rank significantly higher on the group environmental activity scale than the European group. Brazilians were more likely to have engaged in some form of group behavior, such as attending a meeting about environmental issues or participating in a community cleanup, than the European group. Table 1 illustrates this difference between the mean score for each of the European countries and the Brazilians, where Brazil falls below only Luxembourg.

Table 1. Environmental Interest, Independent and Group Activity (mean)

Country	Interest	Independent	Group
Greece	9.6	77.7	5.6
Portugal	9.9	79.8	5.6
Spain	10.1	76.9	5.7
Northern Ireland	9.6	64.0	7.3
East Germany	8.7	72.0	7.6
France	9.6	70.3	7.8
Italy	9.5	69.7	8.2
Republic of Ireland	9.5	57.1	9.4
Great Britain	9.0	62.9	9.4
Belgium	9.2	62.2	11.8
West Germany	8.4	70.1	12.8
Denmark	7.1	60.2	13.1
Netherlands	8.4	56.2	13.1
Norway	8.3	51.6	17.4
Luxembourg	9.5	65.5	24.1
Europe	—	66.5	10.2
Brazil	3.9	56.4 ^a	19.0 ^a

Note: For each scale, the higher value indicates higher reported participation or interest.

^aSignificantly different from European mean <.001.

Source: Euro-Barometer 37: 1992, Brazil survey 1994.

On the measure of reported choice of recycled products, Brazil falls in the middle of the Latin American range. While not directly comparable with the variables in table 1, those in table 2 provide a regional context for a similar type of behavior. Again, while the results must be interpreted with the same caution as those regarding other individual measures, it is interesting to note the comparative position of Brazilians in the region. It suggests that the reported Brazilian activity is not anomalous and is similar to reported activity in other parts of Latin America.

Similar to the measures of individual and group behaviors reported, attempts to understand the concerns of low-income Brazilians about the environment produce expected and unexpected results. On a series of scale items to measure levels of concern about the environment and the degree to which respondents feel they have reason to complain about the environment in their community, Brazil ranks first and third, respectively, when compared to all countries of Europe. Compared to Europe as a whole, the difference in scores is significant (see table 3).

One would expect Brazilians to have complaints about the environment, particularly issues that affect daily living in the urban periph-

Table 2. Percent Choosing Recyclable Products (percent)

Argentina	26.9
Bolivia	19.9
Brazil	18.6
Chile	39.4
Colombia	26.5
Ecuador	17.8
Mexico	23.0
Paraguay	16.6
Peru	15.1
Uruguay	37.8
Venezuela	9.1
Average	22.9

Source: Latinobarómetro 1996.

Table 3. Environmental Concern and Complaint (mean)

	Complaint	Concern
Belgium	38.7	82.7
Denmark	13.3	77.9
West Germany	39.5	83.3
Greece	44.5	95.8
Italy	47.4	87.3
Spain	42.3	86.8
France	39.2	84.3
Republic of Ireland	24.0	76.5
Northern Ireland	27.1	75.5
Luxembourg	35.8	82.8
Netherlands	23.5	78.7
Portugal	34.3	81.7
Great Britain	32.9	84.0
East Germany	48.1	83.8
Norway	20.8	81.2
Europe	34.5	83.2
Brazil	62.0	87.1
Significance	<.002	<.001

Source: Euro-Barometer 37: 1992; Brazil survey 1994.

ery. The “complaint” questions asked if respondents had reason to complain about quality of drinking water, trash collection, loss of green spaces, and similar “neighborhood” items. The “concern” scale, in con-

Table 4. Support for Economic Development versus Environmental Protection (percent)

	Economy	Both	Environment
Europe	5	70	25
Brazil	19	25	56

Source: Euro-Barometer 37: 1992; Brazil survey 1994.

trast, was for broader issues with indirect impact on the lives of those surveyed, such as pollution of the ocean, biodiversity, and global warming. Again the Brazilian group scored significantly higher than the European respondents. In addition, over 60 percent of the Brazilians interviewed reported that they were “very concerned” about destruction of natural resources, global warming, and extinction of plant and animal species.

While these issues have been much discussed in the developed world, and while they do directly affect Brazil and other countries of South America, the expectation for residents of the urban periphery would be that local concerns would outweigh emphasis on more global concerns. These findings contradict that expectation; indeed, respondents registered significant concern on worldwide issues and national environmental problems outside the immediate local context.

Also surprising is that on an item that asked about the relative significance of economic development, Brazilians scored significantly higher than all other countries in support of environmental protection (see table 4). The item asked whether economic development was more important, equally important to, or less important than environmental protection. That is, when given a choice between making economic development a priority over preserving the environment, balancing the two, or preserving the environment as a condition of development, the Brazilian group was most likely to support protection of the environment despite clearly facing serious economic hardship.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS

In addition to the relatively high levels of awareness about the environment, this study shows that activism was also an option among the survey respondents. Grassroots political participation of various kinds reached high levels compared to other regional or national participation. More than 46 percent of respondents reported that they had attended a community meeting at least once, and 50 percent reported having donated their work for a community project such as a *mutirão*, or group cleanup.

Table 5. Opinions on the Environment and the Community (percent)

Question	Yes
Do people have the power to solve environmental problems?	86.7
Are you willing to work in the community to solve them?	81.1
Have you donated your work to the community?	50.2
Have you attended a meeting about community problems?	46.8
Have you contributed money to community efforts?	29.3

N=298.

Source: Brazil survey 1994.

The numbers reported in table 5 are surprising, given many assumptions about the political resources and activity of residents of the urban periphery. While the number of people who have contributed money to the community is sharply lower than those who contributed time or labor, it is reasonable, given that these residents have little money to contribute to community projects. An individual's volunteer labor, on the other hand, is a much more reasonable resource to offer as residents budget their time for community projects.

When asked specifically about the link between community participation and the environment, an overwhelming majority of respondents said not only that they believed that the people had the power to solve environmental problems, but that they would be willing to work in the community to address such problems. Clearly, residents express a willingness to engage in activities that contribute to the long-term improvement of their communities.

Communities have made at least some efforts to link involvement in local efforts to the strengthening of citizenship and democracy, as well as to community resources. Not only have the participants in community organization adopted environmentalism as an important tool for political pressure, but they have also forged links with universities, national NGOs, international organizations working on environmental issues, and other groups in order to address the difficulties of protecting the environment and citizens in areas of rapid urban expansion.

One such effort has brought Anaia Pequeno access to information, services, and education. In 1992, people from the neighborhood distributed pamphlets at the Rio Earth Summit to draw attention to the community's problems and the residents' willingness to participate in solutions. Environmental engineers and geographers from local universities who heard of the community volunteered to produce environmental impact statements, which have been used in judicial processes the community conducted to protect itself from land speculation. The residents are using the information to press the local and state governments to pay attention to the community's infrastructure needs while preserving the

Table 6. Participation and Contacting Behavior Scales (mean)

Ask for help from politician, federal	2.1
Ask for help from politician, state	6.3
Ask for help from politician, municipal	10.5
Ask for help from government agency, federal	5.6
Ask for help from government agency, state	12.5
Ask for help from government agency, municipal	13.9
Municipal participation	12.1
Community participation (ever)	40.2
Community participation (frequency)	43.5
Work for party or candidate	28.9
Persuade others how to vote	34.8
Voted in last election	79.4

N=298.

Source: Brazil survey 1994.

remaining forest cover and preventing further growth without consideration of environmental impact. All these efforts come as part of a neighborhood association initiative called *Cidadania e Meio Ambiente*, or Citizenship and the Environment (Associação . . . de Anaia n.d.).

To place the grassroots participation available to residents of the urban periphery in the context of other political activity, table 6 shows the average score of respondents on several one-hundred-point scales of local political participation. Each of these scales was constructed by combining several variables asking questions about a respondent's history of political contact and involvement, then converting to a one-hundred-point scale.

Table 6 compares political contacting behavior (contacting an elected representative or government agency) with the other available political activities. In this respect, the respondents seem to conform to the expected pattern: individuals with low socioeconomic status are unlikely to engage government and uninvolved in politics. The lowest scores show whether a respondent has ever contacted politicians or government agencies, from the local to the national level, for assistance or resolution of some problem. Both contacting behaviors are relatively infrequent occurrences in the political life of the surveyed residents of the urban periphery. Contacting behavior for both government agencies and politicians usually requires time off from work to visit an office, having a telephone to call a representative, or letter-writing skills to demand attention to a specific problem—"inputs" that most of these respondents have trouble obtaining.

The "municipal activity" scale in table 6 focuses on local activity that takes place outside of the community; for example, attending a meeting of the municipality or local elected officials. This type of participation is also relatively less frequent. To attend such a meeting, a resident faces

obstacles of information, transportation, and scheduling, among others. The relatively high score of state agency contacting may be explained in that in metropolitan Rio de Janeiro, many public services (such as the provision of piped water, provision of sewer services, and administration of schools) that affect transitional communities are actually provided by agencies of the State of Rio de Janeiro.

The community activism scale shows at least one instance of participation in several activities, such as attending a meeting of a neighborhood organization, a parents' meeting at the local school, or similar community endeavor. While the majority of residents still fall into the category of never having participated, the participation score is still high in comparison to the contacting and municipal activity scales. It is in this area that the respondents start to increase their levels of activity as compared to the other types of behavior available in the political bag of tricks.

The second community activism frequency scale takes a second set of questions about similar activities but focuses instead on the frequency of attendance at these community events. Knowing if a person has been involved in an activity at least once might overestimate participation, so this scale addresses the question of how regular that involvement has been over time. The mean score shows that not only do people report participation at least once in their lifetime, but that the reported participation takes place on a fairly regular basis, which has positive implications for the long-term continuity of democratic participation in these communities. Instead of one-time participation in pursuit of specific goals, this activity forms part of a larger pattern of political engagement.

An examination of the mean scores of each of the scales highlights an important characteristic of political behavior in the urban periphery: community-level politics is much more accessible and likely for residents to use than more traditional conceptions of political behavior, such as contacting politicians. The mean scores for participation in community-level politics are much greater than for contacting politicians or agencies, and even for municipal-level politics. While more than 79 percent of those surveyed voted in the last elections, there is a sharp drop between voting behavior and campaign participation, a gap that includes campaigning, contributing to campaigns, working for a party or candidate, and attempting to influence the vote choice of others.⁸

Von Mettenheim found that in general, levels of political participation in Brazil are "patterns of public opinion and voter alignment typical of the advanced democracies" (1990, 23). Although campaigning would seem to be associated with voting in the realm of formal political participation, it does not reflect a similar level of participation. Both the percentage of respondents persuading others how to vote and the percentages working for a party or candidate fall below the comparable scores on the community participation scales.

Table 7. Comparison of Political Activity (percent)

	Voted in last elections	Persuade others	Work for party or candidate
Brazil	79.4	34.8	28.9
United States	54	40	30
Guatemala	74	14	9
Honduras	90	43	42
El Salvador	63	8	6.8
Nicaragua	82	19	20
Costa Rica	88	24	24
Panama	78	46	29

N=298.

Source: Brazil survey 1994; Seligson et al. 1995, 159–63 (data reproduced by permission). Survey questions identical.

The absence of more mainstream political behaviors does not suggest that the urban poor are uninterested in politics, but that they make rational decisions about the allocation of their resources to the arenas that are most accessible and most likely to have results. Thus we see that activities like campaigning and working for a candidate or party, listed in table 6, do not have levels of reported participation comparable to the community behavior presented in table 5. High levels of voting, rather than being inconsistent with a community-centered approach to politics, actually support the proposition that respondents apply scarce resources where they are most valuable and avoid paying the costs of nonparticipation at the polls.

Table 7 compares the results of the Brazil survey with some concurrent data on political participation in Central America (taken from Seligson et al. 1995). The portion of table 7 reproduced from Seligson shows responses from six countries in Central America, as well as the United States, on three different types of political participation: voting, working for a party or candidate, and trying to persuade others how to vote.⁹ Brazil has the fourth-highest score in each category, falling in the middle range of each group. It should be kept in mind, however, that the Brazilian respondents were all poor residents of the urban periphery, whereas the other data come from national samples including respondents of higher socioeconomic sectors. The statistical deck is stacked against the Brazilians in this comparison, in which the Brazilian respondents, with fewer resources, might be expected to show lower rates of participation. Thus, while the responses for Brazil do not outperform the other countries absolutely, their relative similarity is notable given the differences in the samples.

Table 8. Regression of Socioeconomic Variables on Community Activism

	Community at least once	Community frequency	Municipal activism
Constant	29.245	29.793	9.387
Gender	-3.192	5.445	-2.925
Age	2.938	1.713	-2.353*
Education	3.468	2.744	3.552*
Individual income	-0.167	0.736	2.328**
Adjusted R ²	0.000	0.086	0.164

N=298. *Sig<.05 **Sig.<.01.

Source: Brazil survey 1994.

Thus far, we can see a pattern of political participation that is strongest at the local level and for the mandatory vote. The next step is to examine factors that may cause variation in this participation. Table 8 shows the results of three regression equations using gender, education, age, and individual income to explain political participation. For either of the community activism variables, none of the socioeconomic variables has a significant impact. For municipal activism, only individual income is significant at the .01 level. The costs of attending a municipal meeting may be relatively high, and those who have a relatively higher income may have greater flexibility in work scheduling or transportation budget that would allow attendance at these meetings.

Table 8 shows no evidence that gender, age, individual income, or education affects the levels of community participation. It should be noted that the respondents surveyed fall into a fairly narrow spectrum of incomes, with the mean income at 1.7 minimum salaries (roughly \$120 per month at the time of the survey) and more than 20 percent of the sample unemployed. Small increases in income that would give citizens the ability to branch out from local to municipal politics therefore would still leave that income under the national per capita average. Though there is some evidence that despite the challenges to participation, political involvement is possible, the results show weak support for these factors as motivations to participate.

While it is impossible to explain conclusively the origins of community participation with the data available from this 1994 survey, some links can be drawn between environmental awareness and the presence of democratic participation. Table 9 shows the results of regressions with nine independent variables and a dependent group environmental activity scale. The first four are socioeconomic factors as already described: gender, age, income, and education. Also included are the

Table 9. Regression Analysis: Socioeconomic Variables, Participation in Group Environmental Activity

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Constant	11.49	2.24	9.26	8.94	1.75	8.41	7.79
Gender	2.918	3.94	2.51	3.71	4.07	3.42	4.29
Age	.234	-.707	.106	.874	-.73	-.10	.642
Education	-.163	-1.27	-3.68	-1.13	-.11	-.12	-.82
Individual income	3.124*	3.177**	3.07**	2.49**	3.26**	3.27**	2.70*
Community at least once		.320**			1.75**		
Community frequency			.244			.052	
Municipal activism				.272**			.254**
Help from politician					.059	.166	.150
Help from government agency					-.045	.006	-.020
Adjusted R ²	.042	.160	.026	.060	.153	.028	.059

N=298. *Sig<.05 **Sig<.01.
Source: Brazil survey 1994.

two contacting-scale variables, one for contacting government agencies and another for contacting politicians for help. Finally, the model includes the two community-level activism variables, participation at least once and frequency of participation, and the municipal activism scale. Participation at least once in the community has a significant impact at the .01 level. Municipal activism is also positively associated with higher levels of reported group environmental activity.

Both community and municipal activity are positively and significantly associated with group environmental activity. The adjusted R^2 of each of the models, including "community activism at least once," suggests the strongest relationship, demonstrating that having participated in the community at least once provides a doorway to future activity. A surprising result in Table 9 is the significance of individual income, which increases in the presence of the activism variables. While it does not contradict the main finding that low income does not necessarily predict low participation in comparison with individuals of higher socioeconomic status, it does suggest that in the fairly narrow income group included in this sample, small increases in income can have a significant impact on a person's participation in group environmental activities. Although these results suggest that community activism can increase a person's likelihood of participating in environmentally oriented actions, there is still a great deal left to be explained.

When the analysis turns to an examination of individual environmental activity, the same independent variables produce somewhat different results. The "at least once" community participation variable falls from significance, and the frequency of community activity has a negative effect (see table 10). In addition, age is strongly and significantly related to individual environmental activity. Individual environmental activity is represented by actions such as recycling, conserving water, preventing noise pollution, and saving energy. In Rio's urban periphery, these activities would have different motivations and follow different patterns from those seen in Western Europe and the United States. As table 1 also shows, recycling is not a common practice in poor communities, but reuse of items on a household level is quite common. At the time of the survey, in the area only limited recycling was available in distant, more affluent neighborhoods.

Finally, the environmental complaint scales were analyzed using the same set of socioeconomic and community action variables as used for the individual and group environmental activity scales. None of the variables is significant in explaining the respondents' complaints about environmental problems. While this would appear to contradict the hypothesis that community activity leads to environmental activity, it should be recalled that the dependent variable is a scale of items related to complaints about local environmental issues, not action. This finding shows

Table 10. Regression Analysis: Socioeconomic Variables, Participation in Individual Environmental Activity

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Constant	36.55	34.7	41.9	37.7	35.12	41.93	37.76
Gender	2.470	2.67	3.447	2.13	2.573	3.888	2.252
Age	5.987**	5.80**	6.295**	5.71**	5.818**	6.185**	5.598**
Education	1.187	.968	1.679	1.61	.715	1.466	1.372
Individual income	.969	.979	1.101	1.24	.885	1.089	1.216
Community at least once		.063			.062		
Community frequency			-.180*			-.194*	
Municipal activism				-.118			-.133
Help from politician					-.061	.017	-.021
Help from government agency					.061	.093	.088
Adjusted R ²	.040	.038	.058	.041	.029	.053	.034

N=298. *Sig<.05 **Sig<.01.
Source: Brazil survey 1994.

that community activism is not associated with higher levels of complaints. This finding counters some conventional wisdom about residents of the urban periphery, particularly beliefs held by local and state functionaries who must address the demands of the population. Some of the engineers interviewed in the state water and sewer agencies felt that was better for the poor to be uninvolved, because once they participate in politics they develop further demands and overwhelm the already overextended and poorly funded state.

In sum, the data present a pattern of political activity among residents of Rio's urban periphery that is focused on the local level, with high levels of voting, complemented by low to moderate levels of contacting and traditional campaigning activity. We also see mixed support for the hypothesis that community participation encourages environmental participation; the community participation occurrence scale exerts a constant positive impact. The relationship between local participation and the environment, particularly in poor communities like those surveyed in Rio de Janeiro, is complex and difficult to unravel. While signs of growing awareness of environmental issues and links to political participation are encouraging, they are far from the norm.

THE DYNAMIC OF POVERTY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, the struggle for full citizen's rights encompasses many environmental issues, including waste removal, health care, and deforestation. The urban environment is closely linked with problems of industrial pollution, overpopulation, and access to public services. It is estimated that in the years immediately preceding this study, among Brazil's approximately 113 million urban residents, 75 million did not have sewers, and 60 million lacked garbage collection services (Forum de ONGs 1992). Yet though the struggle for material comfort has not yet been won, the residents of Rio's favelas demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice scarce resources to environmental efforts.

The environmental problems of Rio's metropolitan area have drawn increasing attention in recent years, particularly because of the 1992 Earth Summit, the now-abandoned plan to rehabilitate the Bay of Guanabara, and the massive oil spill in that same bay in 1999.¹⁰ In addition, the alternative activities of NGOs, political figures outside the official Earth Summit talks, and other events provided a link for the rapidly growing network of environmental and social organizations. The state federation of neighborhood organizations was one of the participants in the Forum of Brazilian Nongovernmental Organizations (*Forum de ONGs Brasileiras*), which produced an alternative agenda to that of the official Earth Summit conference. This effort to wed social and environ-

mental goals spurred participation even from small community groups trying to link their problems to the agenda of larger organizations through *socioambientalismo*.

It is tempting to attribute the high levels of awareness and participation found in this study to the focusing event of the Earth Summit and its attendant media coverage, two years before the author's survey was conducted. Although the Earth Summit dramatically raised the profile of environmental issues, however, it was quickly relegated to secondary status by economic crisis and presidential elections. While some effort was made to address the social aspects of environmental policy at the offsite alternative conference, most of the discussion at the official conference centered on the elite process (meetings among heads of state) and large-scale issues.¹¹ Although the explicit construction of a socioenvironmental agenda was first broadly recognized at the same time as the Earth Summit, moreover, both community activism and Brazilian environmentalism already had a rich history (see, for example, Viola 1992).

The link between environment and poverty has also been recognized at the institutional level. A major component of the government's plans to address the environmental problems of the Bay of Guanabara, deforestation, and water pollution is environmental education, which some residents have perceived as an effort for partisan political activity. There is also the danger that the poor will be stigmatized as polluters; community leaders, technicians, and urban planners resist the characterization of the poor as solely responsible for the area's environmental ills. In reality, middle- and upper-class residences in metropolitan Rio are responsible for a large amount of pollution through clandestine sewage hookups from residential condominiums (Looye 1995).

Another explanation for the high levels of ecological awareness among the Brazilians surveyed is instrumental political behavior. Anaiá Pequeno is a good example. Community activism and political participation in Anaiá Pequeno have a strong history, beginning in the early 1980s, when the neighborhood association organized to demand a government-sponsored school for the children. As one founding member commented, they never imagined that in ten years they would focus on their community's needs as environmental (Gomes 1994). Community leaders and residents have come to recognize, however, that it does little good to have a clinic, for example, when trash is never collected and the dump is next door, polluting the soil and water. Similarly, without basic sanitation the piped water achieved after popular pressure on the state government is useless, because the sewage backs up into the inadequate pipelines and contaminates the water.

The neighborhood association has thus taken up an environmental focus, because without protecting the environment all the social gains will be undone. Like the media influence attributed to the Earth Summit,

the effect of networking with environmental organizations and the receipt of direct funding can be viewed as a factor in the transformation of local political activity, but not an explanation for sustained awareness and participation on environmental issues.

The levels of awareness and activity expressed in the Brazilian survey are most likely a combination of these factors, including community leadership efforts. Community leadership is crucial, as it provides a link between community struggles and the “green” networks that have begun to overlap with those that support social struggles. Community leaders have begun to conduct environmental education campaigns to link social, health, and economic programs. Part of this process is the continuing evolution of Brazilian democracy and its redefinition by some of its least included citizens as they emphasize their citizenship rights.

This evolution of environmental consciousness highlights some important links between the different ways environmentalism is manifested across the world and across socioeconomic sectors. First, the level of diverse information about the environment in low-income communities—including issues not of immediate concern to those communities—can be quite high. Given the expectations for participation based solely on objective conditions, we would expect to see a high number of communities concerned with issues such as basic sanitation; yet large numbers also are aware of the problems of global warming, deforestation, and nuclear pollution.

The reframing of local issues with environmental components also stems from a longer-term evolution of the Brazilian environmental movement, from its origins in a loose collection of activists to a “complex multisectoral action conglomerate” (Viola 1992). The environmental movement has also experienced a consolidation, in which large organizations with more resources can dominate the “market” for environmentalism like the *barões do café* did for coffee many years ago (Fernandes 1994). These developments have produced a movement that is less internally consistent in regard to unity of method and goals than it was in the beginning, but has more widespread visibility and ability to engage the political system. These changes have simultaneously allowed greater diversity of participation for grassroots organizations and increased competition for access.

The links between local grassroots groups and national or transnational environmental organizations may permanently alter the structure and values of the local groups and change the identity of their participants. Interviews among local elites indicate that community leaders who already have ideas about the environment acquire information and develop contacts with other organizations that lead them to rethink the environmental problems in their area. The “greening of the discourse”

about basic sanitation has greater effects than simply changing terminology, as participation and education lead to changing perceptions and political tactics.

Along with the changing perceptions about local issues have come broader conceptions of the relationship between humans residing in precarious urban areas and the global environment. Though the environmentalism of Brazil, and lower-income Brazilians in particular, may not be the same as that of rest of the world, this study suggests that the urban poor do care and take action about what happens to their environment, and that they link both quality of life and economic development to the environment's condition. While it is encouraging, especially to environmentalists, to find that people of varying socioeconomic sectors have a heightened awareness about the environment, translating that awareness to action remains problematic.

CONCLUSIONS

The last 20 years have brought about many changes in the Brazilian political system and in the interaction of state and civil society. One component of popular participation has been a growing environmental movement. While it is not the intention of this study to conclude that participation in environmental politics drives democratization, this analysis shows that political participation, especially at the grassroots level, and increased activity around environmental problems may be associated with each other and may have a positive impact on overall democratic participation. Environmentalism in Brazil functions as one path to increasing democratic participation, involving multisectoral alliances across Brazilian society.

Another important component to this relationship is that individuals and groups at the grassroots are making the link between democracy, citizenship, and the environment. In the urban periphery of Rio de Janeiro, some communities and community leaders are attempting to mobilize residents to work in their communities and pressure the government to change the course of environmental destruction. While these activities are not the norm for all of Brazil or even all of Rio de Janeiro, they are based in local initiatives that form part of a broader phenomenon linking transition movements to other such efforts today (such as the antiviolence campaign in Rio de Janeiro).

The attempts to mobilize environmentally oriented participation or engage existing community organizations in environmental activity has transformed more than just the groups involved. Their actions have attracted attention from researchers, universities, national and transnational environmental groups, and, perhaps most important, the government responsible for the services they seek. One result is that more

people are aware of the precarious urban environment that affects both poor residents and more affluent members of society. Another is that national environmental organizations have made some efforts to integrate the concerns of the poorer sectors of society into their agenda, which in the past paid little attention to them. An example is the 1993 ECOURBS conference.¹²

Part of the change in the face of Brazilian environmentalism can be traced to shifts in the framing of the environment as a political issue in Brazil. From a relatively elite movement concerned with alternative lifestyles to one that encompasses the social concerns of the urban poor, environmentalism in Brazil has become a broader phenomenon. Broader conceptions of environmentalism now encompasses social justice issues like access to public services and civil rights that leave the less-advantaged members of society with greater environmental problems. The amplified frame also includes the struggle for citizenship as part of the struggle for environmental protection; as individuals become mobilized to change their environment, they are also emerging as fuller citizens.

Whether increasing democratic participation on the part of the poorest sectors and creating broad, multiclass coalitions through environmentalism are possible in Brazil remains to be seen. Decentralization of public policy and community-based solutions are increasingly popular with funding agencies and governments alike, as large-scale projects are criticized for waste and ineffectiveness and fiscal austerity puts even greater limits on measures to address environmental problems. Should grassroots environmental groups find a way to compensate for the lack of government funds and personnel, they could increase their staying power. In Anaiá Pequeno, the neighborhood association already had cooperated with the state government to clean up the water supply back in 1984. The government supplied the materials, and the community provided the labor (Gomes 1994; Carvalho et al. 1993). Communities not only gain public services and preserve their fragile environment through these actions, but also build community infrastructure and stable modes of democratic participation.

The findings of this study indicate that Brazilians residing in the urban periphery link their own local environmental concerns to more global considerations. Additionally, concerns about the global environmental and activism on local environmental issues are positively related to wider community involvement. While these conclusions are preliminary steps on a longer path to a better understanding of both grassroots urban environmental politics and democracy in Brazil, they provide an indication of a change in Brazilian civil society that could be an important factor in both the preservation of the environment and the strengthening of Brazilian democracy.

NOTES

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1. The *diretas já* campaign demanded "direct elections now" and brought the masses into the democratic transition in Brazil (most of the action occurred in 1984).

2. Hawkins (1993) describes the inclusion of indigenous people in decisionmaking in the Amazon as the inclusion of previously "unheard voices" (241).

3. This type of participation in Mexico is well described by Cornelius (1975) and more recently in Brazil by Gay (1994).

4. On the basis of GNP per capita, the average for the European countries in this study is approximately \$20,000 while that for Brazil is less than \$3,000 (World Bank 1994, 168).

5. This claim is asserted prominently on the website <www.rocinha.com.br>. See also Rohter 2001; Baiocchi 2001; Leeds 1996, 48.

6. The "next birthday" system was used to avoid bias toward any particular group, but the Brazilian sample is overrepresented by female respondents nevertheless.

7. The scales were formed by combining several identically constructed items, then confirming the scale through factor analysis and reliability testing of the loadings.

8. Voting as a measure of political involvement is somewhat misleading, as voting is required. The figures however, highlight comparative levels of voluntary participation, in contrast both to the mandatory vote and to levels of participation regionally.

9. Parts of the Brazil survey were modeled after earlier work by Seligson and his coauthors to facilitate direct comparison.

10. Through the Inter-American Development Bank and other sources, the State of Rio de Janeiro budgeted several hundred million dollars in the early 1990s to address existing pollution in the Bay of Guanabara and to check further damage. The State Foundation of Environmental Engineering, FEEMA, at one point estimated that up to 80 percent of the money would go toward basic sanitation and environmental education in the Baixada Fluminense (FEEMA and JICA 1994, 23). In subsequent years this project was derailed and the oil spill further complicated the situation of the bay, yet the difficulty of integrating the social and environmental elements remains.

11. "It was really ironic for those of us who went to the Rio summit. Everyone there was worrying about trees and rainforests, and they were in the city that best exemplifies the worst problem in Latin America, and nothing was said about it." Alfredo Gastal, director of the United Nations Office of Environment and Human Settlement in Santiago, quoted in Nash 1992.

12. The Segundo Seminario Internacional Sobre Problemas Ambientais dos Centros Urbanos (ECOURBS '93) was held December 12–17, 1993, in São Paulo. Created to unite urban planners, social scientists, NGOs, and community activists working in urban environmentalism, the conference included about 250 panel presentations on environmental topics in health, local governance, citi-

zanship and urbanization, urban archaeology, megacities, recycling, water treatment, and education.

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