THE POLITICS OF URBAN POVERTY: PARTICIPATION AND WELFARE

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ABSTRACT

The rapid process of urbanization currently swelling the poor urban neighborhoods of developing countries is changing local and national political landscapes. As the population of urban poor continues to grow—it is expected that by 2030 half of the total urban population will be poor—so are poor peoples' demands for access to public services, as well as the type and intensity of their engagements with political actors. The dissertation focuses on the different types of interactions between the urban poor and politicians and specifically tackles the following questions: What explains the variation in political participation among the urban poor? What drives the urban poor to become active in politics? What types of political activity are these citizens engaging in? The dissertation uses a mixed-methods strategy that makes use of a case study of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and survey data, including an original dataset that includes interviews with over 400 favela dwellers. It finds that in Brazil, there is a “favela effect” in political participation: favela dwellers are more likely to become politically engaged in a number of activities—voting, working for a politician, participating in neighborhood meetings—than people living in more affluent neighborhoods. In addition, the dissertation demonstrates that there are multiple pathways to political participation and that four factors are key in explaining the levels of political engagement: social networks, religious groups, government transfer schemes, and NGO programs. The dissertation contributes to the literature on political
participation and democracy, and helps move the debate on political engagement of the urban poor beyond arguments that, on the one hand, portray them as uninterested or unable to engage in political activities and, on the other hand, describe them as the inevitable victims of clientelism and political bosses.
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Chapter 1: The Politics of Urban Poverty: Participation and Welfare

In the late 1960s, at the height of the Brazilian military dictatorship, the population of Rio de Janeiro increased exponentially, mostly as a result of a wave of migration from poor rural areas. The vast majority of the new inhabitants of the Cidade Maravilhosa settled in the hills that overlook the city, where the shantytowns, or favelas, that they established still stand, and continue to expand. Like thousands of cities across the developing world, Rio de Janeiro has two different worlds: the “asphalt” where the upper classes live, and the “hills” where poor favelados strive to make a living. Today, 22 percent of Rio de Janeiro’s inhabitants, more than 1.4 million people, inhabit the city’s 763 favelas, where the typical resident lives in poverty with little access to government services. For many of these favelados, who dreamed that democratization would provide opportunities to be heard by the authorities and improve their wellbeing, the promise of citizenship and democracy has been delivered mostly in the form of rampant clientelism. Numerous reports show that support and votes from the urban poor are exchanged for such inducements as cash, medical exams, a place in school or social program, a job in the government, and illegal Internet access—as well as chickens, haircuts, and even a couple of drinks at a local strip club, to cite a few examples.

These forms of interaction between citizens and politicians have been well documented across the developing world and are certainly not unique to Rio de Janeiro, to Brazil, or even to Latin America. They are a symptom of at least two broader issues
that currently affect most developing countries in different degrees: high levels of poverty and poor quality of democratic institutions. The dominant form of interaction between the poor and government authorities, — one in which politicians take advantage, especially during electoral periods, of sometimes lax electoral rules and poor enforcement mechanisms, and of the need of poor citizens to access goods and services that can ameliorate their lives—, is a reflection of these deeper problems. At the same time, from the perspective of the poor, the possibility of exchanging political support or a vote for goods and services represents a new lifeline, while also creating incentives for political participation.

Take the case of Adriana, a single mother living in a favela in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.¹ Like Adriana, millions of slum dwellers across the world rely on government authorities or local bosses for favors that improve their livelihoods, even if it is temporary. In her case, she was invited to a political rally by a neighbor. There, she was given some used clothes for her children just for showing up. Adriana also sold her vote in the last election for 20 dollars; in the next election, she’ll try to work and deliver flyers in a nearby favela for a candidate, since she has heard that they can pay her approximately 15 dollars a day, in addition to providing transportation and a hot meal. Certainly not all of the 1.4 million cariocas that live in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas have become as “politically active” as Adriana, yet her example is illustrative of the type of

¹ The name has changed to protect the person’s identity.
interaction that happen between a vast number of slum dwellers in the developing world and politicians.

These type of interactions between the urban poor and politicians or government officials are an important form of political participation and are becoming a key part of the coping mechanisms available to the urban poor. Moreover, while the interests of the upper socioeconomic strata may dominate in the national political arena, it is possible for the poor to attain political influence in their local sphere and their capacity to influence the distribution of goods sometimes exceeds expectations (Chaves Pandolfi & Grynszpan, 2003; Portes, 1972; Seligson & Booth, 1978). Therefore, as the political participation of the poor becomes embedded in local politics, it can have important consequences for political systems in developing countries. This dissertation focuses on these types of interactions between the urban poor and politicians, with a keen interest in what drives the political engagement of the urban poor, and how their increasing participation can change the political landscape.

It is widely agreed that political participation is the bedrock of democratic politics because it can have a considerable impact on the quality of democracy and the exercise of citizenship by influencing electoral processes, representation, and policy agendas, as well as access to, and the distribution of, public benefits and resources. The relationship between participation and socioeconomic status is one of the strongest propositions in comparative politics; early, seminal works, focused mostly on developed countries, found consistent positive correlation between the two (e.g., Verba & Nie, 1972). This led, however, to a
devaluation of poor peoples’ participation in the early literature. As a result, this work falls short of explaining levels of, and patterns in, the participation of the urban poor as the rapid process of urbanization dramatically continues to transform the political landscape of cities in developing countries. In the past two decades, a broad emerging body of literature, drawn from sociology and anthropology as well as political science, has problematized these claims about the relationship between socio-economic status and participation by presenting wide variation in the political engagement of the poor (e.g., Gay, 1994; Auyero, 2000; Krishna, 2008). Available data from African countries also shows that not only do the poor vote more frequently than the rich but that they also attend more community meetings between elections (Bratton, 2008; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2011). In the case of Latin America, the poor vote as much as the rich, contact their representatives more often, and participate in budget assemblies constantly (Abers, 2000; Fornos, Power & Garand, 2004; Booth & Seligson, 2008; Taylor-Robinson, 2010).

In spite of this new data, and the corresponding emerging current in the literature, it is unclear how different social, political, and economic factors affect the forms and intensity of political participation in poor urban neighborhoods in developing countries. While it appears that the relationship between political participation and urban poverty are more complex than some conventional wisdom suggests, a scarcity of reliable and accurate data limits thorough analysis of politics in poor urban neighborhoods of developing countries. We lack both a clear causal framework and a strong micro-
foundational analysis that can explain the differences in levels of political participation of the urban poor, as well as its potential connections to their overall welfare.

This dissertation contributes to filling in this gap, presenting new evidence, including original survey data produced during fieldwork, on politics and participation in urban slums to answer a set of core questions: What explains the variation in political participation among the urban poor? What drives slum dwellers to become active in politics? What types of political activity are the urban poor engaging in? What are the sources and determinants of political engagement in poor urban neighborhoods in developing countries?

This dissertation seeks to move the debate on political engagement of the poor beyond arguments that, on the one hand, portray them as uninterested or unable to engage in political activities (e.g. Lewis, 1959), and on the other hand describe them as mere victims, dependent on the vagaries of clientelistic systems and the political bosses who rule them. I argue that the political participation of the urban poor is not generally driven by a desire to influence the decisions of the government, nor is it strictly determined by socioeconomic status, as the literature suggests. Rather, I assert that the political participation of the urban poor responds to an urgent need to access resources to cope with poverty. The urban poor utilize three mechanisms to effectively participate in the political arena as a coping strategy: information, skills, and mobilization. In turn, poor peoples’ ability and willingness to activate these key mechanisms is directly influenced by: the density of individuals’ social networks; their participation in membership
organizations and religious organizations; participation in government transfer programs; and exposure to non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The dissertation demonstrates that in Brazil there is what I call a “favela effect” in political participation: favela dwellers are more likely to become politically engaged in a number of activities—voting, working for a politician, participating in neighborhood meetings—than people living in more affluent neighborhoods. Moreover, focusing on the case of Rio de Janeiro, I show that these factors are important for different political activities. For example, all else being equal, individuals with high-density social networks (consisting of friends and family) are more than two times more likely to help his/her community than someone with low-density networks. In addition, slum dwellers who belong to membership organizations are almost three times more likely to participate in a public meeting or solve a community problem. Favelados who are part of religious groups are at least two times more likely to become engaged in political activities than people that do not belong to religious groups; and individuals that receive a cash transfer from the government are twice as likely to vote and to have worked for a political campaign that those that do not receive cash benefits. Finally, my data also demonstrates that former NGO beneficiaries are also more likely to attend public meetings.

Why Study the Urban Poor and Political Participation?

Few factors are as strongly correlated with socioeconomic development as urbanization levels, making urbanization one of the most effective reducers of poverty.
Paradoxically, however, the fastest process of urbanization is taking place in the slums and poor neighborhoods of developing countries. As a result, some estimates claim that more than 25 percent of the global urban population, approximately 745 million people, lives on less than 2.15 dollars a day (Ravaillon, Chen & Sangraula, 2008). Moreover, one billion people, or a third of global urban population, live in the approximately 200,000 slums across the world, where there is generally little or no access to basic services, and where substandard housing, overcrowding, and high unemployment coexist with crime and violence (UN-Habitat, 2007; Kharas, Chandy & Hermias, 2010; Davis, 2006). While not all the urban poor live in slums, nor are all slum dwellers poor, the two categories overlap significantly (Davis, 2006). Many poor urban households, even those not located in slums, still lack access to basic services and have to cope with similar challenges that mostly result from their scarce resources, social exclusion, and low socioeconomic status. Urban poverty will create even more challenges in the future, as it is expected that by 2030 the number of urban poor will reach 50% of the total urban population, or approximately two billion slum dwellers around the world (UN-Habitat, 2003; Kharas, Chandy & Hermias, 2010).

As the population of urban poor continues to grow, so does this population’s political relevance. The World Bank estimates that 5 million people move into cities

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2 Hereafter I will refer to slum dwellers and the urban poor interchangeably, unless a clear distinction is necessary. UN-Habitat defines a slum household as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area who lack one or more of the following: durable housing that protects against extreme climate conditions; sufficient living space (not more than 3 people sharing the same room); easy access to safe water; access to adequate public or private sanitation; and security of tenure that prevents forced evictions (UN-Habitat, 2006; UN-Habitat, 2008).
every month (2014). The sheer number of poor people and slum dwellers will put enormous pressure on city and national governments to provide access to basic services and development opportunities. This in itself can have substantial consequences for the allocation of public resources and, naturally, on the political arena. Furthermore, the relevance of slum dwellers will become more critical for electoral processes and political mobilization, particularly as democratization and decentralization processes open up opportunities for participation (Booth & Seligson, 2008; Bratton, Chu, & Lagos, 2006; Krishna, 2008; Stokes, 1991; Faletti, 2010). An increase in political participation in developing countries can have a destabilizing effect on the political system if political institutions are not capable of meeting the demands of new participants (Huntington, 1968). As new data shows that the poor are becoming more involved in politics through a number of political activities in addition to voting, their demands will become central issues in policy agendas. Moreover, the strategies employed by the urban poor to deal with local problems, particularly when these strategies involve political action, have important political consequences because these can influence government behavior in the long term (Singerman, 1995). Consequently, the central question of this dissertation—what determines the forms of political participation of the urban poor, and the levels at which they participate—is one that will become more important as slum dwellers’ political engagement increases.

In addition to focusing on a politically relevant and expanding group of the world’s population, a second motivation for studying political participation of the urban
poor is the direct impact that it can have on the quality of democracy and the exercise of citizenship. As Verba and Nie (1972, p. 1) note in their seminal work, “the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is.” But aside from the number of participants and the available avenues for participation in a society regardless of a person’s socioeconomic status, political engagement can affect the quality of democracy by allowing citizens to exercise their preferences and voice their concerns to political actors (Verba, et al., 1995). Political participation can also encourage politicians to become more responsive to citizen’s needs (Verba & Nie, 1972), more accountable to communities (Fung, 2004; Guerrero & Madrid, 2005; Curting & Meijer, 2006), and even promote democratic legitimacy to a political system (Cohen, 1989; Booth & Seligson, 2009). In short, an inclusive system that allows for participation even by people of low wealth or social status can help sustain and promote democratic practices.

A final reason to focus particularly on the urban poor is that different factors play important roles in cities and rural areas, making the category “poor” problematic and overly broad. While our understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty has improved over the past decades, and fundamental differences between rural and urban poverty dynamics have increased in salience in the literature (Amis, 1995; Beall & Fox, 2006; Fay, 2005), the majority of the empirical literature on politics and political participation of the poor continues to be based either on rural settings or poor urban neighborhoods in highly industrialized countries (e.g., Verba & Nie, 1972; Fung, 2004; Krishna, 2002, Jha et al., 2007). Foundational research has tended to agglomerate the
urban and rural poor into a single category, producing potentially misleading generalizations.\textsuperscript{3}

Urban and rural impoverished areas, however, differ in ways that are profoundly important for understanding their politics. For example, urban areas tend to be much more socially and economically heterogeneous than rural ones, social networks are less stable in cities, and unemployment affects mostly urban areas; therefore, individual and collective mechanisms to cope with urban poverty differ from those available in rural areas (Fay, 2005). Furthermore, the urban poor depend mostly on a monetized economy and generally live in squatter settlements, excluding them from certain public benefits (Thomas, 1995); consequently, their political identities may not respond to conventional patterns. These particular characteristics influence daily routines and mark important differences between the urban and the rural poor when analyzing the determinants of political participation.

\textit{The Puzzle: Beyond Socioeconomic Status}

Most assumptions about the politics of the poor are based on country-level analyses that have helped promote a widely accepted view that political participation and political attitudes are a direct function of socioeconomic status. In other words, income and education define both the extent to which a person engages in political processes as well as his or her political preferences and behavior (Lipset 1963; Verba & Nie 1972; Huntington & Nelson, 1976; Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978.

\textsuperscript{3} For example, Huntington & Nelson, 1976; Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978.
Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Huntington & Nelson, 1976; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Some of the most influential works in Political Science find a strong relationship between levels of economic development and democratization (Lipset, 1953), as well as the probability of sustaining a democracy and a country’s economic success (Przeworski et al., 2000). However as Jones-Correa and Leal note, while the socioeconomic status model highly correlates with participatory behavior, it does not provide a causal explanation and does not explain how and why people participate in politics (2001, pp. 751-752). Moreover, these findings also mostly based on data from developed countries, where material resources and levels of education do indeed seem to play a critical role in explaining political engagement (Lawless & Fox, 2001; Przeworski, 2008).

These country-level arguments have also indirectly helped anchor a belief that the poor are hold undemocratic attitudes and are apathetic in terms of political engagement, since the poorer a country is, the slimmer are its chances of being democratic. As a result, it is still often believed that most of the poor are politically apathetic, marginalized, and sometimes even anti-democratic. Another salient factor that has contributed to the consolidation of theories associating poverty with political quiescence is the difficulty of data collection in slums, as well as the vast heterogeneity of slums—a very diverse set of cases and scarce data.

In this dissertation, I attempt to bring new data to bear on this problem, with a nuanced approach to studying the political participation of the urban poor. I am following new currents in the literature, which have in the past two decades turned their attention
more and more to political participation in developing countries, finding a higher degree of political activity among the poor than earlier generations of scholarship would have argued, and indeed, suggesting that the poor participate as much, or even more than, economically better-off citizens (e.g. Gay, 1994; Bratton, 2008; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2011; Krishna 2008). A starting point for this approach may be seen in the following figures, which draw on data from Globalbarometer 2009.

Taking into account the socioeconomic status of citizens⁴ from 55 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, it becomes clear that in certain political activities, such as voting and contacting elected officials, as well as discussing politics, the poor are actually slightly more active than richer people. In other activities, like participating in demonstrations and contacting community leaders, the better off tend to be more active than the poor, but only marginally. Figures 1-6 show the percentage of people, divided by social strata, that: voted in the last elections; attended a demonstration; is interested in politics; discusses politics; contacted elected officials; and contacted local leaders. (see Figures 1-6).

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⁴ Self-reported personal economic situation has been used before to identify socioeconomic status (e.g. Bateson, 2012). Interviewees that responded that their current personal economic situation is “bad or very bad” are considered poor (35%); those that replied “not good nor bad” are considered middle class (32%); and those answering “good or very good” are considered rich (30%); the other 3% declined to answer or is missing data. An alternative measure is self-reported income; there are no significant differences when this measure is used.
Figures 1-6
The figures above suggest that the socioeconomic status thesis is not straightforward or universal. While in some contexts, we observe a correlation between higher socioeconomic status and greater participation, in other cases poor people are as politically active, or even slightly more active than, those that are better off. While these figures do not suggest causality in any way, they do complicate simplistic pictures of the poor as disengaged from political participation, and suggest that different logics may operate under different circumstances and for different activities. In what circumstances do the poor, despite lacking what would appear to be critical resources and skills, participate as much as the better off? What is determining the levels of participation of the urban poor? What drives poor slum dwellers to participate in politics? In attempting to answer these questions, I bring new data to bear on this puzzle and seek to deepen our understanding of the politics and participation of the poor in the developing world.

**Argument Overview**

This dissertation’s main objective is to provide a micro-foundational analysis and arguments that can shed light on factors that shape and determine the levels of political participation of the urban poor; it also takes into account the broader political context, as political engagement does not occur in an institutional vacuum. The dissertation aims to illuminate mechanisms that have received insufficient attention in the study of the political participation of the urban poor, and to analyze how these factors interact with broader political contexts.
I argue that the most pressing—though not the only—motivation for the urban poor to participate in political activities is to cope with immediate needs imposed by poverty, in addition to securing medium term support that can help them more broadly ameliorate their condition and provide a buffer against future potential setbacks. While the urban poor’s political participation can certainly be motivated by values and/or ideologies, as well as long-term expectations, I argue that the urgency of dealing with immediate hardships overtakes other possible motivations and makes slums different from other parts of the city. Political participation in the slums has to take into account the individual or collective actions through which people try to obtain public goods or goods for themselves (Berg-Schlosser & Kersting, 2003; Dietz, 1998; Singerman, 1995). This is particularly relevant for the urban poor; surveys have shown that the urban poor consider access to government one of the most important ways to improve their lives (Cornelius, 1974; Dietz, 1998). Consequently, the analysis of politics and political engagement in slums must consider formal and informal actions, as well as the highly instrumental nature of individual and collective actions and how these translate (or not) into immediate resources to cope with poor living conditions.

While individual motives are various, and are key to understanding political participation of the urban poor, I argue that there are three essential and closely related mechanisms that the urban poor must bring into play to engage with political actors: information, skills, and mobilization. These mechanisms are fundamental for political action, and the factors that trigger them will have the greatest leverage on participation. I
posit that there are four factors that best explain the levels of political participation in the slums of developing countries since these trigger participatory mechanisms: a) the density of an individual’s social network; b) a person’s religious affiliation and his/her participation in religious groups; c) being a beneficiary of government transfer programs; and, d) having received support from an NGO. Each of these factors is critical because they can help mobilize the urban poor, disseminate relevant information, and/or improve their skills for tapping resources from politics. In short, the argument developed in the dissertation aims to show that the level of participation of the urban poor is not determined by where a slum dweller is positioned on society’s socioeconomic ladder, but by whether or not he or she has the required information, can be mobilized, and/or has the necessary skills to obtain resources from political actors.

The literature has emphasized the important role of networks for political mobilization (Verba et al., 1995; La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998; Teorell, 2003). The dissertation shows that the density of social networks, the first critical factor, plays an important role in the dissemination of information as well as in the mobilization of slum dwellers. By definition, resources are limited and coveted in poor neighborhoods; therefore, people that share a common activity or family tie are more likely to exchange

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5 I use the term social network instead of social capital due to the different and sometimes contested definitions of the latter. More importantly, the term social capital generally refers to shared norms, or entails the existence of such norms (Fukuyama, 2001; Narayan, 1999). Social networks refer to the existence of a formal or informal relation that a person establishes with other individuals as a result of participating in membership organizations or through friend or family ties. The dissertation wants to emphasize the relational aspect of networks instead of potential norms in groups and society and chapter 3 further explains this point.
valuable information that can lead to improvements in household wellbeing. Social networks in slums allow the flow and exchange of information between members and also facilitate collective actions that can lead to communal improvements.

The second factor, religious affiliation and participation in religious groups, can provide relevant information and skills, as well as encouragement to mobilize for a particular purpose deemed relevant for the congregation. As some scholars have suggested, churches can be conduits of political information and recruitment (Ammerman, 1997; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995). In the case of slums and poor urban neighborhoods, particular denominations can be more politically active than others because of their physical presence in these otherwise mostly neglected communities and/or because their leadership has links with political actors. As the dissertation will show, in the case of Brazil, the number of Protestant pastors in slums has increased substantially and many of them have become politically active and influential in their communities. Evidence suggests that not only do churches provide valuable information on how to access resources, but also play a key role in mobilizing congregations for political events, especially in times of campaigning and elections.

The third factor that determines the level of political engagement of the urban poor is participation in government transfer schemes. The socioeconomic status argument claims that the poor lack incentives to participate because they cannot influence politics but most importantly because participation involves some type of expenditure (time and/or money). Nevertheless, poor individuals who receive a cash transfer from the
government do have strong incentives to participate and mobilize, since part of their income might be at stake at election time. Additionally, people that benefit from cash transfer programs will be particularly motivated to engage with the political system as a way of extracting resources and/or maintaining an income from the government.

The last factor, being a beneficiary of an NGO, also influences whether a slum dweller is more or less politically engaged. Many NGOs serving in slums encourage their beneficiaries to undertake political activities and claim their political rights; however, apolitical NGOs working with poor individuals in issues that range from healthcare to housing can also provide important information on how to get to state resources that might otherwise be difficult to access (e.g., how to register for health benefits or their eligibility for other transfer programs). Some literature has emphasized the role of voluntary associations, but the focus has been on the volunteers instead of the beneficiaries (Klesner, 2007).

In sum, the dissertation examines the factors and mechanisms that encourage the urban poor to engage in politics. I find that the political participation of the urban poor in developing countries is multidimensional—that is, that different factors can foster or hinder diverse political actions. The negotiations and motivations at play in each political action shed light on the politics of a population that, while still somewhat neglected, is becoming more and more relevant in the political arena.
Case Selection and Research Design

The study of politics and political participation in slums poses a number of difficulties. Nelson’s seminal work on the politics of the urban poor underscored that the heterogeneity of circumstances and characteristics of poor neighborhoods makes it illusory to think about plausible global theories of political participation in slums (1979, p. 7). Additionally, the opportunities to participate that are made available (or not) by different types of political systems affect poor peoples’ prospects of engaging with political actors. Political action of slum dwellers can be severely constrained and conditioned by the characteristics of the polity. Trying to explain the levels of political participation across the developing world with all-encompassing general theories is an endeavor that is unlikely to produce analysis that corresponds to reality. As new data, such as that which I present in this dissertation, is gathered, in-depth analysis can shed light on key factors that play salient roles in the lives of most slum dwellers, tracing the patterns of poor peoples’ political participation and enhancing our understanding of the politics of cities in the developing world.

Selecting a case to illustrate the political participation of slum dwellers is a tricky challenge: the case should allow for plausible generalizability, which is complicated by the heterogeneity of slums and the urban landscapes of the developing world. Still, while each city and slum are unique, wider socioeconomic and political patterns that transcend specific locales do influence the choices available to the poor and shape their incentives to become politically active. I have selected a case where these patterns—continuous
urbanization, democratization, emergence of non-state actors, and establishment of
government safety net programs for the poor— are relatively advanced, affording us a
picture of how other developing countries undergoing these same trends might develop in
the future. This strategy does not aim to predict what will happen in the slums across the
entire developing world yet it can be more accurate in suggesting how political
engagement might evolve, as opposed to a case where these trends are not present or are
only starting to emerge.

In this respect, Brazil, and particularly Rio de Janeiro, constitutes a useful case for
at least three reasons. First, it offers a useful vantage point from which to survey four
important patterns in the developing world. There are four general patterns that prevail in
the developing world, and these were taken into account in case selection. The first is a
rapid process of urbanization. Rio de Janeiro is highly urbanized, but continues to receive
important flows of poor migrants that are establishing themselves in the city’s favelas.
Thus, as in many cities in developing countries, Rio’s slum dweller population is
increasing. The second trend is the consolidation of democracy; as noted above, the
existence of competitive electoral processes have an important effect on political
participation. Furthermore, Brazil has implemented participatory processes and
institutions (e.g., participatory budgeting) that have begun to become popular in other
countries. The third trend is the emergence of non-state actors, such as NGOs, as critical
players in the process of social change, many of which have built strong relationships
with the urban poor to become important social players. The fourth pattern is the
construction of government social safety nets that specifically target the poor and vulnerable. This is particularly relevant for inhabitants of illegal settlements, as it has allowed for the Brazilian state an approach to these citizens that it would probably not otherwise have had. Brazil has the largest public safety net program in the world, *Bolsa Familia*. When *Bolsa Familia* was established in the early 1990s, only a handful of countries had similar programs; however, these programs have since become very popular, with numerous developing countries putting in place such schemes -modeled after Brazil’s success- and consequently changing their relation with the poor.

Having experienced these trends relatively early makes Brazil a good case study for the purpose of this dissertation, since many developing countries, particularly in Latin America, are experiencing these four trends a present. Two additional reasons make Rio de Janeiro an apt choice for an in-depth case study. There has been for decades a great interest in the city’s favelas, which has given rise to a vast literature and resources that can help shape a plausible theoretical framework. This analysis is grounded on evidence and allows us to bridge the information gap that exists about slum dwellers and their involvement in the political arena. The last reason why Rio can be a useful case is more opportunistic and has to do with the possibility of using an original dataset constructed during my fieldwork that enables hypotheses testing, as well as new data from LAPOP and the Brazilian Census not used before.

This dissertation uses a mixed methods approach that allows me to build a theoretical framework from which a number of empirically testable hypotheses derive.
Drawing on secondary sources as well as qualitative work in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro carried out during months of fieldwork between 2010 and 2013, I construct a theoretical framework that helps explain the drivers and mechanisms of political engagement in poor urban neighborhoods. Before testing the framework’s hypotheses, I build a dataset that makes use of data from across Brazil to test for a “favela effect” or not. In other words, this dataset enables me to assess whether or not people that live in favelas are more likely to engage in political activities than their counterparts living in better off neighborhoods.

It is important to mention that this is the first time, to the best of my knowledge, that this type of analysis has been conducted– a testament to the scarcity of information currently available on this topic. This empirical analysis is aimed at assessing the overall plausibility of the argument that posits that favela dwellers are as active as the rest of the city dwellers. I then introduce an original dataset, constructed from a survey of over 400 slum dwellers living in the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro, which allows me to test the hypotheses that derive from the theoretical framework through a series of regressions.

**Plan of the Dissertation**

This introduction has made the case for focusing on the politics of the urban poor in developing countries and highlighted a key unresolved puzzle within the predominant socioeconomic status thesis: the unexpected high levels of political participation of the poor. Furthermore, the available data suggests no relation between higher income levels and engagement in certain political activities. This chapter also provided a summary of
the general arguments of the dissertation. Chapter 2 discusses political participation in greater depth, and provides a literature review with the aim of giving the reader a better understanding of the current theoretical debate. Moreover, it presents the most recent data on political participation in developing countries and shows interesting relations between the percentage of slum dwellers of a country and its levels of political participation. The overall goal of this chapter is to make a clear distinction between normative approaches to political participation, which, because they focus on what the levels of participation ought to be, rather than grounding the discussion on the existing data, can be misleading. It also provides the reader a sense of the type of data available, highlighting the relative scarcity of data on this topic.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework, and explains the centrality of information, skills, and mobilization as critical mechanisms to access resources in poor urban neighborhoods. It will explain how religious affiliation and participation in religious groups, social networks, being a beneficiary of a government transfer programs and/or engagement with NGOs, might foster or hinder political engagement. Chapter 3 emphasizes the need to develop micro-foundational theories of political participation of the urban poor and answers three fundamental questions: Why do slum dwellers participate in political activities? How do slum dwellers become politically engaged? What factors enhance the levels of political participation of poor people living in developing countries’ cities?
Chapter 4 will introduce the dissertation’s case study, Rio de Janeiro, presenting a general overview of favelas and political participation in them, drawing on the relevant literature as well as extensive fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro. This provides crucial contributions to the theory of the dissertation, including analyzing how opportunity structures in Rio de Janeiro affect levels of political participation in poor urban neighborhoods. This chapter shows the most recent data on political participation in Brazil, which allows me to present levels of participation by type of urban neighborhood. Chapter 4 also makes use of material from focus groups done with slum dwellers from Rio de Janeiro, shedding light on the processes of political participation and the dynamics of local political institutions. It also underscores the context in which the hypothesis testing will be done, and consequently addresses the constraints and opportunities that the local political system presents. This analysis sets up a micro foundational study of participation in Brazilian favelas in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 presents an empirical analysis that, for the first time, is able to combine data on a number of political activities with data that accurately identifies if respondents live in slums. The use of this data will allow a test of a “slum” or “favela” effect—in other words, if people living slums are more (or less) likely to engage in political activities. The overall goal of Chapter 5 is to test the theoretical framework and arguments of the dissertation. To that end, it elaborates five causal hypotheses, related to the critical factors that drive political participation in slums of developing countries. In
addition, this chapter will explore in detail possible alternative explanations with particular reference to Rio de Janeiro.

Chapter 5 also describes and presents an original dataset from over 400 carioca slum dwellers, which guides the empirical analysis and hypotheses testing. It develops a logistic regression (Logit) model for each of the six relevant political activities carried out in the slums of Rio de Janeiro: participating in a demonstration or protest; contacting an elected official or administrator; working in a political campaign; assisting a public meeting; voting; and undertaking an activity aimed at helping the community. The results of the Logit model are interpreted along with those from the possible alternative explanations with the objective of measuring the analytical power of the dissertation’s theoretical framework.

In the 6th and final chapter of the dissertation I summarize the findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis, and explain how these findings contribute to the literature on political participation and the urban poor. This chapter will also analyze the consequences that the political participation of the urban poor can have on citizenship and the quality of democracy. Chapter 6 proposes avenues for future research, and sketches some theoretical implications for the future of politics in poor urban neighborhoods in developing countries.
Chapter 2: The Poor’s Political Participation: An Overview

In their seminal work on political participation, Brady, Verba, and Scholzman (1995) ask “why people don’t take part in politics.” Their answer is straightforward and reflects the prevailing conventional wisdom: “because they can't, because they don't want to, or because nobody asked.” This is seen as being the case because political engagement is generally viewed as an “investment that obliges a surrender of current consumption (be it of leisure time or income) for an uncertain future benefit” (Brooks, 2011). Consequently, it is believed that poor people don’t engage in politics because of their limited resources and lack of skills, a paucity of incentives to participate, and the similarly scant rewards of political engagement. Brady, Verba, and Scholzman’s schema places resource-poor slum dwellers at the margins, without reasons to engage in political activities.

In contrast, this dissertation argues for a revision of this view of the urban poor’s political participation, turning much of the prevailing wisdom upside down. In fact, the urban poor are often able to participate as new avenues for participation open; they frequently want to participate because they perceive the possibility of tapping resources; and many politicians try to mobilize the urban poor to participate. In other words, the poor do in fact take part in politics, and this occurs because, they can participate, they want to participate, and they are not merely asked, but encouraged, to participate.

Before delving into this argument, however, this chapter briefly discusses what is meant by political participation, and provides the reader with an overview of the literature on the
underlying motivations for political participation. A particular set of arguments has permeated the study of politics and the poor for decades, leading to the construction of a consensus view or conventional wisdom, with important theoretical consequences. In this chapter, to preface the development of the theoretical framework in Chapter 3, I will present basic statistics on political participation in developing countries, and on the relationship between specific political activities and the percentage of a country’s urban population that is made up of slum dwellers. The goal of showing these figures is to anchor the dissertation’s discussion in the most recent available data and avoid a conversation based on normative assumptions about the desirability of poor peoples’ participation. That is, it is important to bear in mind the level of current political participation in developing countries and to understand what is driving it, rather than discussion what “ought to be” the level of political participation. I strongly believe this is a key part of any discussion on political participation, since debates about democracy and participation often bog down in discussing the normative dimension of the exercise of citizenship among the poor.

**Political Participation: Definitions and Existing Literature**

What is generally meant by political participation? Over the past decades there has been a reformulation of the concept, broadening it beyond traditional electoral activities such as voting and contacting authorities and/or elected officials. The literature on political participation has gradually incorporated other activities into the realm of the political: communal activities, protesting, demand-making, working for a politician’s electoral campaign, and political discussions among peers all figure into this range of political engagement (Claggett & Pollock
More recently, some scholars have made the case that individual and collective activities can be considered as political engagement, particularly individual or collective activities aimed at improving household or community welfare, since such efforts can have a direct impact on local politics (Singerman, 1995; Paley, 2001). As a result, there is a growing consensus about what activities should be considered political.

Nevertheless, while scholars are slowly arriving at a more ample definition of what constitutes a political activity, there is still a long way to go in integrating the urban poor into a political analysis that focuses on them as political agents, and reversing the neglect of past decades. This is in part because the most widely used and influential definitions of political participation implicitly define a single purpose for all political activities. For example, the classic and most widely used definition of political participation refers to activities aimed at influencing governmental decisions and/or governmental activities (Verba & Nie, 1972, pp. 11-12; Huntington & Nelson, p. 5, 1976). This definition is broad enough to encompass a wide variety of activities, yet this characterization of political engagement leads one to believe that the objective of these activities can only be to alter government actions. But as Singerman notes, there are conceptual problems with these definitions, since they underscore the intentionality of actions and are mostly state-centric (1995, p. 6-11). As she argues, the critical issue is not whether a person “intends” to act politically, but whether actions, individually or collectively, affect the political order, as well as the distribution of public goods and services (p. 7). For the purpose of explaining political engagement in urban slums, the dissertation considers a range of activities to be “political participation,” incorporating both traditional electoral activities, and
other less conventional measures that can affect the political order, such as participating in activities to help a community.

What, then, does the existing literature tell us about the determinants of political behavior, particularly of the poor? According to Teorell, there are “two generic propositions as to what makes people engage in politics: because they have the resources and because they have the incentives to do so (2006 p. 801).” In this respect, foundational research on political participation underscores the idea that socioeconomic status—which brings with it time, money, and civic skills—is intimately related to political engagement (Binder, 1977; Brady et al., 1995; Lawless & Fox, 2001; Salgado Bueno & Mendes Fialho, 2009). As Salisbury succinctly puts it in his review of the literature on political participation, “[w]ell-educated, high-income citizens participate more than the poor no matter what the context or institutional setting (1975, p. 326).” In other words, individuals with higher levels of education and greater income will be more politically active while less favored citizens will tend to remain at the sidelines. By definition, the poor have scarce resources, and as a result of their lack of political agency (their ability to influence policy) there are few incentives for participation. These propositions, which have historically dominated the literature on political participation, also help explain why slum politics, particularly their informal and clandestine elements, remain—with important exceptions—understudied (Auyero, 2010 and 2011). Within this literature, a number of different approaches have presented theories for the apparently lower political engagement of the urban poor.

Three approaches have been particularly influential in defining prevailing current perspectives on why the poor do not engage in politics. Desai (2010) provides a helpful overview
of the perspectives that have influenced our understanding of political participation in poor urban neighborhoods and which supplement the resource and incentives propositions. Desai’s categories focus less on individual assets and more on the means of participation; nevertheless, the lack of resources is critical in all three of his categories. The first category, *resource-mobilization theories*, claims that participation is extremely low since the channels of access to representation are controlled by economic and political elites, and it is in these elites’ interest for the poor to remain uncoordinated and at the margins (Caldeira, 2000; Holston, 2008; Huntington & Nelson, 1976; Paley, 2001; Perlman, 1976; Piven & Cloward, 1971). In this category, we could also add the literature that considers the limits that certain institutional constraints, such as party systems, can impose, and which ultimately might hinder the access of the poor to certain political activities (Jackman & Miller, 1998). In short, the poor do not participate as a result of the institutional obstacles created by the elites. I would like to highlight that in particular, this category does not generally take into account the alternative incentives that the poor might have to participate, focusing more on the impossibility of the poor being able to affect policies and political outcomes. This literature is more concerned with the influence or impact of groups on policy than on levels of political participation.

The second category, *culture-of-poverty theories*, suggests that a self-perpetuating culture of poverty promotes self-exclusion from civic and political life (Lewis; 1959; Eckstein, 1984). According to this argument, poverty itself has an impact on the most basic types of human interactions, and therefore affects the way that poor people engage in political activities. For example, some of the most extreme proponents of this view used to suggest that: “Demonstrative
affection or, [...] what we usually mean by “love” are rare among the poorer, simpler peoples of the world” (La Frange, in Lewis, 1959). These harsh views permeated some of the literature in the 1960s. While it is rare to find such extreme expressions in the field today, it is important to remember the overtly discriminatory and callous tone that once characterized propositions about poor peoples’ politics and their reasons for not participating.

In this category we could also include a less deterministic approach, work that considers civic skills and culture fundamental for higher levels of political engagement. According to this argument, socioeconomically advantaged groups will have higher levels of education, which in turn translates into certain civic skills that enhance political engagement (Almond & Verba, 1965, 1989; Brady et al., 1995; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). In other words, scarce resources can lead to a lack of “civic attitudes” necessary to become engaged in politics. These civic attitudes would include “attitudes such as a sense of efficacy, psychological involvement in politics, and a feeling of obligation to participate” (Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 13) which, according to this approach, are embedded in the “culture” of the well-educated and those with higher socioeconomic status.

The third category, social capital theories, argues that the scarcity of trust and social networks in poor urban communities explains the lack of political participation. Thus, for example, Putnam (1993 and 2000) claims that levels of social capital—generally measured as membership in formal organizations—are key for understanding political engagement. Along the same lines, several authors (Klesner, 2007; Krishna, 2002a; Perlman, 2010; Seligson, 1999) argue that low levels of social capital tend to translate into less political participation and
different attitudes towards democracy. Social capital theories also include the literature on the role of religious and other type of groups such as charitable organizations. In this respect, Patterson (2005a, 2005b) has shown that religious organizations, particularly Protestant ones, can have an impact on political attitudes and participation, while Klesner (2007, 2009) argues that membership in non-political organizations can lead to greater engagement in politics. These theories do not eliminate the possibility of the poor being engaged in politics. However, most social capital theories lend support to the socioeconomic status thesis and are mostly aimed at explaining differences in participation between the lower and upper classes, since it is well-established that participation in membership organizations is mostly done by better off citizens.

These three categories highlight the constraints and factors that generally hinder slum dwellers’ political participation; all of them either explicitly or implicitly revolve around the scarce resources or socioeconomic status of the urban poor. This focus on the lack of resources has led to the current predominant view about the poor’s participation in politics: that they remain marginalized and politically inactive individuals (Berg-Schlosser & Kersting, 2003; Booth & Seligson, 1978, 2008; Bratton et al., 2006; Perlman, 2010). In part, the persistence of existing notions associating poverty with political quiescence may be a function of a scarcity of data, and a lack of proper disaggregation and accounting for the heterogeneity of urban poverty, particularly in developing countries. The following section provides some basic information using some of the most recent aggregate data with the aim of providing the reader an overview of the level of political participation of the poor in developing countries.
Political Participation in Developing Countries: What the Data Shows

Evidence from around the world has called into question theories of the non-participation of the poor, going so far as to challenge the supposed association between low socioeconomic status and low political participation. The data that has been gathered over the past decades show that the relation between political participation and poverty is extremely complex and cannot be oversimplified. As new data is collected and prevailing paradigms are questioned, our understanding of politics and the poor continues to improve, and the goal of this dissertation is to contribute to such understanding.

The study of the political participation of the urban poor is often complicated by a lack of data. When data about the urban poor’s political engagement exists, the precision of the data is often dubious, or there is data for only a handful of political activities, giving us only an imprecise perspective of the level of political participation. Most perspectives about the levels of political participation of the urban poor are mostly based on pre-existing views that see the poor as apathetic; it is necessary to present data to situate the urban poor in the larger perspective of political engagement in order to assess the merit of these views, and determine if indeed the urban poor participate much less than the rest of society. This section shows aggregate data on political participation from across developing countries with the aim of providing the reader an overview of political participation in developing countries. This descriptive section will set the stage for the following theoretical and the subsequent empirical analysis.

The following analysis is based on two widely used sources of data that allow me to compare the levels of political engagement across the developing world: Globalbarometer and
World Value Survey. Globalbarometer (2009), gives us an overview of the levels of political engagement in 59 developing countries. Unfortunately, the data does not allow us to identify the urban poor but it enables a broad international comparative perspective. In this respect, Figure 7 shows the percentage of respondents that voted in the last election. In this sample of developing world countries, on average 74% of the population votes, with wide variation from 23% in Kuwait to 93% in Chile and Uruguay.

Figure 7

![Bar graph showing voting in developing countries](image)

Figure 8 below presents the percentage of respondents that have protested. According to this data, on average 10.7% of the population has participated in protests. It is worth noting that the
standard deviation for this political activity is 9.39, showing an important variation between developing countries. Lebanon leads the percentage of individuals who report participating in protest with 43% and, at the other end of the spectrum we find Singapore and Vietnam with no protests at all.

The next figure presents the percentage of people that have contacted elected leaders. On average, 9.5% of the developing world’s population contacted elected officials (standard deviation of 3.7). At the very top we see Vietnam with 43% and Palestine at the bottom with 1%.
Finally, Figure 10 shows the percentage of Globalbarometer 2009 respondents who have contacted a local leader (e.g. not necessarily elected), the average is 18% (standard deviation of 14.6).
The data from Globalbarometer 2009 illustrates a number of interesting things about political participation in developing countries. First, there is significant variation between and within countries and political activities, yet common patterns appear when outliers are excluded. The data show that voting is, by far, the activity that the most citizens undertake, while showing that less than 20% of the population in developing countries actually participates in other type of political activities. Second, scholars need to be cautious and contextualize their analysis. If we look at Vietnam we immediately see extremely high levels of participation (especially in contacting officials and voting), despite Vietnam’s low levels of democracy; this might, to put it
mildly, lend itself to misinterpretation. Third, the data shows that while in theory “more participation is more democracy,” several political activities acquire particular importance in countries that are not full democracies. Finally, I note that my case, Brazil, is close to the mean of the sample in most political activities when outliers that influence the overall averages are not considered. Unfortunately, the Globalbarometer data can only provide us with an overview at the country level, and does not isolate or focus on the urban poor.

The second source of information I use to present an overview of political participation in developing countries is the World Value Survey (wave 2005-2007), which provides information on four different political activities and allows us to dig deeper into the role of the poor. Contrary to Globalbarometer, these data do allow us to specifically present the levels of political engagement of the urban poor, both in developed and developing countries. If we consider those respondents living in cities of 50,000 inhabitants or more, who classified themselves in the lowest level of their society’s socioeconomic status, we find the following:

Table 1: Political Participation of the Urban Poor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Activity</th>
<th>Urban Poor in Developed Countries</th>
<th>Urban Poor in Developing Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signed a Petition</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joined a Boycott</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended a lawful/peaceful demonstration</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belong to a political party</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the table shows, the only substantial difference between political participation of the urban poor in developed and developing countries, according to the World Value Survey, is the percentage of urban poor that signed a petition in developed countries. Moreover, if we considered the entire urban population regardless of their socioeconomic status, the percentages of signing a petition would change to 45% for developed countries and 16% in developing countries, actually widening the gap. For joining a boycott, developed countries would increase to 12.2% and developing countries would fall to 7%. Finally, the percentages of people attending demonstrations would increase in developed countries to 21.3% and increase only slightly in developing countries to 15.8%. Perhaps more importantly, the data gives us “ballpark figures” for political engagement of the urban poor in developing countries.\(^6\)

Having a point of comparison based on data is important since it provides us a basic baseline. Individuals can tend to form opinions based on normative assumptions, especially when discussing political participation and democracy. In this understanding, it would be expected that levels of participation be high in democratic countries since the system is built on the premise that democracy is based on people’s participation. Consequently, instead of arguing that political participation is high or low based on normative assumptions about the qualities of political systems, a simple data baseline can be useful for further analysis. What do we know about the political participation of the urban poor in developing countries? Using UN-Habitat’s most recent available data on the percentage of slum dwellers as a percentage of a country’s urban

\[^6\] Chapter 1 compared political engagement data between rich and poor and showed that in a number of political activities, the poor actually participate more than their rich counterparts.
population, together with Globalbarometer’s data, we can see some interesting relations that are worth exploring. These figures are by no means presenting causal relations, but they do provide an overview based on the available data; one that reinforces the dissertation’s puzzle.

Figure 11 shows that the percentage of people that reported voting in the last general election is not affected by the percentage of slum dwellers—indeed, Figure 11 reflects a slightly positive relationship.

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7 There is little data on the number of slum dwellers by country. UN-Habitat’s data 2005 is, to the best of my knowledge, the most recent source.
8 Figures 7-10 use data from Globalbarometer 2009 for political activities in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East; and Latinobarometro 2010 for Latin American countries.
The next figure reveals a similar relation between the percentage of people that reported participating in a protest or demonstration and the percentage of slum dwellers as a percentage of a country’s urban population (see Figure 12).

![Figure 12](image-url)

The following two figures refer to the relation between contacting and the percentage of slum dwellers. Figure 13 shows the percentage of people that reported contacting an elected official, while Figure 14 presents the percentage of people that mentioned contacting a local leader or, in the case of Latin America, a local leader or bureaucrat.
Latin American countries in contact a public official (e.g. bureaucrat)

Contact Elected Official and Slum Dwellers

Contact Local Leader and Slum Dwellers
Again, the figures above cannot suggest causality, but do suggest certain patterns that contravene most of the existing literature and the conventional wisdom regarding poverty and political participation. This data suggests a slightly positive relationship between the level of political activity and the percentage of slum dwellers as percentage of a country’s urban population—that is, far from being apathetic, the poor may in fact be driving up the numbers of individuals participating in political activities.

**Conclusions**

This chapter has argued that conventional definitions of political participation, which define it as a group or individual intention of influencing the choices made by governments, are insufficient. This definition, together with a state-centric orientation to the study of politics and emphasis on the importance of socioeconomic status, has led to a widespread acceptance of the idea that the poor do not take part in politics, in large part because they lack incentives to do so. Further, the natural tendency in the literature is to emphasize the public aspects of politics as opposed to private ones. That is, the focus has been on actions that impact general public political outcomes, such as shifts in government policies or electoral processes, and it is often assumed that citizens’ actions are aimed at influencing specific public policy outcomes. I have argued, along the lines of a growing number of scholars such as Singerman (1995), that individual or group activities aimed at improving welfare should also be considered political since over time these can have an impact in the political order.
This chapter also showed some basic data and figures on the levels of political participation in developing countries, which cast considerable doubt on the conventional wisdom: indeed, they show that the poor around the world are participating in a wide variety of political activities. While these figures cannot show causal relationships, they do generate important questions regarding the potential role of the poor, and specifically the urban poor, in driving such levels of participation. These figures were presented also to ground the discussion on the latest data, which is certainly scarce but can still provide us a baseline for the analysis.

In sum, if the poor, as the existing literature argues, do not possess the resources and skills that are key to participate, why do we see these patterns across the developing world? What is determining the levels of participation of the urban poor? What then drives poor urban citizens to participate in politics? The following chapter aims to provide answers to these questions.
Chapter 3. Explaining the Urban Poor’s Level of Political Participation

This chapter directly questions what some argue is “the fundamental law of political participation, […] that political participation varies directly with socioeconomic status” (Binder, 1977). It seeks to answer three fundamental questions about the urban poor and politics:

- Why do they participate in political activities?
- How do slum dwellers become politically engaged?
- What factors enhance the levels of political participation of poor people living in developing countries’ cities?

Responding to these three questions, I develop a causal explanation of political participation and present a micro-foundational analysis of politics in urban slums. I then construct a theoretical framework from which a number of hypotheses and alternative explanations can be derived. All of the hypotheses and alternative explanations will be empirically explored and tested in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Why do the urban poor participate in political activities?

Most slum dwellers face material deprivation, misery, persistent joblessness, and frequent income shocks, as well as a general climate of indifference from government institutions. Why then, would an important number of them decide to engage with political actors? Are there any incentives for participating in processes in which the main actors seem to utterly disregard most of the urban poor’s demands? I argue that the urgent need to cope with poverty, together with
the possibility of tapping resources from the political arena, creates sufficient incentives for slum dwellers to become active and participate in political processes, unleashing a distribution of benefits that is used for personal or communal use. I will explore in detail the “distributive” characteristics of political participation, and how this distributive aspect is critical for understanding the engagement of the urban poor.

As the preceding chapter pointed out, it is often assumed that citizen’s action is aimed at influencing general policy outcomes, and the more informal political and activities of private citizens have mostly been neglected, since the primary intention of most of these actions is not necessarily to affect strategic long-term government choices. There are, of course, numerous exceptions to this rule, in which slum dwellers do in fact organize, for political purposes, to achieve broader policy changes beyond immediate access to resources, and indeed many such organizations have become consequential players in national arenas. For example, studies have found that slum dwellers in widely varied cities across India, Peru, Uganda, Thailand, Bangladesh, Argentina, Kenya, Ghana, Indonesia, and Haiti have formed organizations that promote social welfare and interact constantly with the government and other relevant actors to help their members ameliorate their conditions (d’Cruz & Satterthwaite, 2006; Banks, 2006). Poor waste pickers in South Africa have also formed associations at the local and national levels, and in Latin America a similar movement is currently gaining strength (Satterthwaite, Mitlin & Patel, 2011).

Nevertheless, these types of organizations and movements are not necessarily the norm and do not generally represent how the average slum dweller engages with the political system.
In other words, while there are critical political movements in slums, it would be a mistake to characterize the overall urban poor’s political engagement as directed through these types of organizations. This dissertation will in fact highlight the fundamental role that some organizations play in urban politics, and the ways in which they alter the practice of politics in poor urban neighborhoods. Many of these organizations and poor individuals living in shantytowns across the world have to undertake remarkable efforts to engage with political actors that have historically been hostile to them and indifferent to their most basic needs. However, the more informal political and economic activities of private citizens have mostly been neglected, since the primary intention of most of these actions is not necessarily to affect strategic long-term government choices, but is focused on more micro-level outcomes. As the theoretical framework of this dissertation will argue, in the case of the urban poor, the outcome sought is often achieving access to resources for personal or community use. The urban poor do seek to influence political actors, and they are sometimes successful in doing so, but the main motivation is often to access resources rather than altering specific government policies or programs.

This dissertation is interested in the urban slum dwellers who are not affiliated with political movements or membership organizations with political ends. Therefore, while not neglecting the growing relevance of membership organizations and urban movements seeking to address social problems in slums and to foster political participation, this dissertation will focus on the more common and spontaneous political actions that affect the typical slum dweller living
in cities of developing countries and not necessarily on well-organized social movements originated by slum dwellers to influence policy.

The argument advanced in this dissertation emphasizes the “distributive” characteristics of political participation, as opposed to what can be labeled as an “expenditure” approach. The literature on political participation has underscored the relevance of possessing greater income in order to become engaged in politics, since political activities such as providing support to a candidate can entail expenditure or stop a person from receiving an income to spend time on political activities. That is, participation can have a cost (particularly monetary, as well as time and opportunity costs), and therefore the poor are assumed to be unable to afford it, either because the urban poor do not tend to spend their scarce monetary resources on politics, or because they do not have time to devote to political actions due to the significant time demands of simply earning a living.\(^9\) This dissertation, on the contrary, will posit that most political actions carried out by slum dwellers entail little or no spending, and that time is a not a major constraint for participation because they are embedded in a strong (and growing) urban informal economy, where patron-worker relations and working schedules can be more flexible. Furthermore, political actions can actually become a source of income—a key point in this case.

To understand political engagement in poor neighborhoods, it is important to highlight the “distributive” characteristics of political participation, mostly in the form of political

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\(^9\) Verba, Nie, and Kim also suggest that motivations to participate are more likely to be possessed by individuals of upper status since their education “provides the motivation such as efficacy, interest and a sense of obligation to be active” (1978, p.11).
clientelism;\textsuperscript{10} this has been acknowledged by the literature, which shows that resources are distributed among the urban poor through political networks and brokers (Alvarez Rivadulla, 2012; Arias, 2004; Auyero, 2000; Holzner, 2007; Jha et al., 2007; Klesner, 2009). Traditionally, the most marginalized groups in society are the targets of clientelism because politicians “can get more bang for their clientelist buck by targeting the poor” (Hicken, 2011, p. 299). Clientelism and the distribution of resources for political purposes have been generally studied as a byproduct of electoral politics in emerging democracies; however, these also represent important lifelines that can help poor urban dwellers cope, even temporarily, with hardship. Additionally, participation in slums also revolves around problem-solving of individual and collective issues. Even though problem-solving can lead to clientelistic practices, it is important to think of it as a separate but related category.

The following paragraphs will show, with examples from across the globe, that slum dwellers have access to a broad range of political contacts and processes and therefore there is a vast potential for tapping resources through political participation, including important problem-solving mechanisms for the poor. While clientelism is often driven by the impoverishment of people in the developing world, it would be a mistake to confine our understanding of poor people’s political participation to patron-client dynamics without acknowledging other practices and motives at play (Hagopian, 2006). This research emphasizes the role of clientelism and

\textsuperscript{10} Following Kitschelt and Wilkinson, for the purpose of this dissertation, the terms political clientelism and patronage will be used interchangeably. Political clientelism will refer to a mode of “exchange” of goods for the purpose of political support between constituencies as principals and politicians as agents (2007, p. 7). It is also important to remember that “[c]lientelism involves asymmetric but mutually beneficial relationships of power and exchange […] it implies mediated and selective access to resources and markets from which others are normally excluded” (Roninger, 2004, pp. 353-354).
access to material benefits in explaining political behavior, without attempting to cast the urban poor as hostages to material incentives offered by politicians.

Although vote-buying—the most common form of political clientelism—has received the bulk of attention from political scientists, it is important to highlight the prevalence of other types of clientelistic practices, because the fact is that the benefits and protections afforded by these relationships often constitute an important element of non-state safety nets for the urban poor. Auyero’s work on the “clandestine dimension of politics” in Argentina’s shantytowns has shown that clientelistic networks have become key lifelines for the urban poor (2000). Furthermore, “clientelism at the grassroots level remains largely unexplored […] and the understanding of [it] has derived more from popular imagery than from serious research” (2000, p.58). His work and that of others who have done in-depth research in slums, such as Burgwald and Moser in Ecuador (1996 and 2009, respectively), Levitsky in Argentina (2003), and Jha, Rao, and Woolcock in India (2007), has demonstrated that these political networks have also become problem-solving networks, which the urban poor utilize frequently.

For example, survey data in Argentina showed that 36% of the respondents would contact a politician if they ever lost their job (Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes, 2004) and in Villa-Paraiso, a slum in Buenos Aires, approximately 40% of the population depends on government aid (Auyero, 2000). In Brazil, it has been well documented that local politicians routinely distribute goods, offer professional training, and provide services with the aim of winning the approval, and ultimately the vote, of favela dwellers (Lopez, 2004; Alves de Sa Siqueira, 2009). Because of its effectiveness in attracting the poor into participation, clientelism has become embedded
across many slums in the developing world. Auyero (1999 & 2000) and Paley (2001) have documented how, in Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile respectively, political parties and organizations create networks that provide benefits to the urban poor year-round in exchange for political support. There is also evidence from Uruguay and India that shows that urban squatters rely on intermediaries who are politically connected to parties and officials in order to receive certain goods. In these countries, as well as in many others, those members of squatter settlements who are well-connected to clientelistic networks are able to obtain goods that others cannot (Alvarez Rivadulla, 2012; Harriss, 2005).

The importance for household welfare of public resource distribution through clientelistic practices is also reflected in the work of Wantchekon (2003). In a field experiment in Benin, he found that even when the poor vote in large numbers, they are inclined to vote for clientelistic politicians, who promise to provide goods and services in the form of patronage, instead of for politicians with a broader public policy perspective that could implement long term poverty alleviation strategies (2002). Electoral processes can become periods of bargaining and negotiation for the poor, offering them the opportunity to use their power as voters to sway results for material advantages (Mariz, 2004, p. 103). It is no surprise, then, that an important number of poor people prefer goods and services that are delivered immediately, even if it means accepting patronage, instead of waiting for long term policies whose benefits are uncertain.

The urban poor may also need to rely on political contacts to access services and resources that, in theory, should be delivered to them simply because they are citizens. For example, a World Bank-sponsored report, in which more than 60,000 poor people in 60 countries
were interviewed, showed that most of them confront many barriers in trying to access basic services, including lack of information, bureaucratic hurdles, and requirements for documents that many do not even have (Narayam, 2000). But often, many of these barriers can be overcome through access to political networks. The report underscores the use of clientelism as the prevailing form in which services are provided in urban slums. For example, through an in-depth study in Guayaquil, Ecuador, Moser has shown that the poor have to negotiate with political actors to receive access to social services that are readily available in other areas of Guayaquil (2009). In the case of India, Edelman and Mitra (2008) have put forward evidence that shows that political contacts help slum dwellers access basic amenities such as water connections, sewerage facilities, and garbage disposal—services that the government is supposed to provide irrespective of socioeconomic status. In the United States, findings from one of the poorest urban counties in the country show that the most vulnerable individuals were the ones most likely to engage the political system with the aim of accessing services (Lawless & Fox, 2001).

These accounts, in which citizens obtain goods and services highlights the role of political actors as problem solvers in poor urban neighborhoods, in which the thin line that separates pure clientelistic practices and problem-solving blurs for them to form recursive relationships (Auyero, Lapegna & Page Poma, 2009). In many cases, particularly in poor urban neighborhoods, personal and/or community problems can only be solved through the intervention of political actors. Problem solving *per se* would not generally qualify as clientelism, since citizens might legitimately need to engage with government officials to solve day-to-day issues, without needing to invoke patron-client relationships. Nevertheless, in the
case of the most vulnerable part of the population, dealing with everyday issues commonly becomes a channel through which relationships of power and exchange are established or reinforced. The picture is more complex still, in that, as Auyero, Lapegna, and Page Poma demonstrate, while political actors take advantage of the needs of the poor to co-opt them, vertical relations in patronage networks do not impede the emergence of collective problem-solving actions and horizontal networks that can become important forms of mobilization for the urban poor (2009).

The work of Auyero (2012) in Argentina illustrates extremely well the delicate balance between problem-solving and clientelism that occurs in the shantytowns of the developing world. Auyero narrates the various obstacles that Silvia, a slum dweller in Buenos Aires, had to face in order to claim the pension that she rightly and legally was entitled to. After five years of dealing with bureaucrats, filing numerous forms, and waiting in local and federal offices, the only way in which she was able to collect the small pension was through the help of a local political broker in charge of a grassroots office of the Peronist Party. The broker was able to “push” her case through the government bureaucracy, rendering Silvia so thankful to the broker that she made herself available to assist the broker in various political activities. This account reflects what Levitsky (2001) had previously argued about the Peronist Party and its ability to strategically position itself in lower-class neighborhoods by establishing informal local problem-solving networks that serve to attract poor urban dwellers into clientelistic exchanges.

Indeed clientelism and problem-solving can take many forms and adapt to local circumstances. In the case of Brazil, Desmond Arias (2006) shows that in certain favelas of Rio
de Janeiro a two-tiered clientelism has developed, in which politicians and drug traffickers negotiate access to slums in exchange of offering a number of benefits for themselves and the community and allowing some goods to “trickle down” to the poorest of the poor. During my fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro I could confirm that drug traffickers are indeed the de facto authority in several favelas. For example, while accompanying a candidate to the local chamber during a walk of Rocinha a few weeks before the 2012 elections, he had to pay a bribe to a local gang, which would only then allow him to place a few posters with his image in a square inside the favela.

These problem-solving networks, embedded in poor urban neighborhoods and in constant interaction with political leaders, are not unique to Latin America. In the slums of New Delhi, India, research has shown that the poor are active problem solvers, relying on their neighbors and other acquaintances as well as on “local big-men” (Harriss, 2005; Jha, Rao & Woolcock, 2005). In Kampala, Uganda, urban chiefs generally provide assistance to poor individual members of the community in need of work, healthcare, or other basic necessities, establishing themselves as local patrons (Nelson, 1979, p. 172-174). In Dhaka, Bangladesh, slum dwellers interact constantly with elected officials and with informal leaders who mediate with the local government to solve issues individual and collective problems. Moreover, these contacts become fundamental as a result of the lack of formal and legitimate channels for providing services since in Dhaka, as in many other places, the law prohibits the provision of services to slums (Banks, 2006). This status of illegality that prevails in most slums across less developed countries is also an important reason why clientelistic and problem-solving networks have flourished in such
places. Given that, as some have argued, politicians rely on patronage due to their inability to make credible post-electoral commitments to deliver public goods (Keefer, 2004), the illegality of many urban settlements makes it extremely unlikely that politicians can provide services and therefore increases the incentives for establishing clientelistic practices.

Due to the sporadic emergence of individual and community problems, as well as the clandestine nature of clientelism it is not possible to adequately quantify the extent to which clientelistic practices and problem-solving mechanisms dominate the political landscape of poor urban neighborhoods, particularly in non-election years. However, evidence shows that these practices have become important means of subsistence for an important number of slum dwellers in developing countries. While it is certainly unlikely that problem-solving through clientelism can ultimately resolve the long-term living conditions of the urban poor, there is no reason why we should discard the relevance of accessing resources through political networks for immediate consumption. Furthermore, the “distributive” characteristics of political participation provide clear incentives for slum dwellers to become engaged in politics. In this understanding, the study of political participation must take into account the possibility of extracting goods and services from political actors, as well as political actors as active problem solvers, instead of focusing exclusively on the costs of participation, as most of the literature has underscored.

As Mariz aptly puts it: “While not trying not to reduce political activities to economic or survival-oriented behaviors, [...] it is important to acknowledge that the political involvement of poor people depends largely on their material needs and that politics offers material gains for groups and individuals” (1994, pp. 102-103). Whether it is through clientelistic practices or
through legitimate demand-making processes with governments, there are available resources that the urban poor can tap from the political arena with the aim of improving their overall individual and/or collective welfare.

In sum, the answer to why the urban poor decide to become politically engaged has to do with the possibility of accessing clientelistic networks and other resources from politicians and government agencies. This access can translate into benefits that can have an impact on household’s immediate and medium-term wellbeing, and therefore provides clear incentives for the urban poor to become politically engaged.

**How do the urban poor become engaged politically? Key mechanisms and factors**

In addition to understanding the incentives for political engagement in slums, it is important to think about the underlying mechanisms that drive political activity, as well as the factors that trigger these mechanisms. The previous section outlined the existing incentives that result from opportunities for tapping resources from politics, but certain mechanisms are required to tap such resources. How then, do the urban poor access these resources? There are three essential mechanisms that the urban poor need in order to engage with political actors: accessing information, utilizing skills, and mobilization. As I will explain in the following paragraphs, these three intimately related mechanisms are key for both the urban poor and political actors, in order to coordinate their interactions in a complex setting where overall mistrust reigns due to the historic hostility of public and private institutions to the urban poor.

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11 I call these “mechanisms” because they entail a certain type of action. That is, the individual or group that possesses them uses them as a means to pursue another end, and does not acquire them as an end in themselves.
It is also important to understand the mechanisms behind political participation in order to identify the potential factors that make poor people more likely to activate these mechanisms and which can promote or hinder levels of engagement with political actors. In this respect, it is imperative that they have information regarding the availability of resources and the ways in which they can access such resources. Slum dwellers are aware of the existence of relevant political institutions such as national and local legislatures, political parties, and government ministries; nevertheless, without basic information about how such institutions work, the channels of access, and what resources can be available, slum dwellers would not be able to engage in politics and make the right connections to tap resources.

The urban poor need to gain reliable information for them to decide how to use their valuable time; the information has to be timely, so that slum dwellers do not miss the opportunity of participating and gaining access to benefits. For example, people would need to know from a reliable source that a politician will be providing free meals on certain day and that the eligibility requirements include living in certain neighborhood; or that a protest or public meeting will take place in the neighborhood at a certain time, in which people will petition a local politician for more health services for the future.\textsuperscript{12} Information is therefore the most critical of all mechanisms because if it is credible, accurate, and timely it can broaden people’s exposure to and understanding of politics, allowing them, as McClug (2003) posits, to move beyond personal constraints and encouraging political activity.

\textsuperscript{12} It is important to highlight that resources can be accessed immediately, but the promise of future resources (infrastructure and service provision) is also critical for political participation.
The information required to participate in political activities mostly travels by word-of-mouth through existing networks that link the slums and poor urban neighborhoods with the broader political system. These networks, which will be analyzed in detail in the following section, transfer the necessary information for participation to poor urban communities and can serve as channels through which political actors and institutions gather information about the concerns of the individuals and neighborhoods. Different networks provide different kinds of information, of varying quality, and therefore we can expect different political actions to emanate from different networks. With regard to slums, scholars have demonstrated through anthropological work that networks and brokers provide the information that gears individual and collective action toward participation (Auyero, 1999; Gay, 1994), while Krishna has empirically shown in poor Indian villages that we can expect a person’s level of participation to be higher if he or she has more sources of information (2002). The key issue is to highlight the relevance of information that can lead to political participation, since it cannot be assumed that the urban poor are necessarily informed about opportunities to tap resources.

The second key mechanism for political participation is the skill set that can allow slum dwellers to tap resources. While information is critical for locating opportunities for political participation, it is not, on its own, sufficient to enable individuals to access resources; individuals require certain skills that enable them to use the information appropriately and benefit from their participation. It is fairly common for scholars to underscore the importance of essential “civic

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13 This is mostly the case with non-electoral political activities and in times where elections are not taking place. During election times, party and candidate propaganda, including information on how to participate, generally flows in abundance to poor urban neighborhoods.
skills” for participating in politics; nonetheless, only a few actually specify the skills that are used. Brady, Verba, and Schlozman claim that the necessary skills for political participation are generally obtained in non-political settings that can provide both civic values (e.g. deliberation, tolerance, trust, and reciprocity), as well as civic skills such as linguistic and writing facility, and communication and organizational proficiency that are acquired through major institutions in adult life (1995; Teorell, 2006; Klesner, 2007). Therefore, according to these authors, the ability to plan or chair a meeting, the talent for writing letters, the possibility of attending meetings where decisions are made, as well as the capacity to give a speech or presentation, are the key civic skills that allow citizens to engage in politics (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995, p. 273).

These “skills” are generally equated with high levels of education or a political culture that enhances them and enables popular participation. Similarly, it is generally taken for granted that participating in membership organizations will automatically provide skills to engage in politics and therefore also assume a causal link between skills and organizations. In this line of thought, Lawless and Fox claim that civic skills acquired in non-political settings can be helpful for certain political activities and remind us that the literature emphasizes that impoverished citizens are poorly endowed with these skills, and therefore remain inactive (2001). The notion that the poor lack certain skills when compared to wealthier people has permeated the literature on political participation and has not been questioned, since levels of education are highly

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14 Brady, Verba, and Schlozman use these individual aptitudes to operationalize their model; they also include years of education in order to “show that both schooling and general intelligence matter for political participation” (1995, p. 273).
correlated with these particular skills. In other words, it has been suggested that it is unlikely that poor people possess civic skills that allow them to engage with political actors, whereas well-educated citizens can find their way through the system.

Salgado Bueno and Mendes Fialho, however, correctly point that the “term civic skills can be difficult to deal with because it entails normative aspects about the relationship between participation and democracy” (2009). Moreover, different actions require different skills and those needed for accessing political resources might be different from ones considered necessary to find, for example, employment. That is, while indeed the skills emphasized by Brady, Verba, and Schlozman can help individuals to become more active and effective in political activities, most of the urban poor population has developed a different set of skills, often focused on survival strategies. So while the politically active urban poor may not have the same eloquence as their more well-off counterparts when delivering presentations in public or chairing a meeting where decisions are taken, they need skills or know-how to access vital resources, and have a distinct repertoire of skills to reduce the costs of participation. This know-how can be the result of many different factors and might not necessarily be connected to conventional “civic skills and attitudes.”

It appears then, that the conventional approach to civic skills is biased toward the rich, and may lead to the conclusion that the individuals who undertake political actions are generally the protagonists. In other words, the politically active citizen seems to be the one that delivers a speech, organizes a demonstration, or presents policy ideas in electoral campaigns because he/she has the necessary skills. Nevertheless, it is almost always the case, except in those
activities that are the preserve of an individual, such as contacting a politician, that political actors have generally set the stage for participation. For example, in an electoral campaign political brokers will contact people to encourage them to vote or will organize meetings in the slums. Public meetings and activities aimed at helping the community can be organized by local leaders or organizations that deem it necessary to discuss relevant issues with the public. There is considerable evidence of politicians organizing neighborhood parties, taking walking tours, holding rallies, and distributing clothing with the aim of encouraging contacts with poor slum dwellers (e.g., Nelson, 1979, p. 319). In short, the basic elements for political participation are provided by the system and do not necessarily require a vast number of people with Brady, Verba, Schlozman’s civic skills from poor urban communities, since numerous brokers with links to politicians act as “skillful” intermediaries.

The skills or know-how that slum-dwellers need to participate mostly have to do with navigating the complexities of urban poverty and finding resources to cope with their situation in political activities. Skillful people in the slums will find ways to tap the available resources. While Brady, Verba, and Schlozman’s civic skills can help a person detect where the resources are, in each political activity there is a range of involvement in which the required skills are different. In activities such as demonstrations, public meetings, and political campaigns, a person can be found at the forefront mobilizing other people and publicly discussing a relevant matter; but many individuals just participate by being present, requiring only minimal knowledge about
the issue at hand. The decision to participate revolves around the ability of savvy slum dwellers to gather the necessary information and process it to take part in political activities and/or make use of politicians and brokers to solve problems. The skills and contacts to obtain such helpful information and act are valuable personal assets that set some slum dwellers apart from others.

The final key mechanism that allows the urban poor to access resources available from political participation is mobilization. The literature on participation has long acknowledged the relevance of this mechanism and even some of the strongest proponents of the socioeconomic status model, such as Verba, Nie and Kim (1978), agree that where group mobilization is strong the relationship between socioeconomic status and participation can vanish (Leighley, 1995, p. 191). In this respect, mobilization for political purposes can be understood as “the process of joining up, where people who are not previously engaged in public life or political activity decide to become members of civic groups, join protests, or attend public assemblies [, among other activities]” (Neaera Abers, 2000, p. 136). Whether mobilization relies on ethnic, community, religious, or other types of social ties, when there is group mobilization, the costs of collective action can diminish and therefore promote more participation from ordinary citizens (Tarrow, 1994).

In the case of poor urban communities, mobilization becomes critical because it can reduce the costs of political participation for slum dwellers. Moreover, “[g]iven that mobilization techniques (i.e. direct mail, door-to-door canvassing) are typically directed toward high-status

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15 It is common that in certain demonstrations or campaigns people are not aware of the issues and participate only because they will receive a payment. Politicians fill up stadiums and squares with the promise of a reward for attending. In Mexico, for example, these people are known as acarreados, which literally means “carried to.”
individuals or neighborhoods [...] and that membership in voluntary organizations is concentrated among high-status individuals, the existence of differential opportunity structures across socioeconomic classes is likely” (Leighley, 1995, pp. 187-188). Furthermore, while mobilization is fundamental for political actors, access to slums by elite interest groups is not always straightforward because social networks are less stable in cities (Fay, 2005) and because the multiplicity of social cleavages (religious, racial, etc.) coexisting in poor urban neighborhoods can make access even harder. Additionally in most cases, as Nelson says, the poor are not generally integrated into party structures because of elite attitudes of disdain and fear toward the poor, as well as the risk of alienating established supporters through attempts to mobilize segments of the urban poor (1976, pp. 318-324). As we will see in the following section, mobilization can take different forms and be triggered by different factors. However, the main point is that “mobilization factors simply cannot be ignored if we are to develop a complete understanding of who participates and why they do so” (Leighley, 1995, p. 181).

Information, skills, and mobilization represent the basic mechanisms necessary for political participation in the slums. Individually or jointly, they give the urban poor the basic tools they need to participate effectively. The key question at this point is what factors can trigger these mechanisms, impacting the levels of political participation of the urban poor?

**What factors affect the political participation of the urban poor?**

Following the analysis of the previous section, I argue that there are four key factors (social networks, religious affiliation and religious groups, government transfer programs, and
NGOs) that directly shape the level of political engagement of slum dwellers, since these are intimately related to group mobilization, the dissemination of information, and development of skills. Furthermore, since there are different causal pathways for different types of political participation, I argue that a given factor’s influence on individual or collective modes of participation will depend on which mechanism it triggers. This section will explain why these four factors are key for the urban poor and, at the same time, highlight how each of them can trigger the mechanisms necessary for individual and/or collective political engagement, while Chapter 5 will present the hypotheses that derive from these factors and empirically test them.

1- Social Networks: Weak and Strong

The first factor that impacts political participation in slums is the density of an individual’s social networks. In this dissertation I draw on the terminology and theory of social networks, rather than a social capital approach, in part due to the relative clarity of definition for social networks. Social networks refer to formal or informal relationships that a person establishes with other individual as a result of participating in membership organizations or through friendship or family ties. On the other hand, the definition of social capital is still contested, and various definitions bring with themselves aspects that are not necessarily useful for this specific research.

For example, Pierre Bourdieu, the sociologist who provided the first systemic analysis of social capital, defined the concept as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual
acquaintance or recognition” (1985, p.248). For other scholars social capital is “an instantiated informal norm that promotes co-operation between two or more individuals” (Fukuyama, 2001, p.7). For others it can refer to “the features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1993, p. 2). A different group of scholars believes that social capital is “the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks or larger social structures” (Portes & Landolt, 2000, p 532; Portes, 1998). While there are commonalities and convergences among these definitions, the multiplicity of attributes assigned to the term can lead to conceptual stretching and reduced clarity in the analysis.

Whether it is the ability to secure resources, norms of reciprocity, features of social organization, or resources themselves, all of these attributes rely on the fundamental role of networks, and the ways in which networks facilitate interactions between individuals. I want to emphasize the relational aspect of networks and how this can enable the tapping of resources through the provision of information, skills, and/or mobilization. Moreover, I will inevitably refer to and use elements from the vast literature on social capital and poverty, since it implicitly refers to social networks and the consequences of being part of them. Therefore, when using the term social capital throughout the dissertation, I will exclusively underscore the existence of interpersonal networks, and not other elements of social capital like norms or resources. Finally, I will use Granovetter’s “strong” and “weak” ties to differentiate between strong interpersonal networks that are composed of family and friends and weak networks that rely on distant
acquaintances that an individual generally makes through different membership organizations (Granovetter, 1973; Howard, 2003).\footnote{I deliberately use Granovetter’s work (1973) since he analyses social networks and not social capital. Furthermore, I avoid using the terms “bonding social capital” and “bridging social capital”—the former generally referring to social bonds and organizations within communities, while the latter is meant to depict broader connections and can be divided into four types (Warren, et al., 2001, p. 8-12). Using social networks to explain participation is more parsimonious and makes it easier to underscore how the network is composed and how it can work without creating too many categories. Furthermore a social network analysis allows me to focus on the individual as opposed to communities.}

It is widely accepted that “[a] more autonomous and resourceful citizen can be expected to be more reliant on his or her own capacities in order to deal with the problems and challenges of everyday life” (Van Deth, 2008, p. 202). Consequently, as institutions are usually indifferent or even hostile to the needs of the urban poor, they are forced to rely on social networks that help them “get by” (Warren, Thompson, & Saegert, 2001; Woolcock, 2005). In other words, informal social networks and family relations provide salient coping mechanisms of considerable importance in poor communities. Friends and family have long been critical for survival. Interestingly, however, recent research in certain urban slums shows that membership in formal organizations is declining (Perlman, 2010), and organizations such as unions, women’s groups, and community associations, as well as informal networks which have mostly been associated with social capital, are becoming less relevant for coping with poverty in slums (Gonzalez de la Rocha, 2001). This trend opens avenues for new research and challenges us to test whether or not membership organizations continue to be relevant for the urban poor.

The social network and social capital literatures present copious evidence that interpersonal relations and participation in membership organizations can result in positive
benefits on an array of welfare and development indicators (Narayan & Pritchett, 1997; Grootaert, 2001; Moser & Mellwaine, 1997; Kawachi & Kennedy, 1999; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004; Hall & Lamont, 2009; Abdul-Hakim, et al., 2010). Moreover, a long tradition that goes back to Tocqueville’s work on local organizations political participation (1835) has been complemented by an extensive anecdotal and empirical literature indicating that, across the world, voluntary organizational involvement positively affects the levels of political participation (Verba & Nie, 1972; Seligson, 1999; Lawless & Fox, 2001). In this line of thought, I claim that social networks impact political participation by providing crucial information, skills, and incentives, activating mechanisms that enhance or hinder engagement with political actors. That is, different social networks will affect political participation depending on the mechanisms they are able to trigger (information, skills, mobilization).

Strong social networks composed by close friends and family will have little or no impact on political participation. The reasoning is that while kin and friendship networks are important for slum dweller’s coping and survival strategies, accessing political resources requires links to external networks whose influence stretches beyond the slums. Furthermore, if strong ties allow individuals to cope with poverty, the incentives to reach out to other actors, especially political, and networks decrease. On the contrary, weak ties that result from participating in membership organizations will facilitate the flow of information as well as member mobilization and, since a number of political activities require mass participation (e.g., demonstrations, voting, activities aimed at helping the community, and public meetings), we can expect political engagement to be higher when social networks are characterized by weak ties. The following diagram summarizes
the argument by showing how each type of social network triggers (or not) particular mechanisms that in turn result in particular actions.

Diagram 1. Social Networks & Political Participation

The impact of strong ties on political participation is still contested. On the one hand, work that focuses on the poor has repeatedly shown that friends, family, and neighbors are a key aspect of risk management and problem solving strategies (Woolcock, 2005; Harriss, 2005). On the other hand, and following Granovetter’s claim, Alesina and Giuliano (2011) argue that there is a negative relation between strong family ties and political participation. That is, the more individuals rely on the family as provider of services and transfer of resources, the lower the
level of political participation because “the more the family is all that matters for an individual the less he/she will care about the rest of society and the polity (Alesina & Giuliano, 2011, p. 3).17 Using data from the World Values Survey, Ljunge finds that family ties are negatively related to political participation and political engagement might be motivated by private gain (2011). Teorell also shows that in the case of Sweden, dense networks of friendship and kin do not make people more prone to take political action (2003). In short, while there is strong evidence supporting the argument that strong ties help the poor “get by,” it has not been demonstrated that strong ties can link individuals to a broader political context and actors. I argue that because of the instrumental nature of political participation in slums (tapping resources), individuals with strong ties will resort to political action to secure resources only as a last resort, since many of them can count on close friends and relatives to help cover their basic needs.

There is a burgeoning literature that seeks to understand how citizens access the state to improve their lives and how organizations that create “weak ties” increase levels of political participation. Edelman and Mitra (2008) provide evidence that, because politicians are more interested in groups than individuals, Indian slum dwellers who are able to organize and reach out to politicians are able to secure more services and benefits than those who do not join such organizations. Also in India, Kruks-Wisner has shown that people develop diverse strategies in distinct social networks that can aggregate interests and help the flow of ideas within and across social cleavages (2011). In a similar vein, Teorell has shown that not only the most committed

activists of an organization become politically involved, but also those who are less active within the organization (2003). In short, there is overwhelming evidence from across the world (anecdotal and empirical) showing that those individuals who belong to organizations will tend to be more politically active, and we can expect that the effect in slums will be even higher.\textsuperscript{18}

In the case of poor individuals in developing countries, even though membership organizations are relatively few (Perlman, 2010; Krishna, 2002), I argue that participating in these types of organizations (e.g. unions, women’s groups, sports and recreation clubs, etc.)\textsuperscript{19} will make their members politically more active. As the previous sections have underscored, accessing resources in slums requires precise and timely information, particular skills or know-how, and/or the ability to mobilize, all of which are triggered through the weak ties developed in membership organizations. The urban poor participating in organizations will have access to relevant information that flows between members, in part because brokers and politicians can easily target these organizations and will seek to provide them with information. Moreover, the literature has emphasized how organizations enhance the skills of their members, which, in the case of slum dwellers, leads to acquiring valuable know-how to access resources. Additionally, as I have argued, the costs of group mobilization are considerably lower both for political actors that need mass support and for members who want immediate benefits. In this respect, and as a result of the triggering mechanisms involved, the urban poor that participate in community organizations will tend to be more active in political activities that require collective actions such

\textsuperscript{18} See, for example: Mcclurg, 2003; Williams, 2008; Klesner, 2007; Edelman & Mitra, 2008; Houtzager, Acharya & Gurza Lavalle, 2007; Booth & Bayer Richard, 1998; Krishna, 2002; Castiglione, Van Deth & Wolleb, 2008.

\textsuperscript{19} I deliberatively leave out religious groups since, as I will explain below, we can expect that these groups promote different political activities.
as attending protests or public meetings, working in political campaigns, and activities aimed at helping the community, because members generally share both a cause and characteristics that facilitate such actions.

2- Religious Affiliation and Religious Groups

The second key factor that affects political participation in poor urban neighborhoods is religious affiliation and religious groups. As Casanova has argued, in numerous places around the world there has been a critical transformation towards the “de-privatization” of religion, therefore making it key in public life and in political processes (1994; 2008). It has been widely documented that religious groups have historically played an important role in politics, particularly in Latin America (Gill, 1998). However, at the same time, a number of political parties that identified themselves with a particular religion or religious values are in decline in certain countries, partly because parties seek to appeal to a broader electorate. As Hagopian points out in the case of Latin America, political parties close to the Catholic Church in Colombia, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Guatemala have lost their shares of power and some are striving to survive in a continent that was once clearly identified as a Roman Catholic stronghold, but now counts a fifth of its population as Protestant (2009; 2008). In other countries, parties are accentuating conservative values intimately related to religion and gaining electoral leverage. Religion and politics is not the main focus of this research, but it is important to underscore that the world’s religious landscape and its interactions with political systems is quite complex and that religion is a fundamental matter in the daily life of the poor (Gallup, 2009). For
now, it suffices to underscore that different religious affiliations will affect political participation differently.

As with social networks, information and skills are acquired through religious groups while also enabling slum dwellers’ mobilization. I argue that a household’s religious affiliation and participation in religious groups can have important effects on their level of political participation in terms of disseminating information that is necessary to tap resources and the ability mobilization because of its capacity to rally slum dwellers for different causes. Furthermore, in many slums where violence and security are important concerns, churches and religious organizations act as “safe havens” in which households extend their informal social networks. The damage to the social tissue and social cohesion in many slums from the spike in crime and violence has given religious organizations a strong role in poor communities. As a result, religious affiliation and group participation can be critical determinants of levels of political engagement. Moreover, in addition to their spiritual guidance, in poor urban communities religious groups and churches also provide goods (food, clothes, shelter, etc.), partly as a result of the retreat of the state, thus cementing their importance to these communities and providing vital coping mechanisms for slum dwellers.
In the case of Brazil, for example, Protestantism is key for political engagement. I build on Patterson’s finding (2005a & 2005b) where he shows that Protestantism’s values of individuality and egalitarian social relations, as well as the participatory structure of its churches, can translate into higher levels of political participation. Furthermore, these features enable

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20 His work relies heavily on Max Weber’s classic Protestant Ethic (1934). Also, Verba, Brady & Nie also show that religion promotes political participation (1993). I focus on Protestantism since I will be able to test hypotheses and compare it to other religions that do not share the same characteristics in terms of structure and believes that can impact participation. Needless to stress, in places where Protestantism is minimum or non-existent we cannot expect the same results.
Protestant churches to become physically present in slums where other churches with more complex structures (e.g., Catholic) can struggle to penetrate impoverished areas in vast numbers and be physically present in challenging environments. As Gill argues, “religious competition increases the importance of obtaining active followers […] and] not doing so would lead to a greater loss of poor parishioners to competing groups” (1998, p7). For example, in the case of Rio de Janeiro’s slums, evangelical churches have become particularly relevant actors at the expense of Catholic organizations, which have lost leverage in the communities (McCann, 2006). In this respect, it seems that in contexts where religious groups compete for followers, these groups can become important vehicles for social and political mobilization (Trejo, 2009).21

3- Government Transfer Programs

The third factor that affects slum dweller’s level of political participation is receiving government transfers; particularly conditional cash transfers (CCTs), which assure a regular income to poor families. A burgeoning literature on the effect of CCTs is just starting to explore these important issues. Recent studies have highlighted the impact of CCTs on welfare, but their impact on politics is still unclear (Brooks, 2011). In this line of thought, research has focused on the impact of CCTs on voting behavior, incumbency, and voting turnout (e.g. De La O, 2011; Zucco, 2010), yet we know little about their impact on other types of political participation.

21 It is worth mentioning the role that ethnicity can play in certain countries, since there is a vast literature showing that ethnic appeals made by politicians can mobilize voters and therefore affect the levels of political engagement (Bates, 1983; Posner, 2005; Nelson, 1979). As Eifert, Miguel, and Posner (2010) have shown in the case of Africa, ethnic identities play a salient role at election time for instrumental political mobilization, and therefore can affect the level of citizen’s engagement with political actors. I omit ethnicity as one of the key factors in this section since the empirical literature generally includes a control for it.
While there are numerous ways in which governments transfer resources to citizens, this dissertation emphasizes CCTs because these are expressly designed to target the poor, unlike other cash transfers, such as pensions or unemployment benefits. Furthermore, this cash transfer generally represents an important percentage of a household’s income, generating relation of dependency with the government.

The use of public programs to attract new constituencies is far from new, and there is wide evidence regarding the use of public funds for partisan loyalty (Diaz-Cayeros & Magaloni, 2003; Robinson & Verdier, 2002). It has also been shown that incumbents benefit from implementing this type of social program, partly because of fear of losing coverage, and/or attitudes of reciprocity toward politicians (Manacorda, Miguel & Vigorito, 2010; Finan & Schechter, 2010; Zucco, 2008 & 2011; Baez, Camacho, Conover & Zarate, 2010). As De La O suggests in the case of Mexico’s CCT Progresa, the introduction of the program increased voters’ incomes, provided relevant information about the political arena and, indirectly, helped mobilize the electorate (2007 & 2011). In this understanding, I concur with De La O’s work in that CCTs provide key information that can encourage the urban poor to become engaged with political actors, particularly since slum dwellers have generally been neglected by the state, both in terms of service delivery, and secondarily through the lack of avenues to channel demands. In this respect, transfer programs are seen as a rapprochement from the government, sending a message to the poor regarding the availability of public resources, which were historically inaccessible to the urban poor.

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22 De La O (2007 & 2010) notes that, at least in the case of Mexico, its CCT has hindered clientelism for a number of reasons, including informing recipients about the non-political nature of the program.
I argue then that government transfer programs, and particularly CCTs targeted to the poor, can enhance participation in political activities, such as voting. This occurs because as the urban poor receive a cash transfer they often realize that they are entitled to certain benefits, and will tend to participate in order to maintain the transfer.\textsuperscript{23} Additionally, as recent events in Mexico have shown, beneficiaries can be forced to vote with the threat of being left out of the register of the CCT losing their benefits (El Universal & Reforma, April 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2013). In other words, while CCTs can empower poor voters by making them more aware of their rights, there is

\textsuperscript{23} This realization was cited in multiple interviews during fieldwork.
also the possibility that receiving a transfer program can make the poor more vulnerable to clientelistic practices.

Furthermore, I argue that while electoral participation of slum dwellers might increase as a result of CCT implementation, other forms of political engagement such as contacting public officials or protesting will decline, since government transfers assure a constant flow of funds that, in turn, reduces the need to tap more resources from other places; similar to what has been theorized about the strong ties of social networks. The certainty that the urban poor have regarding the income from public and institutionalized programs such as CCTs will affect their participation in other political activities. In other words, trying to extract goods and benefits from political contacts is not as important because of the certainty of receiving monthly cash transfers from the government.

4- NGO Programs and Projects

The fourth factor that affects slum dwellers’ political engagement is being a beneficiary of NGO programs or projects. NGOs across the developing world have become critical components of social safety nets and therefore vital for slum dwellers, who rely on them to cope with poverty by providing a vast array of goods and services (Paley, 2001; Cammett & Maclean, 2011; Tsai, 2010). In addition to providing important services to the poor, NGOs can have significant impacts on democracy and political participation, since they can provide skills and information about rights and benefits that the poor are entitled to (Banks, 2006; Clarke, 1998; Boulding, 2010). In this respect, it is important to distinguish between individuals participating
in a civil society organization, mostly as volunteers, and individuals who are beneficiaries of NGO programs. Individuals who participate in the general administration of NGOs are generally well-educated middle-income volunteers, whereas the NGO beneficiaries are mostly poor families, usually have low levels of formal education, and require help to overcome difficulties, making a clear distinction necessary. This is a basic but fundamental distinction, because we can expect different political behaviors depending on if a person is participating in the activities or receiving benefits from an NGO.

It is also evident that NGOs serve different purposes and, depending on their program and objectives, they can enhance (or not) political participation. Some NGOs are explicitly created to enhance political engagement (e.g., women’s rights groups), while others might provide health care or improve housing without aiming to increase their beneficiaries’ level of political participation. At the same time, in certain circumstances numerous NGOs have been created by the urban poor that have become aware of the possibility of obtaining resources with the aim of helping their communities (Chaves Pandolfi & Grynszpan, 2003). Independent of the objective of the NGO, I claim that these groups can play an important “educating” role by providing the know-how to access different government services, or by directly pointing out sources where slum dwellers can tap more benefits from political actors. During my fieldwork, for example, I made contact with an NGO that provides healthcare; one aspect of their approach is to use community psychology therapy techniques, and participants are encouraged to share their experiences of how they’ve coped with their children illness. The NGO staff believes that as a result of these exercises the beneficiaries gain confidence and become more vocal about the
problems they face. We expect that those NGO that aim to enhance political rights will have a greater impact than those providing other goods or services to vulnerable groups.

Diagram 4. NGOs & Political Participation

As Boulding suggests, even if NGOs are not politically oriented, these can affect political participation, even if it is an unintended consequence, by allowing interactions between beneficiaries (2010). Additionally, interactions between NGO administrators or volunteers and beneficiaries can also provide the latter with skills and knowledge of how to access resources. In cases where NGOs are not politically motivated, their projects or programs generally aim to help the urban poor overcome a particular difficulty; the key objective is to provide tools or support to
the beneficiaries, which will help them cope with dire situations. Consequently, NGOs working in slums can also be seen as organizations that provide relief as well as skills and information for dealing with potential future setbacks, opening opportunities to exchange ideas as to how local authorities can become helpful. As a result, we can expect activities such as contacting officials and participating in public meetings to increase when slum dwellers receive benefits from NGOs, since the beneficiaries might have new information regarding their rights.

Conclusions:

The objective of this chapter was to encourage the reader to think beyond the socioeconomic status models that argue that a person’s level of engagement with the political system depends on his/her income and education, and present a framework with which we can better understand how the urban poor interact with different political actors. This chapter argued that analysis of the political engagement of slum dwellers has to incorporate the distributive characteristics of political participation, which underscores that political systems and politicians have made resources available for the urban poor to tap. This chapter also emphasizes that while the urban poor have policy and/or ideological motivations to become politically engaged, access to resources is an important driver of political participation. In short, the distributive characteristics approach changes the emphasis from spending resources to participate, as most of the literature suggests, to the opportunities to access public resources that will help poor households cope with poverty. After showing why the urban poor have real incentives to participate in politics, this chapter argued that incentives are not sufficient for slum dwellers to participate; they need at least
one of three mechanisms that can enable them to tap the resources: information, skills, and mobilization. Timely information regarding the location and source of resources is key, as well as the skills or know-how to take advantage of such information. The third mechanism, mobilization, can reduce the costs of participation dramatically, and can enhance collective action since it provides both critical information and know-how. This chapter showed that the analysis of political participation of the urban poor must also explain how the urban poor access resources in order to clearly identify the factors that can trigger such mechanisms in poor urban neighborhoods.

I claim that there are four key factors that can trigger the mechanisms and therefore explain the levels of political participation: religious affiliation and religious organizations, social networks (weak and strong ties), receiving benefits from government transfer programs, and being an NGO beneficiary. These factors provide the answer to the question of what determines the level of political participation. At the same time, this chapter argued that different causal pathways lead to different types of political activities. Consequently, the relationship between factors and mechanisms is intimately related to the political activity carried out by a slum dweller (see diagram below).
This chapter presented an analytical framework for the analysis of political participation of the urban poor that shows overall trends and patterns of political engagement in the cities of the developing world. More importantly, this framework can be empirically tested, since a number of hypotheses and alternative explanations, which will be presented in chapter 5, can be operationalized. The following chapter will present the dissertation’s case study (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) with the aim of contextualizing the theory. After presenting the case study in Chapter 4, I will present the hypotheses that derive from this framework and empirically test the hypotheses with an original dataset of slum dwellers on Chapter 5, while explaining how incentives, the key mechanisms, and their triggering factors all play out in the politics of poor urban neighborhoods of developing countries.
Chapter 4. Political Participation and Brazil’s Urban Poor

This chapter moves from the theoretical framework for understanding the participation of the urban poor, which I proposed in the preceding chapter, to see how this framework manifests itself on the ground, and to present an overview of urban poverty and favelas in Brazil, showing the complex political dynamics that prevail across Brazil’s favelas, and the different ways in which favelados participate. This analysis draws on qualitative evidence from extensive fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro, as well as the relevant historical, anthropological, and sociological literature, and integrates new data, from multiple recent Brazilian datasets that both track political participation and accurately locate respondents at the neighborhood level. Based on this, it makes the case for the importance of this sector of the population in Brazilian urban politics. In addition, it discusses the notion of “opportunity structures” that condition levels of political participation, and proposes a synthesis of the factors that affect opportunity structures to shape the forms and intensity of political participation of the urban poor in Brazil, providing a nuanced view of the complexities of political participation in the favelas. As the following accounts from fieldwork attest, the political landscape of the favelas is indeed complex.

A few weeks before the 2012 local elections in Rio de Janeiro, I was invited to attend a political rally in Rocinha, Brazil’s (and Latin America’s) largest favela. At the entrance to Rocinha, hundreds of people were getting off public vans and gathering to either take a motorbike up to the neighborhood, walk uphill, or simply hang out in one of the shops or food stands. Dozens of people circulated, giving out fliers and pamphlets supporting one of the
hundreds of candidates to the local chamber of deputies (Câmara Municipal). Some candidates had also commissioned megaphones with loud music promoting them, and many buildings showcased posters of the parties. The rally didn’t take place, but instead the candidate, a former resident of Rocinha and now a famous funk artist, led a walk of several hours through narrow passages that had just been “pacified” by the military police. Giving out fliers with the candidate’s aides allowed me to witness how numerous favela dwellers asked for handouts, seeing in the elections an opportune time to negotiate their vote in exchange for additional income.

Interactions between the candidate and his would-be constituents were not the only negotiations occurring. The candidate had to bargain with someone referred to as the “gas man,” in reference to the person who delivers the gas tanks to residences, and offer him money in exchange of allowing the candidate to place one of his posters in a public square. The “gas man” was likely involved with local drug dealers and “owned” the square so any politician that wanted propaganda there had to pay a price; the candidate didn’t budge and therefore was unable to hang his posters in that particular square.

As we walked through the streets, several people, mostly women, asked the aides of the candidate for a job. When they were told there were none left, a few of them began to verbally abuse the aides, telling them to “F###%@ off” and leave those jobs for people from Rocinha. Clearly these favelados wanted the job of handing out fliers and pamphlets since it represented an additional source—or perhaps their only source—of potential income.
As I have discussed, electoral campaigns open up opportunities for negotiating and participating. Nevertheless, the existing literature often conveys the message that participation is about spending money, time, or both, closing doors to those who have neither. But this neglects the fact that thousands of people partake in political activities because, in their need for income, they see an opportunity, even if temporary in this case, of securing some extra cash to get by.

This is not, of course, the only form that political participation may take in the slums of Rio. On September 1st, 2012, I was invited to moderate a session on human rights at the Favela Nova Holanda, in the complex of Mare, one of the most violent neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro. An NGO had put together a seminar on human rights and wanted to spread the word to its beneficiaries and neighbors.

A few minutes before arriving to Nova Holanda on a van that goes through one of the main arteries of the city, a shootout took place a couple of blocks away from the site where the human rights seminar was about to be inaugurated. The media reports later that day, based on the police accounts, said that, in the course of a special operation to disrupt a meeting between drug dealers, two dealers were shot and firearms confiscated.24

Things seemed very different at the favela. Immediately after the shootout, the outraged community burned tires and blocked the streets in protest because the two wounded accused drug dealers were not taken directly to the hospital, but kept inside a military truck, which for some reason took a circuitous route to its destination. Two teenagers died that morning on their way to

the hospital. One of them, Fabrizio, was part of a social project in the slum; his aunt told me that he wanted to become a firefighter. That morning he was walking to work, unarmed.

As the events of that September morning unfolded, many favelados took immediately to the streets to burn tires because information about how the military police treated the wounded rapidly spread by word of mouth of the neighbors and family members. Calls also spread among this group of people living in the same neighborhood for them to demonstrate their discontent with the government and its incursions in the favela. As a result of the shooting, the human rights seminar was cancelled and the NGO that had organized the event organized another activity instead: it quickly mobilized its network, forming groups of neighbors and beneficiaries that went to the police station to demand a thorough investigation.

To the best of my knowledge, however, the crime was not solved.

This tragic incident is an unfortunate illustration of how different forms of political participation, actors, and important mechanisms that would not generally be considered by most of the literature need to be taken into account. First and foremost it is an example of the historic record of police brutality in Brazil, and how most favelados continue to see this type of treatment an extension of the power of the government. An everyday politics characterized by routine violence leads to a need to establish alternative avenues for participation, as the relation between slum dwellers and the government is tense and can easily become violent.

Often, these disparate, alternative forms of politics available to the poor—patron-client relationships, vote-selling and paid promoting, negotiations and compromises with both politicians and a multitude of armed actors, protest—are not “visible” when we think about
political participation. One reason is that, particularly with regard to violence, stories in the media can get easily distorted, presenting accounts that are misleading on the realities inside the favelas, and strengthening stereotypes about unruly and violent-prone favelados. This also happens mostly because it does not conform to the scripts that we adhere to about what constitutes politics, causing us at times to discount participation in forms of politics that go beyond voting in elections and orderly civic-minded involvement in public events, for the supposed public good.

These examples also show that different actors can easily spread information and mobilize people, guiding interventions by providing skills to confront public institutions. Further, they show that while tapping resources is an important feature of political engagement, favelados also have continuous grievances and are trying to find new avenues for expressing their discontent. And they demonstrate the complexity, and complications, of the political landscape within the favelas.

*The Urban Poor in Brazil: an Overview*

To understand political participation in Brazil, it is important to provide an overview of the magnitude of urban poverty in the country. Brazil is one of the most urbanized countries in the developing world. At midcentury, almost two-thirds of Brazilians lived in rural isolation and poverty; however, during the next two decades a massive migration to the cities took place, peaking in the 1960s, and swelling the ranks of Brazil’s urban population (Holston, 2008, pp. 104-105). In 1950 Brazil was 36 percent urban; by 1970 the share of the population living in
cities had reached almost 60 percent; at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Brazilians living in urban areas represented 81% of the total population and by 2010 it was estimated that 84% of the country’s inhabitants lived in cities (Holston, 2008; Perlman, 2010). The initial waves of rapid urbanization resulted in a housing deficit that forced most of those arriving to the cities to look for shelter in the periphery or the hills of metropolitan areas. As movement to the cities has slowed, shantytowns across Brazil continue to grow, but have mostly stopped playing the role of “arrival cities” still seen in other countries, such as India, where levels of migration from rural areas are considerably higher. That is, favelas in Brazil continue to receive a relative small number of immigrants from the countryside; instead, these poor urban neighborhoods have become permanent settlements, which play their own distinctive role in Brazilian politics.

Even though the urbanization process brought about numerous changes, including new opportunities for the new city dwellers, overall urban poverty remains high, and a perpetually striking feature of Brazil is its overall social inequality, with wealthy neighborhoods often presenting a stark contrast to the favelas next door. In terms of wealth distribution, half of Brazil’s total income is in the hands of the top 10% of the population (Perlman, 2010, pp. 48-49). At the same time, data from 1999 shows that while rural poverty is higher (40%) than urban poverty, the majority of poor Brazilians (78%) live in urban areas (Rocha, 2003, p. 135). The profile of poverty in Brazil is changing, with indicators improving substantially in the last decade as a result of multiple factors: partly because of macroeconomic stability, partly due to the implementation of Bolsa Família, a federal conditional cash transfer program aimed at the poor,
and partly due to the economic expansion of the country. The number of poor Brazilians was reduced by almost 20 million (Rocha, 2013).

According to the World Bank (2013), in 2005 the poverty headcount ratio at the national poverty line was 30.8% of the population and in 2009 this figure decreased substantially to 21.4%. This progress is also reflected in the absolute number of urban poor, which dropped almost by a third between 2005 and 2009 (IETS, 2011). As in other developing countries, the distribution of urban poverty across Brazil varies significantly. According to the last census in 2010, approximately 6% of the country’s total population lives in shantytowns. For official purposes, and in census data, slums in Brazil are classified as *aglomerados subnormais* (substandard settlements), defined as a set of at least 51 houses, which generally lack basic public services and occupy land illegally (IBGE, 2010, p. 19). Out of the 11.5 million Brazilians living in the 6,326 slums or *aglomerados subnormais* across the country, 2 million live in the state of Rio de Janeiro and 2.7 million in the state of Sao Paulo. In this respect, 11% of the population of the metropolitan area of Sao Paulo, Brazil’s most populated city, lives in slums, while 14.4% of Rio de Janeiro’s metropolitan area population are urban slum dwellers. These figures are certainly large, but are comparatively lower than those from the metropolitan areas of Belem (state of Para) where 53.9% of the urban population lives in slums, or even Recife (state of Pernambuco) where 23.2% of the urban population continues to live in precarious conditions.

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25 This national study undertaken by the IBGE was the first one of its kind since previous census did not always take into account illegal settlements.

26 It is important to note that not all the urban poor live in *aglomerados subnormais*. 

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The key point is that not all slums are the same, and there are important variations between and within cities, let alone countries. For example, in Rio de Janeiro, the aglomerado subnormal of Assis Martins has only 16 households and 56 people in total, while Rocinha officially has 23,352 households and over 69,000 inhabitants. This variation, as has been underscored before, presents an important challenge for the study of slums—not only in Brazil, but also across other developing countries, where urban settlements present a similarly varied picture.

The stereotype of a Brazilian favela is that of a “marginal” place with little or no access to basic services, where an underclass of people lives in an atmosphere of perpetual violence. Brazilian favelas have been defined as areas “un-served” or “under-served” by the state (Williams 2012), and as Sinek argues, the critical divide between the favelas and the rest of the city is the unequal provision of services (2013). Indeed during my own research in some of Brazil’s largest metropolitan areas, one of the predominant features of the favelas was the precariousness of basic infrastructure.

Furthermore, in spite of the decrease of poverty across the country and in urban centers, millions of Brazilians continue to strive to make a living while confronting social exclusion. For example, Teresa Caldeira’s influential work, City of Walls, provides an illustrative analysis of

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27 While the official definition of aglomerado subnormal affirms that a minimum of 51 households are necessary, the same official document which cataloged these aglomerados subnormais reported numerous aglomerados with fewer than 51 households, including Assis Martins. The official data has also been questioned. For example, unofficial accounts suggest that Rocinha has over 150,000 inhabitants, making it Latin America’s largest shantytown. Moreover, states can have different definitions of slums and therefore the number of slums identified can vary, as can their populations. For the purpose of this research, I use the official Census Data from 2010, since it is the first to cover the entire country.
segregation and discrimination occurring in many Brazilian metropolitan areas, showing that the urban poor, particularly in Sao Paulo, have been victims of extreme brutality by the police and the state, while the well-off have built “fortified enclaves” that segregate the poor and strengthen the stereotype of favelados as dangerous and violent (2000).28 Moreover, even if coverage of basic services is increasing, it is worth noting that the World Bank has shown that the average income of favelados living in the largest complexes in Rio de Janeiro is 49% lower than that of the average person living in other parts of the city (2013).

This suggests a grim reality, one in which the motto inscribed in Brazil’s national flag—“Order and Progress”—is still reserved only for the few, while many populations—particularly the favelados subjected to pervasive violence—are physically cut off from services and rhetoricaly isolated from politics and the exercise of citizenship. While the trend toward decreasing poverty and increasing public service coverage is worth noting, it is also important to keep in mind that the urban poor in Brazil continue to face incredible challenges to improve their welfare, as high unemployment rates, crime, and discrimination take a daily toll in their everyday lives.

The Urban Poor and Political Participation in Brazil

The lack of data and general understanding of politics in poor urban neighborhoods has led to conflicting views regarding the political participation of slum dwellers throughout the world, and Brazil has not been an exception. In her seminal work on the favelas of Rio de Janeiro

28 The word favela itself has long been associated with poverty and violence, as a place of illegality in the collective imagery of Brazil. For a great work about the evolution of the concept and study of favelas see Valladares (2005).
in the 1960s, *The Myth of Marginality*, Perlman argued that political elites’ views and stereotypes about *favelados* as mostly lazy black men, violent and without stable family life, also led to a belief that political apathy prevailed. Perlman argued that this political apathy was a myth, and claimed that favelas had a vibrant political life. More recent studies have made mixed claims about the current political life of Brazilian slum dwellers, some of which have helped anchor the belief that the poor are largely politically apathetic. This section discusses these claims and presents interesting new data that will shed light on the politics and political participation of the urban poor in Brazil.

Contradictory arguments about the degree of involvement of the urban poor in Brazil are far from new. Before Perlman published her seminal work in 1979 arguing for the existence of a vibrant political life in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, a prominent Brazilian scholar, Antonio Machado, had argued that the lack of participation in most of favelas could be “easily proved” through the low levels of participation in favela neighborhood associations (1967). These low percentages of participation were supposed partly due to the fact that the “favela bourgeoisie,” as Machado called the local elites, captured political processes in slums. More recent studies, particularly those studying favelas after democratization in the mid-1980s, also present conflicting perspectives on political participation. On the one hand, important works like those of Gay (1990 & 1994) have highlighted the relevance of associational politics in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas and suggest, along the lines of Arias (2004 & 2006) that even if participation is not necessarily done through the channels of formal democratic and free institutions, *favelados* are not necessarily apathetic. More important, both authors have shown alternative methods for
political participation, rooted in the political landscape of the favelas, particularly the predominance of clientelism and the role of drug lords as de facto authorities.

Toward the same general point, but emphasizing different paths, a burgeoning literature on participatory budgeting has also highlighted the role played by the urban poor in setting their own fiscal course in several cities across Brazil (Abers, 2000; Graham & Jacobi, 2002; Avritzer, 2010). Some scholars have argued that it is precisely because of different types of popular organizations in favelas that access to services has improved (de Souza, et al., 2009). Similarly, Holston has argued that in spite of elite opposition, the urbanization process in Brazil has led to an “insurgent citizenship,” through which the urban poor in the peripheries have found ways to participate in politics (2008).

The picture presented by another set of authors, on the other hand, tends to emphasize the lack of political participation of the urban poor in Brazil. Williams argues that voting “is the only form of democratic participation for the poor” (2008, p. 22). Sinek argues that favela residents do not participate in political affairs because there is “citizenship poverty” (2013). Janice Perlman conducted a study of Rio de Janeiro 40 years after her seminal work in the 1960s, and found that the “most striking [differences in political participation between the first and second study], however, were the low rates of participation of every type […].”

Perlman’s claim is particularly surprising, as she reports her figures, which seem to show a certain increase in political engagement. Perlman reports that in activities related to party politics—signing petitions, attending political meetings, working for candidates—the levels of participation tripled from 1969 to 2001 (2010, p. 212). Furthermore, she found that 66%
(compared to 33% in 1969) said that “all Brazilians should participate in political life,” and 30% (compared to 11% in 1969) think that participation can influence decision-making in the government (2002, p.37). Perhaps even more interesting, and in accordance with the argument advanced in this dissertation regarding the possibility of extracting resources from political actors, is that a staggering 67% of the surveyed favelados (compared to 30% in 1969) have actually sought the help of a government agency to solve a problem (2002, p. 37). Perhaps Perlman’s disappointment is based on the expectation of much higher rates of participation as a result of the democratization process.

In sum, a number of studies, together with data and first-hand accounts that depict dire poverty in Brazilian cities, have strengthened a view that the urban poor do not participate in politics, despite a body of evidence that would suggest just the opposite. This particular view, partly reflected in the works of Perlman (2010) and Sinek (2012), has a strong normative component. That is, while these authors are correct in pointing out the historical inequality of rights and access to public services, as well as strong barriers to influencing public policy, this does not mean that the urban poor in Brazil necessarily have low levels of political participation. While it is critical to continue discussing the forms of political participation and its primary objectives, it should not be confused with the number of times that favelados engage with the political system. Certainly some disappointment is understandable, as the democratization process has not brought full citizenship for all social classes; yet the existing data and an increasing number of scholarly accounts provide evidence that favelados have found ways to interact with political actors in spite of their “poverty of rights.” As Gay points out at the
beginning of his influential work “Latin America’s urban poor are often portrayed as the innocent victims of repressive and exclusionary regimes. Victims they undoubtedly are; innocent, however, they are not. Indeed there is increasing evidence from a variety of contexts that the urban poor have been active, organized, and aggressive participants in political process […]” (1994, p.1).

In the literature on the rich and diverse, if unexpected, political life of the favelas, studies continue to focus on a handful of settlements, while others focus on specific social movements that do not necessarily reflect the political engagement of average favelados, and many other studies lack representative data at the city level to support their arguments. However, recent developments in data collection that will be further discussed in the following chapter– the fortuitous conjunction of both the IBGE Censo data and the LAPOP data together—can now allow us to get a better picture of the forms and levels of political participation of Brazil’s urban poor. Drawing on this data, as well as my own original data from Rio de Janeiro’s metropolitan area, I will test empirically in the following chapter for the presence of an effect (or lack of effect) of favelas on political participation, allowing for a better understanding of the political landscape and participation in Brazil’s poor urban neighborhoods.

**The Urban Poor in Brazil and Political Opportunity Structures**

This dissertation presents a micro-theory of political participation of the urban poor, arguing that country level arguments have generally neglected the politics of slums since they are unable to capture the numerous dynamics that affect political participation. Nevertheless, the
different available opportunities to participate in political activities in poor urban neighborhoods can be constrained by numerous macro characteristics. That is, the extent to which the urban poor participate in politics is also dependent upon what has been called the “opportunity structure” associated with the political system (Tarrow, 1994; Garcia & Hoskin, 2003). Thus, for example, a country that has frequent elections and/or accessible politicians offers extensive opportunities for political participation, while one that is authoritarian and repressive, and which will most likely discourage certain activities, does not offer the same opportunities (Garcia & Hoskin, 2003). Holzner puts it clearly: “All political systems—democracies included—set up opportunities and barriers to participation that have different effects on the capacity and willingness of people from different income groups to engage in politics.” (2010, p. 27).

So what are the principal factors that affect the political structures that enhance or hinder the participation of Brazilian slum dwellers in politics? This dissertation will test a number of hypotheses and alternative explanations with data from the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro. Even though this approach holds the macro-political environment constant, it is important to have an overview of the political opportunity structures in Brazil in order to evaluate the extent to which the case study can “travel” to other cases. In this respect, I argue that there are at least two key factors that have particularly affected the opportunity structures of the urban poor in Brazil, and therefore their levels of political participation: democratization, and crime and violence. These factors impact participation by making activities available as well as creating specific incentives for the urban poor to become more (or less) active in politics. At the same

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29 Tarrow uses the term “political opportunity structure” to refer to a set of constraints that can affect the costs of collective action and therefore encourage or discourage such actions (1994).
time and in spite of the greater access to the political system, it is important to remember, as Fischer and Holston have shown, that the urban poor in Brazil continue to struggle to exercise their political rights and full citizenship (2008 & 2009, respectively).

I emphasize available opportunities because, as was seen in Chapter 2, citizens may not always choose to engage with political actors, even in democratic countries that in theory offer more avenues for participation. The argument advanced here is that while macro-level opportunity structures play a fundamental role in generating opportunities for participation, determining what ultimately drives political engagement in poor urban neighborhoods requires a more refined micro-foundational approach. To provide more context to this micro-foundational approach, I outline how democratization and violence have had a substantial impact in the levels of participation of slum dwellers in Brazil.

While the positive impact of democracy on political participation is not as straightforward in practice as it might be in theory, the degree of democracy in a country impacts the urban poor’s political participation, and represents an important element in the opportunity structure of political engagement. In the case of Brazil, which was governed by a succession of authoritarian military regimes between 1964 and 1985, the democratization process following return to civilian rule opened new avenues for participation, restored several existing ones, and closed others. Overall, as Perlman’s data tracking a number of political activities suggests, democratization increased the political participation of favelados. Out of Perlman’s original sample of interviewees surveyed in 1969, only 5% had attended a political meeting, while by 2001, 12% of those original respondents and 18% of their children had participated in a political
meeting. Similar trends are shown in voting, signing a petition, and working for a candidate (2008, p. 272). However, in spite of the improvement of political participation, Perlman claims that, “redemocratization may have granted the urban poor de jure citizenship, they do not feel as though they have de facto citizenship. They are pseudo-citizens (2008, p. 262)”.

In the case of Brazil, and particularly of Rio de Janeiro, democracy and violence play a key role in determining the opportunity structures of political participation of the poor. A thorough discussion of Brazil’s democratization process and current violence is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but this work would be incomplete without mentioning the intersection of these fundamental aspects of Brazilian politics. An illustrative example of how democracy, crime, and violence shape opportunity structures and affect political participation, is the evolution of the role of neighborhood associations (asociações de moradores), which have traditionally been the most important avenue of participation in favelas. Tracing the evolution of neighborhood associations will enable the dissertation to shed light on the diverse influences—levels of democracy, crime, violence—that shape political engagement. These bodies have changed in role and prominence overtime; they have seen clientelism become a key force in politics, as well as the rise in crime and violence that has also affected the way in which poor Brazilians living in the country’s major cities engage with the political system.

Popular organizations (i.e., those composed of the lower strata and migrants to poor neighborhoods) in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas can be traced to the origins of the shantytowns themselves in the late 19th century. However, starting in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s, the

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30 In a 2001 survey, a staggering 79% of Perlman’s 1969 interviewees said that “the end of the dictatorship had no significant impact on their lives.” (2008, p. 262).
government openly referred to the “favela problem” in its policies, prohibiting the building of new houses and proposing the elimination of shantytowns, which were growing rapidly as a result of internal migration (Zaluar & Alvito, 2008). These policies were met with resistance from favelados who tried to continue living in the new settlements. While the government actively attempted to remove favelas, these decades also saw the emergence of new neighborhood associations and an increased presence of non-state actors, mostly religious organizations such as the Fundação Leão XIII and the Cruzada São Sebastião, which provided certain basic services in favelas. In many favelas, these Catholic organizations became intermediaries between favelados and the state, creating opportunities for local leaders to participate in activities that involved dealing with politicians and policy makers. In short, the relationship between politicians and favelas was confrontational during most of the first half of the twentieth century.

The early 1960s saw an active governmental campaign to remove favelas and relocate its residents, a policy that gained strength after the 1964 coup. The 1960s and 1970s were decades of constant struggle between neighborhood associations and the government, since the latter explicitly tried to relocate favelados to the outskirts of cities.\(^1\) As a consequence of these policies, by the mid 1970’s approximately 100,000 favelados had been relocated (Sinek, 2013). However, these policies also spurred the emergence of neighborhood associations that mobilized across the city, and allowed many to avoid the removal of their homes (McCann, 2008). Throughout the struggle in the city’s favelas, numerous local organizations were created, and

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\(^1\) For a detailed account of popular organizations and popular rights in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas see: Fischer, 2008 and Zaluar & Alvito, 2008; McCann, forthcoming.
local leaders emerged, marking the beginnings of mass mobilizations in Brazilian shantytowns. Even at the peak of favela removal policies, neighborhood associations survived even the most repressive period of military rule (Hagopian, 2006 p. 540).

As a result of the need to organize and mobilize favelados in an attempt to survive the policies of removal, neighborhood associations became key players both for the urban poor, who they ostensibly represented, as well as for politicians. On the one hand neighborhood associations became the center of local politics, since the survival of communities depended on their ability to negotiate with the government and mobilize people; on the other, successive governments were keen to minimize social unrest. The politics of confrontation changed drastically in the 1980’s, especially with the democratization process, as politicians realized that the urban poor would become crucial to their political ambitions. Astute politicians started to expand ties with neighborhood associations with the goal of creating a base of supporters with some experience with mobilization, and would be willing to participate in an exchange of political support for basic services.

To quote McCann:

“[f]rom the early 1960’s through the 1980’s, the local Associação dos Moradores, or resident’s association (a mainstay of every favela), was the arena of local political power and the proving ground for homegrown activists. A few associations were ‘spontaneous,’” founded by local residents, but most were deliberately initiated and cultivated by city and state government [...] Officeholders in both Church and State perceived the associations as a brake against radicalism and hoped that they would serve as the compliant intermediaries of official will (2006, p. 152).”
The 1980s saw a dramatic change of policies toward favelas as political freedom returned to the country. Instead of dismantling neighborhood associations, the government used associations to distribute patronage and channel a number of basic services. As Sinek shows, neighborhood associations moved away from being organizations that challenged state policies and became vehicles for distributing resources and employment (2012, p. 36). The opportunities for patronage and clientelism were vast, since by 1981 in Rio de Janeiro, there were more than 700,000 *favelados* who needed to secure access to basic services; for example, only 6% of the city’s favelas drew their water from an officially installed system (Gay, 1994). Gay’s seminal work [1994] on how the new “democratic politics” affected favelas provides a detailed account of how neighborhood associations’ leaders negotiated public services with different candidates and were able, in some cases, to mobilize favela residents to support the politician that promised the largest bounty. If the party or politician delivered, he would be guaranteed support for the following electoral cycle.

From the late 1980’s to today, clientelism has become embedded in poor urban neighborhoods, but the overall political landscape of favelas and its neighborhood associations has dramatically changed as a result of drug trafficking and organized crime. Illegal activities, such as the famous gambling scheme *jogo do bicho*, were common in favelas, but the drug gangs that emerged in the 1980’s and strengthened their control over favelas quickly realized that neighborhood associations were the locus of political power, and therefore acted to control them; over a hundred association presidents were killed in the ensuing power struggles (McCann, 2008). The 1990s saw a spike in crime and violence across Brazil’s cities and generated a
forceful response from government forces, which continue to battle the heavily armed drug
gangs that have made favelas their refuge. Constant confrontations inside favelas led to police
brutality, and most of the time to indiscriminate targeting along with retaliation from drug gangs;
widespread human rights abuses from both the police and drug gangs became the norm.

Among other consequences of violence is the growing stereotype of favelas as places
outside the public sphere, where government authority is not present. The generalized mistrust
between the state and favela dwellers also made difficult the provision of public services since
public officials, out of fear, avoid entering many favelas. Furthermore, the high levels of crime
and violence have also helped anchor the belief that the urban poor are prisoners of drug lords.
Nevertheless, research shows that clientelistic politics and drug gangs have not only coexisted
but found ways to nurture each other. Desmond Arias (2006) shows that, for example, Rio de
Janeiro has developed a two-tiered system of clientelism in which politicians and drug gangs
negotiate over access to slums in exchange for a number of benefits for themselves and the
community, allowing some goods to “trickle down” to the poorest shantytown inhabitants. Along
these lines, Gay also emphasizes a “Robin Hood effect” where local gangs maintain their support
among favelados by funding certain community projects, providing certain services, and

Democracy also opened new opportunities for more plural organizations from civil
society to gain access to favelas and play an important role in poor urban neighborhoods in spite
of the presence of drug gangs. More importantly, as neighborhood associations lost their

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32 For a great account of how police has dealt with insecurity in favelas see Caldeira, 2000; Desmond Arias, 2006;
legitimacy as representatives of *favelados* with the rise of drug gangs, NGOs became relevant players since these could channel resources to favelas. As Chaves-Pandolfi and Grynszpan show, disillusionment with neighborhood associations and politicians, as well as the availability of resources, has spurred the creation of NGOs; most of the time these have needed the approval of local bosses, but have nonetheless become an important lifeline for the urban poor (2003). Drug gangs and militias still have to approve the presence of NGOs in favelas, but these civil society groups have opened up new avenues for participation, and some of them have pushed for a more inclusive concept of citizenship. In other words, some NGOs are currently playing the role that neighborhood associations previously played: as representatives of the urban poor demanding public services. In this respect, the emergence of civil society groups in favelas can also help explain levels of political participation, as these organizations have also provided channels for social and political engagement both within favelas, and beyond their boundaries.

The politics of survival, and ongoing confrontation between newly established neighborhood associations and the government throughout the dictatorship helped local leaders establish the associations as an important political institution which later allowed certain benefits to flow to the favelas. The avenues for participation that opened up were mainly confrontational in the 1950-1970’s but once the threat of removal practically disappeared, the avenues of participation were marked by the possibility of accessing more resources. It is no coincidence that access to resources and clientelistic practices emerged strongly as soon as democratic politics were reinstalled in the country. The incentives and opportunity structures for participation therefore
changed as democracy advanced in the late 1980s, and favelados increasingly became key players as candidates vied for their crucial support during political campaigns.

The history of neighborhood associations shows that over the past decades, various political actors have emerged in the favelas, but perhaps the only constant has been an endless negotiation between favelados and politicians over access to public services, particularly since the 1980s. This constant negotiation has had an important impact on the political participation of slum dwellers. It became clear that engaging with political actors could translate into community and individual benefits, whether it be through the demands of neighborhood associations that needed to mobilize favelados in defense of their homes, or negotiating patronage with candidates by securing votes during elections. Even with the emergence of powerful drug gangs and the appearance of a different set of interests, politics continues to be a source of resources in spite of the decreasing role of most neighborhood associations. New actors such as NGOs have become relevant channels for favelados, and are increasingly important in terms of voicing concerns over the lack of public services and security.

Political Participation and Poverty in Brazil: New Data

The most interesting and revealing data that can shed light on the politics of favelas are LAPOP 2010 and IBGE’s Census 2010. For the first time LAPOP has no missing data on the census codes at the neighborhood level in Brazil,\(^{33}\) enabling us to match respondents with the

\(^{33}\) I tried to use LAPOP 2012, but the information on neighborhood codes was incomplete making it impossible to use two waves of data.
actual location of their home. More importantly, for the first time, the 2010 Brazilian Census\textsuperscript{34} identified all the favelas (aglomerados subnormais) of the country with a neighborhood code, allowing us to know if a respondent from LAPOP lives or not in a favela. Brazil is perhaps the only country in the world that has collected these kinds of data at this geographical level and, to the best of my knowledge no one has combined these two datasets. Since we know the levels of political participation of randomly selected favelados thanks to LAPOP 2010 and Census 2010, we can show the different levels of political participation of Brazilians by location.

This dissertation has already highlighted the importance of focusing on the urban poor, while remaining attentive to the differences between the rural and urban divide. The data reinforces the need to consider this divide, but first let me present the national levels of political participation in Brazil for eight different activities (see Figure 15). The effect of mandatory voting is immediately clear, but levels of participation in other types of political activities\textsuperscript{35} are closer to other developing countries. Moreover, these figures help us put into perspective the claims of different authors about high or low levels of political participation.

\textsuperscript{34} It is the first time that the Census has conducted the massive task of identifying every aglomerado subnormal, and coincidentally the same happens with LAPOP 2010, which used specific neighborhood identifiers from the Brazilian National Census. Consequently, to the best of my knowledge, it is the first time that we actually have a census reference for slums that can be merged with political participation data.

\textsuperscript{35} Contact-Index activity is composed of 3 measures: contacting a federal deputy or senator; contacting a public institution or ministry; and contacting a local authority such as major, governor, or local deputy or vereador (each action is given a value of .333).
Are there differences in levels of participation between urban and rural populations? Figure 16 shows that while the numbers are similar for four activities—voting, contacting officials, attending political party meetings, and helping solve a problem in the community—there are also four important differences. First, the percentage of people that reported protesting doubles in cities, in accordance with the literature that suggests that greater population density can facilitate coordinated actions. Second, city dwellers are 50% more likely to have attended a session in the state chamber of deputies, which is somewhat obvious as the state chambers of deputies are typically located in large capital cities, and rural populations face barriers of distance. Third, the urban population is less likely to participate in neighborhood associations. This fact is interesting considering that neighborhood associations have played an important role in politics and welfare.
in the cities, as explained above. Finally, the number of city dwellers that have worked for a candidate or political party in a campaign is twice that of the rural population. This important difference might reflect the need to find additional sources of income to cope with poverty, among other things.

Figure 16

We now turn to focus on the inhabitants of Brazil’s cities, particularly the differences between those who live in a poor neighborhood and those who do not, as defined by the Census 2010 data. We should bear in mind that the “non-slum” category includes some poor individuals as well. Figures 17 and 18 show the same eight political activities, divided by whether the respondent lives or not in a slum. It is worth remembering that not all slum dwellers are poor and
not all of those living outside poor neighborhoods are rich. Therefore the following figures (17 & 18) are simply based on the place where a person lives. We find four contrasting results between favela dwellers and non-favela dwellers.

Figure 17

First, there is an important difference in the percentage of people that participate in their neighborhood association. Approximately 13% of non-slum dwellers actively participate in their local associations versus a 21% of slum dwellers who do so. Interestingly, in the previous Figure 17 the percentage of city dwellers that were part of neighborhoods associations was 12%, but when we only focus on slum dwellers this figure increases to 21%. Second, while we see no significant differences with regard to the percentage of people that helped solve a community problem and reported participating in political party meetings, there is a substantial difference
with respect to the percentage of people that reported having worked for a candidate or party in a campaign. The percentage of slum dwellers that worked for politicians or campaigns more than doubles, showing that slum dwellers are much more active in political campaigns than the rest of the urban population. The prevailing view about participating in political campaigns is that it stems from a sense of “volunteerism” and promoting a particular issue or policy. Nevertheless, while this is true for the urban poor, many slum dwellers participate in campaigns because they are paid to attend massive rallies or give out flyers, among other things. During my fieldwork during a political campaign for the 2012 local elections I saw first-hand the impact on household welfare that working for politicians during elections can have. Furthermore, it is worth remembering that Perlman (2010) reported that 67% of her survey respondents had actually looked for help in a government agency and that from 1969 to 2001 numerous political activities, specifically those related to party politics, had tripled. This would seem to contradict the idea, promoting by rising crime and violence, that favelados are isolated from politics.

Figure 18 holds fewer surprises. The only two relevant differences between favela and non-favela dwellers are with respect to the percentage of people that have contacted an authority and those that have attended a session of the chamber of deputies. Those who do not live in slums reported participating in these activities twice as much as slum dwellers. This comes as no surprise since we can expect more affluent and more educated people to have more access to authorities and/or politicians. Nevertheless, the percentage of people who engage in these activities is still relatively small when compared to those shown on the previous Figure. The data also shows that slum dwellers are more likely to vote than those living in more affluent neighborhoods.
Finally, before empirically testing the conventional socioeconomic model with the data in the following chapter, we should consider the status of poor people living outside favelas. The last set of Figures (19 & 20) shows the same eight political activities, but now people not living in favelas are divided between the poor (those earning less than twice the level of the minimum monthly salary) and not poor (earning more than double the minimum salary). This leaves us with three categories: those who are not poor, those poor who are living outside slums, and slum dwellers. Figure 19 shows that the poor, and particularly favela dwellers, tend to work more for political campaigns. It also underscores the importance of neighborhood associations in favelas.
Figure 19

Figure 20 below, shows few differences among the groups. Perhaps again surprisingly, the percentage of *favelados* that voted is higher. In addition, both *favelados* and the poor living outside favelas contact authorities and attend sessions of the chamber of deputies less often, as expected. Still, the overall percentages of people that engage in these activities is rather small (ranging between 2 and 6 percent of the population). It is important to keep these percentages in mind since, as I recently explained, normative views about democracy and democratization might lead some to believe that levels of participation *should* be higher; what the data has shown is that, with the exception of voting, less than ten percent of the population is engages in political activities. In other words, while it could be desirable from a normative perspective for more of
the population to participate, the fact is that those engaging with politicians (including working on campaigns), or those participating in community activities, represent a minority of the entire population.

Figure 20

The preceding sections presented a new panorama of political participation in Brazilian cities, and have shown clear evidence that, contrary to what some have argued, political participation in slums is higher than conventional wisdom would supposed, especially in light of the constraints on both collective and individual actions—from violence to indifferent public institutions and politicians.
Conclusions

In sum, this chapter showed comparative data on political participation and introduced the notion of “opportunity structure” with the aim of providing an overview of key factors that can affect the levels of political participation of the urban poor. It also presented preliminary evidence that shows that the urban poor in Brazil are more engaged in certain political activities than those living in richer neighborhoods. This evidence does not contravene the numerous examples of political rights being curtailed in Brazil or the excesses of political clientelism, as well as political abuse and violence that thousands of favela dwellers continue to suffer. However, it does highlight the need for a new focus on the politics of slums and our general understanding of political participation of the urban poor by showing that in addition to comprehending what drives political engagement we must explore the motivations of such engagement as well as on its consequences in the quality of a city and country’s democracy. In short, we must continue to examine the patterns and intensity of political participation of the urban poor together with a detailed investigation of the motives and the impact on democracy. Thinking beyond the socioeconomic status theory will enable us to understand the incentives for political participation and its consequences on the quality of democracy.
Chapter 5. Political Participation in Rio de Janeiro’s Favelas: An Empirical Analysis

Brazil’s favelas have long drawn the attention of scholars, particularly anthropologists and sociologists, who have spent decades analyzing both social dynamics within them and their interactions with better-off neighborhoods. Bryan McCann compares this wide interest in Brazil’s poor neighborhoods with a classic joke about Arctic demographics that could just as easily apply to the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. How many Eskimos live in the typical igloo? The answer is five: a mother, a father, two kids—and an anthropologist! Still, McCann notes, this would if anything undercount the other social scientists that have lived in and studied, Brazil’s favelas (2006).

As a result of this scholarly interest, a vast literature has informed our views about Brazil’s urban poor and their involvement in politics. The groundbreaking works of Perlman (1979 & 2012), Fischer (2008), Gay (1994), Desmond Arias (2006), together with those of Brazilian scholars such as Machado (1969), Zaluar and Alvito (1998), and Prado Valladares (2005), to name a few, are among the most prominent to have shaped our understanding of politics in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas.\footnote{These are only a handful of influential works among thousands of studies that have provided valuable insight on the cultural, social, and economic structures prevailing in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas. Prado Valladares has lead a great project (Urbandata-Brasil), which is a database that provides information on almost all the urban research in Brazil.} Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, there has not been a thorough empirical analysis about the determinants of political participation of \textit{favelados} or their relative levels of participation. We do not know if \textit{favelados} participate more or less than people living on the “asphalt,” as Brazilians call the better-off or formal neighborhoods.
characterized by paved roads and other services. The main reason why this is the case is that gaining access to slums presents a challenging, and often dangerous task, hampering the collection of the kind of micro-level data needed for such fine-grained analysis (Desmond Arias, 2004 & 2006; Gay, 1999; Davis, 2005).

In this chapter, I present the results of an original survey of the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro in which approximately 400 favela dwellers answered questions about their socioeconomic status, social networks and religion, as well as the political activities they had (or had not) undertaken. I also use the LAPOP 2010 and IBGE Censo 2010 data described in the previous chapters to try to determine if favelados are politically more active than their counterparts living in more affluent parts of cities—that is, if a “favela effect” exists. Using the data drawn from these three surveys, I test the claim that the urban poor are as active as people living in better-off neighborhoods, as well as the theory presented in Chapter 3, that, political participation in poor urban neighborhoods of developing countries is driven by at least four factors (social networks, religious affiliation and groups, government transfer programs, and NGO programs), which help trigger mechanisms (information, skills, and mobilization) through which slum dwellers can access resources.

A note of caution is pertinent at this stage, before presenting the empirical analysis. Throughout this dissertation I have highlighted the importance of being context sensitive when analyzing political participation, particularly when we are focusing on smaller units of analysis. Local political dynamics and structures are embedded in particular places in different degrees and certainly influence the levels of political participation. We have gained valuable insights on
these local dynamics and structures in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, as decades of research have provided evidence and have shown us that there are differences among poor urban neighborhood that have to be considered.

That being said, the theory advanced in this dissertation aims to provide a solid analytical framework through which political participation can be analyzed and further understood. Thinking beyond the socioeconomic status paradigm to examine when this paradigm may not explain participation as well as other models—considering people’s incentives to participate and the mechanisms that allow and enable participation—is fundamental for improving our understanding of politics in poor urban neighborhoods. In this respect, and taking into account differences between favelas, part of the value added of an empirical analysis of favelados’ engagement with politics is that it can shed new light on overall patterns of political participation. That is, while the inhabitants of the favela of Santa Marta or the Complexo da Mare, and the favela of Cantagalo and Cidade de Deus might use different mechanisms to participate in politics, understanding favelados’ overall patterns of political participation provides an illustrative case study of how the urban poor engage with political actors, one that suggests fruitful avenues for future research.

**Testing the “Favela Effect”**

The previous chapter presented figures for the participation of Brazilian favela dwellers derived from two recent datasets: LAPOP 2010 and IBGE Censo 2010. The possibility of
merging the LAPOP 2010\textsuperscript{37} data from Brazil, which collects relevant political participation information, and the IBGE Censo 2010 data enables the empirical analysis of what can be called a “favela effect.” That is, we will be able to know if Brazilians living in favelas are statistically more or less active than their counterparts on the “asphalt.” On one hand, the LAPOP 2010 is a random and representative questionnaire applied across Brazil, which identified the neighborhood and census code (setor censitario) where respondents live. On the other hand, the new data from Brazil’s national census (IBGE Censo 2010) identifies neighborhoods as a slum (aglomerado subnormal) based on specific criteria discussed earlier. It is possible to merge both datasets through a common neighborhood identifier to develop a model in which we control for a number of key factors that, it is believed, affect the levels of political participation. Consequently, we can empirically test the relevance of living in a favela and its effects as a determinant of political engagement in Brazil.

The following table shows information about some key characteristics of the surveyed population by type of neighborhood (favela vs. non-favela across Brazil). As expected, the level of education is lower for favela dwellers, while in favelas the percentage of respondents receiving conditional cash transfers is higher, as is the percentage of interviewees whose income does not exceed the level of twice the minimum wage. It is important to note that the LAPOP 2010 data has information for 212 \textit{favelados} or approximately 9\%\textsuperscript{38} of the entire sample (n=2,482).

\textsuperscript{37} LAPOP 2010 data is widely used to assess political preferences, perspectives, and believes as well as levels of political participation. It is also recognized for the quality of the information it provides, see for example Bateson, 2012. It is worth mentioning that LAPOP 2012 data for neighborhood codes has substantial missing data and therefore it was impossible to test this hypothesis with a second wave of data.

\textsuperscript{38} According to IBGE (2011), approximately 6\% of Brazil’s population lives in aglomerados subnormais.
Table 2: Basic Characteristics of Population by Type of Neighborhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Favela</th>
<th>Not Favela</th>
<th>Entire Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education (Mean Years)</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Mean Years)</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>51% Women</td>
<td>52% Women</td>
<td>52% Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominant Religions</td>
<td>Catholic-54%</td>
<td>Catholic-62%</td>
<td>Catholic-61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelic-23%</td>
<td>Evangelic-14%</td>
<td>Evangelic-15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional Cash Transfer benefits</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income up to 2 minimum salaries</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The LAPOP questionnaire on political participation gathers data from across Brazil on several activities for which eight dependent variables were constructed (see table 2). These are: attended a session of the local chamber of deputies; participated in a neighborhood meeting; voted in the last election; participated in a protest; worked for a political campaign; contributed to solve a community problem; attended a political party meeting; contacted politician(s) or authority(s). I chose to focus on each of the different political engagement variables instead of combining the various types of participation into an additive index because, following Bateson (2012) and Booth and Seligson (1978) different causal pathways may exist for different participation actions.\(^\text{39}\) In other words, favela dwellers may be more participative and engaged

\(^{39}\) The only exception is contacting, for which I created an index composed of 3 variables with a value of .333 each, since it can be argued that in general the same elements are required to contact politicians and/or public administrators. I created an index for contacting the different politicians (Senator, State Deputy and/or Local Deputy, Administrator/bureaucrat). A similar index was constructed and used by Booth and Seligson (2009; p. 291). 118
(or not) in some political activities rather than others, for a variety of different reasons, and I attempt to show this in the analysis which follows.

Table 3: Dependent Variables—LAPOP 2010 (Brazil)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact Index</td>
<td>Additive Index for Contacted: A) federal deputy or senator; B) local authority such as the mayor, local deputy, or governor; or C) ministry/secretary or public institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Chamber</td>
<td>Attended a public audience in local deputy chamber (Câmara de Municipal de Vereadores).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Meeting</td>
<td>Participated in meeting(s) of neighborhood association or improvement community organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Party Meeting</td>
<td>Participated in meeting(s) of political party or political movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>Voted in the last presidential election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>Participated in a protest or manifestation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Problem</td>
<td>Contributed to solving a community problem or neighbor’s problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Campaign</td>
<td>Worked for a party or candidate in the last presidential election</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To evaluate the “favela effect”—that is, the impact that being a favelado may have on the different political activities of citizens—I use multiple regression analysis using logistic estimation methods (Logit) as well as ordinary least squares (OLS). All dependent variables are binary, except for Contact Index, making Logit the appropriate estimation method. For estimating the impact of Contact Index, an OLS regression is used. Political engagement is defined by the eight different dependent variables presented above; for the control variables I use
the respondent’s socioeconomic status (SES), sex, age group (Age), years of education (Education). The independent variable of interest is whether or not a person lives in a favela (Favela). The model, then, estimates the relationship between living in a favela and eight political activities. I use the standard and most commonly used empirical model of political participation:

\[ DV = \alpha + \beta \text{Socioeconomic Status} + \beta \text{Sex} + \beta \text{Education} + \beta \text{Age} + \beta \text{Favela} + \epsilon_i \]

By incorporating the aforementioned independent variables, we can attempt to test some of the foundations of the socioeconomic status theory. Following this theory, we should expect our socioeconomic status variable (SES), as well as the variable that measures the level of education (Education) to be positive and significant across all activities since these personal attributes will enable individuals to be more engaged with the political system and its main actors. I also control for gender (Sex) since there is ample evidence showing that men are politically more active than women. In addition, the model controls for the age group of the respondents because generally older people tend to be more politically active up to a certain age point when participation starts to decline. Finally, the key variable of interest of this model is (Favela), which indicates if a respondent lives in a slum. Following the bulk of the literature, it is expected that living in a favela will negatively affect the chances of a respondent to engage with the political system and its key actors. Table 4 below shows the regression results.

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40 Bateson, 2012; Booth and Seligson, 2009; Krishna, 2008; Klesner, 2007; Patterson, 2005; etc.
The most important and original finding of these empirical models is the significant effect of (Favela) across four of the eight key political activities of LAPOP. Even after controlling for important individual characteristics, a “favela effect” emerges as an important determinant of political engagement in Brazil. At the same time, it is critical to note that the
“favela effect” differs in kind and degree of impact depending on the activity being measured, consistent with what Booth and Seligson claim about differing causal paths for political participation (1978).

The results show that there is one activity in which living in a favela has a statistically significant negative effect on political engagement: contacting politicians. It is perhaps not surprising that the urban poor are less likely to contact politicians, since this activity often requires ties with key people outside favelas. During election times, it is common for politicians to convene events in favelas, but it is unlikely that a common favelado would attempt to contact a politician directly without going through other intermediaries such as neighborhood associations.

The results also show that there is a positive and statistically significant “favela effect” for three important political activities: voting, working for a politician or party, and participating in a neighborhood association or community meeting. Interestingly, these three critical political activities generally require a higher level of community or group mobilization, as they are likely to be undertaken in a community setting or as part of a group. At the same time, there are individual incentives to carry out these activities; people are paid to work on campaigns, and many people have the opportunity to sell their votes (during fieldwork interviews numerous favelados confirmed that politicians offered approximately Reais $30 for a vote).

To measure the magnitude of the “favela” effect on political activities we can calculate the odds ratio of our logistic regression results. In the case of voting, the odds ratio analysis shows that if a person lives in a favela, the odds of him/her voting increases by 76%.
Furthermore, all else equal, the odds of a favelado working for a political campaign or participating in a neighborhood association meeting is nearly double that of non-favelados. With respect to socioeconomic status, the regression results show that more affluent individuals are more likely to participate in protests, attend public sessions of the local chamber of deputies, and engage in solving community problems more than poorer people, and also are less likely to have worked for a politician or political party. Higher levels of education also predict participation in protests and solving community problems, as well as having attended a public meeting of the local chamber of deputies.

Overall, these results contravene much conventional wisdom about the determinants of political participation; rather, this evidence suggests that poor people often play an active role in a number of political activities. Moreover, the magnitude of the effects in the regression analysis suggests that living in a favela has a strong effect on political behavior, and in some cases causes people to be more politically active. These overall findings are consistent with other qualitative studies of slums and poor urban neighborhoods that have shown that low socioeconomic status is not an insurmountable barrier to political activity. In the case of Brazil, for example, Gay (1994) and Desmond Arias (2006) have shown that favelas are not walled off from politics or from political actors; my statistical findings should be read in this vein, and as bolstering arguments for the strong political role of the favelados.

My analysis indicates the existence of a “favela effect” in political participation: put simply, where you live matters for political engagement. But what explains why some favelados

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41 Odds ratio for participating in meeting is 1.897 and for working in a campaign is 2.469.
are more politically active than others? I tackle this question in the next section, where I present hypotheses and discuss alternative explanations derived from the dissertation’s theoretical framework.

**Favelados’ Political Participation: Hypotheses and Alternative Explanations**

Not all favela residents are equally politically active. So what explains the levels of political participation, and what drives political engagement of *favelados*? The dissertation claims that in order to understand the level of political engagement of slum dwellers we need to recognize that there can be additional incentives for participation. This work has argued for the incorporation of what can be labeled as the “distributive” characteristics of political participation, which refers to the availability of resources for the urban poor to tap. I argue that there are four main factors that determine the urban poor’s political participation, working through three different mechanisms. Figure 21 below depicts how each of these four factors triggers the mechanisms that lead to particular political actions.⁴²

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⁴² Details on the framework that guides these figures can be found in Chapter 3.
The pathways depicted in Diagram 6 also point toward a number of working hypotheses, which can be empirically tested with the aim of assessing the strength of the theoretical framework put forward in this dissertation. As Dalton claims, “separate participation modes exist because political activities differ systematically in the requirements they place on the citizen and how the activities relate the individual to government” (1988, p. 36). With this in mind, and based on the abovementioned theory, I develop five working hypotheses on the variation of political participation in urban slums and three alternative explanations.
**Hypothesis 1: Social Networks—Strong Ties**

Social networks made up of family and friends generate strong ties, providing a salient coping mechanism in poor communities. However, the impact of strong ties on political participation is contested. On the one hand, these strong ties are key components of problem solving strategies (Woolcock, 2005; Harriss, 2005). On the other hand, there seems to be a negative relationship between strong family ties and political participation (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011). The more individuals rely on the family as a provider of services and transfer of resources, the lower the level of political participation. *I hypothesize that social networks that build strong ties composed by close friends and family will have no discernable impact on political participation.*

**Hypothesis 2: Membership Organizations—Weak Ties**

The weak social ties that are built by participation in membership organizations facilitate the flow of information as well as member mobilization. As the theoretical framework underscored, accessing resources in slums requires timely information, particular skills or know-how, and/or the ability to mobilize, all of which are provided or strengthened by the weak ties developed in membership organizations. The urban poor participating in organizations will have access to relevant information that flows between members, in part because brokers and politicians can easily target these organizations. *The hypothesis advanced here is that slum dwellers’ political participation will increase with the density of the weak tie networks generated by membership in organizations.* Further, as a result of the triggering mechanisms involved, the urban poor that participate in community organizations will tend to be more active in political
activities that require collective actions such as attending protests or public meetings, working in political campaigns, and activities aimed at helping the community, because members generally share both a common cause, and characteristics that facilitate collective action.\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Hypothesis 3: Religion and Religious Groups}

A person’s religious affiliation and membership in religious groups can have important effects on their level of political participation. The impact of these two characteristics occurs through information dissemination to tap resources, skills to become more vocal about issues, and mobilization. Following the existing literature, this hypothesis claims that Protestants living in poor urban neighborhoods in Brazil will tend to be more politically active than individuals that profess other faiths. Further, slum dwellers’ political participation also will increase when the intensity of a household’s religious participation increases, regardless of the faith. Specifically, \textit{I hypothesize that individuals that are active members of religious groups and Protestants will be more active in political activities that rely on collective action.}

\textit{Hypothesis 4: NGO Beneficiaries}

NGOs play an important “educating” role by providing the know-how needed to access different government services or by pointing out sources where slum dwellers can tap more benefits from political actors. As Boulding suggests, even if NGOs are not politically oriented, these can affect political participation, even as an unintended consequence, by facilitating

\textsuperscript{43} This hypothesis applies to different socioeconomic groups, as most of the literature suggests.
interactions between beneficiaries (2010). This work advances the hypothesis that favelados’ level of political participation will increase when households participate as beneficiaries of NGO programs or projects.

Hypothesis 5: Government Cash Transfer Programs

Government programs that distribute cash create powerful incentives for political participation, especially when the targeted populations are groups, such as slum dwellers, that have been historically neglected by the government. There are important incentives to participate in political activities that can help assure the flow of governmental cash transfers to poor urban households. I hypothesize that individuals that are part of government cash transfer programs will be more inclined to engage in activities that can impact the electoral arena by actively supporting candidates that give clear signals about the stability of government programs.

In addition to the working hypotheses listed above, there are three key plausible alternatives that are worth testing empirically and exploring in more detail.

Alternative Explanation 1: Favela Bourgeoisie

In his seminal 1967 work on Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, Machado da Silva argued that a “favela bourgeoisie” monopolized access to economic resources as well as political contacts, and this perspective is still prevalent. A plausible alternative explanation to explaining the variation in the level of political participation of favelados is that differences in the level of engagement
are explained by economic inequality, as more well-off *favelados* also have more access to the political system. That is, the socioeconomic argument that prevails in the literature on political engagement is replicated at the favela level. If this alternative explanation is indeed correct, then we would expect that better-off *favelados* will be more politically active than their poorer neighbors.

*Alternative Explanation 2: Neighborhood size*

Politicians are generally aware that there are high transaction costs involved in reaching a vast electorate. As the previous chapter showed, Rio de Janeiro has hundreds of favelas that vary widely in terms of population. As in any competitive electoral system, in order to reach a majority of the population, politicians need to “invest” in places with higher returns. Moreover, the Brazilian electoral system treats entire municipalities as a single district, so that elected representatives are not tied to different geographic areas of the city (Sinek, 2013). Consequently, the size of a neighborhood is key in determining whether it is likely to be targeted by politicians. As larger neighborhoods provide a larger electoral bounty, larger neighborhoods may also afford their residents opportunities to engage in political activities, especially around election time. Therefore, a second alternative explanation is that higher levels of political engagement appear in larger neighborhoods due to a greater wealth of opportunities for engagement.
Alternative Explanation 3: Crime and Violence

The burgeoning literature on the effects of crime victimization, as well as insecurity political on participation is still inconclusive. Recent empirical research has shown that individuals who report crime victimization are more politically active than comparable nonvictims (Bateson, 2012). Nevertheless, the perception that prevails is that in countries such as Brazil where high rates of violence persist, “political participation may indeed carry the real risk of physical harm due to victimization by violent crime” (Brooks, 2011, p. 9). This perspective is particularly resonant for the many Brazilian favelas where drug gangs or militias are the de facto authorities. A third alternative explanation would therefore demonstrate that individuals that have been victims of a crime are less politically active than non-victims.

Data and Methods

In order to test my hypotheses I use an original dataset from an impact evaluation of Saúde Criança (SC), a Brazilian NGO, which I coordinated between 2010-2013. The NGO provides support to families that live in favelas and that have ill children that have received medical attention in a public hospital, Hospital da Lagoa. In order to measure the long-term effects of SC, it was necessary to collect data from potentially comparable families that were not enrolled in SC’s program. The team of evaluators was granted access to the in-patient health records from Hospital Jesus, a public pediatric hospital in Rio de Janeiro. The team collected data from a total of 1,812 randomly selected children that had been hospitalized between 2005

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44 See for example: Ventura, 1994; Caldeira 2000; Perlman 2012; Desmond Arias 2006.
and 2010 and applied matching techniques to find comparable families across groups. The evaluation team designed a survey aimed at collecting relevant information on a number of household and individual characteristics that would allow them to assess the impact of SC’s methodology. The survey consisted of different modules that shed light on all the areas where SC’s program might have an impact, including a specific module on political participation. The modules collected general information about the individuals living in each household, the level of, and participation in, schooling of each family member, current employment and income, as well as access to government benefits and public programs. The modules were piloted and the survey of households was conducted between December 2011 and April 2012.

A total of 435 individuals living across Rio de Janeiro’s metropolitan area were interviewed. As the following map shows, the interviewed households are spread throughout Rio de Janeiro’s metropolitan area, with concentrations corresponding to favela locations. As this dissertation has underscored, there is a rich anthropological literature on Brazil’s favelas, particularly of Rio de Janeiro. Nevertheless, the existing analysis focuses on specific favelas to which researchers have access, and therefore our understanding of “favela politics” is limited to information from a handful of them. In spite of the improvement in security in a number of favelas in Rio de Janeiro as a result of the new “pacification” policy (Unidade de Policia Pacificadora UPP), crime and violence are still prevalent. This fundamental obstacle for data collection and research has hindered our understanding of overall patterns of political participation. The original dataset developed for the impact evaluation overcomes this obstacle, since it collected information from across Rio de Janeiro’s favelas.
Map 1: Surveyed families across Rio de Janeiro’s Metropolitan Area

The general profile of the families attended by SC, and therefore of the control group of the impact evaluation, allowed me to work with a random sample of some of Rio de Janeiro’s poorest slum dwellers. To the best of my knowledge, there is no other dataset that particularly focuses on slum dwellers in developing countries, and which captures so much information about different socioeconomic and political aspects of poor urban households. The following table provides some basic characteristics about the surveyed population.

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45 The sample is random because SC’s beneficiaries are linked to a public hospital for which access is random; the same happens with the control group.
### Table 5: Basic Characteristics of Surveyed Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female = 69%; Male = 31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>37.2 years (Mean)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education</td>
<td>7.2 years (Mean)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Protestant 50%; Catholic 28%; Afro-Brazilian 5%; Others 17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Cash Transfer Program</td>
<td>Receives transfer = 57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does not Receive transfer = 31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO Beneficiary</td>
<td>NGO beneficiaries = 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non beneficiaries = 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Size</td>
<td>4.8 family members (Mean)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Black 32%; Parda (brown) 41%; White 23%; Other 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan Area of Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>Baixada Fluminense 33%; West 27%; North 26%; South 6%;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Center 5%; Other 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of crime in last 12 months</td>
<td>Victim = 16%; Not a Victim = 84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household’s Monthly Income</td>
<td>Reais $ 1,296 (Mean)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monthly minimum salary in 2012 = R$622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brazil’s middle class is that which has at least 3 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>salaries or R$1,866.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Model and Results

The original dataset allowed me to control for several variables that other models neglect and avoid omitted variable bias as much as possible. Based on my hypotheses and alternative explanations, I build a model with different specifications to test them. The survey provides information on six key political activities, which are described in the following table.
Fundamental for testing the dissertation’s theoretical framework is the ability to operationalize the four factors that affect the level of political participation of the urban poor: Social Networks, Religion and Religious Affiliation, NGO participation, and Government Transfer participation. For the purpose of testing the hypotheses and alternative explanations, these four factors are operationalized into six variables, which are briefly described in the following table. There is no correlation between any of the six dependent variables of interest, so we can expect that participation in different activities is driven by different factors. In addition to presenting the key independent variables of interest, the table also includes five variables associated with the three key alternative explanations.

**Table 6: Political Activities / Dependent Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Variable</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description: Binary variables</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Contacted a politician or public official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Meeting</td>
<td>Participated in meeting(s) of neighborhood association or improvement community organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>Voted in the last presidential election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration</td>
<td>Participated in a protest or demonstration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Problem</td>
<td>Contributed to solving a community problem or neighbor’s problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign</td>
<td>Worked for a party or candidate in the last presidential election</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Factors Operationalized/Independent Variables of Interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Independent Variable of Interest</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>The interviewee has been a beneficiary of an NGO program (SC beneficiary).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Social Program</td>
<td>The interviewee receives benefits from a Government Social Program, including Bolsa Familia, Familia Carioca, Pension, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>The interviewee identifies himself/herself as Protestant/Evangelical.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks—Strong Ties</td>
<td>The interviewee has a low or high-density personal social network. Interviewees have a low personal social network when they report having 2 or less people they could fully trust, and a high personal social network for reporting having 3 or more trustworthy people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Religious Membership Organization—Weak Ties</td>
<td>The interviewee belongs to a non-religious membership organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Membership Organization—Weak Ties</td>
<td>The interviewee belongs to a religious membership organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Alternative Explanation Variable</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>The logged income of the household. Controls for socioeconomic status or &quot;favela bourgeoisie.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Education</td>
<td>The number of years the interviewee spent in school. Controls for socioeconomic status or &quot;favela bourgeoisie.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average household income of Neighborhood</td>
<td>The logged average household income of the neighborhood where the interviewee lives. Controls for political participation being undertaken by more affluent neighborhoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Neighborhood</td>
<td>The logged size of the neighborhood where the interviewee lives. Controls for political participation being undertaken in larger neighborhoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Victim</td>
<td>Have you or anyone in your household been a victim of crime in the past 12 months. Controls for crime and violence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

46 There is no correlation between any of the six independent variables of interest.
In order to test the five hypotheses and three alternative explanations, I use multiple regression analysis using logistic estimation methods (Logit) since all dependent variables are binary. Political participation is defined by the six different activities. In addition to the independent variables of interest and alternative explanations shown in table 7 above, I control for an additional number of factors: Sex, Age (Age), Age Squared (Age2), and Race (Black). The following general model estimates the relationship between each of the four factors that theoretically drive political participation in favelas and the six political activities:

\[
\text{Political Participation} = \alpha + \beta \text{HholdIncome} + \beta \text{IncomeNeighborhood} + \beta \text{Sex} + \beta \text{Age} + \beta \text{Age2} + \beta \text{Education} + \beta \text{Black} + \beta \text{INDEPENDENT VARIABLE OF INTEREST} + \epsilon
\]

This model enables us to test the five abovementioned hypotheses and alternative explanations by political activity. Data restrictions mean that these regressions are not capable of providing an analysis of variation over time. Based on my theoretical framework, we would expect that the drivers of political participation be other variables rather than the conventional socioeconomic status. These tests can provide us with an initial assessment of the plausibility of the hypothesized casual mechanisms. Table 8 reports the coefficients from the Logit regressions for each of the six political activities.

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47 The literature has shown that these variables can have an impact on the levels of political participation (Bateson, 2012; Booth and Seligson, 2009; Krishna, 2008; Klesner, 2007; Patterson, 2005). Women tend to be less active than men; older people tend to participate more than younger people up to a certain age; and, for the case of Brazil, Blacks tend to participate less in politics.
48 See Annex 1 for correlation matrix.
Table 8: Logistic Regression Analysis of Favelados’ Political Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Demonstration</th>
<th>Campaign</th>
<th>Public Meeting</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>Help Community</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td>-0.495</td>
<td>-0.238</td>
<td>0.454</td>
<td>-0.187</td>
<td>-0.149</td>
<td>0.103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.293)</td>
<td>(0.203)</td>
<td>(0.251)</td>
<td>(0.257)</td>
<td>(0.289)</td>
<td>(0.243)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neigh. Income</strong></td>
<td>0.187</td>
<td>-0.130</td>
<td>-0.269</td>
<td>-0.235</td>
<td>-0.683</td>
<td>-0.0908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.452)</td>
<td>(0.276)</td>
<td>(0.374)</td>
<td>(0.310)</td>
<td>(0.538)</td>
<td>(0.270)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong>&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.176</td>
<td>-0.682</td>
<td>-0.00120</td>
<td>0.0875</td>
<td>-0.656</td>
<td>-0.168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.532)</td>
<td>(0.359)</td>
<td>(0.344)</td>
<td>(0.389)</td>
<td>(0.402)</td>
<td>(0.338)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>-0.191*</td>
<td>-0.00203</td>
<td>0.00915</td>
<td>0.222**</td>
<td>0.0759</td>
<td>-0.0652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0947)</td>
<td>(0.0786)</td>
<td>(0.0777)</td>
<td>(0.0713)</td>
<td>(0.146)</td>
<td>(0.0692)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age2</strong></td>
<td>0.00209*</td>
<td>-0.000132</td>
<td>0.0000141</td>
<td>-0.00240**</td>
<td>-0.000236</td>
<td>0.000695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00105)</td>
<td>(0.000922)</td>
<td>(0.000885)</td>
<td>(0.000827)</td>
<td>(0.00163)</td>
<td>(0.000824)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>-0.0418</td>
<td>-0.00193</td>
<td>-0.000435</td>
<td>0.153**</td>
<td>0.0611</td>
<td>-0.0249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0711)</td>
<td>(0.0424)</td>
<td>(0.0402)</td>
<td>(0.0532)</td>
<td>(0.0566)</td>
<td>(0.0428)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong>&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0.557</td>
<td>0.560*</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>0.556</td>
<td>-0.408</td>
<td>0.528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.468)</td>
<td>(0.280)</td>
<td>(0.341)</td>
<td>(0.365)</td>
<td>(0.393)</td>
<td>(0.306)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Network</strong></td>
<td>0.319</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td>-0.122</td>
<td>0.289</td>
<td>0.853*</td>
<td>0.0800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.482)</td>
<td>(0.301)</td>
<td>(0.360)</td>
<td>(0.385)</td>
<td>(0.387)</td>
<td>(0.310)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Membership Org.</strong></td>
<td>-1.222</td>
<td>0.687</td>
<td><strong>0.807</strong></td>
<td>1.269</td>
<td><strong>1.875</strong>*</td>
<td>0.685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.794)</td>
<td>(0.404)</td>
<td>(0.409)</td>
<td>(0.684)</td>
<td>(0.501)</td>
<td>(0.387)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protestant</strong></td>
<td>-0.611</td>
<td>-0.0959</td>
<td>-0.0561</td>
<td>0.548</td>
<td>0.283</td>
<td>-0.370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.491)</td>
<td>(0.291)</td>
<td>(0.338)</td>
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<td><strong>Religious Org.</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.980</strong></td>
<td>0.763*</td>
<td><strong>0.858</strong></td>
<td>-0.561</td>
<td>-0.0714</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.493)</td>
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<td>0.424</td>
<td>0.410</td>
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<td>(0.288)</td>
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<td>**Govt. Cash Transfer</td>
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<td>(0.392)</td>
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<td><strong>Victim</strong></td>
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<td><strong>0.806</strong></td>
<td>0.597</td>
<td>-0.202</td>
<td>-0.256</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.521)</td>
<td>(0.328)</td>
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<td>(0.466)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>2.830</td>
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<td>-2.304</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(4.074)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pseudo R2</strong></td>
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<td>0.0881</td>
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<td>0.1006</td>
<td>0.1390</td>
<td>0.0722</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses = "* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001"; all models show robust standard errors.

<sup>a</sup> Male = 1, Female = 0

<sup>b</sup> Black = 1, Other = 0.
The results of the regression analysis are consistent with the expectation that there are diverse causal pathways to different political activities and demonstrate the complexity of politics in the slums since no single variable appears to drive the overall engagement with the political system and its actors. The following paragraphs will recapitulate the results for each hypotheses and provide some insight as to why we observe these empirical results, as well as explaining the magnitude of the effect certain factors have on political participation. The overall consequences of these results will be further analyzed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

**Hypothesis 1: Social Networks—Strong Ties**

The regression results show that the density of a person’s social networks composed of family and friends has no effect on political participation, with one exception: helping the community solve a problem. I had previously hypothesized that strong ties would have no effect on participation, but this hypothesis was incorrect in one respect: there is in fact a positive, statistically significant, and strong effect of dense strong-tie social networks on whether or not a person was active in helping his or her neighbors solve a community problem. The data shows that, all else being equal, a person with strong family and/or friend ties is 2.34 times more likely to help his/her community than someone with a low density network. These empirical results are similar to Alesina and Giuliano’s findings (2009), and are not necessarily surprising, given that numerous family members tend to live in the same neighborhoods, creating synergies for cooperation to improve the community. Evidence from poor urban neighborhoods, particularly in Brazil, suggests that family members are likely to live in the same favelas. As a result, the
motivation to undertake collective action to solve community problems is high. An additional interpretation is that if strong ties allow individuals to cope with poverty, the incentives to reach out to other actors and networks, especially those of a political character, decrease. In short, the first hypothesis suggested that we should expect that individuals with stronger ties to be less active politically. This proved to be partly correct, with the data showing a strong impact on helping solve community problems that do not necessarily involve elected authorities.

**Hypothesis 2: Membership Organizations—Weak Ties:**

The empirical analysis is consistent with the hypothesis since it shows that *favelados* that belong to membership organizations, such as unions or parents’ associations, are more likely to participate in public meetings and help their community solve a problem. In addition to being positive and statistically significant for these two activities, the magnitude of the impact is also substantial. The results show that holding others factors constant, a person that belongs to a membership organization is 2.24 times more likely to participate in a public meeting that those that don’t belong to membership organizations, and 6.5 times more likely to help solve a community problem. This indicates that, as expected, membership organizations are important mobilization mechanisms for political engagement. As people generally join an organization to pursue an objective, such as improving the school that their children attend, it is not surprising that members of such organizations are particularly active in their community.
Hypothesis 3: Religion and Religious Groups

In spite of anecdotal evidence that evangelical pastors have mobilized *favelados* for political purposes in the past years, surprisingly the results show that being Protestant has no effect on political engagement. In other words, the faith professed by a *favelado* appears to be irrelevant to his/her political activism. Nevertheless, the empirical analysis finds that those individuals that belong to a structured religious organization, such as a bible study group, are much more likely to become engaged in political activities than people that do not belong to such groups. There is a positive and statistically significant effect of belonging to a religious organization when it comes to participating in demonstrations, having worked for a political campaign, and attended public meetings. In fact, the magnitude of the impact is quite significant—being part of a religious organization more than doubles the likelihood that a person participates in these three activities, partly confirming the initial hypothesis. As almost 28% of the sample population participates in religious groups, the reach of these organizations suggests that they have a powerful potential effect in the political arena.

Hypothesis 4: NGO Beneficiaries

The regression analysis shows that being a beneficiary of an NGO has no effect on five of the six political activities. However, there is a positive and significant effect of receiving benefits from an NGO on attending public meetings. The analysis shows that a person that has been part of an NGO program is two times more likely than a non-beneficiary to attend public meetings.
The fourth hypothesis suggested that beneficiaries would tend to be more participative, yet the analysis shows otherwise. Saúde Criança provides assistance to families that suffered health shocks, and consequently does not encourage political participation among the sample population for this survey. The NGO does, however, provide monthly group discussions on diverse topics such as domestic violence and substance abuse. It is therefore intriguing, and opens up avenues for research, that NGO beneficiaries would attend public meetings as opposed to another type of political activity.

**Hypothesis 5: Government Cash Transfer Programs**

I hypothesized that individuals that receive money from government transfer programs would have more incentives to become politically active, especially in electoral activities. The regression results show that indeed individuals that receive a cash transfer from the government are twice as likely to vote and to have worked for a political campaign than those that do not receive cash benefits. The regression coefficients show a positive and statistically significant relationship for both activities. The impact of cash transfers from the government is particularly relevant, since there are at least 12.5 million families receiving *Bolsa Família*, Brazil’s government flagship conditional cash transfer (Soares, 2010). The coverage is extensive and therefore the consequences it can have on political participation are substantial.
**Alternative Explanations**

The regression results show that two of the three alternative explanations have no impact on the level of political engagement of *favelados*. The variables used to measure the first alternative explanation, favela bourgeoisie or socioeconomic status, are not statistically significant, except for years of education which has an effect on the likelihood of voting. However, the magnitude of the effect of education is roughly half that of receiving government cash transfers, for example. The overall lack of significance of the rest of the variables on the rest of the activities contradicts this alternative explanation. The empirical analysis also shows that the size of the neighborhood has no impact on the level of political engagement of a resident. Consequently, in the case of Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, we can discard the argument that suggests that residents of larger neighborhoods are more politically active because there are, in theory, more opportunities to become engaged with the political system and its actors. These results suggest that while *favelados* are as active as those living in better-off parts of the city, political activities are not exclusive to larger neighborhoods and that *favelados*, as many works suggest, are interacting constantly with the rest of the city.

The regression results show some particularly interesting results with respect to the role of crime and violence on political participation of slum dwellers. In line with the findings of Bateson (2012), who finds that contrary to general assumptions about crime victims being less politically active, there is a positive and significant effect on participation, specifically participating in demonstrations, contacting politicians or public officials, and working on a
political campaign. The magnitude of the effect on participating in demonstrations is particularly large (victims are four times more likely to demonstrate than non-victims). The reasons and mechanisms that drive this participation, as Bateson concludes, are still unclear. However, these findings are important, as they show that the urban poor are not passive, as they’ve been generally portrayed, and are trying to find channels to solve some of their most relevant grievances. Finally, race, one of the control variables, has an important effect on having worked for a political campaign. Blacks are 1.7 times more likely to have worked for a politician or political campaign than people from other races.

Conclusions

Political participation is complex and constantly evolving. This chapter has presented new evidence that speaks to this complexity by showing the often impressive level of political activity of the urban poor, and examining the different factors that can lead to diverse forms of participation. Leveraging recently available data, it shows that there is a “favela effect” with respect to specific political activities: all else being equal, people living in favelas are more likely to vote, work for a political campaign, and participate in a neighborhood association meeting than people living in better off neighborhoods. At the same time, the empirical analysis also showed evidence that living in a favela negatively impacts the likelihood of contacting politicians or public officials. This first set of results challenges the notion that the urban poor are politically apathetic, and raises important questions with respect to what determines the level of political engagement of favelados.
Using an original dataset from the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro, this chapter tested hypotheses and alternative explanations that aimed at shedding light on the factors that drive the urban poor’s political engagement. It presented empirical evidence showing that the likelihood of an urban poor resident participating in a public demonstration is largely determined by being part of a religious organization. The models did not provide any evidence as to what determines if a slum dweller contacts or not a politician or public official. When it comes to working for a politician in a campaign, being a recipient of government transfer programs and belonging to a religious group significantly impact the likelihood of engagement. Favelados that have been the beneficiaries of an NGO program, or belong to membership organizations or religious groups, will be much more inclined to participate in public meetings. With respect to the most iconic political activity, voting, we also found some interesting results. While voter turnout in Brazil is particularly high (82%), due to mandatory voting laws, favelados who receive cash from government programs are twice as likely to vote as those that don’t receive resources. Finally, the empirical evidence shows that a larger social network composed of friends and family (strong ties), as well as belonging to membership organizations (weak ties) has a positive and significant effect on participating in activities to improve the community. The final chapter of the dissertation will summarize the framework and findings of this work, and analyze the consequences of these results on the quality of democracy.
Chapter 6. Conclusions: Participation, Welfare, and Democracy

The complex process of urbanization currently swelling the slums and poor urban neighborhoods of developing countries is dramatically changing the political landscape, both nationally in these countries and at the city level. The population of urban poor continues to grow—it is expected that by 2030 half of the total urban population will be poor (UN-Habitat, 2003), and so are its demands for accessing public services and development opportunities to improve their well-being. The difficult problem of providing public services and meeting the needs of the urban poor is even more difficult as a result of the informal and illegal status of most slums. Moreover, the rise in the number of poor urban dwellers comes at a time when conventional portraits of the urban poor as marginalized, apathetic, and politically unimportant is being challenged, as new data show that the poor’s overall participation in politics is increasing substantially. This dissertation has presented a causal framework and a micro-foundational theory that can shed light on the evolving patterns of political participation of the urban poor. Specifically, I have proposed answers to the following questions: What explains the variation in political participation among the urban poor? What drives slum dwellers to become active in politics? What types of political activity are the urban poor engaging in? What are the sources and determinants of political engagement in poor urban neighborhoods in developing countries?

The Argument: Why, How, What?

The dissertation has argued that the changing political landscape and growing urbanization processes in many developing countries have made the urban poor important
players in local and national politics. Moreover, as these processes have moved forward, a number of studies and new data has provided ample evidence that the urban poor engage in a variety of political activities, complicating the notion that a person’s being politically active is only a function of his/her level of income and education. Rather than the urban poor being bystanders and ultimately apathetic to politics, the urban poor find novel ways of participating. My dissertation adds to this current of the literature by providing evidence for the participation of the poor.

In addition to this, the classic definition of political participation has often referred to activities aimed at influencing governmental decisions, leaving the more informal political and economic activities of private citizens outside the realm of participation. In the case of the urban poor, I have argued, participation can certainly be aimed at influencing long-term strategic government choices but the primary intention of political participation is to obtain resources to cope with poverty by improving individual and household welfare. Furthermore, the activities undertaken by the urban poor to cope with poverty do not necessarily conform to what is commonly seen as “political”, for example helping solve community problems, therefore we have tended to discount as political participation such activities.

In addition to presenting evidence that shows that the urban poor are politically active, this dissertation has tested hypotheses about the drivers of political engagement of slum dwellers. On top of the basic statistics that show that in certain cases and activities the poor are more active than their more wealthy counterparts (see chapter 2), the dissertation has emphasized that the urban poor have additional incentives to become politically active, calling into question the
conventional wisdom about the drivers of political engagement. By focusing on the routine political actions that often characterize the everyday lives of poor urban slum dwellers in developing countries, it emphasizes that there are certain characteristics of poor individuals and households that influence their political behavior. An important driver of participation is the possibility of tapping resources to cope with poverty and economic uncertainty, which aligns well with clientelistic political systems and politicians that are ready to hand out such resources in exchange of political support. This combination of an urgent need to cope with poverty, on the one side, and the possibility of getting resources from politicians on the other side, enables what I refer to as the “distributive” characteristics of political participation. That is, instead of thinking about political participation in terms of expenditure of time and resources as well as opportunity costs, as much of the literature suggests, we must consider political participation as a way to obtain resources distributed by politicians. In other words, the urban poor have salient incentives for becoming active in the political arena, since certain activities might translate into resources that help them cope with poverty.

The dissertation found a “favela effect” – that inhabitants of shantytowns are more likely than their counterparts living in better off neighborhoods to participate in certain political activities- and, in addition, presented a theoretical framework that can help us better understand how political participation takes place in urban slums across the developing world. Chapter 3 argued that the analysis of political participation in poor urban neighborhoods of developing countries must take into account at least four factors (social networks, religious affiliation and groups, government transfer programs, and NGO programs), which can trigger mechanisms
(information, skills, and mobilization) through which slum dwellers can generally access resources. These four factors and three mechanisms, together with the analysis of the incentives to participate, form a causal framework that can be empirically tested.

**Main Findings: A “favela effect” and pathways to participation**

I have underscored the need to improve our understanding of politics and political behavior in poor urban communities since the study of more obvious political elites has received much more attention than the less glamorous groups of people. Furthermore, as the dissertation has shown, in spite of conflicting accounts of the importance of the urban poor, the reality is that they are central actors in the politics and the economy of cities (Saunders, 2010, p.70). Based on months of extensive fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the use of data from three main sources, including an original dataset I developed which includes interviews of over 400 carioca slum dwellers, I presented two econometric models to test both the “favela effect” and the hypotheses that derive from the theoretical framework.

Based on the fieldwork and the empirical analysis, the dissertation demonstrates that in Brazil, there is a “favela effect” in political participation. For the first time, to the best of my knowledge, a common neighborhood identifier in two datasets allowed us to identify respondents living in Brazil’s favelas, which in turn enabled an empirical test that showed that in a number of activities –voting, working for a politician, participating in neighborhood meetings- *favelados* actually participate more than people living in more affluent neighborhoods. This finding is particularly relevant since it provides new evidence to two important issues. First, it
demonstrates that the urban poor can be more politically active than other city dwellers. Second, it shows that the levels of political participation can be influenced by the location of a person’s residence. That is, evidence from Brazil shows that it matters where a person lives.

In addition to showing that favelados can indeed be more politically active than those living on the “asphalt”, the dissertation further investigated the motivations that drive individual political participation. That is, it is not sufficient to know that slum dwellers participate; we need to understand what makes a favelado more politically active than other dwellers living in similar conditions. In line with Booth and Seligson (1978) I have argued that there are multiple pathways to political participation, and that every specific action might be caused by a different set of factors. In the case of poor urban dwellers in developing countries, the evidence from my fieldwork, as well as the empirical tests, showed the following. First, all else being equal, slum dwellers who belong to membership organizations are almost three times more likely to participate in a public meeting or work to solve a community problem than those who do not partake in such organizations. Similarly, favelados with strong social networks composed of friends and family are more likely to help solve a community problem than those slum dwellers with less dense social networks. Favelados who are part of religious groups such as Bible study groups are at least two times more likely to become engaged in political activities than people that do not belong to such groups; however, contrary to what I originally hypothesized, religious affiliation does not seem to play a role in determining a person’s level of political engagement. Another relevant finding is that individuals who receive a cash transfer from the government are twice as likely to vote and to have worked for a political campaign than those that do not receive
cash benefits. Lastly, the empirical analysis also demonstrates that former NGO beneficiaries are also more likely to attend public meetings than favelados that have not received benefits from NGOs.

**Bounds on the dissertation: the theoretical framework and the results**

There is a fundamental question that naturally follows from the theoretical framework and its results: how well do the theoretical framework and the results travel? In other words, how useful is the analysis of mechanisms (information, skills, and mobilization) and factors (social networks, religious affiliation and groups, government transfer programs, and NGO programs), and how representative of slums across the world are the empirical results? Can they travel beyond the metropolitan area of Rio de Janeiro?

Unfortunately there are no simple answers to these important questions. As I have emphasized numerous times throughout the dissertation, every single favela or shantytown has political dynamics of its own, making all-encompassing theories inadequate. The reason why I underscore that this dissertation provides a theoretical framework is that as such, it provides enough structure to enable theory building, but remains flexible enough to allow for variations. The framework provides a clear outline of the necessary mechanisms that lead to political participation, and suggests the analysis of factors that lead to these mechanisms in the context of slums and poor urban neighborhoods. However, the possible factors that can trigger the mechanisms may vary across countries, and the framework can be adjusted for this. Some factors will reach across national boundaries, such as the presence of social networks of family and
friends or religious groups; on the other hand, there are factors that might not be relevant in other places, such as government cash transfers, which are not government policy in all countries, or NGOs, which might not be present in a significant number of slums. Additionally, there can be other factors that play a role in specific contexts. For example, in the case of Brazil, ethnicity does not play a significant role in metropolitan areas, yet there is evidence showing that ethnicities are fundamental for political engagement in other countries (e.g. Nelson, 1979; Posner 2005).

The patterns and factors identified in this dissertation, using this theoretical framework, can shed light on the politics of urban poverty, and provide us with a clearer understanding of the urban poor’s interaction with the political system. Attention to these patterns can help mitigate a significant problem in our study of the politics of the urban poor: the variability of data completeness from place to place. While one can always wish for more and better data, the reality is that, as the dissertation highlighted, there are significant limitations that must be acknowledged. The lack of data on the urban poor and slums is one of the main reasons that our general understanding of political behavior in poor neighborhoods of developing countries remains incomplete. Nevertheless, the dissertation’s results make important contributions, since they show causal relations in addition to acknowledging processes through which these relations take place. The dissertation’s theoretical framework and results build on important bodies of anthropological, political, and sociological analysis from across the world that have provided relevant evidence and which serve as an important basis to support my claims. As chapters 2-4 have shown, there is strong anecdotal evidence that the mechanisms and factors that proved to
play a key role in Rio de Janeiro are also important in poor urban neighborhoods in cities across Uganda, Argentina, Thailand, India, South Africa, Chile, and Ecuador, to name a few.\textsuperscript{49}

Finally, it is important to refer to the potential linkages between the dissertation’s framework and the protests that shook dozens of cities across Brazil –June/July 2013, in which hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to protest against a rise in public transport costs, then quickly shifted their attention to protest Brazil’s prevailing corruption, and express their disapproval of the government’s $12 billion expenditure for the soccer stadiums that will host the World Cup in 2014 despite the significant unmet needs in country’s public services. Is there something that this dissertation’s arguments and findings can tell us about these protests that were covered by all major international media? The survey data\textsuperscript{50} from the protests shows that the average protester was not the typical Brazilian. The data showed that 43% of the protesters have at least a college degree and their family income was well above the national average. In short, the protestors that took over the main squares and government buildings across the country were better-off than the rest of the Brazilian population, which shows that in certain contexts, the socioeconomic model of political participation is highly relevant. This does not contravene or dismiss the arguments and findings advanced in the dissertation; on the contrary it strengthens both the argument and findings for at least two important reasons.

First, the prevalence of better-off protestors does not contravene the argument and findings since both the socio-economic status theory and my theoretical framework are not

\textsuperscript{49} See chapter 3 for more details.
\textsuperscript{50} The survey was conducted in the capital cities of 7 states, with a total of 2002 interviewees. See: http://g1.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2013/06/veja-integra-da-pesquisa-do-ibope-sobre-os-manifestantes.html
mutually exclusive but complementary; that is, the applicability of each will vary based on the context. More importantly, the results of the hypothesis that tested for a “favela effect” (see chapter 5, Table 4) show that living in a favela does not have an effect on the likelihood of participating in a protest, and actually show that both income and education are statistically significant and therefore important determinants of an individual’s possibility of protesting. In other words, as my model shows no favela effect for protesting, it makes sense that Brazilians with higher levels of education and income were more likely to participate in the June/July 2013 protests.

Second, and perhaps more important for fully understanding the determinants of favelados’ political participation, at the same time that these protests against government transport tariffs and corruption were taking place, some favelas of Rio de Janeiro also experienced important mobilizations. The military police raided the favela of Mare with the argument that as a result of the massive protests, groups of delinquents from Mare had robbed vandalized property. The brutal military police intervention ended with the death of 10 people, and days later over five thousand inhabitants of the favela of Mare took the streets to protest against the continuous deadly police interventions. The protests were organized by local NGOs, Evangelical pastors who were able to mobilize Mare inhabitants, as well as neighbors that spread the word of the protest. A few days later, at least two thousand favelados from Rocinha and Vidigal in Rio de Janeiro also took the streets to protest lack of public services; similar events
The events of June/July 2013 are an illustrative example of the complexity of political participation and how this important component of politics is evolving as new groups increase their relevance within the political system. The protests lead by better-off Brazilians show that the socioeconomic model of political participation can help explain some of the most numerous protests. However, we cannot disregard and/or underestimate the importance of the mobilizations in the favelas, since these too had important consequences, albeit not at the national but at the local level.

**Opportunities for Future Research:**

The dissertation has suggested several potential avenues for future inquiry. Perhaps the most important undertaking is gathering more data about the urban poor and their political behavior. As the dissertation has argued, there is a rich body of anthropological and sociological literature that has shed light on the politics of specific poor urban neighborhoods or slums, yet we lack survey data that can allow us to explore political behaviors across cities and countries. The second avenue for future research involves testing the dissertation’s theoretical framework in other countries. This would entail further exploring the effectiveness of the three mechanisms (information, skills, and mobilization) in contexts other than Brazil, and investigating the circumstances in which each of the four factors (social networks, religious affiliation and groups, government transfer programs, and NGO programs), play prominent roles. A third potential research agenda is further exploring the relationship between crime victimization and political

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participation. The empirical results of the dissertation showed, in line with recent research (Bateson, 2012), a positive and significant effect of victimization on a number of political activities (protest, working for a political campaign, and contacting politicians or public officials) that needs to be further explored. A fourth area of future research, and perhaps the most important, is to examine the set of paradoxes that exist as a consequence of the increasing levels of political participation of the urban poor, particularly participation in an institutional setting dominated by clientelism and weak democratic institutions. I discuss these paradoxes in greater detail in the following section.

**Implications for Democracy: Paradoxes of the Poor’s Participation**

The truism that “the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is” (Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 1) is widely accepted because in theory political participation can allow citizens to exercise their voice, and therefore make politicians more responsive to their needs (Verba, et al., 1995). More recent research claims that higher levels of democratic participation—measured by voter turnout—positively affects the distribution of wealth (Mueller & Stratmann, 2003), and that more participation leads to more representativeness, and therefore to more evenly distributed processes of development (Seligson, Smith, and Zechmeister, 2012). This is not necessarily incorrect, but this dissertation has emphasized that we need to think beyond voter turnout to avoid misleading generalizations about the quality and consequences of democratic political processes. Put simply, measuring levels of political participation in different political activities will not provide us with a complete picture of democratic processes and the
quality of democracy; we must take into account the motivations, incentives, and other factors that drive participation of different groups, as well as the avenues through which participation takes place.

The dissertation began by highlighting that the most common interactions between poor citizens and politicians are characterized by clientelistic relationships, which directly affect the motives and consequences of political participation. A burgeoning literature referred to in the dissertation is documenting and analyzing these interactions and consequences. My analysis of the motivations and determinants of political participation, and the avenues through which this takes place, uncovered at least two important paradoxes that should be explored further in light of the impact that these can have on the overall quality of democracy in developing countries.

The first paradox is related to the classic literature on political participation, which views participation as a normatively good and positive activity, while implying that the clientelistic nature of participation in the context of the slums and poor urban neighborhoods is undemocratic, since it distorts democratic processes. In other words, the more participation there is in a context of clientelism, the quality of democracy can decrease because clientelism can tarnish the procedural fairness of certain democratic processes (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007) and because clientelism often entails the misuse of public resources, and the creation of selective access to resources which others are normally excluded from.\(^\text{52}\) Future research thus must not solely focus on the levels of political participation in different activities, but should center on who is participating, the underlying incentives, and the means through which participation

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\(^{52}\) See for example Auyero, 1999; Roniger, 2004; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007.
occurs, since these have important consequences for the quality of democracy. That is, we must not assume that higher levels of participation will strengthen democracy; we must carefully analyze the process of participation itself, since the way in which participation occurs can have substantial consequences for citizenship and democracy.

The second paradox is intimately related to the first one, and has to do with the potential for temporary improvement of individual and household welfare as a result of the distributive characteristics of political participation. While the poor may have expected that the promise of democracy would bring about improvements in their welfare, they have been mostly neglected in terms of access to services and opportunities for long-term development. That is, it seems that “the economic virtues of democracy” indeed seem to be “another figment of the ideological imagination” (Przeworski, et al., 2000, p. 271). However, the clientelistic nature of political participation has opened the possibility of accessing resources that can, at least temporarily, help the poor get by, and has created important incentives for participation in processes that theoretically support democracy. Paradoxically, then, it is not the democratic processes themselves that have—insufficiently, but partially—fulfilled the promise of improving the welfare of the poor, but “distortions” in such processes that can eventually affect the quality of democracy. More research is required to better understand both the responsiveness of politicians and governments to greater levels of political participation by the poor, and the potential role of “distributive” characteristics of political participation on individual and household welfare.

In conclusion, I have presented a theoretical framework and new evidence that contributes to our understanding of the urban poor’s political behavior. By improving our
knowledge of the motives and factors that drive the political participation of poor citizens living in the urban slums and neighborhoods of developing countries we can also start to untangle the aspects that impact the quality of democracy and the exercise of full citizenship. Perhaps if we continue to investigate political participation and the urban poor, deepen our comprehension of its effects on the quality of democracy, Adriana—the single mother living in a favela in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro who exemplifies how many poor citizens interact with their political systems—will be able to exercise her full citizenship instead of having to sell her vote and give out fliers for a hot meal and used clothes for her children. If untangling the complexity of political participation and its relation to the quality of democratic processes can help make elected officials more responsive to her needs and those of her community, then it is an agenda that it is certainly worth pursuing.
### Annex I. Correlation Matrix

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* indicates correlation at the 0.01 level. The correlation coefficients are so small that, even when there is a statistical it does not have an effect.
Bibliography


