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International Political Science Review 2009 30: 67

DOI: 10.1177/0192512108097057

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Competing Visions of Democracy and Development in the Era of Neoliberalism in Mexico and Chile

JUDITH A. TEICHMAN

ABSTRACT. This article takes as its starting point the current scholarly concern with democratic quality, poverty, and inequality. It notes the tendency of political leaderships at the federal level in Mexico and Chile to exclude political pressures that contravene their neoliberal imperatives. It develops this argument with specific reference to the contestation over conditional cash transfer programs. Research reveals the existence of two competing visions of democracy and development at the root of this conflict. The neoliberal perspective is supported by political-technocratic leaders who developed these programs, while the community development perspective is found among their civil society critics. The community development perspective challenges the key tenets of the neoliberal viewpoint, making its exclusion from policy development and monitoring understandable. However, this exclusion may give rise to increased criticism of the responsiveness of democratic institutions and to less than efficacious policy outcomes.

Keywords: • Democracy • Development • Mexico • Chile • Poverty

Introduction

The debt crisis of the mid-1980s triggered an economic transformation in Latin American countries with profound social and political repercussions. Neoliberal policy prescriptions adopted through the 1980s and 1990s have produced neither equitable prosperity nor widespread poverty reduction. This failure has coincided with public disillusionment with democratic deliberative institutions, a development that some observers have linked to citizens' belief that their voices were not being heard by public officials (Hagopian, 2005: 319, 325, 343). Hence, scholarly concern for democracy has expanded from preoccupations with elections and civil liberties to a variety of other issues related to the actual responsiveness of governments to

citizens and ways in which citizens can ensure that responsiveness (Diamond and Morlino, 2005: xi; Rueschemeyer, 2004: 76). As civil society organizations have become vociferous and at times militant in their opposition to neoliberal policies because of their perceived negative social implications, scholarly interest in social policy has increased (Avritzer, 2002; Stahler-Sholk et al., 2007).

This article focuses on the efforts of civil society organizations in Mexico and Chile to influence a particular type of social policy outcome: conditional cash transfer programs.¹ The discussion, however, places these programs within the broader context of neoliberal policy imperatives – imperatives that have shaped the varying receptiveness of states in Mexico and Chile to civil society pressures. Poverty and inequality, preoccupations for civil society groups for some time, are now among the major concerns of development experts and scholars alike. Conditional cash transfer programs have become the best known anti-poverty strategy in the region.² I argue that in both Chile and Mexico, countries with differing economic, social, and political experiences, contending visions of democracy and development are at the root of the struggles over these poverty programs. Further, the similarities between these two visions, labeled the “neoliberal” and “community development” perspectives, across the two countries, are striking. In this section, I outline the main facets of these visions as ideal type constructions. I provide substantiating data in the sections that follow, especially in the fourth and fifth sections of the article. Findings suggest the presence of competing political cultures: one powerful and in charge of social policy, the other considerably weaker and excluded from the national domestic policy process.

Conditional cash transfer programs are, of course, just one policy area and the evidence presented is not meant to suggest that participatory channels are absent or that civil society organizations have failed to shape public policy in other policy arenas. However, the criticisms raised by the opponents of these programs fall within a category of demands residing outside of the Chilean and Mexican states’ “imperatives.” States remain open to those groups whose demands they can readily assimilate within their predominant policy imperatives and usually closed to those they cannot (Dryzek, 1996). For the last two decades, the overarching imperative of the ruling elites of Mexico and Chile has been market (neoliberal) reform – a package of policies that has sought to reduce the role of the state in the economy.³ While, early on in the market reform process, neoliberal reformers assumed that the market was the best solution to poverty, they now recognize that the most excluded groups require targeted programs if they are to be incorporated into the market.

In Mexico and Chile, many political leaders and technocrats at senior levels of government, particularly those in finance ministries, share this revised neoliberal policy imperative. The neoliberal vision contains a strong dose of the Schumpeterian belief that the act of governing must be confined to elites who, unlike the general public, are not driven by irrational influences and have a clear sense of reality (Schumpeter, 1950: 257, 261). Hence, citizen participation occurs largely at election time, while policy design and monitoring are the exclusive purview of elected political leaders and high-level bureaucrats/technocrats – the former because they can be held accountable at election time and the latter because they have the training to properly develop public (social) policy. Governments may consult citizenry they consider highly qualified. The neoliberal predisposition to a minimalist definition of democracy sees this as highly conducive to stable

economic growth. Since the market is the most efficient allocator of resources, the neoliberal view is predisposed (indeed, obligated) to exclude groups and demands that challenge this imperative, particularly those making demands that would require interference with market mechanisms and/or involve an increase in the role of the state. An overriding concern for macroeconomic stability also drives the search for cost effective ways to address social problems. Technocratic (quantitative) knowledge predominates in the development and assessment of policies. Given the assumption that market-led economic growth will eliminate most poverty, the neoliberal perspective believes that social support programs, bestowed not as a right of citizenship but according to technocratic criteria, can and should be kept to a minimum. Neoliberal policymakers are predisposed to focus this support on individuals and families, not communities, because of the belief that this support is the most efficient use of state resources and contributes to macroeconomic stability.

The community development perspective, found among civil society group leaders, involves a variety of demands not readily assimilated by the predominant state imperative. It defines democracy in terms of citizen impact and policy outcome that improves people's lives. Hence, consultation, without actual impact, is not enough. Furthermore, participation in policy design and monitoring must occur on the part of both poverty-oriented organizations *and* the citizens of poor communities. This perspective shares a number of important similarities with alternative development, rights-based development, and feminist critiques of mainstream development (Friedmann, 1992; Molyneux and Lazar, 2003; Pieterse, 2001). Like these perspectives, it sees the poor as central agents in their development (not the market) and attaches great importance to the efficacy of initiatives developed with the use of local knowledge (the knowledge of people living in poor communities). Therefore, poverty is not a technical matter measurable by income level but is multidimensional and shaped by local contexts. This perspective tends to view the state, if truly participatory, as a key ingredient in improved social welfare, particularly in mitigating the negative social impact of the market. Finally, the community development perspective attaches great importance to community activities in the achievement of social cohesion and social improvements. Indeed, this perspective sees individual and family as inseparable from the community and argues that to be successful a program must give attention to both.

In both Mexico and Chile, civil society organizations have played a role in democratic transitions, and they continue to play important roles in popular struggles to mitigate social hardship. As argued below, those facing the greatest difficulties in having their demands addressed are usually organizations whose demands challenge neoliberal imperatives.

I obtained much of the material presented in this article through a series of open-ended interviews of country and multilateral (the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank) officials, and civil society activists in Chile and Mexico. I also interviewed International Food Policy Institute officials involved in the Mexican program. Multilateral senior officials included vice presidents, division chiefs, senior and lead economists. Twenty-eight interviews of government officials and civil society leaders were carried out in the case of Chile and forty for Mexico. Country officials included individuals at the ministerial rank and two levels beneath this rank. For Chile, country officials included officials in the Social Planning Ministry, the Finance Ministry, the Office of the Presidency and

the Social Solidarity and Investment Fund (FOSIS). For Mexico, country officials included officials in the Finance Ministry, the Social Development Ministry, political leaders in President Fox's transition team, and officials in Mexico's social development fund, the National Institute for Social Development (INDESOL). Civil society leaders interviewed included leaders and past leaders of the organizations in Tables 1 and 2, among them the leaders of some of the more active member organizations of the umbrella associations.⁴

Chile: the Legacy of Dictatorship, the Neoliberal Imperative, and Pressure for Civil Society Participation

Following seventeen years of military rule, the election of a civilian government in 1990 brought to power a centre-left coalition (the Concertación), which, while accepting the basic features of the neoliberal model put in place by the military, promised growth with equity. Substantial poverty reduction, propelled by healthy economic growth rates, has been overseen by a leadership composed of highly trained technocrats, people with degrees and graduate degrees, often in economics, from well-known US universities.⁵ These individuals honed their academic/technocratic skills in think tanks in order to challenge the economic policies of the military government's University of Chicago-educated economists (Silva, 1991). Many of the new civilian leaders, having experienced the hyper-mobilization of the Popular Unity period (1970–3), sought to avoid popular mobilization, which they believed would push public spending upward, erode business confidence, and reduce economic growth. At the same time, the country's steady economic growth rates reinforced commitment to the market model. The legacy of a centralized state with power heavily concentrated in the executive (the presidency and the Finance Ministry) and a weak Congress facilitated a closed policy process. By law, the Finance Ministry has power over all programs with budget implications, making it, in effect, a super-ministry with control over all public policymaking, including social policy (Teichman, 2001: 90). Meanwhile, Congress is weak, particularly in fiscal matters, able to approve or reduce expenditures but not able to increase or redistribute them (Siavelis, 1997: 328).

Following a drop in civil society organizational activity in the aftermath of the political transition, the mass base of the Concertación and organized labor agitated through the 1990s for better protection for workers and for more equitable health care, with only limited success in achieving their goals (Sandbrook et al., 2007: 165–71). One study of citizen participation suggests that Chilean citizens have been ever more excluded from the political arena and access to political power, with both parties and social movements becoming increasingly sidelined by government (Taylor, 1998: 122). Another presents evidence that President Lagos (2000–6) cut short the process of consultation on health policy, causing considerable disillusionment among civil society groups (Rindefjäll, 2005: 104–6, 125, 133). Civil society groups' questioning of the principle of private health care and labor demands that threatened to increase the cost of labor challenged cherished neoliberal precepts. Kurtz argues that the stability of Chilean democracy itself is based on the quiescence and political exclusion of the rural poor – also a necessary component of competitive export agriculture dependent upon cheap labor (Kurtz, 2004).

Nevertheless, the Concertación has provided some improved channels of access for its citizenry. The administration became more open to a gendered policy agenda through the establishment of National Service for Women (SERNAM), and it brought about improvements in the labor code which benefited women and criminalized intrafamilial violence (Franceschet, 2005: 95, 128). However, organizations representing middle-class women have been much more successful at gaining access to SERNAM than has been the case for those representing poor and indigenous women whose demands incorporate the particular social dimensions of their exclusion, class and race (Franceschet, 2005: 9; Richards, 2006). Meanwhile, there is evidence that policymakers devalue the input of poor and indigenous women because they are not educated (Paley, 2001; Richards, 2006). Indigenous women argue that the state's neoliberal project shapes its desire to allow the exploitation of resources in Mapuche territory, while poor women's demand for state-supported redistributive measures confronts a neoliberal imperative that rejects the high degree of state intervention necessary to address the problem (Richards, 2006: 9, 21).

With the return to civilian rule, international financial support for civil society organizations declined, and most became financially dependent upon the government's Social Solidarity and Investment Fund (FOSIS). Established in 1990, FOSIS reflected the Concertación leadership's initial support for community-initiated projects and a desire to stimulate the active participation of local communities (Raczynski, 1995: 216). However, over the decade of the 1990s the focus of FOSIS's programs moved away from community-based projects toward ones targeting individuals and families. One of the complaints of civil society organizations was the government requirement that they implement programs exactly as designed by FOSIS bureaucrats without any opportunity to provide feedback that might improve programs. By 2002, however, some middle FOSIS officials were beginning to seek ways to open up the system to NGO advice. Most senior officials, on the other hand, were strongly resistant to even this minimal involvement in policy.

Although Chilean government officials were asked about their views on civil society participation in social policy in general and in conditional cash transfers in particular, they almost invariably gave responses that applied to *all* policy. And although Finance Ministry officials demonstrated the most marked negative position on civil society participation in policy, some highly placed Social Planning Ministry officials also shared this attitude. In the words of one of them:

Nongovernmental organizations cannot be involved in the design of policy. They have their own particular interests. Many of them are based outside the country and they bring these outside interests to bear on policy. They are not accountable except to their own boards. The job of policymaking is that of the elected official.

If the upper level of the state bureaucracy was not a particularly hospitable site for policy persuasion, Congress was even less so. Civil society groups complained that Congress people generally dismissed their concerns.

By the late 1990s, the Concertación government faced growing criticism from civil society organizations for its failure to afford them greater access to the policy process. Initially, the government of President Ricardo Lagos moved to address

these concerns when it accepted a loan from the Inter-American Development Bank to strengthen civil society. The loan led to the establishment of a Citizen's Council, and activists saw this development as offering an opportunity for them to help shape policy; indeed, the loan agreement states explicitly that one of the purposes of the US\$14.5 million loan is to foster active citizen participation in public policies (IADB, 2005). However, the government never acted upon the recommendations of the Council and most civil society representatives resigned from the Citizen's Council in frustration, convinced that the government had abandoned any interest in civil society participation in public policy. In fact, the government took only US\$8 million of the US\$14.5 million loan. A new Law for Citizen Participation, providing a variety of measures to strengthen civil society and promising state support for civil society participation, had its origins in this earlier initiative. It holds out hope for an increased opening up but many civil society organizations remain skeptical. These critics point to the vagueness of participatory mechanisms and the threat to organizational autonomy stemming from the myriad legal requirements that organizations must meet, if they are not to risk losing their legal status (Coalición por la Participación Ciudadana, 2006).

Great hopes have been pinned on current President Michelle Bachelet, who campaigned on promises to create a participatory democracy and address the social needs of Chileans. However, the regime's accomplishments have fallen considerably short of popular expectations, and it has faced an onslaught of civil society protests and strikes by students, environmental organizations, indigenous groups, and labor. On at least two key policy initiatives, reform of the pension system (a major source of poverty for the elderly) and reform of Santiago's transportation system (upon which the low-income public depends), her government failed to consult civil society organizations advocating for the poor. Her advisory council for pension reform consisted of economists, including one member of the political right who had served under Pinochet (Estrada, 2006), while the transport reform plan came from a neoliberal think tank headed by her finance minister (Vogler, 2007). Given that the latter proposed halving the number of buses, the director of the country's oldest poverty organization (Hogar de Cristo) declared the transportation plan to be "the worst humiliation of the poor in a long time" (Vogler, 2007). Civil society organizations' rejection of the notion of self-financing for the city's transportation system and their demand for a return to a state-funded redistributive pension system, however, are demands that the neoliberal imperative could not readily accommodate.

Mexico: the Technocratic Legacy and Challenges to the Neoliberal Imperative

Mexico's transition from authoritarian single party (Institutionalized Revolutionary Party, PRI) rule and move toward neoliberal reform were both events accelerated by the debt crisis of the early 1980s. That crisis thrust to predominance technocratic policymakers, most sporting graduate degrees from American universities (Centeno, 1999: 141). By 1989 one of them, Carlos Salinas, occupied the presidency and the stage was set for an increasingly far-reaching market reform program. With the transition to electoral democracy in the year 2000, President Vicente Fox, a strong adherent of the market model, retained many of the previous regime's technocrats, particularly in the Finance Ministry.⁶

With the debt crisis, as access to state resources diminished because of state streamlining and sharp reductions in state expenditure, the worker and peasant organizations that had backed the PRI began to withdraw support. The earthquake of 1985 and the failure of the government to respond adequately produced an upsurge of grassroots organizing, particularly in Mexico City. By 1988 thousands of grassroots organizations were backing opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the federal election. By 1997 the PRI had lost control of Congress. In 2000 Vicente Fox's "Alliance for Change," an alliance dominated by Fox's Popular Action Party (PAN), was elected with strong support from a wide array of civil society organizations, most of whom expected to be able to influence his policy agenda.

Unlike the Chilean case, the Mexican political transition involved substantial weakening of the presidency and a rise in congressional activism, since the strength of the presidency had resided not in formal constitutional powers but in the disintegrating informal corporatist/clientelist arrangements of the PRI. Furthermore, the opposition made its earliest inroads against the PRI in local and state elections in the 1980s and early 1990s (Rodríguez and Ward, 1995). Numerous community-based movements with economic, social, and environmental demands contributed to the erosion of PRI power at the municipal and state levels (Haber, 2006; Stolle-McAllister, 2005; Williams, 2001).

Despite the fact that Vicente Fox's centre/right administration was strongly committed to the neoliberal imperative, it initially appeared willing to grant policy access to civil society organizations, many of which were highly critical of neoliberalism. In the period leading up to the election, thousands of civil society organizations were consulted extensively on social policy, resulting in a report produced by Fox's social policy transition team that recommended, among other things, civil society participation and evaluation of social programs. In addition, Fox did appoint people who had been active in the NGO community to positions within his new government. He appointed Cecilia Loría, senatorial candidate for the left-wing Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in 1997 and an activist in NGOs involved in women's issues, head of INDESOL, the government agency responsible for allocating funds to nongovernmental organizations for social programs. He also appointed Rogelio Gómez Hermosillo, former head of the NGO Alianza Cívica and former member of the board of directors of the NGO Convergencia, head of the country's conditional cash transfer program. Human rights activist María Claire Acosta was appointed subsecretary for human rights in the Ministry of External Affairs. Despite this auspicious start, the opportunity for civil society organizations with social policy concerns to influence policy declined as the administration wore on. The notable exception was INDESOL. The Institute's director was, according to all, instrumental in keeping the organization open to civil society input. Unlike FOSIS, INDESOL encouraged policy feedback from civil society organizations and regularly requested modifications to programs in response to the advice it received.

As in the Chilean case, those making social policy demands that challenged the neoliberal imperative tended to have the greatest difficulty in obtaining policy access. Most of the social policy recommendations of the Fox social transition team were ignored, such as those calling for the major restructuring of social policy including the establishment of universal programs in health and education, beefed up infrastructure, and productive investment programs to

provide employment – all policies not only posing a fundamental increase in the role of the state but also manifesting a notable lack of faith in the ability of the market to solve pressing social problem. New members of Fox's social policy transition team were appointed to the cabinet. Two years into the Fox administration, even strong *Foxistas* were becoming disillusioned with the president's commitment to civil society participation. Ricardo Goveia, a former leader of a poverty-related NGO and a member of Fox's social transition team, stated publicly that, in his view, the government had no interest in strengthening the role of civil society in public policy (*Reforma*, September 27, 2002). By 2004 it was clear that the administration had also rejected its social transition team's call for civil society participation. The Law for Social Development rejected NGO participation in favor of a technical committee, composed of academics and government officials, charged with monitoring social policy.

The Fox administration's rejection of an agreement negotiated with civil society organizations on a human rights bill is a further indication of the discomfort that the administration felt with the incorporation of social rights. Discussions between the government's Intersecretarial Commission on Human Rights and human rights organizations produced, in early 2004, a consensus on a new human rights bill. In the negotiations, civil society groups, including *Convergencia*, one of the organizations covered in this article, pressed for and achieved an expanded concept of human rights that included social rights (labor rights and measures prohibiting discrimination against women). However, the president's legal office removed the social and labor rights aspects of the bill before sending it on to Congress. Similarly, trade unions have struggled against increasing pressure for labor flexibilization. Although women trade unionists, for example, have been able to persuade the leftist opposition PRD party to incorporate their gender concerns, the likelihood of the government incorporating any of their proposed labor protection measures is remote (Brickner, 2006: 68). To do so would undermine the labor flexibility seen as crucial to export competitiveness.

One event may have been pivotal in triggering disillusionment among former Fox administration enthusiasts for civil society consultation. In the first year of the Fox administration, a large number of NGOs were invited to comment on the budget proposal. This attempt at consultation, according to one observer, was such a fiasco that many Fox administration officials became convinced that civil society involvement in most policy was not possible. In the words of a senior member of the Fox transition team:

What we took away from this experience was that civil society organizations cannot really participate in policy. The majority of nongovernmental organizations have good intentions but low professional abilities. There is a great deal of technical knowledge [required to understand the budget process] and they just could not grasp the process. It became clear that NGOs just do not have the capacity to participate.

Throughout the Fox years, civil society organizations continued to react at the national, state, and local levels, oftentimes intensely, to policies perceived as threatening to communities and livelihoods. Highly mobilized groups have had some success but largely in areas the state could incorporate within the predominant policy imperative. Small grain producers, hit hard by the opening of the Mexican market to imported grains, were successful in obtaining an increase in the federal

agricultural budget in 2001, but tariff reductions on grain remained intact (Acuña Rodarte, 2003). While during the Fox administration the Organization of Peasant Ecologists in the state of Guerrero secured the release of two of their members from prison, the government reversed the suspension of logging in the region in 2001 and deforestation continues (Cienfuegos and Carlsen, 2003) – giving priority to market driven resource-based growth. Under President Fox, at the federal level, environmental NGOs witnessed a decline in both consultative fora and policy influence (Díez, 2006: 161–2). However, NGOs concerned with HIV/AIDS, with strong financial backing from the World Bank and support from international NGOs, have continued to have access to and an impact on policy (Torres, 2006). Civil society organizations have often found more opportunity for organized resistance and exerting influence on policy at the state and local level through local Planning and Neighborhood Councils. However, there is evidence of differential access and influence based on social class (Guarneros-Meza, 2007: 106–7).

Like other groups that have challenged the neoliberal imperative, critics of conditional cash transfer programs in both Chile and Mexico have also faced considerable difficulty in being heard and influencing policy outcome. An examination of the struggles over these programs reveals important similarities in the two cases despite the fact that they have had divergent economic and social experiences over the last twenty years.⁷ There are also political contextual differences: while Chile was a consolidated neoliberal democracy by the time the government introduced its conditional cash transfer program, the Mexican program spanned its authoritarian and democratically elected regimes and debate surrounding the program occurred during the transition process. Nevertheless, in both cases there is a sharp tension between the technocratic/neoliberal vision of democracy and development and the community development one.

Chile's Conditional Cash Transfer Program: Policy Exclusion in a Consolidated Neoliberal Democracy⁸

In 2002, incoming President Ricardo Lagos announced Chile Solidario. A program aiming to confront extreme poverty, it focused on the country's poorest 225,000 families. It originated in the concerns of two sets of technocrats: the administrative unit within the Finance Ministry responsible for expenditures (the Office of Budget Management) and a group of officials in the Social Planning Ministry. Budget officials were especially driven by the neoliberal imperative. Faced with the fallout from the 1997 Asian crisis, their primary concern was keeping expenditure under control; they saw conditional cash transfer programs as a way to use public monies more effectively. Officials in the Social Planning Ministry wished to find a way to reduce extreme poverty without creating welfare dependency. At the same time, both sets of technocrats recognized the need for state action since extreme poverty figures were no longer declining despite economic growth. The program provided for the transfer of a small sum of money to the female heads of households contingent upon their fulfilling no less than fifty-three conditions, involving, among other things, school attendance and regular health checkups. Described as the "perfection of targeting," the selection of participant families by means of a detailed income survey known as the "Ficha CAS" reflected the highly technocratic nature of the program. Preparation of the program included

a consultative seminar involving academics with established credentials on poverty issues, personally known to the president. Only one person connected with one of the poverty-oriented civil society organizations (Hogar de Cristo) was included. This discussion, however, focused on the issue of whether there would be a simple transfer of cash or a transfer combined with psychological-social support in the form of social workers assigned to beneficiaries of the program. The seminar did not address the major issues of concern to civil society organizations.

All four Chilean civil society organizations (see Table 1) were critical of the new program. One of the most critical was Acción. It claimed that its member organizations arose in response to the human rights violations of the military dictatorship and were among that regime's most active opponents. It was also the most vociferously critical of the current regime's neoliberal economic model despite being widely viewed as closely tied to the Concertación government. The other umbrella organization, ASONG, was established under the protection of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean during the period of military rule. The member organizations of ASONG tend to be older, internationally recognized humanitarian organizations, such as the Red Cross and long-standing domestic and often religious organizations. The first civilian government of Eduardo Frei established the National Foundation for Overcoming Poverty to build a society-wide consensus on how best to reduce poverty and inequality. Originally it was comprised of representatives from a cross section of society (labor, poverty organizations, government, the private sector), but private sector representatives exited the organization over their opposition to increased labor protection and measures to reduce inequality. The Foundation then reconstituted itself as an independent organization administering a variety of poverty-related programs. Hogar de Cristo, established in 1944, is the oldest poverty organization and is widely recognized as the organization with the greatest expertise in poverty programs, a reputation that secured its representation at the consultative seminar.

TABLE 1. *Civil Society Organizations Concerned with Poverty in Chile*

Name	Year estab.	Type	No. of affiliates	Main concerns	Politics
Acción (Chilean Assoc. of NGOs)	1990	Umbrella	70	Poverty, inequality, community, rural development	Critical left, Concertación
ASONG (Assoc. of NGOs Consultative to the UN)	1982	Umbrella	38	Poverty, youth, women, relief work	Independent
National Foundation for Overcoming Poverty	1996	Individual	NA*	Poverty, inequality, community development	Critical left, Concertación
Hogar de Cristo	1944	Individual	NA	Poverty, marginalization, children, youth	Concertación

Note: *NA: Not applicable.

Source: Interviews, civil society organization documents.

All saw their activities in both running poverty programs and lobbying government on social policy as integral to the democratic political process because these activities contributed to good policy outcomes and helped to hold government accountable. These civil society leaders not only directly challenged the neoliberal concept of minimalist democracy and elite-generated knowledge, but three of the four (Acción, ASONG, and the National Foundation) also challenged the neoliberal faith in the market. They were, for example, highly critical of the “one size fits all” aspect of the Chile Solidario program, arguing that its rigid fifty-three conditions neglected both the particular circumstances faced by different families and the fact that local conditions can vary markedly among poor communities. One ASONG leader with long experience in local development projects was particularly blunt about the possibility of success for such a “top-down” approach: “if you do not involve the local population and become aware of local conditions your program will fail.”

However, it was not enough just for program designers to be aware of local conditions. Civil society leaders diverged significantly from neoliberal technocrats on the issue of *who* ought to participate in policy development. For the former, poor citizens must be personally involved in the program and policymakers must allow the perceptions of the poor to shape policy outcome. This was particularly necessary for the beneficiary selection process. The use of fine quantitative distinctions in income (technocratic knowledge) to select beneficiaries would result in a failure to incorporate all of the neediest and might well include people not thought by their local communities to require such assistance. Failure to incorporate local knowledge would not only produce poor policy outcome, but would also be likely to generate intra-community conflict. Civil society leaders privileged local knowledge (knowledge of the real life situations faced by poor people) over quantitative data, conceptualizing poverty as multifaceted, as involving more attributes than simply income. Hence, Hogar de Cristo called for the involvement of “local experts” (people without university degrees, resident in the poor community) in program development and implementation, and Acción recommended that local community representative committees oversee the selection of program beneficiaries (Acción, 2002: 11; Hogar de Cristo, 2002: 2).

Civil society leaders also criticized the program for the absence of complementary community development projects, which were necessary, they argued, to establish social networks, social cohesion, and employment opportunities. This demand directly challenged the neoliberal faith in the market; it was argued that the market supplemented by a targeted transfer program would not be enough to lift the extremely poor out of their misery. For Hogar de Cristo the government had to even go beyond community development projects to ensure the pursuit of a macroeconomic growth program sufficient to generate employment for program beneficiaries (Hogar de Cristo, 2002: 4). And finally, civil society leaders of Acción, Hogar de Cristo, and the National Foundation regretted what they saw as the increasingly targeted nature of Chilean social policy since 1990 and the abandonment of community projects based on local initiatives. They saw this development as abandoning a cherished value in Chilean daily life: that of community spirit and solidarity.

By 2003 most, though not all, Finance and Planning Ministry officials took a position opposing civil society participation in policy development and monitoring of Chile Solidario.⁹ Two senior government officials expressed the view that the

organizations which were pressing for involvement in Chile Solidario were not “civil society” because they were largely composed of the non-poor operating programs funded by the government. According to this view, civil society was in fact already participating in the program. The remarks that follow reflect a concept of participation quite distinct from the one held by the community development perspective. In the words of one top official: “We see civil society participation in Chile Solidario as occurring when the family signs the contract with the state making a pledge to achieve certain goals. This is participation of the poor in the program.” Excluded from policy input, Chilean civil society organizations nevertheless continued to lobby the authorities. All submitted documents to the Ministry of Social Planning outlining their objections to the program.

While the Chilean Solidario program was being discussed among World Bank and Chilean Finance and Social Planning Ministry officials, in preparation for the 2003 loan, parallel discussions were also occurring between these World Bank officials and the leaders of the civil society organizations involved with poverty issues.¹⁰ Chilean civil society organizations gained a sympathetic hearing from World Bank officials who supported both a civil society advisory committee on policy design *and* local community monitoring of the program. However, the government resisted World Bank pressure for civil society participation, arguing that Congress was the rightful place for public involvement in policy. Reiterating the concern about the absence of NGO accountability, one irritated senior official exclaimed: “We are responsible for the Bank loan for this program, not the NGOs, so why should they be involved?”

Acción, the Foundation for Overcoming Poverty, and Hogar de Cristo made a joint proposal to the World Bank and to the Social Planning Ministry that they carry out a citizen’s evaluation of the Chile Solidario program. While the World Bank was supportive and willing to provide the necessary funding, the failure of the Planning Ministry to support the initiative meant that the loan fell through. The World Bank eventually convinced Chilean officials to agree to civil society monitoring and evaluation of the program and this was written into the loan conditions (World Bank, 2003: 9). The civil society organizations viewed this as only a partial victory, however, since they were not to be involved in policy design and Planning Ministry officials formed part of the evaluation team. Some of these organizations prepared to carry out their own independent evaluation of the program.

Mexico’s Conditional Cash Transfer Program: Political Transition and the Challenge to the Neoliberal Imperative

Mexico’s conditional cash transfer program was an important issue during the 2000 election campaign. PRI President Ernesto Zedillo had introduced the Mexican program, *Progresá*, in 1997. But despite the avalanche of criticism directed against the program, President Fox (2000–6) decided to maintain it, renaming it *Oportunidades*. Like the Chilean program, it provides cash payments to the female heads of extremely poor households in exchange for keeping children in school and taking them to health clinics. By 2002 the government had extended the program, originally targeted at 400,000 families, to over four million families.

Like the Chilean program, the Mexican one arose out of concern for a key neoliberal policy imperative. Technocrats in the Finance Ministry and in the

National Population Council were preoccupied with fiscal challenges in the wake of the 1995 economic crisis. Like their Chilean counterparts, these technocrats viewed state subsidies as wasteful because the benefits were not sufficiently targeted at the extremely poor. They also placed a high value on the use of technocratic criteria in the beneficiary selection process. The development of an index of marginality made possible the selection of the poorest communities. Then, detailed surveys allowed for the selection of beneficiary families within these communities in accordance with whether incomes fell below the value of a basic food basket. The arrangement for ongoing outside evaluation of the program that could be used to support the argument that the program should continue also reflected this technocratic preoccupation with “hard” data.¹¹ Critics, particularly leaders of civil society organizations, expressed moral revulsion at a program evaluation process that involved the use of a control group (10 million Mexicans) who received no Progresá support and whose progress could be compared with those who did (*Reforma*, December 27, 2000; December 28, 2000). The controversy fed growing antagonism toward “technocratic” approaches to poverty alleviation, which, according to critics, ignored important social and ethical dimensions. The Fox social transition team, having engaged in extensive consultation with thousands of civil society organizations on social policy, strongly recommended civil society involvement in both the program and its monitoring.

There are four major civil society organizations in Mexico concerned with social policy (Table 2), all of which see their organizations as having an important role in both democratization and social policy development. All had concerns about Progresá, although their levels of criticism varied. FAM and Convergencia, both on the political left, were the most critical. Many of the organizations belonging to FAM were established in the wake of the 1985 earthquake to pressure the government to provide housing for the poor. The FAM supported the left opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the 1988 national election. By the mid-1990s, however, it had turned its attention from housing to more general

TABLE 2. *Civil Society Organizations Concerned with Poverty in Mexico*

Name	Year estab.	Type	No. of affiliates	Main concerns	Politics
FAM (Forum for Mutual Support)	1992	Umbrella	250	Housing, poverty, inequality	Left/PRD
Convergencia (Convergence of Civil Society Organizations for Democracy)	1990	Umbrella	120	Human rights, social rights	Left/PRD
CEMEFI (Mexican Center for Philanthropy)	1998	Umbrella	7300	Promotion of a culture of philanthropy	Right
Fundación Miguel Alemán	1984	Individual	NA	Rural development, research	PRI

Source: As for Table 1.

issues of poverty and inequality. The other umbrella organization on the political left, *Convergencia*, is primarily concerned with human rights and approaches the poverty issue from the perspective of social rights as an aspect of human rights. CEMEFI, with some of Mexico's major corporations (*Televisa*, *Bancomer*, *Banamex*) as members, claims as its mission that of promoting a culture of philanthropy and strengthening organized citizen participation in solving problems. Although CEMEFI claims to be politically independent, some of its leaders have been closely associated with the PAN and it is widely perceived as right leaning in its political orientation. Finally, family and friends of past Mexican president Miguel Alemán established the *Prista* Fundación Miguel Alemán. It oversees rural support programs and a variety of research activities in health, tourism, and the environment. It was the least critical of *Progres*a/*Oportunidades*, perhaps because a PRI government established the program.

These four organizations have a history of acting together, going back to the early 1990s during the twilight of PRI authoritarian rule when they struggled against the PRI's hostility to civil society and began to lobby for the country's "Law to Promote Civil Society Organizations," passed in 2003.¹² This common struggle forged a strong bond through constant dialogue and led to the emergence of a certain commonality of perspective on the points identified below. Because Mexico's political transition involved an invigorated role for Congress, leaders of these organizations saw lobbying congressional representatives as an important activity. However, there was a consensus among these civil society leaders that Congress people and parties (particularly the PRI) were reluctant supporters of civil society participation.

Mexican poverty NGOs demonstrated greater variability in their attitudes than Chilean NGO leaders. The two left-leaning organizations (*FAM* and *Convergencia*) saw democracy, civil society participation, and efficacious policy outcomes for the poor as inseparable. The other two organizations placed more weight on participation as an important goal in itself. CEMEFI accorded civil society particular importance in ensuring democratic accountability and in mitigating corruption. Notably, views about what constitutes "civil society" also differ. *FAM* and *Convergencia* are strongly and vociferously critical of neoliberalism and reject the notion (espoused by the other two organizations) that entrepreneurs should also be considered part of "civil society." All, however, saw Mexican civil society weakness as a problem for Mexican democracy, arising from a cultural legacy that had strongly discouraged civil society participation in politics and policy.

There was also a consensus that civil society participation was especially important in poverty policy issues. For all except the Fundación Miguel Alemán, for which consultation appeared to be sufficient, strengthening democracy meant civil society involvement in the *design* of public policy. This perspective included the right-leaning CEMEFI, one of whose leaders went so far as to declare that "civil society should *determine* policies." As in the Chilean case, the reasons for this insistence on close involvement in policy stemmed from the fact that *Oportunidades*, in many respects, did not seem to be up to the task of solving poverty. Most Mexican civil society leaders had little faith in the market to lift people out of poverty and envisioned an expanded role for the state that went well beyond promoting education and health care through cash transfers.

Like their Chilean counterparts, Mexican civil society leaders identified the lack of sufficient attention to community development programs as one of

the key inadequacies of the conditional cash transfer approach. Once again, even civil society leaders associated with the political right, presumably the most likely to view the market model as efficacious, also took up this point. In the words of one former leader of CEMEFI who had also been a strong Fox supporter: "Oportunidades is not a real program to overcome poverty. To do this you must organize civil society and strengthen societal groups. You must develop both human capital *and* the social fabric at the same time." There were, however, differences over the concept of community development. While all emphasized the importance of productive activities because of their employment generating consequences, for CEMEFI this meant the provision of micro-credit to stimulate business activities. For FAM, it meant the development of cooperative productive activities. Nevertheless, all agreed that a finely tuned targeted transfer program, in the absence of state-supported employment generating activities, was not enough.

Leaders of three of the four organizations (FAM, Convergencia, and CEMEFI) echoed one of the main concerns of Chilean NGO leaders – the failure to incorporate local knowledge through involving the poor in the program selection process. They too feared that the use of finely tuned income data to select beneficiaries would result in errors of inclusion and exclusion. They were especially concerned about the dangers of intra-community conflict. According to one FAM leader, "Oportunidades destroys the social fabric of communities. It creates conflict. I have seen this happen." Indeed, a study carried out by IFPRI, the organization charged with the official evaluation of Progreso, provides evidence of the divisive impact of the program. One qualitative report, buried in the nine-chapter IFPRI evaluation, revealed the negative impact of the program on community cohesiveness and the sadness of community members arising from a program that gave benefits to some who, as far as members of the community could see, were no more deserving than those who had been excluded (Adato, 2000: 13–14, 18–19). For FAM and Convergencia the solution was some form of local citizen involvement in the beneficiary selection process to ensure both a fair and effective system of beneficiary selection and community agreement that those incorporated into the program were, in fact, the most in need of help.

Meanwhile, Mexican officials, including one former civil society leader, stood firm in their rejection of civil society organization involvement in any aspect of the program. In the words of one of them: "Civil society organizations are not and should not be involved in policy design. Yes, they should be listened to. But that is all. They are incapable of seeing the bigger picture." The sentiments expressed by Mexican officials reflected the neoliberal vision that sees policymaking as the exclusive purview of educated elites. In a comment reminiscent of that made by a Chilean official, one official stated: "Civil society participation in Oportunidades occurs when beneficiaries commit themselves to attend health clinics and keep their children in school." Mexican officials argued that civil society involvement in beneficiary selection would perpetuate or create clientelism and that the use of quantitative criteria was the fairer and more transparent method of choosing beneficiaries. They flatly rejected the relevance of local knowledge.

Civil society organizations lobbied their own government (the Ministry of Social Development) and Congress. They apparently received a sympathetic hearing from some Congress people, particularly members of the PRD. They also complained bitterly to the World Bank civil society personnel. The scenario was

similar to that in the Chilean case. The World Bank eventually offered US\$20 million to carry out a civil society consultation on Oportunidades but the Fox administration rejected the offer. The Mexican administration also refused to take up Ford Foundation support for the same purpose. According to some civil society leaders, the stiffest resistance to civil society consultation came from the Finance Ministry.

The criticisms made by Mexican civil society organizations resonated with many Congress people, with many academics, and with members of Mexican society more generally. Criticism of PRI rule merged with criticism of neoliberalism for many PRI opponents, and that included criticism of past social policy. There is evidence in the Mexican case that social policy began to respond to this barrage of criticism, showing concern for a wider spectrum of the poor and for community development. The Fox administration introduced a new program, Habitat, to address the poverty of the elderly through community participation. Oportunidades incorporated very small poor communities in their entirety in order to avoid the sort of community divisions identified by the program's critics. A new health insurance program, Seguro Popular, goes beyond the extremely poor, aiming to provide health care to those in the informal sector. This contrasts with the Chilean case, where civil society has apparently been less successful in persuading policymakers to increase the weight of community-oriented programs.

Conclusions

In Chile and Mexico, states resisted pressure from civil society organizations for participation in policy development when they perceived the demands as threatening to their neoliberal policy imperatives. While all civil society organizations may be expected to complain bitterly when they feel their demands are not being met, those, like the civil society organizations covered in this study, whose demands are not readily accommodated by the dominant imperative face greater and more consistent resistance. These organizations both advocate for the poor and have considerable experiential knowledge of poor communities. As such, they identify what is probably neoliberalism's most daunting challenge: that of ensuring equitable prosperity.

Struggles over conditional cash transfer programs, between their technocratic supporters and civil society opponents, have at their core distinct approaches to the meaning of democracy and the requirements for development. For opponents of these programs whose views approximate to the community development perspective, democracy is largely instrumental. They judge its quality in terms of the ability of civil society to shape policy outcome. Opponents of conditional cash transfer programs challenge the neoliberal imperative on a number of fronts. They believe that minimal targeted interventions will fail to reduce poverty sufficiently, that stronger interventions by the state are necessary, that local knowledge is superior to technical knowledge in making programs efficacious, that the uneducated poor must be actively involved in poverty policy, and, finally, that community development must be a central component of the development project. The neoliberal vision has a great deal of difficulty incorporating these ideas. It sees democracy in minimalist terms and views the participation of civil society organizations and local community members in policy design and monitoring as inappropriate because effective policy requires technocratic expertise. It sees

the market as the most effective mechanism of poverty reduction and resists more interventionist solutions perceived as more costly. The technocratic architects of the conditional cash transfer programs argue that the NGOs that seek involvement in these programs represent particular interests, lack the necessary professional know-how, and are not accountable. The neoliberal vision sees the poor as ill equipped to participate in policy development.

In Mexico, where there is greater poverty and the neoliberal model has met with considerably less success, and where communities and livelihoods continue to be shattered by various aspects of the neoliberal policy prescription, civil society criticisms have had greater saliency. Some new social policy initiatives suggest an attempt is being made to address many of the concerns raised by the community development perspective. These developments have been facilitated by the fact that Mexico's political system is more decentralized and its federal Congress more active, affording more access points to civil society groups.

In Chile, on the other hand, the community development vision appears to be more firmly excluded. The Chilean political system is more highly centralized, and the technocratic policymakers more entrenched and more determinedly resistant to civil society involvement in policy. The relative success of the Chilean economic model, in terms of steady economic growth rates and poverty reduction, are no doubt important factors in convincing policy elites of the correctness of their vision. At the same time, the tenaciousness of community development proponents is notable, particularly given the country's much lower level of poverty and the generally more positive impact of the market model in reducing poverty. Opposition activity is on the rise and it may yet secure a more participatory democracy and revisions to some of the major features of the current overarching imperative.

After two decades of neoliberal restructuring and the predominance of market-oriented technocratic policymakers, the community development perspective not only persists but also boasts a core of dedicated adherents. Conditional cash transfer programs are, admittedly, only one policy type. However, these programs have become a central focus of the discussion over poverty reduction. Despite widely divergent social, economic, and political experiences, struggles over policy in both Chile and Mexico reflect the tension between these two perspectives. This struggle suggests political cultures deeply divided over both the meaning of democracy and what is required to reduce poverty. The findings presented here would appear to confirm survey data that also identify a split in fundamental beliefs in Mexico and Chile between citizens who define democracy as "liberty" and others who perceive democracy as substantive policy outcomes in terms of social improvements (Klesner, 2001: 123). The civil society leaders examined in this study are driven by a concern to improve the lives of the poor and, for the most part, do not believe that is possible without a different form of democracy – one more deeply participative than is currently the case – and a more activist state. The neoliberal and community development visions are not easily integrated. An opening up to the community development perspective could well mean inroads into some of the most cherished tenets of the neoliberal vision, a development that neoliberal proponents will resist. The failure to open up to the community development perspective, however, may risk increasingly harsh criticism of the responsiveness of democratic institutions and the less than efficacious policy outcomes in poverty reduction.

Notes

1. I deal with a specific type of civil society organization: the nongovernmental organization (NGO). NGOs are nonprofit organizations, with varying degrees of financial dependence on governments. They provide services for, or advocate on behalf of, third parties. Some observers argue that financial dependence on the state has been responsible for a decline in NGO activism (Taylor, 1998: 116). In Latin America, the prospect of state containment of dissent through co-optation is an ongoing challenge for oppositional groups seeking to improve the lives of the disadvantaged. On this, see Haber (2006).
2. The following countries now have such programs: Nicaragua, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Peru. The World Bank has also been promoting these programs in other parts of the global south (interviews, three senior-level officials, World Bank).
3. These policies include trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation, reduction/elimination of the public deficit, and labor flexibilization (reforms such as the greater freedom to hire and fire geared to reduce the cost of labor). There are, however, very important differences in the extent to which governments in the two cases have incorporated social objectives, as illustrated by the fact that Chile has a considerably higher level of social expenditure than Mexico and its social programs cover a much higher proportion of the population (Teichman, 2008: 448).
4. As confidentiality was a condition of these interviews, only descriptive, nonidentifying characteristics are included. I conducted interviews with multilateral officials in English. All others were conducted in Spanish.
5. Between 1990 and 2003 poverty declined in Chile from 36.8 percent of the population to 18.7 percent. However, inequality has remained high.
6. For example, Francisco Gil Diaz, architect of the country's trade liberalization, became minister of finance, and Santiago Levy, a former top-level finance official, became head of the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS).
7. In contrast to Chile, Mexico suffered a severe economic crisis in 1995 and economic stagnation thereafter. Poverty has remained widespread.
8. Chile is a consolidated neoliberal democracy in the sense that there is a consensus among members of its elected political elite, across the political spectrum, on the efficacy of the neoliberal model.
9. The information in the remainder of this section comes from interviews with four senior officials, two each from the Finance and Planning ministries, and from two World Bank officials involved in the program. A notable exception to the generalization that senior officials were opposed to civil society consultation was Minister of Social Planning Cecilia Pérez, who had been director of the National Foundation for Overcoming of Poverty before taking over the ministry. In her brief tenure (from 2002 to March 2003) she made efforts to expand civil society participation. In January of 2003 the ministry appears to have been contemplating the establishment of working groups to stimulate civil society participation involving Hogar de Cristo and the municipal government in Chile Solidario (*La Segunda*, January 9, 2003). However, this idea was dropped once Pérez left office.
10. A number of smaller organizations, including organizations representing indigenous interests, were also involved.
11. The organization contracted to do the evaluation was IFPRI. Its positive findings are widely regarded as having been instrumental in President Fox's decision to keep the program.
12. This law provides them with a legal framework, a variety of tax benefits, and with the commitment that strengthening civil society organizations would better enable them to participate in policy.

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Acknowledgments: The author is grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada for its financial support for this project. The author would also like to thank the three anonymous external reviewers for their helpful comments.