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NGOS, TURNOUT, AND THE LEFT: A SUB-NATIONAL
ANALYSIS OF BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

This paper is designed to examine the role non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play in politics. Previous evidence suggests NGOs mobilize communities to challenge existing patterns of authority or that they serve hand-in-glove with existing elites. We reconcile these two contradictory findings by identifying an important contextual feature that helps determine the extent NGOs mobilize or anesthetize. We argue a community's level of education influences not only whether people vote but *how* they vote. We employ a cross-sectional data set from Brazilian municipalities that allows us to estimate the relationship between NGOs, voting turnout, and electoral results. We find that although there is a significant statistical interaction between literacy and NGOs when explaining voting turnout, the effect is not substantively important. The interaction between literacy and NGOs is, however, an important consideration in determining how people vote: in communities with relatively low literacy rates, a robust NGO presence significantly increases the left's electoral fortunes. Our findings imply the influence NGOs have on society is more political than social.

INTRODUCTION

Are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) neutral arbiters, facilitating the development of social capital and civil society without favoring one political persuasion over another? Or, do NGOs carry with them an ideological baggage that influences how their constituency votes? These questions are growing in importance since NGOs have become a significant presence in the developing world. Whether responding to natural disasters or providing technical training in agriculture, NGOs are increasingly relied on for a wide variety of services. Citing figures from the Union of International Associations, Davies notes that from 1854 to 2007, the number of International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) increased from six to over 60,000 (Davies 2008). The numerical proliferation at the local level has also been important. In terms of aid, \$3.5 billion was channeled through NGOs in Africa at the end of the 1990s which represents just under 20 percent of total aid to the continent (Chege 1999, cited in Hearn 2007; p. 1096). In some countries NGOs are providing services to more than a third of citizens (Devine 2006 ; p. 79-80). This “third sector” represents an important alternative or compliment to both government and existing societal institutions.

But more than just service providers, the arrival of NGOs may spark political change. NGOs may compete with governments, may weaken clientelistic relations by providing alternative sources for public goods, may have transformative effects on members through the formation of social capital--or they may merely reinforce the status quo through their co-optation or capture by existing elites. Recent scholarship suggest that NGOs can have all these effects--and more--with a vague assertion that the specific nature of any NGOs impact is a function of context. (Clarke 1998; Mercer 2002).

In this paper, we examine the political consequences of NGO activity, focusing on citizens' attitudes and behavior. We focus on three questions: First, does participation in NGOs empower

citizens and encourage engagement more broadly? For this question we focus more specifically on whether NGOs increase or decrease turnout in their communities. Second, do NGOs transform political attitudes and voting behavior, or do they strengthen the positions of existing elites? To answer this second question we focus on the impact NGO activity has on voting behavior. Third, do these effects vary with context? In particular, we examine NGOs' impact where levels of human capital vary.

Using a sub-national data set on NGOs in Brazil, we examine the political effects of NGOs. We measure the impact of NGOs on turnout and support for leftist parties, and test for interactions with levels of human capital (literacy). We find that in municipalities with relatively low levels of education, NGOs have a positive effect on turnout and the percentage of the population supporting leftist candidates. In relatively more educated populations, NGOs have little impact on participation. Although statistically significant, one can question their substantive importance when explaining turnout; In terms of substantive importance, NGOs matter when explaining voting behavior. In communities where literacy is relatively low, a growing NGO presence is associated with significant gains by the left. While NGOs in relatively uneducated communities are statistically associated with higher voting turnout (something we often associate with social capital and civil society), their more tangible influence is political.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section one, we describe the current literature on NGOs and the questions that remain unanswered. From those questions we derive several hypotheses. In section two, we introduce the data and model. In section three we report the results. In section four, we discuss the stability of the results and offer several possible explanations. In the conclusion, we highlight the limitations of our study and its implications.

PREVIOUS WORK

The literature on NGOs and their impact on policies and outcomes as diverse as health, education, poverty, hunger, and disaster relief is both descriptively rich and voluminous. Despite the volume, the relative number of articles and books on the direct political consequences of NGOs is small. One theme that stands out, however, is the diversity of conclusions reached regarding the impact of NGOs on politics. Broadly, the literature can be classified into scholarship that sees NGOs as agents for political mobilization and change, and scholarship concluding that NGOs merely strengthen the status quo.

One set of findings emphasize the principal agent relationship between NGOs and their patrons, suggesting NGOs discourage political change. Broadly, this literature argues NGOs limit their scope of activities to those favored by donors, and that these limits are most constraining when the primary client or donor is government. For example, Anthony Bebbington, a long-time observer of NGO activity, has consistently voiced concerns over whether NGOs serve the population specified in their mission statements or the donors who financially back their efforts. As early as 1993 in an edited volume with John Farrington, the two authors question whether NGOs answer the call of their intended beneficiaries or instead represent the concerns of their donors or urban-based elites (Bebbington and Farrington 1993). In later work, Bebbington observed a secular trend in which NGOs involved with poverty alleviation progressed through an evolution that has gravitated away from political action. According to Bebbington, there has been a “certain depoliticization of poverty, in which poverty discussions are increasingly separated from questions of distribution and social transformation...”(Bebbington 2005; p. 706). Many case studies reach similar conclusions. Surveying activity in Brazil, Garrison (2000) finds that as NGOs evolve, they bring with them a more technocratic discourse that serves to legitimize the neoliberal Brazilian state. Gray finds that NGOs in Vietnam have functioned more like government sub-contractors whose motives and methods are not all that distinct from the state (Gray 1999).

An equally compelling literature reaches the opposite conclusion: NGOs are agents of political mobilization and change. Early studies on NGOs and democratization represents the bulk of work extolling the virtues of NGOs and how they raised the level of civil society to challenge authoritarian regimes (Hojman 1993; Diamond 1994; Lambrou 1997; Silliman and Noble 1998). A key component of this work is the conceptualization of NGOs as mobilizers of previously excluded groups. NGOs were seen as important actors in expanding the number of voices and interests in the process of democratization, organizing pro-democracy interests that had not yet been heard: students, women's groups, farmers, unions, religious groups, the media, and human rights organizations (Diamond 1994). Even after the initial transfer of power from military to civilian rule had been accomplished, these new groups continued to fulfill important roles in the new democracies (Lambrou 1997). Much of the work pointing to the impact NGOs had on democratization came from first-hand observations of the democratization process and the role these organizations played in it. This literature has earned more recent support in quantitative studies which find a direct connection between increased NGO activity and political change (Brown, Brown et al. 2002; Brown and Desposato... 2007; Brown, Brown et al. 2008; Boulding... 2009; Boulding 2010).

The tension in this growing literature suggests a need for macro variables that explain the differential impacts of NGOs. Two important steps in this direction were Gerarde Clarke's article in *Political Studies* in 1998 and Claire Mercer's 2002 article in *Progress in Development Studies*. Both articles explain why little systematic research exists on NGOs and why the results so far have been inconclusive.

In 1998, Clarke recognized an important feature of the NGO literature that militated against frank assessments of their political effects: much of the actual literature was produced by activist and others who held important stakes in NGO success. Despite that initial impediment, by 1998 a

number of articles and books began to emerge, providing more honest assessments of NGO activity. Clarke noted two divergent sets of findings in this literature, one de Tocquevillian and one Gramscian. In the Tocquevillian tradition, significant groups of observers argued NGO activity strengthened civil society and democracy itself by providing avenues through which formerly unorganized interests could express themselves (Clarke 1998; p.85). Those Clarke termed Gramscians found that NGO activity takes what were nascent, grass-roots movements and institutionalizes them in ways that diminish the extent to which they challenge the state (Clarke 1998; p. 86). In the end, Clarke argues that there is significant empirical evidence for both perspectives--NGOs may mobilize or demobilize, inspire change or stabilize the status quo--and the determining factor is context. Clarke offers no guidance, however, as to what might define different contexts. While he alludes to why we find a growing civil society in some contexts and decline in others, there is relatively little to go on in terms of testable hypotheses.

Four years later, Mercer too recognized the overt normative bias that pervades much of the work on NGOs and politics. For Mercer, the problem is the overly optimistic view that NGOs will help democracy. In addition to their liberal bias, Mercer points out the work suffers from a fair amount of ethnocentrism, arguing that developing societies must overcome their current societal norms to foster the kind of civil societies that will engender democracy (Mercer 2002; p.11). Finding most of the work that extols the virtues of NGOs as conduits through which democratic societies can be formed to be dubious, Mercer argues for a 'contextualized approach' which recognizes that NGOs form very complex relationships with society. And, in order to understand their impact, the wider social, economic, political, and cultural contexts require our full attention (Mercer 2002; p. 11-13).

Our reading of the existing literature comes to roughly the same conclusions. First, given that NGOs are often supposed to be apolitical in their orientations, it is difficult to find work that systematically attempts to examine whether they influence politics. Second, and more importantly

for our purposes here, we agree that the impact NGOs have on politics is very much a product of the context within which they are inserted. Work following Mercer's review seems to prove her point: whether NGOs promote political participation, democracy, or political change--more broadly defined--depends on where the NGOs are located.

The current challenge is to begin assessing their conclusions--do NGOs have differential impacts as a function of context, and can we identify macro variables that affect the nature and magnitude of these impacts? In the next section, we argue that education as measured by literacy plays a key role in this intermediation, offering several hypotheses about the relationship.

NGOs, Education, and Politics

We propose examining the relationship between NGO activity and politics along a dimension we argue should matter most: education. Specifically, we want to know whether the relationship between NGO activity and politics varies between municipalities that are illiterate and highly educated. Toward that end, we use sub-national level data from Brazil in order to hold important country characteristics constant. By focusing on Brazil's 5,000 plus municipalities (counties), we can vary the levels of education in order to help identify whether a municipality's level of education translates NGO activity into political change. Before proceeding to the data, let us describe why we chose education.

Education levels can influence the relationship between NGOs and politics in a number of different ways. The causal mechanisms we identify here are not exhaustive, they merely represent a starting point. First, NGOs and education can act as functional equivalents, when one is absent the other helps mobilize communities. Second, education can act as an amplifier, increasing NGO influence on political participation. Finally, to the extent that education increases knowing one's

rights as a citizen, education is crucial to breaking the bonds of clientelism. The ability to read and write represents an important set of tools citizens employ to exercise political autonomy.

Education and NGOs as functional equivalents. NGOs are often designed to help organize groups of people who normally don't interact on a regular basis. Whether it is farmers who have to travel considerable distances to meet with other farmers, or an association that organizes women to discuss issues on infant care and related health issues, in the most successful cases NGOs bring people together in ways that permit increased communication and cooperation. Often, NGOs are designed or created for the expressed purpose of organizing individuals who have previously been disorganized: the poor, the illiterate, etc. Those with the means and ability to organize themselves, those with relatively high levels of human capital (education), may rely less on non-governmental activity to participate in politics. If education and NGO activity act as equivalents, we would expect to observe a strong relationship between NGOs and turnout in the least educated municipalities, but not where the average level of education is relatively high.

Does the same change described above with respect to turnout influence who wins and loses? Here we are on less solid theoretical and empirical ground. A more informed, organized, or autonomous electorate will not necessarily favor one side of the political spectrum over the other. It's also not clear whether NGOs operate as neutral arbiters or ideologically biased political actors. Since in this national sample we cannot delineate which organizations might lean to the left or even involve themselves in politics, we are agnostic about the outcome. While one might be tempted to equate political mobilization (turnout) with voting for the left, the two are not the same. With those caveats in mind, we test whether the same mechanisms outlined above might influence the electoral success of the left; We want to establish whether there is an empirical relationship between NGOs and the left. Moreover, we want to know whether context influences their association.

Hypothesis 1: *NGOs and education are functional equivalents in terms of their relationship with turnout and voting behavior.*

Education amplifies NGO influence. Education, though not a necessary nor sufficient condition for effective participation in politics, is often conceptualized as an important component that helps determine an individual's level of social capital (*Paxton 1999*). Work by economists in the field of endogenous growth theory emphasizes how the overall level of human capital can have important spillover effects on each individual's ability and accomplishments (*Lucas 1988; Romer 1989; Lucas 1990*). The reasoning here is simple, in contexts with high levels of social capital, NGOs can be more effective and efficient. Where the population is less adept at communicating, organizing, and participating, NGOs will have a more difficult time in mobilizing their constituents.

Education can also increase the influence NGOs have on politics through its impact on clientelism. An educated populace is less inclined to rely on clientelistic arrangements to express itself politically. Armed with the ability to read, for example, citizens can effectively navigate government bureaucracy without relying on others who demand payment or political allegiance. Given that clientelism is defined as the exchange of goods and services between two unequal parties, a lack of education could mean an individual is more likely to rely on such forms of clientelistic exchange. Literate individuals are able to acquire information on politics in a number of different venues; they are not wholly reliant on radio, television, or more educated citizens to provide important information. Armed with that information, they are more likely to exercise independent political choices. In addition to breaking the bonds of clientelism, a higher level of education can also increase one's sense of internal political efficacy, increasing the probability of political participation (*Almond and Verba 1963; Scoble 1968; Olsen 1972*).

Again, we want to reiterate that increasing social capital or eliminating clientelism does not automatically lead voters to favor the left; We simply want to know whether NGOs are associated

with mobilization (turnout) or with changes in political attitudes and voting behavior. With the same caveats, we generate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: *Education amplifies the influence of NGO activity on turnout and voting behavior.*

METHODS AND ANALYSIS

Data

The two dependent variables we employ to evaluate our hypotheses are turnout (ballots cast as a percentage of the voting age population) and the share of the vote won by the Worker's Party (PT; *Partido dos Trabalhadores*). The voting data we obtained comes from IPEA's website (*IPEA 2011*). Although voting is mandatory in Brazil, Table 1 indicates that not all municipalities participate fully. For example, in the 2006 presidential race, roughly 74 percentage of the population cast valid ballots. This figure ranges from 45 percent to 89 percent at the municipal level. In terms of the PT's share of the vote, in 2006 Lula--the PT's incumbent presidential candidate--averaged 53 percent of the vote across all municipalities, a figure that ranged from 17 to 95 percent. Figures on turnout and the PT's share of the vote were obtained from IPEA (*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada*). In addition to data on voting and turnout, we obtained data on the number of NGOs in each municipality taken from a survey conducted in 2005 (IBGE). The survey was conducted by Brazil's state statistical agency (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*; IBGE). Control variables were obtained from IBGE and IPEA respectively.

Table 1 about here

Methods

Given the cross-sectional nature of the data, we use the 2005 data on NGOs to predict the level of turnout and the PT's success in 2006. We use Ordinary Least Squares with state fixed effects in order to account for the significant heterogeneity that exists between Brazil's different regions. Including state fixed effects also allows us to control for candidate effects that no doubt characterize the different state races that we include in our analysis.¹

Our variable of interest is the number of NGOs within a municipality per 1,000 residents. The kinds of NGOs included in the survey differ dramatically: they range from social and religious organizations to groups dedicated to specific activities in the fields of education or health. While disaggregating the number of NGOs into what would be roughly 15 different groups would be a logical approach, the hypotheses tested in this paper should pertain to all the different kinds of NGOs found in the data. Moreover, different classification schemes along different dimensions requires considerable thought, theoretical justification, and additional statistical analysis. Given the space constraints of journal contributions, we decided to focus here specifically on the results generated by the aggregate measure of NGOs. In order to meet the assumptions made by Ordinary Least Squares estimation, we logged the number of NGOs per 1,000 residents because of its highly skewed nature. In addition to the variable of interest, we include a number of other independent variables as controls.

Income. Turnout and voting behavior (voting on left-right issues) are often associated with income (*Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980*). This is especially true in the 2006 election in which Lula did very well in the poorest municipalities, a significant shift from the broader base of support he enjoyed in the 2002 elections. A wealthier community is likely to enjoy higher levels of political efficacy which could influence turnout.

¹ For example, one state might have a close race between two attractive candidate for governor, raising turnout in every municipality in that state, while voters in another state might be dissatisfied with their options and again, be more likely to stay home in every municipality.

Inequality. Where incomes are highly unequal, communities may represent an important breeding ground for discontent. Inequality throws in stark relief the important differences between rich and poor, providing fertile ground for political mobilization. At the same time, there are reasons to expect inequality could have the opposite impact. To the degree that in unequal contexts politics is purely an affair of the elite, we might expect lower turnout and a more conservative brand of politics. We remain agnostic to either theory, yet include inequality in the equation as a control variable.

Urbanization. We include urbanization in the model since there are a number of reasons to expect that the rural-urban context can have an important impact on the decision to vote as well as for whom? From early literary classics written by Jorge Amado (1974), to modern day ethnographic studies by Robert Gay (Gay 1990), we know that clientelism can exist in the city and in the countryside. What we don't know is where it is most prevalent. Theories associated with modernization indicate that once workers leave the countryside in search of wage labor in the city, the degree of control political elites hold on the masses declines. Gay's work in the favelas of Rio indicates otherwise (Gay 1990). Consequently, urbanization may or may not track the degree of clientelism prevalent in the community.

Population. The political life of the small town versus the big city is likely to present different constraints and opportunities for politicians as they attempt to mobilize society. Rather than relying on commercial media, people living in small towns often rely on word-of-mouth to transmit important news. The difference in how people communicate in large cities versus small towns surely influences turnout and voting behavior. We account for whether the size of the population influences both turnout and the choices made by the electorate.

Migration. Previous work suggests the Left has polled less well in communities characterized by large migrant populations (Ames 1994). Without past ties to the community, voters lack the cues

necessary to make informed choices, forcing them to rely on patronage politics. The Left usually relies on community organization relative to other parties that focus on patronage strategies.

The regressions reported in the next section estimate the correlation between NGOs and turnout in the 2006 elections at 5 different levels (state deputy, federal deputy, federal senator, governor, and president). The same model is used to estimate the relationship between NGOs and the PT's share of the vote at the same 5 levels. We employ the following regression model:

$$(1) \text{ Turnout or PT Share}_{2006} = a + b_1(\text{NGOs per 1,000 Residents}_{2005} \text{ (logged)}) + b_2(\text{Literacy}_{2000}) + b_3(\text{Urbanization}_{2000}) + b_4(\text{Migrants}_{2000}) + b_5(\text{Population}_{2000}) + b_6(\text{Income per capita}_{2000}) + b_7(\text{State Dummies}) + e.$$

To determine whether context matters in terms of education, we estimate the model above with the interaction between NGOs and literacy added:

$$(2) \text{ Turnout or PT Share}_{2006} = a + b_1(\text{NGOs per 1,000 Residents}_{2005}) + b_2(\text{Literacy}_{2000}) + b_3(\text{NGOs X Literacy}) + b_4(\text{Urbanization}_{2000}) + b_5(\text{Migrants}_{2000}) + b_6(\text{Population}_{2000}) + b_7(\text{Income per capita}_{2000}) + b_8(\text{State Dummies}) + e.$$

Equation (2) provides a direct evaluation of our two hypotheses. If the coefficient on the interactive term is insignificant, educational context does not matter with respect to NGOs and their correlation with political participation and voting behavior. If the coefficient on the interactive term is negative and statistically significant, NGOs operating in less educated municipalities have a more positive effect than do their counterparts in more educated municipalities. This would suggest NGOs work as substitutes for education in terms of turnout and voting behavior. If the coefficient for the interactive term is positive and statistically significant, it suggests that education enhances NGO activity.

The empirical strategy outlined above is limited to the extent it does not account for endogeneity. In the context of our study, municipalities with high levels of turnout and a preference for leftist candidates may encourage the creation and placement of NGOs. Although entirely possible, the correlation between literacy, turnout, and NGOs is quite low, leading us to believe that the impact of endogeneity on our estimates is weak. The Pearson's r correlation between literacy and NGOs is .28 and between turnout (Presidential '06) and NGOs is .30. Ideally, we would employ an appropriate instrumental variable. Finding a variable that affects the number of NGOs in each municipality but not turnout or votes for leftist candidates is no easy task; we have not found one at this writing. Since no variable with these properties exists to our knowledge, we are somewhat limited in the claims we can make. Fortunately, there is an alternative to the instrumental variable solution: propensity score matching.

The idea behind matching is to generate a sample of cases that more closely approximate the kind one would see in a blocked or even randomized experiment. Matching routines abound and are available in a number of different statistical software programs. We chose to use the approach suggested by Alexis Diamond and Jasjeet Sekhon which employs a fairly robust algorithm to match cases: genetic matching (Diamond and Sekhon 2005). One requirement of using the matching technique is that the treatment variable must be dichotomous. In our study, the treatment variable is not dichotomous: the number of NGOs weighted by population (logged). To test the stability of the results with respect to claims about endogeneity, we split the NGO variable into a dichotomous one by designating cases below the mean as zero and those above the mean as one. While not an ideal solution, it allows us to check whether the kind of assumptions we are making in the OLS framework are responsible for generating the results we observe. We examine our main regression results in this matching framework to check whether our foundational results hold: the regression model that predicts the percentage of the vote won by the PT presidential candidate (includes the interaction between NGOs and literacy). As can be observed in Appendix I, our results hold,

providing at least some preliminary indication that our estimates are robust to the assumptions we make regarding endogeneity. Having shown that our results are robust to matching techniques, while giving us more confidence in our results, does not absolve us from the usual disclaimers about causality, selection, and the limits this places on our study.

RESULTS

Tables 2 - 5 report the OLS results for the 2006 elections at five different levels: state deputy, federal deputy, senator, governor, and president, show strong NGO effects on political behavior. First, when considering the direct impact of NGO presence on turnout, the estimates indicate there is no relationship in all but one race: in 2006, there is no correlation between NGOs and Turnout (Table 2). All of the other variables are strongly correlated with turnout in the expected direction. Literacy and income both have a very positive and strongly significant correlation with turnout across all types of elections. Inequality has a negative relationship which is statistically significant.

Table 2 about here

However, once we include an interactive term, there is a strong and significant relationship between NGO presence and turnout. The coefficient on the interactive term is negative and statistically significant, implying that turnout is much more sensitive to NGO activity in communities where literacy is relatively low. Because the interaction is between two continuous variables, a further step is required to understand their substantive impact. To evaluate the importance of NGOs and context, we generated predicted values for turnout when literacy is at its minimum, median, and maximum and when NGOs were at the 5%, 25%, 50%, 75%, and 95% percentiles (holding all other variables constant at their means). This exercise was performed for the presidential race where we expected to see the greatest effect. The impact NGOs have on turnout is substantively small. When varying NGOs from the 5th percentile to the 95th percentile in relatively

uneducated communities (literacy at its minimum), turnout increases by only about 2 percentage points.

Table 3 about here

Table 4 reports results for voting behavior from regressions estimating the relationship between NGOs and the PT's vote share in five different races in 2006. Unlike Table 2 which showed relatively little correlation between NGOs and turnout (except for the gubernatorial races), we find NGOs had an extremely positive and statistically significant correlation with the PT's success. For each ten-fold increase in NGOs per 1,000 population (e.g., going from 1 NGO to 10 NGOs per 1,000 residents), the coefficient implies the PT's chances increase by roughly one percentage point (the coefficient is .95) in the presidential election.

In Table 5, we estimate the same models with the addition of the interactive term between literacy and NGO activity. The coefficient on the interactive term between literacy and NGOs is negative and statistically significant. The significantly negative coefficient implies that as both literacy and NGOs increase, the PT's success is less sensitive to increases in NGO numbers. Again, to understand the substantive significance of the interaction, we generated different predicted values and their confidence intervals for the same levels of literacy and NGO activity as earlier, holding all other variables constant at their mean values (see Table 6). We conducted the exercise for the presidential race. When literacy is held constant at its highest value, we find a small 1 percentage point decrease as NGO activity ranges from the 5th percentile to the 95th percentile. At the mean level of literacy, voting for the left increases just over 2 percentage points as NGO activity ranges from the 5th to 95th percentile of the distribution. At the minimum level of literacy, our model predicts that when NGO activity is at the 5% level, 51.3 percent of the population will vote left (95% confidence interval; 48.28, 53.61). When NGO activity is increased to the 95% level, the model predicts a substantial increase to 58.80 percent (95% confidence interval; 55.15, 62.45). At the lowest level of literacy, when increasing NGO activity from the 5-95 percent level, there is a 7.5

percentage point increase in support for the PT. This is a significant change since the margin of victory for most mayoral races is 3 to 5 percentage points.

Tables 4-6 about here

DISCUSSION

The results imply that NGOs are better at politics than they are at increasing social capital and civil society. While this is certainly a possibility, there are several limitations which militate against drawing such a bold conclusion. First, the inferences we draw are constrained by context: our data analysis is based on a specific time and place that may be unique (the Brazilian elections of 2006). It would be tempting to claim that this was a peculiar election in that Lula, the PT's incumbent presidential candidate, did well among poorer voters in rural areas than in the previous race, generating our results on literacy, NGO activity, and the PT. It is important to remember, however, that we found similar results over a wide range of races and candidates. Although our results could be dependent on the Brazilian context, they don't seem to be dependent on Lula's candidacy.

Second, the kinds of NGOs captured in our variable of interest are extremely heterogeneous. To expect a sports club to function the same as an organization designed to educate citizens in their economic and political rights is problematic. While disaggregating NGOs into different kinds or classifications will provide more refined conclusions, that we found some strong empirical patterns at this level of aggregation suggests the effect is important. Additional insights and claims, however, can be generated by disaggregating NGOs into more coherent and theoretically relevant groups.

Third, there is the problem of endogeneity. The number of NGOs in a community is not exogenously determined nor is it assigned randomly. Without a convincing instrument, we can identify some important political patterns but should be modest in any causal claims. With that in mind, we find the success of the PT (a party associated with a programmatic leftist ideology) varies

more dramatically as NGO activity increases in relatively uneducated communities. Where education levels are relatively high, there seems to be no association between NGOs and politics. At the same time, there appears to be no substantively significant relationship between NGOs and turnout, regardless of the context. What explains these contrasting patterns?

The impact NGOs have on turnout might be constrained by Brazil's electoral laws: since voting is mandatory, there may simply not be enough variation for NGO activity to explain. Although there is variation in turnout, the importance of education, income, and other socio-economic outcomes overshadow NGOs. Rather than mobilizing the electorate, NGOs seem to have an important relationship with *how* people vote, particularly in uneducated communities. Although not an exhaustive list, two plausible explanations come to mind. First, let us articulate what is a more apolitical view that implies NGOs are neutral arbiters in the political process. NGOs provide individuals with the kind of organization and communicative space to articulate their desires and concerns, affecting political attitudes and orientations. In that sense, NGOs do increase social capital, civil society, and it just so happens in this case to have benefitted the left. Second, there is a more cynical argument. NGO activity, often associated with services for the poor and the environment, is primarily an undertaking populated by individuals sympathetic to more liberal causes. As NGOs proliferate, they provide information and organizational space for those sympathetic to their cause. Consequently, at least in the context of the Brazilian elections in 2006, these organizations were able to influence electoral outcomes in relatively uneducated areas, where previous political orientations may be less well formed. We cannot determine which explanation is correct without more data and analysis. Classifying NGOs further into groups that distinguish between political, recreational, and social organizations might help toward this impasse.

CONCLUSION

The deep divisions in research on NGOs suggest that scholarship should examine macro and institutional factors that affect NGO impact on politics. In this paper, we focused on one such factor - education. Leveraging newly available data on NGOs in Brazil's 5,000 plus municipalities, we sought to test whether the impact NGOs have on voting turnout and support for the PT varies by educational level. Two broad themes emerge from the models estimated in the preceding section: 1) NGOs have a more consequential influence on voting behavior than voting turnout; 2) the education level of a community is an important contextual feature of NGOs and their impact on politics. The results imply, most importantly, that NGOs and the educational level of society serve as functional equivalents. In well-educated societies, the impact NGOs have on turnout and voting for the PT are relatively small. In municipalities with relatively low levels of education, NGOs are strongly correlated with important changes in the PT's electoral fortunes.

The wider implications of the study are twofold. First, the results suggest that when context is taken into account, NGOs matter politically. In the 2006 Brazilian Presidential elections, NGOs had an important positive effect on Lula's chances in communities with relatively low levels of human capital. Unless context is taken into account, the relationship between NGOs and politics will remain obscured. Second, NGOs may provide the means through which relatively uneducated populations can express their views. We offer no evidence on whether NGOs influence citizens' views or NGOs function as unbiased avenues through which a disadvantaged populace can express its opinion. What is clear, however, is that in terms of political participation and voting behavior, NGOs will have their biggest impact among the least educated.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Turnout State Deputy	5556	74.25	6.94	31.18	196.35
Turnout Fed Deputy	5556	74.64	6.63	31.15	195.58
Turnout Senate	5556	125.42	16.36	56.35	353.79
Turnout Governor	5504	72.70	6.41	44.42	90.47
Turnout Presidential	5504	74.43	5.93	45.00	89.67
PT State Deputy	5557	21.53	16.48	0.32	91.53
PT Fed Deputy	5557	30.72	17.32	2.00	95.51
PT Governor	5557	35.05	25.95	0.00	146.23
PT Senate	5557	27.95	23.61	0.00	99.94
PT President	5557	53.64	17.71	14.65	95.10
% Migrants	4973	6.89	5.62	0.02	108.73
NGOs p/c (logged)	5475	0.70	0.73	-3.00	3.35
% Literate	5507	78.23	12.46	39.34	99.09
% Rural	4920	39.65	22.25	0.03	98.44
Gini Coefficient	5507	0.56	0.06	0.36	0.82

Table 2: Turnout in 2006 Elections Regressed on the number of NGOs per capita (logged) and control variables					
	State Deputy	Federal Deputy	Senator	Governor	President
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
NGOs per thousand (logged)	0.11	0.10	0.11	0.16	0.08
	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)
% Literate	0.23***	0.21***	0.29***	0.33***	0.36***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Population (logged)	-1.50***	-1.55***	-1.19***	-1.24***	-1.08***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Income Per Capita (Thousands)	7.71***	5.02***	4.34***	10.60***	12.84***
	(1.54)	(1.40)	(1.45)	(1.34)	(1.30)
% Rural	0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
% Migrants	-0.07***	-0.06***	-0.06***	-0.07***	-0.06***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Gini Coefficient	-11.26***	-8.38***	-9.87***	-12.99***	-13.91***
	(1.37)	(1.24)	(1.29)	(1.19)	(1.15)
Constant	85.99***	88.04***	72.25***	73.88***	71.56***
	(2.29)	(2.08)	(2.16)	(1.99)	(1.93)
Number of observations	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891
Adjusted R2	0.375	0.352	0.562	0.617	0.583
note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1					
All models include state fixed effects					

Table 3: Turnout in 2006 Elections Regressed on the Interaction between the Number of NGOs per capita (logged) and Literacy					
	State Deputy	Federal Deputy	Senator	Governor	President
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
NGOs per thousand (logged)	2.56*** (0.65)	3.21*** (0.59)	2.40*** (0.62)	1.78*** (0.57)	1.91*** (0.55)
NGOs X Literacy	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.02*** (0.01)
% Literate	0.24*** (0.01)	0.23*** (0.01)	0.30*** (0.01)	0.34*** (0.01)	0.37*** (0.01)
Population (logged)	-1.54*** (0.08)	-1.60*** (0.08)	-1.23*** (0.08)	-1.27*** (0.07)	-1.11*** (0.07)
Income Per Capita (1,000)	9.19*** (1.58)	6.89*** (1.44)	5.72*** (1.50)	11.58*** (1.38)	13.94*** (1.33)
% Rural	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
% Migrants	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
Gini Coefficient	-11.69*** (1.37)	-8.93*** (1.24)	-10.28*** (1.29)	-13.27*** (1.19)	-14.24*** (1.15)
Constant	85.58*** (2.29)	87.53*** (2.08)	71.87*** (2.16)	73.62*** (1.99)	71.26*** (1.93)
Number of observations	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891
Adjusted R2	0.377	0.356	0.563	0.618	0.584
note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1					
All models include state fixed effects					

Table 4: Percentage of PT Vote in 2006 Elections Regressed on the number of NGOs per capita (logged) and control variables

	State Deputy	Federal Deputy	Senator	Governor	President
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
NGOs per thousand (logged)	0.49 (0.38)	0.89** (0.38)	0.52** (0.26)	1.35*** (0.27)	0.95*** (0.24)
% Literate	0.13*** (0.04)	0.17*** (0.04)	0.13*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)	-0.08*** (0.03)
Population (logged)	1.33*** (0.27)	4.16*** (0.27)	1.88*** (0.18)	2.28*** (0.19)	1.44*** (0.17)
Income Per Capita (1,000)	3.02 (4.91)	-41.01*** (4.95)	-19.53*** (3.36)	-37.22*** (3.47)	-75.06*** (3.14)
% Rural	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
% Migrants	0.06 (0.04)	0.21*** (0.04)	0.17*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)	0.05* (0.03)
Gini Coefficient	4.60 (4.36)	7.58* (4.39)	9.45*** (2.98)	17.84*** (3.08)	18.55*** (2.79)
Constant	-4.82 (7.30)	-37.08*** (7.35)	7.93 (5.00)	-34.45*** (5.17)	28.12*** (4.67)
Number of observations	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891
Adjusted R2	0.211	0.277	0.821	0.833	0.721
note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1					
All models include state fixed effects					

Table 5: Percentage of PT Vote in 2006 Elections Regressed on the Interaction between the Number of NGOs per capita (logged) and Literacy					
	State Deputy	Federal Deputy	Senator	Governor	President
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
NGOs per thousand (logged)	-1.48 (2.09)	3.96* (2.10)	3.43** (1.43)	1.92 (1.48)	5.57*** (1.33)
NGOs X Literacy	0.03 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.04** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)
% Literate	0.12*** (0.05)	0.19*** (0.05)	0.14*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.03)	-0.06** (0.03)
Population (logged)	1.36*** (0.27)	4.11*** (0.27)	1.83*** (0.19)	2.27*** (0.19)	1.36*** (0.17)
Income Per Capita (1,000)	1.83 (5.07)	-39.16*** (5.10)	-17.78*** (3.47)	-36.88*** (3.58)	-72.28*** (3.24)
% Rural	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
% Migrants	0.06 (0.04)	0.21*** (0.04)	0.17*** (0.03)	0.15*** (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Gini Coefficient	4.95 (4.37)	7.03 (4.40)	8.94*** (2.99)	17.74*** (3.09)	17.73*** (2.79)
Constant	-4.49 (7.31)	-37.59*** (7.36)	7.45 (5.00)	-34.54*** (5.17)	27.35*** (4.67)
Number of observations	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891	4,891
Adjusted R2	0.211	0.278	0.821	0.833	0.721
note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1					
All models include state fixed effects					

Table 6: Predicted Values (in grey) and Confidence Intervals (95%) of PT Vote at the Minimum, Median, and Maximum Values of Literacy by NGOs (selected percentiles)

	NGOs				
	5th	25th	50th	75th	95th
Literacy					
40%	51.27	53.98	55.35	56.57	58.80
	48.94	51.52	52.65	53.58	55.15
	53.61	56.43	56.43	59.56	62.45
70%	50.44	51.29	51.72	52.10	52.79
	48.29	49.13	49.53	49.86	50.44
	52.60	53.45	53.91	54.33	55.14
99%	49.87	49.44	49.22	49.03	48.67
	46.72	46.59	46.44	46.26	45.80
	53.03	52.30	52.01	51.80	51.54

Appendix I. OLS regression using matched data (PT Presidential Vote 2006)

Coefficients	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
constant	92.16	3.66	25.17	< 2e-16***
NGO (treatment 0/1)	8.06	2.73	2.95	.0032**
Literacy	-0.49	0.037	-13.1	< 2e-16***
NGO*Literacy	-0.085	0.034	-2.49	0.013*
Income per capita	-81.13	3.63	-22.38	< 2e-16***
% of population in rural areas	-0.1	0.01	-10.49	< 2e-16***
% of population that are migrants	-0.2	0.037	-5.57	2.68e-08***
Gini Coefficient	32.88	3.41	9.64	<2e-16***

Residual standard error: 11.03 on 3791 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.5976, Adjusted R-squared: 0.5969

F-statistic: 804.4 on 7 and 3791 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16"

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