

I wanted Escoffier to make clear the degree to which “mobilizational citizenship” can co-exist with more traditionally liberal forms of citizenship.

Activists in some informal settlement neighborhoods in Johannesburg have taken a stance against political incorporation and formed organizations with political cultures that, in many ways, seem to approximate the practices that Escoffier finds in Lo Hermida. Yet one similarly designed study of two informal settlements in Johannesburg, with similar variation in political practices, found that the settlement that took on a more independent mode of activist organization was consequently faced with profoundly dangerous attacks by the local state and frequent threat of eviction (Marcel Paret, “Fragmenting Urban Movements: Political Parties and Popular Resistance in Johannesburg’s Informal Settlements,” *Sociology of Development*. 8(3), 2022).

Second, and relatedly, I was left wondering what the policy implications of mobilizational citizenship might be. Can the liberal democratic state respond through techniques of policy and bureaucracy to demands made through this mode of activism?

And third, how does “mobilizational citizenship” help us to understand the state? I can imagine at least two ways of thinking about this question. On the one hand, the setup to the book is the consequences of mobilizational citizenship in places like Lo Hermida for helping to scale up the 2019 protests. How did the consequences of this popular explosion reflect on the goals of mobilizational citizenship for state reform? Was the subsequent constitutional convention something that we should understand as a product of this kind of activist engagement?

On the other hand, we can think about this question through the relational Gramscian perspective that Levenson (*Delivery as Dispossession: Land Occupation and Eviction in the Post-Apartheid City*, 2022) develops in his study of two land occupations in Cape Town, South Africa. He describes how the judicialization of land rights and the focus of city bureaucracy on maintaining orderly urbanization encourages land occupiers to pursue strategies aimed at producing visibility and legibility to the parts of the state they perceive as most advantageous. Activist strategy is forged in relation to state strategy and vice versa. How might we think of the variation between Lo Hermida and Nuevo Amanecer in Santiago in light of this argument?

Escoffier’s *Mobilizing at the Urban Margins* is a remarkably grounded account of multiple forms of grassroots politics. As I considered these questions myself, I was struck by the global implications of an account that self-consciously roots itself in two particular neighborhoods in one particular city. This is a great testament to Escoffier’s capacity to link theory to empirics in his observations of Santiago, and, in doing so, to generate a profoundly relevant account and argument.

### Response to Benjamin Bradlow’s Review of *Mobilizing at the Urban Margins: Citizenship and Patronage Politics in Post-Dictatorial Chile*

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— Simón Escoffier 

I am grateful to Benjamin Bradlow for his generous and thoughtful engagement with *Mobilizing at the Urban Margins*. Bradlow’s first comment addresses the compatibility of mobilizational citizenship with liberal citizenship. While the book focuses on a community that largely rejects political parties, formal institutions, and other liberal notions of political belonging, mobilizational citizenship does not inherently oppose these elements. It can coexist with liberal institutions. However, because it offers activists an alternative, self-constructed form of political incorporation, it often develops in tension with institutions that have historically excluded or instrumentalized them.

Brazil offers an instructive comparison. In housing struggles that share key features with mobilizational citizenship, activists in informal settlements have engaged elite allies, legal tools, and liberal frameworks tactically. Their efforts show that bottom-up citizenship can operate both through and against liberal institutions. The Chilean case adds a distinctive insight: mobilizational citizenship may flourish even where institutional support is absent or deliberately rejected by activists wary of co-optation. This invites a broader understanding of democratic inclusion—not as formal access, but as a practice forged from below through memory, identity, and community work.

Bradlow also asks about policy implications. While the book is grounded in social movement and citizenship studies, it suggests two potential avenues for policy reflection. First, the framework can help foster more diverse and empowered civil societies in urban margins. In Chile and elsewhere, policies have weakened local organizing capacity and replaced it with top-down governance to manage political capital from above. The result has been fragmented communities with limited leadership and low engagement beyond state-led initiatives. Policymakers have often distrusted poor residents’ capacity for participation, while political actors have sought loyalty over autonomy. Mobilizational citizenship shows how some communities have nonetheless built power from below. Social policy should do more to support grassroots organizers and independent initiatives.

Second, the book calls for a more situated approach to participatory policy. Policymakers must recognize that excluded communities engage politically in varied, often informal and memory-based ways. Supporting this engagement means more than expanding institutional outreach—it requires understanding how class, gender, race, and violence shape political subjectivity. *Mobilizing at the Urban Margins* offers a lens into these dynamics. Unfortunately, as the book and other research suggest, Chile’s elitist political

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class remains poorly equipped—or unwilling—to respond accordingly.

Beyond policy, mobilizational citizenship should be seen as a tool to empower excluded urban actors. It highlights how collective identity can function as political capital. Moving beyond rational choice models of protest, the book aligns with scholarship showing how activists use identity strategically—to expand leadership, strengthen networks, and sustain mobilization. Drawing on memory and shared experiences, they create trust and sustained intergenerational mobilization, building collective action capability outside of institutional frameworks.

Bradlow's final point invites reflection on the state and recent developments in Chile. While the book does not fully explain the 2019 protests or the constitutional process, it shows how mobilizational citizenship intersects with political opportunities. When threatened, underprivileged communities turn to collective resistance. When a strategic opportunity opens, they may pursue institutional

engagement. In 2019, protests created such an opening. Several *población* leaders ran for local office in 2021—despite prior skepticism of electoral politics—and six were elected as grassroots-based councilors.

Moreover, key elements of mobilizational citizenship—especially memory and decentralized protagonism—extended beyond the urban margins. Protesters across Chile invoked collective memory to frame repression, linking it to past state violence and systemic exclusion. This reframing helped build a shared narrative across class and geographic boundaries. Meanwhile, bottom-up protagonism flourished: hundreds of local assemblies emerged, and many new, unaffiliated candidates successfully ran for the constitutional convention. These developments echoed the political culture described in the book, far beyond its original field sites.

I thank Bradlow once again for this dialogue. At a time of democratic uncertainty, the agency of excluded communities demands both political recognition and serious analytical attention.