

Response to Simón Escoffier's Review of *Urban Power: Democracy and Inequality in Sao Paulo and Johannesburg*

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— Benjamin H. Bradlow 

Escoffier offers a very generous and detailed read of my *Urban Power*. I am extremely grateful for his insights and the opportunity to respond. He asks whether activists can draw on my conceptualization of “urban power” to devise movement strategies. My analysis is historical and conjunctural and, in this sense, may not neatly map onto a simple strategic blueprint. Nevertheless, I do want to emphasize two key lessons for strategy that emerge from this conceptualization. First, the imperative to build movements that transcend individual neighborhoods is critical. Much of the literature on urban movements has focused on those that come together at the scale of an individual neighborhood. What *Urban Power* illustrates is that, in São Paulo, we can observe multiple generations of movements that network across the entire city. In achieving this broader scale of organization, these movements can make programmatic policy demands beyond securing benefits for a single neighborhood. In contrast, we see a scalar devolution in Johannesburg, where movements that were once constituted at a city-wide scale fragment to the neighborhood or even street-based scale.

The second lesson follows from this observation. Making programmatic policy demands allow for a more enduring engagement with local government bureaucracy that can build coordinating capacity within the local state. By focusing on policy reforms, São Paulo's *mutirão* (self-build) programs, movements were able to engage a wider swathe of street level, mid-level, and senior ranks of the local government bureaucracy over extended periods of time. In contrast, Johannesburg witnessed only limited engagements between housing activists and local government bureaucrats.

Escoffier challenges my emphasis on programmatic policy, noting that growing scholarship has underscored the role of clientelist politics in sustaining survivalist networks, building new safety nets, and empowering brokers within marginalized urban poor communities. While clientelism can be a useful strategy to build these informal organizational structures, this approach struggles to explain state capacity for systematic change in the distribution of urban public goods.

It might be that clientelism and other small-scale forms of mobilization prevent the emergence of such capacities. I begin the study with a descriptive quantitative comparison of service availability in informal settlements across São Paulo and Johannesburg, across time. This allows us to observe systematic changes in the distribution of public goods, which can then be explained through a focus on organizational structures.

Finally, Escoffier asks how my arguments might address the contemporary moment of right-wing authoritarian politics in much of the world. While *Urban Power* argues that the most virtuous configurations of high “embeddedness” and high “cohesion” do fall away in the case of São Paulo, the persistence of programmatic redistributive goals in the city's politics is striking, particularly as it has been led by mayors allied with Jair Bolsonaro. The city has continued to upgrade informal settlements and expand reduced and free fares on the municipal bus system. In contrast, in Johannesburg, the structuring discourse of the city's politics have witnessed a surge of anti-immigrant rhetoric, coupled with deteriorating conditions of public services in the built environment.

Thus, an analysis of the rise of right-wing authoritarianism must pay attention to the organizational forms emerging in informal settlements and understand what enables—or prevents—those organizational forms to network, federate, and make policy demands. For example, whereas the Catholic Church structured the basis of informal settlement activism in São Paulo in the 1980s and 1990s, evangelical denominations prevail in the social life of the city's *favelas* today. This is increasingly true in Johannesburg's informal settlements as well. Future work on configurations of movement and local state power will need to pay close attention to how religion, movement politics, and bureaucratic engagements change in this new socio-political conjuncture.

Mobilizing at the Urban Margins: Citizenship and Patronage Politics in Post-Dictatorial Chile. By

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— Benjamin H. Bradlow , Princeton University
bhbradlow@princeton.edu

The uprisings in Chile in 2019 suggested a sharp break with a tired political economy paradigm in the putative home of “neoliberal” authoritarianism. The student-led movement that produced a new constitutional convention garnered worldwide attention. Once in power, former student leader Gabriel Boric struggled. The constitutional convention failed to produce a new constitution, and the populist right gained the upper hand in a new election. Though these outcomes are not the explicit focus of Simón Escoffier's trenchant book, his analysis of activist strategies of two working-class, territorially peripheral neighborhoods in Santiago carries important implications for this national story.

Escoffier's book is framed by a fundamental comparative question in the study of neighborhood politics: why do some *poblaciones* that were hotbeds of activism in the struggle for democracy persist as mobilized communities, while others do not? The two *poblaciones* selected as sites of Escoffier's empirical work share key characteristics today