

# The Fragile Flower of Local Democracy: A Case Study of Decentralization/ Participation in Montevideo

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*This article analyzes the decentralization/participation (DP) program implemented by the Frente Amplio (FA) in the municipal government of Montevideo. Based on original surveys, interviews, and direct observation, the article argues that the DP program contributed to improvements in city services by providing the government with better information about citizens' needs and preferences, but failed to boost civic engagement among city residents because the channels of participation offered did not convince average citizens that their input in public forums would have a significant impact on governmental decisions.*

Decentralization and participation . . . must be made into complementary mechanisms that will reinforce each other for the sake of better management and a deepening of democracy.

—Jordi Borja<sup>1</sup>

[W]e may discover to our sorrow that “participatory democracy” can mean the end of both participation and democracy.

—Daniel Patrick Moynihan<sup>2</sup>

A pair of strange bedfellows advocating decentralization and participation emerged in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s. From one side of the bed, international development donors like the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have pushed decentralization/participation (DP) pro-

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grams on recipient nations as tools for improving government provision of services and convincing citizens that democracy works. From the other, leftist political parties have been at the forefront of implementing such programs at the local level under the banner of “deepening” democracy. This article focuses on a particularly interesting case of a DP project at the municipal level, that carried out in Montevideo by the Frente Amplio (FA, or Broad Front), a left party with a history of strong opposition to military rule in Uruguay but with no prior administrative experience.

The Frente has now governed the city for eleven years since winning the 1989 mayoral elections on a platform proposing the decentralization of the city administration and the opening up of new channels of citizen input to give citizens, especially the poor, a larger voice in local government. Through these instruments, the FA hoped to achieve more responsive and effective service delivery on the part of the government and more civic engagement<sup>3</sup> on the part of city residents. While there is substantial evidence that city services have improved since the FA began implementing its program, Montevideans do *not* seem to have become more civically engaged nor have the excluded gained a much larger say in decision-making processes. The article argues that crucial to this outcome was the program’s design. Specifically, the DP program aided the advance in city services by providing the government with better information about citizens’ needs and preferences. At the same time, this process failed to boost civic engagement because the channels of participation offered did not convince average citizens that their input in public forums would have a significant impact on governmental decisions.

The article proceeds in seven sections. The first examines theories of why decentralization and participation might or might not improve government performance and civic engagement. The second suggests why Montevideo is a compelling case for analysis. Section three provides a history of the DP process, including the crucial switch from a more direct form of participation in the 1990-1993 period to a less direct form in the period that followed. The fourth section shows that this change engendered a decline of citizen interest in the participatory mechanisms. In the fifth and sixth sections, I argue that both forms of participatory decentralization engendered improvements in city services, yet only the first form stimulated wider civic engagement. City records collected during field research from May to August 1999 and opinion surveys conducted in August 1999 provide the empirical basis for these claims. The conclusion considers rival explanations for the expansion of city services and the stagnation of civic engagement, comparing them with the institutional design argument presented here. It then moves to a more theoretical terrain to suggest that for local governments to improve service delivery, participation as information provision is sufficient. But to build civic engagement they need to offer participation as deliberation, in which citizens make collective decisions over important issues and these decisions have significant bearing on policy outcomes.

### 1. DECENTRALIZATION AND PARTICIPATION: THE KEYS TO DEEPENING DEMOCRACY?

Debates over how much participation democracy should entail, which level of government is most effective, and the nature of the relationship among participation, decentralization, and democracy have often been intertwined. Simplifying, one group of scholars views decentralization and participation as linked, and sees their combination as the key to improving government performance and activating citizens, thus deepening democracy. Another group holds instead that one, the other, or both together endanger democracy by leading to ungovernability and citizen frustration. Before summarizing these arguments, let me provide a general definition of decentralization as the transfer of either resources, responsibilities for public services, or decision-making power away from the central government either to lower levels of government, to dispersed central state agencies, or to the private sector (either businesses or nongovernmental organizations). Decentralization and participation are separate but complementary concepts, in that the former is often viewed as a necessary step to achieve the latter. Although the references to decentralization in the literature cited below typically refer to that from national to state or municipal governments, rather than from municipal to lower tiers (as in the case of Montevideo), the logic behind the arguments about the relationship between decentralization, participation, and democracy remains essentially the same.

Vocal adversaries of decentralization and excessive participation emerged in the 1960s partially as a response to calls for participatory democracy and community empowerment in the United States and Western Europe and to the establishment of new nations in the developing world. Moynihan and Huntington best reflect this early generation of scholars who argued that too much participation leads to inefficiency, problems of governance, and ultimately dissatisfaction on the part of citizens. Huntington wrote that a “surge of participatory democracy” weakens government by overloading the system with demands and making it impossible to govern effectively.<sup>4</sup> Those who participate end up alienated because their demands cannot be met.<sup>5</sup> In a different kind of argument, McConnell, who favored centralized government, contended that because some interests are concentrated locally, decentralization would benefit the powerful and jeopardize local minority interests.<sup>6</sup> More recently, centralists have criticized the notion that lower levels of government are “closer” to the people and therefore more appropriate spheres for encouraging participation.<sup>7</sup> Nunes, for example, argues that decentralization transfers social conflicts to the local level, where there is greater political inequality, thus reinforcing relationships of subordination and “pulverizing the relative strength of subaltern actors.”<sup>8</sup> Corruption and clientelism are also more prevalent at the local level, making participation unattractive to many citizens (and making participation itself not democratic). In addition to the dangers to

participation, decentralization hinders development because local governments are less technically capable than the central government and because the State loses regulatory capacity and fiscal control.<sup>9</sup>

Advocates of decentralized government and participation, beginning with Rousseau, and later John Stuart Mill, argue that civic participation educates people to become full citizens, reduces conflict by helping people accept government decisions, and integrates the community.<sup>10</sup> Tocqueville's visit to the United States helped make him an advocate of independent townships and active citizens and a critic of centralization's dampening effect on "civic spirit."<sup>11</sup> In recent years, development scholars<sup>12</sup> and urban planners<sup>13</sup> have again taken up these themes, arguing for decentralization of government and an increase in some form of citizen participation in public policy making. These changes would make government more responsive, effective, and efficient, citizens more socially integrated and public spirited, and because of the changes in government and citizenry, local economies more prosperous and more equitable. For example, Rondinelli et al., along with the mainstream development donors, advocate decentralization on the basis of "subsidiarity," the notion that the lowest possible level of government should provide services.<sup>14</sup> The logic of their argument is that decentralization brings government "closer to the people," facilitating local participation (especially of the poor), which allows the government to better understand and therefore provide for people's needs. Similarly, for the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the UNDP, decentralization's greatest importance lies in its unique ability to make citizen participation possible. In turn, participatory institutions should help sustain democracy.<sup>15</sup> In practice, however, successful experiments in participation are rare. Though optimistic about the potential of DP programs, Herzer and Pirez point out that participatory experiences "only happen in exceptional circumstances" and are often "transitory."<sup>16</sup> From their examination of municipal participation in Latin America in the 1980s, they conclude that two conditions must be met for such programs to be sustained: a party or an individual with political will in local office and the existence of local popular organizations.<sup>17</sup>

A competing vision of decentralization and participation within this camp comes from Latin American authors unimpressed with the experience of decentralization in the region, where responsibilities have frequently been transferred to the local level but not financial resources, rendering participation meaningless. These authors<sup>18</sup> argue that the mainstream developmentalists have a vision of participation that views citizens as information providers so that experts may improve public policy design,<sup>19</sup> and/or as volunteer laborers in limited development projects. While these critics appreciate that decentralization may open the way for popular participation, they advocate participation in making decisions about policy design and implementation, not just in consultation or labor provision. This distinction echoes the lesson of Selznick's *TVA and the Grass Roots*,

which argues that state-sponsored participation programs tend to co-opt citizens by offering them mere “administrative involvement,” the opportunity to provide information rather than “substantive participation,” the chance to make decisions.<sup>20</sup> It is an important distinction that proves useful when analyzing DP projects like the one in Montevideo.

## 2. THE CASE FOR THE MONTEVIDEO CASE

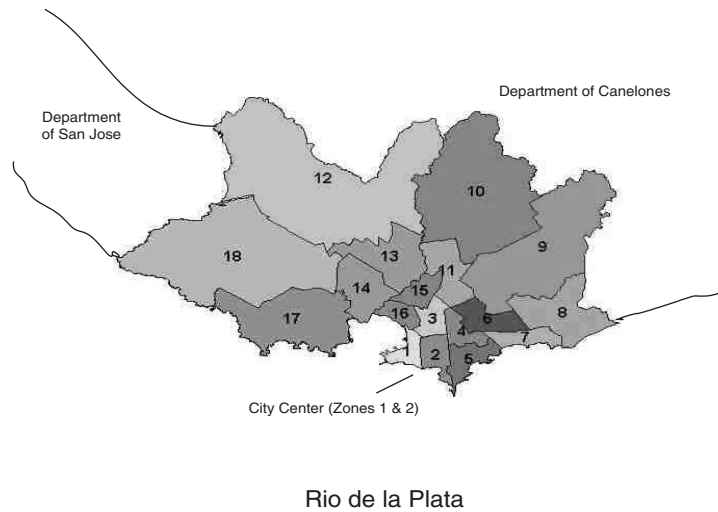
The Frente Amplio’s DP program in Montevideo presents a fascinating case for several reasons. On one hand, if Herzer and Pirez are correct that an organized local population and a party with political will are the prerequisites for successful participatory programs, then Montevideo presents a most likely scenario. Perhaps because of their long experience of democratic rule and its interruption by an unpopular military dictatorship (1973 to 1984),<sup>21</sup> Uruguayan citizens are those who most strongly support democracy and show most interest in politics in the Latinobarometer surveys.<sup>22</sup> Montevideo residents became particularly active and organized during authoritarian rule. Economic hardship and lack of political access during the dictatorship sparked the creation of scores of neighborhood associations, soup kitchens, health clinics, and housing cooperatives.<sup>23</sup> Though these movements began to decline with the return to democracy in 1984, many remained active and had enough presence in the late 1980s that Mariano Arana, a prominent urbanist and future mayor of the city, called these popular organizations a “substantial resource with which to initiate a policy of change to a participatory and pluralist basis at the city level.”<sup>24</sup> The lack of political freedom under the dictatorship also contributed to ideological changes made by the Frente Amplio, a coalition of parties including the Communists, the Socialists, and former revolutionary guerrillas (the Tupamaros) as well as some social and Christian Democratic groups.<sup>25</sup> During the decade of military rule, the party moved to value procedural democracy more highly. The FA adopted the deepening of democracy as its central goal and citizen participation as the tool to achieve it.<sup>26</sup> Given the setting of long democratic rule, an organized citizenry, and a party committed to participation, we might anticipate finding a rise of civic engagement.

On the other hand, if Huntington and others are right that too much participation overloads the government with demands and reduces its capacity to respond, then the FA administration is an especially improbable case to find improved government performance. First, there was a huge backlog of demands for urban infrastructure. From the 1910s until the 1960s, Montevideo’s public services compared quite favorably to those in the rest of urban Latin America. However, residents had seen their demands for services repressed during military rule and ignored during five years of ineffective government by the Colorado Party (1985-1989). In fact, by the end of the 1980s, the crisis in public services—as well as the rise of poverty, inequality, social segregation and informalization of the

labor force—led scholars to write of the “Latin Americanization” of Montevideo.<sup>27</sup> Second, during its municipal campaign in 1989, the Frente Amplio had created high hopes among the population that their demands would be addressed. Third, when the FA won those elections and took municipal office in 1990, it had no technical expertise in local government and indeed, no administrative experience whatsoever. An inexperienced party facing an expectant population with a long list of demands makes for an unlikely scenario to find improvements in government service delivery.

Montevideo also provides an interesting case because the debate among the political parties during the 1989 mayoral race focused on decentralization and participation and many of the issues mirrored those in the academic debate described above. All the candidates agreed that some kind of decentralization was necessary, but they differed on the form it should take and what type of participation should accompany it. The candidates for the “traditional” Colorado and Blanco parties advocated administrative decentralization, whereby certain municipal responsibilities would be carried out by several administrative centers outside the downtown area and neighborhood associations would operate in agreement with City Hall to implement specific projects. The Frente Amplio claimed that the traditional parties offered only “deconcentration” (shifting workers and services to neighborhood branches) not real decentralization, which would require devolution of power to the citizens. The coupling of decentralization and participation, and the crucial role they play in deepening democracy is evident throughout the FA’s basic program of government in 1989. The following passage sums up the FA’s message: “Citizen participation is the irreplaceable road to impel the process of the deepening of democracy, and it constitutes an essential ingredient for giving a democratic meaning to the decentralization that the Frente Amplio proposes.”<sup>28</sup> It is also clear that for the FA leaders participation meant effective citizen involvement in decision-making processes, not merely as information providers.<sup>29</sup> This alarmed the traditional parties, who saw too much participation as endangering representative democracy.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, despite its particularities, Montevideo is not unrepresentative of Latin American cities in terms of the jurisdiction of local government. Like many other municipal governments in the region, Montevideo’s City Hall is responsible for regulating or providing basic services such as water and sewerage, trash collection, street paving, lighting and maintenance, preschools, parks, public markets, public transportation, and public health. And like most of its counterparts, it does not have its own police force, nor is it responsible for education and hospitals (though it does run several health clinics).<sup>31</sup> The two aspects of local government that set Montevideo apart, its status as national capital and its position as one of Uruguay’s nineteen departments (similar to provinces), do not negate the general lessons it can offer.



*Figure 1. Map of Montevideo's eighteen zones.*

Note: Adapted by the author from <http://www.montevideo.gub.uy/comunales.htm>. This map is the intellectual property of the Intendencia Municipal de Montevideo (Municipal Government of Montevideo). It is used with permission.

### 3. DESIGNING DECENTRALIZATION/PARTICIPATION IN MONTEVIDEO, 1990-1993

The key point about Montevideo's DP experience is that the particular design of the participatory mechanism matters. The FA's initial DP program, from 1990 to 1993, offered a form of participation that was much more clear, inviting, and potent than that offered by the reformed program that followed (from 1994 to the present). Rather than creating a new form of direct democracy and stimulating more citizens to participate, the reforms to the project at the end of 1993 added two layers of representation, obscuring the link between participation and results and contributing to a decline in participation. The first steps in this analysis will be to describe the history of the DP process and compare the pre- and post-1993 periods.

On entering office in January 1990, the new FA mayor, Tabaré Vázquez, immediately began the process by submitting a resolution to divide the city of 1.3 million residents into eighteen zones (see Figure 1) and to create community centers in each zone (CCZs). The resolution also called for elections to a "political organ" to head each zone at an unspecified future date. The CCZs were to serve as administrative outposts of the municipal administration and as arenas for participation. Initially, each CCZ had a small group of municipal workers, including an architect and a social worker as well as nonprofessionals who could provide a limited number of localized services such as public lighting, repair of storm drains, and loans of materials for housing improvements. Mayor Vázquez appointed a coordinator

for each CCZ to oversee this team and to begin organizing general “deliberative assemblies” and thematic commissions in which individual residents and delegates from local social organizations (such as neighborhood associations, soup kitchens, and housing cooperatives) could participate. Yet, just as the DP project began taking shape, the opposition parties reacted against it.

The FA’s opponents in the municipal council (Junta Departamental) collected one thousand signatures to present their case against the decentralization resolution before the national parliament.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, Vázquez proceeded with the project by modifying the wording of the resolution and opening up negotiations with the opposition through a mixed committee of council members and administration officials. By the end of his first year in office (1990), sixteen CCZs had opened, and public meetings had been held throughout the eighteen zones to discuss each zone’s priorities for the administration’s five-year budget plan. Approximately 25,000 people participated in dozens of such meetings, which served more to create huge lists of demands than to organize and prioritize them into a coherent budget.<sup>33</sup> A study of neighborhood associations discovered that 60 percent of them had participated in the budget discussions.<sup>34</sup> Vázquez also promoted participation by rotating the meetings with his cabinet members to a different neighborhood each week, thus offering citizens a public opportunity to air requests and complaints.

Gradually, more administrative responsibilities were transferred to the CCZs. Ninety-seven different administrative procedures could be conducted through the CCZs by the end of 1991.<sup>35</sup> Previously, citizens had needed to make the trip downtown to the municipal administration’s central office (the infamous “palace of bricks”) to wait in long lines. Following decentralization, they can visit or even call their local CCZ to complain that their trash was not collected, for example, or that the light on their street has burned out. And city workers at the CCZ can be dispatched more quickly to resolve the problem.

In addition, more people began taking part in the regular general assemblies and thematic commissions (for issues such as health, infrastructure, culture, and the environment) organized by the zone coordinators. By 1992, there were seventy-seven such commissions across the eighteen zones, with a maximum of twelve functioning in one zone and only one in other zones.<sup>36</sup> Neither the public assemblies nor the commissions could make final decisions about zonal issues, but they did make proposals, prioritize demands from the zone’s social organizations, and carry out community projects with the aid of CCZ workers. Though the commissions were active, they lacked institutionalization, forming and dissolving frequently with constant changes in the number of participants.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, a group of CCZ social workers write of the pre-1993 period, “The breadth and depth that citizen participation had acquired created two problems to solve: the institutionalization of this participation and the rapid resolution of the problems and demands presented.”<sup>38</sup>

While the FA administration was beginning to realize that the DP process needed to become more regularized, the opposition parties continued to condemn the project in the municipal council—stalling the negotiations in the mixed committee—and in the press. One study recorded more than 150 attacks by the opposition in the press during the first two years. The Colorado and Blanco parties, fearing further erosion of their electoral base should the DP program succeed, accused the Frente and the CCZs of copying the practices of the Cuban Committees for the Defense of the Revolution and the Soviet KGB to manipulate city residents.<sup>39</sup> Though these claims were unfounded, the Frente administration did want a channel of participation that was consistent and legitimate. The continually evolving general assemblies and thematic commissions of delegates from social organizations and individual volunteers did not provide consistency and may have led to questions of legitimacy. Facing strong pressure from the opposition and with the need to achieve more stability in the DP program, in 1993 the Frente Amplio compromised its original plan and proposed a new formula—ultimately approved by the municipal council—that gave the opposition automatic seats at the zonal level.<sup>40</sup>

The new mechanisms were designed both to provide the government with clear, stable, and legitimate interlocutors and to appease the opposition parties. Now, in addition to the CCZ, each of the city's eighteen zones would have a local board (Junta Local) of five members with decision-making authority (two selected by the opposition parties and three by the ruling party) who serve for five years, and a local neighbors' council (Concejo Vecinal) with between twenty-five and forty zonally elected members who have a consultative role and serve for two and a half years. The local councils essentially replaced and formalized the public deliberative assemblies, while the local boards represented a compromised version of the original plan for generally elected political organs. In addition, rather than zone coordinators, each CCZ would have a professional city functionary as a director to manage administrative functions and the local boards would each have a political appointee as a "secretary."

In late 1993, the FA held internal elections for the local board members in which approximately 20,000 party members voted, whereas the opposition Blancos and Colorados chose to appoint their local board members. The same year, open elections for the local councils attracted nearly 70,000 voters, which is less than 7 percent of eligible voters (while general elections always reach a turn-out of over 80 percent). The elections were organized in the CCZs (not by the national electoral institute) at the zonal level, with the same social organizations that had previously sent delegates to the deliberative assemblies now presenting candidates for the local councils. The roles of the local councils are to consult with the local boards and their secretaries on the zone's budget and public service priorities, to propose projects and improvements for the zone, and to act as monitors over government implementation. The councils generally meet twice a month and

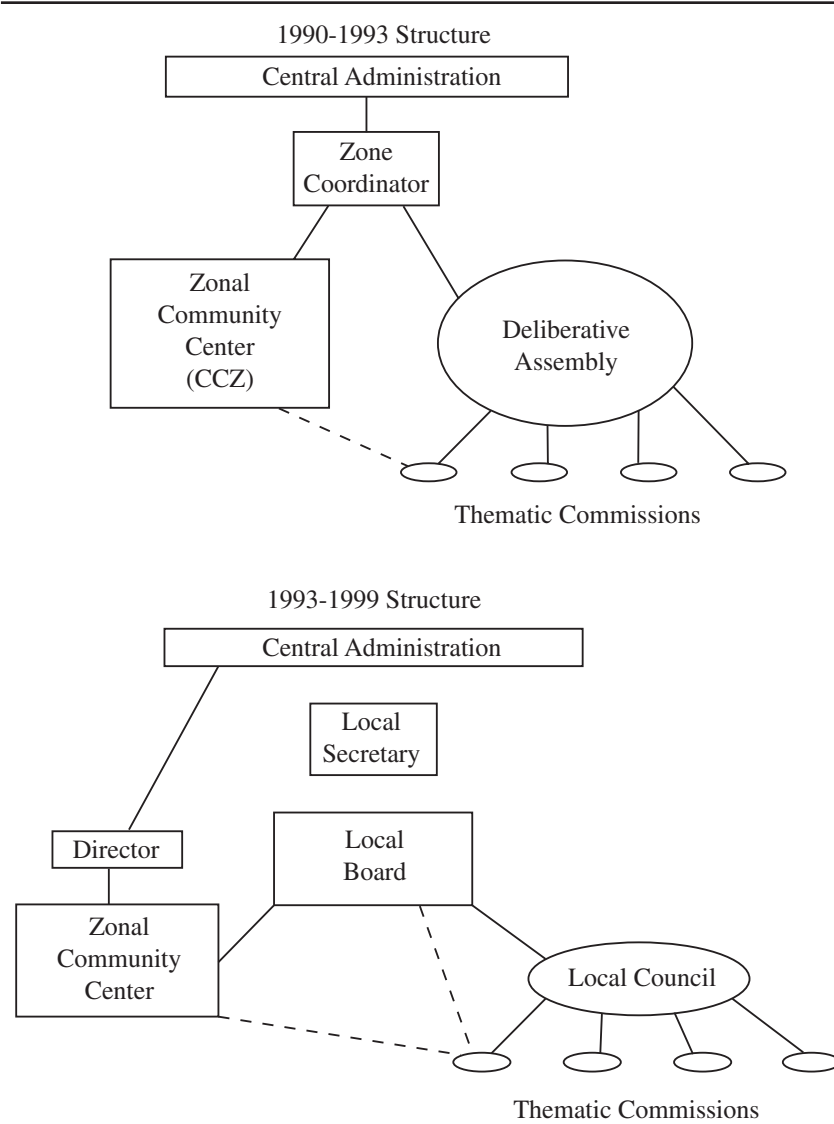


Figure 2. Rectangular shapes indicate that the structure is part of the executive branch; circular shapes indicate that the structure is independent. Dashed lines indicate less consistent interaction than whole lines.

have continued the practice of creating thematic commissions. These commissions also meet regularly to discuss specific issues (road construction, the elderly, transportation, parks), providing opportunities for citizens to participate in addition to the yearly discussions to modify the annual budget. The roles for the local boards are nearly identical to those of the local councils, with the differences that the boards are considered part of the municipal executive branch and thus have decision-making power over some zonal issues and responsibility for overseeing

the functioning of the CCZ. The local councils are considered independent entities.

Figure 2 illustrates the DP institutions (which exist in each of the eighteen zones) and shows how they changed from the pre- to the post-1993 periods. The next sections examine the consequences of these changes.

#### 4. FOLLOWING THE DP TRAIL, POST-1993

With the establishment of the local boards and councils at the end of 1993, the Frente administration maintained the DP project as its centerpiece, and the public seemed to approve. The 1994 municipal elections validated the FA city government and returned the party to office in Montevideo, this time with 45 percent of the local vote (up 10 percentage points from 1989). The new mayor, Mariano Arana, continued Vázquez's program, devolving a few more services and city procedures to the CCZs (though Arana did end the rotating cabinet meetings). New local council elections were held in subsequent years and the number of voters participating expanded from 68,558 in 1993 to 82,496 in 1995, and then to 105,394 in 1998, which amounts to about 10 percent of the Montevideo electorate.<sup>41</sup> In May 2000, the FA once again won the mayoral elections. Arana earned reelection with 58 percent of the vote, thirty percentage points ahead of his closest rival.<sup>42</sup> These electoral results suggest that the FA's decentralized participation program has indeed been popular. Nonetheless, the formalization of citizen participation in the local councils and the introduction of the local boards proved to have important negative consequences for the DP program's ability to attract participants.

Sometime after the local boards and councils were inaugurated in December 1993, participation began to decline in contrast to the early enthusiasm on the part of the public to take part in the local organs.<sup>43</sup> There are several ways in which the new system discouraged participation in the institutions implemented as part of the decentralization process (the local boards and councils, thematic commissions, and annual budget meetings). In the earlier period, citizens' demands went directly from the zonal assemblies and commissions to the mayor's office via the zone coordinator. After the creation of the local boards and councils, demands first had to pass through two filters, given that the two local bodies mostly hold separate meetings.

The legislation granting the politically appointed boards' decision-making authority and the popularly elected councils a consultative role also dampened citizen interest. These formal rules not only discourage regular citizens from presenting demands because of the extra distance established between them and city hall, but also discourage the councilors from participating in council meetings, as evidenced by their substantial drop-out rate. In a study by several social workers in the CCZs done in 1997, the drop-out rate ranged from 7 percent in one zone up to 74 percent in another, with a total drop-out rate of 45 percent.<sup>44</sup> Although the

councilors have at least some popular mandate (since they were locally elected), their discussions can be invalidated by the decisions of the local board members who may be disconnected from the neighbors' concerns (since board members are party selected). In addition, as one ex-official in the FA administration has argued, councilors and citizens may not be participating more numerous because the discussions in the council meetings often revolve around *expedientes* (files) (i.e., small, often individual problems of little interest to the typical citizen) and because debates often degenerate into fights between representatives of different political parties.<sup>45</sup>

The change to local boards and councils has had other significant effects as well. Most important, the regular meetings of the local boards, and even of some of the local councils, are not open to the public in most zones. In some zones, occasional meetings are scheduled to receive the public, and/or residents may ask for an audience, depending on the zone. Rather than deeper democracy in the making, this seems very much like a reproduction of traditional political hierarchy, where the regular citizen must wait outside the closed doors before being allowed in to meet the "truly important," something I witnessed on more than one of my many visits to local board and council meetings. Generally, the only—and the few—people at these meetings were board members and councilors. In many interviews with local board members and councilors, I was told that one cause of the lack of participation was that once residents thought they were "officially" represented by the local boards and councils, they did not feel the need to participate any longer because they had someone else to do it for them. This may well be true. Whether residents feel as if they have been relieved of their duty to participate or councilors have discouraged them from doing so by acting like typical politicians (and these are not mutually exclusive possibilities), the fact is that currently very few regular citizens participate even in the thematic commissions. There are some zones in which some residents are active in these commissions, but the norm is that each commission is made up of a few councilors and occasionally a board member.

The annual budget assemblies, which in the initial period attracted thousands of residents, contain at least two mechanisms that also dampen the urge by the public to participate: the unimaginative organization of the assemblies and the lack of significance given to the proposals made by the assemblies' participants, including the local councilors. In the assemblies I attended in several zones in 1999, the number of residents attending varied from approximately 100 to 300 per zone. Yet by the end of the normally three-hour assemblies, fewer than a third of the initial crowd was still present, most having left after the first hour. Why? First, the assemblies always begin half an hour late at the very minimum. Second, the assemblies are generally structured so that the presidents of the local council and the local board speak first, welcoming the mayor, followed by a forty-five minute speech by the mayor. The majority of those present often leaves once the mayor

finishes talking.<sup>46</sup> If they have stayed, patiently, they still must sit and listen as several members of the local council present their proposals and questions and the municipal cabinet members make their replies. By this time, the mayor has often retired from the assembly because of other obligations, as has most of the rest of the public. Thus, by the time the average citizen has the chance to address the local governing bodies, there is almost nobody left to talk.<sup>47</sup>

Yet it is not merely the uninspired organization of the assemblies that discourages participation in the budget process, it is also that the type of participation allowed is more akin to information-providing than to decision making. The budget amounts destined to each zone and to each aspect of city government are decided by the mayor's cabinet, both in terms of how much for investment versus how much for services and in terms of how much for transportation versus how much for public lighting, for example. The local boards and councils in each zone receive a detailed budget plan that shows how much each zone can expect with regard to each type of investment. The boards and councils then make lists of priorities for each category using input from the community. This is arranged differently in each zone. Some council members set up meetings in their neighborhoods to hear suggestions, and in some zones they place suggestion boxes in public buildings. For example, those in Zone 5 know that they can expect one hundred thousand *pesos* to replace or install street lamps, so they create a list of which streets should receive new lamps or replace old lamps. There is no guarantee that these lists of priorities will be respected in practice. In defense of the process, the municipal authorities do engage in a round of negotiating with the boards and councils if they are unsatisfied with the amounts listed in the original budget plan.

In summary, fewer people are participating in the decentralization program because the process introduced in 1993 gave elected councilors and especially average citizens (*vecinos*) insufficient reason to participate. The process does not provide a clear, inviting, and potent channel for citizen participation. It is not clear because of the multiple layers of representation; it is not inviting because of the closed doors and long waits; and, fundamentally, it is not potent because citizens lack the power to directly influence the most important questions in the budget because City Hall retains control over the critical issues. A survey of local councilors conducted in August 1999 shows that the local councilors think that the two most important areas for improvement in the decentralization program are precisely the lack of substantial participation on the part of citizens and the councils' lack of power (see Figure 3).<sup>48</sup>

Thus far, I have argued that there were two phases of the DP project, and that the active citizen participation in the first phase began to decline in the second phase. It remains to be shown that the DP project contributed to improvements in city services across both of these phases but only succeeded in encouraging wider civic engagement in the first phase.

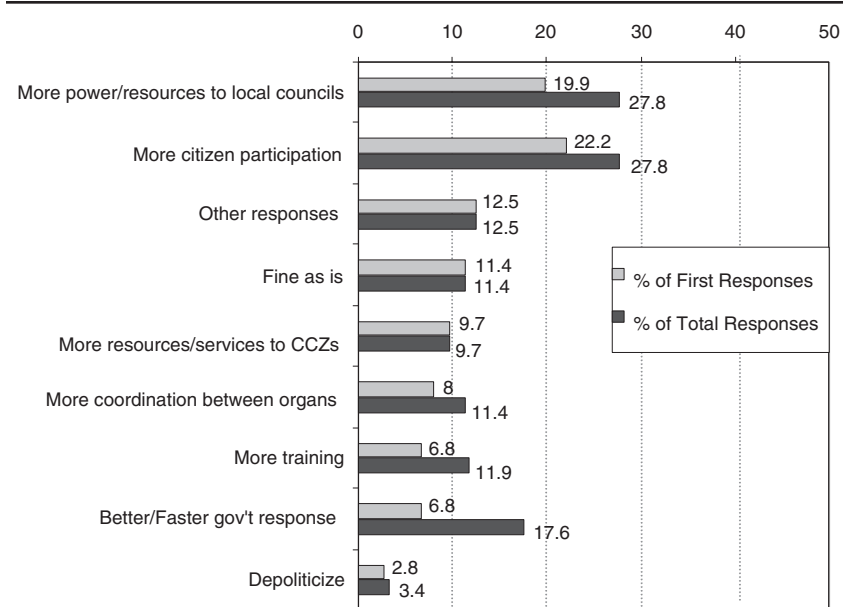


Figure 3. What should be done to improve decentralization (as percentage of councilors who responded)?

Note: CCZs = Community centers in each zone.

#### 5. MONTEVIDEO, BEFORE AND AFTER

To see how much government services have improved in Montevideo, we must start with the period prior to the implementation of the DP program. In 1990, the Frente Amplio inherited a city that by all accounts was “full of pot-holes, dirty and dark, with problems regarding transportation, sanitation, the environment, and housing among the most cited.”<sup>49</sup> Even the mayoral candidate for the incumbent Colorados in 1989 admitted the emergency situation in the capital city. The Colorado administration (1985-1989) had proved unable to make substantial improvements in the major services the city government provided—street paving, sanitation, trash collection, and public lighting—nor in providing citizens with adequate channels of participation after the fall of military rule.<sup>50</sup> The reasons for the Colorados’ lack of success are at least partly accidental: the popular Colorado candidate elected in 1984 died a few months after taking office; his first replacement was accused of corruption and his own party asked him to step down; and the third Colorado mayor in the five-year term could not reverse the incapable management he inherited from his predecessors.<sup>51</sup> Another probable reason for ineffective service provision under the Colorados is the city bureaucracy’s notorious inefficiency, petty corruption, and lack of coordination.<sup>52</sup>

Opinion polls from the period reflect these negative assessments. More respondents disapproved of the administration of Colorado mayors than approved

throughout the period.<sup>53</sup> In a 1988 survey, 52 percent of the respondents reported that the Colorado administration was “bad,” 35 percent called it “fair,” and only 10 percent called it “good.”<sup>54</sup> And a survey in 1990 showed that 48 percent of respondents considered the Colorado administration similar to the previous (military) administration, 42 percent thought it was worse, and only 9 percent thought it was better.<sup>55</sup>

Ten years later, things look dramatically different in Montevideo. At the end of eight years of FA administration, a survey in December 1997 reported that 73 percent of those asked considered Montevideo to be better or much better than it was ten years before,<sup>56</sup> and a wide majority of respondents approve of the job done by FA mayors.<sup>57</sup> The rest of this section will show that not only do Montevideans *think* the city has improved in general as the surveys suggests, but that in fact city records demonstrate an increase in the provision of many local government services and arguably a rise in efficiency as well. In addition, the section will compare the results of a 1992 survey of residents of three representative zones of Montevideo with those of a 1999 survey of the same zones designed by the author and a colleague<sup>58</sup> to illustrate how citizens have taken notice of the improvements in service provision.

My examination of the FA’s performance in Montevideo will start with the city services which residents find to be most important. In a survey of adult residents carried out shortly before the 1989 elections, respondents were asked which services the municipality should provide. The top four answers were (1) trash collection, 47 percent; (2) lighting, 13 percent; (3) basic sanitation (sewerage), 5 percent; and (4) street paving, 4 percent.<sup>59</sup>

(1) With regard to disposal of municipal waste picked up by trash collectors and street sweepers, the city has increased the amount of waste disposed from 231,245 tons in 1992 (169 kilograms/person) to 577,200 tons in 1997 (430 kg/per), an increase of 150 percent.<sup>60</sup> In the absence of evidence that Montevideans doubled the amount of waste they generated over a five-year span, it seems that the coverage of trash collectors and street sweepers has expanded. In addition, while at the beginning of the first FA administration there had been 1,700 illegal (and unsightly) garbage dumps, by 1994, there were only 150.<sup>61</sup>

(2) It is perhaps surprising that public lighting should be so important to residents, but two considerations suggest why this should be the case. First, adequate lighting theoretically improves citizens’ safety by deterring crime (we shall see below that Montevideans are quite concerned with the crime rate). Second, the city’s light fixtures during the Colorado administration in the late 1980s operated sporadically and declined over the period, from 67 percent of public lights working in 1985 to 55 percent in 1989. Thus, nearly half the public lights were out in 1989 when the FA was elected. By 1993, 80 percent were functioning, and 90 percent worked by 1997.<sup>62</sup> The number of light fixtures increased as well. In 1990

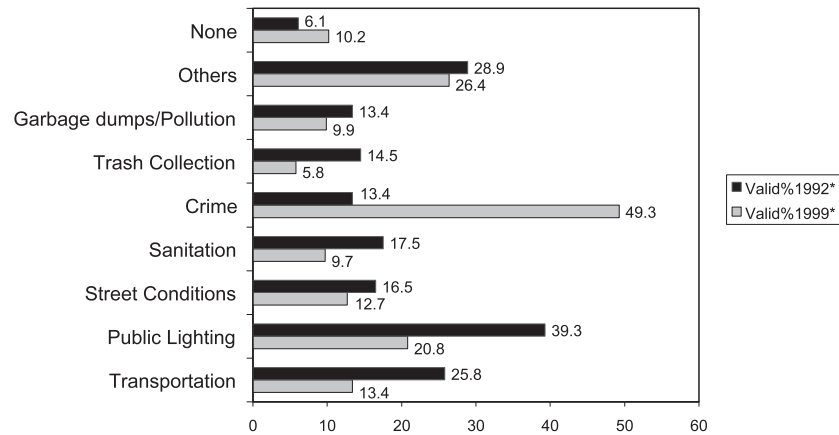


Figure 4. Principal problems of the neighborhood.

there were 45,000 light fixtures; by 1993, there were 52,000, a 16 percent increase.<sup>63</sup>

(3) In the past two decades, Montevideo has undertaken three major sanitation projects, all with loans from the Inter-American Development Bank, in 1981, 1989, and 1996. The first two counted on considerable support from the central government (90 percent and 50 percent, respectively), while the financial responsibility for the last has been placed almost entirely on the municipality. The only data available on the actual extension of the coverage of the sanitation services shows an increase in the percentage of the population covered from 76 percent in 1992 to 81 percent in 1995, with the expectation that with the completion of the 1996 Sanitation Plan in the year 2000, 91 percent of Montevideo's residents would have sanitation services.<sup>64</sup>

(4) Perhaps most impressive is the huge change in the amount of street paving done by the city government under the Frente Amplio. Whereas during the Colorado administration (1985-1989) there was an average of 430,000 square meters of pavement poured per year to maintain old and construct new roads, during Vázquez's administration (1990-1994), the average was 755,345 m<sup>2</sup>/yr. During Arana's first few years (1995-1997), the average jumped even higher to 826,383 m<sup>2</sup>/yr.<sup>65</sup> This nearly doubles the average during the Colorado years and compares favorably to the entire period from 1934 to 1955, when the maximum constructed was 420,000 m<sup>2</sup> in 1934.<sup>66</sup> In addition to the increase in the amount of pavement poured, the quality of the pavement used improved as well, as the amount of "economical pavement" (poor quality) decreased from 50 percent of the total poured in 1990 to about 15 percent in 1997, while the percentage of asphalt went up from

Table 1  
*Favorable Ratings of City Services (in percentages)*

Service	1992	1999	1992	1999	1992	1999	1992	1999
	Zone 3	Zone 3	Zone 7	Zone 7	Zone 9	Zone 9	Total	Total
Transportation	65	68	53	68	36	51	51	59
Public lighting	40	59	38	66	29	44	35	53
Street conditions	34	40	45	66	32	28	36	39
Trash collection	67	82	62	85	37	64	55	74
Sanitation	86	81	80	93	32	42	65	65
Street sweeping	39	45	38	59	9	17	28	35

*Note:* Percentages are of those saying the service is very good or good over those who responded.

35 percent to more than 70 percent and the amount of concrete has stayed roughly the same.<sup>67</sup>

At the same time that the government increased service delivery in these four crucial areas,<sup>68</sup> it reduced the number of city employees by about 20 percent from 12,329 in 1990 to 9,904 in 1998<sup>69</sup> while increasing the percentage of professionals from 6.7 percent of the city workforce in 1988 to 11.6 percent in 1996.<sup>70</sup> This represents an increase in government efficiency, as fewer workers were necessary to provide a higher level of service delivery. A comparison of results of the 1992 and 1999 surveys show that the population has noticed the increases in the output of city services. The earlier survey took place in early 1992, before many services had been deconcentrated, thus providing a good contrast to the later survey.

One pair of questions asked people to name the two biggest problems in their neighborhood. Figure 4 shows a decrease in mentions of all types of problems except for crime.

There are large differences in terms of transportation, public lighting, sanitation, and trash collection. About half as many people mentioned these as problems in 1999 as in 1992. Crime is the only problem that caused concern among more people in 1999 than in 1992. There are two possible reasons for this. There may have been a real rise in crime and/or improvements in other services may have made crime stand out. In fact, both things seem to be true. Certain types of violent crime have become more frequent since 1992 (see Appendix B), but since the national government is responsible for the police, the municipal administration does not receive the blame. At the same time, Montevideans rate city services better than they did eight years ago.

A series of questions in the 1992 and 1999 surveys asked residents their opinions of specific government services.<sup>71</sup> Table 1 presents the results for both years, separating out each zone, which were chosen to represent the different types of city areas: Zone 3 to represent the central urban areas (mostly middle class), Zone 7 to represent the wealthier areas along the eastern coast, and Zone 9 to represent the peripheral areas with significant numbers of poor households.

The total results show that residents rated nearly all city services more favorably in 1999 than they did in 1992, and especially public lighting and trash collection, which were the top two services citizens believed the city should provide in 1989. If one compares across the three zones, it is clear that the aggregate picture actually masks some other improvements in ratings of city services.<sup>72</sup> For instance, satisfaction with transportation seems to have improved considerably in Zones 7 and 9, which are zones further from the center of the city and historically had had fewer transportation options. In fact, the respondents in Zone 7, the wealthiest area, note large improvements in each of the six services they were asked about. It is also clear that while the residents of the poorer area (Zone 9) do evaluate most services more favorably than they did before, their degree of satisfaction is still much lower than that of their counterparts in the other two zones.

City records and public opinion polls both strongly suggest that the FA administration has improved service provision over the previous years, bringing services up to a high level of approval by the majority of residents, while reducing staff to improve efficiency.<sup>73</sup> The administration seems to have responded to residents' concerns by making an extra effort to deliver the very services that residents found most important in 1989 (trash collection and public lighting), as reflected in the output of these services and in the positive ratings given these services by city residents. The advances in government performance conform to the expectations of theorists optimistic about decentralized participation. But these scholars, and the Frente Amplio's leaders, expect and want positive results in terms of citizenship as well. Here the outcome is mixed. The initial form of participation did seem to have many of the benefits that proponents of participatory reforms claim, but the post-1993 form did not.

#### 6. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OR CIVIC STAGNATION?

Civic engagement refers both to actual participation in social and political organizations and to how people perceive their integration into and efficacy in public life. A rise of civic engagement would entail more people participating in civic organizations, more people feeling integrated into some sort of community, and more people thinking they have the ability to influence public decisions. Rather than growing, civic engagement has stagnated or even slightly declined in Montevideo between 1993 and 1999. In addition, the local council system introduced in 1993 represents the middle and upper strata of society better than it does the lower strata. Thus, the goal of expanding the political influence of the excluded has not been met either, again contra the expectations of some decentralization advocates.

Comparing the two surveys, one can see a substantial increase in the number of households that have used the CCZ in their zone, from 29 percent of households in 1992 to 55 percent in 1999. This gives further hope to the decentralizers' hypothesis: not only is there a decentralized participation program in Montevideo, but

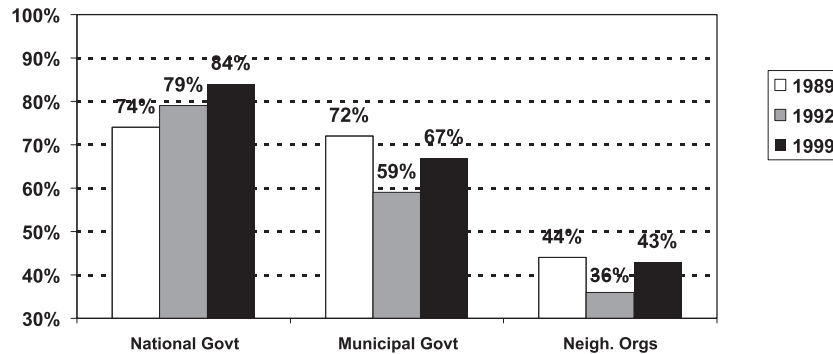


Figure 5. Degree of possibility to influence decisions at different levels (percentage of those who consider they have little or no possibility).

people actually use the program to some degree. Nonetheless, the fact that more people are using these centers seems to have had little effect on their attitudes and behavior regarding local problem solving. For example, when asked what is the best way to resolve neighborhood problems, one might have expected that there would have been an increase in the number of people suggesting collective action, yet there was virtually no change in how people answered this question.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, when asked whether they personally considered that participating in some way in the solution of the city's or the neighborhood's problems was important, the percentages of people answering "yes, very important" actually dropped slightly (from 65 percent to 61 percent).<sup>75</sup> It is interesting to contrast the rather large number of people who believe that participating is important with how few people think that they can actually influence public institutions. While one might expect that the increase in citizen contact with the municipal government through the CCZs would result in greater feelings of efficacy in the population, this does not seem to be the case. Figure 5 shows the responses to a similar question on three surveys, from 1989, 1992, and 1999.<sup>76</sup> We asked the following: to what degree do you consider that people like you have the possibility to influence the decisions of the national government, of the municipal government, and of the neighborhood organizations?

Consistent with the decentralizers' expectations, as one moves closer to the local level (from national to municipal to neighborhood), perception of efficacy increases, and this is true across the three periods. And there has been a steady increase in the perception that people have little or no possibility of influencing the national government. A different pattern emerges when one looks at the levels of the municipal government and neighborhood organizations. Initially, from 1989 to 1992, there was an increase in the perception that one can influence the decisions made at these levels. This corresponds to the period in which the Frente Amplio took municipal office, opened the CCZs and invited citizens to participate

Table 2  
*Participation in Civic Organizations (in percentage of those who participate in at least one organization)*

Type of Organization	1989	1992	1999	CV1999
Parish or religious organization	18	18	12	9
Social/sports club	14	17	10	16
Parents' association	11	12	7	11
Neighborhood association	5	8	4	57
Party/political club	16	5	3	44
Nursery/soup kitchen	6	5	1	6
Women's organization	4	3	3	10
Neighborhood health clinic	5	5	1	15
CCZ/CV commission	N/A	5	3	100

*Note:* The columns do not add to 100 percent because people can belong to more than one organization and because the organizations with few participants are not listed here. N/A = not applicable.

in open assemblies and thematic commissions. However, in the 1992-1999 period, we witness a reversal in the feelings of efficacy, nearly to the predecentralization levels, suggesting that the effects of the FA's program were minimal at best.

The failure to increase the perception of collective or personal efficacy has been accompanied by the absence of the extension of social integration. When asked the classic survey question of whether they considered themselves part of a social group, 65 percent of the respondents in 1992 replied affirmatively while only 57 percent did so in 1999.<sup>77</sup> This decline is made up of small dips in feelings of affinity virtually across the gamut of social groups (neighborhood, professional, religious, class, political, age, and sports), while there was an increase in identity with one's family (11.7 percent to 18.9 percent).

Perhaps the most important measure of civic engagement comes not from how people think about public life, but from how they act. Frente leaders expected that the opening of the CCZs and the emphasis on participation by the municipal government would encourage the creation of new local organizations and stimulate activism in them because organized groups could gain a larger voice in public affairs. Skeptics might assume the opposite, that opening new mechanisms of participation would decrease other forms of civic activity by drawing people from them. A comparison of the surveys from 1989, 1992, and 1999 shows that neither of these scenarios accurately captures what occurred. Table 2 reports selected results of a question that listed a series of organizations and asked respondents to say in which organizations they participated, if any. The table also shows results from a survey of the local councilors in 1999 (column "CV1999") to illustrate which types of organizations are best represented in the local councils.

The results from 1989 to 1992 are mixed. There appears to be little change, except for small increases in the percentage of respondents participating in social or sports clubs and in neighborhood associations, and a steep decline in the percentage of respondents active in political parties and clubs.<sup>78</sup> This latter finding is

explained partially by the crisis in the Uruguayan Communist Party, which had a large and active membership in the 1980s but descended into disarray with the demise of the Soviet Union in 1990 and lost thousands of members. While the opening of the CCZs in 1990 may have had a small effect on civic participation in the first phase, when one compares the 1992 and 1999 results, the DP program appears to have done nothing to stop the decline in participation across the entire spectrum of civic organizations. This decline cannot be attributed to the replacement of other organizations by the DP program because participation also declined in the CCZ and local council activities.

The number of neighborhood associations is another measure of participation, though it is a more problematic one. At the end of 1988, there were 436 functioning neighborhood associations, yet in 1991, their number had declined to 371.<sup>79</sup> Of these, more than one hundred were new.<sup>80</sup> The most recent tabulation of neighborhood associations available is from an incomplete series of reports from the CCZs from 1998, and it suggests that there were at least 224 neighborhood associations in that year.<sup>81</sup> Even if we assume that the actual number of neighborhood associations was 341 (by imputing that the missing zones each had the average number of associations), there is still a decline from 1991. This indicator of participation is problematic because it tells us little by itself.

Unfortunately, other types of information, such as how long the association has been functioning and how the association operates, are only available for the pre-1993 period in two excellent studies by an Uruguayan expert on neighborhood associations, Mariana González. Her initial study was a census of associations carried out in 1988 and 1989. González compared associations based on the date of their formation and found that the associations formed during the dictatorship or earlier were qualitatively different from those formed during the Colorado administration from 1985 to 1988.<sup>82</sup> These later associations were distinguished from the earlier ones by several traits:

a greater degree of informality, higher relative percentage of organizations that did not hold meetings or held them with less frequency, the majority did so in family houses, more than half had never elected leaders, the majority lacked legal status (*personería jurídica*), a low level of coordination both with other neighborhood associations and other types of organizations in the area, an important rate of dissolution, greater dependency on the Municipal Executive to resolve their demands, and it was also in this group that a greater percentage showed the existence of political affinity among the membership.<sup>83</sup>

González conducted her second census at the end of 1991 and made several interesting discoveries. Most important here, there was a surge of new associations—136 had been formed since mid-1989—and the demise of 257 associations that had formed in the 1985-1988 period.<sup>84</sup> In addition, the profile of the associations changed, such that there were higher percentages of associations that held regular meetings, that elected their leaders, that held meetings in public places, that applied for legal status, and that had regular contact with other organizations in

Table 3  
*Monthly Household Income (in percentages)*

Income	Residents	Councilors
3,000 pesos or less	15.8	10.5
3,001 to 5,000 pesos	26.2	11.0
5,000 to 9,000 pesos	22.3	27.6
9,001 to 14,000 pesos	17.1	23.8
14,001 to 20,000 pesos	9.6	13.3
20,001 pesos or more	8.8	13.8

Table 4  
*Education Level (in percentages)*

Education	Residents	Councilors
Primary (complete or not)	30.6	14.1
Junior high school	24.8	11.3
High school/technical/police	27.3	46.0
University/teacher's college	17.3	28.7

their area.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, though the overall number of associations dropped from 1988 to 1991, the character of the associations became more democratic and active. Since that time, it is difficult to tell precisely what has happened to the associations other than that their absolute number has declined.

One might argue against my claim of stagnation in civic activity by pointing to the rise in the number of voters in the three elections of the local councilors. There are two problems with this argument. First, the increase is slight as a percentage of eligible voters. The percentage of voters in the local council elections rose from 6.5 percent of registered voters in 1993 to 10 percent in 1998.<sup>86</sup> Second, even if there had been a larger increase in the vote in neighborhood council elections, the fact remains that voting is the traditional kind of participation that involves very little effort on the part of the citizen. The Frente Amplio's goal was not merely to add another kind of election and hold it more often than every five years; the party specifically called for participation that went beyond occasional voting.

The FA administration had hoped to deepen democracy through their decentralized participation program by creating an arena in which the historically excluded sectors of society, particularly the poor, would have greater direct input into the decisions that affected their lives. Partially to compensate for their underrepresentation in other arenas, the intention was that the excluded would be overrepresented at the zonal level. However, the administration's main participatory mechanism, the local council, does not truly give the poor and less educated much more opportunity to contribute to decision making. A comparison of the results of the 1999 survey of Montevideo residents with the results of the survey of the elected local councilors illustrates this point. Tables 3 and 4 show that the per-

centages of poor and less educated people are much lower in the councils than in the population.

While 42 percent of residents' households earn less than 5,000 pesos per month, only 21.5 percent of councilors' households earn this amount. In each of the other income brackets, the richer residents are overrepresented in the neighborhood councils. In addition, the average monthly income for the councilors is 11,630 pesos (about US\$1,000 at the time of the survey), whereas the average monthly income for the residents is estimated to be 8,773 pesos (about US\$760).<sup>87</sup>

The underrepresentation of the less educated is even more dramatic. While only 45 percent of residents have attained at least a high school degree, three quarters of the councilors have a high school degree or beyond. The local councilors are also disproportionately older. While 19 percent of residents in the survey were between the ages of 20 and 29, only 3 percent of councilors were in this age group. Finally, our survey also shows that much lower percentages of the poor have used the administrative organs of decentralization, the CCZs. Starting with the lowest income bracket, only 44 percent of those have frequented a CCZ. The rate of visiting a CCZ goes up with income from there, reaching 82 percent of those in the highest income bracket.

In general, then, the decentralization process in Montevideo has *not* led to a rise of civic engagement, nor have traditionally excluded sectors gained a much larger voice.<sup>88</sup> They seem to be under- rather than overrepresented in the participatory mechanism introduced by the Frente Amplio.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The case of the Frente Amplio's DP project in Montevideo is paradoxical. On one hand, it strengthens the arguments of the advocates of decentralized participation in that the project seems to have led to the improvement of city service delivery, even in a case where one would least expect it. On the other hand, these arguments are weakened by the fact that rather than contributing to the growth of civic engagement in a case where it appeared likely, the second phase of the FA's program coincided with its apparent decline or stagnation at best. This latter outcome makes DP only a partial success in Montevideo. Before concluding with some general lessons from the Montevideo experience, I will first address alternative or additional explanations for the improvement in city services and the civic stagnation.

The opposition parties argue that the reason services expanded under the Frente administration is that it increased the size of the city budget and ran budget deficits most of its years in office. Total expenditures on investments in constant Uruguayan pesos did indeed double from 1989 to 1998. However, government service delivery stayed the same or even declined in the predecentralization period from 1985 to 1989, despite the fact that investments rose 47 percent and the government ran deficits in most years. And from 1989 to 1993, investments rose at

the same rate (48 percent), but there was a marked improvement in services, corresponding with the initiation of the DP process.<sup>89</sup> This suggests that the DP project played a larger role in the improvement in services than did budget deficits.

As for civic stagnation, my institutional design account differs from explanations given by some local actors. Many within the municipal administration recognize that there is a general “crisis of participation” in Montevideo, as it was labeled in the official report of the 1996 conference, “Montevideo in Forum II.”<sup>90</sup> But they offer a different explanation for it. When asked about the problem of participation in interviews, administration officials usually used two arguments: that declining economic conditions in Latin American countries have made participation more costly, and that there is a global trend toward individualism and consumerism that discourages participation in civic activities because people would rather shop and be entertained (or work to pay for those things).<sup>91</sup> Given (1) that there seems to have been an initial surge of participation when the decentralization program began in 1990 in Montevideo, and (2) that participation seems to be on the rise in certain other Latin American cities (notably Porto Alegre<sup>92</sup> and other Brazilian cities that have adopted its participatory budget process), it seems the administration’s arguments do not tell the whole story.

Another possible explanation, that the improvement in local service delivery means that citizens are essentially satisfied with City Hall and thus do not see the need to participate, also fails. If all the citizens who initially participated were satisfied with City Hall’s response in the first years, their friends and neighbors would see the results and begin participating themselves, and many of the original participants would find new problems and new needs. Indeed, this is exactly what happened in Porto Alegre, where hundreds of new participants engage in its participatory budget process each year and where new demands for social services and job training have begun to appear alongside the original demands for basic sanitation and street paving.<sup>93</sup>

My argument is not that the institutional changes in the participatory system made in 1993 caused a decline in civic engagement, but that they did nothing to encourage civic engagement nor to halt its decay. Because the new structures introduced in the post-1993 period were much less successful in motivating people to participate within them than were the previous structures, they failed to encourage people in general to become active in civic organizations or to feel more effective or integrated as citizens. The DP program’s second phase failed to improve on or even maintain the level of civic engagement attained in the first phase.

Nonetheless, I would like to stress that compared to the past, there has been a marked improvement in the way city government relates to residents. Prior to the first FA administration, City Hall had been largely closed to citizen input, and the few inroads were through political favoritism. The decentralization process has in fact meant an improvement in participation, and to the majority of city residents, the DP process has been quite successful. Not only have Montevideans granted

the Frente Amplio wider and wider electoral victories at the municipal level and near victories at the national level<sup>94</sup> but they continue to rate decentralization very highly in surveys.<sup>95</sup> In addition, a plurality of local residents considers that the creation of the CCZ in their zone has had a positive effect and agrees that decentralization “gives real power to the *vecinos* to govern themselves.”<sup>96</sup> At the same time, however, these positive attitudes toward decentralization are not evenly distributed throughout the population. It is interesting that higher percentages of wealthy residents believe the CCZs have had a positive effect, while lower percentages of the poor believe this to be true.

To conclude, what can the case of Montevideo teach us about decentralization and participation in general? First of all, the warnings of those like Huntington and Prud’homme that they endanger democracy and make government ineffective seem unfounded, given the improvements in service delivery. Nonetheless, the experience of Montevideo should caution the advocates of decentralization who believe it can easily engender civic renewal. In fact, the case in question conforms most to the expectations of the defenders of “participatory decentralization” such as Corraggio, who argue that for decentralization to have a transformational effect on democracy, it must include a strong component of citizen participation in decision making and not merely in information provision. Decentralization *does* facilitate the participation of citizens by way of informing the government of their preferences, and when the government acts on this information, it can improve service delivery. With more entry points—the eighteen new CCZs in this case—it is easier for people to engage in this kind of participation. As we saw, in Montevideo there was an increase in participation as information provision, as more people began using the CCZs. Their most important reasons for going to the CCZs, however, was not to participate in assemblies or meetings with other citizens, but to make individual complaints or requests.<sup>97</sup>

Yet while participation as information provision may be necessary for improved government services, it is not sufficient to engender a boost in civic engagement. For this to occur, there must be a mass of citizens interacting collectively around issues important to them. This type of participation is costly for the participants, both in terms of the time spent in meetings and the money spent on transportation to them. Given that much more time is required to participate in meetings than to make a complaint or a suggestion at an administrative office, there must be a greater stimulus for people to come to, and to stay in, meetings. That is, one must offer participation as direct, effective involvement in decision making. This is precisely where the architects of the decentralization/participation process in Montevideo have failed. Shortly after his inauguration in 1990, former FA mayor Tabaré Vázquez remarked that “local democracy [is] a fragile flower and difficult to grow.”<sup>98</sup> Ten years later, we might conclude that while decentralization may help democracy’s petals bloom, mechanisms of more effective participation are necessary for democracy’s roots to deepen.

## Appendix A

The survey of Montevideo residents was carried out in person by ten university students from 14 August to 22 August 1999. We randomly selected city blocks in the three zones used in the 1992 survey, which had been chosen to represent the different types of areas in Montevideo: Zone 7 to represent the wealthier areas along the eastern coast; Zone 3 to represent the central urban areas in decline (more poverty); and Zone 9 to represent the peripheral areas of the city with significant numbers of poor households. We had hoped for 450 completed questionnaires and the final sample size was 444. In terms of the distributions of gender, age, and education, the survey sample was quite close to the figures for the population over 19-years old taken from the *Anuario Estadístico* 1999 (from <http://www.ine.gub.uy> for the year 1998). While women (over 14 years of age) make up 54.1 percent of the population (over 14 years of age), they made up 56.5 percent of the survey. For age and education distributions, see appendix Table 1.

Table 1

	Age				
	20 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 and older
Population	21.3	18.1	17.0	14.6	29.0
Survey	18.8	17.8	16.3	16.8	30.3

	Education						
	None	Primary <sup>a</sup>	Jr. High	Secondary <sup>b</sup>	Magisterial	University	Other
Population	1.0	32.6	21.7	26.1	2.7	15.2	0.6
Survey	2.0	28.6	24.8	26.6	3.0	14.3	0.7

a. In the population, this includes those who did not complete primary education.

b. This includes both general secondary education and technological schools (UTU).

## Appendix B

Table 2  
*Crime Rates*

Type of Crime	Average 83-84	Average 85-89	Average 90-92	Average 93-95	Average 96-98	Percentage Change 90-92/96-98
Assault and battery	2,843	3,426	4,026	3,519	2,633	-35
Sexual crimes	491	482	411	373	380	-8
Homicides	36	67	72	97	112	56
Theft	13,722	27,120	26,034	25,552	26,896	3
Armed robbery	817	1,698	1,994	3,236	4,508	126
Property damages	3,378	4,271	3,970	3,357	2,764	-30

Sources: For 1983-1997, calculations from Rep. Oriental Uruguay, INE (1985-1998); for 1998, <http://www.ine.gub.uy>.

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13. See, for example, Borja, "Past, Present, and Future"; Jordi Borja, "The City, Democracy and Governability: The Case of Barcelona," *International Social Science Journal*, "Cities of the Future: Managing Social Transformations," 48, no. 147, (March 1996); and Ladislau Dowbor, "Decentralization and Governance," *Latin American Perspectives*, 98, no. 2 (January 1998), pp. 28-44.
14. Rondinelli et al., "Analyzing Decentralization Policies."
15. Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo and Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, *Reforma Social y Pobreza: Hacia Una Agenda Integrada de Desarrollo* (Washington, DC: BID & PNUD, 1993), 43-4.
16. Hilda Herzer and Pedro Pirez, "Municipal Government and Popular Participation in Latin America," *Environment and Urbanization*, 3, no. 1 (April 1991): 95.
17. *Ibid.*, 91.
18. See José Luis Corragio, "Las Dos Corrientes de Descentralización en América Latina," in J. L. Coraggio, *Descentralización, el Día Después . . .* (Buenos Aires: Universidad de Buenos Aires, 1999); Silvio Caccia Bava, "Desenvolvimento Local: Uma Alternativa para a Crise Social?" *São Paulo em Perspectiva*, 10, no. 3 (July-September 1996);

and José Roberto Felicissimo, "A Descentralização do Estado Frente às Novas Práticas e Formas de Ação Coletiva," *São Paulo em Perspectiva*, 8, no. 2 (April-June 1994).

19. For example, the World Bank introduced a new element for analyzing poverty called "participatory poverty assessment" in which the poor report their needs and resources. See Lawrence Salmen, "Listening to the Poor," *Finance & Development*, 31, no. 4 (December 1994). Some authors describe this as the "mainstream" or "pragmatic" view of participation. See John Martinussen, *Society, State and Market: A Guide to Competing Theories of Development* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1997), 234-5, and Gerd Schönwälder, "New Democratic Spaces at the Grassroots? Popular Participation in Latin American Local Governments," *Development and Change*, 28, no. 4 (October 1997): 756.

20. Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots* (Berkeley: University of California at Berkeley Press, 1949), 264-5.

21. Uruguay's tradition of civilian-elected presidents stretches back to 1903. The maintenance of democratic rule in Uruguay was aided by strong export sectors (beef and wool); cooperative government arrangements between the two dominant parties, the Colorados and the Blancos; and the incorporation of the labor movement through social democratic welfare policies. The 1973 military coup followed years of economic stagnation, the erosion of cooperation between the two dominant parties, and the rise of a terrorist threat from unsatisfied sectors in the extreme left.

22. Agustín Canzani, "El Interés por la Política Sigue en Franco Descenso," *El Observador* (31 July 1999), 6.

23. See Rosario Aguirre, "Relación Entre Organizaciones Barriales y la Gestión Municipal: El Caso de Montevideo," *Medio Ambiente y Urbanización*, 10, no. 43-4 (June-September 1993): 92-3; and Eduardo Canel, "Democratization and the Decline of Urban Social Movements in Uruguay: A Political-Institutional Account," in Arturo Escobar and Sonia E. Alvarez, eds., *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy* (Boulder, CO, San Francisco, and Oxford, UK: Westview Press, 1992), 278.

24. Mariano Arana and Fernando Giordano, "Montevideo: Between Participation and Authoritarianism," in Richard M. Morse and Jorge E. Hardoy, eds., *Rethinking the Latin American City* (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, and Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 159.

25. For a history of the Frente Amplio see Marta Harnecker, *Frente Amplio: los desafíos de una izquierda legal* (Montevideo: La República, 1991).

26. For an account of this ideological transformation among many left parties in South America, see Kenneth M. Roberts, *Deepening Democracy? The Modern Left and Social Movements in Chile and Peru* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), chap. 1.

27. See Aguirre, "Relación entre Organizaciones," 92, and Alejandro Portes, "Latin American Urbanization During the Years of Crisis," *Latin American Research Review*, 24, no. 3 (1989): 7-44, particularly 30. For the specific phrase, "Latin Americanization," see Danilo Veiga, "Segregación Socioeconómica y Crisis Urbana en Montevideo," in Mario Lombardi and Danilo Veiga, eds., *Las Ciudades en Conflicto: Una Perspectiva Latinoamericana* (Montevideo: CIESU and Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1989), 299.

28. Frente Amplio. *Documentos/6: Bases Programáticas para el Gobierno Departamental* (Montevideo: Comisión Nacional de Propaganda, 1989), 10.

29. *Ibid.*, 6.

30. Intendencia Municipal de Montevideo [IMM], "Primer Foro de Descentralización y Participación Ciudadana Realizado el 5 de Mayo de 1990," (Montevideo: IMM, 1990), 44.

31. For a cross-national comparison of municipal government functions in Latin America, see Andrew Nickson, *Local Government in Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995).

32. The mayor's resolution did include several items that could be construed as violations of national laws. For example, the eventual "political organ" could be thought of as the local boards (Juntas Locales), which Uruguayan law allows for in urban areas of each department. These boards are subject to national regulations that prohibit them from being elective offices without approval from both chambers of Congress. See Laura Cabrera San Martín, *La Descentralización en Montevideo: Reflexiones de los Protagonistas* (Colonia: Editorial Fin del Siglo, 1994), 31-3.

33. For the estimate of 25,000, see Alvaro Portillo, "Montevideo: La Primera Experiencia del Frente Amplio," in Alicia Ziccardi, ed., *Ciudades y Gobiernos Locales en la América Latina de los Noventa* (Mexico, DF: FLACSO, Instituto Mora, and Grupo Editorial M.A. Porrúa, 1991). Other authors also report enormous assemblies that thousands of people attended across the city. See Mariana González, "Sencillamente Vecinos? Las Comisiones Vecinales de Montevideo: Impactos del Gobierno Municipal Sobre Formas Tradicionales de Asociación," master's thesis (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Universitario de Pesquisas de Rio de Janeiro, 1995), 107, and Marta Harnecker, *Forjando la Esperanza* (Santiago, Chile and Havana, Cuba: LOM Ediciones and MEPLA, 1995), 294.

34. González, "Sencillamente Vecinos?," 108.

35. The procedures range from denouncing the presence of rats or illegal pig-raising to requests for traffic lights or street repairs. For a listing of all 97 procedures, see San Martín, *Descentralización en Montevideo*, 63-7.

36. González, "Sencillamente Vecinos?," 109-110.

37. *Ibid.*, 108-111.

38. Jaqueline Calvetti, Pablo Gorriti, Graciela Otonelli, Adriana Pizzolanti, Pilar Varela and Silvia Zapata, "Análisis sobre los Concejos Vecinales" (Montevideo: IMM, 1998), 3.

39. See Gerónimo de Sierra and Blanca Charbonnier, "Descentralización y Participación: Los Partidos y los Actores Directamente Implicados en la Experiencia de los Centros Comunes Zonales (1990-1992)," in CIEDUR, CIESU, ICP, and FESUR, *Participación Ciudadana y Relaciones de Gobierno* (Montevideo: Ediciones Trilce, 1993), 18-19.

40. This compromise formula adhered more strictly to Uruguayan law. See note 32.

41. *Mirando al Sur*, Monthly periodical (November 1998), 3.

42. *La República* (16 May 2000), 9.

43. See Alejandro Portillo, "Innovación Política y Transformaciones en Montevideo Luego de Ocho Años de Gobierno de Izquierda," in Beatriz Stolowicz, ed., *Gobiernos de Izquierda en América Latina: El Desafío del Cambio* (Mexico, DF: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco and Plaza y Valdés Editores, 1999), 73; Eduardo Canel, "Political Opportunities and Local Agency: Municipal Decentralization and Community Participation in Montevideo," paper presented 1998 LASA meeting, 11; and Jorge Zabalza, *La Estaca* (Montevideo: Ediciones del Cerro, 1998), 37.

44. Calvetti et al., "Análisis sobre los Concejos," 13-14.

45. Portillo, "Innovación Política," 76.

46. A particularly dramatic example of this occurred in Zone 18, where the mayor spent at least twenty minutes announcing the names of people newly granted land titles by the city government and handing over the titles one by one. Literally five minutes after this process ended, half the audience left the assembly.

47. The one exception to this pattern was Zone 5, where there was very large attendance, the audience stayed until the very end, and the structure of the assembly was quite different. In Zone 5, the public first chose between attending one or another of a number of smaller meetings dedicated to particular themes, where they were allowed and encouraged to ask questions and make proposals, and then later convened in a single assembly. It is interesting to note that Zone 5 is one of the wealthiest zones of Montevideo, and that the zone's "problems" are not severe relative to poorer areas. For example, one of the most contentious issues in Zone 5's assembly was that of whether to enact and how to enforce an ordinance forcing people to clean up after their dogs, as in New York City.

48. The survey was designed and conducted with the collaboration of Daniel Chavez. Of the eighteen zones, sixteen zones returned the questionnaires that we distributed, for a total of 219 councilors participating in the survey. There were 617 councilors elected in 1998, but with an approximate 50 percent drop-out rate, the universe of councilors was roughly 310 in late 1999. We think that the response rate of 71 percent of 310 is fairly good. In Figure 3, the total of "percent of Total Responses" adds up to more than 100 percent because all the responses were counted in the numerator while the denominator remained the same (the total number of councilors who responded to at least one of the two questions). Figure 3 presents the answers to two open-ended questions from the survey: what do you think of the current form of decentralization? And, what should be done to improve decentralization? The answers to the questions have been added together because many respondents used the space provided after both questions to suggest improvements or make complaints about the current decentralization system.

49. Silvana Rubino, "Una Realidad 'Tétrica': la Intendencia Municipal de Montevideo," in Carina Perelli, Fernando Filgueira and Silvana Rubino, *Gobierno y Política en Montevideo* (Montevideo: PEITHO, 1991), 6.

50. See Rubino, "Una Realidad 'Tétrica,'" as well as Fernando Filgueira, "La Intendencia Municipal de Montevideo: Dinámica Interna y Relación con Actores Privados," in Perelli et al., *Gobierno y Política en Montevideo*, and Ember Martínez and Pilar Ubila, eds., *Políticas Municipales y Participación Popular: Seminario-taller Mayo 15 al 21, 1989 Montevideo* (Montevideo: Túpac Amaru Editorial, 1989).

51. Rubino, "Una Realidad 'Tétrica,'" 38.

52. See Filgueira, "La Intendencia Municipal," 46 and *passim*; and Martínez & Ubila, *Políticas Municipales*, 129-31.

53. The first Colorado mayor, Aquiles Lanza, had 29 percent disapproval versus 23 percent approval; the second and third mayors, Jorge Elizade and Julio Iglesias, received 62 percent versus 8 percent and 36 percent versus 16 percent, respectively. See *El Observador*, 29 September 2000, in [www.equipos.com.uy](http://www.equipos.com.uy).

54. Silvana Rubino, "Los Habitantes de Montevideo: Visión de la Intendencia en una Coyuntura de Cambio," in Perelli et al., *Gobierno y Política en Montevideo*, 95.

55. *Ibid.*, 95.

56. Juan Carlos Doyenart, "El 73 Percent de los Montevideanos Considera Que la Ciudad Está Mejor Que Hace 10 Años," *Posdata* (23 January 1998), 32.

57. The rates of disapproval for both Vázquez and Arana have always been below 30 percent, and the rates of approval hovered around 50 percent from 1990 to 1998, and hit 65 percent for Arana in September 1999. See *El Observador*, 29 September 2000, in [www.equipos.com.uy](http://www.equipos.com.uy).

58. I am indebted to Daniel Chavez for his collaboration in the funding, design, implementation, and analysis of the 1999 survey. We conducted the survey jointly with the help of Maria Jose Doyenart and a group of ten students at the Universidad de la República in

August 1999. For a description of the survey, see Appendix A. Results from the 1992 survey are taken from: Rosario Aguirre, Gerónimo de Sierra, Inés Iens, and Blanca Charbonnier, "Informe de una Encuesta a Vecinos sobre Descentralización, Participación y Centros Comunes Zonales," *Investigations Series*, no. 99 (Montevideo: CIEDUR, 1992). Some of the results there are also reported in Rosario Aguirre, Gerónimo de Sierra, and Inés Iens, "Descentralización, Participación y Los Centros Comunes Zonales Vistos por los Vecinos," in CIEDUR et al., *Participación Ciudadana*, 113-41.

59. Rubino, "Los Habitantes de Montevideo," 81.

60. IMM, *Montevideo, Capital* (Montevideo: IMM, 1998), 114.

61. IMM, "Montevideo en tu Barrio: Balance de Gestión, Guía del CCZ 8," (Montevideo: IMM, 1994), 16.

62. For all figures in this section, see IMM, *Aquí Va el Dinero de los Vecinos: Presupuesto 1998* (Montevideo: IMM, 1998), 17.

63. IMM, "Montevideo en tu barrio," 51.

64. IMM, *Montevideo, Capital*, 114.

65. *Ibid.*, 106.

66. Juan Rial, "El Municipio: Instancia Paralela o Base de Participación?" CIESU Working Paper no. 126, (Montevideo: CIESU, 1986), 10. Information for the years 1956 to 1984 is not available.

67. IMM, *Aquí Va el Dinero*, 16.

68. This is not to say that the IMM has lagged in other areas. In fact, there appear to have been improvements nearly across the entire spectrum of municipal services, and particularly with regard to public spaces such as plazas and parks.

69. IMM, *Montevideo, Capital*, 132.

70. The first figure is taken from Martínez & Ember, *Políticas Municipales*, 133; the second is from CLAEH, *Montevideo en Cifras* (Montevideo: CLAEH and IMM, 1996), 160.

71. Unfortunately, the authors of the original 1992 study did not report their complete findings regarding these questions. Thus one is forced to compare only the favorable responses, which are assumed here to be those that were "very good" and "good" rather than including "fair" as well. If one adds the "fair" answers to the favorable category for 1999, the differences in the responses in 1992 and 1999 show huge increases in the favorable rating of city services. Thus "fair" answers have not been included, making this a stronger test. It is also assumed here that the percentages reported in 1992 were of those who responded, excluding "Didn't answer," given that in many other sections of the 1992 report, the percentages are reported in that fashion.

72. The large improvements in certain services in certain zones get averaged out in the totals. The 1992 survey had a much higher proportion of respondents from CCZ 3 and CCZ 7 than did the 1999 survey. The 1992 survey had 303 respondents in CCZ 3, 221 in CCZ 7, and 300 in CCZ 9. The 1999 survey had 130 respondents in CCZ 3, 86 in CCZ 7, and 218 in CCZ 9.

73. Taking the 1999 results from the question of how is your neighborhood in terms of specific services, fewer than 25 percent of respondents rate 5 of the 6 services as "bad" or "very bad" and for the remaining service, street sweeping, less than 50 percent rate it as "bad" or "very bad."

74. The changes were all less than 3 percent. In 1992 and 1999, the comparative responses were: 8 percent versus 6 percent considered "contacting acquaintances to move things" the best way to resolve problems; 32 percent versus 32 percent said "petitioning the authorities"; 38 percent versus 40 percent said "pressuring the authorities by collectively

organizing”; and 14 percent versus 11 percent said “collectively solving the problem without help from the authorities.” The rest of the respondents in both years either did not answer or had a different response.

75. To complete the picture, in 1992, 17 percent answered “yes, a little important” while 14 percent answered “no, not at all important.” In 1999, 24 percent answered “a little important” while 13 percent answered “not at all important.”

76. The 1989 survey is of 485 randomly selected people in Montevideo, not from the three zones that the other two surveys used. The results are reported in Agustín Canzani, “La Sociedad Montevideana: Problemas y Desafíos,” *Uruguay Hoy*, no. 5 (Montevideo: CIEDUR, 1989), 37.

77. The complete wording is the following: “Some people consider that they have little to do with others and other people think that they are part of a social group. Do you consider that you have little to do with others or do you feel part of a social group?”

78. Uruguay’s two traditional parties, the Colorados and Blancos, organized thousands of political clubs in urban centers in the 1950s, some of which reappeared following the dictatorship. See German Rama, *Club Político* (Montevideo: ARCA, 1971), for a study of these clubs in the pre-dictatorship period.

79. See González, “Sencillamente Vecinos?,” 39-40.

80. *Ibid.*, 40, 113.

81. This is from my own calculations from official reports from each CCZ in 1998, though four of the CCZs’ reports are missing (2, 6, 7, 17). If we assume that each of those zones had the average number of neighborhood associations (19), then the total would be 341.

82. The elected Colorado mayor, Aquiles Lanza, implemented a program (the Neighborhood Action Project) that stimulated the creation of neighborhood associations by registering all the associations in the city and forming a team of advisors who would serve as the link between the association and the IMM. This project lost momentum with the death of Lanza in 1986, and in any case, has been the subject of widespread criticism for its clientelism. For a detailed analysis, see Mariana González, *Las Redes Invisibles de la Ciudad: Las Comisiones Vecinales de Montevideo, 1985-1988* (Montevideo: CIESU, 1992), Chapter III.

83. González, “Sencillamente Vecinos?,” 197-8.

84. These are my calculations on the basis of González, “Sencillamente Vecinos?,” 39 and 113, and González, *Las Redes Invisibles*, 103.

85. González, “Sencillamente Vecinos?,” 199.

86. Voting is mandatory in most elections in Uruguay, but not for the local council elections.

87. Given that the survey of the residents only asked people in which income bracket they belonged, their average monthly income was estimated by taking the middle figure of each bracket and for the last (upper) bracket by using the average figure from the survey of the councilors in this bracket.

88. The only exception is women. Women have historically been absent from positions of political and social power in Uruguay. Currently only 10 percent of senators, 13 percent of representatives, and 29 percent of municipal councilors are women. In contrast, 45 percent of local councilors are women, which comes much closer to their presence in the population (53 percent). The figures for senators and representatives are my calculations from [www.parlamento.gub.uy](http://www.parlamento.gub.uy). My calculations for the municipal councilors are from [www.montevideo.gub.uy/ediles](http://www.montevideo.gub.uy/ediles). The figure for local councilors is from my 1999 survey.

89. All calculations are made from IMM Budget and Planning Division, “Evolución de los Ingresos y Egresos,” (Montevideo: Unpublished documents, no date).

90. IMM, *Construyendo Ciudadanías: Montevideo en Foro II* (Montevideo: IMM, 1997).

91. A third argument I heard in several interviews was that there is no crisis of participation, but rather a change in participation, in that people are participating in new ways, but the defenders of this argument had little convincing evidence that this might be a plausible explanation.

92. See Gianpaolo Baiocchi, "Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment and Deliberative Democratic Theory," *Politics & Society*, 29, no. 1 (March 2001), particularly 55-60.

93. These observations are based on eight months of fieldwork in Porto Alegre in 1998 and 1999.

94. In the 1999 presidential race, the party won the first round of national elections (though not the second round) with former mayor Tabaré Vázquez as their candidate.

95. In the 1999 survey, 61 percent of the respondents had a positive or very positive opinion of decentralization, 20 percent found it neither positive nor negative, and less than 5 percent considered it negative or very negative (the rest did not know or did not answer). And of those who responded, nearly three-quarters agreed with decentralizing services to the maximum and strengthening the local councils, and disagreed with reversing the decentralization process. These percentages are fairly stable compared to the 1992 survey.

96. In the 1999 survey, 46 percent of the respondents said the CCZ had had a positive effect, 36 percent said it had not changed things much, 4 percent thought it was negative, and 14 percent did not know or did not answer. Likewise, 46 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that decentralization gives power to the vecinos to govern themselves, while 17 percent neither agreed nor disagreed, 23 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 15 percent did not know or did not answer.

97. Forty-three percent of those surveyed who had visited a CCZ, did so to make a complaint or a request. The second most frequent reason (40 percent) was to do some other traditional activity, such as pay taxes.

98. IMM, "Primer Foro de Descentralización y Participación," ii.