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# 1

# Theorizing Power, Public Goods, and the City

In 1996, Mariza Dutra Alves and her husband split up. Without her husband's income, finding a place to live within the municipal limits of São Paulo, Brazil, one of the world's largest and most unequal cities, suddenly felt out of reach. She moved in with her parents in Suzano, a municipality in the eastern part of the larger São Paulo metropolitan region, which is home to some twenty million people.

There, she found work as a domestic cleaner in Cidade Lider, a working-class district in the city's sprawling eastern periphery. In a private car with no traffic, the drive from Suzano to Cidade Lider would take about an hour. By intermunicipal public bus, the journey was two times as long. For the wealthy residents who occupy the city's core, a district like Cidade Lider, with its simple, low-rise shop fronts, winding roads, and informal shack settlements, feels like a world away.

But for Mariza, it was an entrée into the city's economic opportunities. Basic necessities were her concern. "Because I was working so far from my children, I would return home extremely late," she told me twenty-one years after the breakup. "Just to give you an idea, I left home at 4:30 in the morning, only to return at nine o'clock at night."[1]

Mariza hoped to make enough money to one day get a place to live that she could call her own. She befriended someone who lived in an informal shack that was close to the houses she cleaned. Her new friend was a participant in a self-build housing project in São Paulo, known in Portuguese as a *mutirão* (pronounced "moo-chee-rau"). The project was organized through a cooperative



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formed under the umbrella of one of the oldest housing movements in the city, called the União dos Movimentos de Moradia.

When I interviewed her, Mariza remembered how she was apprehensive at first about attending one of the cooperative's meetings. She told herself that she didn't have the time, that she didn't know what to do at a meeting, that she didn't understand why there needed to be a movement in the first place.

"Why did people have to occupy land given that there was a right to housing in the constitution?" she recalled asking herself.

But by October 1998, Mariza had become convinced that it was time to join the movement. And she was ready to act. She began speaking with a group of people who were similarly desperate for a foothold in the city to plan a collective occupation in Mooca, a working-class district in the north and east of the municipality. The group hoped to use the occupation to force somebody—anybody—to act.

For twenty days, they slept under wood and tarps. Finally, the group was granted government land in the far eastern district of Itaim Paulista. There, members could begin to construct a neighborhood of their own, eventually totaling 420 homes in all.

Mariza had begun a life of occupying and organizing. This would become a life of forcing the hand of government to act and then working to ensure that action led to results on the ground.

---

The past half century has witnessed a great global migration to cities, particularly across poor and middle-income countries in the Global South. For the one out of every seven humans who lives in an urban slum today,[2] cities are sites of struggle. The proliferation of slums—where the basics of city life are largely unavailable—as a dominant mode of urban life underscores how the creation of cities is inherently divided and unequal. Many of these areas lack decent shelter without a threat of eviction. A toilet. A way to move between work and home. The distribution of these goods characterizes the rationed inequalities of our urban world.

Now, in a warming world, slums are both the first refuge of climate migrants within the Global South and the zones of deepest vulnerability to climate impacts (Rigaud et al. 2018; Vince 2022). In 2014, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published its *Fifth Assessment Report* (2014). These reports are the authoritative synthesis of the global research consensus on interdisciplinary climate science. The *Fifth Assessment Report* was the first to have a stand-alone chapter on cities and urbanization.

Across the text of this Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, slums are frequently mentioned as sites of two core problems for governing

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climate resilience. First, inequalities in urban public goods define an urban built environment unable to cope with climate-induced migration and disaster risk. Of particular importance here are the defining inequalities in the distribution of housing, sanitation, and transportation. And second, the lack of responsive governing arrangements prevents resilient urban systems.

The people who manage the formal life of cities—primarily bureaucrats and politicians who work in local government—often cite the frustrating impotence of the bureaucracy associated with their work. They might say that formal hierarchies or interagency competition constrain their scope to act. But they also enjoy a profound sense of empowerment because the institutions they populate clearly matter for changing the lives of the people who live in their cities.

The people who live in the slums of cities experience different deficits of influence: to be heard, to get ahead, to live what Amartya Sen has famously described as "lives they value—and have reason to value" (1999, 8). Yet they have also discovered their own forms of power: in movements, organizations, and largely informal arrangements that make the contingencies of urban life bearable and meaningful.

Like Mariza, urban residents across the globe frequently take it upon themselves to develop housing and municipal services when their governments have been slow to act or have failed them completely. Usually, these actions are a form of resistance to the reproduction and spread of exclusion that characterizes contemporary patterns of urbanization. These actions sometimes concatenate into broader social movements.

And when these actions turn into movements, they sometimes generate a broader process—usually in local government—to include the most excluded parts of these cities in the array of public goods that make urban life livable and full of opportunity. This book is about the push and pull of grassroots activists like Mariza, the movements they form, and the politicians, bureaucrats, and private actors they encountered—and continue to encounter. It is the story of, on the one hand, those who have organized to gain the attention and will of government and, on the other, the process of working to make the government capable of delivering on that will. In other words, it is about what it takes to see the will to power for rights in the city realized in the built environment of cities: urban power.

To state the question that motivates this study: *Why are some cities more effective than others at reducing inequality?* This book will answer that question through an in-depth comparison of two global "megacities": São Paulo in Brazil and Johannesburg in South Africa. In doing so, it will propose and test an argument about the governance of urban inequality that speaks to a wider range of cities across the globe, particularly—though not exclusively—in the rapidly urbanizing Global South.

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This book will argue that what differentiates cities that can begin to include their most excluded places from those that cannot is what I call "urban power." I define *urban power* as the coordination of the formal and informal social relations that produce governing institutions that manage the distribution of public goods across the space of the city. The ties between local government and a sphere of social movements in civil society—*embeddedness*—and coordinating capacity internal to the state—*cohesion*—are what make urban power effective in building toward a more equal city.

"Urban power" is about the processual configurations of power that enable the distribution of the basics of life in the city—the public goods that make urban life dignified, humane, and sustainable. Inequalities in distribution are produced through what Max Weber once described as processes of "social closure," through which boundaries mark who is and who is not included in the distribution of resources. The state is a critical institutional sphere where such boundaries are drawn and redrawn. When Weber wrote about social closure in urban space, he recalled the history of medieval walled cities to illustrate in stark terms just how governing institutions mark who is on either side of the boundaries of social closure. Among more contemporary sociological treatments of the state, a closely related idea comes from Michael Mann's (1984) term *infrastructural power*. He defines this as "the capacity of the state to actually penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm" (1984, 189). My use of *urban power* refers to the distinct dimensions of such "infrastructural" statecraft at the urban scale, especially municipal government, which shapes such closure in the built environment.

Western sociology has traditionally understood the process of urbanization as a transition toward industrial, rational modernity.[3] Likewise, demographers have understood urbanization and the transition from slums to neighborhoods with access to basic services as critical factors in the "demographic transition" to higher life expectancy (Dyson 2011). These approaches assume a type of teleology about patterns of urbanization. But what urban planners call "the built environment" of cities is not a product of physical laws. The built environment is a product of social conflict.[4]

Today, the persistence of the urban informal settlement is a crucible of some of sociology's founding assumptions about modernity: the economics of urbanization without industrialization (Gollin, Jedwab, and Vollrath 2016), the politics of institutions that are unable to include all urban residents in the provision of adequate housing and basic services, and the largely informal social organization of collective action. By 2050, in large part due to climate change–induced migration in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia, two of every three humans will live in a city. And 40 percent of those residents, an estimated two billion people, will live in slums (Rigaud et al. 2018). The exclusions of urban life are at both the practical core and the theoretical

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core of the contemporary nature of inequality. The relationship between these inequalities in the urban political economy is about the power to govern, which is ultimately defined by the strength and scope of democratic authority over private actors.

## Why Is Urban Redistribution So Hard?

"Urban power"—the coordination of the formal and informal social relationships that produce the institutions that govern the distribution of public goods across urban space—can work either to enforce social closure or to build urban inclusion. Though cities today do not build walls like the medieval city, they can enforce closure through land use laws, prejudicial allocation of financial and institutional authority for building and maintaining infrastructure, and evictions. The extent to which cities mobilize law, finance, and policies toward creating a more inclusive distribution of public goods becomes the basis on which the bonds of social closure either harden or begin to break down. The question of why some cities are more effective than others in reducing urban inequalities is, in this sense, a question of under what conditions urban power gets mobilized toward breaking the boundaries of social closure. And this is no simple task.

We might reasonably wonder why local government matters at all. An interdisciplinary set of arguments about the political economy of cities emphasizes the structuring role of globalization. The past half century of transnationally integrated markets and political institutions has led many scholars of urban political economy to downplay the urban scale of politics. When the sociologist Saskia Sassen (1991) observed these changes in the early 1990s, she argued that the primary function of cities is to serve in a hierarchy of global relations of exchange, with a select few coordinating those relations as so-called global cities. This influential approach carries a couple of key implications for the questions that I pose in this book. This approach suggests that *all* cities have undergone—or are undergoing—significant restructuring due to their role in the global integration of markets. The global is the primary scale that counts. Further, the nature of this kind of restructuring is to increase inequality in cities. For "global cities," there is a clear spatial imaginary aligned to Sassen's vision of inequality. The cores of cities are where the wealthy work, particularly in the so-called FIRE industries of finance, insurance, and real estate. The peripheries are home to the vast populations of low-wage service workers who clean city center buildings and serve food and other amenities to these white-collar winners of the new global economy.

To be sure, the literature on urban neoliberalism has, at times, emphasized that local and municipal politics and institutions matter and can vary (Brenner and Theodor 2002). However, the emphasis on the structural shift toward

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neoliberalism, which focuses on global dynamics, constrains room for agency at the local level. This literature has highlighted the trend toward decentralization reforms for public administration down to the municipal scale. Such reforms assume a strong reliance on local generation of revenue. The trend of decentralization has accelerated what Harvey (1989) describes as the transition of urban administration from "managerialism" to "entrepreneurialism," as local governments compete for private development to secure local tax revenues. To the extent that local action matters, it only matters in one direction. Because so much of local administration is geared toward capturing footloose private capital, little effort and resources is expended on broadening inclusion in the public goods of the city. The privatization of public services, tax incentives, and public subsidies for profit-generating activities becomes the primary scope of local government action. The outcome has an inexorable tendency toward lifting up the drawbridge of social closure.

This structural logic is at work in more locally driven theories of urban politics as well. "Growth machine" theory (Logan and Molotch 1987), for example, has focused on local coalitions between business and political elites to maximize economic growth as the decisive relationship in urban political economy. Similarly, the collective capacities of a "regime" in "urban regime theory" are defined by the interaction between the configuration of the actors that make up the local regime with the capability to act and the policies that are the object of institutional action (Stone 1989). These approaches are commensurate with the more global view of neoliberal urban restructuring because of the propensity of local authorities to ally with business elites to respond to the competitive pressures of neoliberal decentralizing reforms. The "growth machine" approach highlights the structural forces that bring these groups together, in particular the precedence of the "exchange value" of urban land over its "use value." This approach suggests that established elite concerns are the relatively immovable force around which redistributive reforms must navigate.

The tools of "growth machine" and "regime" theorists are useful for identifying both the importance of local institutional configurations and the varieties of conflict between growth-oriented and redistributive policy goals. For example, Stone (1993) theorizes the possibility of two types of redistribution-oriented regimes, which he describes as "middle class progressive" and "lower class opportunity expansion." However, he sees these categories as largely "hypothetical" (1993, 18). Notably, work in the urban literature that looks beyond U.S. cases for comparative leverage has called into question the usefulness of the "regime" and "growth machine" frames, due to much greater variation in intercity competition across countries (Davies 2002; Stoker and Mossberger 1994). These critiques emphasize the possibility of social coordination between political and other social actors for realizing programmatic goals in cities. But

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the possibility for a more inclusive programmatic change—as opposed to a program of economic growth—is unlikely. Work on redistributive politics in cities in the United States, for example, has highlighted the constraints that federal government regulations pose for cities (Petersen 1981) as well as the possibility for redistribution through regulations such as minimum wage laws (Martin 2001).

I agree that the conceptual tools of "growth machine" and "regime" theorists are useful. But the assumption—sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit—of much of this work that assigns independent weight to local politics is that all cities are growth machines, which is not necessarily the case. Likewise, the "growth machine" and "regime" theoretical paradigms assume a relatively uniform regulatory and implementing capacity of the local state, which also does not hold, particularly in the Global South. Furthermore, there is a wide variety of interscalar governing relationships between national or federal, state or provincial, and local governments.

A different kind of interdisciplinary literature on the political economy of development, often called "power-resources" theory, emphasizes variation in governing regimes but does so only within a national political framework. The extent to which subnational institutions are subject to contingency and variation is relatively minimized in these accounts. The emphasis has been on variations of class coalitions aligned to programmatic political parties as enabling or disabling policies for economic development and/or redistribution (see Esping-Andersen 1990; Pzeworski 1985). In particular, the role of democracy has been seen as critical for redistributive outcomes (see Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992). The role of left political parties in Latin America (Huber and Stephens 2012) and alliances between working-class organizations in civil society and a left political party in the Indian state of Kerala (Heller 1999), for example, have been found to drive gains in both human development and economic growth. In sum, under conditions of subaltern collective action in coalition with a programmatic political party, redistribution is possible, even given the structural constraints of global capitalism.

These "power-resources" approaches to theorizing the state and distributional outcomes are mirrored in the social movements literature. Instead of just a focus on class coalitions or political parties, the movements literature makes it possible to identify other kinds of collective actors that can matter for producing redistributive policy change. Recent work on a "political mediation" model of social movement action has highlighted the need for a responsive political elite to react to movement demands in order to make them successful (Amenta et al. 2010). This literature has readily acknowledged a focus on cases in the United States (Amenta 2014), however, and therefore assumes a degree of generalizable bureaucratic capacity to act that does not exist in other parts of the world. Even the more state-centric accounts of social movements seen in

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work on "political opportunities" take for granted the question of state capacity beyond the capacity to repress movements (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Tarrow 1994). The literature on social movements has emphasized that a range of collective actors can produce a bottom-up, demand-side dynamic for change. But it does not explore the mechanisms for generating state capacity to make it happen.

The most prominent way of theorizing how different sectors of society might generate internal state capacities is in Evans's (1995) concept of "embedded autonomy." Evans uses this concept to characterize how states achieve economic development. In his paradigmatic account of South Korea, autonomous bureaucrats work with organized groups of industrial elites to implement a national project of industrial upgrading and development of exports for economic growth. Heller (1999) has found a similar dynamic in Kerala, but with a different protagonist—the working class—driving gains in both social outcomes and economic growth. Both focus on the importance of the coherence of different social groups outside of the state as a support for state action.

These prior findings might lead us to expect that if we observe variation in distributional outcomes at the urban scale, the root of change must lie at the national level and not at the local level. The "power-resources" approach allows for the possibility of variation in distributive regimes in contexts in which the structural forces of global capitalism might otherwise be seen as overdetermining. In fact, the thrust of the work in this literature has increasingly focused on middle-income countries in the Global South (see Evans and Heller 2015) where state capacities are highly varied. Work in the "power-resources" tradition has generally focused on national-level issues such as wages and social welfare benefits. But once we begin to disaggregate the institutional sphere of the state, capacities of state institutions to regulate the wage relationship and to tax and redistribute may vary considerably from capacities to alter the distributional consequences of the built environment.

Projects of political change are always spatially uneven (Snyder 2001). It is one thing to pursue redistribution with the centralized authority and resources of a national state. It is quite another to do so at the local level, where government actors must coordinate delegated legal authority that is often unclear, may overlap with state or provincial government, and may lack requisite fiscal resources for implementation. This becomes even more complicated when political parties of a given ideological stripe control one scale of government but not another. And even if there is an alignment of political parties across different scales of government, this is no guarantee that they will all work together. As this study will show, the alignment of parties across scales can sometimes hinder, rather than enable, urban-scale projects of distributional change. At the same time, political party competition—and changes in power—may very well enable more responsive government. But there is no reason to expect that

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TABLE 1.1. Existing Explanations and Predicted Outcomes

| Theoretical School | Consequence for Inequality |
|---|---|
| "Power-resources"/movements | Variation |
| Neoliberalism/"growth machines" and "regimes" | Growing inequality |

this is a sufficient condition for building the bureaucratic capacities that are required for projects of distributional inclusion. Table 1.1 illustrates how the urban literature has tended to focus on the sources of growing inequality in cities, while the nationally focused "power-resources" literature has analyzed the sources of variation in distributional outcomes.

We can bridge these literatures by asking: *Under what conditions does social mobilization translate into making the local state matter for redistribution?* Recent qualitative empirical work on urban governance in the Global South has explored this question through a focus on the role of neighborhood associations and movements themselves. For example, in Mumbai, India, neighborhood associations in informal settlements have organized to prevent likely eviction due to the redevelopment schemes of national and state government as well as multinational private firms (Weinstein 2014). In São Paulo, "insurgent citizenship" strategies of neighborhood associations have asserted land rights that had previously been denied or hidden in formal law (Holston 2008). Both of these examples, however, focus on the role of the courts to enforce (or deny) land occupancy rights, and they focus on social organization at the scale of the neighborhood. They do not directly implicate the role of bureaucratic action to deliver new infrastructure, such as housing, sanitation, or transportation, or the role of social movements that organize beyond the scale of the neighborhood. These findings underscore that democratic institutional arrangements are a necessary condition for residents to organize freely, assert rights to stay in the city, and demand public goods in their neighborhoods. Even across democratic and nondemocratic contexts, recent work has highlighted the importance of the relationship between local state organization and social mobilization. Ren's (2020) comparison of Indian and Chinese cities finds that the organization of local governance varies widely and shapes residents' struggles with significant consequences in the regulation of both land use and air pollution.

To summarize so far, the politics of distributing public goods in cities has largely been characterized by theories of "supply" of state capacity or "demand" from excluded social sectors. But this finding still does not address some larger questions about the processes involved in enacting change in cities around the globe. What are the characteristics of governing regimes that

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make such programmatic, city-wide outcomes in delivery possible? How do these demands translate beyond regulatory change or legal enforcement into concrete delivery at a city-wide scale by local governments?

## Defining "Embeddedness" and "Cohesion"

I argue that the theoretical concepts of "embeddedness" and "cohesion" explain processes of change that bridge external social mobilization and the internal, organizational life of state institutions. This approach cuts across questions of "supply" of state capacity from above and "demand" from below. Social pressure and institutional capacity, I contend, are in dynamic interaction. And for the types of public goods I examine here, this interaction has concrete results—often, quite literally.

I define *embeddedness* as the connections of the local state to civil society, particularly a sphere of social movements, that produce the ideas and influence for policy change that realizes human development. And I define *cohesion* as the internal coordinating capacity of the local state to implement policy changes. The concepts of "embeddedness" and "cohesion" adapt prior explanations of social bases of state action like Evans's "embedded autonomy" to the unique dimensions of the urban administration of public goods. Furthermore, I argue that the analytical usefulness of these explanations depends on our ability to wield them to explain not only why an institutional configuration produces a given outcome in a particular moment but how those institutional changes occur over time.

Prior explanations of the role of embeddedness in generating state capacities do not fully account for the full range of influential social actors in the urban context (see Evans 1995; Heller 1999). The social sectors likely to induce changes in the distribution of public goods in cities are not likely to be either business elites or traditional trade unions. Due to their organizational focus on precisely these goods, social movements for goods of collective consumption, such as housing or transportation, are much more likely candidates for "embedded" connections to local state institutions to drive change in the distribution of public goods. In the literature on social democracy in both northern Europe (see Esping-Andersen 1990) and Latin America (see Huber and Stephens 2012), these movements are rarely as durable or as encompassing as traditional social actors, such as unions. The mobilization of such movements articulates and builds popular pressure for distributive goals. The connections that these movements have to both political parties and professional bureaucrats within the local state make it possible for these goals to enter the halls of formal power.

It is important to note that network ties between movements and the state are a necessary but not necessarily sufficient condition for "embeddedness" to exist, however. Social movements have a wide repertoire of strategies, which could be considered oppositional, on one end of the spectrum, or clientelistic,

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on the other. So how do we know when their relationship to the state is embedded? "Embeddedness" describes network ties that are oriented toward programmatic outcomes—that is, city-wide policies as opposed to discretionary or clientelistic ones. This criterion resembles Fung and Wright's (2001) model of "empowered deliberative democracy," which theorizes the relationship between participatory democratic reforms and institutional action. The kind of state-society embeddedness under examination in this study highlights the role of movements, as opposed to individuals, and emphasizes not just deliberation but changed modes in the state's delivery of physical goods.

My comparative analysis in the cases of São Paulo and Johannesburg in this book will show that the interplay between movements and political parties became vital for either mobilizing or demobilizing urban movements in each city. The role of political parties therefore had meaningful effects on processes leading toward configurations of higher or lower embeddedness and cohesion. Though bureaucrats and movements occupy the foreground of much of the empirical story I tell, the role of political parties in the background is never far from the field of action. Sociologists cannot theorize urban governance without paying attention to the strategies and tactics of political parties. A key takeaway for practice is that bureaucrats, planners, and movement activists alike cannot ignore the role of parties in shaping their strategies for generating policy change at the urban scale.

Embeddedness is critical for generating the disciplining impetus for institutional cohesion. Evans's theorization of embeddedness is largely a macro-level explanation of the relationship between state and society for economic development. His approach, along theoretical lines associated with Polanyi's (1944) description of market exchange being "embedded" in human social relation, focuses on the institutional sphere of the state and that of the market, primarily on channels of communicating information across the social spheres of market and state. My approach, however, considers embeddedness from a more meso-level understanding, which is commonly associated with Granovetter (1985). I focus not only on the abstract strength or weakness of network ties between actors in the civil society sphere—particularly social movements—and the local state but also on the temporal structure of those ties. In other words, sequencing matters for explaining the variation in configurations of embeddedness and cohesion. From this standpoint, the emphasis is not only on sharing information between different spheres of social action but on the formation of durable bonds over time between actors both within and outside the state that can produce the disciplining power of coordination that defines "cohesion." Sequencing matters because embeddedness and cohesion can be mutually reinforcing, but they may also undermine one another. For example, cohesion might undermine embeddedness. Likewise, embeddedness might overwhelm cohesion.

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Institutional action at subnational scales is intrinsically about coordinating delegated authority from higher scales in order to deliver public goods. The concept of "cohesion" makes a parallel logical move to that in prior work that sought to bring the institutions of the state "back in" to sociological analysis (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985; Morgan and Orloff 2017). This work has regularly considered how national state institutions are in co-constitutive relationships with international, global, and transnational institutional configurations. The concept of cohesion that I advance here describes the distinct nature of subnational institutional capacity.

"Cohesion," therefore, comprises two axes of coordinating capacities that are relatively unique to urban—as opposed to national—government: "vertical cohesion," which is the capacity of municipal institutions to coordinate the delivery of public goods across institutions at state and federal levels; and "horizontal cohesion," which is the capacity of institutions to coordinate across multiple line agencies at the municipal level. We can compare the function of "cohesion" in urban public goods distribution with the role of the Weberian "autonomy" of state bureaucracies in driving economic development in East Asian developmental states (Amsden 1989; Evans 1995; Wade 1990), which focuses on single national agencies that manage economic policy. More recent work has found pockets of bureaucratic effectiveness within a single economic agency in Ghana (McDonnell 2017). Cities, however, tend to be nested in intermediate subnational (e.g., state) and national (e.g., federal) levels of authority, and the delivery of public goods tends to cut across multiple agencies. This makes it necessary to develop a concept that can address the interscalar (i.e., vertical) and transversal (i.e., horizontal) problems of bureaucratic effectiveness.

My focus on cohesion is not only concerned with Weberian autonomy or capacity in terms of characteristics such as rational procedures of appointment, clear rules and lines of accountability, and predictable careers of personnel. "Cohesion" is distinct from what is commonly referred to as "state capacity." The dominant, Weberian view of "state capacity" is that the rational, rule-following features of organization of personnel should produce effective bureaucratic action. The notion of discipline as a feature of bureaucratic coordination does not feature for Weber. This is, in large part, because his ideal type of bureaucracy describes a single agency aiming to act in a linear command structure. The Weberian view of state capacity therefore provides limited analytical purchase for describing bureaucratic action for delivering goods that require coordinating multiple agencies along with multiscalar regulations and funding flows. This notion of *disciplined* coordination builds on a critique by Chibber that rule-following is not a sufficient condition for state bureaucracies to realize developmental aims: "In order for it to be effective as a *developmental* state, bureaucratic rationality must also be structured in an appropriate apportionment of *power* among state policy agencies" (2002, 952).

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Above I describe "urban power" as defined by the strength and scope of democratic authority over private actors. We can think of this "strength and scope of democratic authority" in terms proposed by the Brazilian political theorist Leonardo Avritzer (2002). He argues that democracy should not be "regarded simply as the institutionalization of political competition"—that is, formal characteristics such as elections and separation of powers—but, instead, as "a societal practice in need of institutionalization" (2002, 5). The link between social action and the institutionalization of that action is precisely what the concepts of "embeddedness" and "cohesion" allow us to recognize. They are concepts that allow us to specify when social action is institutionalized via the *configuration* of these two factors. And they allow us to specify the pathways through which different cases travel via alternating configurations of these two factors.

Such pathways also underscore the importance of *sequence* and *process* to understanding configuration. Social bases of state effectiveness cannot be theorized without an explanation of change over time. Configurations of embeddedness and cohesion exhibit aspects of both path dependence and institutional indeterminacy—structural weaknesses that allow for agentic change. Sewell describes the causal properties of historical events and sequences: "Although individual actions can be shown to have fateful social effects, it is also true that every act is part of a sequence of actions and that its effects are profoundly dependent upon its place in the sequence" (2010, 7). To illustrate, in order for movements to build lasting reform in state institutions, they need to navigate the institutional architecture that has been established through past struggles. In cities, this means reckoning with the deep and lasting influence of private-sector actors, particularly those invested in the value of urban land, who often act as central power brokers in urban politics.

In this study, I focus on the temporal dynamics of within-case variation. The precise sequence of change matters for assessing the causal pathways for the construction of institutional capacity to distribute public goods over time. I care not only about the configurations that exist in cities but also about the order in which those configurations change. Specifying the configuration and sequencing of these two factors—embeddedness and cohesion—makes it possible to categorize and compare how local political power is coordinated in cities, as illustrated in Table 1.2. For policymakers, planners, and other practitioners, the question of how to construct either or both "embeddedness" and "cohesion" is not a simple technical exercise of formal institutional design. Instead, my goal in introducing these concepts is, in part, to help practitioners see themselves as working both within formal institutional contexts and across a broader social terrain, shot through with private market interests and movements.

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TABLE 1.2. Configurations of Embeddedness and Cohesion

| | | **Embeddedness** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | ***Low*** | ***High*** |
| **Cohesion** | ***Low*** | *Rentier*<br>Narrow elite capture | *Mobilizational*<br>Redistribution-oriented policies without financial and administrative capacity |
| | ***High*** | *Managerial*<br>Programmatic top-down administration, often growth-oriented | *Integrationist*<br>Effective administration of redistribution-oriented policies |

## The Comparative Methodological Approach

This book argues that understanding the emergence of embeddedness and cohesion can explain why some cities are more effective than others in reducing inequalities. Studies of single cases can help us discover and theorize novel ways of thinking about urban change. But if we seek to understand variation across cities, a comparative method is necessary in order to develop explanatory concepts. The role of comparison in interdisciplinary urban studies has been subject to increasing methodological and conceptual debate, particularly as scholars have sought to include non-Western cases. Jennifer Robinson (2022) has underscored the importance of comparison for making cases from the Global South not merely objects of descriptive analysis but subjects for theoretical development. Sociology's methodological emphasis on structured comparison is particularly useful for variation-finding approaches to theoretical development. Within disciplinary sociology, Garrido, Ren, and Weinstein (2021) have taken as a starting point the many differences that Global South cities exhibit in relation to their Northern counterparts. In doing so, they have argued that Northern theory can be reconstructed through theorizing from Southern cases to develop a "truly global urban sociology" (2021, 4). This book shares with Garrido, Ren, and Weinstein the empirical attention to Southern cities and the analytical ambition to reconstruct urban theory.

The empirical heart of this book is a comparative investigation of São Paulo, Brazil, and Johannesburg, South Africa. Through this comparison, I test and develop the theoretical concepts of "embeddedness" and "cohesion" as configurational factors that enable distributional change in cities. I selected São Paulo and Johannesburg for this study based on a range of similarities that hold constant across the cases. These are cities in national contexts that had similar

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social movement bases for their transition to democracy, similar extensions of rights to urban public goods in new constitutions, and a similar decentralized implementation for those rights, including a primary role for municipal government. Furthermore, these cities are the largest in their respective national contexts and serve similar functions in terms of connecting to global networks of trade and finance. They are considered to be in the same "alpha level" category of global connectedness by the most common quantitative ranking of "global cities" (Globalization and World Cities Research Network 2020). Finally, they have had a similar proportion of residents living in informal settlements and started with similar deficits in access to the public goods under study here. Yet, as the next chapter will make clear, São Paulo has been more effective than Johannesburg in expanding inclusion through access to three kinds of public goods: housing, sanitation, and transportation. It is precisely the similarly high degree of movement mobilization in the period of democratization, along with the strong commitment to urban public goods distribution through local governments in both cities, that makes their subsequent divergence surprising. This is the empirical variation that makes it possible to evaluate the helpfulness of the concepts of "embeddedness" and "cohesion."

This comparative logic follows what Imre Lakatos, the theorist of social science, described as a "positive heuristic," drawing primarily on the "research programs" associated with the "power-resources" school of political sociology and the "institutionalist" school of sociology of development. The positive heuristic "is a research policy, made up of models and exemplars, for digesting anomalies by constructing theories consistent with the hard core [of a research program]" (Burawoy 1989, 761). Cases are selected largely because of similarities that these two related approaches emphasize regarding social mobilization for democracy and the extension of socioeconomic rights after democratization. The anomalies that I explain come into focus when we look more closely at specifically urban literature, which emphasizes different conflicts of distribution—namely, over urban land and public goods—that have not been featured in the literatures in political sociology and sociology of development. To extend their general research program to the scale of the city, therefore, requires the theoretical apparatus that I develop here.

## Conceptualizing and Measuring Inequalities of Urban Public Goods

The variation in outcomes between São Paulo and Johannesburg that I describe in the next chapter makes comparison useful to find answers for why some cities are more effective than others in reducing inequalities. But how to measure the distribution of public goods is not an obvious task. While measuring inequalities of wealth and income is not without controversy, the

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purpose of such measurement is generally straightforward. Individuals are lined up in a distribution, and then their endowments of wealth and income are compared with one another.

It is rather simple to conceptualize a distribution of wealth or income, even though measurement can be quite difficult due to the fact that wealth and income are often hidden. Wealth and income can be represented by single monetary figures. Conceptualizing inequalities in the distribution of public goods is much more complex. In fact, the very concept of "public goods" itself can be slippery. Legal scholar Bob Hockett provides a particularly useful definition. He defines public goods as goods for "which private sector actors have neither the jurisdictional authority nor the coordinative or financial capacity to invest in socially optimal amounts" (2020; see Hockett 2017). This definition differs from the more constrained characteristics of a "public good" that any economist will learn in graduate school: "non-excludable"—it is impossible for one person to stop another from using the good—and "nonrivalrous"—using the good does not prevent another from using it.

This traditional approach from economics undergirds work by Elinor Ostrom (1990) on varieties of governance for natural resources, such as water basins. Ostrom emphasizes these natural resources as "commons," which are defined by the inherent costs of excluding any groups or individuals from their use. The central problem for her is that commons can therefore be overused or used in ways that generate undesirable outcomes across groups.

Ostrom's approach, while highly relevant to the profound questions of how we manage natural resources, is not particularly well suited to urban questions. The common public good in the urban context is the city itself. By this, I mean that one of the city's primary advantages is found in the goods it provides that enable public health and, increasingly, adaptability to the impacts of a warming planet. These goods are sometimes residential—such as housing—and sometimes networked—such as transportation. There are also goods, such as sanitation, that are both; a toilet is residential because it is inside the home, but it is networked because it is ultimately connected to a much larger sewage system. In practice, and in contrast to the more limited economic definition of a public good, these goods *are* excludable. In theory, they are the stuff of the common good that is intrinsic to the city itself.[5]

What determines whether these goods are or are not excludable is institutional power: the relationship between state, market, and society that regulates the realization of the theory of the city as a public good. Therefore, when we think about the notion of public goods within the urban context, there is good reason to opt for Hockett's definition. In particular, this definition's focus on "socially optimal amounts" emphasizes the question of distribution. In both Brazil and South Africa, the constitutions that were drafted after the transition to democracy define such a distribution quite clearly for the goods under examination here:

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They are rights of all citizens. The theoretical goal of the city as a public good is indisputable.

Furthermore, Hockett's more expansive definition highlights the institutional characteristics of a "public good." The market, by itself, cannot provide such goods in the socially optimal amount. In contexts where rights to such goods are explicit in the constitution, which is itself a product of the struggles for enshrining those rights in the first place, it is therefore clear why they can be considered "public." Furthermore, the key characteristics of an institution that can provide such goods are legal authority, coordinating capacity, and financial capacity.

With these two concepts in mind, then, we can safely describe housing, sanitation, and transportation as public goods. This is very different from saying that there is something inherent about these goods that makes them subject to exclusive provision by public authorities. Rather, it is clear that the state is an indispensable sphere for ensuring that the provision of these goods gets closer to what is defined in a democratic constitution as "socially optimal"—that is, as a right.

This still does not resolve how we might empirically assess "success" or "failure" in producing a distribution of these goods that is closer to that "socially optimal amount." In order to think about access to these goods as a distributional question, it is helpful to begin with the concept of rationing. This goes all the way back to Weber's 1921 study of the medieval city as a place where those inside the walls had access to the city's benefits, while other villagers were literally walled away from those benefits. The de facto and de jure spatial inequalities of Brazilian and South African cities that this book analyzes carry obvious resonances with what Weber described. A key premise of this study is that it is best to think about the relative distribution of urban public goods as a matter of inclusion—who is included in the distribution and who is not.

This may not be as simple as it sounds, either. Inclusion in housing is not straightforward to measure, for example. The dominant mode of exclusion in these cities is not what we might think of as "true" homelessness—that is, sleeping on the street. This is not to say that such forms of homelessness are not a problem in either city, but the scale of this form of homelessness is dwarfed by the use of informal shelters, which are often built by residents themselves. These shelters are "informal" precisely because they lack the legal recognition of land rights conventionally associated with a shelter's location. This lack of land rights then generates vulnerability to the insecurity of eviction, by both the market and the state. When it comes to housing, therefore, the question becomes whether land policies enable the production of a more secure form of residence, in terms of urban residents' access to public goods as well as a reduction in the risk of eviction. This emphasizes the multisectoral nature of housing policy; it is not only about the physical production of housing but also about land use planning.

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Among the three goods under examination in this book, sanitation is perhaps the easiest to measure. What share of residents of informal settlements has a flush toilet inside their home, and what share does not? While figuring out the answer to this question is relatively straightforward, I must emphasize that this is not to say that sanitation does not carry with it multisectoral coordination challenges as well. Provision of the infrastructure that enables a flush toilet to exist in a residential home, for example, requires sewer lines. To connect to water treatment facilities, these sewer lines have to be formalized. Of course, various forms of septic tanks (or pits) can exist quite easily with informal land tenure. But, generally speaking, some type of formal assessment of land tenure is de rigueur in almost all parts of the world for bulk sewer infrastructure to reach an urban residential home.

This is historically the case in both Brazil and South Africa. As a result, sanitation policy, like housing, also crosses over into land use planning. In contexts involving persistently high shares of informal dwellings, which certainly describes the conditions in both São Paulo and Johannesburg, one of the starkest ways to represent change in access to sanitation is by looking at how sanitation has changed *within* informal settlements in the city, that is, the share of residences within informal settlements that have a flush toilet inside the dwelling. Doing so also echoes recent calls in international urban planning scholarship to focus on "disaggregated, interurban performance metrics" in order to "give a clearer picture of the equity of water and sanitation services" (Carolini and Raman 2021, 101).

Transportation carries its own challenges. There is no widely recognized single quantitative metric for measuring equality or inequality in transportation. While there have been recent attempts to introduce quantitative measures of transportation inequality, these have generally focused on specifying what is meant conceptually by "distributive justice" in transportation (Pereira, Schwanen, and Banister 2017). Therefore, we should look at how a public transportation system does or does not include residents in the functioning of the city through at least three dimensions that are each largely about change over time. First, do reforms to the transportation system reduce the time required to get from residence to work? Second, do transportation system reforms make the cost of transportation cheaper for the city's poorest residents? And third, do reforms to the transportation system expand the geographic availability of the service? Compared with housing and sanitation, transportation has the least crossover with other policy sectors in terms of its provision. However, as we will see, it still carries with it great costs; financing these costs is a perennial concern for policymakers, and how they are financed has direct implications for assessing the degree of inequality in collective transportation.

Taken together, framing distributional questions of urban public goods as questions concerning rationing and inclusion underlines the political nature

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of these policy arenas. To distribute these goods more equally is a normative goal defined in both Brazil's and South Africa's constitutions. Questions about administrative capacity are therefore really about the distribution of power: What *share* (as opposed to the nominal number) of the city's residents will be included in the city's benefits?

## Research Methods

In order to identify the institutional mechanisms that explain the divergence between São Paulo and Johannesburg, as well as the sequential pathways they have traveled to get there, I draw on fieldwork that I conducted in the two cities over sixteen months between 2015 and 2018. This includes 225 semi-structured interviews with current and former high- and mid-ranking officials in government departments, mayors, city councillors, housing activists in professional nongovernmental organizations and grassroots movements, private property developers, executives in sanitation companies and bus companies, consultants, and scholars. I conducted 110 interviews in São Paulo and 115 interviews in Johannesburg. A full list of these interviews is in appendix B. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. In Brazil, all interviews were conducted in Portuguese, and in South Africa, all interviews were conducted in English.

As a method of historical social scientific research, I conducted these interviews as an archivist of the recent past. For projects aiming to uncover processes of institutional change in earlier periods of time, a researcher would hope for a set of oral primary evidence along the lines of the interviews I conducted for this project. My goal was to reconstruct a series of events and relationships that are otherwise largely outside of the formal archive of press releases and media reports. Many of the conflicts that I documented escaped the gaze of the public record. They appear technical and forbidding, and their significance may have only been understood in retrospect. That being said, I collected hundreds of documents of additional primary written evidence, including legislation, newspapers, professional trade publications, and internal government and nongovernmental organization documents. For those conflicts that did appear in the public record, I cite contemporaneous documentation to contextualize claims made by my informants in interviews.

My aim in the interviews and archival work was to identify the relationships between key actors, institutional spaces, and events that explain how institutional arrangements for distributing public goods have changed over time in São Paulo and Johannesburg. I used snowball sampling until I reached a point of saturation for each type of actor. In practice, this meant that at the end of interviews, I would ask who else I should talk to, to understand the key events, policies, and institutions involved in a given interview. This particular

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question provided at least two kinds of useful information. It exposed broader social networks that were critical for piecing together a relational account of policy change, and it helped me understand when I was reaching meaningful degrees of informant saturation (Small and Calarco 2022) within my investigation of a given policy arena. I used archival documentation to corroborate or call into question accounts from interviews, as well as to assist in triangulating contradictory accounts from different informants. I collected legislative documents and urban plans in order to understand the formalization of political decisions.

I draw on these data to construct a historical account of change in local state institutions in São Paulo and Johannesburg. This account relies on specifying sequences of change, which roughly correspond to different mayoral administrations. Such a sequential method, or "process tracing," is useful "for establishing the features of the events that compose individual sequences (e.g., their duration, order, and pace) as well as the causal mechanisms that link them together" (Faletti and Mahoney 2015, 212).

## Structure of the Study

The book documents the histories of institutional changes in the distribution of three public goods: housing, transportation, and sanitation. As we will see, the governance of each good is never entirely separate from that of another; just as city politics are nested in larger national contexts, these policy arenas have significant areas of overlap. However, each public good also thematizes a specific debate that emphasizes different dimensions of the concepts of "embeddedness" and "cohesion" as explanatory factors for the capacities of cities to reduce inequalities. These concepts are premised on some degree of social contestation. The policies of housing, transportation, and sanitation illustrate a spectrum of openness to social contestation. Housing is the policy area most obviously open to social contestation, transportation is an intermediate case, and sanitation is most clearly the preserve of insulated technocrats.

In the next chapter, I lay out a contextual history of each city, especially the social mobilizations that led to democratization in Brazil in the late 1980s and South Africa in the early 1990s, and illustrate how the distribution of these three public goods has changed in São Paulo and Johannesburg since democratization. This comparative history of the relationship between urban distribution and struggles for democracy sets the stage for identifying the sequence of change in both cities in the period of interest in this book—that is, after their transitions to democracy. I begin by focusing on how urban inequality was thematized as intrinsic to the struggle for democracy in each country. As a result, the new democratic dispensations made reducing urban inequality

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an explicit goal and empowered local government to be the governing scale to exercise the power to realize this goal. I then lay out in both quantitative and spatial detail what these inequalities in housing, sanitation, and transportation looked like in each city at the moment of transition to democracy and how they have changed over time. Before the second chapter concludes, I return to the substantive theories discussed in this introductory chapter to show how the variation between the two cases confounds expectations that emerge in the global literature on cities and inequality.

The third chapter concerns the distribution of housing in each city. Here I ask, Why did São Paulo manage to develop planning tools that generated power to relativize the rights of private property in order to deliver social housing in well-located areas, while Johannesburg did not? The politics of housing in both cities have been the most directly thematized by organized social movements. It is therefore unsurprising that this is a sector that has been shaped most clearly by the relationships between state and society. In São Paulo, I show that successive waves of movements developed durable relationships with politicians and bureaucratic officials, producing an incremental project of internal capacity within the state to conceptualize and deliver housing. In Johannesburg, I show that the municipal bureaucracy became progressively de-linked from its social movement base. In the wake of the transition from Apartheid, white real estate interests did not have the political legitimacy to openly challenge the largely black government, so they developed hidden strategies that disabled the capacity of the local government to implement reforms that were often aimed at redistribution. While strong embeddedness in São Paulo produced an increasingly cohesive governing capacity in the local state, the lack of embeddedness in Johannesburg made the local state vulnerable to relatively hidden challenges by traditional white elites that prevented the emergence of a similar capacity.

The fourth chapter focuses on the dominant mode of collective transportation in each city: in São Paulo, the bus; in Johannesburg, the minibus taxi. I ask, Why did São Paulo formalize its bus sector and reform it to be cheaper and to extend into the poorest neighborhoods of the city, while Johannesburg could not formalize or integrate its minibus taxi sector? In São Paulo, reforms in the sector focused on an institutional approach that allowed the municipality to develop relationships with key formal and informal actors in the privately owned bus sector, which built the requisite trust that the public sector would not exclude the interests of existing informal bus operators. In contrast, Johannesburg has placed a premium on the introduction of a new technology in collective transportation: bus rapid transit. By leading with technological reform, the city was unable to develop ties to minibus taxi operators that would enable a shared project of sectoral reform. The embeddedness of the local state in São Paulo pushed it to pursue the institutional path, while Johannesburg's

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lack of embeddedness pushed it into a confrontational relationship with the dominant informal operators. Furthermore, Johannesburg's cohesion was progressively undermined as it pursued a technological path driven by fleeting international events and alliances. This resulted in a new bus rapid transit system used by few residents, the vast majority of whom continue to opt for a minibus taxi system largely unchanged since the dawn of democracy.

The fifth chapter shifts its focus to sanitation, a policy arena in which São Paulo managed to generate downward, municipal accountability of a state-level sanitation company for slum upgrading, while Johannesburg struggled to generate higher-level support for municipal sanitation priorities. In both cases, the key delivery agent for water and sanitation is a semi-independent agency. In São Paulo, this agency is constituted at the state level, while in Johannesburg, it operates at the level of the city. São Paulo was able to build its own planning capacity and draw on new national mandates to create shared institutional spaces that made this independent agency accountable to the planning prerogatives of the city. In Johannesburg, the city was unable to establish clear planning priorities or create an institutional environment where the delivery agency would become accountable to those priorities. While São Paulo used its embedded ties with social movements to take advantage of new national policy to build up power at the municipal scale to direct the priorities of an independent water agency, Johannesburg's lack of embedded ties in the movement sphere left it vulnerable to increasingly particularistic and captured ties in its relationship with an independent water agency.

Taken together, these three chapters thematize debates over (a) expanding the rights of the poor versus creating openings for elite resistance, (b) organizing reform by prioritizing institutional change or technological change, and (c) the extension of public goods distribution through the establishment of accountability to municipal plans or faith in the independence of sectoral delivery agencies. In the concluding chapter, I return to the global picture of urbanization and efforts at redistribution with which this chapter began. I argue that the conceptual apparatus of "embeddedness" and "cohesion" can help us rethink questions of distribution in cities across the globe. And I argue that the concepts developed here are critical to a new global urban sociology that is centrally concerned with questions of distributional conflict in and about the slum, the quintessential territory of our rapidly urbanizing world.

The heart of this book is a paired comparison of two cities. But the arc of the book is an argument about the study of cities and urbanization globally. That is to say, this book is about the problems of social closure in cities through the distribution of public goods. If we see cities from the vantage point of the most excluded places in them, then we can begin to see what it means to break today's "walls" of social closure. The experience of place-based exclusion in the world's informal settlements, *favelas*, and *mjondolos* is the experience

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of a broad swath of humanity, one in seven people. Exclusion in these places carries profound implications for public health, economic opportunity, and adaptability to a warming world. By looking for variation in efforts to distribute urban public goods, we can begin to understand why some cities are more effective at breaking the bonds of urban exclusion than others. We now turn to the comparison that frames this study.

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