

Transforming Subjects into Citizens: Insights from Brazil's Bolsa Família

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Welfare programs distribute benefits to citizens. Perhaps even more importantly, by conveying powerful messages about how the state views poor people, welfare programs shape people's views about themselves as subjects or citizens. Theoretical debates on how public policies can enhance democratic citizenship inspire our study of Brazil's Bolsa Família (Family Grant). Has this conditional cash transfer program, which forms a major point of contact between the state and millions of poor Brazilians, elevated feelings of social inclusion and agency? A prominent perspective in the welfare-state literature would not expect a positive outcome given the strict means testing and behavioral requirements entailed. Yet our focus group research with Bolsa Família recipients suggests that the program does foster a sense of belonging and efficacy. Policy design and government discourse matter. This innovative welfare program yields rich insights on alternative paths to citizenship development for middle- and low-income countries in the third wave of democracy.

Political science has had little to say about the consequences of public policy outcomes for democratic citizenship," bemoaned Suzanne Mettler and Joe Soss a decade ago in the pages of this journal.¹ Indeed, rare are the conversations between

policy analysts and those interested in understanding the hearts and minds of policy recipients, especially in developing world contexts. By conveying powerful messages about how the state views poor people, social assistance programs shape people's views about themselves as subjects or citizens. Social assistance, when well designed and implemented, can be an important tool not only to reduce material poverty but also to build a sense of social inclusion and efficacy among beneficiaries.

Our point of departure is that the development of a robust and meaningful experience of citizenship—where everyone enjoys political, civil, and social rights—is essential for the deepening and legitimation of contemporary democracies, especially new democracies. Social benefits, acquired through procedures that are judged to be reasonable, fair, and transparent, can only help deepen poor people's appreciation of their newfound political rights. In this spirit we embrace the view that "citizens are made not only at the national level through constitutions and elections, but also in their day-to-day engagements with the local state."² Drawing upon T.H. Marshall's three dimensions of citizenship—civic, political, and social—we contend that social citizenship is necessary to exercise genuine political participation. By social citizenship Marshall means "the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society."³

Our interest in social policy provisioning thus centers on the "feedback loop" it can set into motion.⁴ Feedback effects rest on how citizens interpret their

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interactions with the government over welfare policies. Two clusters of outcomes motivate our study. The first, denoted by “social inclusion,” rests on heightened self-esteem and a sense of positive recognition by one’s government. As Evelyn Nakano Glenn writes, “Citizenship is not just a matter of formal legal status: it is a matter of belonging.”⁵ Governments that recognize all members of the national community as worthy enough to have their basic needs met and their life chances lifted can go far toward generating this sense. The self-isolation that can result from social exclusion—being left out and looked down upon by others—is all too often part of the vicious cycle of poverty.⁶

The second outcome of interest, denoted by “agency,” entails the notion that individuals “can effectively shape their own destiny.”⁷ Poor people often express feeling powerless,⁸ which may cause them to become withdrawn and resigned to their life circumstances. A key task of development is to break the downward spiral that can result from giving up. Self-esteem and active agency are crucial to overcome obstacles to well being. As Amartya Sen notes, “There is indeed a strong rationale for recognizing the positive role of free and sustainable agency.”⁹ Welfare policies that foster a sense of recognition, fairness, and rights facilitate the exercise of “voice,” which helps citizens hold their governments accountable for meeting basic needs.

What are the characteristics of welfare programs that instill a sense of social inclusion and agency in their recipients? A heated debate among policy scholars centers on two dimensions: whether programs need to be universally available (not based on income and subject to means testing), and whether they come without behavioral obligations (not stipulate conditionalities) in order to generate positive outcomes. It is possible to disapprove of income-based testing and yet approve of making benefits conditional upon recipients carrying out certain behaviors, and vice-versa. On the one side—the more vociferous one—means testing and behavioral stipulations are viewed as stigmatizing and paternalistic because they subject the poor to frequent state monitoring and suggest that they are incapable of exercising good judgment. Feelings of shame, social isolation, and powerlessness are among the negative results purportedly generated. On the other side, means testing and conditionalities, if designed and implemented appropriately, are seen as compatible with and perhaps even as facilitative of citizenship formation.

A bold policy innovation on the social protection agenda of many developing countries gives this debate new relevance. Conditional cash transfer programs (CCTs), which feature means testing and behavioral requirements, have swept Latin America in the past two decades. CCTs were introduced in seventeen Latin American countries between 1989 and 2010. They are diffusing rapidly elsewhere in the developing world with the

support of leading international organizations like the World Bank, which depicts them “at the forefront of a new thinking on social protection, which reexamines the presumed trade-off between equity and efficiency.”¹⁰ CCTs are also hailed as “one of the most significant developments in global social policy since the expansion of social security in industrialized countries.”¹¹ Despite the dramatic unfolding of CCTs, few analysts have investigated their full political consequences.¹² CCTs are designed to alleviate short-term poverty by ameliorating income-deprivation and long-term poverty by building human capital among children. Families are eligible to participate if they fall below a certain income threshold.¹³ Designated beneficiaries of households, typically mothers, receive funds monthly in exchange for meeting “co-responsibility” requirements in education and health care.

Means testing and conditionalities are likely to remain features of Latin America’s income transfer programs due to economic and political constraints. Social democratic examples of citizenship development in Western Europe, which feature universal and unconditional provisioning, may not provide a realistic model to follow for middle- and lower-income countries in the third wave of democracy. Even the European welfare states that were formed and long influenced by social democratic ideals have begun to drift toward the use of income-tested benefits.¹⁴ Partly because CCTs target by income and specify behavioral obligations they have gained widespread political acceptance in Latin America.

Tensions thus exist between the social democratic ideal of welfare states that feature universalism and no recipient co-responsibilities and the targeting and conditionalities mandated by economic and political constraints in contemporary Latin America and other developing world regions. Conflicts also exist between the historic focus of the Latin American left on redistributive structural reforms and the more moderate contemporary Latin American left’s acquiescence to work within existing fiscal and political boundaries. The latter’s concern for economic efficiency and acceptance of individual entitlements rather than insistence on collective class gains marks a departure from the past. Targeted social policy, once highly criticized in left circles as meager compensation for neoliberal restructuring, has become an integral part of the left’s social policy package.¹⁵ Although left critics cannot deny that CCTs have improved the material wellbeing of people, they might still contend that the perceptions and understandings they generate among beneficiaries are not citizenship enhancing.

There are thus two debates at hand. First, are targeted and conditional welfare policies necessarily worse than universal and unconditional models for the practice of citizenship? Second, when targeting and conditionality are used, what are the institutional design structures that best generate social inclusion and agency? To address these

debates we focus on Brazil's Bolsa Família (Family Grant), the largest CCT in the world. Because other countries look to the Bolsa Família as a model for emulation,¹⁶ the insights we draw have relevance well beyond Brazil's borders. We probe perceptions of program beneficiaries on issues like social inclusion and personal agency. Some rethinking of criticisms needs to occur if positive citizenship responses emerge out of a program known for exceptionally tight income targeting and substantial, well-monitored conditionalities. Does the program go beyond improving the material deprivation of the 50 million Brazilians who receive it and make them feel less marginalized, more socially included, and more efficacious personally and politically?

To find out from beneficiaries themselves we undertook extensive research in Northeast Brazil. The Northeast is a region marked by grinding poverty and a history of political clientelism.¹⁷ Focus group and survey findings, together with interviews with "street-level bureaucrats"—program coordinators, social workers, health professionals, and educators—shed light on the experiences and perceptions of the poor. To preview our argument, social policies that contain targeting and conditionalities can indeed generate citizenship outcomes. Our results suggest that the Bolsa Família does elevate beneficiaries' sense of social inclusion and personal agency, which is necessary for poor Brazilians to even claim their citizenship rights. Yet appropriate program design and discourse are crucial. Specific aspects of the Bolsa Família's institutional design and the government's framing create positive effects for social inclusion and agency. Means-tested programs can generate a sense of inclusion if they are broadly targeted; provide clear instructions that are pitched in positive, supportive, and understandable ways; and abide by consistent rules that are enforced by impersonal and impartial authorities. Conditionalities can be deemed acceptable—and even generate positive behavior beyond what is asked—if they are cast in non-punitive ways, stipulate conduct that most people can reasonably rise to, and are consistent with the state's constitutional obligations to support social rights. Thus, if means testing and conditionalities are well implemented, the subjective states that support citizenship formation should emerge.

We proceed as follows. First we critically engage the debate about whether welfare state policies that rely on selective (versus universal) principles and that attach behavioral strings to their provisioning can generate a sense of inclusion and agency. Turning to Brazil, we then describe the Bolsa Família's major design features. The next section, which reports focus group findings from Northeast Brazil, reveals the program's positive subjective effects. We then use people's testimonies to identify what it is about the conditional cash transfer program that generates such sentiments. We draw attention to those features that are generalizable beyond Brazil. Our findings underscore how welfare state policies undertaken

by a renovated left in Latin America can generate positive meanings for the poor, thereby enhancing citizenship and the legitimacy of democracy.

Social Policy Design: Retaining Subjects or Making Citizens?

A growing literature that examines mainly Western Europe and the United States contends that welfare state policies have the potential to integrate beneficiaries socially, boost their sense of dignity and efficacy, render them more likely to perceive democracy as legitimate, and ultimately encourage them to become more engaged political participants. These are the ingredients for making citizens. Welfare policies thus "can serve as sources of information and meaning, with implications for political learning."¹⁸ How social protection is designed and delivered crucially shapes whether it contributes to people's sense of inclusion and agency or perpetuates marginality and hopelessness. Understanding how people obtain and stay enrolled in programs is a useful starting point of analysis. Which dimensions of policy variation are significant for generating different kinds of feedback for citizenship formation? Among the key dimensions often identified are whether policies are selective versus universal and obligations-oriented versus unconditional.¹⁹ We assess whether a program that is both means-tested and conditional can generate feelings of social inclusion and efficacy, and if so, how. When targeting and conditionality are employed, which features of institutional design best enhance inclusion and agency?

Targeted (Means-Tested) versus Universal Programs

Targeting is based on the premise that benefits should be provided on the basis of individual need. Means-tested welfare programs assist lower-income people exclusively. Eligibility is based on being poor. In the US, food stamps, Medicaid, AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), and TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) are means-tested programs. By contrast, Social Security, the G.I. Bill, Medicare, and public education are universal. They distribute services and benefits to people at all income levels in certain categories (e.g., old people, former soldiers, old and in need of medical care, or of school age.). With the notable exception of policies in Costa Rica, examples of universal social protection are rare in Latin America. The vast majority of CCTs in the region are means-tested. They combine geographical and household targeting: priority regions are selected based on poverty indexes and prospective beneficiaries apply based on family income characteristics.

The social democratic ideal as established in Western Europe was to guarantee the universal exercise of economic, social, and cultural rights, a system based on progressive taxation. Welfare policy in Sweden, for example, has been largely universal. Proponents of universalism oppose the

means testing associated with “liberal” or “residual” welfare regimes, which they associate with control by authorities and stigma for beneficiaries. These are not the only grounds for rejecting targeting. Others concern the administrative costs of income testing, the disincentives for seeking better paid employment, and the notion that social programs are best defended when they include more articulate segments of the population.²⁰ The objection that we focus on here concerns the stigma that is thought to accompany means testing. Following social democratic examples, the comparative social-policy literature has tended to regard means testing as an extension of the poor-law tradition and as precluding the possibility of a social right.

A parallel defense of universalism is embodied in various postwar enactments of the British welfare state, such as the National Health Service Act. In the words of Richard Titmuss,

One fundamental historical reason for the adoption of this principle was the aim of making services available and accessible to the whole population in such ways as would not involve users in any humiliating loss of status, dignity or self-respect. There should be no sense of inferiority, pauperism, shame or stigma in the use of a publicly provided service; no attribution that one was being or becoming a ‘public burden.’²¹

Similarly, various analysts of the US welfare state consider means testing—especially if conducted at frequent intervals—as an impediment to positive self-esteem and a rights-based outlook among recipients. As articulated by Suzanne Mettler and Jeffrey C. Stonecash, “Universal eligibility criteria may help to incorporate beneficiaries as full members of society, bestowing dignity and respect on them. Conversely, means-tested programs may convey stigma and thus reinforce or expand beneficiaries’ isolation.”²² The G.I. Bill exemplifies a universal program that communicates to a broad-based constituency their government’s support.²³ The highly means-tested AFDC, by contrast, is thought to generate feelings of untrustworthiness and powerlessness, which in turn, dampen demand. Recipients regard speaking up as ineffective as well as risky. In a comparison of SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) and AFDC, Joe Soss takes issue with the ongoing need of AFDC beneficiaries to prove their means-tested eligibility, be part of regular casework relationships, and be subject to regular case reviews.²⁴

There is a similar critique of targeting in the developing world, one based partly on the notion that means testing is invasive and stigmatizing. A central concern of policy makers interested in administering targeted social programs in Latin America and other developing regions is that feelings of shame will not only hurt citizenship formation but also inhibit low-income persons from seeking poverty relief.²⁵ Amartya Sen goes so far as to assert that self-respect and respect by others, rather than being of “marginal interest,” is akin to a basic need and should be considered seriously by policy makers interested in lifting the life

chances of the poor.²⁶ Ethnographic studies of the poor in various developing regions reinforce the importance of stigma avoidance.²⁷

Obligations-Oriented versus Unconditional Programs

The citizenship value of programs is also thought to rest on whether they are contingent upon specified behavior. Many analysts across the developmental divide of the first and third world condemn conditionalities as antithetical to citizenship formation. The argument is that “welfare contractualism” breaks with the Marshallian philosophy of social rights. In this vein, an important current of opinion argues for the replacement of conditional and targeted benefits with an unconditional cash grant or “citizen’s income” that is sufficient to cover basic needs.²⁸

In the US context, some behavioral strings attached to the social protection agenda have brought considerable criticism. “While some policies, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, expand and underscore citizens’ rights, other programs stress the obligations that individuals must fulfill in order to merit full standing as citizens and to gain access to the benefits of social provision.”²⁹ Policies that “subject recipients to a heavy regime of direction, surveillance, and threats of disciplinary action,” end up suggesting that recipients are unworthy of respect.³⁰ TANF, which emphasizes work requirements and time limits to assistance, is regarded as an example.

Conditional cash transfers, as their name implies, carry behavioral stipulations. Numerous authors criticize the conditionality aspect of such programs as being detrimental to instilling the sense of social inclusion and agency necessary for citizenship building.³¹ For example, Nicholas Freeland contends that it is “morally highly questionable” that a government can tell citizens they have a right to social protection and then deprive the most destitute among them of that right if they fail to meet certain conditions.³² A similar critique is launched by Lena Lavinas:

The imposition of conditionalities assumes that the poor are unaware of universal rights and are incapable of making rational long-term choices. Conditional schemes thus involve a paternalistic view of poverty, assuming that poor people do not know how to spend or act “appropriately” and that the state is responsible for bypassing their preferences, correcting them, making their children’s schooling compulsory (which is already a law), or enforcing the monitoring of all the family members’ health.³³

An intermediate position suggests that lumping together all programs with income-based criteria or with specified behavioral obligations obscures important differences. The key is to distinguish between the abstract principle of means testing (or conditionalities) and how programs with such features are implemented in practice. For instance, one analysis compares three government programs that target low-income people—TANF, Head

Start, and public housing assistance—and finds that they have different effects on recipients' propensity for civic and political engagement. How authority relations are structured is pivotal in deepening or discouraging the incorporation of disadvantaged citizens.³⁴ Similarly, analysts have observed important variations among the behavioral requirements and monitoring arrangements of CCTs. They suggest implicitly that these differences might influence how recipients experience welfare programs.³⁵ Thus far, however, few studies recommend disaggregating means testing and conditionalities and exploring how more specific features shape recipients' sense of social inclusion and agency.

The central questions before us, hence, are whether social policy designs must be universal to have beneficial effects on citizenship, and whether social policy must forgo behavioral conditionalities to have positive effects on the perceptions that recipients develop about themselves and their government? Or, might targeting and conditionalities be designed and carried out in ways that allow nonetheless for the generation of citizenship norms? In other words, are there different pathways to social citizenship?

Basics of the Bolsa Família

According to the skeptics, the Bolsa Família would be unlikely to enhance feelings of social inclusion and political efficacy among beneficiaries despite its contributions to reducing their poverty. Notably, two key program features—that it is strictly means-tested and subjects recipients to several monitored conditionalities—might dampen positive perceptions.

The Bolsa Família began in 2003 when President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010) consolidated a range of transfer programs that had existed previously under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002).³⁶ Lula housed the Bolsa Família in the newly established Ministry of Social Development (MDS) in 2004. He staffed the ministry with well-trained technocrats committed to breaking inter-generational poverty by providing immediate income support to poor families and encouraging behaviors with long-lasting consequence for human development, such as school attendance.³⁷ Lula's own humble origins lent credibility to his commitment to poverty alleviation.

Federal and municipal authorities jointly administer the program. Using countrywide poverty maps, MDS technocrats determine the number of grants to be disbursed per municipality, thereby limiting availability.³⁸ To ensure that the most destitute families within those municipalities receive the grant, the ministry employs income and household composition eligibility formulas. Self-reported family income and the number of children and teenagers in the household determine the structure of benefits. Families are eligible if they fall below a per capita monthly income threshold of roughly \$90.³⁹ Among households suffering extreme poverty, Bolsa Família benefits repre-

sent a considerable portion of total income.⁴⁰ Applicants provide household information to their municipal Bolsa Família office, which in turn transfers the data to the MDS. Ministerial technocrats manage a national database, the Unified Registry (Cadastro Único). Beneficiaries are required to update their eligibility every two years. The MDS in Brasília verifies family incomes by running crosschecks with other government databases. For example, if an applicant claims wages below the poverty line but other databases (e.g., one for pensions) reveal a household income in excess of the eligibility threshold, the application will be screened out. If red flags emerge, social workers connected with municipal Bolsa Família offices are authorized to do home visits. Regular caseworker visitations are not, however, part of the program.

How do the conditionalities operate? The designated household beneficiary, typically the mother, is responsible for meeting the “co-responsibility” requirements. Children must be enrolled in school and attend classes 85 percent of the time. Children and mothers need to meet basic health care stipulations. Children have to obtain all immunizations on schedule, as set by the Ministry of Health, and receive medical check-ups to assess nutritional status. Pregnant women must receive prenatal care and breastfeeding is required.⁴¹ School personnel monitor the attendance record. Public health clinics monitor the health care requirements. The information is sent to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health in Brasília, which in turn transmit the information to the MDS. School attendance is reported every two months and the health record every six months. Brazil's constitution stipulates the free primary and secondary education and universal health care that makes realization of these requirements possible.⁴²

Families who do not comply with the conditionalities can lose their benefit.⁴³ The MDS recognizes that non-compliance may result from extreme vulnerability, and therefore follows a routinized sequence of steps before suspending benefits. Early on a family receives a warning and has the chance to respond. A social worker is often asked to investigate and assist family members in meeting the requirements.⁴⁴ If problems are not resolved, benefits are blocked for thirty days and then (up to two times) suspended for two months. Benefits are canceled if non-compliance persists. How beneficiaries regard the verification of their incomes, the imposition of conditionality requirements, and their ongoing monitoring will be treated in what follows.

Listening to the Poor: A Focus Group Approach

We examine the effects of the Bolsa Família—a demanding CCT for its means testing and conditionalities—on citizenship development. Within Brazil, we focus on the poor in the Northeast, where Bolsa recipients are concentrated.

Due to the fatalistic worldview for which this demographic segment is known,⁴⁵ these are people least likely to experience social inclusion and empowerment. Historically, their experience with social benefits is associated with clientelism, personalism, and arbitrariness. They are also among those least likely to show popular support for democracy.⁴⁶ Whereas elite support for democracy has grown since the transition in 1985, ordinary Brazilians have displayed a disturbingly high level of indifference to the regime type. Brazil has typically ranked among the bottom three or four Latin American countries where mass confidence in democracy is lowest. Hence, expressions of citizenship outcomes and belief in the legitimacy of Brazilian democracy should be duly noted.

We draw on study participants from three municipalities to guard against the possibility that their experiences were influenced by idiosyncratic factors. Two municipalities, Camaragibe and Jaboatão dos Guararapes, are in the state of Pernambuco. The other, Pau Brasil, is in the state of Bahia. All three have high levels of poverty and inequality but vary in population size, ruralness, and political makeup.⁴⁷ Hence, between the design features of the Bolsa Família and the characteristics of the Northeast, one would not necessarily expect to see outcomes in line with citizenship ideals.

Focus groups with program beneficiaries form the core of the research presented here. Although focus groups are a non-representative research strategy, their advantages are many. Unlike one-on-one interviews and surveys, focus groups allow participants to discuss topics in a setting where members can share ideas and reach consensus.⁴⁸ They provide an opportunity for individuals to share their personal understandings in terms that are meaningful to them. What is not said can be as important as what is said. Given the free flow of dialogue, the discussion can go in unanticipated directions. We deemed the non-hierarchical aspect of focus groups to be particularly well suited for Bolsa Família recipients, as it provided a comfortable setting for low-status individuals to voice their opinions without feeling intimidated.

We held eleven focus groups across three research sites in June 2009.⁴⁹ Our moderators were Brazilian social scientists who had worked with poor Northeastern communities. Their familiarity with this population allowed them to use appropriate vocabulary and methods of questioning. Their academic training helped them direct the discussion in productive ways. All moderators followed a similar script. Some questions were narrowly constructed and others were open-ended. The moderators recruited participants directly from the community through informal networking.⁵⁰ The groups ranged in size from six to eight members. As focus groups work best with relatively homogenous members, men and women participated in separate conversations. Participants were non-remunerated but were informed that there would

be refreshments after the discussion. They were made aware that our team had no authority over their grants or the program in general. The lively and candid discussions—which included criticisms as well as praise of the Bolsa Família—lasted an average of one hour.⁵¹

To complement the focus group findings we employed a questionnaire, which allowed for the aggregation of individual opinions based on a pre-determined format. In June and July of 2009, we interviewed over 1,100 individuals to capture poor residents' views in the three cities. Our team of university students went door-to-door in poor neighborhoods to talk to people from beneficiary and non-beneficiary households. We used a quota sample to capture both recipients and non-recipients and applied the questionnaire throughout poor neighborhoods.⁵² Since quota samples run the risk of producing biased results by oversampling convenient groups, we trained our interviewers to avoid such errors. To ensure valid results, they made clear they had no authority or involvement with the Bolsa Família program. Here, we go only as far as reporting general responses to select questions that illuminate specific aspects of the focus group discussion.

We also conducted numerous interviews with other actors associated with the Bolsa Família. In 2009 and 2011, we interviewed high-level federal technocrats in the MDS in Brasília as well as program administrators, social workers, public health nurses, and civic leaders from the three cities. Whereas technocrats in the federal ministry shed light on factors relevant to program design, local officials provided a sense of the dynamics of program implementation on a day-to-day level. Discussions at both levels formed a vital complement to the other research strategies.

For the sake of causal inference, it would be ideal to compare two social programs that serve demographically similar recipients but vary on analytically relevant design features, namely, whether they are means-tested versus universal, conditional versus unconditional. Unfortunately, there is no social policy in Brazil that would constitute an appropriate comparison. Instead, we use process tracing, a valuable tool for causal inference that allows for an “examination of ‘diagnostic’ pieces of evidence within a case that contribute to supporting or overturning alternative explanatory hypotheses.”⁵³ The real leverage for causal inference comes from detailed command of the case, the ability to see mechanisms or sequences “up close,” and identify observable implications of hypothesized explanations.⁵⁴ We assess the assertions about means testing and conditionalities from the academic literature against the testimonies made by our study subjects.

Learning from Beneficiaries

Bolsa Família recipients told us first-hand about their lives and experiences with the program. We probed on matters that would reveal social inclusion or exclusion, agency or helplessness. What kinds of responses would signal

exclusion and helplessness? Expressions of social isolation or losing face would suggest exclusion. In practical terms, beneficiaries might have said that they sought to hide their participation from neighbors or even considered not applying to the program. Indications of helplessness would come in the form of confusion, frustration, and feeling at the mercy of government officials. In practical terms, beneficiaries might have complained about not being able to figure out program logistics and experiences of inconsistent treatment by nurses, educators, and local Bolsa Família personnel. Instead, the discussion reflected social inclusion and agency. They told us that the Bolsa had helped them lead more autonomous and dignified lives. They saw it as understandable and fair in its design and distribution, as attainable and navigable despite bureaucratic complexities, and defensible through political action. Their testimonies thus suggest that social policy designs need not be universal or unconditional to generate positive effects on citizenship formation as long as the rules are clear and judged to be reasonable and fair.⁵⁵

Social Inclusion

The daily fulfillment of basic needs is a precondition for feelings of social inclusion. Dignity is necessary for citizenship. In every focus group discussion, participants reported that the Bolsa had enabled them to purchase essentials. People now have enough food to eat, children have the shoes and clothes they need to appear in public without shame, parents no longer have to beg or enter into debt peonage to support their families. Members from one Pau Brasil group reported clear differences before and after the introduction of the Bolsa:

Before getting the Bolsa, I don't know if you noticed but there were lots of kids in the streets begging for food [general agreement]. They asked a lot and a lot; kids were begging all day and all night [the group agrees]. And now it has stopped. Before it was the mothers themselves who would send their children out to beg because there really wasn't anything to eat. The children went from house to house. Now we don't see much of this. Rarely do you see it.⁵⁶

Economic independence emerged as a theme time and time again. It came up in terms of independence from family help, church handouts, and indebtedness with local shopkeepers. As one person explained, before the Bolsa the only alternative was to turn to religious institutions or family for help. “[One would have to] go to church and ask, ‘would it be possible for you to give me a basket of food?’ You’d ask family to help. You’d ask for a handout here and there.”⁵⁷ One participant’s testimony about life after the Bolsa was very revealing: “I started to feel independent. It’s as if I worked and had a salary.”⁵⁸ Other studies echo the importance of not having to subjugate oneself. A study done in a Northeastern rural community found that women beneficiaries were relieved to no longer be in debt with local shopkeepers.

Their newfound ability to pay at the time of purchase gave them a feeling of heightened community status.⁵⁹

The ability to purchase shoes and thereby elevate children’s social standing was a pervasive topic. Almost universally, participants spontaneously offered that “shoes” were one of their first purchases. “[The grant] helps a lot, I can buy things for the kids shoes, whatever they need for school.”⁶⁰ As found in the World Bank’s *Voices of the Poor*, a monumental interview-based study, shoes and decent clothing were seen as essential to a dignified existence.⁶¹

The provision of basic needs would have limited effects on social inclusion if the program imparted a critical view of why the poor are poor. Various responses to an open-ended question on why the Bolsa was created suggest that our participants did not feel blamed for their poverty. No one reported that they felt the government held them responsible for their destitution. Participants across all groups maintained that the program was created “to help the poor.” For instance, in one group four participants said in quick succession that it was “to help the poor,” followed by three others who also pointed out that, like them, “Lula was poor.”⁶² That “Lula was poor”⁶³ and “came from the Northeast,”⁶⁴ unlike past presidents, personified their sense that the state understood their plight. These sentiments were echoed in responses to our questionnaire. Overwhelmingly and spontaneously, 83 percent said that “helping the poor,” “helping poor children,” or “helping the poor have a better life” was the primary motivation for the Bolsa’s creation. Although appropriate ministerial discourse could generate this sympathetic understanding elsewhere, no doubt the strong associations of the program with Lula reinforce this viewpoint in Brazil.

To assess whether the design features of means testing and conditionalities lowered self-esteem or heightened stigma, we asked participants to critique the program. If they were significant irritants, such complaints could have easily come forth when we invited people to talk about “one thing they didn’t like about the program” or to “tell us what they would change about the Bolsa.” Interpreting groups’ responses requires attention to what was said as well as what was not said. Participants in two of the three cities expressed complaints about long lines, either to withdraw funds (Pau Brasil) or update the program registry at the municipal office (Jaboatão). Both these issues reflect a broader problem of uneven local capacity, something that needs to be addressed but is not inherent to the program design. If participants expressed a common “wish” it was to increase the grant amount. But most striking was the absence of complaints about means testing and conditionality. No one reported targeting or monitoring to be degrading, shameful, confusing, or onerous. For instance, no one said they felt embarrassed to receive the grant, wished they had more privacy, or felt their

privacy had been violated. Nor did anyone express any negativity toward street-level bureaucrats (e.g., social workers) who monitor compliance with the requirements. Our line of questioning could have easily opened the door to the admission of such feelings. That it did not accords with responses to our questionnaire. When asked whether the Bolsa Família made them feel proud, ashamed, or neither, the vast majority of Bolsa recipients said they were “proud” (75 percent) or “neither” (18.8 percent), with only a small number (1.6 percent) reporting “shame.” Clearly, if the program were considered stigmatizing, many more would have reported feeling ashamed.

Remarkably, we heard affirmation of targeting as a positive feature. For focus group participants, accurate means testing ensures that those who most deserve the benefit actually receive it. “There are no exceptions. Now, if they see that there are two or three people working, then they’ll cut [the grant].”⁶⁵ Income-based testing also de-personalized the experience such that people were not beholden to personalistic whims but subject to consistent bureaucratic criteria: “It’s like this. Today I consulted with a community health agent and she explained to me that when someone starts to work his or her taxpayer identification number enters the system. The system knows that you are working. It’s the system and it also enters into the registry, so that when you start to work formally [with a signed workers’ card] then they automatically take you off the program.”⁶⁶ The “system” to which she refers is the Unified Registry, which as noted previously includes crosschecks on various income sources. In sum, focus group testimony revealed that the truly poor regard strict targeting and means testing as working in their favor.

If targeting does not hinder social inclusion, might program conditionalities run counter to citizenship development? After all, the program requirements and ongoing monitoring could be perceived as burdensome or paternalistic. If recipients felt this way, one would expect them to report being offended by a heavy-handed government and mistrusted by street-level bureaucrats. In over eleven hours of strikingly open and uninhibited conversation, we heard virtually nothing to this effect. Instead participants said the program requirements were reasonable. “Monitoring is important. [The government should] monitor without cuts.”⁶⁷ Someone else explained, “[The] information about us really helps the state to know if the person is really using [the Bolsa] in good faith for the child, thus it has the right to get this information.”⁶⁸ Another person went further: “[I like] everything. All in all. The money, the requirement that children go to school, vaccines, you know? The medical assistance. . . . I think it’s a complete package.”⁶⁹

The Bolsa is gender-sensitive in that it prioritizes women as the designated beneficiaries. We specifically asked our female respondents to contemplate the effects

of conditionalities on their time and roles as mothers. Across the board, they responded that they did not see conditionalities as problematic. The exchange in Pau Brasil was illustrative:

Anon: No because these are things that every mother needs to do anyway.

Anon: It’s routine and a mother’s responsibility. And sometimes we forget that we have an appointment for a vaccine on a particular day. With the monitoring we know when to vaccinate. If you fall behind, you know which day you need to bring in [the child]. I think it’s only helpful.⁷⁰

Our participants’ positive views on conditionalities were all the more remarkable given that they knew there were teeth to them. They knew first-hand of instances where benefits were cut due to failure to keep up school attendance.

Agency

For the Bolsa Família to foster citizenship, the program would need to enable participants to act as their own agents. Ideally, participation in the program should convince beneficiaries that they have the ability to shape their own life course. We first investigate whether Bolsa participants display a sense of efficacy within the confines of the program. Understanding the program is a precondition for autonomous action. Is it reasonably easy to enroll and stay enrolled in the Bolsa, and to navigate problems when they occur?

Participants across all focus groups displayed a basic understanding of the program’s rules and operation. Despite local variation in how participants learned about it and applied, we heard that the application process and requirements were similar everywhere. For example, some learned about the program through television and went to the local Bolsa Família office on their own; others learned about it through a community health agent who also helped them apply. Nonetheless, they ultimately filled out the same form and followed the same procedures. As one man explained, “You go to city hall along with the community health agent from your neighborhood. You bring your information with you. City hall uploads your information to the system. This system is in Brasília. The system has your information and there is a period where you wait for approval of your application: either yes or no.”⁷¹ While we heard about varied experiences in how long it took to be accepted into the program, all groups expressed the view that the registration process was fairly straightforward.

Notably, our participants also understood that entry and maintenance into the program was not subject to the whims of local patrons, politicians, or meddling local authorities. Instead, everyone recited the conditionalities, such as regular school attendance. Further, we heard much confirmation that the Bolsa was

a “federal program” or from “Brasília,” the nation’s capital. “It’s federal.’ [General agreement in the group]. ‘The card says so.’”⁷² Our survey confirmed people’s understanding. When we asked respondents to identify who was responsible for the Bolsa’s creation, 72 percent reported President Lula (who was still in office at the time).⁷³ To our participants, Lula represented the federal government.

Knowledge that a distant authority ran the program—the federal government—helped participants understand that even if local politicians tried to use the program in exchange for votes, such appeals would not be credible.⁷⁴ When we asked, “Do you need a politician’s help to maintain the Bolsa?” our group in Jaboatão debated and then concluded the following:

Anon: No.

Anon: No.

Anon: I don’t think so.

Anon: Only unless the next politician wants to get rid of it.

Anon: It’s really a federal program. It’s not Tom, Dick or Harry’s. It’s federal.

Anon: It doesn’t depend on the councilman or anyone else, it’s really the federal government.

Anon: “It’s a federal benefit. [The Bolsa] is from a federal agency...”⁷⁵

An experience of agency within the program rests also on the ability to navigate bureaucratic roadblocks. A fatalistic belief system might lead individuals to simply acquiesce upon encountering difficulties. Given the size, scope, and decentralized operation of the Bolsa, we expected the poor to experience some challenges. In Pau Brasil for instance, some participants reported having difficulty locating their Bolsa Família cards after they thought the MDS in Brasília had sent them. Others had questions about suspended grants. Remarkably however, their stories revealed that many were able to take matters into their own hands and solve problems independently. One of our participants in Pau Brasil even reported that to inquire about her payment she “called Brasília,” using the toll-free number provided on the MDS booklet given to cardholders. She then received instruction on how to resolve the problem locally.⁷⁶

Beyond investigating efficacy within the program, we went on to explore the broader issue of whether the Bolsa has contributed to enhanced feelings of agency in political life. We first sought to determine whether individuals saw the program in rights-based terms. We then probed how people would defend the program’s continuation if it were challenged. We regard the views they express on collective action as significant. Taking inspiration from William A. Gamson, “beliefs about efficacy are at least as important as understanding what social changes are needed.”⁷⁷ The agency component we tried to tap “refers to the

consciousness that it is possible to alter conditions or policies through collective action.”⁷⁸

So, do participants regard the Bolsa as a social right? Our survey asked participants if they thought the Bolsa Família was an obligation or a favor on the part of the government. Among those respondents who were also Bolsistas, 53 percent said it was an obligation of the government, 33 percent said it was a favor, 8 percent said neither, and 5 percent did not know. While the “rights based” response is just over a majority, we nevertheless find it significant because the Brazilian state has long neglected the poor and those who received “favors” from clientelist politicians got ahead.

If the Bolsa Família is regarded among a majority of poor people as a right, it follows that beneficiaries should be willing to undertake collective action to defend it. Therefore we posed the question to focus group participants: “What would you do if politicians were to eliminate the Bolsa Família?” Overwhelmingly, we heard views that elected officials would face serious electoral repercussions. Participants felt that elections would be an important mechanism for accountability: “I would not vote for him if he were to declare this. But I don’t think a president would ever say this. Otherwise he wouldn’t be elected. If he wants to be elected, he wouldn’t say it.”⁷⁹ Another respondent engaged in more combative discourse: “I see it like this, get in his face and make him run, because it’s our loss. It’s something that helps us and we have to go after it, the general population has to keep up the pressure and go after him. He would lose, he would have to leave.”⁸⁰ This line of discussion yielded an interesting exchange among group members as well:

Moderator: What would you do if a politician tried to take away the Bolsa Família?

Anon: He wouldn’t even come to office!

Anon: He wouldn’t get past the front door.

Anon: We’d take him out!⁸¹

Clearly, our respondents viewed it in their interest to vote for politicians who would maintain the Bolsa. All groups saw voting as an important tool for the defense of rights. These expressions of exercising agency through the ballot box were likely informed by widespread media reports in 2006, which hailed poor Northeasterners as decisive in delivering Lula’s reelection.

Our focus group participants were also quick to identify protest politics—above and beyond the ballot box—as a mechanism for pursuing meaningful political action. While the idea that protests might be an important political strategy seems obvious today—given the momentous protests throughout the country in June and July 2013—at the time of our research there had not been large-scale mobilization since democratization in the 1980s. Also, the poorest of the poor do not generally engage in

insurgent political action. It is thus all the more remarkable that we heard the following:

Moderator: What would you do if the Bolsa Família were cut off?

Anon: A type of social movement People often go on strike, join movements, protest. I think we could at least try.

Anon: The people could organize collectively and protest against that government agency.⁸²

When talking to another group that expressed a willingness to protest, we asked where they would do so, realizing the difficulty of actually traveling to the nation's capital. Two participants explained that City Hall would be an appropriate choice because people there co-administer the program:

Anon: The Bolsa Família intermediaries are from the city hall; they are public servants. To make a protest in front of City Hall, you have to organize people from our city.

Anon: We can also send a petition to Brasília. Yes, we can.⁸³

In sum, our groups expressed a clear sense of agency and empowerment through both the vote and protest action.

Explaining Positive Evaluations of the Bolsa Família

How does a highly targeted program that is also known for well-monitored conditionalities generate such positive views? We first address why the Bolsa, despite means testing, does not appear to be stigmatizing. We then explore why its conditionalities seem to be accepted and sometimes even welcomed by beneficiaries. In the spirit of “replacing proper names with variables,”⁸⁴ insights gleaned from the specific experience of Brazil's CCT can be used to assess and build more general theories. Two analytically distinct but reinforcing explanations are at work. One has to do with institutional design: the even-handed, non-intrusive, ruled-based nature of the program. The second concerns the program's justification in the rights-based language of citizenship, and not the more traditional language of paternalistic clientelism. The Bolsa Família creates the steppingstones of citizenship because it meets both the Weberian condition and the rights-based condition. The fact that they converge and reinforce each other makes for an especially powerful combination.

The Bolsa Família's expansive scope no doubt decreases the potential for stigmatization even though it is targeted. Overall, roughly one-quarter of Brazil's population receives the program. The large number of people who are in the same situation creates a shared experience that forestalls feelings of shame. It might be different if the program were targeted to a much smaller group. The population size that the program serves may be what some authors—such as Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens—envision when they

assert that “means testing is compatible with basic universalism as long as the transfers are broadly targeted and seen as a citizenship right, not as charity.”⁸⁵ Wherever poverty is pervasive, as it is in many developing countries, broadly targeted social welfare programs could render similar outcomes.

The Bolsa Família is also framed in a way that is favorable to citizenship formation. The government, in its advertising of the program, projects a sympathetic view of why people are poor and a strong commitment to bringing the most destitute citizens along in the country's aspirations for improvement. Indeed, in publicizing the Bolsa on radio, television, and in widely distributed written materials, the MDS has gone to great lengths to emphasize the state's dedication to social inclusion and the expansion of social rights. For example, the simple graphic depiction of the Unified Registry, a highly technocratic instrument, features the phrase, “To Know in Order to Include.” In an informational booklet for applicants and beneficiaries the language of inclusion and rights is stark. For example, after outlining the program's requirements, it underscores in bold letters, “Keep in mind: If your family meets the eligibility requirements of the program, receipt of the benefit is your right, not a favor from anyone.”⁸⁶

A later version states, “The Bolsa Família is a program that transfers money directly to families as a way of guaranteeing the human right of adequate food, education and health.”⁸⁷ Importantly, printed material for beneficiaries is written in accessible language and illustrated with simple graphics. Other distributional materials that we encountered in our fieldwork feature photos of smiling and healthy children. These positive messages dovetail with the ubiquitous logos of the two governments associated with the program's expansion. The overarching logo of the federal government during Lula's administration, which appeared on the Bolsa debit cards, reads “Brazil: a Country for Everyone.” The emblem of the subsequent federal government (2011–present) reads, “A Rich Country Is a Country Without Poverty,” words that signal a commitment to including the poor in Brazil's upward trajectory. Although strong associations of the Bolsa Família with Lula enhance the message of solidarity with the poor, broader lessons can nonetheless be learned. By couching social assistance in supportive ways, governments can foster a sense of inclusion.

As for the Bolsa Família's operation, how means testing is carried out averts several undesirable consequences, including stigma. Rather than subjecting people to the direct supervision of a social worker or other “street-level bureaucrat,” the process works according to impersonal rules and procedures. On the issue of whether means testing breaks with the Marshallian conception of a social right, John D. Stephens argues, “conditional cash transfers, such as Brazil's *Bolsa Família*, should be considered a social right provided that the benefit is triggered more or less

automatically by an income test and does not provide authorities with much discretionary latitude.”⁸⁸

Rules of eligibility are depicted in the clearest terms. For example, the informational booklet features a simple chart that guides readers to find their grant amount based on household income and composition, including the ages of the children. A shortage of understandable information on social services can reinforce feelings of powerlessness and marginalization, a finding amply documented in the *Voices of the Poor*.⁸⁹ Thus, the government’s ability to communicate effectively with poor people, who are particularly susceptible to confusion and manipulation, can only enhance their agency.

Beyond explaining the program in ways that people with little education can understand, the government’s method of means testing likely diminishes feelings of mistrust. That income is self-reported and verified through impersonal channels hundreds of miles away from most recipients is an important distinguishing feature. Notably “Brasília decides” was a common refrain and generally seen as positive among our focus group participants. The program contains no provision for regular social worker visits to the home. Social workers come into play only if conditionalities are not met. Were the Bolsa Família to be more like the AFDC, focus group participants might well have reported less positive feelings. Indeed, we heard no complaints regarding intrusive state personnel. That restrictions are experienced through established procedures and a distant authority rather than direct and sometimes arbitrary personalized supervision aligns with one study’s conclusion that bureaucratic rules can be complex but deemed acceptable if recipients regard them as fair and uniformly applied.⁹⁰

Turning to the issue of conditionalities, it was striking that in eleven hours of conversation none of our focus group participants so much as hinted at being offended or irritated by them, even when we asked what they did not like and would change about the program. Given that conditionalities are monitored and seem to have increased the uptake of education and health services,⁹¹ the absence of complaints is notable. What accounts for this?

Clarity of the rules is once again evident. Making expectations clear diminishes the sense that a recipient is subject to the whims of street-level bureaucrats with more authority and status. Focus group participants across the board could readily recite what is expected of them. How did they know? As with the means testing component, the ministry has gone to great lengths to explain the requirements of the program. For example, the informational booklet that is widely distributed lists them; it even includes the vaccination schedule.⁹² Local Bolsa Família offices reinforce the message.

The content of the conditionalities also matters. The MDS emphasizes that health and education are basic rights and that the conditionalities (sometimes couched as

“co-responsibilities”) encourage the poor to realize these rights. This discourse is intended to distinguish the program from paternalistic approaches to social assistance based on “hand-outs” or “assistencialismo.”⁹³ Importantly, surveys that pose open-ended questions about rights suggest that most Brazilians are much more likely to identify social rights than civil rights. In particular, they mention the right to education and health.⁹⁴ Program conditionalities are aligned with social guarantees enshrined in the country’s constitution. Another convergence is also evident: mothers we spoke to regard education and health care as essential to their children’s welfare anyway. Moreover, they see it as their maternal duty to make sure their children take advantage of these services. If, for example, the program stipulated a formal work requirement, their receptivity might have been different.

Furthermore, a welfare program with conditionalities is more likely to be consistent with citizenship building if it is reasonable to expect that people can readily meet the conditions. For the most part the health and education infrastructure of Brazil allows children to attend school and engage in preventative health care, and in the exceptional instances where it is lacking, the authorities do not punish the poor for the state’s failure to keep up its end of the bargain. Here we draw on the work of Stuart White, who argues that conditionality does not necessarily conflict with the Marshallian idea of a social right as long as there is reasonable access to the resources specified by the conditionality rule.⁹⁵ For example, if a minimum income is made conditional upon having a job and employment possibilities are plentiful, then the right of reasonable access is not violated.

In both theory and practice, the state addresses non-compliance in a supportive and non-punitive manner. State officials realize that some people may have difficulty meeting their co-responsibilities.⁹⁶ In the spirit of trying to promote “agency,” program officials encourage recipients to seek assistance if they are struggling. One option for self-help is to call the widely publicized toll-free information number at the MDS. Another is to go to a designated local Reference Center for Social Assistance (CRAS) unit. Testimonies from our focus groups revealed that in fact people sought assistance from these channels. The state’s sympathetic view extends further. For instance, beneficiaries are not penalized if they live in communities that are underserved by public health services.⁹⁷ Furthermore, grants are suspended only after repeated warnings and efforts to help families meet expectations. Bolsa Família officials work collaboratively with social workers from the CRAS to investigate why some families are not meeting the requirements and to assist them to do so. In short, failure to meet program conditionalities is viewed as a sign that families are in need of support—not punishment—and the state has an obligation to assist them.

Finally, program requirements encourage recipients to use a greater range of services than they otherwise would and to develop self-confidence along the way. Notwithstanding the criticism that conditionalities give state agents too much power over the poor, positive consequences can result from the interactions between social service providers and recipients that CCTs induce. Social workers, teachers, and public health nurses have observed that when beneficiaries step into clinics and schools—even if their first steps are prodded by the program—they become aware of the range of other services available and begin to use them. Some local officials report that the Bolsa seems to have stimulated a growing demand for services.⁹⁸ This suggests that a social program like the Bolsa Família can generate the sense of inclusion and efficacy that is so crucial to equipping poor people to improve their lives.

No doubt the strong association of the Bolsa Família with the compelling figure of Lula gives the program a layer of meaning for poor Brazilians that it would not have otherwise. In their eyes, Lula was poor, rose above circumstance, and as president showed solidarity in providing important opportunities to others, especially by giving back to people who were as poor as he had been. Given the symbolic significance of Lula, the sense of social inclusion and agency that the program has spurred goes well beyond the cash it delivers in a clean technocratic fashion. Although this combination of descriptive and substantive representation strengthens the CCT's positive perceptual impact in Brazil, it is important to emphasize that Lula's contribution was institutional and not personalistic. For example, unlike the policies of a more populist figure like Hugo Chávez, the Bolsa Família—through its budgetary and extensive bureaucratic bases—will endure for a long time to come. In other words, although the figure of Lula is central in the minds of current beneficiaries, the citizenship-building mechanisms of the program are institutional and transcend the person. In this spirit, it is important to identify some of the specific features of design and delivery that the focus groups indicate as meaningful and that can be replicated elsewhere.

Conclusion: How Policy Design and Discourse Matter

Our study begins with the view that citizens are made through their day-to-day interactions with the state. Social welfare policy can structure daily engagements in ways that either heighten or diminish a sense of belonging and agency. People's program experiences can set in motion positive "policy feedback" effects.⁹⁹ How poor people interpret their relationship with the state and its representatives shapes their views on whether their government cares about people like them and is willing to invest in their future. Social welfare

programs need to foster inclusion and enhance agency in order to transform people from subjects to citizens.

Theoretical debates on how public policies can enhance democratic citizenship inspire our study. A widely-held tenet in the literature is that welfare policies should not only alleviate people's immediate poverty but also boost their sense of dignity, self-confidence, and efficaciousness. Yet scholars disagree on how to achieve this. A prominent vein argues that universal and unconditional welfare policies are essential to render these aspirations realities. Our research on Brazil's Bolsa Família suggests that there are different ways to design policy to enhance citizenship. We offer specific suggestions on how this can be achieved.

Brazil's CCT is one of the developing world's most significant anti-poverty policy models in recent years.¹⁰⁰ A major point of contact between millions of destitute Brazilians and the state, it features both rigorous means testing and well-monitored conditionalities. How recipients experience the Bolsa Família is significant for whether they feel a sense of belonging and develop a capacity for autonomous action, both of which are essential for enhancing the quality of one of the world's largest democracies. Because other developing countries have looked to the Bolsa Família as a model, understanding the program's impact on outcomes relevant to citizenship formation has relevance well beyond Brazil. These outcomes are important everywhere but perhaps especially for new democracies in the developing world, where the establishment of legitimacy with broad publics is essential.

Our research suggests that far from creating stigma, as one might expect a means-tested program to do, the Bolsa Família imbues beneficiaries with heightened feelings of belonging and agency. Children can now wear clothes that allow them to appear in public without shame, parents no longer have to beg to support their families, and beneficiaries no longer need to ask local merchants for items on informal credit. Our focus group research suggests that people attribute these outcomes to the government's social assistance program. Rather than feeling that the state is paternalistic in making benefits dependent on behavioral reform, many recipients view the conditionalities as aligning with their parental responsibilities and the constitution's guarantees in education and health. Constitutionally-mandated provisions in these areas, together with the additional income that the program affords, allow beneficiaries to fulfill their desired roles. At a time when policymakers in the region are rethinking decentralization, the positive outcomes that can come from a strong central technocratic ministry—a single standard that is more consistent, equitable, fair, and free from local political manipulation—are apparent.

Our study contributes to the theoretical literature on citizenship formation as well as to important policy questions about the best ways to structure welfare programs.

Even though there is uneven local capacity to provide services, we find nevertheless that major program features related to means testing and conditionality worked to enhance people's sense of inclusion and agency. Means-tested programs can foster inclusion if they reach large numbers of poor people, provide clear information, are cast in positive and supportive ways, and follow consistent rules that stem from an impersonal and impartial authority. Conditionalities can be made acceptable, even positive, if they are couched in non-punitive ways and come accompanied with state agents and institutions that support the ability of beneficiaries to meet them. Means testing and conditionalities, which for a variety of practical purposes are here to stay in many places, can be framed and carried out in ways that advance citizenship goals.

Our study also makes a compelling case for the merits of listening to beneficiaries to understand how social welfare programs affect the poor. We draw inspiration from scholars like Mettler, Soss, and Narayan et al., who undertake a similar approach.¹⁰¹ The new and vast literature on CCTs has not for the most part learned from those affected. As Michael Taylor notes, we must pay attention to the stories people tell.¹⁰² People's narratives reflect the way they understand and give meaning to things. In this spirit, we end with one person's testimony as to why Lula's fulfillment of a campaign promise gives him faith in Brazil's democracy:

Our past presidents did not come from the Northeast like President Lula and his jalopy. That's what you call it, right? From Recife to São Paulo his family went looking for work, suffering hunger on the way. So, the Bolsa Família is everything that Lula preached and that was reported in the media: "I want all Brazilians to have the opportunity to eat three meals a day. What are those meals? Every man should have the dignity of having breakfast, lunch and dinner."¹⁰³

Critics of the left's renovation in Latin America should take note. Although conditional cash transfers like the Bolsa Família represent an "add on" rather than a deep structural reform that significantly redistributes wealth and power, they can indeed be far more than a "hand out" to placate the poor. If designed and implemented well, they can contribute to elevating a sense of belonging and agency in a setting where exclusion has rendered poor people effectively unable to even claim their citizenship rights. As such, conditional cash transfers may legitimate electoral democracy in countries where ordinary people have shown relative indifference to regime type. Ultimately, by furthering the growth of a more confident and efficacious citizenry, they may well reshape the political context in ways that deepen the reform impulse itself.

Notes

- 1 Mettler and Soss 2004, 55.
- 2 Heller and Evans 2010, 435. See also Shklar 1991.

- 3 Marshall 1950, 8.
- 4 Pierson 1993. On the limits of policy feedback effects, see Patashnik and Zelizer 2013.
- 5 Glenn 2011, 3.
- 6 Narayan et al. 2000, ch. 7.
- 7 Sen 1999, 11.
- 8 Narayan et al. 2000, 235.
- 9 Sen 1999, 11.
- 10 Brière and Rawlings 2006, 22.
- 11 Fajth and Vinay 2010, 1.
- 12 Economists have measured the effects of CCTs on poverty and inequality, e.g., Fiszbein and Schady 2009. Political scientists, such as Hunter and Power 2007 and Zucco 2013, have investigated the electoral benefits of CCTs on presidential candidates. Besides Auyero 2012, few researchers have asked low-income Latin Americans how they experience the programs.
- 13 Almost all CCT programs in Latin America have tried to target their benefits rather narrowly to the poor. Bolivia has two CCTs that are distinctive in being universal although a large share of the population would pass a poverty means test if required to do so.
- 14 Gilbert 2002, 137–142.
- 15 Madrid, Hunter, and Weyland 2010, ch. 7; Hunter 2010, 154–159.
- 16 Sugiyama 2011.
- 17 Hagopian 1996, 15.
- 18 Pierson 1993.
- 19 Mettler and Soss 2004, 64.
- 20 Van de Walle 1998. If the Bolsa created disincentives for work, it would be troubling for agency. Our focus-group evidence suggests it does not. Various participants not only expressed a desire to work but also voiced aspirations to acquire a signed work card, a document that has historically symbolized Brazilian citizenship. Studies indicate the Bolsa does not affect adult labor supply decisions, Soares 2011.
- 21 Titmuss 1968, 40.
- 22 Mettler and Stonecash 2008, 275.
- 23 Mettler 2005.
- 24 Soss 1999.
- 25 Grosh 1994; Laurell, 2000; Hanlon, Barrientos, and Hulme 2010.
- 26 Sen 1995.
- 27 Narayan et al. 2000.
- 28 Parijs 1992; Standing 2002.
- 29 Mettler and Soss 2004, 61.
- 30 Mettler and Soss 2004, 61.
- 31 Other critiques involve the viability of requiring recipients to use services whose supply is inadequate, and the state's ability to monitor recipient behavior. Another viewpoint is that greater income, not state directives, is more important in inducing parents to develop their children's human capital. See Banerjee and Duflo 2011; McGuire 2013.

- 32 Freeland 2007, 77.
- 33 Lavinias 2013, 37.
- 34 Bruch, Ferree, and Soss 2010.
- 35 Bastagli 2009; Soares 2011. [AUS: Spelled Bastagli in your References.]
- 36 Lindert et al. 2007 and Soares 2011 provide excellent overviews of Brazil's CCT.
- 37 Another concern was that the program operate outside of local patronage networks. Bolsa Família has been largely successful in avoiding clientelism. See Sugiyama and Hunter 2013.
- 38 Barros et al. 2010.
- 39 The average amount paid to a family is roughly \$75 monthly. For payment levels see Soares 2011, 57. For information on the demographic profile of recipient families, see Costanzi and Fagundes 2010.
- 40 Soares, Ribas, and Osório 2010.
- 41 The booklet given to designated beneficiaries recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued nursing for another two years; MDS 2006, 24–25.
- 42 Sugiyama 2012.
- 43 Coutinho 2010 reports that between the program's initiation and 2010, 65,000 cases of de-enrollment occurred due to non-compliance.
- 44 These social workers tend to come from the Reference Centers for Social Assistance (CRAS), designed to assist extremely vulnerable people. Presently, roughly ninety percent of all municipalities have such centers.
- 45 Almeida 2008, 246.
- 46 Power 2010, 238–242.
- 47 Jaboaão dos Guararapes is the largest city (pop. 687,688), and has a history of corrupt local leadership. Camaragibe, a medium-sized city (pop. 143,210), has a long tradition of leftist politics and good governance practices despite high rates of poverty. Pau Brasil's rural location and small size (pop. 12,342) lends itself to personalism in local politics. See Ipeadata.
- 48 On the logic and methodology of focus groups, see Denzin and Ryan 2007.
- 49 Four were in Camaragibe, four in Jaboaão dos Guararapes, and three in Pau Brasil.
- 50 In Camaragibe and Jaboaão, community health agents and nurses with the Family Health Program helped recruit participants. In Pau Brasil, the moderator first recruited from a group of parents and then used a snowball technique to find other volunteers.
- 51 Concentrating on the experiences of beneficiaries may raise concerns of selection bias. Are past or present beneficiaries a self-selected group of up-takers who are less subject to feeling stigmatized by public assistance? The fact that we heard criticisms suggests that we did not only hear from enthusiastic supporters of the program.
- 52 See Weisberg 2005 on the logic of this sampling method. As quota sampling is non-random, we cannot reliably estimate the standard errors and coefficients for the broader population in the Northeast or Brazil. Quota samples can, however, have good inferential qualities for the population selected into the sample. We draw on Smith 1983 for guidance.
- 53 Bennett 2010, 208.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Unlike Mettler 2005, Soss 1999, and Campbell 2003, we do not link feelings of inclusion or empowerment with voting behavior since Brazil has compulsory voting.
- 56 Pau Brasil, Women's Focus Group No. 2.
- 57 Camaragibe Women's Focus Group No. 1.
- 58 Camaragibe, Women's Focus Group No. 2.
- 59 Brandão, Dalt, and Gouvêa 2007.
- 60 Pau Brasil, Women's Focus Group No. 1.
- 61 Narayan et al. 2000.
- 62 Camaragibe, Women's Focus Group No. 2.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Pau Brasil, Men's Focus Group No. 1.
- 65 Jaboaão, Women's Focus Group No. 3.
- 66 Camaragibe, Womens' Focus Group No. 1.
- 67 Jaboaão, Women's Focus Group No. 2.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Pau Brasil, Women's Focus Group No. 1.
- 70 Pau Brasil, Women's Focus Group No. 2.
- 71 Pau Brasil, Men's Focus Group, No. 1.
- 72 Jaboaão, Women's Focus Group No. 3.
- 73 A more recent panel study conducted by Cesar Zucco found that 84 percent of respondents identified the federal government as its main funder and manager. Personal communication with Cesar Zucco, December 20, 2010.
- 74 Pau Brasil, Woman's Focus Group No. 2.
- 75 Jaboaão Women's Focus Group No. 2.
- 76 Pau Brasil, Women's Focus Group No. 1.
- 77 Gamson 1992, 6.
- 78 Ibid., 7.
- 79 Jaboaão, Women's Focus Group No.4.
- 80 Camaragibe, Women's Focus Group No. 1.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 Pau Brasil, Women's Focus Group No. 2.
- 83 Pau Brasil, Women's Focus Group No. 1.
- 84 Przeworski and Teune 1970.
- 85 Huber and Stephens 2012, 6.
- 86 MDS 2006, 9.
- 87 MDS 2010, 6.
- 88 Stephens 2010, 515.
- 89 Narayan et al. 2000, 237.
- 90 Soss 1999; Bruch, Ferree, and Soss 2010.
- 91 McGuire 2013, 9.
- 92 MDS 2010, 18–23.

- 93 Brière and Rawlings 2006, 15.
 94 Brinks 2008, 152, n. 10.
 95 White 2010.
 96 Personal interview with Selaide Camargo, Administrator for Ministry of Social Development, June 29, 2011, Brasília; personal interview, Maria do Socorro Tabosa, Coordinator for Ministry of Social Development, June 29, 2011, Brasília.
 97 Personal interview, Patricia Jaime, Coordinator, Ministry of Health, June 29, 2011, Brasília.
 98 Personal interview with, Ana Claudia Souza de Silva Bispo, Family Health Program nurse, June 29, 2009, Pau Brasil; personal interview with Ana Maria Farias Lira, Secretary of Social Assistance July 7, 2011, Camaragibe.
 99 Pierson 1993.
 100 In addition to CCTs, microcredit banking programs, non-contributory pensions, and family health initiatives are notable.
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