

“Elections are commonly viewed as the central component of representative democracy. Yet democratic representation entails a far more complex process that extends well beyond election day. Citizens participate in public life through a multiplicity of civic initiatives—among them voluntary associations, social movements, interest groups, and nongovernmental organizations—all of which enable citizens to voice common concerns and influence public policy between elections. Representative democracy is thus best understood within the broad framework of *mediated politics*, a theory that seeks to integrate the multiple channels of interaction linking various constituencies with the political system.



What are the implications of this integrated approach for democracy promotion? For one, it invites donors to reconsider their tendency to focus primarily on formal, professional NGOs and to expand their support to equally worthy but less conspicuous associations, such as informal primary and secondary networks. For those on the ground, an integrated approach may mean combining forces with actors from all parts of civil society in order to strengthen the collective call for democratic change. ”

—Enrique Peruzzotti, June 9, 2009

# Mediated Politics: Reassessing Democratic Representation in Latin America

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*The views expressed in this presentation represent the analysis and opinions of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.*

# Presentation Outline

- Part I: Overview of competing theories of democratic representation and of non-electoral forms of participation
- Part II: Introduction of 'mediated politics' model
- Part III: Interactions between forms of participation
- Part IV: Conclusion

# Part I. Theories of Democratic Representation

## The Electoral Model: Political Parties

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Parties as the central mediating structure  
between citizens and government

**Individual  
Citizen**

**Political  
Parties**

**Roles**

- Symbolic integration
- Aggregative function
- Electoral structuring
- Governing function

**Representative  
Institutions**

# The Metamorphosis of Representation Thesis: Decline of Political Parties & Personalization of Politics

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Diminishing role of parties as mediating structures  
between citizens and government

**Individual  
Citizen**

## **Declines in:**

- Party membership
- Party identification
- Citizen participation in campaigns
- Party alignments in the electorate
- Electoral participation

**Political  
Parties**

**Representative  
Institutions**

# Theories of Democratic Representation: The Electoral Model: Unmediated Representation

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**Individual  
Citizen**

**Vote**



**Elections inadequate  
accountability tool**

- Voter isolation vs. collective action
- Informational asymmetries
- Poor 'signaling mechanism'
- Inadequate tool of citizen control

**Individual  
Representative**

'Individualization'  
of Electoral Behavior

Candidate-centered  
Campaigns

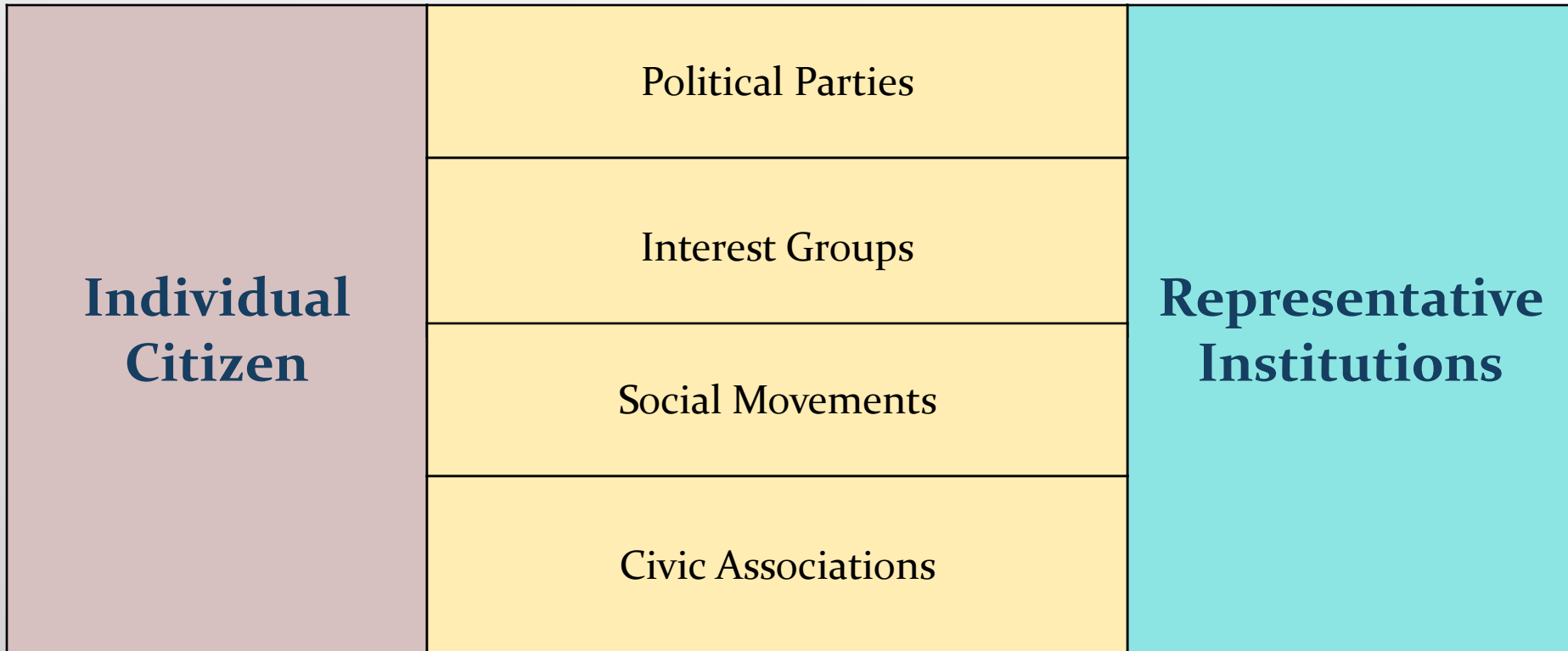
# Challenging the “Unmediated” Version of the Representative Process

- Sectors of the electorate still identify with parties, and parties play a significant role in the political process
- The decline of engagement in party politics does not signal the absence of civic engagement or of social disinterest in politics overall.
- Nonpartisan, engaged citizens simply resort to other channels, venues, and political mediations
- Rise of protest movements and social accountability initiatives, proliferation of public-interest NGOs, creation of arenas of institutionalized participation (participatory budgeting, social councils, citizen audits, etc.)

# “Effective Citizens” = Associated Citizens

Plurality of associational forms that play a mediating role

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# Theories of Non-Electoral Forms of Participation

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## **Social Capital Model**

G. Almond & S. Verba; C. Pateman; R. Putnam

## **Public Sphere Model**

J. L. Cohen & A. Arato; J. Habermas

## **Pressure Group Politics**

Classical pluralism (D. Truman); Neocorporatism (P. Schmitter);  
Neopluralism (J. Berry)

# Theories of Non-electoral Participation: Competing or Partial Models?

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Theoretical Approach	Social Capital	Public Sphere	Pressure Group Politics
Form Of Participation	Non-political Civic Engagement	Contentious & Identity Politics	Lobbying (Direct Influence)
Associational Format	Thick Primary & Secondary Networks	Informal Publics Social Movements	Permanent & Professional Organizations
Contribution to Democracy	Socialization Democratic Personality Civic Culture	New Issues Collective Learning	Public/Private Interest Representation
Examples	Boy Scouts Bowling Leagues	Environmental Movement	Trade Unions ACLU

# Part II. Notion of Mediated Politics

- Representation entails a complex political process that goes well beyond the electoral moment
- Representation extends throughout an elected official's tenure, through a multiplicity of civic initiatives by which associations, movements, and the public seek to influence decision-making
- "Effective citizens" engage in collective action to express the demands and claims of specific constituencies between elections
- Mediated politics as a multilayered terrain in which different constituencies are organized, transformed, and recreated
- Democratic representation understood as an ongoing process of claim-making
- 'Mediated politics' as the multiple arenas in which that politics of claim-making takes place

# Towards an Alternative Theory of Representation: The Mediated Politics Model

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<b>Individual Citizen</b>	<b>Non-political Civic Engagement</b>	<b>Contentious &amp; Identity Politics</b>	<b>Lobbying (Direct influence)</b>	<b>Electoral Competition</b>	<b>Representative Institutions</b>
	<b>Thick Primary &amp; Secondary Networks, Voluntary Associations</b>	<b>Publics, Protest/ Social Movements</b>	<b>NGOs and Interest Groups</b>	<b>Political Parties</b>	

# Part III. A Differentiated Theory of Participation

In itself, each model is inadequate in fully accounting for the practice of democratic representation; it is therefore necessary to bring them together into a common theoretical framework.

Analysis of different linkages and interactions among participatory layers and of participatory layers and institutions

- Shifting formats of participation
- How different layers feed one another
- How layers conflict with one another
- Interactions between participatory layers and representative institutions

# Shifting Formats of Participation

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**Membership**

**Non-Membership**

- Putnam social capital decline thesis

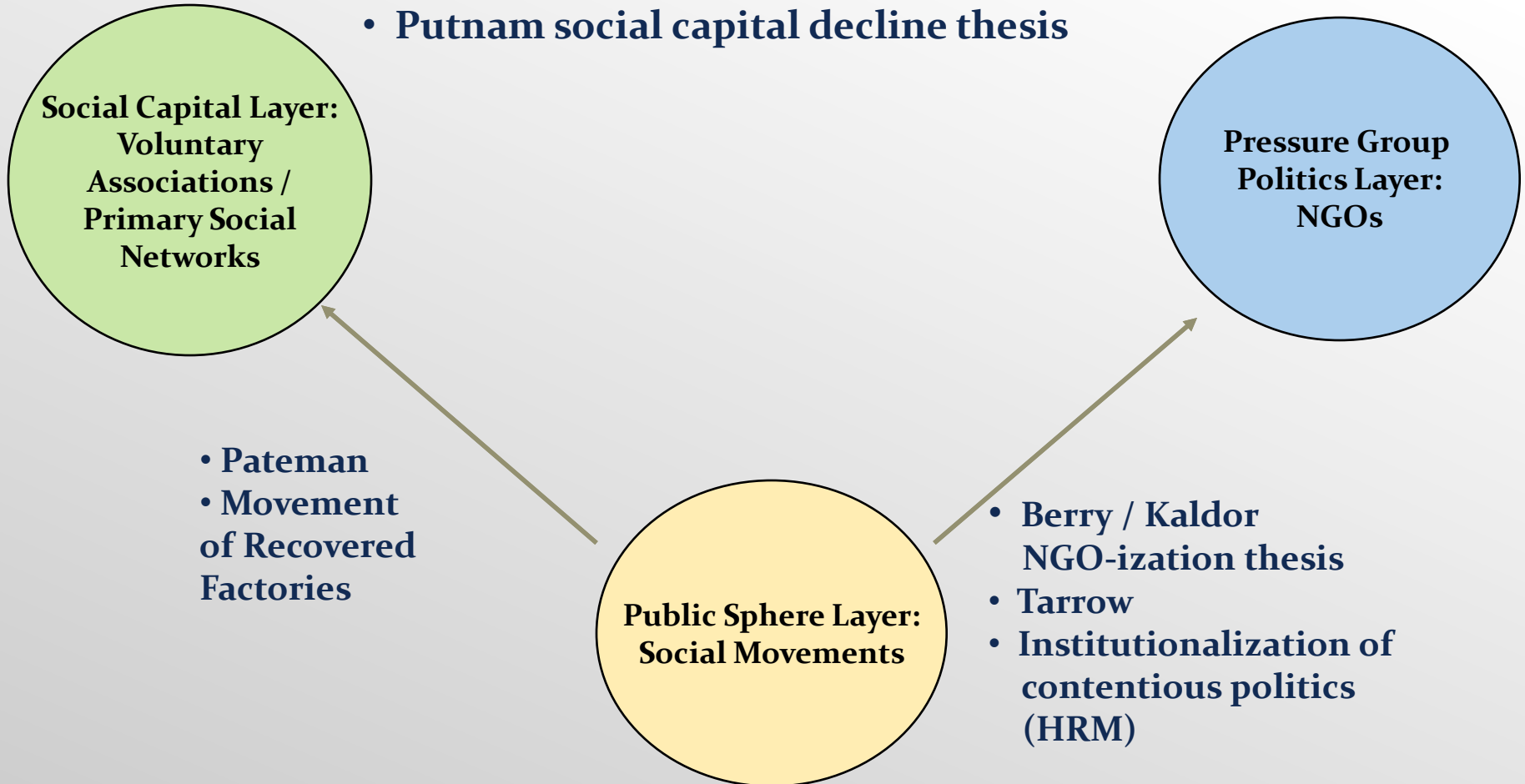
**Social Capital Layer:  
Voluntary  
Associations /  
Primary Social  
Networks**

**Pressure Group  
Politics Layer:  
NGOs**

- Pateman
- Movement  
of Recovered  
Factories

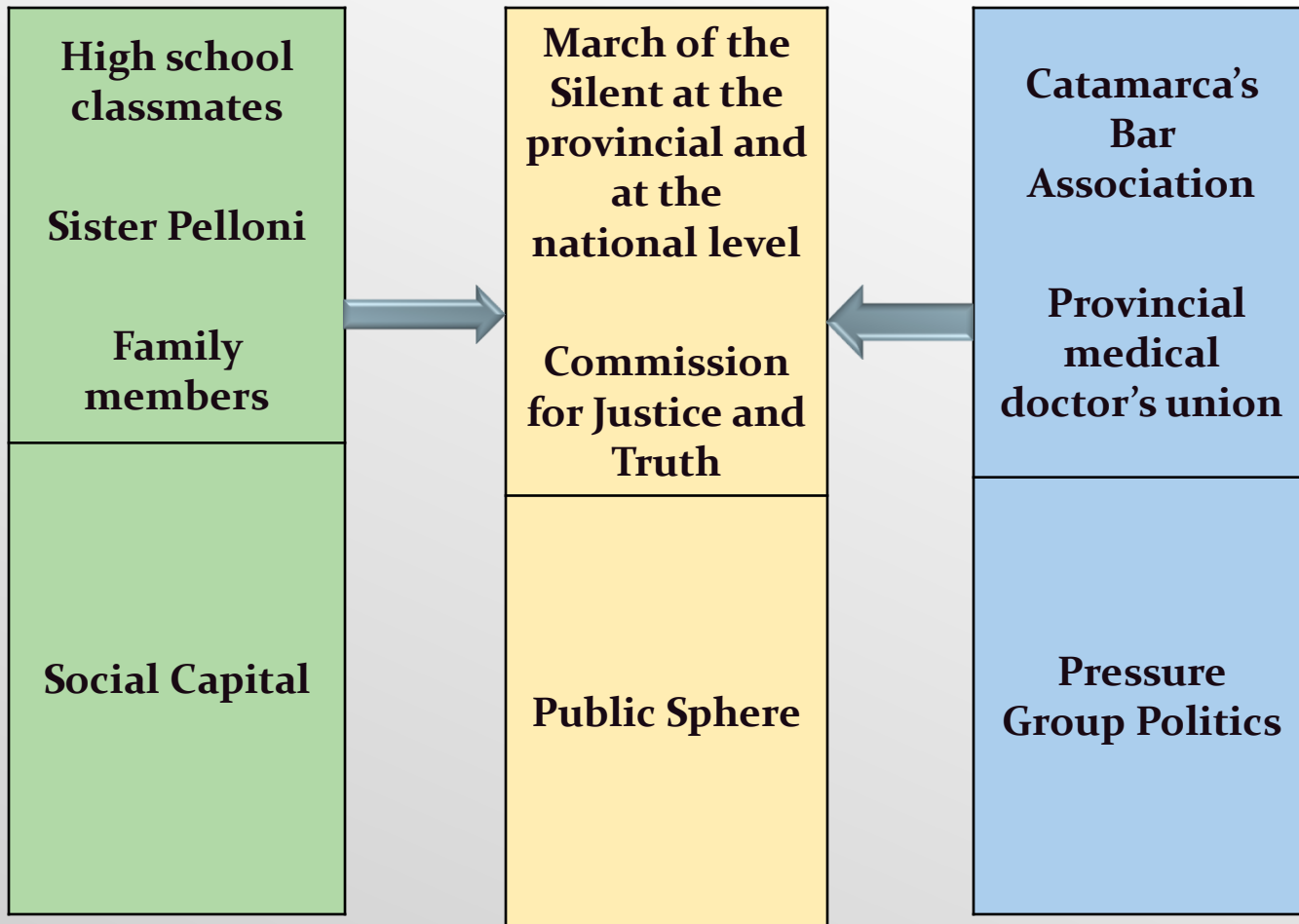
**Public Sphere Layer:  
Social Movements**

- Berry / Kaldor  
NGO-ization thesis
- Tarrow
- Institutionalization of  
contentious politics  
(HRM)



# How Different Layers Feed One Another: The Maria Soledad Case

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# How Multilayered Initiatives Interact with Representative/State Institutions

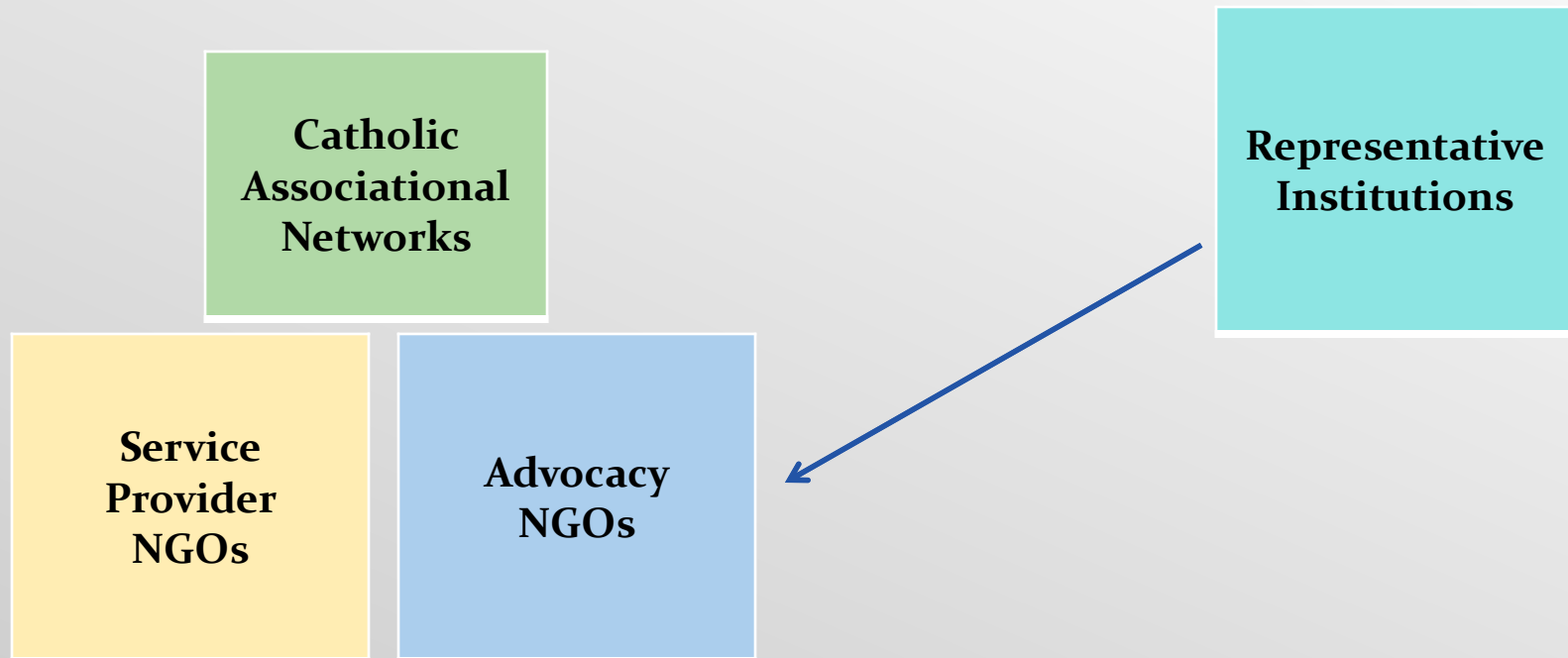
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# How Different Layers Conflict With One Another: Politics of Children's Rights in Argentina

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- The adoption of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child by the Argentinean Parliament strengthens the position of advocacy NGOs within the subsector of civic associations working on children's issues.
- After the adoption, all civil society actors working on children's issues are forced to join in cooperation, this time with advocacy NGOs in a stronger, leading position.



## Part IV. Conclusion

- Theories that are based on a single model of participation cannot provide a comprehensive understanding of the overall dynamics of democratic representation.
- The notion of mediated politics aims at integrating all the different layers into a coherent multilevel conceptual framework.
- This approach offers a rich agenda for research and provides a more complex roadmap for practitioners and those interested in democracy promotion.

# Future Research Agenda

- Each form of participation makes a distinctive contribution to democratic politics, and thus the underdevelopment or weakening of any layer would inevitably deprive the other ones of an important resource.
- Analysis is needed of the different links and interactions among the participatory layers and of each of them with government institutions.
- Such an agenda will lead the field of participation studies away from the sterile debate over which is the most adequate form of democratic participation.

# Implications for Democracy Promotion

- A central conflict of new democracies concerns alternative views of representation.
- A mere electoral understanding of democracy is inadequate in comprehending the nature of such a conflict, for delegative, populist and representative models of democracy presume regular and free elections.
- Formal and professional NGOs that are usually privileged targets of donor funding represent a specific layer of civil society.
- To what extent do these targeted NGOs have meaningful linkages to other layers of civil society (especially to grassroots groups)?
- How can we develop strategies that foment positive-sum interactions among various mediating layers that empower all representative actors?

# Implications for Practitioners

- Each participatory layer has advantages and disadvantages over the others.
- When combined, the layers enjoy increased productivity:  
*The most effective forms of civic intervention might be those that mobilize actors and resources from all layers, thus benefiting from the specific input that each actor brings into the initiative.*
- Encouragement of “joint ventures.”