Social movement studies are one of the classics of Latin American literature. From the 1990s, scholars have extensively analyzed Latin American civil society and its interaction with political and economic dynamics, mainly through the lenses of contentious politics and new social movement theories. From indigenous movements in the Andes, to labor organizations and human rights groups in Argentina, to the youth mobilizations in Mexico, Brazil and Chile, civil society across the region has often been seen as a bastion resisting neoliberalism or as an incubator of innovative forms of participation, local governance and citizenship claims, able to positively challenge, without dismantling, the nation state. Driven by the excitement that followed paradigmatic social protests (e.g. the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico, the ‘Gas War’ in Bolivia, the *piquetero* movement in Argentina), this literature has sometimes abused the interpretative frameworks of resistance, emancipation and participation, disregarding both civil society routines (beyond peaks of mobilization) as well as those social sectors that were not leading emblematic struggles against the state (often called ‘revolutions’), but that were rather engaging in slower and perhaps less exciting reforms. This book contributes to fill this gap and redress those biases by presenting an in-depth analysis of civil society’s involvement in ‘ordinary’ policy-making, in the framework of the relatively consolidated democracies of the Southern Cone.

Through an agency-driven perspective and drawing on classic social movement theories on framing and coalition-building, the author’s goal is ambitious: explaining civil society organizations (CSOs)'s variation in policy-making engagement by focusing on their strategies to mobilize ideas and resources. Unpacking discursive frames and collective advocacy strategies, a more nuanced portrait of domestic civil societies emerge, which overcomes monolithic interpretations of social actors as either strong and autonomous or disconnected and coopted by the state. The book’s main strength is certainly the depth of the empirical analysis. Using qualitative data from three countries (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay), Risley proposes a systematic discussion of how public-interest CSOs (defined in contrast to interest groups) engage in policy making within three domains: freedom of information, children rights and environmental protection. After an introductory chapter, which briefly discusses some background theory and presents the main hypotheses (including figures illustrating explanatory and dependent variables), the core part of the book (chapters 2 to 4) consists of a detailed account of different policy-making processes and CSOs’ participation. The chapters are organized around key hypotheses/arguments, to show variations as well as consistencies across four different cases: 1) freedom of information policies in Argentina; 2) child-protection reforms in Argentina and 3) Chile; and 4) environmental advocacy around the Bio Bio dam project in Chile. Chapter two compares the different level of involvement in policy-making across the four cases, while chapters three and four discuss the way in which CSOs have framed their discourses and built their partnerships, and the effects of these variables on policy-making involvement. Chapter five presents the main hypotheses on involvement,
framing and partnership-building, focusing exclusively on the case of CSOs’ advocacy on child welfare in Uruguay. Before some brief conclusive remarks, the last chapter addresses, although only superficially, some key questions on the impact of contextual factors on CSOs’ agency. Certainly the chapter contributes to fill a gap that readers - especially those interested in the overlap of social movement studies with international relations and institutionalist approaches - will feel throughout the book. Eventually, Risley broadens out her argument on CSOs’ participation, abandoning the agency-driven perspective and discussing the often critical role of contextual factors such as the nature of political environments or the influence of transnational flows of discourses and resources.

From a theoretical perspective, the book’s conclusions reaffirm well-know arguments on civil society and participation. Variations in policy-making engagement are explained by the type of frames selected - whereby more persuasive, positive and constructive messages prove to be more successful - and by the ability of CSOs to form effective alliances through, for example, division of labor and balance between diversity and cohesion. While these arguments are not completely novel, they are convincingly illustrated through an admirable analytical depth and rigorous comparative approach. The ability to delimitate the object and variables considered is certainly valuable to avoid out of topic digressions; yet, in this context, some issues could have constituted interesting integrations into the analysis. In particular, the divergences in policy outcomes, in addition to policy-making processes, would have been worth specific attention. After all, in most cases CSOs mobilization is not only performative but substantive and impact-focused. A more systematic integration of exogenous and contextual elements would have also contributed to the explanatory endeavor of the study. Overall, the book constitutes a valuable contribution to explaining civil society’s role in domestic policy-making in the Southern Cone, beyond overrated narratives of resistance, contention and revolution.

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