

Horizontal social movements and agenda-setting: evidence from Brazil

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Abstract: I explore the question of whether horizontal social movements are successful in introducing their preferred policy platforms into the public agenda. Previous scholarship has listed centralization, hierarchy, and leadership as key factors that explain the success of social movements, but has not comprehensively taken into consideration the existence of these horizontal entities. Preliminary empirical evidence mainly focused on media coverage of the MPL-São Paulo, a movement that advocates for free public transportation in Brazil, suggests that these movements are not able to attract media attention on their own merits. Rather, they are only objects of media coverage in the presence of newsworthy events not related to their policy platforms or their own existence – in the case of the MPL-São Paulo, this event was police brutality in protests. The paper calls for more research on the internal functioning of these movements, in particular the issue of how information flows within and is pushed outside of their boundaries.

Keywords: movimento passe livre; MPL; public transportation; agenda-setting.

1. Introduction

The month of June 2013 was an atypical one in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. Within weeks, a mobilization of 2,000 people against the increase of bus and subway fares by mayor Fernando Haddad (Workers' Party, the PT) and governor Geraldo Alckmin (PSDB, center-right party) rapidly escalated into a massive protest of 65,000 people. The Movimento Passe Livre (MPL-São Paulo), a social movement organization that claims to be horizontal and leaderless, was

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the main force behind the riots, although many other organizations also participated on the protests after their spread.

The organizational characteristics of the MPL-São Paulo were a constant theme of debate during that period. For instance, the interview of journalists from the television program Roda Viva with two members of the MPL-São Paulo involved the alert that those members had been randomly selected to participate in the show. Mayor Fernando Haddad commented on the difficulty his administration had to negotiate with a movement that had no identifiable leader at that time. “It is a movement that only let things out. But things need to be processed first,” he said².

The MPL-São Paulo is an example of what the literature on social movements calls collectivistic-democratic social movement organizations (SMOs) (ROTHSCHILD and WHITT, 1986). The term horizontal social movement has also been used in the past decade to refer to movements that are horizontally – and not vertically – organized and that do not have a core leadership, such as the *piqueteros* and the *interbarrial* in Argentina. The existence of these movements seems to not have been comprehensively absorbed by the literature, which up to this point identifies coordination, leadership, and hierarchy as the drivers of the success and survival of SMOs. Can horizontal social movements succeed in pushing their demands into the public agenda if they lack the organizational characteristics that have been identified by scholars as the drivers of success?

This paper constitutes a first step into understanding how the organizational structures of horizontal SMOs operate and to what extent they do or do not allow or these movements to hold agenda-setting power. More specifically, I start to unpack the policy influence of the MPL-São Paulo in the light of its organizational structure by looking at its agenda-setting power at the

² Jornal GGN, 2013.

media level. My preliminary findings suggest that the MPL-São Paulo is not able to draw media attention on its own. Rather, since its creation in 2006, it was only able to attract media coverage because of a newsworthy event not related to its policy platform: the occurrence of police brutality in one of the protests conducted in 2013 against the increase in public transportation fares.

My empirical analysis of agenda-setting consists of data on (i) media attention (e.g., the number of stories published on the MPL-São Paulo and its policy platforms) collected from Brazilian newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo* between January 1st, 2006 (the date of creation of the MPL-São Paulo) and December 31st, 2014; (ii) historical and political context of the period for which I have data on media attention, obtained through secondary sources; and (iii) public opinion data. In the absence of in-depth information about the MPL-São Paulo, I explore its internal functioning by relying on primary sources (mainly the documents available on its websites) and existing literature on horizontal movements in Argentina. The methodology hereby adopted is far from ideal, as discussed in the last section. Because of such shortcomings, I treat the empirical evidence presented in this paper with relative caution.

This paper proceeds as follows. I discuss previous literature on social movements and organizational decision-making in order to draw theoretical expectations; present the methodology approach adopted in the paper; present data on the origin, history, and organization of the MPL-São Paulo; explore existent literature on social SMOs in Argentina and the results of the media content analysis; and conclude by spelling out the limitations and debating the theoretical and empirical implications of the paper.

2. Theoretical discussion and expectations

The idea that organization is fundamental to the survival and success of social movements is not new in social sciences. Since the 1970s, scholars have been highlighting the importance of coordination, leadership, and hierarchy for

both purposes. Zald and McCarthy's (1977, 1987) resource mobilization theory emphasized that the survival of social movements depends on particular forms of organization: leadership, administrative structure, incentives for participation, and a means for acquiring resources and support (MCADAM and SCOTT, 2005, p. 6). Brill (1971) also stresses the importance of leadership for the construction of effective organizations, while Gamson (1990) identifies that successful groups tend to be more bureaucratized and centralized (GIUGNI, 2004, p. 22).

The emergence of horizontal movements in the early 2010s forces us to face the question of *what type* of organization matters. The first step in this sense is to develop a better understanding of what horizontalism means. The idea of horizontal organizations resonates with the concept of collectivist-democratic organizations as proposed by Rothschild and Whitt (1986). In collectivist-democratic organizations, authority resides in the collectivity as a whole and is delegated, if at all, only temporarily, being subject to recall. There are minimal stipulated rules in these organizations. Likewise, there is minimal formalization: the division of labor is minimal and the "myth" of expertise is deconstructed. Centralization is also absent, since activities are devised and directed by multiple, relatively independent subgroups, and not by a well-identified leadership (LOFLAND, 1996).

Scholarly attention about whether and how horizontal or collectivist-democratic organizations survive and are successful has been scant. In fact, not much has been written about how these social movements function to begin with. Up to this point, however, empirical evidence suggests that the defining features of horizontal social movements – absence of leadership and decentralized decision-making – are not the ones identified by previous scholarship as the key variables that explain the survival and success of social movements. Thus, on the one hand, previous scholarship indicates the pivotal role of coordination, leadership and hierarchy for resource mobilization in

social movement organizations. On the other hand, social movement organizations such as the MPL-São Paulo lack the exact same features described by the literature as fundamental to resource mobilization.

Can social movement organizations succeed in pushing their demands into the public agenda if their mode of internal organization deviates from the standard bureaucratized approach described by the literature? If leadership, coordination, and hierarchy are necessary conditions for the success of social movements in provoking policy change, is horizontalism doomed to fail?

I attempt to address these questions by examining how horizontal social movement organizations mobilize resources – in particular, information. I argue that resources can refer to legitimacy, money, time, culture, facilities, and labor, as stated by Zald and McCarthy (1977, 1987), but also to information. In the context of the resource mobilization theory, culture as a resource refers to the know-how required to mobilize, produce events, or access additional resources (EDWARDS and GILLHAM, 2013). However, this is hardly the only type of knowledge mobilized by social movements. Activists must also have knowledge about the issue they stand for, and about their preferred solutions to the problems that relate to this issue. For instance, participants of a social movement that advocates for free public transportation fares discuss strategies to pressure for policy change, but in addition, they also debate why the government status quo is not ideal for them or what their response would be if the government offered a compromise that is not ideal in their view.

In fact, information may refer to “the problem, the solution, or to the process of policy making itself” (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 2014, p. 14-15). In the context of social movement organizations, information can refer to the problem (public transportation fares are not free, but should be), the solution (transportation fares should be paid with resources extracted from progressive tax systems), or the process itself (how to organize protests to fight for free public transportations).

Information is an important resource because it is used in framing processes, which are highlighted by the literature on social movement as an important strategy for success (SNOW and BENFORD, 1992; SNOW et al., 1986; CAMPBELL, 2005). Campbell (2005) defines frames as “metaphors, symbols, and cognitive cues that cast issues in a particular light and suggest possible ways to respond to these issues.” He adds that framing requires “the strategic creation and manipulation of shared understandings and interpretations of the world, its problems, and viable courses of action.” To the extent to which organizations are able to frame issues in ways that resonate with the ideologies, identities, and cultural understandings of supporters, they succeed (CAMPBELL, 2005, p. 48-49).

If framing is a necessary condition for success, successful social movement organizations are able to obtain, use, analyze, manipulate, and push information out of their own boundaries. This implication fits well in the context of my definition of success, which refers to the ability of such entities to set the public agenda by pushing their preferred policy platforms, mobilizing the support of stakeholders. Agenda-setting can occur at the media or at the government level, that is, social movements can set the public agenda by influencing what the media covers and what policymakers pay attention to. Because policymakers are attentive to media coverage and shifts in public opinion, these are considered by the literature as two factors that may affect agenda-setting at the governmental level (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 1993).

In the light of these discussions, another question arises: how does information circulate within social movement organizations, and how is information exported from their boundaries so that it reaches key stakeholders? I rely on the work of Baumgartner and Jones (2014) to draw hypotheses that will allow me to examine this research question. In studying how the government detects and processes information, the authors suggest that decentralization is the right organizational form for problem discovery or

understanding, while hierarchy is the right organizational form for problem solving. Following this logic, the diversity of information present in decentralized forms of organization is inversely related to ease of decision-making. The simplification of decision-making comes with hierarchy and control, because these are associated with censorship of information. Baumgartner and Jones highlight the role played by leaders in this process:

That is, leaders often use rules of standing, distinctions between experts and outsiders, or other criteria to censor or eliminate unwanted components of the information stream. [...] Inevitably, moving forward requires assessing what information is relevant and designing organizational routines to bring that information front and center (BAUMGARTNER and JONES, 2014, p. 25).

I propose that the transition from informational diversity to informational simplification described by Baumgartner and Jones will not occur in decentralized modes of organization that lack formal leadership. Rather, information in horizontal SMOs will float around in meetings, assemblies, or day-to-day conversations and will either reach stakeholders without the proper frames that would attract their attention or not reach stakeholders at all. This happens because of the absence of leadership. Under such circumstance, information is not prioritized, manipulated, and framed. It is also not conveyed from the organization to its exterior (and, as a result, it is not properly absorbed from its exterior). Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) labeled the term “two-step flow of information” to refer to the ability of leaders to facilitate the relay of information from internal to external worlds, and vice-versa. When leadership is absent, this link is broken.

A viable approach to test this hypothesis is to look at media attention to the policy platforms of social movement organizations. If these organizations are successful in drawing the attention of the media for their preferred policy platforms, one would expect media coverage to be continuous, even if at low

levels. Media coverage will undoubtedly be higher and lower from time to time because of the issue-attention cycle (DOWNS, 1972), but it will exist. Notwithstanding, successful social movements should be able to keep media coverage about their organization or their preferred policy platforms at minimum levels during most periods. Because horizontal social movements are not able to prioritize, manipulate, frame, and push information out of their own boundaries for the reasons described above, I expect that they will not be able to maintain even low levels of media coverage, what undermines the potential support they might receive from key stakeholders to their cause.

3. Methodology

In the light of scholarly understanding of social movements and organization theory, I rely on a least-likely case study of organizational effectiveness: the MPL-São Paulo. The MPL-São Paulo is a suitable case for the purpose of this research in that it allows me to explore the extent to which horizontal SMOS are effective despite their horizontal and leaderless structure. I gather information about the MPL-São Paulo by consulting their website and news stories and opinion articles that discuss it. Because I do not have access to specific data on these organizational characteristics of the MPL-São Paulo, I complement my analysis by presenting the existing literature on horizontal movements in Argentina.

I measure agenda-setting power by conducting a media content analysis of one of the main Brazilian newspapers: *O Estado de S. Paulo*, which is produced in the state of São Paulo but is also distributed nationally. In particular, I focus on monthly media attention, that is, how many stories were published per month about the MPL-São Paulo and their policy platforms. I collected 102 stories that contained the key words “tarifa zero” and “transporte” and 232 stories that contained the key words “movimento passe livre” within the period of January 1st, 2006 (the year of creation of the MPL-São Paulo) and

December 31st, 2014. I use two sets of keywords to confirm the strength of this measure in terms of internal validity.

The stories were downloaded from the Internet archive of the newspaper, which has an online comprehensive database of all printed stories since 1870. The focus on agenda-setting at the media level is justified by the existent literature on agenda-setting, which lists media coverage as one of the factors that may influence policymakers' decisions³. I complement this measure by conducting research on the historical and political context about the events that occurred within this period on news outlets archives. I also gather public opinion data to measure the salience of transportation as a social problem and the existence of popular support to the protests conducted by the MPL-São Paulo in 2013 and to their policy platform.

4. MPL-São Paulo: origins, history, and organization

Traveling around São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil, is no easy task. Buses and subway trains are overcrowded at most times throughout the length of the day. Waiting times for buses are often long because buses are constantly late. It is no coincidence that urban mobility has been considered one of the most serious problems facing the city in the last years. The latest edition of the Indicator of Wellness in the City of São Paulo (IRBEM) brings the dissatisfaction of "paulistanos" with urban mobility back to the public agenda⁴: the issue ranks amongst the five worst evaluated public areas in 2014.

In general, the latest editions of IRBEM (2009, 2012, 2013 and 2014) indicate that the population of São Paulo has been dissatisfied with the small size of the subway network, the small number bicycle lanes, the low priority that is given to the subway system, and both the waiting time for and the punctuality of buses. Buses and subway trains are considered not only

³ See Baumgartner and Jones, 1993.

⁴ Ibope, 2015.

ineffective but also costly in the light of the quality of the service that is offered to the population. In addition, as the problems of urban mobility are not properly tackled by policymakers, the number of public transportation users increases over time. Between 2003 and 2014, for instance, the annual number of bus users increased 143%.

The chaos in urban mobility is not an exclusive problem of São Paulo, though; it affects all other large urban centers of Brazil. Protests against the increase of bus or train fares have been recurrent in the last decade. In 2003, for instance, a group of citizens promoted the “Revolta do Buzú” (Bus Revolt), a protest against the increase in the price of bus fares in Salvador (Bahia). Between 2004 and 2005, another group of citizens promoted the “Revoltas da Catraca” (Turnstile Revolt), a set of protests against abusive increases in bus fare prices in the city of Florianópolis (Santa Catarina).

These two revolts culminated in the creation of the social movement organization⁵ Movimento Passe Livre (MPL) in 2005 at the World Social Forum in the city of Porto Alegre, in the south of Brazil. The MPL-São Paulo was founded one year later in the city (the exact date is not spelled out at the MPL-São Paulo’s website). Since 2005, the MPL has been pressuring for the adoption of free public transportation in the country. The organization believes that not only should the provision of transportation be through public (and not private) means, but also that it should come at zero cost to citizens. The MPL believes that citizens can only have access to health, education, leisure, and work, if public transportation is free. For the MPL, urban mobility is the means through which citizens may access all socioeconomic rights and their individual needs.

The MPL’s main principles are autonomy, nonpartisanship, horizontalism, independence, and federalism (the four first principles are

⁵ Zald and McCarthy (1977) define the term “social movement organization” as a complex or formal organization that identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement and attempts to implement those goals.

further explained in the paragraphs below). These principles guide the relationship between the national MPL and its local branches. The federal pact that unites them implies autonomy to local organizations inasmuch as they comply with the principles of the national MPL⁶. According to the MPL's website, the MPL and its local branches must aim to achieve its goals by using "the strength originated in the streets" and not the "parliamentary path." This suggests that protests, and not lobbying, are the primary strategy of the MPL for pushing for policy change.

The main goal of the MPL-São Paulo, which is the focus of this paper, is to push for the adoption of free public transportation fares in the city ("tarifa zero"). As required by the MPL, the MPL-São Paulo is guided by the principles of *autonomy*, *independence*, *horizontalism*, and *nonpartisanship*.

The MPL's letter of principles explains that *autonomy* means that all financial resources are supposedly created and managed by the organization itself, without any reliance on donations from firms, NGOs, political parties, or other organizations. *Independence* refers to the fact that all local MPLs are allegedly independent amongst themselves and from political parties, NGOs, and governments. *Nonpartisanship* suggests the supposed noninterference of political parties in the organization. Although individuals affiliated with political parties can join the organization (if they comply with the principles and goals of the MPL and do not use the organization as a platform to further their own agendas), the MPL cannot support political candidates. Finally, the principle of *horizontalism*, with which this paper is concerned, refers to the following guideline:

Everyone involved in the MPL must have the same decision-making power, and the same right to express their opinions and to leadership. [...] A horizontal movement is a movement in which all members are leaders, or in which leaders do not exist. Thus, all members have the same rights and duties and there

⁶ MPL websites as accessed in March 2015.

are no formal positions; all members should have access to all available information. The responsibilities for specific tasks should be assigned to members on a rotating basis, so that everyone can learn how to develop distinct functions⁷.

Unfortunately, besides what is reported on the websites of the MPL and the MPL-São Paulo, not much is known about how the MPL-São Paulo in fact operates. One news article indicates that, although there is no hierarchy, a group of 40 people organize the MPL-São Paulo⁸. The same article reports that different representatives were chosen for the meetings held with the mayor of São Paulo at the time of the protests. An opinion article⁹ indicates that an individual at MPL-São Paulo does not need leadership status to introduce new ideas in the group. This piece mentions that all members are potentially leaders. In any case, the concept of horizontalism as described in the MPL's letter of principles is of great importance to this paper. It suggests that in such social movements there is no unique, easily identifiable leadership core and that decision-making is decentralized to lowest levels of participation.

5. *Horizontalidad* and media content analysis

Previous works on horizontal movements in Argentina can be a useful source of information about the dynamics of decision-making in horizontal SMOs. Sitrin (2012) describes neighborhood assemblies in Buenos Aires (*interbarrial*) and the unemployed workers' movement (*piqueteros*) in the country. In relation to the first movement, she reports that, although the gatherings are run with a facilitator, there are very few guidelines or rules to coordinate the meetings, which results in all sorts of chaos and disruption:

⁷ MPL-São Paulo website as accessed in March 2015. Link: www.mpl.org.br/.

⁸ Último Segundo ("Conheça os integrantes do MPL que atraíram milhares às ruas em São Paulo"), 2013

⁹ Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil ("A organização dos sem organização: oito conceitos para pensar o inverno brasileiro"), 2013.

Topic areas way outside the purview of the gathering would be raised, such as a call for the end of U.S. imperialism, that political party members then would insist was agreed upon at the *interbarrial*. [...] Sometimes a debate on whether or not to add something to the agenda would go on for an hour. [...] Some people also shared the perspective, usually upon reflection, that there was too loose a consensus process and not enough structure to the *interbarrial* (SITRIN, 2012, p. 68).

Sitrin reports that from 2006 on, the *interbarrial* meetings began to adopt structure in the assemblies, which mitigated the described problems, but the author does not explain what type of structure these movements adopted. In relation to the *piqueteros* movement, Sitrin indicates that decisions are made with consensus in the absence of leaders. The author describes the decision-making process of the movement with public officials:

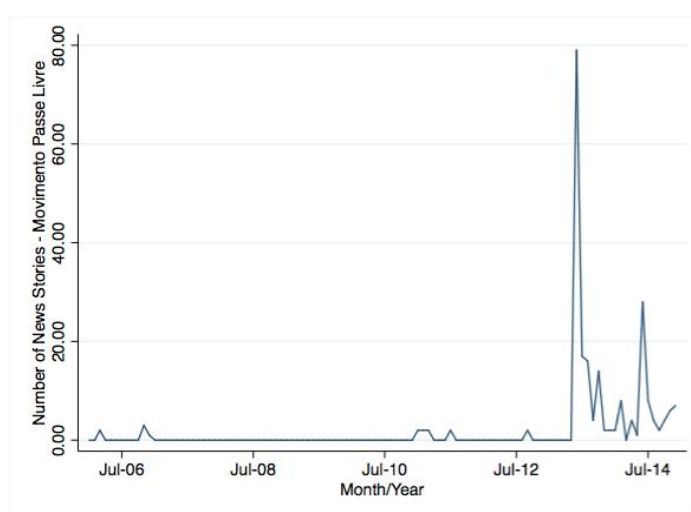
[...] When it is time to negotiate with officials [...] is to have a voz (voice) and two orejas (ears). The role of the voice is to communicate only that which the group has previously empowered the person to do, and the ears are to listen and make sure that is how things are communicate. It is the ears that report back to the group as a whole, not the voice. They always send three people to negotiate: two to listen, and one to speak (SITRIN, 2012, p. 69).

Sitrin concludes her analysis of the decision-making processes embedded in *horizontalidad* by noting three limitations of such mode of organization, two of which are of interest to this paper. The first is the amount of time that an assembly can take to make a decision. The second is the fact that, while the movements claim to have no leadership, there are people who, for various reasons, hold positions of more respect, and this respect often looks like leadership (SITRIN, 2012, p. 78).

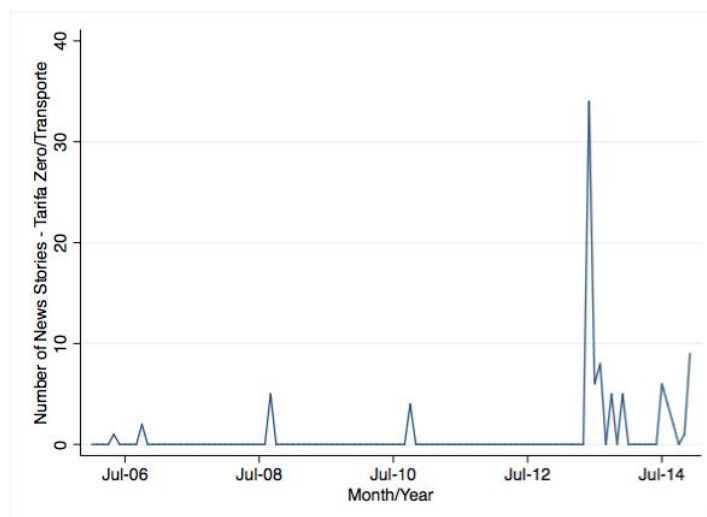
I now discuss the results of the analysis of media coverage on the MPL-São Paulo and its policy platforms. Figures 1 and 2 plot the number of stories published in *O Estado de S. Paulo* per month in each year since 2006 with the key words “movimento passe livre” and “tarifa zero transporte”. In both cases,

we observe several periods during which no news story was published – the average number of published news stories from January 1st, 2006 to May 31st, 2013 is 0.15. This period of scarce media attention is followed by a peak in coverage in June 2013, after which media attention remains at an average rate of four stories per month.

Figure 1. Media attention in *O Estado de S. Paulo* – “Movimento Passe Livre”



Note – created by the author.

Figure 2. Media attention in *O Estado de S. Paulo* – “Tarifa Zero and Transporte”

Note – created by the author.

The month of June in 2013 was arguably the most important period of the history of the MPL-São Paulo. In May 2013, the current mayor of São Paulo, Fernando Haddad, and the current governor of the State of São Paulo, Geraldo Alckmin, decided to raise the bus and train fares from R\$ 3 to R\$ 3.20. The MPL conducted three acts in the city between June 6th and June 11th that mobilized 2,000 people each (see Table 1). While cases of police brutality were reported in these three protests, the tension between protesters and the police rose in the June 13th protest, when 230 people were arrested, and several were injured by the use of bombs and rubber bullets by the police to disperse the protesters.

As a response to police brutality, about 65,000 people marched on June 17th to protest not only against the rise of bus and train fares, but also in favor of quotas for Black people in universities, the end of corruption, the impeachment of the governor of São Paulo and the president of Brazil, and freedom for Palestine¹⁰. The decision to revoke the increase of bus and train fares was made

¹⁰ Último Segundo (“Em São Paulo, passeata de 60 mil pessoas vira protesto contra tudo”), 2013.

by mayor and the governor on June 19th. This was the first time in which the MPL-São Paulo was able to impede the increase in the price of the bus and train fares. The SMO had attempted to do so – without success – in 2006, when the former mayor Gilberto Kassab raised the fare from R\$ 2.00 to R\$ 2.30; again in 2010 when Mr. Kassab increased the fare to R\$ 2.70; and in 2011 when Mr. Kassab once again rose the fare to R\$ 3.

Table 1. Size of the MPL-São Paulo Protests in June¹¹ 2013

Date of Protest	Size of Protest (in number of protesters)
June 6 th	2,000
June 7 th	5,000
June 11 th	10,000 to 12,000
June 13 th	10,000
June 17 th	60,000 to 65,000

Note – created by the author.

Interestingly, at the time of the protests of June 2013, a Datafolha public opinion poll indicated that while 55% of the city of São Paulo population favored the protest against the increase of bus fares, only 14% of them declared be in favor of having the mayor invest in public transportation at zero cost for citizens. A total of 76% of the city of São Paulo population affirmed that the mayor should instead invest in infrastructure. The question asked by Datafolha mentioned the MPL-São Paulo's proposal (zero cost public transportation for citizens) and the response of the municipality administration (the proposal

¹¹ O Estado de S. Paulo ("Em uma semana, quarto protestos contra aumento da tarifa em São Paulo"), 2013; Último Segundo ("Haddad e Alckmin anunciam redução no preço da passagem em São Paulo"), 2013; and O Estado de S. Paulo ("Paulistano fica refém de tiros e de bombas em ato por redução da tarifa"), 2013.

would cost the administration R\$ 6 billion per year, demanding a decrease in infrastructure investment).

Mr. Haddad would only increase the bus fares in December 2014, when he also announced¹² that bus fares would come at no cost for students that live in the city of São Paulo. The MPL-São Paulo reacted negatively to the news, claiming that what should be implemented is public transportation at zero cost for the entire population, and not only for students. The policy adopted by Mr. Haddad was implemented in January 2015.

Taken together, Figures 1 and 2 and the above description of the events that proceed and succeed the protests of June 2013 give us clues in terms of causality. It seems that the MPL-São Paulo and its policy platform was only able to get media attention in June 2013 when the protests exploded in São Paulo. The agenda-setting merit seems to not be of the MPL-São Paulo, however. The description above, which is constructed with information extracted from secondary sources, suggests that the protests exploded because of the newsworthiness of police brutality, and not because the population of the city of São Paulo favored the policy platform of the MPL-São Paulo. The data from the Datafolha public opinion poll reinforces this possibility. All in all, this seems to indicate that horizontal SMOs such as the MPL-São Paulo are not able to raise attention to their policy platforms by themselves.

6. Limitations

The analysis presented in this paper should be read with caution for several reasons. First, the mechanisms that explain *why* horizontal SMOs fail to push their policy platforms to the public agenda (if they indeed do so) are not spelled out. In particular, I cannot assess how horizontalism and the absence of leadership shape the information flow inside the MPL-São Paulo. Likewise, there

¹² Último Segundo (“Haddad anuncia ônibus tarifa zero para estudantes de São Paulo em 2015”), 2014.

is no clarity over why and how information is not framed to attract the attention of stakeholders before being expelled out of or is never expelled in the first place by the MPL-São Paulo.

Sitrin's work on Argentina can only provide us with hints in this sense. It may be possible that the participants of the MPL-São Paulo cannot reach a decision, as Sitrin notes, because of the mechanism proposed by Baumgartner and Jones (2014): in the absence of leadership and hierarchy, there is no censorship and prioritization of information. However, it is not clear if this is the case because Sitrin's warning in relation to the existence of "semi"-leaders. If there are participants in the MPL-São Paulo who hold positions of respect, are these individuals considered leaders by other participants? Are they able to control the flow of information, as leaders would do?

The second shortcoming relates to the fact that this study does not allow me to distinguish between necessary and sufficient conditions. Although the occurrence of police brutality seems to be a necessary condition for the spread of the 2013 protest and the success of the MPL-São Paulo in attracting media coverage to its existence and its policy platform, it is not clear if it in fact is. In this sense, a better understanding of the factors that explain the agenda-setting power of horizontal SMOs can only be obtained if scholars engage in comparative studies in the future.

Third, the MPL-São Paulo does have the mainstream media, which includes *O Estado de S. Paulo*, as its main target. Rather, the MPL- São Paulo claims it focuses its efforts in the nonmainstream media. Thus, a complete measure of media attention would incorporate media content analysis of news articles published in nonmainstream media. The fact that small news outlets often do not have organized archives as that of *O Estado de S. Paulo* could be a potential roadblock for scholars who attempt to collect this data.

Fourth, in this paper I only consider media attention, and not media tone, as a measure of agenda-setting. A media tone analysis would allow me to assess

whether the MPL-São Paulo has been successful in shifting the media coverage of itself or its policy platform from negative or neutral to positive. Lastly, agenda-setting does not only involve media attention or tone. Rather, it also involves the extent to which policy makers pay attention to issues. Accordingly, future research should collect data on the salience of the MPL-São Paulo's policy platform in bills introduced at the municipal and state legislature and in the speeches and executive orders of the mayor and governor of São Paulo.

7. Conclusion and discussion

This paper has considered the question of whether horizontal social movement organizations can succeed in pushing their policy platforms into the public agenda. By looking at agenda-setting at the media level, this work provides readers with evidence, namely, that these organizations are not able to attract media attention by themselves.

In the case explored in this paper, the MPL-São Paulo was only able to introduce their platforms into the media agenda when an external event – the occurrence of police brutality in one of the protests organized by them – mobilized a greater number of people, destabilizing the social order. The evidence presented in this paper is, however, preliminary. Further research is needed to clarify the functioning of horizontal SMOs and how it shapes information flow and their agenda-setting power at the media and government levels.

This paper only accomplishes the task of setting a research agenda on the aforementioned topic. The limitations addressed in this paper should all be incorporated into a research design that allows scholars to tackle these research questions more comprehensively. The question of whether and how horizontal SMOs are able to succeed remains important for two reasons. First, up to this point, previous scholarship on social movements has suggested the importance of centralization, hierarchy, and leadership for the success of SMOs. The

existence of horizontal SMOs has been not incorporated into the scholarly research agendas, what leaves us with an unaddressed theoretical gap, namely, what should we expect of social movement organizations that lack the variables identified by scholars as key factors in understanding the success and survival of these organizations?

Second, horizontal SMOs currently operate in several countries. I only cite Argentina and Brazil in this paper, but horizontalism can be found in Spain (Indignados) and in the United States (Occupy Wall Street), among other countries. Although each of these movements has their own particular histories, they have the distrust in representative democracy as a common characteristic. The very choice of horizontalism is rooted in the disenchantment these movements have with organizations that are hierarchically organized but, in their view, do not represent the broader population. As mentioned, the MPL claims to refute centralized decision-making bodies in which the few decide for the many.

The understanding of how horizontal SMOs operate in politics may thus not only advance our knowledge on the pitfalls of representative democracy but may also shed light on the possible benefits and limitations of participatory democracy. Descriptions of horizontal decision-making processes such as the one provided by Sitrin (2012) are of fundamental importance in this sense, but we must go beyond and grapple with the causal mechanisms that link these processes to the success or failure of horizontal SMOs. At a time during which massive protests occur from Brazil to United States, this debate seems more than urgent than ever.

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