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*American Sociological Review*, Vol. 69, No. 2. (Apr., 2004), pp. 265-291.

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# Privatizing the Welfare State: Nonprofit Community-Based Organizations as Political Actors

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*This paper examines a form of state social provision that has been neglected by current sociological theory: publicly funded supportive services. Federal policies of privatization and devolution, embraced since the Reagan years, have made private, nonprofit organizations the primary deliverers of these services. Public supportive services are distributed via competitive state- and local-level allocative processes that send government contracts to specific nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs), which in turn serve specific neighborhoods and individuals. I describe a model by which CBOs generate greater contract revenues by adding electoral politics to their more traditional roles of providing services and building communities. This model produces a new kind of CBO: the machine politics CBO. By reciprocally distributing services to residents and binding residents to the organization, machine politics CBOs create reliable voting constituencies for local elected officials. These officials trade these constituencies at higher levels of the governmental system and steer government human service contracts to favored CBOs. Through this process, nonprofit CBOs can influence the allocation of service-based social provision in cities and therefore impact individuals' ability to access these services.*

Sociological research on public social provision generally is built upon studies of income transfers from governments to individuals. This research has provided valuable information about how income transfer policies are established, why particular categories of people are made eligible, how levels of cash benefits

are set, and why eligibility and generosity change over time. Cross-national research has tested theories about why different nations make different policy choices in these areas and what the outcomes are for their citizens (Amenta 1993; Bradley et al. 2003; Esping-Andersen 1990; Hecló 1974; Hicks and Misra 1993; Huber, Ragin, and Stephens 1993; Korpi 1983; Moller et al. 2003; Orloff and Skocpol 1984; Pierson 1995; Stephens 1979). Work focused on the United States has considered the question of why cash benefits are so low and restricted compared with other industrialized democracies (Amenta 1998; Hicks and Swank 1983; Piven and Cloward 1971; Quadagno 1994; Skocpol 1992; Weir, Orloff, and Skocpol 1988) and has examined state-level policy differences in eligibility and benefits (Cauthen and Amenta 1996; Lurie 2001; Meyers, Gornick, and Peck 2002; Soule and Zylan 1997; Zylan and Soule 2000).

However, there is one sector of the welfare state that is rarely examined in the current social

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provision literature but that is actually much more important in the lives of poor people—especially the urban poor—than appears at first glance: state funding of supportive direct services. Recent research by Garfinkel et al. (forthcoming) shows that more than 20 percent of U.S. federal social provision dollars currently are spent on such services,<sup>1</sup> yet this dimension of the social benefit package rarely is considered in welfare state studies (e.g., Bradley et al. 2003:199).<sup>2</sup> In aggregate population terms, income support is the most important determinant of individual well-being (Bradley et al. 2003; Moller et al. 2003). If we are interested in the welfare of our poorest citizens, however, we must consider the direct services component of the social benefit package as well. Research repeatedly has demonstrated that only a small proportion of all state income transfers go to the poor (e.g., Ellwood 1988; Katz 1996). In contrast, state-funded direct services go primarily to the poor.<sup>3</sup> These two distributional facts argue that services may well be as important as income transfers to poor people's well-being (see also Meyers and Garcia forthcoming).

Three key differences distinguish income transfers from direct services in terms of the relationship between the state and citizens. First,

income transfers come directly to citizens as cash payments from the state. In contrast, direct services often are mediated by a third party: a private, nonprofit organization (NPO). In the United States, NPOs currently deliver the majority of state-funded direct services to citizens (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Katz 1996; Salamon 1995; Smith and Lipsky 1993).<sup>4</sup> Second, income transfers usually are *entitlements*, which means citizens need not compete to receive them; anyone who meets the statutory eligibility criteria can obtain state income support, regardless of the total cost to the state (Weaver 1985).<sup>5</sup> Direct services, on the other hand, are supported by discretionary government spending, which is subject to regular appropriations by Congress and state and local legislatures (Posner and Wrightson 1996; Weaver 1985). This means that demand for services can easily exceed supply, and there is competition among service providers for funding allocations and among individual service recipients for access to limited services (DeHoog 1984; Edin and Lein 1998; Fabricant and Fisher 2002; Kramer 1982; Savas 2002; Smith and Lipsky 1993). Finally, income transfers and direct services differ in the product delivered. Income transfers come in cash, which is fungible. However, direct services can vary greatly in their quality and effectiveness, depending on the skills and practices of the service providers (e.g., Breaux et al. 2002; Chaskin 2001; Fabricant and Fisher 2002; Meyers, Riccucci, and Lurie 2001; Smith and Lipsky 1993; Stein 1990).

These distinctions between the two categories of state social provision highlight the role of the mediating institution that brings services from the state to citizens: In the majority of cases, this is a private NPO. NPOs supply childcare, develop and manage housing, assist senior citizens

<sup>1</sup> Direct cash transfers account for 42 percent of social provision dollars and medical insurance accounts for 38 percent. Direct services spending, which includes the relatively small (compared with state and local) federal contribution to public education, is by far the least reliable of the figures, due to the difficulty of locating these expenditures within complex public budgets (Garfinkel et al. forthcoming). This implies that direct services spending is actually *underestimated* as a proportion of total social provision spending.

<sup>2</sup> Castles (1998) and Slessarev (1988) discuss direct services within a social provision framework.

<sup>3</sup> For example, a recent study of the social benefit package in New York City details the availability of a wide variety of income and in-kind (services) support. The only non-means-tested services available are public education (which wealthier citizens rarely use) and Medicare (health insurance for the non-dependent elderly). In contrast, the authors account for nine different means-tested services, and they further note that their list does not comprise all such available services (Garfinkel et al. forthcoming; Table 1).

<sup>4</sup> While the United States leads the industrialized democracies in the level of NPO delivery of state-funded direct services, the use of NPOs is a growing trend in other nations as well (Brown 1988; Hood and Schuppert 1988; Kramer et al. 1993; Salamon and Anheier 1996; Ullman 1998).

<sup>5</sup> An important exception to categorizing U.S. income transfers as entitlements is cash support for poor dependent children, which was eliminated as an entitlement by the 1996 welfare reform.

with daily living tasks, provide employment training, supervise youth development projects, and deliver a range of other supportive human services. Their positioning between the state and citizens creates a layer of policy decisions and implementation issues absent from the delivery of income transfers. Funding allocation decisions form a critical piece of the policy-making process for direct services. NPOs within the same neighborhood, and in different cities and neighborhoods, compete to win government contracts to deliver these services (DeHoog 1984; Kramer 1982; Salamon 1995; Savas 2002; Smith and Lipsky 1993). Which specific NPOs win contracts determine *where* services are available, *how* individuals access them, and ultimately *who* benefits from public spending for the poor. Since NPOs usually serve particular geographic areas, the contracts they win mostly channel public dollars to residents of those areas rather than to equally needy people elsewhere. Furthermore, not only can NPO implementation practices produce highly variable service quality, but also can be used to pursue non-service-related organizational goals.

All of these factors indicate the need to examine the role of direct services and their NPO providers in state social provision. Services come to citizens via very different mechanisms than do income transfers. As such, the social processes underlying the services component of social provision must be examined on their own merits. I identify and analyze the discrete set of institutional processes that govern the availability of publicly funded services to needy citizens: specifically, the social and political processes by which NPOs mediate the allocation of these services from governments to poor people.

I introduce and discuss a model describing three types of CBO activity: service provision, community building, and electoral politics. Most previous research on CBOs has focused only on the first two activities, examining CBOs as sites from which to address the individual needs of poor people and repair the frayed social fabric of poor neighborhoods (Chaskin 2001; De Souza Briggs, Mueller, and Sullivan 1997; Gittel and Vidal 1998; Gronbjerg 2001; Halpern 1995; Leavitt and Saegert 1990; Portney and Berry 1997; Sampson, Morenoff, and Earls 1999; Walsh 1997; but see Warren 2001). I include the third activity, examining the politi-

cal work of CBOs, as well. Because the object of CBO political activity is the *local allocative process*, it is distinct from other types of organizational political involvement, such as policy advocacy (which aims to influence the content of legislation and overall budget appropriations) or protest movements (which actively oppose state positions and use different repertoires of action to press for change) (e.g., Kriesi et al. 1995; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Piven and Cloward 1971, 1977; Quadagno 1994).

## BACKGROUND AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Understanding the role of direct services and NPOs in U.S. social provision is becoming increasingly important due to far-reaching policy changes that have developed since 1980. Reagan-era efforts to shrink the size and influence of the federal government gave rise to two policy directives—so-called “privatization” and “devolution”—that have reshaped the face of social provision, especially for the poor.

*Privatization* refers to the contracting out of public services to private third parties. With increasing frequency since the Reagan years, privatization has been applied at the federal, state, county, and city levels to a wide variety of services, from road maintenance to weapons development to human service provision (DeHoog 1984; Seidenstat 1999; Smith and Lipsky 1993). Among many other consequences, privatization has fueled the enormous growth in NPO delivery of publicly funded direct services since the 1970s (Salamon 1995). Unlike many policy changes that are the focus of social provision studies, however, the trend toward privatization did not result from any specific piece of legislation. Nevertheless, the changes wrought by privatization on social provision—especially for the poor—may be as significant as those initiated by major legislation in social provision history. The most concrete indicator of privatization is the steep increase in government contracts to NPOs for the delivery of services to needy citizens; I focus on these dynamics.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Social provision studies focused on the 1996 welfare reform are beginning to recognize the impor-

*Devolution* is the transfer of decisions regarding the details of spending public funds from the federal government to states, counties, and municipalities. Like privatization, the devolution trend dates primarily from the Reagan years (Chubb 1985; Conlan 1998). For studies of income transfers, devolution means the reformulation of policy on eligibility and benefit levels in accordance with the preferences of individual states (Amenta and Halfmann 2000; Lurie 2001; Meyers et al. 2002; Soule and Zylan 1997; Zylan and Soule 2000). Devolution of direct service policy means that lower levels of the federal system decide the details of their own service delivery programs. It also means, however, that the competition between NPOs for government service contracts is decided by a different set of actors: state- and local-level elected and appointed officials rather than federal ones.<sup>7</sup> In other words, decisions over how to allocate public resources for service-based social provision move closer to the local arenas in which NPOs operate.

U.S. social provision has long been a joint public-private enterprise, with oscillations over time in the availability of assistance via each of these sectors (Katz 1996). For most of U.S. history, however, public funds to private service providers came from state and local governments—not from the federal government (Hall 1992; Salamon 1995; Smith and Lipsky 1993). Early federal social provision focused on income support and public jobs, but with the War on Poverty, the federal government marked its first significant commitment to a service-based approach to the poor. By the early 1960s, the vis-

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tance of direct services and their privatization. New welfare policy aims to move recipients into work, making employment training and childcare integral parts of current welfare programs. These services frequently are provided by NPOs under contract to the state (Breux et al. 2002; Meyers et al. 2002; Meyers, Riccucci, and Lurie 2001). As a result, some studies of welfare reform now consider the additional policy questions surrounding direct service provision and privatization.

<sup>7</sup> Posner and Wrightson (1996) note that elected federal officials increasingly are seeking to reclaim discretionary control over privatized federal service funds by “earmarking” funds from block grants to go directly to specific NPOs, rather than to the states for contracting decisions on that level.

ibly growing poverty and segregation of African American and Latino urban ghettos had helped push poverty to the top of the national agenda. The War on Poverty sought to funnel federal funds into these affected areas to provide education, training, and other services to the large numbers of poor and unemployed people, thereby reducing local inequality and giving a boost to the national Democratic Party (Clark 2000; Gillette 1996; Piven and Cloward 1971; Sundquist 1969).

As both an antipoverty and a political strategy, the War on Poverty funding structure was unique within the set of intergovernmental financial relationships. Rather than sending War on Poverty dollars to the states as grants-in-aid, the federal government allocated them to newly established, independent Community Action Agencies (CAAs), which were usually private, nonprofit organizations (Clark 2000:27). The CAAs were charged with a dual mission: service delivery and political organization, with both to operate *outside* cities' existing governmental and political bureaucracies. With respect to service delivery, this meant targeting additional public resources to underserved—usually African American and Latino—populations. In terms of politics, it meant using government expenditures to leverage political support (cf. Burstein and Linton 2002; Fenno 1973; Fiorina 1981, 1989; Mayhew 1974).

As early recipients of federal contracts to provide direct services to the poor, the CAAs are an important landmark in the privatization of public social provision. They also foreshadowed the political consequences of devolution, which would begin in earnest some 15 years later. To the consternation of the architects of the War on Poverty, the CAAs very quickly became a lesson in the difficulties of controlling state and local politics from Washington, D.C. Governors and mayors bristled at the growing organizing successes of the CAAs and feared being thrown out of office by newly mobilized, mostly poor and minority voters (Andrews 2001; Gillette 1996; Quadagno 1994). Following vociferous complaints from local elected officials, in 1967 Congress passed the “Green Amendment,” which required Community Action funds to be allocated only to those organizations designated by local politicians as official CAAs in their jurisdiction. This legislation effectively brought most CAAs under

the control of local political establishments. In the delicate relationship of federalism, states and municipalities won an important victory: They would control the allocation of federal social provision dollars coming into their territory.

The Green Amendment severely limited the CAAs' ability to establish a link between service provision and electoral mobilization: the patron-client relationship that had been a hallmark of the nineteenth century political machine (Banfield and Wilson 1963; Gosnell 1937; Merton [1949] 1967; Riordan 1948). Whereas the machine used patronage to build constituencies that kept it in office—and in control of the public purse—the CAAs developed only a "patron-recipient" relationship (Hamilton 1979) with local residents, distributing benefits (jobs and services) that were not contingent upon any reciprocal behavior. This was the fatal flaw of the CAAs, Hamilton (1979) argues, as "a political strategy that fails to concentrate heavily on the stakes of the electoral process means that groups not involved electorally will always be in demand-making, benefit-seeking, and invariably subordinated positions" (p. 226). In other words, the CAAs' ability to create social change for the poor was severely constrained by their lack of *electoral* political capacity.

Government controls public resource allocation, and elected officials are the decision-makers within government. Without representation at that table, which might have been won through electoral organizing, the CAAs were unable to participate in the governmental bargaining process. Instead, their main tool for influencing resource allocation decisions was popular protest directed toward government (Moynihan 1969; Quadagno 1994), and this proved to be a short-lived strategy for success. By the end of the 1960s, Congress cut CAA funds dramatically, and shortly thereafter the program was ended. Despite their demise, however, the CAAs left an important lasting legacy: the privatized structure of federally funded direct service provision between the federal government and nonprofit organizations. As the trend toward privatization of federal services of all kinds has accelerated since 1980 (Seidenstat 1999), there has been a steep rise in federal contract revenues to U.S. NPOs (Salamon 1995; Salamon and Anheier 1996).

From 1974 to 1995, federal support to nonprofits increased from \$23 billion to \$175 billion (Johns Hopkins Nonprofit Sector Project 2000; Salamon 1995).<sup>8</sup> The most recent figures (1995 data from Johns Hopkins Nonprofit Sector Project 2000) show the enormous size of the U.S. nonprofit sector and its employment: \$567 billion in annual revenues (about 7 percent of national GDP) and 8.6 million full-time employees (nearly half the size of public sector employment).

Trends of privatization and devolution have made nonprofit CBOs a new option for the exchange of service provision and electoral activity that was performed so well earlier by the machine but was prevented from occurring in the War on Poverty agencies. The machine built its reliable voting constituencies through the mechanisms of patronage and party organization, usually via a set of local political clubs (Erie 1988; Gosnell 1937; Wilson 1962). The present day context of a weak or absent machine, however, makes the task of creating identifiable, reliable constituencies at the local level much more difficult (Freedman 1994; Guterbock 1980; Ware 1985). Candidates for office can try to build these constituencies themselves, or there may be some other organizational form available to perform this task. Unions have sometimes fulfilled this role, for example (e.g., Axelrod 1982; Bok and Dunlop 1970; Delaney, Masters, and Schwochau 1990; Freeman and Medoff 1984; Juravich and Shergold 1988).

I argue that today's nonprofit CBOs are in a structural position that enables them to fill the gap left by defunct political party organizations in poor neighborhoods (i.e., they can take on an electoral organizing role at the neighborhood level). Government financial support for CBO service provision activity, combined with CBOs' community building efforts, make it possible for CBOs to establish a patronage-type exchange with local residents. This exchange is more

<sup>8</sup> No studies report on dollars going specifically to the CBO subset of NPOs, as most breakdowns of the NPO sector are by service sub-area (e.g., health, education, culture, etc.). Studies of this kind indicate that the fastest-growing sub-area is health, but all other sub-areas, including those most likely to be served by CBOs, also are growing at substantial rates (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986).

complicated than the machine's, but it functions in the same way: to create and turn out a reliable voting constituency. This cultivation of electoral strength results in the generation of additional government contracts to CBOs, which are vital to organizational survival and expansion.

## DATA AND METHODS

Despite the importance of CBOs to social provision in the United States, few studies have examined how public dollars actually end up in these organizations and how the contracting process affects what happens once the dollars are there (but see Fabricant and Fisher 2002; Smith and Lipsky 1993). Answering these questions is done most convincingly by looking closely at how contracting and service provision processes operate on the ground, as in participant observation.<sup>9</sup> I use this method to examine how CBOs provide publicly funded direct services to needy citizens.

Not all nonprofit organizations are CBOs. For example, while both the Red Cross and the National Urban League are nonprofits, they are not CBOs.<sup>10</sup> The nonprofits classified as CBOs are, first of all, "community-based" in that they are organized around a particular geographic place (i.e., a "community," such as an urban neighborhood). CBOs generally operate pro-

grams *only* in their local geographic space, which distinguishes CBOs from larger nonprofits operating at multiple sites,<sup>11</sup> as well as from broad-based movement organizations (e.g., Kriesi et al. 1995; Meyer and Tarrow 1998).

Second, the mission of CBOs is to increase attention to the needs of disadvantaged residents of their geographic place (i.e., "community members") who are said to be receiving insufficient resources and consideration from government and market entities. This increased attention takes the form of service provision to, and/or advocacy work on behalf of, "the community." The "disenfranchised community" orientation of CBOs distinguishes them from other nonprofit organizations located in poverty-stricken areas, such as nonprofit hospitals.<sup>12</sup> While the CBO orientation does have something in common with protest movements' oppositional stance (e.g., Meyer and Tarrow 1998:4), CBOs' dependence on government funding locates them in a less contentious relationship with the state (Salamon 1995; Smith and Lipsky 1993), and CBO competitors are less "counter-movements" (e.g., Meyer and Staggenborg 1996) than they are simply other CBOs seeking the same government contract dollars.

Finally, CBOs are characterized by the significant participation of "community members" in the organizations' daily activities (e.g., as staff, volunteers, or members of the Board of Directors).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See Gans (1999) for an important methodological discussion of participant observation and other qualitative methods often grouped under the umbrella term "ethnography."

<sup>10</sup> The standard usage for defining nonprofit organizations is an administrative designation: incorporation under Section 501(c)3 or 501(c)4 of the Internal Revenue Code. The key aspects of this designation require: (1) that profits of the organization not be distributed to its directors, and (2) that the organization be "substantially oriented" towards public purposes. Horton Smith (1997) takes issue with this definition on the grounds that many voluntary associations are not incorporated at all, but nearly all studies of NPOs use this definition as a minimum standard (see Salamon and Anheier 1996). Recent work (e.g., Gronbjerg 2001) has begun to explore a more sociologically meaningful definition of "nonprofit," which suffers from overly broad scope: For example, both a three-person (incorporated) society for the protection of a particular species of plant and a \$1 billion nonprofit hospital fit under the administrative definition of an NPO.

<sup>11</sup> There are some exceptions to this local operations rule. Some CBOs have developed successful programs in their home areas and have been asked by funders—always in search of strong programs—to expand their reach to other neighborhoods. However, this type of CBO always has its roots in one particular geographic "community."

<sup>12</sup> For example, hospitals' primary mission is to provide health care. The fact that many inner-city hospitals serve large numbers of residents who live in the local area is simply an operational externality and not central to the hospital's organizational identity.

<sup>13</sup> This latter characteristic is one of the several inheritances of CBOs from their organizational predecessors, the Community Action Agencies (CAAs). Under the guidelines of the War on Poverty, CAAs called for "maximum feasible participation" of local residents in the development and implementation of CAA programs (Clark 2000; Gillette 1996; Moynihan 1969).

The evidence I present is drawn from a field study that examines how CBOs work to revitalize poor urban neighborhoods. That study was conducted from May 1997 until September 2000 in a low-income, majority-Latino area of New York City. The area's population is about 65 percent Latino and about 35 percent poor. The study area encompasses two distinct but contiguous and related neighborhoods—Lindale and Eckerton<sup>14</sup>—that share most of their demographic characteristics. The first 15 months of the study involved intensive participant observation at eight local CBOs: four in Lindale and four in Eckerton. I worked as a volunteer in each of the organizations for one-half day each week. My volunteer work was staggered over the 15 months, such that I volunteered continuously in each CBO for a period of 6 to 9 months. I also attended a wide variety of neighborhood events, community meetings, and family gatherings during this time, in addition to accompanying staff and participants of the CBOs on trips and events carried on outside the study neighborhoods.

At the conclusion of the intensive fieldwork period, I carried out a series of 80 network data interviews with staff members and clients of the eight CBO organizations. During the four months it took to complete the interviews, I checked in with the study groups on a regular basis and also continued to attend neighborhood events and gatherings. I then largely withdrew from the field for approximately eight months, though I did maintain occasional contact with most of the CBOs I studied. I returned to the field in September 1999 as part of a separate participant observation research project,<sup>15</sup> and I resumed data collection until September 2000.

### ACTIVITY ARENAS OF CBOs

I investigate three activity arenas of CBOs: service provision, community building, and

electoral politics. These are cumulative forms of work; each precedes the next. As stated above, most extant work on CBOs has addressed only the first two: service provision (e.g., Gronbjerg 2001; Halpern 1995; Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1986; Salamon 1995; Smith and Lipsky 1993) and community building (e.g., Chaskin 2001; De Souza Briggs et al. 1997; Hassell 1996; Leavitt and Saegert 1990; Portney and Berry 1997; Saegert, Thompson, and Warren 2001). Providing services and building relationships of trust and collaboration within the neighborhood are important roles for CBOs. However, several authors have pointed out the limitations of these strategies for creating real improvements for poor people in poor neighborhoods (Cohen 1999; DeFilippis 2001; Halpern 1995). They point to a simple problem: Community-focused activity does little to alter the continued exclusion of the poor from economic and political opportunity, including the power to influence decisions about how public resources are allocated and where government encourages private investment.

I examine service provision and community-building work within the context of their potential for fueling the third activity arena: *electoral politics* work. Almost no existing research addresses CBOs and political elections. One of the primary reasons for this gap is that the non-profit law *explicitly prohibits* CBOs from engaging in most forms of politics, especially partisan electoral politics. I argue here, however, that despite the literature's focus on service provision and community building, CBOs are not restricted to just these activities. Rather, CBOs also can deploy electoral strategies, and they do so to influence the politics of public resource allocation for social provision.<sup>16</sup> The ability of CBOs to politically maneuver more government contracts in their direction increases the availability of services they can provide in their neighborhoods, thereby potentially improving

<sup>14</sup> All names of neighborhoods, organizations, and individuals are pseudonyms.

<sup>15</sup> This is the Second Generation in Metropolitan New York Project, a study of young adults from the second generation of the "new" immigration (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, and Waters forthcoming; Marwell forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> CBO electoral political activity is distinct from policy advocacy or protest movements, both of which are legally permitted in CBOs under section 501(c)4 of the Internal Revenue Code, and represent the participation of CBOs in more generalized processes of political voice than the electoral organizing discussed here (e.g., Goetz 1993; Portney and Berry 1997; Saegert et al. 2001; Warren 2001).

the outcomes for residents in those areas.<sup>17</sup> The result of this approach is the creation of a *machine politics CBO form* in poor urban neighborhoods, and an accompanying method of distribution of public social provision to the poor. Table 1 locates all eight of the organizations from the present study within these activity arenas.

### COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AS SERVICE PROVIDERS

Service provision is a core piece of the missions and activities of all of the CBOs in this study. CBOs provide services to local residents in two distinct ways, however: either on a *nonreciprocal* or a *reciprocal* basis. The key difference between nonreciprocal and reciprocal service provision is whether CBO service recipients become part of CBO community-building activities (Figure 1).

Nonreciprocal service provision entails no expectation that the local resident will return anything to the CBO; this is what Hamilton (1979) characterizes as the "patron-recipient" relationship. Reciprocal service provision, however, means that the CBO communicates to the local resident that some form of return to the organization is expected from him or her. Examples of such reciprocity might include participation in a tenant organization run by the CBO, attendance at activities sponsored by the CBO, or involvement with CBO fundraising activities, such as anniversary dinners or street fairs.

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<sup>17</sup> While it is true that individual outcomes cannot be ascertained by examining winners and losers in service contract competition, it is fair to assume that offering more services in a neighborhood will improve local residents' access to such services. Whether or not those particular services, as implemented by a particular CBO, actually have positive impacts on individuals is a different question than the one addressed here. Furthermore, to determine the winners in localized competitions for government service contracts, it would be necessary to operationalize the political, organizational, and neighborhood variables discussed here and examine their relationship to the distribution of government contracts. I currently am conducting such research on city and state contracts to all NPOs in New York City.

Although CBOs that provide services on a reciprocal basis hope for high levels of reciprocity, the legal environment makes it difficult for CBOs to enforce this relationship. As such, creating reciprocity from local residents has been documented in the literature as one of the most difficult challenges for CBOs (Chaskin 2001; De Souza Briggs et al. 1997; Saegert et al. 2001). There remains an important difference, however, between the organizational practices of CBOs that *attempt* reciprocal service provision and those that do not. Furthermore, some CBOs are more exigent in their reciprocal expectations than others.

### NONRECIPROCAL SERVICE PROVISION

In nonreciprocal service provision, CBOs are indifferent to whether local residents return something to the organization in exchange for the service they receive. No discussion of reciprocity is broached by CBO staff to clients, there are few if any organizational events in which clients might participate, and the CBO is characterized by distant relationships between staff and clients and among clients. One example of this type of CBO in the present study is the Loving Care Child Development Center (Loving Care). Loving Care got its start in 1965, when a small group of parents banded together to help each other with childcare on a volunteer basis. Loving Care currently serves over 800 children at three different locations in the neighborhood. There is full-day care for preschool children, after-school care for school-aged children up to age 12 years, and both half- and full-day Head Start programs. The care of most children at Loving Care is paid for by either the federal government (Head Start) or the city government (all other programs).

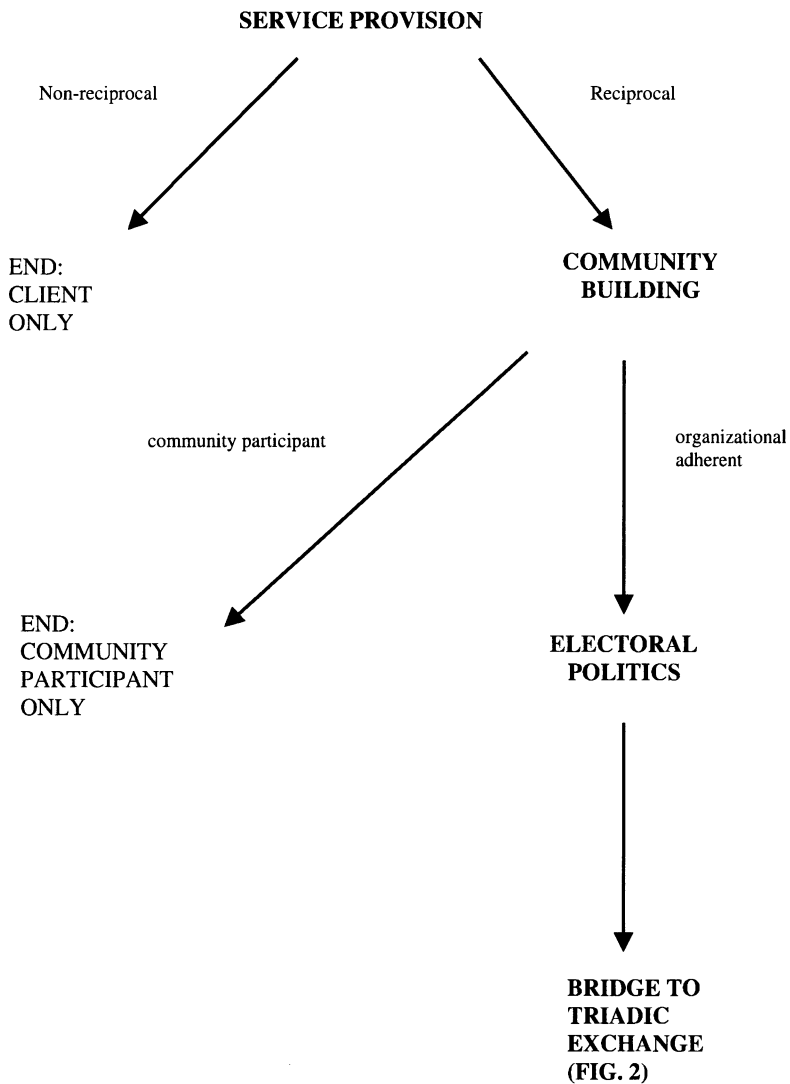
Loving Care meets many local residents' material needs for childcare. As the organization has grown, however, it has become increasingly distant from its clients, moving into a nonreciprocal service provision model. In the following excerpt from my field notes, the executive director of Loving Care, who has been there since the organization's founding, described to me how Loving Care has changed over the years:

When the [Loving Care central] building opened on [Skyler] Street in 1973, there were 500 kids from about 250 families [who received care there].

**Table 1.** CBO Activity Arenas

CBO Name	Service Provision		Community Building		
	Nonreciprocal	Reciprocal	Community Participant	Organizational Adherent	Electoral Politics
Lindale Beacon	X				
Loving Care Child Development Center	X				
Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church		X	X		
El Vecindario CDC		X	X		
Community Guardian		X	X		
Eckerton Beacon		X	X		
Holy Name Catholic Church		X	X		
Lindale Center for Service		X		X	X

*Note:* CBO = community-based organizations; CDC = community development corporation.



**Figure 1.** CBO Activity Arenas

Generally, it was still a very close-knit program, very community-based, even though it was growing fast. Students [from those years] still call and visit to thank Anita [Lester, executive director] for their experiences there. One of the kids, John, who was 12 when the . . . building opened, has been their custodian there for many years. "Now, though," [Anita says], "it's not the same. It all changes when you become a funded program" [i.e., when most children's care is paid for by public subsidies]. Loving Care now has over 100 employees, and *even though quite a few people do come in to see their old teachers, send letters, etc., the place doesn't have the same feeling*. Anita says, for example, that she doesn't know all the kids like she used to; she recognizes most of them, but she used to have *relationships* with all of them. (Author's field notes, October 9, 1997; first emphasis added, second emphasis in original.)

Although Loving Care had begun as a CBO supported primarily by the volunteer work of parents who had no other source of childcare, as this group of founders saw their children grow up, they lost touch with the organization. Combined with the growth in availability of public funds to provide childcare to low-income families, this meant that the newer families who utilized Loving Care began to view it more as a service provider rather than as a community-focused, self-help organization. The current service-provision emphasis is underlined by the bureaucratic orientation of Loving Care staff. Following bureaucratic rules was of particular importance to the staff, as I recorded in my field notes:

As we finish cleaning up the classroom, I ask [Luisa] Viera [the assistant teacher in Room 202] to tell me about her work. She says that there's a lot expected of [the classroom teachers]. *She says the most important thing* is that every day, both the head teacher and the assistant teacher have to write up 40 "observations" on the kids in their classes. [With 20 kids in the morning class, and 20 in the afternoon class, this is presumably one daily observation per child]. Then they have to conduct home visits. Then there is other paperwork. So it's a lot, and there's really not enough time to do it all. (Author's field notes, June 30, 1998; emphasis added.)

Much of the daily routine at Loving Care was shaped by bureaucratic requirements such as these. Government standards have helped to enforce minimal thresholds of care, which is an important service achievement. However, attention to these matters left little time, effort, or

interest for other activities, such as cultivating relationships with or among parents. At Loving Care, parents rarely seemed to know each other, barely exchanging a few words with other parents when they came to pick up their children at the end of the day. Loving Care provides an important service to local residents: a safe place for working parents to leave their children and an orientation towards developmental child care. However, fostering community ties within the organization is not part of Loving Care's present approach, though it was once its central focus. Thus, Loving Care currently provides services on a nonreciprocal basis.

### RECIPROCAL SERVICE PROVISION

The CBOs that practice reciprocal service provision are caught between conflicting bureaucratic and program demands. Financial support of CBO services usually is contingent on service recipients being free of obligation to the CBO. This is particularly the case for publicly funded services, which must follow governmental rules of equal access and nondiscrimination, and also usually applies to foundation or other privately supported services. Currently, however, a core aspect of CBO work is to construct lasting relationships between CBOs and local residents. Indeed, relationship-building as a primary function of CBOs has dominated the discourse of the last decade in CBO, government, and foundation discussions of how to improve conditions in poor neighborhoods (e.g., Chaskin 2001; De Souza Briggs et al. 1997; Scully and Harwood 1997; Stone 1996; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2000; Walsh 1997; Warren 2001). Reciprocity between CBOs and local residents is critical to this relationship-building function, which is believed to leverage residents' resources and support for CBO work.

The majority of the eight CBOs in the present study practice reciprocal service provision of some kind. CBOs use different strategies for establishing reciprocity with their clients, however, and some CBOs create more demands on their clients than do other CBOs. I observed one example of reciprocal service provision at the Eckerton Beacon, a city-funded youth and family support program. The Eckerton Beacon is run as a semi-autonomous organization by a local CBO, the Rockview Neighborhood Center.

During my fieldwork, the appointment of Wilson Padilla as new program director at the Beacon led to a more directed strategy for encouraging reciprocity for Beacon services. Padilla made continuing participation by each child at the Beacon contingent upon the child's parent attending at least one meeting of the parents' association each year. He also instituted small fees for participating in the Beacon's core programs and required parents to pitch in with various activities, such as parties and field trips. The goal of these approaches was to increase families' commitments to the Beacon, thereby increasing their investment in the success of the organization. This construction of reciprocity through service provision laid the foundation for community-building work as practiced by the Beacon and several other CBOs in the present study.

A second example of CBO reciprocal service provision can be seen in the housing development work of two community development corporations: El Vecindario Community Development Corporation (El Vecindario) and the Housing Office of the Lindale Center for Service (LCS). Financed by a combination of federal, state, and city contracts and tax subsidies, El Vecindario and LCS develop, build, and manage subsidized housing for low-income families and senior citizens. All of this government-subsidized housing is required to be distributed by lottery to income-eligible renters or buyers. These lotteries involve the public announcement of the availability of housing units (e.g., by advertising in local newspapers), a standard application, the collection of applications by a government agency, and a random drawing.

Even within these strict procedures, however, there is ample room for CBOs like El Vecindario and LCS to skew the lottery results in favor of their own clients.<sup>18</sup> First, there is the question of distributing information that new housing units will be available. While sophisticated, persistent, low-income housing seekers may have learned when and where to look for public announcements, individuals who have connections to a CBO like El Vecindario or

LCS are much more likely than unconnected individuals to find out when new housing is being built in their neighborhood and to request applications. Second, government-subsidized housing applications are quite complicated. The housing staff at El Vecindario and LCS can assist local residents in completing their applications, thereby increasing the number of valid applications submitted to the lottery by individuals connected to the CBOs. This becomes critical to lottery outcomes because incomplete applications are excluded. Together, then, these information and assistance benefits offered by El Vecindario and LCS ensure their clients' overrepresentation in any subsidized housing development built in the CBOs' service areas.

The high value of housing resources in New York City's increasingly tight and expensive market encourages a strong reciprocity from local residents toward the housing development CBOs. Fieldwork repeatedly confirmed that these residents are among the most reliable participants in various El Vecindario and LCS activities. Furthermore, strong relationships between tenants and housing CBOs usually lead to improved outcomes for the housing developments themselves: better security, greater tenant care for the physical plant, and the growth of supportive tenant networks within buildings (De Souza Briggs et al. 1997; Leavitt and Saegert 1990). All of these outcomes are valued by housing CBOs like El Vecindario and LCS, as well as by the external funders of their housing programs.

In both nonreciprocal and reciprocal forms of service provision, clients have important material needs met—childcare, housing, supplementary education, and so on. When CBOs engage in reciprocal service provision, however, they move from only providing services to also doing community building work. In this transition, there is a qualitative shift in the relationships between CBOs and their clients. CBOs that do community building create stronger relationships with their clients, thereby maintaining client identification with the CBOs, their community programmatic missions, and their staffs.

<sup>18</sup> Research informants also described how other local housing organizations, including the Jewish Faithful of Eckerton, engage in similar practices.

## COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AS COMMUNITY BUILDERS

The majority of the CBOs I studied engage not only in service provision but also in community building (see Table 1). As with providing services, however, CBOs can build community in distinct ways. Figure 1 shows the two CBO approaches to community building that emerged from the present study's data. CBOs may work to produce either *community participants* or *organizational adherents*. Each of these approaches incorporates a distinct understanding of the relationship of local residents to the CBO, its mission, and the CBO's home neighborhood. The key difference between community participants and organizational adherents is that the latter make it possible for a CBO to also engage in a third activity arena: electoral politics (see Figure 1).

The CBOs that create *community participants* have a broad understanding of the community-building enterprise. Community participants are called upon to take part in various CBO activities, motivated by the good feelings that come from contributing to the general improvement and health of their neighborhood. Both CBO staff and local residents involved in the community-participant approach to community building will speak of doing things "for the community" or of enhancing the "sense of community" in their area. Community participants are likely to be involved in several local organizations, not simply the one where they work or from which they receive a service. In contrast, CBOs that seek to produce *organizational adherents* have a narrower, more instrumental view of their community-building work. In particular, these groups emphasize the benefits that the organization produces for individuals rather than for the more diffuse entity of "the community." Organizational adherents are tied more tightly to particular CBOs than are community participants, with the former unlikely to devote time or energy to work on any local issue not engaged by their home organization. The two housing organizations discussed above, El Vecindario and LCS, represent these distinct approaches to community building. Although both engage in reciprocal service provision, El Vecindario works to mold local residents into community participants, while LCS focuses on creating organizational adherents. This diver-

gence is captured by the two CBOs' operating philosophies.

All of the work of El Vecindario is built on its theory of what might be termed "social justice." Since its founding days, El Vecindario has understood itself as struggling against a series of recalcitrant, opportunistic foes—absentee landlords, the City of New York, aggressive housing seekers from Eckerton's growing Hasidic Jewish community, the forces of gentrification—who deny a decent and communal quality of life to the mostly Latino residents of its Eckerton neighborhood. El Vecindario believes that the Latino residents who suffered through the difficult conditions of the 1960s and 1970s, fought to reclaim their buildings and blocks during the 1970s and 1980s, and thereby helped to spur the current resurgence of Eckerton, now have a *right* to live in the area. One demonstration of El Vecindario's social justice philosophy is found in the program for the organization's 1997 celebration of its 25th anniversary. A long narrative detailing the numerous housing development, management, and organizational tasks performed by El Vecindario over the years is the centerpiece of the printed program, covering 10 pages. The narrative concludes with the following warning:

El Vecindario anticipates tremendous changes in the Eckerton area in the next decades. The waning of the older industrial businesses, the possible incursion of market rate housing in [Eckerton], combined with budget cuts in rent subsidy programs and the continued assault on tenant protections *threatens to transform our community into one that the current Latino residents may neither recognize or [sic] be able to live in*. Consistent with our mission, El Vecindario will continue to fight for the right to be an active participant in the shaping of the future of [Eckerton]. (El Vecindario Community Development Corporation 1997, 25th anniversary program, emphasis added.)

It is unacceptable to El Vecindario that all of its work to revitalize Eckerton may, in the final analysis, price its low-income, Latino residents out of the area. The organization firmly believes that the central operating principles regarding real estate in Eckerton should be *fairness* and *justice*, not simply the competitive market. In partnership with the Latino residents of Eckerton, El Vecindario built a *community* there. Now El Vecindario demands that the tangible (material) and intangible benefits of that community be honored by others. This is a broad-

based, collective claim that includes all of the Latino residents of Eckerton. El Vecindario's appeals to local residents for support and involvement in the organization invoke this historically grounded idea of community and create all clients as "community participants."

In contrast, LCS works from a more direct and instrumental organizational philosophy: "helping people." Assistance to individual residents (budding "organizational adherents") is the main goal at LCS. There is little talk in the organization of working to bind the residents of Lindale together as a community. This individually focused, material orientation can be traced in large measure to the social work background of LCS's founder, Tony Rodriguez. Rodriguez currently serves as the New York State Assemblyman for Lindale and Eckerton, but his work as LCS's founder, along with the intimate relationship he maintains with the organization today, ensure that his vision of "helping people" remains at the core of LCS's work. The following excerpt from my field notes, taken at the annual Christmas meals service program, provides a typical articulation of Rodriguez's approach:

I ask Tony how many people they'll be serving today, and he says about 400 to 500 in the center, and 2,200 delivered meals. I ask how many volunteers are around, and he says there are 62 out delivering meals, and a lot more working in the center. He says that despite what people say about him being no good, he [helps LCS] get a lot of meals out to a lot of people who wouldn't otherwise get anything. For homebound people, getting the meal and the visit means a lot to them. "Other people talk and complain, *but I get out there and do things for people,*" he says. (Author's field notes, December 25, 1997; emphasis added)

This foundational philosophy of "helping people" also appears in LCS's formal organizational mission statement, which concludes with the following promise:

*If you need help in Lindale or any of the communities that we serve and your particular problem is not listed [in our directory of services], please call the department [of LCS] that specializes in the area you are concerned with. If we cannot help you directly, we will find the person that can.* (Lindale Center for Service, n.d., emphasis in original)

The "helping people" approach at LCS means that its community-building work remains focused on individuals, rather than on a collec-

tive notion of a larger entity known as "the community." As such, local residents do not become participants in this broader community but rather become organizational adherents, bound specifically to LCS. The other four CBOs in the present study that engage in community-building work (see Table 1) take the "community participant" approach found at El Vecindario. These CBOs also attempt to turn local residents into community participants by projecting a diffuse concept of community and encouraging residents to act on its behalf. LCS's distinct process of transforming residents into organizational adherents makes it the only one of the eight CBOs in the present study to enter into the third CBO activity arena: electoral politics.

### COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND ELECTORAL POLITICS: THE TRIADIC EXCHANGE

I argue that the allocation of public human service funds is in part a political process and that CBOs engaged in electoral politics do so to exert influence over the allocation of social provision service contracts. Public resource allocation decisions, including government contract decisions, are made outside of the neighborhoods where CBOs provide services and build community. Public agencies charged with allocating government funds for various social provision services usually fall under the direct control of the executive (e.g., mayor, governor), which means executives have the capacity to control contract decisions. Powerful legislators also may influence these decisions as part of their bargaining with the executive to pass policy changes or other legislation. Politicians need to win elections to stay in office. By engaging in electoral organizing and producing reliable voting constituencies, CBOs can pressure these political actors to make favorable contract allocation decisions.

When public funds for a CBO increase, it can offer additional opportunities and services to local low-income residents. These include jobs in the CBO itself, as well as additional locally based options for housing, daycare, youth development, drug treatment, and other key supportive services. The growing privatization of these publicly supported human services gave rise to the CBO as a new, nongovernmental

organizational form that now conducts significant “street-level” policy making (Lipsky 1980). Furthermore, devolution has moved decisions over service funding allocations closer to the neighborhoods where CBOs operate (i.e., to states and localities). CBOs in poor urban neighborhoods are thus structurally positioned to reprise the role of the political machine, despite the social science consensus that the machine is dead (Erie 1988; Freedman 1994; Gordon 1968; Guterbock 1980; Moynihan and Wilson 1964). Like the machine, today’s CBOs can organize voters to affect the allocation of public resources (service contracts) and direct those resources to specific persons within neighborhoods (patronage).

The political machine organized voters by distributing patronage through a direct exchange between voter and party. CBOs, however, are explicitly prohibited from engaging in this kind of exchange, which would entail fusing the CBO with the political party, thus jeopardizing the CBO’s legal nonprofit status. However, my data show CBOs can engage in a more complicated (and technically legal) resources-for-votes exchange. This is a three-way, indirect exchange among CBO, client/voter, and elected official (see Figure 2).

In this exchange triad, the CBO serves as the fulcrum through which patronage resources are distributed and client/voters are organized. The CBO is a necessary component of the primary exchange between the political entity (the elected official) and the individual client/voter.

Unlike during the time of the political machine, today’s elected officials themselves no longer hold significant divisible benefits that can be distributed to client/voters, such as patronage jobs. In the triadic exchange, the CBO holds and distributes benefits to client/voters, but the elected official is the conduit through which resources for distribution (i.e., government contracts) come to the CBO. In essence, CBOs are structurally positioned to replace political party organizations.

This replacement has been partly the result of the dramatic decline in resources that are controlled by political parties. For example, civil service reform has significantly reduced the number of jobs under the direct control of party organizations (Erie 1988; Freedman 1994; Moynihan and Wilson 1964). The concomitant decline of party organizations, which usually is linked to resource depletion, also has been well documented (Erie 1988; Guterbock 1980; Jones-Correa 1998; Ware 1985). In contrast, CBOs have seen the resources under their control expand with the increasing privatization of public services (Salamon 1995). CBO patronage resources now include jobs in the CBO itself and in its related efforts; preferential access to CBO services; and other kinds of assistance, including help with navigating public service bureaucracies.

The proposed model of CBOs as practitioners of a new machine politics must be understood within a wider set of political and organizational practices (see Figure 3). The bot-

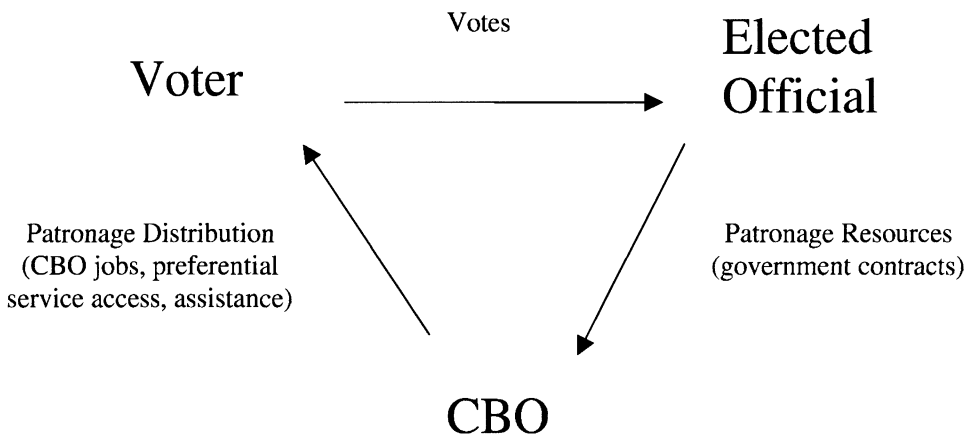


Figure 2. Triadic Exchange

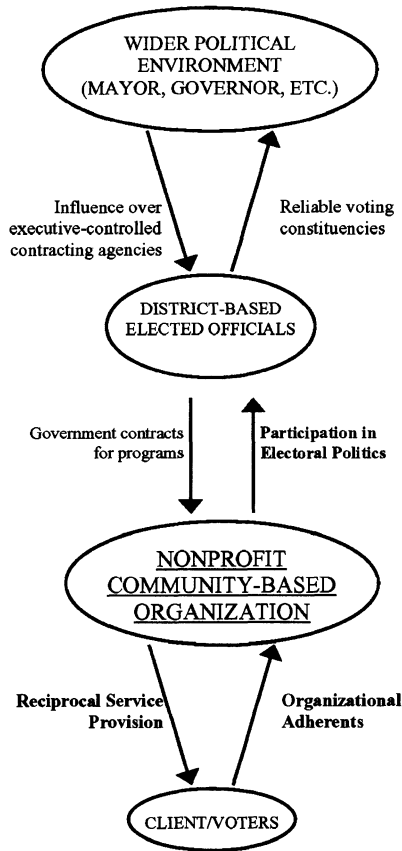


Figure 3. Wider Exchange System

tom half of Figure 3 captures the local system of relationships and practices between the CBO and its individual client/voters, as described in the preceding discussion of Figures 1 and 2. Here, Figure 3 captures empirical differentiation among CBOs in the distinct activity arenas of service provision, community building, and electoral politics. Only by moving from service provision through community building to electoral politics can the triadic exchange be completed.

The completion of the triadic exchange engages the processes described in the top half of Figure 3: CBO modes of service provision and community building that do not lead to electoral politics activity means there is no link to the top half of Figure 3. The top half of the figure describes the broader political system in which the triadic exchange is embedded. Here, the lower-level electoral districts in which CBOs are located (e.g., City Council, State Assembly,

State Senate districts) connect to higher, aggregated levels of the polity (e.g., city, state, nation). The top half of the figure includes the position of each of the constituent elements in this process and specifies the exchange relations that link them. Some of the exchanges in the model are direct (e.g., services are provided by the nonprofit CBO in exchange for participation from client/voters), while others require intermediate steps and exchanges (e.g., electoral politics activity provided by the CBO in exchange for government contracts from district-based elected officials). All of the exchange relations specified in Figure 3 can vary in magnitude, though in the model's strongest form of operation, each of the exchanges operates at a high level. For example, a CBO with a strong electoral politics capacity means a district-based elected official can deliver a large reliable voting constituency to higher levels of the wider political environment, which leads in turn to

high levels of government contracts going to the CBO.<sup>19</sup>

### THE TRIADIC EXCHANGE IN OPERATION

One CBO in the present study adds electoral politics to its service provision and community-building work—the Lindale Center for Service (LCS)—and thus can be classified as a practitioner of the new machine politics. For LCS, the key elected official in the triadic exchange is New York State Assemblyman, Tony Rodriguez. Rodriguez founded LCS in 1976 and was elected to the Assembly in 1984. Although he then resigned as executive director of LCS, he has maintained his position as *de facto* head of the organization. No major program or administrative decision is made at LCS without Rodriguez's approval. Rodriguez also is the head of LCS's "shadow" political institution—the Lindale Neighborhood Democratic Club—under whose auspices the most direct of the electoral politics work of LCS is performed. With Assemblyman Rodriguez as its strong leader, able to command loyalty from LCS adherents and also to strike bargains with other players in the wider political environment, LCS has become a practitioner of a new machine politics.

### WHY RELIABLE VOTING CONSTITUENCIES MATTER

The work LCS does to provide reciprocal services and create organizational adherents has placed Rodriguez at the head of a reliable voting constituency with considerable appeal in the wider political environment. First, it is a relatively large group of voters as voter networks go. In most elections, Rodriguez's political club can deliver about 3,000 votes in a district of the city that usually turns out only about 5,000 voters. While this may seem like a

small absolute number of votes for a citywide or statewide contest, the number should be seen in the context of a severely diminished capacity for delivering blocs of voters at all. The increasing disconnection of voters from party or other political organizations, combined with the importance of media-based campaign appeals, has rendered constituencies like Rodriguez's fairly uncommon. Thus, there is added value to capturing even these relatively small number constituencies.

In addition, the political context of New York City in the 1990s made these constituencies even more valuable, given that the city's Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, was a Republican in a heavily Democratic city. In both his election (1993) and re-election (1997) campaigns, Giuliani's margins of victory were relatively small. Delivering otherwise Democratic voters to a Republican candidate—even in small numbers—thus represented an important contribution, for which rewards were forthcoming. Rodriguez was the first major Democratic elected official to cross party lines and endorse Giuliani for re-election, and Rodriguez maintained a good relationship with the mayor throughout his tenure.

Rodriguez's reliable voting constituency also is of interest to citywide, statewide, and national officials because of its ethnic composition. Rodriguez's voters are primarily members of minority groups, particularly Latinos, mostly of Puerto Rican and Dominican descent. With the rapid growth of the Latino population, the "Latino vote" has in recent years become a voting segment of significant interest to politicians, not only in New York City but also nationwide (DeSipio 1996). Rodriguez certainly recognizes this interest and, in partnership with LCS, has organized a group called *Moviendo Juntos* ("Moving Together"), which he bills as "the largest group of Latino leaders in New York City" (from field notes). This organization represents a clear public announcement that his constituency is a Latino one. *Moviendo Juntos* operates under the nonprofit umbrella of LCS.

Finally, decision-makers in the wider political environment are interested in Rodriguez because of his position in the New York State legislature. Rodriguez is one of the senior members of the Assembly and chairs a powerful assembly committee. Both the mayor and the governor need to work with legislators to imple-

<sup>19</sup> Compare to Burstein and Linton (2002), who argue that social movement groups are more likely to affect public policy when their activity can contribute to the electoral effort of politicians, and Fiorina (1981), who demonstrates that Congressional representatives who assist their constituents ("constituent casework") reap electoral benefits from doing so.

ment their public policies and budget allocations, and Rodriguez plays an important role in these processes. Thus, because of the clout of Rodriguez's reliable voting constituency and his own position of power, players in the wider political environment have strong incentives to bargain with him.

### **FROM ORGANIZATIONAL ADHERENTS TO RELIABLE VOTERS**

To enter the arena of electoral politics, a CBO must transform its organizational adherents into reliable voters. This process has two components. First, a CBO must get its organizational adherents to understand the role of politics and the importance of voting in the life of the CBO to which they are bound. It is not enough for the organization to engage in reciprocal service provision and to cultivate adherents. For these organizational adherents to become reliable voters, they must be aware of the wider environment that links their receipt of services to their participation in the electoral arena. Second, the CBO must convince political decision-makers that it has influence over the members of its voting constituency, which is manifested when the CBO regularly turns out its voters in elections. LCS fulfills these two requirements of electoral politics through three sets of activities: (1) continually educating its client/voters about the contract allocation mechanisms operating in the wider political environment, (2) regularly exhibiting the LCS constituency to decision-makers within that environment, and (3) winning elections on the district level.

### **EDUCATING CLIENT/VOTERS**

LCS has two sets of client/voters: organizational staff members and organizational service recipients. As in political machines, some of the most reliable organizational adherents and voters in CBOs are those individuals who are employed by the organization itself. LCS currently comprises over 50 separate programs and organizations that offer cradle-to-grave services. To deliver all of these services, LCS has over 1,500 employees. This makes employment within the organization a key resource for LCS's electoral politics work. LCS uses its job opportunities to involve local residents in its operations and to cultivate and reward their loyalty.

Their jobs span a wide range, including superintendents at LCS-managed buildings, tenant organizers, GED teachers, receptionists, social workers, home attendants, and others.

Many of these employees also are local residents, and residency is a key component of transforming organizational adherents into reliable voters: If an LCS employee cannot vote in local district elections, his or her job is wasted patronage. There is strong recognition of this fact among employees—when employees move out of the area, they often maintain their voter registration at the address of a family member who lives in the old neighborhood.<sup>20</sup> In addition to counting on staff members' own votes, LCS relies on a number of its staff to help with the arduous tasks of grassroots campaigning, including creating lists of reliable voters,<sup>21</sup> making pre-Election Day phone solicitations and turning out voters on Election Day.

For a large core group of LCS staff, the relationship between being an employee of LCS and participating in the organization's formal political work is quite well understood. Explicit electoral activities cannot take place on LCS premises or on LCS time, as the nonprofit law prohibits this. Instead, the Lindale Neighborhood Democratic Club, whose members are nearly all affiliated with LCS (either as employees or clients), performs the electoral

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<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that all LCS employees are local residents. There are a few professional jobs—housing development, legal assistance, accounting, social work—that often are filled by outsiders. It is important for LCS that qualified workers fill these jobs because organizational competence is a necessity for CBOs if they want to continue receiving government contracts. (I, who was identified by the organization as someone with a graduate level education, was offered jobs at LCS numerous times.) The total number of jobs filled by outsiders, however, is relatively small, and some LCS professionals are also local residents.

<sup>21</sup> Most political campaigns in New York City purchase these lists, which identify registered voters who have voted in recent primary and general elections. Campaigns usually target these voters, rather than the general public, through mailings and phone calls prior to Election Day, and door-knocking on Election Day itself. The Lindale Neighborhood Democratic Club compiles and maintains these lists itself, rather than purchasing them.

piece of the triadic exchange. For example, LCS is officially closed on Election Days, and many staff members instead congregate at the political club. There is a strong sense of expectation of this behavior, as noted in this excerpt from my field notes, written about three weeks before the 1997 mayoral election:

I ask Paul [Torres, former Deputy Director for Housing, LCS] what employees from LCS will be doing on Election Day. He says that of course they'll be at the [Lindale Neighborhood Democratic Club], working there. I ask, "That's not required, is it?" and he smiles, says ironically, "Of course not." The implication is clearly that employees are expected to show up and work. I ask what would happen if someone didn't go. He says he wouldn't necessarily lose his job, but it certainly wouldn't help him hold onto it. Again, he has the ironic smile, though the implication is a bit less clear. Paul is always careful not to give me any directly damning quotations when I talk to him. (Author's field notes, October 19, 1997)

Fieldwork on this and several other Election Days during the study period confirmed that many LCS employees—and on this day as members of the Lindale Neighborhood Democratic Club—spend up to 12 hours going door-to-door throughout the neighborhood to pull out voters for favored candidates. Behind many of the doors they knock at are people who also are clients of LCS—the value to the triadic exchange of staff members' role ambiguity on this day is clear.

LCS staff members have multiple opportunities to learn about the relationship between engaging in electoral politics and securing government contracts to fund organizational activities. Their daily job tasks are embedded within a continual discourse about government funding and the political processes that affect contract allocations. LCS clients are less exposed to these informational channels, but they also are important targets for the organization's electoral politics work. LCS primarily utilizes public forums to educate these client/voters about the connections between political activity and service availability. These forums include gatherings to mark the commencement of new LCS services as well as ongoing coverage of LCS's work in the monthly LCS-sponsored community newspaper, *Times of Lindale* (circulation = 10,000 free copies).

During the fieldwork period, I observed numerous events to commemorate the opening of new LCS services. These events always featured Assemblyman Rodriguez as the keynote speaker and frequently brought in other actors from the wider political environment as well. LCS organizational leaders, as well as Assemblyman Rodriguez, always made sure to point out to the assembled client/voters how political activity played a role in service delivery. The following excerpt from my field notes marks the presence of a wide variety of political figures at the well-attended ribbon-cutting ceremony for a new LCS-sponsored housing development in Lindale:

There is a large tent set up on Colson Street [in front of the new building, Comunidad Tower], with balloons tied to many of the tent poles and floating around inside. There are about 200 senior citizens sitting in chairs under the tent and about 50 more people standing around outside. At the front of the crowd is Marie [Pertutti, Director of the LCS Housing Office], flanked by [Assemblyman] Tony [Rodriguez], [a U.S.] Senator from New York, the local Borough President, and two local City Council representatives. Tony speaks first, says Marie deserves so much credit for the new building, but that all of the elected officials there helped, too, and he's happy to work with them to bring things into the community. (Author's field notes, July 2, 1997)

Events such as this represent one opportunity for LCS client/voters to make the connection between services and politics. In the *Times of Lindale*, these connections often are made more explicit. An analysis of the *Times* from April 1997 to December 1999 indicates that the newspaper's articles fall into three main categories. The first and smallest category covers items of general community interest. The second category (about 47 percent of all articles) covers the programs and services provided by LCS. The third (about 28 percent) covers Assemblyman Rodriguez. In particular, this latter category communicates the important role that Rodriguez plays in bringing benefits to Lindale residents and highlights the political clout he wields. One example is found in the cover story of the March 1998 issue, which begins: "On February 4, 1998, history was made in Lindale as [New York State] Gov. George E. Pataki made an unprecedented visit and tour of the community. The Governor, who was invited to visit and

tour the area by Assemblyman Tony Rodriguez, arrived with many of his top commissioners" (p. 1). This and similar stories are part of the client/voter education process employed by LCS as it works to turn organizational adherents into reliable voters.

### DISPLAYING THE CONSTITUENCY

A second key piece of LCS's electoral politics work is to display the LCS voting constituency to public officials who make decisions about public service contract allocations. This communicates to these officials that Assemblyman Rodriguez has a responsive and large set of potential voters. The public events LCS utilizes for client/voter education also double as opportunities for this constituent display. Perhaps the most important of these events during the course of the year is the annual retreat of LCS's *Moviendo Juntos* organization. It is here that the embeddedness of the triadic exchange in the wider political environment can be most clearly viewed.

*Moviendo Juntos* is a coalition of some 350 neighborhood "leaders" from the area, including members of tenant associations, block associations, low-income housing cooperatives, parent-teacher associations, and local CBOs. *Moviendo Juntos* operates under the nonprofit umbrella of LCS, but, in another example of role fluidity at LCS, it is organized by staff members at Assemblyman Rodriguez's district office. In addition to monthly meetings regularly attended by high-ranking city and state political figures, the highlight of the year at *Moviendo Juntos* is its annual three-day retreat, held at a nonprofit conference center in upstate New York.

The formal goal of the retreat is to allow *Moviendo Juntos* leaders to have concentrated interaction with policymakers and government agency officials who administer a variety of public service programs that impact people's lives in Lindale. The most important informal goal of the retreat is for Assemblyman Rodriguez to put his voting constituency on display for government agency officials, who certainly report on the retreat to their respective executives. The retreat helps facilitate the triadic exchange: Client/voters receive patronage benefits, Rodriguez displays his constituency to

government officials, and government officials connect Rodriguez's political strength to their future decisions about government contract allocations.

Two types of events held during the retreat contribute to this process. During the day on Saturday and Sunday, *Moviendo Juntos* members attend workshops that address issues of concern to their neighborhood work, such as affordable housing, welfare reform, or domestic violence. Each of the workshops features a panel of speakers, a mix of high-ranking public agency officials and representatives of study area CBOs. Rodriguez himself usually moderates each panel and comments on the significance of the gathering for both panelists and *Moviendo Juntos* members. An excerpt from my field notes on the first session from the 1998 retreat illustrates this:

By 10:00 A.M., all the workshop panelists are seated, including Tony [Assemblyman Rodriguez], the moderator. The room is mostly full [with about 160 people]. Tony stands up and begins the session. First, he introduces the panelists: Veronica White, CEO of the New York City Housing Partnership; Richard Roberts, Commissioner of New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development; Joseph Lynch, Acting Commissioner of New York State's Division of Housing and Community Renewal; Bill Traylor, Vice President of the Local Initiative Support Corporation [a major syndicator of tax credits for subsidized low-income housing programs]; and Cece Tkaczyk, Executive Director of the Neighborhood Preservation Coalition of New York State. He points out to the *Moviendo Juntos* members that *they're important enough for all these important people to give up their Saturday for them*, and Joe Lynch even brought his wife, who Tony also introduces. (Author's field notes, January 10, 1998; emphasis added)

The triadic exchange is in clear view here. LCS has organized a group of nearly 200 local leaders who have sufficient commitment to their work to give up their entire weekend to the retreat. Rodriguez presents this constituency of client/voters (designated as "leaders") to the public officials who represent the mayor, governor, and other relevant political players. Rodriguez's remarks make it clear that he is responsible for the organization of these client/voters and of many more individuals who answer to these "leaders." The *Moviendo Juntos*

members see how Rodriguez has brought these top-level agency officials to meet with them, thereby demonstrating his ability to be in contact with the decision-makers who provide the government contracts that pay for CBO jobs and services. Furthermore, Rodriguez's speeches remind the client/voters of the role that voting plays in delivering these resources.

The workshops are a key feature of the conference because they embody the triadic resources-for-votes exchange. At the same time, the conference continues to distribute patronage to the client/voters, thereby reinforcing their loyalties to LCS and to Rodriguez. The main benefits of the conference are the leisure activities. First, there is the simple fact of a free weekend in the country for a group of people who have few opportunities for such an activity. Rodriguez pays for the entire cost of the retreat (conference rooms, lodging, food, transportation, etc.) out of his Assembly "member-item" budget.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the *Moviendo Juntos* conference is well known for its parties. There are four parties during the weekend: one on each of the bus trips to and from the conference center, one on Friday night, and one on Saturday night. On the bus trips, *Moviendo Juntos* members share food they have made and

mix drinks from an impromptu bar set up somewhere in the bus aisle. The Friday and Saturday parties feature a disc jockey brought along from Lindale, flashing lights, drinking, and lots of dancing. Both parties go on until long after midnight, but people always make it to the workshops the next day.

The *Moviendo Juntos* retreat is only one example, albeit a highly illustrative one, of how LCS and Assemblyman Rodriguez work together to organize client/voters and then parlay that voting constituency into influence within the wider political environment. Top elected officials not only send their agency leaders to the *Moviendo Juntos* retreat, but they also make appearances at LCS events and facilities on a regular basis. During their election campaigns, for example, Mayor Giuliani appeared at the LCS senior citizen picnic at a state park in Long Island, Governor Pataki traveled to the LCS senior center to speak about his health policy proposals, and former U.S. Senator Alfonse D'Amato was the featured speaker at the opening of a new subsidized housing development built by LCS. Clearly, LCS and Rodriguez have the attention of important players in the wider political environment.

## WINNING ELECTIONS

The final piece of LCS's electoral politics work is to convert the promising display of client/voters into actual electoral victories. During the fieldwork period, Assemblyman Rodriguez's political club was recognized as a contributor to one citywide electoral victory (Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's 1997 re-election) and also as the winner of three critical district-level elections (a 1999 state judicial election, a 2000 state district leader election, and a 2001 city council election). At a meeting of *Moviendo Juntos* two days after the 1999 judicial election, which pitted Rodriguez's candidate against a candidate backed by the district's Hasidic Jewish population, Rodriguez drove home the importance of his organization's win:

Tony says that [Election Day] was a "very, very successful day" for the organization [*Moviendo Juntos/LCS/Lindale Neighborhood Democratic Club*]. The Hasidim lost, and they lost badly . . . He says that the victory is only the beginning of a larger struggle, in which they have to find out who their friends are. Candidates have to choose sides, and if they want the support of one of the

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<sup>22</sup> Each member of the New York State Legislature receives a quantity of public funds to distribute to nonprofit organizations in his or her district. Assemblyman Rodriguez spends the majority of his member-item funds on the annual *Moviendo Juntos* retreat. At the 2000 retreat, for example, Rodriguez stated that he had spent \$40,000 for the weekend (author's field notes, February 19, 2000). The importance of member-item funds to legislators who seek to build machine politics CBOs like LCS is underlined by an ongoing political battle in New York State. In 2001, State Senator Pedro Espada (Bronx) switched his party affiliation from Democrat to Republican. His publicly stated reason was that since the Republicans control the State Senate his member-item would increase significantly by switching parties (Perez-Peña 2002). Afterwards, it was found that Espada had channeled over \$400,000 in member item funds to a CBO for which he serves as the Executive Director. Public outcry led to the funds being returned, but Espada remains embroiled in a legal fight over his party switch. He continues to maintain that he wants to be a Republican because of the additional resources it brings into his district.

more impressive Democratic organizations in the city [i.e., *Moviendo Juntos*], they [the candidates] are going to have to play with [Rodriguez and his organization] . . . He says that you can't expect things to move your way without understanding the politics of what's going on. A political favor means that when there are two hundred requests for public money, and only two get funded, the people who are owed a favor get one of those two. At work today, he had three high-level people from the Mayor's office call to talk to him about what Lindale needs. He says he's not sure if he wants to take that step [of getting so close to the Republican Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani], since it's a little scary, but this is the kind of recognition the organization is getting now. (Author's field notes, November 4, 1999)

The reward for engaging in these three types of work in electoral politics is that they produce a steady flow of government contracts to LCS. During the fieldwork period, LCS received millions of dollars in contract revenues for a wide variety of projects. These included the organization's third federally funded Section 202 supportive housing building for senior citizens. Most neighborhoods are lucky to win one of these highly competitive contracts, but LCS opened its third such building in 1997. In 2000, LCS won an extremely unusual, \$26 million contract to build and operate a 216-bed nursing home in Lindale. This contract was facilitated by Governor Pataki, who allowed it to be funded through the New York State Dormitory Authority. Also in 2000, LCS won a new contract to operate its own legal assistance program for low-income individuals needing help with civil cases. These three important new contracts were in addition to the ongoing contracts that fund over 90 percent of LCS's regular \$7 million budget.

Although my focus has been on explicating a model of the social provision work of CBOs, it is important to ask why only LCS, among the present study's eight CBOs, practices electoral politics as part of its social provision strategy. A combination of individual-, organization-, and neighborhood-level factors are required to explain this, and a full discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. At the individual level, the amount of interest in, and ideological orientation toward, politics among CBO leadership, staff, and clients is critical. So, for example, LCS leaders have shaped strong interest in and acceptance of political activity among both staff

and clients through the organization's political education work, described above. Almost no efforts of this nature—particularly around the specific issue of the relationship between voting and winning contracts—is found at any of the other seven study organizations. However, LCS's electoral efforts are limited to influencing contract allocation decisions; the organization has minimal interest in creating policy change.<sup>23</sup>

At the organizational level, both political history and primary service type affect CBO participation in electoral politics. *El Vecindario*, for example, very nearly collapsed as an organization in the 1980s after one of its founders was elected to the City Council and subsequently was convicted for taking bribes. This experience created a kind of political path-dependency for *El Vecindario*, such that it assiduously avoids *organizational* involvement in electoral politics, even though some of its staff are independently involved in a variety of political causes. The Eckerton Beacon also avoids electoral politics, but for a very different organizational reason. Beacon programs provide youth and family support services via set contracts from the city government; there is no additional public support available, and therefore electoral organizing provides no benefit.

Finally, there are neighborhood-level factors affecting CBO involvement with electoral politics. Given that politics is a district-level game in New York, the structure of local political opportunity has an important effect. As discussed earlier, actors at higher levels of the wider political environment (see Figure 3) seek to identify and pull together reliable, identifiable voting constituencies from the lower levels of the system. It is more efficient for the higher levels of the system to have clear winners within lower-level districts, as this makes the identification and organization of multiple, discrete, lower-level constituencies easier. LCS has become the clear winner in this competition within the study area. One important result of LCS's preeminence, however, is that it leaves very limited opportunities for the wider set of CBOs in the area to gain from becoming

<sup>23</sup> This is an important distinction between the machine politics CBO and social movement organizations, which generally focus on policy issues.

involved in electoral politics. Thus, the other CBOs in the study are structurally limited in the electoral politics activity arena. This pattern of one politically dominant CBO emerging in low-income neighborhoods with larger CBO populations can be observed in other areas of New York City as well.<sup>24</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) are key players in an expanding arena of public social provision: privately delivered, direct services to the poor. Devolution has actually *decreased* the total public dollars being spent on these services (Conlan 1998), but privatization has rapidly *increased* the amounts being funneled through government service contracts to CBOs (Johns Hopkins Nonprofit Sector Project 2000; Salamon 1995). Together, these two recent national policy shifts have greatly altered the face of social provision to the poor. Current sociological theories of public social provision focus on income support and, thus, they miss out on this important component of the social benefit package. More and more, the well-being of our poorest citizens depends on state- and local-level decisions about how to allocate public service contracts. These decisions greatly impact the street-level availability of key supportive services like housing, job training, childcare, and so on.

CBOs provide material resources, build local social ties, and offer other kinds of assistance to residents of poor urban neighborhoods. At the same time, however, decisions about how to *allocate the resources* that fund those services (i.e., service contracts) remain a function of government. Those governmental decisions, as always, are affected by political concerns. The model of economic and political exchanges within which nonprofit CBOs are embedded, presented in Figure 3, illustrates the mechanisms by which CBOs can implement a strategy for influencing governmental decisions about the allocation of service contracts. Importantly, however, many CBOs do *not* engage this strat-

egy. Instead, like seven of the eight CBOs in the present study, they remain within the two more traditional CBO activity arenas: service provision and community building.

These CBOs focus on practices internal to the communities in which they operate. They do not orient their actions substantially toward a critical external institution that has significant control over their ability to perform their community-based activities—namely, the broader political processes that impact government contracting decisions. Ethnographic studies that examine only CBO service provision and community building work similarly overlook the importance of these organizations' engagement with institutions beyond the boundaries of their neighborhoods. The present study incorporates that broader perspective, linking highly local events to broader social, political, and institutional processes (see also Abu-Lughod et al. 1994; Duneier 2000; Gregory 1998; Rabrenovic 1996; Venkatesh 2000).

Internally focused CBOs fit the prevailing policy conception of how these organizations should operate: serving local residents and building community cohesion. A CBO that enters the arena of electoral politics, however, can be understood as opting into a key component of democratic decision-making: electing the representatives who make governmental choices, including decisions about how to distribute resources for public service provision. The foregoing discussion of LCS demonstrates that it is legally and practically possible for CBOs to add electoral politics work to the more traditional CBO activity arenas. Reciprocal service provision plus a community-building approach that seeks to create organizational adherents moves CBOs into the realm of electoral politics. This is where the triadic exchange among CBO, client/voters, and elected officials is realized, producing what is in essence a new version of machine politics.

The distinction between political machines and machine politics (Sayre and Kaufman 1960) is important here. Political parties created political machines by exerting strict discipline over their component parts throughout the polity (e.g., city, state). Indeed, the very notion of a political *machine* is that it aggregates the work of otherwise independent organizations for the benefit of a larger entity. As the data presented here show, however, LCS currently only prac-

<sup>24</sup> Newspaper accounts and my own observations show the existence of several other New York City CBOs that are in a similar position vis-a-vis other local CBOs and the wider political environment.

tices the *exchange function* of machine politics. LCS uses the resultant political power to its advantage only within a limited geographic space (i.e., its immediate neighborhood). There is no effort to link LCS's nonprofit-political operation to similar units of organization across the polity (e.g., city or state) to control larger processes. The potential for CBOs to attempt such an approach certainly exists, but empirical evidence shows no such activity at this time.

Service-only CBOs aim simply to replace government's service provision function and hopefully to improve service quality. CBOs that engage in both service provision and community-building work represent the prevailing policy vision for how these organizations should operate (e.g., Chaskin 2001; Leavitt and Saegert 1990; Saegert et al. 2001). This CBO model meets the material needs of residents of poor neighborhoods and also encourages greater collective activity within neighborhoods. Indeed, CBOs of this type often are understood as a great hope for revitalizing democracy through communitarian practice (e.g., Putnam 2000; Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Warren 2001). This type of CBO, however, may have trouble parlaying residents' diffuse "sense of community" into influence over material resource inputs. So, for example, El Vecindario has seen its share of government contracts fall over the years, and the Eckerton Beacon places much of its fundraising emphasis on private sources, which respond to its success at community building but ultimately have much less money available than the government. CBOs that organize local residents without an eye toward electoral politics often have fewer resources with which to address material needs. This is particularly true when CBOs of this type are located in areas where they must compete with a local CBO that practices machine politics.

The machine politics CBO represents a *particular* kind of political enfranchisement for the poor. Client/voters who participate in this type of organization have partially demystified the processes by which government allocates public resources and can claim to be part of an ongoing, albeit highly localized, political pressure group. Service-provision-only CBOs contribute no such political education or involvement. CBOs that organize local residents as community participants represent an alternative approach to creating a political voice

among the poor (e.g., Ferman 1996; Goetz 1993; Jones-Correa 2001; Purcell 2002). Should this type of CBO consistently prove less adept at meeting the social provision needs and preferences of the poor than the machine politics CBO, however, we should expect to see fewer of the former type of organization. In other words, just as the political machine did, the machine politics CBO likely will suppress programmatic innovation and political contention in poor neighborhoods, though very possibly in exchange for tangible benefits for its constituents.

The discussion of the machine politics CBO illustrates that informal organizational means of controlling public resource allocations continue to exist in cities, despite the advent of civil service reform, program proposal merit ratings, and other bureaucratic procedures designed to eliminate particularistic treatment. In the case of CBO contracts, it is the larger policy shifts of privatization and devolution that have provided an institutional opening for exercising political influence over service contract allocation decisions. Social provision policy continues to change in the United States; witness such developments as time-limited welfare benefits, talk of privatizing Social Security, public education vouchers, expanded government-sponsored health insurance, and so on. In this political climate, sociologists need to pay more attention to the state- and local-level processes that shape citizens' access to service-based social provision.

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