

The class, race and age of activists in Brazilian social movements is becoming more diverse

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By Democratic Audit UK

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*Social movements have become increasingly important form of participation in democracy, beyond the traditional means of joining political parties and fighting elections. This is evident in Brazil, where large street protests on a number of issues have featured people from a range of backgrounds. In this audio interview, **Cheryl Brumley** spoke to **Marília Pontes Esposito** and **Raquel Sousa** of the University of São Paulo to discover more about the trend.*



A demonstrator on a SlutWalk protest in Brazil. Credit: [William Droops](#) (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

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Democratisation took place in Brazil in 1985, after more than two decades of military dictatorship. It is clear this period still [casts a shadow](#) over Brazilian society, although we have also seen vociferous social movements emerging across the country as people take advantage of, and seek to strengthen, their democratic rights. The current President [Dilma Rousseff](#) was herself involved with guerilla groups fighting the military government in the

1960s and 1970s.

Tensions have been played out on the streets of Brazil's cities, including in the widespread [rioting](#) since 2013. [Protests began](#) in response to public transport fare increases, but have drawn in other issues including police brutality and the costs of staging both the 2014 football world cup and the 2016 Olympic Games.

In this interview, Marilia Pontes Esposito and Raquel Sousa explore the role and composition of social movements in Brazil. They suggest that the participants have changed since democratisation, with younger and poorer people more likely to take part, as well as the highly-educated middle class. Social movements have not necessarily supplanted political parties in the democratic process, but do allow people to participate differently.

For instance, some movements have an expressive dimension rather than specific political demands, such as the [SlutWalk](#) marches. The structure of social movements also differs from traditional political groups, with a move away from hierarchy toward horizontal organisation, with flexible leaderships.

Marilia Pontes Esposito is a Professor of the Sociology of Education and Raquel Sousa a doctoral candidate at the University of São Paulo.

[Download the edited transcript of this interview here.](#)



*The **LSE Review of Books** has launched a three-part podcast series on LSE's research impact in Brazil. Cheryl Brumley travelled to Rio and São Paulo at the end of last year to speak to academics and policymakers in the country about research on topics ranging from favelas, city transformations, and leftist politics. Catch the latest episode below, or [listen to all episodes here](#).*

Episode 2: Favela Life: From Drug Gangs to Drum Beats

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Featuring Sandra Jovchelovitch, Jacqueline Priego-Hernandez, Paul Heritage, Silvia Ramos, Celso Athayde and others.

Produced by Cheryl Brumley. Contributors: Marilia Pontes Esposito, Raquel Sousa. Voiceovers done by: Cheryl Brumley and Amy Mollett. Music: Podington Bear (Daydream Heartbeat) via the Free Music Archive. Text introduction by [Richard Berry](#).

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