Politics for the People:
Political Legitimacy in Peru’s Informal Housing Settlements

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Abstract: This research examines whether the neighborhood organizations that govern Peru’s informal housing settlements should be considered politically legitimate governing entities with a limited right to make and enforce laws. By utilizing Allen Buchanan’s justice-based theory of political legitimacy, this paper establishes the baseline criteria for legally recognizing informal, non-state governing institutions. It then applies these criteria to Peru’s neighborhood organizations through an extensive literature review, and interviews with local leaders. The goal is to create a theoretical foundation for grassroots development policy that can be modeled on examples of successful informal housing settlements in Peru.
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“There, a great city for the poor would be built, a ‘model city’ that would be called Villa El Salvador.” – Cecilia Blondet (1991)

PART ONE: The Urban Millennium

In 2008, the world entered a new era of urban development. Propelled by internal migration in the global south, the world’s urban population surpassed 50% of total population for the first time in human history (U.N. Habitat, 2015, p. 1). The world’s urban population continues to grow at a rate of 78 million people per year, supporting projections that the world’s urban population will reach 66% of total population by 2050 (p. 1). At first glance, it may be assumed that rapid urbanization will produce cataclysmic consequences; however, when properly managed, urban population growth gives us strong reasons for optimism. Cities are proven drivers of innovation, and economic growth, accounting for nearly 70% of the world’s GDP (p. 1). Beyond their economic and technological benefits, cities offer a clear ‘urban advantage’ to the people. This urban advantage includes easier access to employment, healthcare, transportation, utilities and services (Meyer, 2013, pp. 146-147). Altogether, cities are safer, cleaner, and more economically active than rural areas. Given that a majority of the world’s population now relies on the advantages offered by cities, we can truly claim to have entered the ‘urban millennium.’

We have entered a new millennium, yet our development policies have not adapted to changing circumstances. Neoliberalism and globalization have concentrated urban advantages in wealthy neighborhoods, leaving millions of people in urban poverty. In this paper, I will depart from traditional top-down approaches to urban development in order to advocate a unique grassroots way to protect the human rights of the urban poor. Unlike previous work on informal
housing settlements, I do not concern myself with categorizing these movements or evaluating their success (such a goal has already been brilliantly achieved by authors in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and political science). Instead, my project is philosophical in nature, drawing on empirical geographic research, and existing political theory to determine the political norms that would best provide for the just rights, dignity, and just treatment of the urban poor. For this project, I will draw on an extensive literature review, as well as interviews with local leaders, informal settlers, and government workers in the cities of Arequipa, and Lima, Peru.¹

My approach is unique in that it will utilize Allen Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy to argue that Peru’s neighborhood organizations may be considered politically legitimate governing entities. From here, I will proceed to discuss the implications of granting political legitimacy to neighborhood organizations, and where to apply further research on their relationship to the state. The result will be a theory of urban development that explores the normative function of neighborhood organizations, and offers pragmatic solutions to urban poverty.

Before we can proceed with a normative evaluation of Peru’s neighborhood organizations, it is important to know the challenges presented by urbanization in the developing world, and current solutions that have been proposed to combat them. In the next section, ‘Urban Challenges,’ I will begin by offering a brief overview of the current problems arising from urban immigration. In the section titled ‘Land Invasions in Peru,’ I will go on to outline the historical development of land invasions as a grassroots solution to inadequate housing. Finally, in ‘Land Invasions in Development Policy’ and ‘New Millennium, Persistent Challenges,’ I will evaluate

¹ Due to the political nature of this research, interview participants have been guaranteed anonymous participation. A reference to interview citations can be found in the “Fieldwork Notes” section at the end of this paper.
current urban housing policies, so that we can continue with our goal of presenting a new framework for development of the world’s informal housing settlements.

_Urban Challenges_

There is no question that urban immigration has rapidly expanded across the developing world, placing a strain on institutional resources, and exacerbating existing inequalities. Migrants, who are often fleeing economic, environmental, and political instability, arrive in cities with limited resources (U.N. Habitat, 2007). They face discrimination from existing urban classes, and find themselves with little economic security. Government institutions have had difficulty providing for the basic human rights of new migrants, creating an ‘urban divide’ in cities that heavily advantage a small, wealthy elite (U.N. Habitat, 2008, p. VIII). Take for instance, prices for piped water. Due to improper management, and inadequate infrastructure, the urban poor pay “up to 50 times” more for water than upper income groups (U.N. Habitat, Water & Sanitation, 2015). Energy provision presents a similar problem. Even though it is often cheaper, and safer than using combustible fuels, the upfront cost for electricity hookups can be prohibitively expensive for poor families (Fig 1.1). This encourages extralegal electricity hookups, where families pay to tap into their neighbor’s existing electricity connection. Though families using extralegal hookups pay for their electricity, it often
costs them 60% more per month than metered users (GNESD, 2008, p. 13). Extralegal connections also prevent “the establishment of sound electricity sectors,” dissuading electricity providers from expanding service into peri-urban areas (p. 13) (UK Aid, 1999).

Nowhere is the urban divide more prevalent than in access to land and housing. Globalization and neoliberal trade policies have allowed foreign capital to flow freely into developing countries, altering the way cities are spatially constructed. Real estate investment has turned central city districts into commercial areas, surrounded by high-income residential neighborhoods (Mathur, 2005, p. 53). Meanwhile, on the outskirts, land speculators buy up land in anticipation of further urban growth. Land is then sold to desperate migrants for premium prices with no guarantee of future access to basic services (Davis, 2006, pp. 82-89). As the inner city becomes more developed, the poor are pushed further onto the periphery, where serviceable land is often scarce. Paradoxically, as more wealth begins to pour into cities, less support is given to provide housing for the urban poor (Godfrey & Hays-Mitchell, 2011, pp. 141-143). Municipal taxes are often lowered in order to incentivize foreign investment, limiting funds for improved housing projects; while liberalized housing policies leave the poor with no other option other than to continue paying developers outrageous prices for unserviceable land on the city’s periphery (Davis, pp. 68-69, 94).

It is important to note that globalization does, to some extent, benefit the urban poor. Influxes of wealth and development create employment opportunities for the least advantaged; however, these opportunities rarely improve access to adequate housing. Of the employment opportunities created by globalization and neoliberal economic restructuring, informal occupations that fall outside of government regulation, census, and social protection have flourished the most (Hays-Mitchell, 2006, p. 255). Informal occupations include contracted
laborers, street vendors, and house-hold workshops, where wages and employment are neither consistent, nor protected (p. 255) (Fig 1.2). The International Labour Organization estimates that informal employment now accounts for about half of total global employment (2015, p. 13). Developing regions are particularly dependent on informal economic sectors. Informal occupations account for nearly 80% of all employment in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, 50% of all employment in Pacific and Southeast Asia, and 35% of all employment in Latin America and the Caribbean (pp. 13, 29). While an expanding informal economy has created more employment opportunities for the urban poor, it has not improved wages. Not only do informal wage employees earn anywhere from 43% – 65% less than formal wage employees, but their wages continue to decrease, leading to greater income inequality across the developing world (pp. 41, 43, 53).

The prevalence of the informal economy, coupled with depressed wages, has a direct impact on access to adequate housing. Urban migrants who lack a formalized address, and work in the informal economy are often not accounted for by government census. For all intents and purposes, they do not exist. In many countries, lack of an address and official government identification make it extremely difficult to access any government assistance (Lalwani, 2012, p. 81). Not to mention, lack of official identification and a consistent, reported income limits the ability of urban migrants to take out loans, mortgage property, and even take part in official property transactions (p. 81). Even if urban migrants obtain proper identification and formal
wage employment, the initial costs of property ownership are expensive. In some parts of the world, property taxes and safety inspections are added onto the cost of owning a home, making it extremely difficult for the urban poor to own their own property. Therefore, it becomes clear that while globalization and market liberalization have done much to benefit the global formal economy, it has in many cases impeded the ability of the urban poor to realize their rights to adequate housing and basic services.

The History of Land Invasions in Peru

Despite new growth in the world’s cities, grassroots strategies for combating urban injustices have existed for decades. Since the 1950’s, urban migrants in Latin America have organized ‘land invasions,’ in which settlers takeover and occupy undeveloped public and/or private lands. Informal houses, constructed of inexpensive, readily available materials, are then built on the occupied land. It is now estimated that informal housing makes up anywhere between 30% and 70% of all housing across the developing world (U.N. Habitat, 2007, p. 9).

While informal housing solves immediate needs for shelter, it is not without problems. The most obvious problem faced by informal housing settlements is lack of land ownership. Without access to land, many settlers live in a state of constant insecurity. They can be evicted from their homes at any time. Eviction crews bulldoze property indiscriminately, destroying homes and possessions alike. If settlers attempt to resist, they can be met with violence from police or privately hired thugs. Even if eviction is avoided, lack of land ownership can have other negative effects. Settlers who do not own their land are less likely to improve their homes because they do not retain the value of their investment (Soto, 2015, pp. 195-196). This makes informal houses

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2 I use the term informal housing to refer specifically to housing that is self-built, typically with easily available materials, but always without the initial consent of city planning officials. I differentiate this from the term ‘slum,’ which I will use sparingly to refer to poor housing conditions as described by the United Nations.
extremely susceptible to natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and monsoons (Godfrey & Hays-Mitchell, 2011, p. 179). Informal housing settlements also face problems receiving basic services. Unlike in the developed world, where homes are built on top of already serviced subdivisions and then sold to buyers, informal houses are built before the land can be surveyed for service infrastructure. This means that neighborhoods often go for long periods of time without basic services, leading to higher rates of poverty and disease. Unless these problems can be reliably solved, the U.N. estimates that the number of people living in ‘slum’ conditions is expected to increase to 889 million by 2020 (U.N. Habitat, 2008)\(^3\).

Nowhere have land invasions gained wider support and success than in Peru. Land invasions established themselves as part of the national identity during the political crisis of 1968-1975, in which leftist General Juan Velasco Alvarado overthrew the democratically elected President, Fernando Belaúnde Terry (Dosh, Demanding the Land: Urban Popular Movements in Peru and Ecuador, 1990-2005, 2010, p. 4). At a time when conservative, pro-business military leaders were the norm in Latin America, General Velasco promised to oversee a new era of state-sponsored capitalism, directed to the benefit of the least advantaged. Oddly enough, Velasco’s biggest contribution to the development of urban land invasions had nothing to do with cities at all. On June 24\(^{th}\), 1969, Velasco announced the most extensive land reform in Peruvian history (Velasco, 1969). This reform aimed to break-up large scale agricultural properties, giving ownership of the land to workers cooperatives. In his announcement speech, Velasco emphasized a new national perspective on property rights. Rather than an unalienable right given to those lucky enough to afford or obtain it, property was to be seen as a “social function in a new system

\(^3\) The United Nations characterizes ‘slums’ by the following five criteria: 1. inadequate access to sanitation and infrastructure, 2. poor structural quality of housing, 3. overcrowding, 4. insecure residential status.
of justice,” making property ownership that did not serve the function of justice, in a sense, invalid (Alvarado, 1969, p. 282).

In hindsight, Velasco’s project may have proved to be too ambitious. Many poor farmers found themselves without the knowledge, expertise, or capital to manage the land they had been given. Unable to work their new land, farmers flocked to the cities in search of new opportunities. This period of mass migration set the stage for one of the world’s largest, and most influential land invasions, Villa El Salvador. On April 27th, 1971, two hundred poor, landless families occupied state-owned land in Pamplona, eight miles south of the capital, Lima (Blondet, 1991, p. 287). The invasion took days of careful planning. In what would become prototypical for future land invasions, duties and responsibilities were handed out to local leaders before the invasion. Leaders were to negotiate with the state, assume security roles, and maintain the organization of the community. What they had not planned on, however, was that the invasion would grow by hundreds of families in only a few days, making it into one of the largest land invasions in modern history. After violent clashes with police and pressure from both the international community and the Catholic Church, the government eventually gave in to the demands of the settlers. On May 14th, the Velasco government announced that it would uphold its commitments to the landless poor, relocating the 2,300 families to the Lurin Valley, a few miles further south of Pamplona (Blondet, 1991, p. 291). There, the government, led by the newly established National System of Social Mobilization (SINAMOS), began to work with community leaders to establish a successful low-income residential neighborhood named Villa El Salvador.
Now, Villa El Salvador is a fully recognized municipal district with an official population of over 402,000 inhabitants, making it one of the largest informal housing settlements in Latin America (Fig. 1.3) (Alcazar & Adrade, 2010, p. 189). It also remains one of the most politically active districts in Peru, boasting a thriving civil society, and high rates of political participation. The history of Villa El Salvador and the Velasco government has undoubtedly influenced the growth of Peru’s informal housing settlements. It is now estimated that over 80% of all homes in Lima are self-built (Cockburn, Romero, Lucci, & Lenhardt, 2015, p. 4). The success of Villa El Salvador has encouraged the establishment of strong invasion organizations that can seamlessly transition into new roles as neighborhood organizations. In the absence of ‘formal government,’ neighborhood organizations take on a variety of functions, providing water trucks, security, electricity, building materials, urban planning, and even local justice systems (Dosh, 2010, pp. 5, 21) (Ardito, 1997, p. 12). At the same time, they serve as interlocutors between the state, NGOs and private service providers, taking part in the urban planning process and negotiating for needed services (Wheeler, 2009, p. 103). Municipally recognized neighborhood organizations can appeal for property ownership, piped water, sanitization, and paved roadways (Cockburn et al, 2015, p. 4).

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4 Neighborhood organizations can take on a variety of forms, roles, and functions. For this reason, I define a neighborhood organization as the primary political unit in charge of representing, and organizing an informal housing settlement.
Eventually the oldest informal housing settlements may develop into economically vibrant residential and commercial areas, complete with “mega shopping centers, health centers, recreation areas, gyms, schools, technical institutes, supermarkets, cinemas, and cultural centers” (Sakay, Sanoni, & Deng, 2011, p. 476). Far from their simple but proud beginnings as reed-matted houses, land invasions have thus firmly established themselves as important creators of economic and political opportunities in Peru.

**New Perspectives on Informal Housing**

As Peru’s first land invasions have developed, so has our perspective on their role in development policy. Land invasions are not always seen as dangerous and subversive activities, but are instead viewed as possible solutions to deficiencies in urban housing, infrastructure, and planning. Sakay, Sanoni, and Deng have argued that informal housing settlements provide the fastest, and cheapest way to solve the world’s housing crisis (2011, p. 476). They note that informal housing settlements utilize an ascendant system of urban development, in which land is developed based on available resources and the specific needs of community members. Outside real estate developers are replaced by councils, committees, and public forums, as a part of an inclusive neighborhood organization. Though this means informal housing settlements develop at a slower pace than formal neighborhoods, the process is less capital intensive, requires less government involvement, and is far more adaptable to economic shocks (2011, p. 476). Sarah Lund has argued that informal housing settlements develop in a unique ‘third space’ between the public and private sphere, creating a strong historical connection to the land (Lund, 2011, p. 36). New developments in the community are tied to specific historical events. For instance, an addition to the family might correspond with the building of a new room in the family house; while the establishment of piped water might be achieved with a large community protest
(Sakay, Sanoni, & Deng, 2011, p. 479). The result is a community that develops a strong historical identity, while honing important technical and political skills (Dosh, 2009, p. 90). Even without financial ownership, there are few people that invest more into their homes than residents in the world’s informal housing settlements.

Driven by this new scholarly perspective on informal housing settlements, concrete development policies have begun to emerge. Rather than demolishing slums, the United Nations has turned its focus towards improving living conditions in the world’s existing informal housing settlements. Efforts now aim to upgrade homes with safer building materials, acquire service infrastructure, and formalize land ownership, in order to lift communities out of dangerous slum conditions (U.N. Habitat, 2015, pp. 8-9). In doing so, the United Nations hopes that informal housing settlements might eventually integrate organically with existing urban infrastructure, providing urban advantages to previously isolated portions of the population. International efforts have been largely successful, as 227 million people have moved out of slum conditions between 2000 and 2010, putting the United Nations ten years ahead of its urban development goals (U.N. Habitat, 2008, p. X).

Peru has always been on the progressive end of international housing policy. Numerous government organizations have been founded to improve living conditions in the country’s informal housing settlements. The two most important organizations are the National Housing Fund (FONAVI) and the Commission for the Official Registration of Informal Property (COFOPRI). Established in 1979, FONAVI was originally intended to provide low-interest financing for middle-income families looking to upgrade their homes with sturdier building materials (Fernandez Maldonado & Brendenoord, 2010, p. 344). This purpose changed in the 1990’s, when President Fujimori directed FONAVI to begin providing building materials for
low-income families (BANMAT). While this new purpose more directly benefited the urban poor, Fujimori’s administration of FONAVI was wholly political and terribly mismanaged. As a result, it was folded into the renewed Ministry of Housing and the MIVIVIENDA fund in 2002, as part of the Toledo administration’s new housing initiative. Now, the fund serves to provide credit for home mortgages and families planning to move into social housing projects (p. 346).

Unlike FONAVI, COFOPRI still exists in its original role. Established in 1996 at the urging of Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto, COFOPRI was designed to provide land titles for informal settlers (p. 345). The commission has the power to award land titles to municipally recognized land invasions occupying public land. It can also negotiate the purchase of land titles for land invasions occupying on private land. The hope is that by formalizing property ownership, real estate markets will develop, driving economic growth, and strengthening formalized institutions. While COFOPRI has not managed to create this robust real-estate market, it has served to distribute over 1,797,836 land titles from March 1996 to February 2009, having a noticeable impact on the security of many families (p. 345).

**New Millennium, Persistent Challenges**

Altogether, Peru’s strong neighborhood organizations, coupled with help from the government and NGOs, have shown promising, if imperfect, success in solving the urban housing crisis. While only 41% of ‘slum dwellings’ had access to piped water in 2002, in only five years, this number increased to 63% (Cockburn, Romero, Lucci, & Lenhardt, 2015, p. 1). Electricity coverage similarly increased from 65% to 89% over the same amount of time (p. 1). Meanwhile, self-built homes across Peru are continually being reconstructed with more durable materials. Though these successes show the strength of the Peruvian housing model, we should be careful not to become too complacent. Accurate numbers on service provision are difficult to
obtain because census takers rely on formal addresses to gather data. Without official addresses, many informal homes don’t exist on any formal government record, leaving a significant percentage of the urban population unaccounted for (Interview 1). Further, as families grow, new homes are built in existing communities. These houses are extremely difficult to account for because they are often placed on small pieces of land in between already established buildings.

The Peruvian government’s market first approach to housing should give us reason for concern. While new government policies, such as the establishment of MIVIVIENDA and COFOPRI, aim to build thriving real estate markets and to increase the value of middle-income homes, they have done very little to address high demand for lower income housing. Peru’s housing deficit is currently estimated at 1.9 million units for a population of 30 million, an increase in demand of around 400,000 units since 2010 (fondo Mivivienda, 2014, p. 8) (Fernandez Maldonado & Brendenoord, 2010, p. 443). Market based approaches cannot solve this problem in isolation because they assume that access to land titles is the essential component to the success of informal housing settlements. This overlooks a glaring need for local political institutions that can oversee the creation of service infrastructure, security services, and legal protection. Land titles may provide greater economic security, but they offer little immediate benefit to the quality of human life, and the protection of human rights. Not to mention that, without adequate services and legal institutions, land titles will be of little financial value to informal settlers. As the urban population continues to increase, there is reason to believe that housing shortages will only grow worse. For every home that gets access to basic services, another self-built home will be constructed on the city’s periphery. This means that without substantial changes in policy, current efforts to improve housing conditions will not address the
root of the problem. From this, it is clear that more must be done to set up institutions that can advocate for and protect the rights of informal settlers.

Internationally, the United Nations faces a similar issue. International efforts to improve existing informal housing settlements have reduced the percentage of the developing world’s urban population living in slums from 39% in 2000 to 32% in 2010 (U.N. Habitat, 2008, p. XII). In absolute terms, however, the number of people living in slum conditions continues to increase by 6 million people per year (p. XII). As is the case in Peru, every time a house is improved with basic services, urban immigration ensures that at least one new home is built somewhere on the edge of the city. This has lead the United Nations’ housing branch, U.N. Habitat, to admit that current efforts to improve slum conditions are not sufficient to overcome demographic increases in urban population (p. XII).

Our exploration of the urban housing crisis, both its problems and solutions, has thus far shown notable deficiencies in the way development policy is carried out in the world’s cities. Every year, millions of people are left without rights to adequate housing, services, and security. While neighborhood organizations in countries like Peru show promise in combating urban poverty, current development policies fail to fully utilize the strengths of greater social mobilization. In the next section of this paper, I will promote a new foundation for urban development based on Allen Buchanan’s human rights approach to international law. Our new urban millennium might be fraught with challenges, but it’s from these challenges that new, powerful ways to protect basic human rights might emerge.
PART TWO: Political Legitimacy and Neighborhood Organizations

More than Civil Societies

Despite the importance of land invasions and neighborhood organizations in protecting and promoting the rights of the urban poor, very little work has been done to establish their normative role in urban development. Scholars continue to describe neighborhood organizations as ‘community based organizations’ that operate within ‘civil society.’ To aid in this definition, the World Health Organization notes that the common understanding of civil society has three general conditions: 1) It consists of non-state organizations 2) It is not for profit 3) Its members are volunteers (WHO, 2015). While this description does not appear immediately problematic, it carries with it some unfortunate normative assumptions. By this account, the role of civil society is to fill in the gap between government organizations and private businesses. They lobby governments, spread information, encourage participation, raise money, and start initiatives; however, they lack any real decision-making power, being always subject to the ultimate authority of the state.

We can easily understand the assumed differences between civil society and government in terms of political legitimacy. Political legitimacy is used to normatively denote any entity that is morally justified in wielding political power, “where to wield political power is to (make a credible) attempt to exercise supremacy, within a jurisdiction, in the making, application, and enforcement of laws” (Buchanan, 2004, p. 235). Here, we can see the importance of positive descriptions in establishing normative roles. The label civil society carries with it assumptions about what neighborhood organizations are permitted to do. Many terms operate in this way. For example, labeling someone a father not only refers to a man with a child, but entails a certain ‘fatherly’ role. By placing neighborhood organizations within civil society, we are not simply
denoting them as grassroots political organizations, but also implying that they should be limited to roles as narrowly focused, volunteer-based, interest groups. Since it is assumed that civil societies should be volunteer-based, we refrain from granting them political legitimacy, preventing them from coercing participation, or enforcing laws. Therefore, any neighborhood organization that attempts assert a right to self-govern is assumed to be overstepping its supposed role as a civil society.

The assumption that neighborhood organizations cannot be politically legitimate governing entities is problematic for two major reasons. The first is that it cedes all political power to state governments. Part of the reason we assume that neighborhood organizations cannot be anything more than civil societies (i.e. governments) is because we traditionally accept that states have a monopoly on political power within their borders. However, if we prevent neighborhood organizations from exercising political power, their only option is to petition government, meaning all development decisions must come from the top down (Fig. 2.1). As a result, those not fortunate enough to already be influential in government are left at the mercy of a few elite policymakers. While national governments can decentralize, this process is both time consuming, and rarely takes local factors into account. For this reason, local government is often designed from a national,
rather than local, perspective, causing politicians to misdiagnose local challenges and community needs (Diez, 2009, pp. 36-38). Even if regional and municipal officials fairly represent their locality, informal housing settlements are especially affected by bureaucratic states. Complex legal-political frameworks can make the costs of petitioning for property and basic services unnecessarily high (Bland & Chirinos, 2014, pp. 80-85). Without institutional methods that protect their rights, neighborhood organizations turn to un-institutional methods, such as protests, marches, and civil disobedience. When these methods become threatening or disruptive, violence between the state and the community can erupt (Bland & Chirinos, 2014, p. 85).

Altogether, maintaining the state as the sole source of power in development policy limits the development of informal housing settlements, and creates friction between the state and local organizations.

The second problem is that by denying neighborhood organizations possible roles as governing entities, we do a grave disservice to their value in the development process. Traditional civil societies usually limit their efforts to very specific social issues. They may represent a group of people, but usually only serve as their voice when it comes to a certain type of concern. A teachers union, for example, may represent teachers in a certain geographic area, but their concern is almost entirely with negotiating conditions of employment. Neighborhood organizations by contrast perform a wide variety of functions for the good of the community. They concern themselves with service provision, neighborhood infrastructure, security, informal adjudication, land distribution and a host of other functions that we typically attribute to governments; however, it is assumed that neighborhood organizations can never be justified in fulfilling a governing role unless they are established by the state (i.e. they are not considered politically legitimate). Therefore, decisions made by neighborhood organizations are not seen as
enforceable, or binding. Neighborhood organizations can represent settlers, but can never justifiably act for their interest through political action. The result is a normative evaluation of neighborhood organizations that “belittles the goals, organization, and function of these communities” (Bayat, 1997, p. 55).

If we want establish a foundation for urban development that takes the positive contributions of neighborhood organizations seriously, we must stop seeing them as civil societies, lacking in the justificatory use of political power. By changing our perspective on these important organizations, we might finally produce a bottom-up model for urban development that strengthens the political, economic, and social potential of the world’s informal housing settlements.

**Buchanan’s Theory of Political Legitimacy**

In Part One, we established the need for a new grassroots development model in the world’s informal housing settlements. At the start of Part Two, we discussed the lack of a robust normative evaluation of neighborhood organizations. With these two precepts in mind, we can begin to build a foundation for the claim that neighborhood organizations can (in some cases) be considered politically legitimate. Recall from the previous section the importance of this question. Political legitimacy will ultimately tell us whether or not neighborhood organizations are justified in wielding political power, and thus will determine what functions they should be permitted to have in the development process, making the question of political legitimacy essential in any grassroots development model.

To determine if neighborhood organizations can be considered politically legitimate, we must first find a theory of political legitimacy to apply to them. In this paper, I will proceed by using a theory of political legitimacy developed by philosopher Allen Buchanan in his book
I concede that any attempt to apply a particular theory of political legitimacy to real-world organizations will be controversial, given the rigorous debate this subject still garners in scholarly circles; however, if we refuse to adopt a theory simply for lack of a knock-out argument, then we will resign ourselves to political limbo, never able to progress in the face of greater challenges, and changing circumstance. The purpose of this paper is not to fully explain, or defend Buchanan’s theory of international law, but rather to expand its application to previously unexplored territories. While a rigorous defense of Buchanan’s theory will not be pursued here, in order to successfully apply it to neighborhood organizations, we must first give a brief overview of the theory, before arguing why it offers us the best way to normatively evaluate the role of neighborhood organizations in urban development.

Buchanan’s goal in *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations for International Law* is to establish a moral foundation for international law. Justice, he argues, should be the primary moral goal of the international system, and that all people are obligated by The Natural Duty of Justice “to help ensure that all persons have access to institutions, including legal institutions, that protect their basic rights” (Buchanan, 2004, p. 74). This obligation is based on the Moral Equality principle, which states that “all persons are entitled to equal respect and concern” (p. 87). In fact, the Moral Equality Principle is so morally intuitive, and so basic to the functioning of modern liberal democratic institutions that Buchanan does not even bother to argue against potential moral skeptics. The question then arises, if all persons are entitled to equal respect and concern, what most basically human beings are entitled to, simply by virtue of being ‘persons?’ Here, is where The Natural Duty of Justice’s concern for human rights comes into play.
According to Buchanan, “human rights are rights persons have simply by virtue of being persons” (2004, p. 97). They are the most basic foundations of human survival, dignity, and flourishing, the deprivation of which would be in gross violation of the Moral Equality Principle. These rights, listed by Buchanan and generally accepted by international law, include: (1) the right to life, (2) the right to security, (3) the right against torture, (4) the right against arbitrary arrest, detention, or imprisonment, (5) the right against enslavement or involuntary servitude, (6) the right to resources for subsistence, (7) the right to due process and equality before the law, (8) the right to freedom of expression, (9) the right to association, (10) the right against damaging persecution due to ethnicity, race, gender, or sexual preference (p. 131). Not only are these rights owed to all persons, they also provide “fundamental moral constraints on actions, policies, and institutional arrangements” (p. 90). If the chief aim of our political institutions is justice, then the protection of human rights must be instrumental in the character of our governing institutions. In this way, human rights form a practical and theoretical grounding for a moral theory of international law.

In order to achieve justice, it is necessary that certain entities wield political power to protect human rights and to promote vital human interests. To reiterate, wielding political power is the credible “attempt to exercise supremacy, within a jurisdiction, in the making, application, and enforcement of laws” (Buchanan, 2004, p. 235). The right to exercise political power is denoted by the term political legitimacy. When a particular entity is considered politically legitimate, it is considered justified in wielding political power. Buchanan argues that an entity is only justified in wielding political power “if it meets a minimal standard of justice” (p. 234). These minimal standards are “(1) that it does a credible job of protecting at least the most basic human rights of all those over whom it wields power, and (2) provides this protection through
processes, policies, and actions that themselves respect the most basic human rights” (p. 247). Therefore, if an entity does a credible job of protecting the rights listed above, and it does so in ways that do not violate human rights, then it may be considered politically legitimate.

There is one major question in this theory of political legitimacy: How do we determine who gets to wield political power in society? Indeed, it seems that the very idea that some people are privileged with political power, while others are not, seem to violate the Moral Equality Principle. Buchanan answers this question by resorting to democratic theory. Democracy recognizes the problematic nature of giving certain individuals power over others, and reconciles this by giving all individuals an equal say in who gets to exercise political power in society (Buchanan, 2004, p. 253). The result is a political system that takes the Moral Equality Principle seriously by giving everyone an equal say in government. Further, democracy is important because it gives us strong reason to comply with laws. This is because in democracy “each citizen’s recognition of the equality of all citizens supplies a reason for compliance with the laws” (p. 253). In democracy, citizens are not obligated to obey the government because of its political authority, but rather, they have a moral obligation to respect the decisions of persons in our democratic community – so long as those decisions are just. For these reasons, Buchanan adds a third conditional criterion to our theory of political legitimacy (3) “where institutional resources exist for democratic authorization of a government… they must be utilized,” meaning that, if an institution has the resources to be democratic without seriously threatening its ability to achieve justice, it must do so (p. 254).

**Accepting the Theory: Three Reasons**

Now that we have summarized Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy, it is important to consider why this theory best serves to normatively evaluate the role of neighborhood
organizations in development policy. I will save any rigorous defense of Buchanan’s claims for more focused philosophical discussion on the nature of political legitimacy. Instead, I intend to prove why this theory best serves the purpose of development policy, even if it does not garner widespread theoretical consensus (if such a thing is ever possible). My argument here will follow from three wholly independent claims: (1) the widespread use of human rights discourse in current international development policy, (2) the general acceptance of moral concerns in scholarly literature, (3) the importance of unpacking state sovereignty in development policy. From these three claims, we can assert the usefulness of Buchanan’s theory over others in our evaluation of neighborhood organizations.

Our first thoughts on development inevitably lend way to ideas about increased economic growth, industry, wealth, and technology; however, this hides the fact that our international institutions are increasingly concerned, not just with economic development, but with human development, or more specifically, human well-being. Guided by the United Nation’s Declaration on Human Rights, U.N. development subsidiaries concern themselves more with human rights than economic growth. In fact, the United Nation’s Development Programme takes a ‘Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)’ to development that aims to ensure that all of its actions “further the realization of human rights” (UNDP, 2012, p. 3) This can be seen more specifically in U.N. organizations that deal directly with informal housing settlements. The United Nation’s population division, which issues the “World Urbanization Prospects,” emphasizes the need for urban advantages to be distributed evenly, while ensuring healthy living conditions in the world’s cities (U.N., 2014, pp. 17-18). Similarly, U.N. Habitat, the United Nation’s development programme for the world’s informal housing settlements, concerns itself with access to adequate housing for the world’s urban poor, not for the sake of a healthy real
estate market or improved land value, but for the protection of human rights, including rights to housing, sanitation, improved water sources, and security. Other international institutions also take a rights-based approach to their development operations. Even the World Bank, which is frequently criticized for being too economically minded, and whose own “Articles of Agreement” prevent it from engaging in human rights discourse, set its goals directly on human development measures, which once again include things like access to sanitation, water, and shelter (Alston, 2014). The case gets even stronger when we look at non-governmental agencies which frequently work in informal housing settlements. With the exception of the odd think-tank, one finds that NGOs are intimately concerned with human rights and, if not with human rights, human well-being.

The prevalence of human rights/human development goals across international institutions is extremely important in the selection of a theory of political legitimacy because it gives us important clues about where the focus of our development policy truly lies. We can then develop norms that correspond with these development goals. We can see from our short analysis that human rights play a significant role in international development policy. As a theory that is primarily concerned with human rights, Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy serves the primary purpose of international institutions. If some neighborhood organizations prove to credibly protect the rights of their members, wouldn’t it further international development policy objectives to recognize their rights preserving functions as politically legitimate? Further, the widespread use of human rights discourse in international institutions improves the accessibility of Buchanan’s theory, making it easier for development programs to adopt his concern for political legitimacy, as it would not present a large departure from existing international norms.
Another reason Buchanan’s theory is appropriate for our normative evaluation of neighborhood organizations is the prevalence of moral concerns in scholarly literature. While theoretical debates on the nature of political legitimacy are possible in many fields, social scientists who work in/on the world’s informal housing settlements are deeply concerned with human rights and human well-being. This can be clearly seen in the shifting scholarly opinion on land invasions from subversive attacks on private and state institutions to beneficial urban movements. Current research, focused on improving human well-being in the face of urban challenges, is more than ever willing to explore the benefits of grassroots movements in achieving human development goals. Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy fits well within this scholarly shift in development policy. It focuses our evaluations of political institutions on how credibly they protect human rights, aiding scholars and policy makers in their quest for just institutions. At the same time, it could strengthen the claims of the people against governments that do not protect their rights, further encouraging greater political participation, social mobilization, and decentralization. While we will examine the potential benefits that evaluating neighborhood organizations on the basis of political legitimacy will bring later in this paper, it is clear that the goals of Buchanan’s theory are in-line with current views on the world’s informal housing settlements. To the extent that it can be proven to successfully promote human rights, human well-being, and just institutions, Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy has a place in the evaluation of the world’s neighborhood organizations.

The final reason Buchanan’s theory is well-suited for a normative evaluation of the world’s neighborhood organizations also happens to be one of its most controversial aspects. Unlike previous theories that see the state as the sole wielder of political power, Buchanan’s theory of legitimacy “unbundles” state sovereignty by making the sole requirement of political
legitimacy the protection of human rights, rather than the possession of statehood (Buchanan, 2004, p. 7). The result is that many different non-state institutions may be considered politically legitimate if they protect rights that the state fails to protect. This opens the state to a wide variety of internal political arrangements that may promote justice. The ability to ‘unbundle’ state sovereignty by tying its political power to human rights is immensely helpful in the context of urban development, which has seen top-down, outside capital infused efforts fail time and time again to improve living conditions in the developing world. Now, internal political units, such as neighborhood organizations, can be seen as legitimate routes of grassroots development, rather than representative institutions that are often severely weakened by state sovereignty. This will allow a “localization of efforts” to improve human rights, where resources and institutions can be specifically catered to local needs (p. 185). A further benefit is that allowing politically legitimate non-state entities undoubtedly creates greater political participation in underdeveloped areas. If people know that their locally created institutions not only represent them, but carry the legitimate force of law, then active political support is bound to follow. This meaningful political participation is itself seen as a human right by institutions such as the United Nations, and its promotion will, at the very least, increase the strength of local democracy. (UNDP, 2012, pp. 3-4). Decentralization can therefore begin to start from the bottom-up, rather than the top-down, occurring faster and being specifically aimed at the previously underrepresented groups.

The controversy presented by such a theory is easy to understand. International law has long been a state centered system. States are the primary actors in international law, which grants them certain privileges and rights, including a strong right to territorial integrity. To de-center state sovereignty therefore seems to threaten the existing international system. Such a radical upending might not be achievable, and worse, it could create conflict as states struggle to hold on
to their authority. Further, states are viewed as the primary actors in achieving justice. Though states can severely misuse power, there is no doubt that they also do significant work in the protection of human rights, both domestically and internationally. Therefore, it is possible that weakening states would cause more harm for the cause of justice than good.

Against this objection, I will argue two points on how Buchanan’s theory of legitimacy prevents these challenges from occurring. The first is that our unbundling of sovereignty ought not to be a significant threat to state power. Inequalities in urban development are very rarely caused by blatant disregard for human rights, and are increasingly caused by corrupt institutions, ineffective policy, and lack of resources, which in turn violate human rights. In this context, giving political power to neighborhood organizations should help the state achieve policy objectives, rather than take away existing power and resources from the state. One might argue that to give political power, which entails ‘supremacy’ in the making and application of laws, to neighborhood organizations would severely weaken state power in informal housing settlements; however, recall that political power only applies to supremacy “in a jurisdiction” (Buchanan, 2004, p. 235). While Buchanan’s focus on the political legitimacy of states generally uses jurisdiction to refer to territory, this does not necessarily have to be the case. It is possible to allow neighborhood organizations to exercise political power in a limited legal, as well as territorial jurisdiction. For example, it makes no sense to allow neighborhood organizations jurisdiction over ‘national security,’ since such laws are outside of the interest and role of neighborhood organizations; however, the ability to pass laws related to land and water usage within their community is less problematic for state sovereignty. As a result, neighborhood organizations would be limited to exercising political power only in instances of important local interest. This means that the ability of states to carry out their normal functions will not be
compromised because neighborhood organizations would simply fulfill human rights obligations that the state, often through no fault of its own, finds itself unable to fulfill.

This perspective on sovereignty is not entirely radical. Some theorists have noted that our existing constitutional democracies show how multi-layered sovereignty is possible (Pogge, 1992, pp. 59-60). The executive, judicial and legislative branches of government all have specific, limited powers within a system of checks and balances that prevents one branch from having complete control. Pogge notes that attempts of each branch to stretch the constitutional limits of their power places constitutional democracies in “permanent danger of constitutional crisis;” however, this danger simply teaches us that “crises need not be frequent or irresolvable” (p. 59). The key point is that almost every modern democracy has multilayered sovereignty with each government organization having a specific goal, a particular jurisdiction, and limited power. While neighborhood organizations are different because they are non-state actors, there is no reason that granting them the limited exercise of political power should drastically harm states, or cause conflict. If anything, new legal routes of achieving human rights should create more cooperation between the state and neighborhood organizations.

The second reason why Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy is not immediately harmful for states is that the theory maintains the primacy of states through a commitment to their territorial integrity. In discussing the right to secede, Buchanan notes that “an entity is not legitimate if it comes into being by displacing or destroying a legitimate state by a serious act of injustice” (2004, p. 264). This means that an entity cannot claim to be politically legitimate if it hopes to damage an existing state through acts of injustice. Buchanan further strengthens the claims of the state against contentious entities within its borders by claiming that entities only have a remedial right to secede, which means that secession can only be an option of last resort
against grave injustice (p. 351). These two components, if adopted into our application of political legitimacy, allay worries that recognizing neighborhood organizations as politically legitimate would create conflict. For instance, while informal housing settlements may be hotbeds for political dissention, as some sympathized with Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) insurgents in Peru, intentional participation in violent conflict would immediately revoke a neighborhood organization’s claim to politically legitimate, leaving it without support domestically or internationally. This would dissuade violence and encourage peaceful solutions to disagreements (p. 275). Further, by adopting a remedial right to secede, this theory would allay fears that large urban areas would break off from the state entirely, a concern in cities that might be composed of large minority populations. Considering that violent conflict can be utterly disastrous for human rights, the fact that ‘unbundling’ sovereignty would serve only to prevent conflict should be considered a success for this theory.

In this section, we have established that Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy should be used to evaluate the political legitimacy of neighborhood organizations for three main reasons: (1) the widespread use of human rights discourse in current international development policy, (2) the general acceptance of moral concerns in scholarly literature, (3) the importance of unpacking sovereignty in development policy. Therefore, even if Buchanan’s new moral foundation for international law does not manage to overcome theoretical challenges, his theory of political legitimacy will still offer clear advantages for development policy. While debate might continue over the ‘true’ nature and role of the international system, persons and organizations that are deeply involved in urban development should find that Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy works towards their interests when applied to neighborhood organizations,
a step-forward that might be achieved sooner than complete acceptance of Buchanan’s new
moral foundation for international law.

**Peru as a Case Study**

Now that we have a theory with good reason to be used in evaluating the political
legitimacy of neighborhood organizations, the only thing that remains is to apply the theory in
order to discover: (1) If neighborhood organizations can be considered politically legitimate, and
if they can, (2) what minimal requirements neighborhood organizations must fulfill to continue
to be considered politically legitimate. While it might be tempting to examine all of the world’s
neighborhood organizations, such a process is unrealistic due to the time and resources it would
consume. Instead, when applying Buchanan’s criteria to neighborhood organizations, it is useful
to apply them to organized, developed, and accepted neighborhood organizations. If these
organizations fail to meet the standards of political legitimacy, then it is an exercise in futility to
continue to apply it to other neighborhood organizations, but if they do manage to meet the
provided criteria, then they may serve as a model for the development of informal housing
settlements around the world.

For this purpose, Peru’s neighborhood organizations present a viable case study. As
explained in Section 1 of this paper, perhaps no county’s neighborhood organizations are more
important, nor better organized than Peru’s. As Paul Dosh notes, land invasions in Peru “have
become routine and institutionalized;” their informal housing settlements often experience
“vibrant neighborhood-level democracy” (2010, p. 7). With a long history of successful land
invasions to draw on, Peru’s neighborhood organizations have been able to establish successful
methods of governance and development that allow them to be “the sole neighborhood
governance structure through which residents channel all administrative matters” (p. 24) (Murakami, 2000, pp. 51-56). Meanwhile, the widespread acceptance of land invasions has given new neighborhood organizations the flexibility to experiment with innovative ways to secure their human rights (Dosh, 2010, pp. 147-148). The message here is clear. If Peru’s well-developed neighborhood organizations are unable to meet our criteria for political legitimacy, then it would appear that the theory is too strict to be applicable to neighborhood organizations, without some incredible increase in their resources and ability. Therefore, Peru’s neighborhood organizations will provide us with a litmus test for the political legitimacy of neighborhood organizations around the world.

**PART THREE: Political Legitimacy for Neighborhood Organizations in Peru**

The process for evaluating Peru’s neighborhood organizations is straightforward. We have to determine if they uphold the Natural Duty of Justice by credibly protecting the human rights of community members. Then we can evaluate if they can meet the just institutions and democracy components of Buchanan’s theory, before finally concluding on their normative position in urban development. This will not involve an in-depth study of particular neighborhood organizations, but rather, we will draw on geographic, sociological, and political research to examine Peru’s neighborhood organizations holistically. The goal is not to determine whether individual neighborhood organizations are politically legitimate, but rather if this theory would be applicable to neighborhood organizations as a whole. Different informal housing settlements will have context specific needs, ensuring that neighborhood organizations have different functions, but our ultimate goal is to see whether these functions are, as a whole, credibly human-rights-promoting. If Peru’s neighborhood organizations prove to generally take
on the essential roles of a politically legitimate governing entity, we are obligated to grant them political legitimacy.

Fulfilling the Natural Duty of Justice

In order to examine how important Peru’s neighborhood organizations are in providing for the human rights of their community, we must determine which rights they focus on protecting, and promoting. As we discussed earlier, it would be an unfair burden to expect neighborhood organizations to offer full protection of all human rights, as some rights fall outside the resources and concerns of neighborhood organizations. For example, it would be unnecessary for us to do an analysis of how neighborhood organizations protect human rights against torture because torture is usually carried out by states against political prisoners or to receive information related to national security, placing it outside of the development aims of neighborhood organizations. It is worth noting, however, that if a neighborhood organization were to torture people, then it would no longer be considered politically legitimate. The limited power and function of neighborhood organizations allows us to our analysis to three human rights categories: (1) subsistence, (2) security, and (3) legal equality, which will cover the human rights that are most important for neighborhood organizations to protect.

(1) Subsistence

There is no purpose more essential to neighborhood organizations than ensuring the survival of the community. From the moment a land invasion begins, material needs such as housing, water, and sanitation are primary concerns – without these basic services, disease, poverty, and high mortality will persist in any community. Neighborhood organizations form most basically out of these needs. They represent the pooling of community resources and leadership in order to ensure the basic survival not just of the community, but of individual
community members. For this reason, neighborhood organizations should play an essential role in protecting the human right to life and subsistence. If they accomplish little credibility in protecting these rights, then it is difficult to argue that they have any claim to political legitimacy.

The first concern of any neighborhood organization is housing. This is no different in Peru. While most immediate housing needs are taken care of from the start of the settlement, as individual families build temporary homes out of cardboard, scrap wood, and other materials, this does not mean that neighborhood organizations play no role in the acquisition of adequate housing. Their concern focuses around the improvement of building materials in order to improve the permanency of settlements. While most home improvement is done individually by families, neighborhood organizations often assist by organizing community construction crews to help in the improvement of homes (Interview 1). By treating labor as a shared resource, neighborhood organizations allow communities to be built faster, and more efficiently. Neighborhood organizations also must approve the expansion of existing homes or informal businesses, in order to ensure that future plans for service infrastructure (especially roadways) are not impaired (Interview 2). Finally, neighborhood organizations represent the community by working with NGOs to finance group building projects, or by petitioning government for building funds from the ministry of housing (Sahley & Danzinger, 1999, pp. 11, 82, 85). In many cases, NGO ‘slum’ upgrading projects cannot take place without neighborhood organizations, as NGOs will only provide financial/material assistance if settlements promise to provide the labor needed to complete building projects. As representatives of the settlement, neighborhood organizations are tasked with organizing these deals and ensuring that enough workers are available (Interview 4).
It is worth noting that the process and success of housing upgrades depends largely on the location of the informal housing settlements. The dry desert surrounding Lima makes building materials relatively scarce. The result is that, without external help, informal housing settlements develop more slowly. It also means that neighborhood organizations are more essential in acquiring outside building materials. In Peru’s third largest city, Arequipa, informal settlers have nearby access to upgraded building materials, due to a nearby volcanic white stone quarry (Fig. 3.1) (Chanfreau, 1988, p. 47). While this stone originally served to build Arequipa’s beautiful stone Plaza de Armas, it now provides cheap building material for Arequipa’s low income housing (Interview 6). This access to sturdier building materials means that individual families can upgrade homes more easily, lessening the responsibility of neighborhood organizations (Chanfreau, 1988, pp. 43-47). Neighborhood organizations play another important role, however, as the transport of heavy stone necessarily requires planned clearings for roadways. No matter the context, we have seen that neighborhood organizations in Peru are not as essential to housing conditions as individual families are, but they play an important role in organizing community resources towards the upgrading of homes. We should therefore consider it an important component of politically legitimate neighborhood organizations that they at least provide baseline assistance for families wishing to upgrade their homes with durable materials, as this is essential in promoting safety from environmental and human hazards.

Fig 3.1: This large volcanic stone quarry on the outskirts of Arequipa was originally utilized by Spanish colonizers to build Arequipa’s Plaza de Armas. Now, with Arequipa’s wealthier members electing to use concrete, it serves to provide building materials for the city’s lower income classes.
Another important service provided by neighborhood organizations is access to drinking water, without which no human community could survive for long. Lima is sometimes referred to as a city where it never rains, and with good reason. Lima averages less than 2 wet days a month for an average rainfall of less than 4 mm per year (BBC, 2011). The lack of natural water sources means that Lima’s informal housing settlements are entirely dependent on external sources for water. Local solutions are extremely important for the settlement’s early access to water because Peru’s national government is often unable or unwilling to provide for piped water immediately. Neighborhood organizations begin by collecting money to purchase water truck service. Though water trucks are easy to obtain, making their acquisition a simple test for political legitimacy, the water they provide can be full of dangerous diarrheal illnesses. In addition to safety concerns, water trucks are significantly more expensive than piped water. Therefore, neighborhood organizations are encouraged to continue the quest for piped water acquisition.

Peruvian neighborhood organizations have been known to achieve access to piped water through a variety of ways. Some methods are more reliant on the Peruvian government’s help than others, but all of them require the presence of a strong neighborhood organization. Dosh notes that in service acquisition, neighborhood organizations can pursue demands through rogue, militant, conformist, and bootstrap means (Dosh, 2010, p. 20). Rogue efforts involve the
extralegal acquisition of services, in this case, tapping into existing water pipes to steal water without permission or payment. Militant efforts involve marches, protests, or occasionally, violence to force the state into providing services. This is rarely successful in Lima, considering the national government (which owns SEDAPAL, the city’s water supplier) is much less responsive to militant demands than local government. Conformist efforts involve soliciting or buying water services from the state. This often involves clientelist behavior, such as pledging political support for a particular politician, or political party (Fig. 3.2). Finally, bootstrap efforts involve paying for the right to tap into another neighborhood’s water supply, or the building of a settlement’s own waterworks (p. 134) (Hordijk, 2011, p. 5). These efforts cannot be entirely autonomous, however, as the pipes must connect to viable water source, which, in Lima, is ultimately provided by the national government under SEDAPAL (Interview 5). The only difference is who gets paid for service, SEDAPAL, a neighboring settlement, or no one at all.

Whether the neighborhood organization uses more autonomous methods of acquisition (rogue, bootstrap) or externally dependent methods (militant, conformist), it is clear that neighborhood organizations utilize a variety of ways through which to realize their community’s human right to water.

I argue that the way that a neighborhood organization acquires water services is not important because granting a neighborhood organization political legitimacy will ultimately give it new, legal methods of accessing basic services. What is important for the purpose of this evaluation is the role that neighborhood organizations perform in providing access to water. When the state is unable to provide water to informal housing settlements, Peru’s neighborhood organizations attempt to obtain water through any means necessary. The easiest initial way is through water truck access. For this reason, I claim that in order for a neighborhood organization
to be considered political legitimate (in a settlement with a need for water), it must provide access to an unimproved water source, such as a water truck, or in other countries, a well, river, etc. Since unimproved sources still beleaguer the ultimate health of the community, this is not enough. Neighborhood organizations must show a credible effort to provide access to an improved water source. In this case, the success of the effort is not necessarily important because gaining access to improved water sources is difficult. Dosh notes that in his study of 20 land invasions in Peru and Ecuador, only 11 (55%) were able to gain access to piped water (Dosh, 2010, p. 207). A significant impediment is that local municipalities are required to approve the operation of water suppliers within their jurisdiction (Interview 5) (Aragon & Bonifaz, 2013, p. 10). This forces neighborhood organizations into clientelist relationships with local mayors, pledging political support in return for service access. What is essential is that neighborhood organizations make a credible effort to provide improved water access to their community. If they do this, they will be justified in having jurisdiction over their own water supply, allowing for greater legal success.

Unlike water, sanitation services are not immediately essential to the survival of the community. Most informal housing settlements begin with simple latrines, which they go on to use for a significant period of time. Despite not being an immediate need, the United Nations groups sanitation together with water as an essential human right. This, coupled with the importance of sanitation in preventing disease, make it worthy of note in our analysis of Peru’s neighborhood organizations.

Sanitation is different from water services in a variety of ways. While water can be received through direct supply, via water tanks, trucks, etc until the settlement becomes developed enough for piped water, sanitation service (usually) must be provided through piping.
This makes it very difficult to acquire sanitation service through autonomous means. It is not an easy feat to build a localized sewer system that can tap into existing piping in other neighborhoods (Dosh, 2010, p. 206). For this reason, neighborhood organizations usually use militant or conformist methods for achieving sanitation service; however, this does not mean that neighborhood organizations do not play an important role in sanitation acquisition, as they must negotiate with municipal leaders to gain access to the initial capital needed to build sewer works. This often involves working with NGOs to develop feasible sewer development plans, or encouraging local families to take advantage of public funds (p. 126). After all, if enough families cannot manage to pay the cost of sewer hookups, then the entire project may fall apart due to economic infeasibility. Neighborhood organizations may be reliant on external sources for sanitation, but the organizations themselves are extremely important to gain the external support needed to set up sewer systems. Without neighborhood organizations to apply political pressure, and show neighborhood commitment to the use and payment for services, sanitation service would rarely reach out to low-income communities.

Sanitation’s high cost and external dependence makes it difficult to use in evaluating a neighborhood organization’s political legitimacy. It is quite obvious that neighborhood organizations which achieve the difficult task of constructing their own sewer-works should have the ability to manage their own sanitation policy directly with suppliers; however, the role neighborhood organizations play in relation to externally dependent provision is more nuanced. Rather than provide for sanitation, neighborhood organizations increase the likelihood of service provision and enhance project feasibility. Since neighborhood organizations are so essential to sanitation provision for the poor, I think it is reasonable to say that their role in sanitation service strengthens the case that neighborhood organizations can be considered politically legitimate, but
sanitation service should not be considered a requirement for political legitimacy because its provision requires more resources than neighborhood organizations can typically provide on their own. This should not stop us, however, from morally obligating a politically legitimate neighborhood organization to provide for sanitation service when the opportunity arises.

We have now established that neighborhood organizations play a key role in providing for the survival of informal settlers, and their communities. Even when neighborhood organizations do not have the resources to provide services on their own, their relationship to both government and non-government entities allows them to provide for basic services where, normally, no services would ever reach. In closing, we should also note that while neighborhood organizations are not typically concerned with matters of economic subsistence (such as welfare programs), they are involved in a variety of other essential subsistence functions. Neighborhood organizations often support, or establish community kitchens (comedores populares), and “wasi-wasi” daycare services (Dosh, 2010, p. 48) (Aragon & Bonifaz, 2013, p. 4). While these services are generally run independently by local women’s organizations, neighborhood organizations have been known to provide services, zoning, construction labor, and starting capital for the establishment of community services (Interview 7). Altogether, we can say that neighborhood organizations are essential to the survival of Peru’s informal housing settlements.

(2) Security

When land invasions first began to organize on the outskirts of Lima, the central concern of neighborhood organizations was security. Rather than security from crime, settlers wanted security from police and hired thugs, attempting to evict them from the land (Blondet, 2005, p. 287). Neighborhood organizations would assign nightly watchmen, arm settlers with chains and wood bats, and hunker down for the potential eviction. In the past, this resulted in violent
conflicts between land invasions and the national police, as was the case in Villa El Salvador. Now that land invasions are widely accepted in Peru, the security role of neighborhood organizations has shifted away from eviction protection to protection from crime, traffic, and social disintegration (Interview 3) (Ploger, 2012, p. 213). It is interesting to note that stereotypes which claim that informal housing settlements are plagued by crime are not necessarily true, as community policing and a lack of valuable property dissuades would be burglars (Interview 1) (Dosh, 2007, p. 31) Community policing is very important to reductions in crime because Peru’s informal housing settlements experience a massive ‘security gap’ (Ploger, 2012, p. 216). Budget cuts in national police service have limited police coverage to wealthy tourist districts, leaving other municipalities to be entirely reliant on their self-funded, and self-organized “serenazgo” police units. Unfortunately, this means that only municipalities with a large enough tax base are able to fund adequate police coverage. As a result, Peru’s newest informal housing settlements are left with spotty, if not non-existent, security.

While crime is limited by lack of wealth, the threats to informal housing settlements can be worse than burglaries. Settlers need protection from serious threats, such as child traffickers, land speculators, and drug dealers, as well as, simple matters such as traffic incursion, and unregulated commercialization (Interview 1). Neighborhood organizations have been largely tasked with overseeing the community policing that keeps Peru’s informal housing settlements safe. One of the first steps neighborhood organizations take is to establish a neighborhood watch (Interview 4) (Ploger, 2012, p. 216). Neighborhood watches are assembled with volunteers, or if the neighborhood has enough money, private guardsmen. Watchmen are then equipped with cheap whistles that they can blow if the community is threatened (Interview 3). While this offers only a rudimentary form of protection, the threat of a quickly formed mob is enough to deter any
would-be criminal. As communities become more established, community policing begins to encompass the protection against new settlers, unwanted commercial enterprises, and excess traffic. As neighborhood organizations begin to focus on these issues, they develop a need for community fencing, complete with metal gates (Ploger, 2012, p. 222). These functions are so important that, even in cases where neighborhood organizations fall into disuse, fence maintenance and policing continue to be supported by community members.

The ability of neighborhood organizations in Peru to dissuade crime in their communities, despite an ever-growing security gap, is a strong testament to their ability to be politically legitimate governing entities (Interview 1). Providing protection for members is one of the principle signs of a politically legitimate governing institution, and neighborhood organizations can often achieve security protection better than local authorities. It is fairly easy to see what we should consider a credible protection of the human right to security in the case of neighborhood organizations. If a neighborhood organization can produce a reliable security plan, which may include basic security functions, such as volunteer guards, and if they manage to keep crime relatively low, then they may be considered politically legitimate. Further, neighborhood organizations that receive funding from, or form out of criminal organizations, as is the case in some of the world’s informal housing settlements, should not be considered politically legitimate. This encourages neighborhood organizations to continue on the path towards promoting the security of all their members.

(3) Legal Equality

There is no doubt that informal settlers lack equal access to legal institutions. As we established earlier, informal settlers lack formal employment, government identification, and a home address. This makes it difficult for them participate in government, receive benefits, and
utilize the judicial system (Interview 1). Access to these institutions is extremely important for social mobility because it gives settlers the chance to access capital that can be used to improve their homes, businesses, and neighborhood infrastructure. With such a glaring need for legal equity in Peru’s informal housing settlements, it would be reasonable to assume that, to be politically legitimate, neighborhood organizations would have to credibly work to achieve legal equality. After all, equality under the law is essential component of any morally justified government.

At the most basic level, Peru’s neighborhood organizations fulfill a need for equal representation in government. In their analysis of Peruvian decentralization efforts, Bland and Chirinos keenly point out that Peruvians don’t just want inclusion in decision-making; they want to engage with policy makers to ensure that their policies are effectively carried out (Bland & Chirinos, 2014, p. 82). Peruvian decentralization efforts lack penalties for authorities who mismanage participatory budgets, or refuse to hold accountability meetings, making it difficult for the state to hold local government accountable (p. 90). This makes grassroots organizations important for keeping local politicians focused on the interests of their constituents. Individually, an informal settler has little ability to affect major policy changes, but when settlers form a collective entity, they can disrupt local government through marches, protests, and recall elections. Further, neighborhood organizations are important because they produce public forums where settlers can voice their concerns and opinions (Interview 4). Throughout the local democratic process, participating settlers receive the chance to participate in local politics, gaining valuable political skills that may grant them to access new opportunities. Neighborhood organizations can then work to fulfill the interests of informal settlers who, because of their legal ‘invisibility,’ are not properly represented in local government.
Without wealth or formal status, settlers have difficulty getting legal help in solving disputes, invoking their rights, or gaining access to land titles. Neighborhood organizations help equalize access to legal institutions by acting as legal arbitrators for their members. The poverty and extra-legality of settlers prevents them from using formal institutions when disputes arise (Ardito, 1997, p. 12). As a result, settlers rely on neighborhood organizations to settle disputes among themselves, creating “a system of social norms, rights, duties and interpersonal obligations which deals with the basic demands for justice and security” (p. 12). Neighborhood organizations mimic formal legal structures by imposing fines or requiring compensation to offended parties (p. 15). Failure to adhere to these penalties could result in exclusion from the community, and consequently, the loss of important benefits provided by the neighborhood. The result is a community that can become even more concerned with moral principles and human rights than state-sponsored governments, as neighborhood organizations primarily focus on the community’s need for rehabilitation, and social harmony (p. 26).

Neighborhood organizations also provide important support for settlers’ land claims. From the settlement’s beginning, neighborhood organizations are responsible for dividing lots, and planning the neighborhood. Since the formal recognition of settlements, and consequently the acquisition of land titles, requires that neighborhoods are planned with roadways, civic buildings, and public areas, neighborhood organizations are intimately involved with the planning of the neighborhood and the resolution of land disputes (Fig. 3.3) (Ardito, 1997,
Neighborhood organizations also negotiate with government entities, such as COFOPRI to provide land titles for occupied land. These negotiations can involve the mediation and expertise of NGOs, which aid neighborhood organizations in urban planning. In cases where settlers occupy private land, neighborhood organizations can negotiate with COFOPRI, and private entities to establish a fair buying price (Dosh, 2010, pp. 76-77). Since prices are typically lower if the land is bought all together, rather than sold to individual settlers, neighborhood organizations are instrumental in the buying process. Without community organized negotiations, high ‘market’ prices can stall the purchase of land titles for decades. In more difficult legal struggles, neighborhood organizations sometimes hire lawyers to argue land claims, and invoke government action to protect the human rights of settlers (p. 155). Once land claims are established, neighborhood organizations perform important roles in formalizing the settlement. They ensure that roads are paved, addresses are provided, and settlers fill out the necessary paperwork to formalize themselves (Interview 4). For this reason, neighborhood organizations are extremely important to the eventual development of the settlement.

After examining how Peruvian neighborhood organizations promote legal equality for settlers, it becomes clear that they meet the burden of justice exceptionally well. In many cases,

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5 See Part One: Land Invasions in Development Policy for a more complete discussion of COFOPRI
neighborhood organizations are better at promoting justice than existing legal structures in Peru. They successfully allow settlers an equal say in government, an equal access to legal institutions, and equal access to land titles. The only question that remains is what should be considered a credible effort as far as achieving legal equality is concerned. I argue that it would not be an overly prohibitive burden to require neighborhood organizations to hold public forums, establish judicial arbitration systems, and set up a neighborhood development plan before they can be considered politically legitimate. This will ensure that neighborhood organizations are performing the basic functions necessary to achieve legal equality.

Conclusion

After analyzing three human rights categories that should be the central concern of neighborhood organizations, we can clearly see that they can fulfill all the roles necessary to be considered politically legitimate governing entities. At the end of each individual section, we were also able to extrapolate what actions/functions a credible adherence to justice would require. These requirements are not so difficult to achieve as to dissuade neighborhood organizations in Peru and around the world from organizing themselves in hopes of being considered political legitimate. While it is true that Peru’s neighborhood organizations sometimes need external help to achieve their objectives, this hardly negates claims to political legitimacy. After all, even politically legitimate states rely on international institutions and economic relationships with other countries to protect human rights. For this reason, we can say that neighborhood organizations have the ability to meet the first criteria of political legitimacy, doing a credible job at providing for the human rights of their members.
Democracy and Just Institutions

Before we can fully claim that Peru’s neighborhood organizations may be considered politically legitimate, we must also evaluate them based on the last two requirements of Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy, democracy and just institutions. Democracy is seen as an essential component of Peru’s neighborhood organizations. Since neighborhood organizations exist to allow informal settlers a voice in local decision-making, they are consciously established with democratic principles in mind (Ardito, 1997, p. 25). This does not mean that all neighborhood organizations share power equally. While most neighborhood organizations are “nominally democratic,” Dosh points out that they can be either power-concentrating or power-sharing (Dosh, 2010, p. 24). Neighborhood organizations can choose to have a few elected leaders making the decisions, or they can spread out decision making power through referendums, smaller city-block councils, and committees. At their core, both governing structures are democratic, relying on community participation to hold elected leaders accountable to the settlement’s interests. Leaders who are perceived as being corrupt, or who fail to perform their duties are quickly replaced. While leadership changes can destabilize a community, it ensures that leaders are directly responsible for their community’s needs. As one person pointed out to me in Arequipa, there may actually be more democracy in Peru’s neighborhoods than anywhere else in the country (Interview 7).

We can expect that given their democratic nature, and commitment to justice, neighborhood organizations would generally promote human rights through just institutions. It is true that community justice can get out of hand. In Bolivia, the decentralization of legal authority has led to several instances of mob violence (Human Rights Watch, 2015). We should not let these exceptions prove the rule; however, as mob violence in Bolivia is rarely endorsed, and
carried out by any representative political entity. Rather they form as instantaneous, unorganized responses to external threats. If anything, strong neighborhood organizations should prevent outbreaks of violence by monitoring their communities and promoting social harmony. In the past, neighborhood organizations have also been criticized for discriminating against women, but this is no longer the case (Ardito, 1997, p. 26). Women now actively participate in and lead neighborhood organizations (Interview 7). They also play important roles in the management of local soup kitchens, day care centers, community hospitals, and local businesses. Therefore, there is little evidence to support the claim that neighborhood organizations are inherently, or frequently unjust.

Though neighborhood organizations typically contain just, democratic institutions, this does not mean that these criteria should be ignored when evaluating their political legitimacy. We should constantly expect neighborhood organizations to meet baseline levels of democracy and justice in order to be considered politically legitimate. If anything, our analysis has revealed that democracy is an easily attainable goal for neighborhood organizations, and thus they should always be expected to be democratic before they can be considered politically legitimate. By tying political legitimacy to these two conditions, we will only encourage neighborhood organizations to continue developing thriving grassroots level democracy.

The Implications of Political Legitimacy in Peru

So far, we have established that Peru’s neighborhood organizations are not simply civil societies, but often meet the criteria of politically legitimate governing entities. Consequently, we are morally obligated, by our interest in justice, to recognize the justified use of political power in neighborhood organizations that meet these criteria. This means that the right of neighborhood organizations to create and enforce laws in their jurisdiction should be protected.
As a result, neighborhood organizations will have a pathway for ensuring their legality, and autonomy. The implications of this recognition could have significant benefits for human rights and urban development. In the next section, we will examine these implications.

Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy has important implications for the development of informal housing settlements because it provides a moral imperative to recognize neighborhood organizations. While systems of political recognition currently exist, these systems are based solely on political discretion. For instance, the Peruvian government gives district mayors the ability to grant neighborhood organizations status as ‘representative entities’ (Dosh, 2010, pp. 32-33). Once a neighborhood organization is recognized by the mayor, it is granted a right to exist that builds permanence and prevents eviction. Recognition is also important because, in most cases, it must be granted before neighborhood organizations can start dialogues with service providers, and local government (Interview 5). COFOPRI, the government’s land titling agency, usually requires the recognition of a neighborhood organization before it awards land titles, and many NGOs also require recognition before assisting neighborhood organizations with service provision. Without formal recognition, neighborhood organizations have no legal way to interact with the national and municipal authorities. This limits their ability to achieve policy objectives and may eventually result in underdeveloped or completely abandoned communities.

Unfortunately, Peru’s process of municipal recognition is insufficient because it is overly political, and does not recognize the right of neighborhood organizations to wield political power. Like the legitimacy of states in the current international system, municipal recognition in Peru “is viewed as a discretionary ‘political decision,’” rather than a legal obligation based on the principles of justice (Buchanan, 2004, p. 272) (Dosh, 2010, pp. 32-33). There are no
standards or restrictions that guide a mayor’s ability to grant legitimacy. For this reason, mayors often use their powers of recognition to establish clientelist relationships with neighborhood organizations, forcing them to support the mayor’s political ambitions in return for recognition. This limits the autonomy of the settlement in return for legality. Under this system, neighborhood organizations are seen as political resources, rather than politically legitimate entities. The human rights of settlers take a back seat to political opportunism, and settlers are further deprived of their ability to influence local government. It is a game settlers are often willing to play, however, as a lack of recognition could set back settlement development for years, and force them to participate in extralegal strategies for survival (Dosh, 2010, pp. 200-201).

A further problem with the municipal recognition system is that it does not grant the use of political power to neighborhood organizations. This effectively prevents neighborhood organizations from formally self-regulating. They are not formally allowed to manage their own service provision without municipal permission. Likewise, their statutes, laws, and regulations are seen as norms rather than binding laws; their neighborhood watch, vigilantes rather than local police; urban plans, guidelines rather than legal zoning. This severely limits the power and effectiveness of neighborhood organizations and makes them dependent on the government authorities they seek to distance themselves from (Bland & Chirinos, 2014, pp. 81-82). Without the power to establish and enforce law, neighborhood organizations will continue to have trouble achieving their human rights objectives. Dosh argues that informal housing settlements face a ‘security trap,’ in which neighborhood participation declines after settlers receive land titles or some important services (Dosh, 2010, pp. 212-217). This occurs when settlers feel like they are sufficiently protected, so that participation in neighborhood organizations is no longer necessary.
The security trap is particularly dangerous because without participation, neighborhood organizations cannot raise the money or labor to gain access to important services, such as water and sanitation. Further, the inability of neighborhood organizations to ‘legally’ enact fines makes it difficult to overcome the free rider problem. Settlers will tap into existing service infrastructure without paying for initial construction costs, or sometimes without even paying for service consumption. This hurts the efficiency and reliability of service networks, harming development even further. In fact, without the ability to properly use political power, settlers can go for decades without gaining access to land titles or more developed services.

Our new model of political legitimacy solves these issues by obligating governments to recognize the legitimacy of neighborhood organizations that fulfill the Natural Duty of Justice. If the Peruvian government is forced to recognize the legitimacy of applicable neighborhood organizations, then properly organized neighborhood organizations will gain a right to limited self-governance, and the ability “to repudiate the authority of the state over some members of the group” (Buchanan, 2004, p. 25). This will allow neighborhood organizations to directly manage their own service provision, and give them the ability to purchase service provision for the entire neighborhood at once in order to lower costs. They will also be able to legally collect the money and labor needed to construct their own infrastructure without waiting for municipal budget allocation. Perhaps most importantly, informal housing settlements will be able to escape eviction more easily, and be able to apply for land titles earlier. The granting of real political legitimacy will also help neighborhood organizations avoid the security trap by allowing them to take real, legal action in support of their community’s interests. This will encourage settlers to keep participating in government because their decisions will have a permanent, lasting impact,
both on their community, and on the settlement’s relationship with other communities and organizations.

Despite the benefits of this model, there are legal questions that need to be explored before it can be successfully applied. While political legitimacy tells us the rights we are obligated to give to neighborhood organizations, it does not tell us how to structure the state’s relationship to neighborhood organizations. This question ultimately rests on the difficult subject of autonomy. Political legitimacy gives neighborhood organizations the right to self-govern, and repudiate the state on some matters, but, as we have discussed, it does not grant neighborhood organizations any independence from the state. This means that national and municipal governments would still have the ability to pass laws, collect taxes, and regulate the nature of informal housing settlements. With these powers, states could starve neighborhood organizations of funds, limit service provision, rezone settlements, and enact legislation that could be potentially damaging to grassroots organizations. It is for this reason that work must be done to establish what legal rights neighborhood organizations have against the state. Though we will save any broad discussion of these rights for another time, it is worth suggesting that the answer to these legal questions may not be so difficult. Intrastate autonomy, in which neighborhood organizations are given some freedom from state action, might be the most successful and easiest arrangement to pursue.

To conclude our discussion on political legitimacy, I want to stress the importance of international actors. Though justice obligates states to recognize the legitimacy of certain neighborhood organizations, this does not mean that states will honor their obligation. For this reason, it is important that regional and international institutions encourage states to recognize their neighborhood organizations through incentives, policy, and political pressure. In the short
term, the international focus should be on convincing states that by recognizing their neighborhood organizations as more than civil societies, they will benefit greatly from improved urban development, democratic participation, and economic formalization; however, in the long term, the international community should work on developing a global system founded on the principles of justice, by which states are forced to uphold their moral obligations to be considered legitimate.

International actors and NGOs also have a role to play in strengthening of neighborhood organizations. Since elected leaders usually lack important technical, legal, and political skills, the international community should work on constructing development policy at the neighborhood, rather than national level. By providing assistance directly to neighborhood organizations, urban communities will be given the tools they need to achieve their own human rights objectives without having to rely on the patronage of local elites. This focus on local development can have important spillover effects as well. In Peru, early land invasions have paved the way for younger generations. Knowledge is passed down and disseminated, leading to stronger, better developed communities. Similarly, the international community should work on applying this theory of political legitimacy across the globe. Neighborhood organizations in other countries may be close to, or at levels necessary for political legitimacy. Further, the success of Peru’s neighborhood organizations provides strong reasons to begin establishing neighborhood organizations in countries without strong grassroots political organizations. If the world can mimic Peru’s strong grassroots democracy, it will go a long way in developing a just, sustainable path to urban development that remains in the hands of the people.

Finally, international actors should protect the right of neighborhood organizations to wield political power. We cannot justifiably continue to view neighborhood organizations as
mere civil societies, when they clearly demand for the power to self-govern. To ignore the role of neighborhood organizations as legitimate governing entities, would be to deny people the ability to act in ways that promote their own human rights, leaving them reliant on national or local governments. This places informal settlers in development limbo, waiting on salvation from external sources. The international community is therefore obligated to protect the right of informal settlers to pass, enforce, and adjudicate laws that promote justice. Failing to do so would put into question the legitimacy of the international system itself.

PART FOUR: New Millennium, New Solutions

The urban millennium has arrived. Unfortunately, our policies have not adapted to meet new urban challenges. Current top-down approaches to development policy have proven inadequate to chip away at the urban divide. Informality and the mismanagement of service infrastructure will continue to leave millions without access to adequate housing or basic services, creating massive violations of human rights. In order to ensure that urban advantages are provided for all people, we have applied a new theoretical lens to our perspective on neighborhood organizations in the world’s informal housing settlements. First, we examined the growth of urban immigration, and the challenges faced by the urban poor. This led us into a discussion on the growth of grassroots solutions to housing and service shortages in the developing world. In particular, the formation of neighborhood organizations stood out as an important solution to inadequate housing conditions. Though we have traditionally seen neighborhood organizations as just another part of civil society, our investigation into Buchanan’s theory of political legitimacy offers a starting point for viewing neighborhood organizations as legitimate governing entities. This would allow neighborhood organizations the
ability to create, apply, and enforce laws, significantly strengthening their ability to provide for informal settlers.

Through our examination into the role of neighborhood organizations in protecting the human rights of settlers in Peru, we have also set up a model of grassroots urban development that can be pursued in cities around the world. By encouraging informal settlers to organize into politically legitimate political units, we could build the institutional foundation necessary to secure rights to subsistence, security, and legal equality. From this, we can begin to give politics back to the people, allowing them to determine the path of their own development. This new perspective on neighborhood organizations will help tackle urban poverty, develop informal housing settlements, promote political participation, and maintain the equal respect and dignity of the world’s informal settlers. While I have focused this paper on Peru’s neighborhood organizations, there remains work to be done on applying this model across the world’s informal housing settlements. We have established the basic rights of neighborhood organizations, but now robust legal rights must be developed that determine the normative relationship between neighborhood organizations and the state. We have already firmly entered the new urban millennium, but work on urban development policy has just begun.
Works Cited


Fieldwork Notes

06/18/2015: Villa El Salvador. Lima, Peru

    Interview 1: Former resident of a settlement outside of Villa El Salvador
    Interview 2: Neighborhood leader in charge of road maintenance
    Interview 3: Neighborhood watchman in charge of gate upkeep, and monitoring
    Interview 4: Executive council member of a local neighborhood organization

06/19/2015: San Isidro. Lima, Peru

    Interview 5: Former employee in service of the mayor of Lima

06/22/2015: Arequipa, Peru

    Interview 6: Peruvian sociologist working in Arequipa’s informal housing settlements
    Interview 7: Leaders in a neighborhood soup kitchen
    Interview 8: Informal employees in a neighborhood daycare center