

Fieldwork Report

The IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award allowed me to conduct fieldwork in São Paulo, Brazil for my dissertation on the collective organization of app-based delivery workers in the city. As is often the case with precarious workers, delivery workers have shied away from traditional forms of labor organizing including unions. Instead, they have found new ways of engaging in collective resistance. My dissertation investigates these different types of labor organizations and the strategies they use to advance precarious workers' interests. It seeks to understand how organizations leverage workers' power, how they forge a shared class identity and class experience among workers, and how they position themselves in political struggles that impact the working class more broadly.

The dissertation studies four different types of labor organization: a worker association, a community-based organization, a labor union and a grassroots labor organization. While they share a common goal to improve the working conditions for app-based delivery workers in São Paulo, they differ with respect to the strategies they deploy to achieve this goal and their emphasis on working class identity and solidarity. While some class organizations focus exclusively on workplace demands, others define a broader scope of grievances that includes housing and healthcare. Additionally, some organizations engage in political mobilization while others use professionalization strategies to try to improve workers' conditions. Through interviews, participant observation and document analysis, I try to understand why they take different approaches and how organizational structure and strategy impact outcomes within a particular historical context.

Over the course of six weeks, I conducted over fifty semi-structured interviews with delivery workers and organizational leaders to understand the strategic dilemmas they face and

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how they attempt to overcome them. In addition to collecting interviews, I observed organizational meetings and mobilization efforts, collected documents and tracked social media outlets of key institutional and individual actors.

During my fieldwork, it became clear that state actors play an important role in how precarious workers mobilize and their ability to successfully meet their goals. Additionally, during my stay in São Paulo, I interviewed delivery workers who were organized via WhatsApp groups and regularly met at a square near where I was staying. These workers were not part of any formal organization, but they were nonetheless engaged in an important form of collective organization. These discoveries would not have been possible without my presence in the spaces where workers live and work. I am grateful to IRIS for supporting this important study. By going into the field and speaking directly with workers and activists, I am in a much better position to understand the processes that shape their mobilization.