

Can you hear me?
A Comparative Analysis of Civic Space in Global Policy Making and Civil Society Participation at the United Nations

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Civic space is tightening across the globe, particularly for civil society participation in global policy-making at the United Nations. Existing literature has often focused on looking at participation in only one or two UN institutions. This paper expands the scope of citizen participation to almost a dozen UN policy processes in order to compare best practices in civic space design, through different stakeholder engagement models, as well as in civic space usage, through the tools and tactics employed by civil society to influence negotiations. I triangulate interviews, literature reviews and ethnographies for this analysis. While the majority of UN processes use a token model of engagement for civil society input that is neither fully fair nor competent, precedents of more progressive practices exist across different UN institutions that should be replicated in both regressive and progressive engagement models. The variety of tactics and tools employed by civil society to influence policy is not determined by how participatory a process is, but by civil society sharing said tools and tactics across processes. However, effective usage of these tactics is reliant on good coordination among civil society.

