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CITIES AND POLITICS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

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The last fifteen years have witnessed an impressive outpouring of comparative politics research examining urban politics in the developing world. This article shows how this research advances our understanding of phenomena such as clientelism, law and order, and local public goods provision. Scholarship could be strengthened, however, through more careful attention to the urban nature of the politics examined. This article proposes two distinct ways in which urban politics can be conceptualized: politics taking place in urban *agglomerations* characterized by large, diverse populations settled at high densities; or politics taking place within the boundaries of city *jurisdictions* possessing legal powers and responsibilities distinct from those at other tiers of government or in rural areas. Adopting either of these conceptualizations illuminates new avenues for empirical work, theoretical innovation, and improved measurement. This article also shows that recent scholarship has neglected important, and fundamentally political, topics such as urban political economy, land markets, and urban environmental harms. Engaging with these areas would allow political scientists to revisit classic questions regarding the institutional influences upon economic growth, the politics of redistribution, and the determinants of collective action.

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After decades of neglect, the last fifteen years have witnessed a prominent wave of political science research examining politics in cities of the developing world. For example, prominent scholarship examines the provision of local public goods in the slums of Kampala, Uganda (Habyarimana et al., 2009), while influential work on clientelism focuses on Buenos Aires (Auyero, 2000; Levitsky, 2003). Meanwhile, recent scholarship on political order and violence investigates public security in cities such as Lagos, Nairobi, Medellín, and Rio de Janeiro (Arias, 2006; LeBas, 2013; Moncada, 2016).

This outpouring of research, part of a broader “subnational turn” in comparative politics, should be applauded in light of the compelling substantive reasons for studying cities in the developing world. In 2014, almost half of the developing world’s population resided in urban areas, usually defined as settlements of at least 5,000-10,000 (United Nations, 2015, p. 21). Moreover, approximately 86% of new population growth is predicted to occur in cities of the developing world (Montgomery, 2008, p. 762). And, the growth of megacities in Asia and Africa—now far larger than metropolitan areas in the developed world—has captured the popular imagination.¹ Yet urbanization is also occurring at a massive scale outside of them: the world’s most rapidly growing urban centers are medium-sized cities or cities with less than 1 million inhabitants in Asia and Africa (United Nations, 2015, p. 20).

At the same time, many developing countries engaged in political, fiscal, and/or administrative decentralization starting in the 1980s, making city governments increasingly important venues for politics. Municipal elections were held in 57 of 114

¹ This is evident in the popularity of films such as “City of God” and “Slumdog Millionaire.”

developing countries by 2008.² Local officials also have more revenue at their disposal following fiscal decentralization: almost 20% of public expenditure in Latin America occurs at the local level, and nearly 80% in China (United Cities and Local Government and World Bank, 2008, pp. 69, 295). Many countries have also decentralized administrative responsibilities for important services, such as policing, education, and water and sanitation. For example, 83% of Latin American countries require local governments to manage urban water and sanitation systems on their own or in partnership with higher tiers of government, and almost all African, Asia-Pacific, and Eurasian countries do (United Cities and Local Government and World Bank, 2008, pp. 37, 67, 113, 191, 243). These shifts have made city governments increasingly important points of contact between citizens and the state.

There are also theoretical and methodological reasons to study cities. Studying urban politics in developing countries can lead to theoretical innovation. Scholars can critically examine the extent to which arguments developed to explain national-level processes hold for urban processes, and whether urban experiences actually lead one to question standard interpretations of national-level phenomena, such as democratic consolidation and party system dynamics.³ Studying cities also offers methodological advantages.⁴ Many outcomes of interest to political scientists are observable at the local level, such as income inequality, political competitiveness, and public service access.

² Election data from United Cities and Local Governments and World Bank (2008) for countries defined as developing according to World Bank classifications.

³ Snyder (2001, pp. 101–2), for example, describes how scholarship on subnational democratization and authoritarian enclaves within democratic systems has led to a reconceptualization of processes of regime change.

⁴ See also Snyder (2001) and Trounstein (2009, p. 614), which emphasize the methodological advantages of analyzing subnational and local governments respectively.

Because subnational units such as cities are more comparable to one another than nations, it is easier to isolate key variables of interest when comparing cities (or even city neighborhoods) within a country than when conducting cross-country studies. When studying cities rather than nations, researchers can also develop more context-appropriate measures or indicators reflecting key concepts of interest.

This article reviews recent comparative politics scholarship on urban political processes in the developing world. It shows that this recent wave engages closely with mainstream theoretical debates in comparative politics, and has advanced our understanding of important phenomena such as clientelism, law and order, and local public goods provision. This emerging area of scholarship could be strengthened, however, through more careful attention to how the “urban” nature of the research sites affects authors’ findings. This article proposes two distinct ways in which urban politics can be conceptualized: as politics taking place in urban *agglomerations* characterized by large, diverse populations settled at high densities; or as politics taking place within the boundaries of city *jurisdictions* characterized by particular legal powers and responsibilities. Adopting each of these urban lenses illuminates avenues for theoretical innovation, new empirical terrain, and opportunities for improved measurement.

This article also shows that greater engagement with urbanists in other fields would alert comparativists to important topics rarely studied by political scientists. Comparative politics scholarship on cities in the developing world has almost totally neglected important, and fundamentally political, topics such as urban political economy and land markets, which are central to the urban experience. While existing work in other disciplines offers important insights, greater engagement by political scientists could

contribute to our understanding of the politics of these phenomena. Studying these themes also presents opportunities to revisit long-standing debates regarding the institutional influences on economic development, the politics of redistribution, and the ingredients for collective action.

WHAT IS URBAN POLITICS?

What is urban politics? This article proposes two different ways of conceptualizing urban politics, both of which draw upon different definitions of “urban” or “city.” A long tradition of writing in social and urban theory defines cities as *agglomerations*: large, densely populated settlements characterized by social and economic heterogeneity. From this perspective, politics in urban areas is likely to differ in important ways from politics in rural settings. One can also conceptualize cities, however, in terms of a specific legal status—a local *jurisdiction* possessing distinct powers and privileges. From this perspective, city politics is likely to differ from politics at other tiers of government, or in city as opposed to village jurisdictions. Adopting either an agglomeration or jurisdictional lens can prompt theoretical innovation, the discovery of new research questions, or improvements in research design.

Classic work in social and urban theory provides an intellectual rationale for defining urban politics as political processes in urban agglomerations. Urban centers, as Louis Wirth emphasized, possess features that distinguish them from rural settings: they are large, densely populated, and possess heterogeneous populations (Wirth, 1938, p. 8). Urban social life and organization is thus likely to differ significantly from that in rural contexts. The sheer size of the population, as well as distance from “traditional” society,

creates pressures and opportunities for economic and social specialization (Simmel, 1950, pp. 416–417, 420; Wirth, 1938, pp. 20–21), and forces individuals to develop more impersonal or indirect relationships governed by standardized metrics such as currency and minutes (Mumford, 1937, pp. 59–60; Simmel, 1950, pp. 411–412). Urban systems—social, economic, political, and infrastructural—thus exhibit greater complexity than their rural counterparts.⁵

This sociological definition of the “urban” as a distinctive social and economic environment suggests one must study the politics of urban agglomerations because it is likely to differ in fundamental ways from politics in rural (or suburban) contexts. For example, the social, economic, and ethnic heterogeneity typically found in cities could produce different politics. In a classic essay, Mumford argued such diversity would engender discord and conflict (Mumford 1937, p. 59), an intuition carried forward in more recent scholarship reporting that inter-group contact can engender conflict (e.g., Lim et al., 2007). In contrast, prominent modernization theorist Lipset (1959, p. 97) argued that contact between diverse groups in cities increases tolerance for difference and facilitates political moderation, providing a more fertile setting for democracy (see also Anthony, 2014, p. 748). Such theorization regarding how distinguishing features of the urban milieu may produce distinctive politics provides a clear justification for political science scholarship on themes such as the effects of rural-to-urban migration on individual political behavior, the effects of racial or ethnic heterogeneity on local public goods provision, and how growth in the urban fraction of the population affects national

⁵ Auerbach et al. (2017) outline additional reasons why urban agglomerations in the developing world exhibit social complexity, including rapid population movement, high levels of informality, and the multi-focal nature of local institutional environments.

level politics, such as political party system dynamics. It also indicates that the mechanics of clientelism, political mediation, political communication, and other processes may vary systematically between urban and rural settings—thus calling for disaggregated analyses.

On the other hand, one can define “urban” as a specific type of political jurisdiction. The literature on U.S. and European urban politics takes this approach, equating “urban” with municipal (or local) government—implying that politics looks quite different at this tier. This literature focuses specifically on municipal politics and explores the interactions between municipal jurisdictions and other tiers of government or broader sets of actors. From the 1960s onwards, U.S. urban politics wrestled with the question of “who governed” city administrations, examining the respective role of city officials, local elites, and the mass public (e.g., Dahl, 1961; Hunter, 1953; Stone, 1989). Newer strands of scholarship probe how municipal governments are nested within broader systems, including higher tiers of government and broader networks of social, economic, and political actors.⁶ Municipal governments are typically situated within national hierarchies, constrained by higher tiers of government, often through constitutional provisions. While decentralization has increased municipal powers and policy responsibilities dramatically over the last forty years, municipalities must still lobby or work with other tiers of government to achieve many aims.

As the “urban governance” and “multi-level governance” literatures have highlighted (see Hooghe and Marks, 2003; Pierre and Peters, 2012), policymaking and implementation also increasingly involves coordinating networks of actors both inside

⁶ For example, Sellers (2002). See Kübler and Pagano (2012) for a review.

and outside of standard governmental institutions. Urban politics scholarship focusing on the United States and Europe has also highlighted the extent to which municipalities increasingly exist within broader metropolitan areas containing multiple municipalities. Such fragmentation makes it necessary for municipalities to coordinate with one another and other actors, such as special district and regional governments (e.g., Feiock, 2013; Kübler and Pagano, 2012; Weir et al., 2009). The assumption underlying much of this more recent work is that local politics looks very different than politics at intermediate or national tiers: it necessarily involves complex interactions with other governmental and non-governmental actors, whereas national politics may not (Pierre and Peters, 2012, p. 72).

An “urban as jurisdiction” lens not only distinguishes between politics at different tiers of government, but also between the politics of different types of local jurisdictions. Local governments in more densely populated and larger agglomerations often possess a different legal status and power than local governments in rural settings. The process of establishing “city” governments varies across contexts, but typically involves a change in the overarching institutional framework within which politics takes place.⁷ Electoral institutions often differ between “city” and “village” jurisdictions, while city and village governments may be eligible for different sorts of transfer payments and state or national government programs. Indian law, for example, provides for different types of local government institutions in rural and urban areas. “Panchayats” in rural areas are not

⁷ The American politics literature, for example, examines the politics of establishing (“incorporating”) municipal governments (e.g., Bridges, 1997).

charged with providing as many types of infrastructure as municipal corporations in large cities, while panchayats are eligible for more central government programs.⁸

These alternative definitions of urban constitute ideal types, especially in the “urban as agglomeration” case. Rural versus urban can be thought of as a continuum, and many metropolises expand at low densities, and thus may not represent agglomerations in the sense that social theorists originally envisioned.⁹ In other cases, there may be a strong empirical overlap between the two definitions.¹⁰ This being said, the analytic distinction made here between the two definitions of urban can help researchers refine their theoretical arguments and define more compelling research designs. For example, scholars interested in understanding the effects of decentralizing policy responsibility from national or state governments to the local level will likely find it most helpful to employ a jurisdictional definition of urban politics. In contrast, scholars concerned with the relationship between ethnic or racial diversity and patterns of political brokerage may find it helpful to start with the agglomeration-based definition, especially if they are interested in relationships within informal settlements that lie outside formal city boundaries. In many situations, both definitions will be relevant. The ensuing discussion will show how adopting these alternative definitions of urban points to new avenues for empirical work, theoretical innovation, and improved measurement in active areas of ongoing research.

⁸ See <http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend73.htm> and <http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend74.htm>. See also Denis et al. (2012, p. 59).

⁹ See, for example, the African case, where cities often expand at low densities.

¹⁰ While in countries like Mexico, municipalities often encompass rural territory, in others (like India), density and population are key factors affecting whether or not a settlement is designated as urban.

VIBRANT AREAS OF RECENT RESEARCH

The recent wave of comparative politics research conducted in cities of the developing world primarily addresses three themes: political intermediation and clientelism, the rule of law, and local public goods provision.

Clientelism and Political Intermediation in Cities

Clientelism—the distribution of selective benefits to voters in exchange for political support—has been one of the most vibrant research areas in comparative politics over the last two decades. Much of the literature on clientelism is urban in inspiration, with ethnographic and qualitative accounts of clientelistic exchanges in the low-income neighborhoods of Lima, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires (e.g., Collier, 1976; Gay, 1994; Auyero, 2000), providing intuitions for later scholarship. While recent research in urban settings underpins much of what we know about clientelism, greater acknowledgment of the urban nature of the research sites where data was collected would allow for theoretical and empirical advances.

Early research on political behavior among recent migrants to Latin American cities, as well as more recent research on clientelism in cities throughout the developing world, has yielded much of what we know about clientelism and political intermediation. It is now clear that low-income urban voters often approach the state through intermediaries or brokers. Studies in Latin American cities during periods of rapid urbanization highlight the important roles played by local bosses and neighborhood associations (e.g., Collier, 1976; Gay, 1994; Perlman, 1976). Clientelism in these settings took the form of deferential, hierarchical relationships between slum residents, local

bosses, and city officials.¹¹ Recent research on political organization in Indian and African slums also highlights the importance of “local leaders” and neighborhood associations who interface between the urban poor and politicians and bureaucrats (e.g., Jha et al., 2007; Auerbach, 2017; Paller, 2014).¹²

While some research depicts local leaders as “free agents” who maintain independence from political parties so as to have access to the state regardless of the party in power, recent work focuses on partisan brokers based in urban neighborhoods (e.g., Auerbach, 2016; Levitsky, 2003; Szwarcberg, 2015). This literature reports that partisan brokers often target core rather than swing voters (e.g., Nichter, 2008; Stokes et al., 2013),¹³ and that they find ways to monitor voter compliance with exchanges despite ballot secrecy, such as observing participation in rallies and other campaign activities (Szwarcberg, 2015). Recently, scholarship on clientelism in urban areas of the developing world has highlighted alternative types of brokers, including associations (e.g., Arias, 2006; Holland and Palmer-Rubin, 2015) and bureaucrats (e.g., Oliveros, 2016).¹⁴ Overall, the recent literature’s emphasis on credible commitments in clientelistic exchanges indicates that clientelism has become more transactional and less hierarchical.

Related work examines the circumstances under which clientelism may be replaced with other forms of citizen-politician linkages in urban settings. Studying municipalities in three Argentine provinces, Weitz-Shapiro finds that clientelism becomes less common in the presence of both a growing middle class and robust political

¹¹ See Stokes (1995, p. 17).

¹² Note that Krishna (2013, pp. 1022–1024) finds extremely few direct interactions between politicians and slum residents in Bangalore.

¹³ Both studies draw on primarily urban data.

¹⁴ Read (2012) describes an alternative mode of neighborhood-level intermediation: state-sponsored neighborhood wardens in Taiwan.

competition (Weitz-Shapiro, 2014); the extent to which both factors increase with urbanization, we would expect urbanization to decrease the prevalence of clientelism. Studying African party systems, Resnick (2013) highlights the extent to which opposition parties employ populism—rather than standard clientelistic strategies—to reach the growing ranks of the urban poor. Pasotti (2009) argues that in weak party systems such as Colombia’s, tight fiscal conditions prompted mayoral candidates to adopt broad-based brand-focused campaigns rather than employ clientelism. In Accra, Ghana, however, Nathan (Forthcoming) finds that middle class voters tend to withdraw from the political sphere rather than support programmatic parties because politicians have difficulties providing the sort of public policies they desire; politics thus continues to revolve around particularistic exchanges despite rising wealth.

Closer attention to how particular aspects of urban settings affect clientelism would allow researchers to refine their understandings of its micro-foundations, as well as transitions away from it. If one defines “urban” in terms of agglomeration, one would focus on understanding how common features of the urban environment—such as ethnic diversity, informal land markets, and residential density—either facilitate or stymie clientelistic exchanges. For instance, scholars have recently examined how informal land markets support clientelistic exchanges: decisions to refrain from clearing slums (or from evicting slum residents) can constitute a contingent benefit or means of currying support with low income voters (e.g., Holland, 2016; Larreguy et al., 2015).¹⁵ No work explicitly considers how residential density affects clientelism. Scholarship examining how local leaders exchange neighborhood votes for local infrastructure (e.g., Auerbach, 2016; Gay,

¹⁵ Note that these recent studies echo classic works such as Collier (1976).

1994; Rojo et al., n.d.) implicitly suggests that greater infrastructural needs in dense urban slums may provide more fodder for clientelism than in rural areas, but further research is required. Density, for example, may also make it easier for brokers to monitor their clients or, alternatively, weaken brokers by easing citizen access to outside options.

An “urban as jurisdiction” perspective would instead suggest one investigate whether the specific types of institutions found in, or services offered by cities—as opposed to village or provincial governments—lend themselves more readily to clientelistic exchanges. Institutions such as ward-based representation on city councils, for instance, may be more susceptible to clientelism than at-large representation.¹⁶ Relatedly, the overwhelming emphasis of the recent clientelism literature on handouts has left many other types of city policies unexamined that are, in many cases, subject to contingent exchanges. These include both “positive” and “negative” inducements to support particular politicians (see Mares and Young, 2016). For example, city policies such as business licensing, zoning, and property tax collection can be implemented in a discretionary manner, yet have received very little attention within the clientelism literature.¹⁷ City officials can also enforce the payment of user fees for municipal services such as water or trash collection in a strategic or contingent fashion.¹⁸ This is important because patterns in one policy realm may not carry over to others, as Kramon and Posner (2013) note in a recent critique of the distributive politics literature. Considering a range of urban services in tandem—and how voters are treated differentially with respect not just to program receipt, but also fee payment and rule

¹⁶ The literature on U.S. urban politics has considered the effects of ward versus at-large elections on the strength of political machines (e.g., Erie, 1988, p. 26).

¹⁷ Chubb (1981) represents an early and prominent exception.

¹⁸ See Herrera (2017, pp. 69–70) for examples from the Mexican water sector.

enforcement—would thus provide us with a better sense of the extent to which clientelism is actually occurring in cities of the developing world, as well as whom politicians are targeting. This is crucial for understanding if clientelism is more or less prevalent in urban or rural settings, whether or not it takes on different forms in urban and rural areas, and if so, why such differences exist.

Cities and the Rule of Law

Comparative politics has long been concerned with state control over territory because it underlies political stability and the effective delivery of public services, including shielding citizens from violence. The rule of law also constitutes a central concern of citizens throughout the developing world. Respondents from thirty-six developing countries ranked crime as one of their top two concerns in the 2010–2014 wave of the World Values Survey.¹⁹ Public concern is also understandable in light of the prevalence of police inefficacy, corruption, and human rights violations (e.g., Hinton and Newburn, 2009; Moncada, 2013). Despite its fundamental importance, however, the politics of law and order has received little attention from scholars of comparative politics until recently. New work in urban settings focuses on the politics of police reform, police extraction rackets, and security operations run by non-state actors in megacities of the developing world. In this research area as well, greater attention to specific ways in which the urban setting affects these political dynamics would allow for theoretical and empirical advances.

A first set of recent studies examines police reform initiatives intended to bring

¹⁹ World Values Survey, Wave 6 (2010-2014).

forces more effectively under civilian control, reduce corruption and police brutality, and improve crime control in democracies and hybrid regimes. Such reform programs usually entail appointing civilian security ministers rather than members of the police hierarchy, establishing legislative oversight commissions, providing for governmental rather than police review of misconduct cases for corruption or excessive use of force, or provisions for decentralization or citizen participation.²⁰ While the literature highlights a few successful initiatives involving decentralization and community policing (e.g., Fruhling, 2009, p. 39; Arias and Ungar, 2009),²¹ most studies emphasize strong barriers to reform adoption and implementation, such as conflicting interests between different tiers of government (e.g., Davis, 2006; Eaton, 2008),²² police resistance to reforms through work stoppages and violent threats (Flom and Post, 2016), politicians' self-interest in preserving police extortion rackets for campaign finance (Eaton, 2008), citizens' preferences for tough-on-crime policies over laws protecting detainee and witness rights (e.g., Ungar, 2006), and the countervailing influence of informal rules incentivizing corruption (Sabet, 2012). These institutional obstacles and entrenched interests fuel policy cycling, with reforms adopted following security scandals, but subsequently repealed or left to languish (Flom and Post, 2016; Macaulay, 2012, p. 178).²³

A second set of studies considers the extent to which non-state actors, by

²⁰ See Ungar (2011, pp. 7–10) and Sabet (2012, p. 26).

²¹ See also Magaloni, Franco, and Melo (2015), which reports that Urban Pacification Programs (UPPs) in Rio de Janeiro reduced the number of police killings.

²² Policing is typically managed at the subnational, but not necessarily the municipal, level (United Cities and Local Government and World Bank, 2008, pp. 37, 191).

²³ Examining Colombian cities, Moncada (2016) finds that support from a cohesively organized local business community can mitigate these problems under certain conditions. Relatedly, González (2016) finds that reform program design affects outcomes.

providing security in urban areas, increasingly challenge the state's claim to a "monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force," thereby undermining what Max Weber believed to be the very definition of the state (see Weber, 1978). Ineffective police forces, the literature reports, encourage citizens to turn to alternative providers of law and order, especially in urban spaces they patrol ineffectively or not at all. Scholars document the extent to which middle and upper income households, as well as private enterprises, increasingly contract with private providers of security from off-duty police officers to security firms (Carter, 2013, p. 82; Hinton and Newburn, 2009, p. 20). Poor communities, in contrast, organize community defense organizations (e.g., Bateson, 2013; Carter, 2013) or turn to illicit organizations such as drug traffickers (e.g., Leeds, 1996). Other work examines the extent to which militia with unofficial ties to the police or political parties control (and extract rents from) informal settlements in Rio de Janeiro (Arias, 2013; Hidalgo and Lessing, 2015), as well as Lagos and Nairobi (LeBas, 2013). Particularly illuminating are studies examining the informal ties between these non-state actors and politicians and the police, and the political circumstances under which non-state actors are given greater leeway to exercise authority.²⁴

While this recent research focuses on megacities of the developing world, it pays insufficient attention to ways in which the dynamics described are peculiar to urban agglomerations, and especially informal settlements.²⁵ A substantial body of research indicates that urbanization is associated with violence and crime (see Moncada, 2013, pp. 224–225), but political scientists have paid scant attention to how factors such as density

²⁴ See, for instance, Arias (2006) on Brazil, Rios (2015) on Mexico, and LeBas (2013) on Kenya and Nigeria.

²⁵ This is not to imply that violence does not occur in rural locations, rather that causal processes may vary between urban and rural environments.

and the built environment affect the state's ability to police or otherwise exert authority.²⁶ It may be that non-state actors find it easier to defend their turf in the unmapped and narrow streets of informal settlements than in more regularized parts of the city. Relatedly, scholars of geography and urban planning describe the rise of segmented urban landscapes in which elites build fortified enclaves protected by high walls and security technology, often directly abutting informal settlements controlled by non-state actors (e.g., Caldeira, 2000; Davis, 2010). The substitution of private solutions for state services and erection of physical barriers, they argue, erodes public support for investments in meaningful police reform. These themes deserve greater attention from political scientists, because they may help us understand variation in fundamental types of state capacity and citizens' perceptions thereof.

Adopting an "urban as jurisdiction" perspective emphasizing administrative boundaries and responsibilities also outlines new avenues for research on the politics of law and order. Existing work (outlined above) already acknowledges the ways in which shared policy responsibility between tiers of government (following decentralization) or the strong informal influences exerted by mayors can complicate police reform and create political incentives to delegate territorial control to non-state actors such as drug traffickers. The extent to which elected officials and the military actually control police hierarchies, however, deserves far greater attention. Accounts of political influences upon policing—such as Wilkinson's influential (2004) analysis of the electoral calculations affecting police responses to riots in India—assume rather than problematize the extent to which politicians can control the police hierarchy. Yet, as the police reform literature

²⁶ Scholars have, however, examined how the structure of urban social networks affects society's ability to contain inter-communal violence (e.g., Varshney, 2003).

shows, police hierarchies have typically not been brought firmly under civilian control. Studying this question in Brazil and Argentina, Flom (2016) argues that political control can only be achieved with little political turnover. Given that police extortion and protection rackets often operate outside the direct control of elected officials, it is also important to examine the extent to which such operations affect municipal efforts to deliver public services such as transport, where police commonly “tax” informal providers and thus have an interest in preventing public sector regulation and provision.²⁷ Similarly, police rackets may stymie efforts to collect standard municipal taxes, such as business licensing fees and property taxes.

Local Public Goods and Service Delivery

An equally vibrant literature bridging political science and economics examines “local public goods provision,” a catchall term used to refer to local public services and infrastructure. While much of the scholarship on developing countries in this literature focuses on villages, prominent studies focus on cities. This work should be applauded in light of the extent to which rapid urbanization has placed existing delivery systems under strain, and the fact that so many countries have decentralized many important policy functions to the local level. As in the previous two cases, closer consideration of the urban nature of the subject matter points to important avenues for future research.

A first set of studies builds on prior scholarship examining the relationship between ethnic diversity and public goods provision across American cities (Alesina et al., 1999) and cross-nationally (e.g., La Porta et al., 1999), probing how ethnic diversity

²⁷ See Post, Bronsoler, and Salman (Forthcoming) on police rent extraction in the transport sector.

affects the production and allocation of local public goods in the increasing heterogeneous urban centers of Sub-Saharan Africa. Habyarimana et al. (2009) assess empirical support for alternative mechanisms that might explain a negative correlation between diversity and local public goods provision in lab-in-the-field experiments in the slums of Kampala, Uganda. The authors concluded that co-ethnics may be more effective than non co-ethnics at sanctioning one another if they violate norms regarding cooperation. Other work in Sub-Saharan Africa reports that ethnic ties attenuate with urbanization, as modernization theorists suggested long ago (Robinson, 2014), and that greater residential mixing in cities weakens voter expectations of ethnic favoritism in the allocation of local public goods and services (Ichino and Nathan, 2013). Studying Metropolitan Accra (Ghana), however, Nathan (2016) finds that ethnic voting persists in homogenous urban neighborhoods, as well as poor urban neighborhoods where politicians can sway voters through the distribution of private goods. There is significant room for more work: these dynamics likely vary by service area and institutional context.

A second group of studies examines how electoral and institutional factors affect the allocation of infrastructure services typically managed solely by city governments or in conjunction with higher tiers of governments. Examining municipal-level variation in access to water, sanitation, and education in Mexico, Hiskey (2003) and Cleary (2007) find greater access associated with political competition and other forms of political participation. Similarly, Bertorelli et al. (Forthcoming) find access to quality infrastructure in Bangalore to be associated with greater political knowledge and participation. Inspired by prominent city experiments with participatory budgeting, such as Porto Alegre, Brazil (e.g., Abers, 2000), political scientists and sociologists have also

studied the conditions under which participatory budgeting and other types of participatory institutions can improve democratic accountability and affect the choice and distributive incidence of local public programs.²⁸ Scholarship on participatory institutions in Latin American cities largely finds that programs only reduce elite domination of the political process in cities where civil society is already strong and engaged, and public officials are able and incentivized to implement them effectively (e.g., Baiocchi, 2005; Goldfrank, 2007; Wampler, 2015).²⁹ In contrast, Ghertner (2011) finds that participatory institutions in Delhi offer the middle class a privileged position in local government, supplanting informal ties between the urban poor and state actors. Very recent work examines gender differentials in access to municipal participatory institutions (McNulty, 2015), and the circumstances under which they persist (Herrera, Forthcoming).

An “urban as agglomeration” perspective highlights important ways in which these literatures could be extended. An emphasis on the size, density and complexity of urban agglomerations reminds one that many of the most fundamental urban services—such as water and sanitation, mass transit, and street lighting—are delivered through complex infrastructural systems that bear little relation to their rural counterparts.³⁰ The complexity, scale, and networked nature of these systems raise important research considerations. First, when studying the allocation of services, we must pay attention to the technical aspects of the systems we study in order to choose appropriate outcome

²⁸ For a recent review of the literature, see Speer (2012).

²⁹ Donaghy (2011) offers a more sanguine account of participatory institutions in Brazil’s housing sector, arguing that they are associated with an increase in social housing program adoption regardless of the strength of local civil society.

³⁰ For example, while villagers may be able to draw water from simple wells, urbanites would encounter contaminated water were they to do so, leaving them dependent on complex distribution networks.

measures and understand constraints upon the political manipulation of services and infrastructure. Network structure, for example, shapes the ways in which political actors can allocate piped water and electricity.

In addition, acknowledging the scale and complexity of urban infrastructural systems reminds one that it is imperative to study not only the allocation of services, but also their production: such systems require large up front investments and consistent maintenance. Following decentralization, local utilities are often required to fund maintenance, and even some investment, out of user fees. Given that large fractions of the population consume infrastructure services, local officials face strong political pressures to charge prices well below what will cover costs and even disincentives to collect fees. Since the 1990s, dozens of developing countries have adopted institutional reforms—such as privatization and the establishment of legally independent providers (“corporatization”)—intended to insulate urban service providers from electoral pressures so as to raise collection rates and funnel more funds into system maintenance and investment.³¹ Yet with a few prominent exceptions (e.g., Herrera, 2017; Krause, 2009; Post, 2014), scholars of comparative politics have paid scant attention to the political and economic conditions under which such reforms were attempted, or the circumstances under which they were sustained over time and generated service improvements.³²

Meanwhile, an “urban as jurisdiction” perspective indicates that political scientists studying service delivery in cities of the developing world should pay more

³¹ See Herrera and Post (2014).

³² There is a large body of work in geography, development studies, economics on these topics, as well as literatures within specific policy areas, such as water policy. However, these literatures often pay insufficient attention to factors political scientists understand well, such as incentives for elected officials and voters.

attention to the complex webs of institutions and non-state actors actually providing services, and interactions between them. While decentralization has increased the number of services provided by city governments, metropolitan areas often exhibit jurisdictional fragmentation, which can greatly complicate efforts to address metropolitan-wide problems (see Stren and Cameron, 2005). In some cases, services spanning multiple municipalities in a given metropolitan area may be operated by a distinct governmental entity, such as corporatized utility (see above). City governments, however, often exercise formal and informal influence upon these providers, dynamics that have received little attention to-date. Relatedly, metropolitan-level governments may be created to handle specific functions such as transportation or land use planning (see Stren and Cameron, 2005), or metropolitan areas may be reorganized by bringing areas of recent urban growth into existing city boundaries (Gore and Gopakumar, 2015).

Just as importantly, private entrepreneurs and community associations often arise to meet demand for services outside the reach of urban infrastructure networks, or even augment the state services where it is deficient (Post et al., Forthcoming). For example, water tanker trucks often deliver water even to households with utility connections in the intermittent systems commonly found in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, because state utility services arrive just a few hours a week, which may be insufficient for household needs. These non-state providers often maintain informal relationships—and sometimes even formal relationships—with state actors. While the geography, urban planning, and public policy literatures have explored such interactions, political scientists have barely scratched the surface.

NEW, FERTILE TERRAIN FOR POLITICAL SCIENTISTS

While clientelism, the rule of law, and local public goods provision, have received significant attention from political scientists conducting research in cities of the developing world, topics such as urban and regional political economy, urban settlement and land markets, and the urban environment have received very little.³³ Geographers, economists, urban planners, sociologists, and anthropologists, however, engage in lively debates on these issues. Political scientists, drawing on their understandings of political institutions, party systems, and political behavior, can add significantly to our understanding of these substantively important topics. Just as importantly, studying these areas provides opportunities for theoretical innovation within comparative politics with respect to our understanding of the institutional foundations of economic growth, the politics of redistribution, and sources of effective collective action.

Urban Political Economy

The first area that deserves attention from political scientists is urban political economy in the developing world. Currently, the main literature focusing on this topic is the economic geography and economics literature on clustering.³⁴ The clustering literature in geography inspired a “spatial turn” in economics focusing on how subnational—and particularly urban-level—processes fuel economic growth. This surge

³³ Urban politics scholars focused on the U.S. and Europe, in contrast, have researched these topics.

³⁴ The “Global Cities” literature in Sociology and Urban Planning also examines urban political economy, but with a narrower focus on the ways in which large megacities fit within a hierarchy of cities within a globalizing economy. Within development economics, there is also a growing literature on factors (primarily non-political) affecting the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.

in interest builds upon a long tradition of scholarship in geography and urban planning that examines how agglomeration economies—that is, the increasing returns to scale that accrue as firms co-locate—fuel economic dynamism. Co-location, this literature shows, allows firms and industries to upgrade, and thereby compete in an increasingly global marketplace. While originally applied to economic clusters or “industrial districts” in Europe and United States, more recent work attempts to identify the factors that contribute to successful cluster development in the developing world, where barriers to business development are more significant, and large fractions of economic activity takes place in the informal sector.³⁵

This literature should prompt political scientists to revisit one of the most longstanding questions in political economy: what factors explain economic growth or dynamism? Most political economy scholarship exploring the institutional and political influences upon economic growth focuses on national-level institutions. Yet the clustering literature indicates that the foundations of growth may be found—at least in part—at the urban and regional level. Also, because the clustering literature developed outside political science, it usually neglects how political institutions, political regime type, political parties, and organized interest groups such as unions and employer associations, affect micro-level dynamics—especially in studies of clusters in developing countries.³⁶ The qualitative literature on clustering in geography also typically focuses on positive cases. Political scientists’ attention to politics, as well as the importance of studying negative cases in addition to positive cases, would thereby also contribute to

³⁵ See World Bank (2009) for a review.

³⁶ Notable exceptions include Montero (2002) and Cammett (2007). Scholarship on the developed world has explored such linkages to a greater extent, e.g. Sellers (2002).

debates regarding the circumstances under which clusters are likely to emerge and be resilient. Recent work on cooperation between members of the informal sector—including the governance of business and worker associations (e.g., Grossman, 2016; Hummel, Forthcoming), and the circumstances under which entrepreneurs and workers cooperate, trade, or discriminate across ethnic, class, and partisan lines (Gaikwad and Nellis, forthcoming; Grossman and Honig, 2016; Michelitch, 2015; Thachil, 2014)—represents an important step in this direction.

Urban Land Markets

Another area ripe for contributions by political scientists is urban land markets in the developing world. With some notable exceptions (e.g., Boone, 2014; Joireman, 2011; Onoma, 2010; Rithmire, 2015), comparative politics scholarship on this topic has been sparse in recent decades. This represents a major problem for our understanding of politics for a number of reasons. Land regulation is, first of all, an important vehicle for redistribution and means of granting political favors in the developing world. This is particularly the case for urban land, which tends to be more valuable. Cornelius (1975, p. 180), for example, found that the most frequent demand made by migrants to Mexico City during the 1970s was for land title. Similarly, Holland (2016, p. 244) finds that authorities often do not evict squatters from public lands in present-day Bogotá and Lima out of fear of electoral reprisals. Land regulation also affects access to subsidized urban services such as electricity and water, as utilities often fail to service areas without clear land title out of political considerations (Kjellen and McGranahan, 2006, pp. 4–10). Land regulation is also a key means of granting favors to powerful groups, such as business

and organized crime; urban sociology research, for example, documents the mafia's role in land development in Mumbai (Weinstein, 2008). In addition, land acquisition and development can become a central form of state activity. Scholarship on China highlights the incentives local government officials have to engage in property development (Hsing, 2010) or historic preservation (Zhang, 2013)—for personal gain, to help meet current expenditures, or facilitate economic growth. Such development projects and urban regeneration schemes inevitably have distributive consequences, and thus become loci for political struggles and conflict.³⁷

As in the case of urban political economy, political scientists could bring important perspectives to the table were they to conduct more research on this topic. They have well-developed understandings of political party systems, distributive politics, and local state capacity that may be useful when studying the politics of urban land markets—factors often neglected in analyses in the geography, sociology, and urban planning literatures. Also, they can draw on existing political science scholarship focused on land markets in the United States and elsewhere, including classic studies of urban redevelopment projects (e.g., Dahl, 1961) and the role of local development interests in local political regimes (e.g., Logan and Molotch, 1987; Stone, 1989).

Urban Environmental Problems

Political scientists should also devote greater attention to the politics of urban environmental problems in developing countries, and particularly to the politics of uneven exposure. Public health scholarship has documented vastly differing rates of child

³⁷ Such schemes may involve non-state as well as state actors, as El-Kazaz (2014) finds in Cairo and Istanbul.

mortality and disease between poor and more affluent residents of cities in the developing world (Hardoy et al., 2013). Scholars argue that urban environmental problems contribute greatly to this divergence. Certainly, the location of the poor on marginal land without utility connections, prone to natural disasters such as landslides, or vulnerable to flooding or other consequences of climate change, can be partially attributed to the lower prices such land commands in formal or informal markets. However, we must also understand the *political* factors that contribute to such marked differences in the physical environments experienced by urban residents.

Much existing research on the politics of uneven environmental exposure in cities of the Global South comes from a sociological tradition. Auyero and Swistun's perceptive ethnographic account of environmental suffering in an Argentine shantytown, for instance, probes why residents fail to articulate their grievances effectively and instead become resigned to their situation (Auyero and Swistun, 2009). Other work examines laudable—but probably not representative—efforts by social movements to push back against lax state authorities and polluters.³⁸ Comparative political scholars could contribute to these debates by examining the circumstances under which polluting projects are sited in particular communities but not others, why communities mobilize effectively in some cases but not others, and why pollution regulations are more aggressively enforced in some neighborhoods than others. Investigating these topics would allow one to revisit existing theories and empirical findings regarding distributive politics in the developing world; current analyses omit protection from environmental harm, despite its fundamental importance for life chances.

³⁸ See Evans, ed. (2002) and Carruthers, ed. (2008).

While these questions have historically been quite difficult to tackle due to a lack of good data, the arrival of automated text analysis, remote sensing techniques, and national pollution registries could allow political scientists to gain a better sense of the relevant universe of cases and measure differences in exposure and political action across neighborhoods and over time.³⁹ Another fruitful avenue for research is to understand the circumstances under which metropolitan-level institutions are formed to address environmental externalities or threats posed by climate change, and how common pool resource management functions become institutionalized.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the recent growth of comparative politics scholarship on cities of the developing world should be welcomed. Urban populations are growing rapidly at the same time that municipal governments are playing larger political roles and delivering more services. This suggests that political scientists should devote more energy to studying burgeoning urban settlements in the developing world.

To-date, recent comparative politics scholarship on developing country cities has been well integrated into disciplinary debates. In fact, some of the most prominent publications of the last two decades are actually analyses of urban politics, though they are not framed as such. This research wave has yielded important insights regarding the dynamics of clientelism, law and order, and local public goods provision and other themes of general interest. Comparative politics scholars conducting research on these topics in cities typically do not think of themselves as “urbanists,” meaning that they

³⁹ See Pacheco-Vega (2007) on research avenues opened up by new pollution registries.

engage little with work by comparativists working on other themes in urban settings, and also often fail to engage with urbanists in related disciplines. This orientation toward the discipline contrasts dramatically with the American politics subfield of urban politics.⁴⁰

This essay argues that scholars studying politics taking place in cities should consider the specific way in which their study sites are “urban.” This article proposes two alternative definitions of urban that scholars can bring to their work. Urban areas can be conceptualized as *agglomerations*, or as large, densely populated, and diverse concentrations of people that contrast sharply with rural environments. Alternatively, one can define urban as a specific type of *political jurisdiction*, distinct from higher tiers of government and distinct from villages, which often possess different political powers and functions. Studies of already-popular themes like clientelism and local public goods provision could be enriched through adopting one or the other lens. Such engagement would lead to improved theorization and measurement strategies, as well as highlight new avenues for research. Adopting either lens may also suggest scope conditions or sub-setting strategies for comparative politics scholarship conducted in cities or with both rural and urban jurisdictions.

Second, and just as importantly, engagement with scholarship on cities in other disciplines highlights the fact that political scientists have almost entirely neglected crucial political arenas such as the urban political economy, the politics of land markets, and the politics of exposure to environmental harms. Studying these themes would allow

⁴⁰ The subfield of U.S. urban politics has constituted a cohesive scholarly community in close and fertile dialogue with geographers, sociologists and urban planners, but which has operated outside of the disciplinary mainstream of political science for decades (Sapotichne et al., 2007). This situation has changed in the last decade; scholars of U.S. and European urban politics increasingly publish in leading Political Science journals.

comparativists to contribute theoretical and methodological insights from political science, and may even encourage scholars to re-examine classic questions through a subnational lens, potentially leading to major reformulations of theory.

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