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Reflections on "The Politics of Informality": What We Know, How We Got There, and Where We Might Head Next

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Abstract Building on the methodological and empirical contributions of the various authors in this special symposium, this concluding reflection acknowledges the important role that informality plays in urban and national politics in the global South, even as it proposes a range of alternative ways, this critical topic could and should be inserted into contemporary scholarship in comparative politics. It begins with a discussion of two decades of research on urbanization and economic globalization, thus introducing a wider set of disciplinary concerns than merely urban servicing into the study of informality, ranging from the transformation of property rights regimes in the context of ascendant neo-liberalization to the recent emergence of more decentralized political structures for claim-making and governance. The essay then suggests that greater historical and contextual specificity in the study of informality, along with the methodological innovations highlighted in the papers, will further help reveal the range of responses to informality seen across the different case studies. Specifically, it proposes that closer attention to divergent urban and national pathways of democratization, attention to institutional variations within and across democratic regimes, political party dynamics at the local and national level, and the existence of urban violence, among other factors, will help explain how and why bureaucrats and elected officials may choose to deal differently with the existence of informality. The essay concludes by arguing that informality should be considered as both a form of governance and a means of enacting citizenship. It thus asks scholars to question the longstanding conceptual dichotomies that permeate much of the literature on informality, including the stark conceptual divide between the formal and informal, and instead to recognize that complex, interactive, and iterative relationships between citizens and the state in the arena of informality are what drive urban servicing and sociopolitical change.

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What a pleasure to see this special issue of *Studies in Comparative International Development* in which an array of pioneering political scientists offer inventive approaches to the study of urban informality. The four papers that comprise this symposium critically reflect on the appropriateness of long-standing methodologies in political science and offer alternative pathways for the study of informality. The authors of these papers build on the assumption that new forms of data collection are needed in order to understand the politics of marginality and informality in cities of the so-called global South. Their preferred methodologies include the embrace of historical and archival analysis, as underscored by Adam Michael Auerbach; the deployment of crowdsourcing technologies, as developed by Alison Post, Anustubh Agnihotri, and Christopher Hyun; the adoption of ethnographic field methods as shown by Tariq Thachil; and a purposeful mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to better reveal process tracing, as posited by Tugba Bozcaga and Alisha Holland. The search for new research strategies and tactics owes not merely to the paucity of reliable aggregated data on attitudes, outcomes, and the interactions between citizens and the state among marginalized populations, or to the fact that the informal activities in which they often engage by their very definition tends to involve under-the-radar-screen behavior that is purposefully obscured and thus difficult to access. It also owes to the fact that in recent years, the social, economic, and spatial character of cities in the developing world has been transforming in dramatic ways and at a speed that makes comprehensive and longitudinal measurement of causal dynamics in the domain of informality quite difficult to obtain

The rapidity of urban change is not merely a methodological problem. It also has implications for the field of comparative politics and many of its long-standing assumptions about political order and even democratization and citizenship. If decades ago, scholars like Samuel Huntington argued that the main challenge of political "modernization" involved confronting political cultures that prioritized ascription over achievement, or establishing institutions that enshrined democratic rather than authoritarian values, in the current era questions of "modernization" increasingly revolve around the need to enhance state regulatory capacities and strengthen the rule of law, particularly through the eradication of corruption and the strengthening of bureaucratic capacities as well as accountability. While these issues are relevant at all levels of government, these days, they are perhaps most openly struggled over at the scale of the city, often in the form of ongoing negotiations between citizens and the state over urban service provision. As I have argued elsewhere (Davis 2017a), governance of cities in the developing world often requires informality—not merely because the uneven reach of effective state institutions can limit the distribution of public goods, but also because governing authorities often strategically use informality to pursue their own state interests (Davis 2017b). In this complex environment, theorists of the state and scholars of informality must be in dialogue with each other, if only to understand the Janus-faced character of informality: its capacity to undermine as well as strengthen governance, citizenship, and social order at the level of the city.

An argument can be made that decisions made by local states to shun or tolerate informality do not merely reveal the state's priorities with respect to upholding the law, creating urban order, or accommodating citizen claims. They literally embody them, and

by so doing tell us something about the state's own character and self-definition as a source of authority that may be as likely to find its legitimacy or electoral successes through informal mediation as through formal processes. To recognize this is also to call for a more phenomenological understanding of the state, its form and function, as well as how it operates as a system of governance institutions and practices at multiple scales. What we are suggesting here is that no account of urban politics, governance, or citizenship in the developing world can be complete without understanding the role and reach of informality and how the state responds to or deploys it. And if one truly seeks to advance this particular approach to state theory, we will need to develop new analytical lenses, new forms of comparison, and new methodologies better able to capture, document, assess, and theorize these complex interactions. Evidence from sociological research on the relations between informality and governance has shown that one of the most powerful ways to advance these aims is to deploy deeply ethnographic methods (Boudreau and Davis 2017; Schavelzon 2012; Sharma and Gupta 2006).

The papers in this symposium confront these challenges head on, but collectively take them one step further by innovating or adopting a wide range of new methodologies—not merely ethnography—to understand whether and how housing, water, and other basic urban infrastructural public goods are provided to marginal populations; whether and why they may be as likely to be provided through informal as formal mechanisms; to ascertain which types of political strategies both citizens and the state use to achieve these urban servicing aims; and to reveal what these practices tell us about quintessential concerns of political scientists, ranging from bureaucratic capacity to the legitimacy of local authorities to the nature of distributive politics to the ethics of governance.

Some Necessary Background: Cities and Economic Globalization

Before diving into their findings, it may be worth giving a brief overview of the empirical and scholarly context of both urbanization and governance into which these papers insert themselves. Over the past decade or two, scholars in a variety of social science fields have increasingly turned to the study of cities, often for the purpose of understanding macroeconomic shifts as reflected in the twin phenomenon of globalization and liberalization (Satterthwaite 2007), with these studies engaging questions of informality either directly or indirectly. Broadly speaking, two distinct analytical frameworks have emerged: one focusing on the role of cities as the principle drivers of economic and social development at both the urban and the national scale, the other calling attention to the significant social and environmental costs associated with rapid and often unplanned urbanization. In neither of these currents are political scientists as active as they could or should be, perhaps because urban politics that has a subfield has been out of favor for several decades.

Those who have argued that cities are the privileged sites for economic development tend to focus on how urbanity unleashes creative potential through agglomeration and the spillover effects of knowledge economies. These ideas have gained most popularity among economists, who view the proliferation of urban slums and informal settlements in the developing world not as markers of systemic weakness, but rather of "the city's" ability to attract rural poor through the promise of improved livelihoods and health (Glaeser 2011). Among economists, attention is also shifting to economic clusters in key cities or areas within them, with research suggesting that such experiments can

support new, creative economies in previously declining, post-industrial cities and regions, thus re-energizing the study of the urban economic development nexus at a scale smaller than the nation (Porter 2003). As a sign of the globalization of ideas, cluster theory also is migrating to the developing world, particularly to South and East Asia where bottlenecks among export-led industrializers pushed their national governments to invest in industrial clusters outside major cities. But the theoretical and practical significance of cluster theory in the developing world has been slow to gain a foothold in the face of the increasing national obsession with producing global cities that can showcase high-end real estate, global finance, and ICT (information and communications technology) activities, all considered the principal avenues through which cities and their nations were to prosper economically (Olds 2011).

The preoccupation with finance, services, communications, and other tertiary sector activities can be explained by international capital's search for new investment outlets in the face of declines in industrial and agricultural output. Yet, it also captures the imagination of investors—both public and private—in emerging economies that seek to generate national economic gains through more than export-led industrialization or agriculture. The cases of India and China are exemplary in these regards. In these and a selected array of other emerging economies in Latin America and elsewhere, including Turkey (one of the cases examined in this symposium), urbanization has become associated with major transformations of the urban built environment—either in the form of slum clearance and the regularization of property so as to revitalize urban land markets, or in the form of iconic architectural projects and massive mega-project developments that often co-exist side by side with high overall levels of urban poverty and informality.

Scholars have suggested that the move to transform urban landscapes into economic incubators and showcases of innovation and development may be greater in cities where decentralized governance has limited the local state's fiscal capacities. This pushes local authorities to generate revenues through transformations of their own spatial backyards. In the search for fiscal incentives to attract the innovative classes, authorities have turned to the private sector for resources and ideas, thus increasing state willingness to support a massive rebuilding of the city landscape. Reliance on local public-private partnerships for urban development is seen as enabling regional and national progress outside the typically slow moving and bureaucratic mechanisms of national-level governance, echoing processes enabled through the introduction of special economic zones (SEZs) in the 1980s and 1990s (Romer 2010).

In the second line of research, focusing more on the downside of urbanization, scholars are divided with respect to who is most responsible for the negative externalities associated with rapid urbanization. Some of this has to do with the fact that, in the current neoliberal era of decentralization and state downsizing, major urban servicing and land use transformations usually involve both public and private sector actors, as both share incentives to generate and capture revenues. But when city authorities begin to ally with real estate developers around such massive urban transformations, and when they join private investors in displacing or dispossessing residents from properties or locations, they often face political opposition. While similar challenges in the 1970s placed the analytic focus on the failure of the state to keep pace with increasing urban populations, contemporary scholars and development agencies have broadened the focus to include the failure of the market, limited private sector investment, and neoliberal structural adjustment policies unable to adequately account for the needs of

the urban poor (Beall 2004; Harvey 2008). Thus, to the extent that neoliberal restructuring of urban space within the context of continued globalization produces extreme spatial fragmentation, exclusionary urban development, and local conflict, the route to prosperity via transformation of urban land uses and accelerated real estate development—rather than manufacturing and industrialization—continues to be paved with social and political obstacles.

For this reason, much of recent scholarship continues to highlight the many negative political externalities associated with the dispossession and dramatic transformations in urban land use deployed in order to pave the way for new urban projects central to the global city aspirations of the governing elite, both public and private. Some of these changes include decreasing access to shelter and secure tenure for existing and incoming populations of urban poor, and displacement of vulnerable populations to the urban periphery. Much of these changes are occurring in an urban context where the proportion of the working population in the informal sector is increasing rather than decreasing, owing to macroeconomic changes associated with the decline of manufacturing and the rise of an IT and service-driven economy. As such, even among those scholars whose concern is less about land use change and more about urban economic growth, there is recognition that these transformations are unfolding in the context in which urban service provision is stressed beyond capacity. From inadequate infrastructure to environmental degradation to significant increases in urban poverty and rising rates of violence and insecurity (Martine et al. 2008), rapidly urbanizing cities in the developing world today are seen as hosting a plethora of social and political problems that persist in the midst of accelerating prosperity. This is where the focus on informality, the subject of this symposium, becomes absolutely central to our understanding of politics and the trade-offs between economic prosperity and political stability.

Urban Informality and Development Goals

In the most rapidly urbanizing regions of the world, the management of urban poverty, most clearly manifested through the increasing occurrence of slums and informal settlement patterns, has emerged as one of the most consistent lenses through which scholars and practitioners now address the costs and benefits of rapid urbanization across the developing world (Roy and AlSayyad 2005). While the cities of Sub-Saharan Africa have the highest rates of informality and slum growth as a percentage of total urban expansion, Asian cities are now home to the largest total number slum-dwellers, placing the issue at the center of a multidisciplinary debate over the role of urban informality as a driver or inhibitor of economic development. From an economic standpoint alone, that informal economy in developing nations, operating primarily in the urban periphery and "slum" settlements, is estimated to account for upwards of 50% of all urban employment across the developing world (Becker 2004). Despite the observable increases in per capita economic productivity that accompany rural-urban migration, others point out that the lack of formal tenure and property rights which has accompanied the relative lack of affordable housing provision by local governments and the private sector alike, alongside the inadequate provision of educational opportunity, likely account for tens of billions of dollars of unrealized capital in slums (de Soto 2001; Yamauchi et al. 2009).

Renewed interest in the forms and functionality of informal settlements is also closely related to the continued consolidation of human rights at the heart of development discourse, first clearly articulated through the formulation and adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and more recently in the global agreement on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Both established critical benchmarks for measuring development and progress in the twenty-first century, and the SDGs in particular put questions of urbanization at the center of debate. The demographic shift to a majority urban global population, along with the expansion of urban footprints at rates that more than doubles that of urban population growth (Angel et al. 2011) mean that the environmental, economic, and social impact of urbanization has a progressively more direct impact on national and global outcomes. In this context, cities have emerged as one of the few truly cross-cutting arenas in which to effectively implement policies and measure progress towards meeting the MDG/SDG targets (Hassan et al. 2005). In the most recent Un-Habitat III Conference in Quito, efforts to place SDGs on the global agenda grew largely out of efforts by advocates for the poor and displaced to focus global attention on cities as the new battlefront for guaranteeing prosperity, equity, and inclusion. Since the approval of the New Urban Agenda in 2016, both national governments and multilateral institutions alike have been pulled into direct engagement with urban authorities about how to advance MDG/SDG aims. As they debate the political and economic costs and benefits associated with the transformation of informal settlements, the revitalization of neglected neighborhoods, the renovation or upscaling of traditional activities, sites, and land uses, and the displacement fallout from accelerating property values that comes as a consequence of all these priorities, finding consensus is nearly impossible.

In this context, how city-level authorities treat informal settlements and informal activities has become key to their own political futures, not merely with respect to their relationships to citizens as electoral constituents and political subjects, but also with respect to their own national political allegiances and aspirations, both party-specific and ideological. Too much accommodation of informality or the claims of citizens to stay put or be better serviced might get in the way of land use transformations and the formalization of property rights needed to facilitate urban economic growth, thus creating negative fiscal externalities while also potentially generating charges of populism or even corruption and insufficient attention to the rule of law. Yet too little accommodation can leave authorities open to grievances about potential violations of human rights and an unwillingness to recognize the inclusionary aspirations from poor residents and their advocates alike, thus generating charges of neoliberal excess, elite capture, and insufficient commitment to participatory democratic ideals.

How Political Scientists Can Further Advance the Research Agenda

The papers presented in this symposium address these issues to varying degrees, thus laying the groundwork for more purposeful discussion of the complexities of informality in the field of comparative politics. Although it is somewhat surprising that the authors did not engage more directly with discussions of citizenship and democracy, or pay more attention to the workings of party politics, all did address questions of urban governance—and within that general rubric, most concerned themselves with the urban conditions of marginalized populations and how they are produced through bureaucratic

logics and/or the state in interaction with citizens. As noted in the overview piece by Auerbach, LeBas, Post, and Weitz-Shapiro, a central concern has been to "consider how the state assesses, maps, and responds to the demands of informal sector actors." This mandate has translated into a deliberate focus on local bureaucracies and how they operate in the context of the myriad urban servicing requisites in the cities under study (in India, Colombia, and Turkey). The authors' insights and findings in this regard are particularly significant, reflecting to a great degree of the institutionalist underpinnings of any effort to rethink informality and its relevance comparative politics. And although several of the papers do examine citizens and how they negotiate urban service bureaucracies, perhaps the most deliberate attention has been paid to the institutional logic of bureaucratic behaviors. This focus is welcome in a discipline long dominated by methodological individualism. Even when the focus is on particular bureaucratic actors and how they negotiate their everyday work requisites, as with the Colombian surveyor stymied by the inadequacies of GPS technologies, the authors' efforts to understand bureaucratic behavior as embedded in specific organizational dynamics helps us understand why at times local authorities are unwilling or unable to provide citizens the urban services or land use accommodations they are demanding.

This is particularly clear in the Post, Agnihotri, and Hyun paper on water servicing, in which the bureaucratic complexities of service delivery incentivized residents to work directly with lower level service intermediaries, that is with "valvemen" who had direct access to water taps, thus allowing more discretion and negotiation at the neighborhood level over service outcomes. The authors thus claim that rather than any larger political rationality of the state agency it was the complex bureaucratic set-up (in which the city's water utility bureaucracy enabled a certain discretion to operate at lower levels of the supply chain), and the discretion that such arrangements gave lower level operators, that explains the pattern of servicing to informal settlements. A concern with the bureaucratic intricacies and whether or how they might compete with or countervail against more partisan political logics is also tackled in the paper by Bozcaga and Holland, who discuss the conditions under which bureaucrats will enforce regulatory frameworks or behave flexibly because larger political issues are at stake. They address this dilemma through the lens of debates over forbearance versus dilution of the law, and ask how we should understand when (and why) local bureaucrats might follow or relax regulatory rules.

One of the most striking findings in the Bozcaga and Holland paper is their identification of the multiple logics at play in determining bureaucratic actions—particularly the ways in which tolerance of informality (or dilution of the law, to use the authors' framing) with respect to squatting and the approval of building permits is both path-dependent and context-specific, particularly with respect to larger electoral cycles. In this regard, they methodologically build on but depart from the analytical focus on the discretionary power of street-level bureaucrats, identified by Post et al., and offer a more temporally disaggregated understanding of stages of permitting and how they unfold over time. They claim that through process tracing one can identify certain moments or "opportunities" where a single decision can impact overall outcomes in a larger chain of decision-making, even though that single decision is not the sole producer of outcomes. By simultaneously identifying a larger bureaucratic structure and individual opportunities for discretion, these findings speak to scholarly efforts in the fields of sociology, geography, and anthropology to move "beyond dichotomization" in the study of informality, and to understand the porous boundaries

between the formal and informal, whether understood sectorally, temporally, or with respect to ongoing interactions between citizens and the state (Davis 2017a).

Such findings also dovetail with my own efforts (Ibid.) to distinguish between a state's authority and its interests, both of which function at the level of the city. A state may have the institutional or legal authority to regulate populations and city spaces, something I often attribute to patterns of state formation more than regime type. But it may not always be in the state's interest to do so, depending on whether such actions may undermine its governing capacity or legitimacy more generally. In this sense, it is not uncommon for two of the defining functions of the state—as identified by Weber in the form of coercive or legal authority on the one hand, and legitimacy on the other—to be in conflict or tension. Informality is critical precisely because it inserts itself into this space of tension, both revealing the contradictions between state authority and state interests, but also compelling authorities to privilege one of these functions over the other. Just as significantly, it is not always clear whether variations in regime type determine whether and how states might embrace informality for such aims. Studies have shown (Naqvi 2017) that even in settings where democratic structures and institutions remain weak and unstable, as in Pakistan, informal practices in urban servicing can help engender greater state accountability. A similar scenario unfolded in Mexico City through informality in urban water provision (De Alba 2017). Both cases suggest that informality of servicing was necessary to the political project of state strengthening and legitimacy. Faced with the incapacity to provide universalized urban services to the urban poor, informal intermediaries often step in and this legitimizes the state.

Even so, the question that emerges when contrasting the results shared for these three settings (India, Turkey, and Colombia) is why are the findings so different with respect to bureaucratic behavior? One of the great advantages of having a symposium with multiple papers from different contexts is that such comparative questions can be posed. One way to start answering them is with a more concerted focus on regime type and on differences in the nature of democracy across the three different countries that are examined in these two papers. Stated simply, there are larger questions and concerns that have long preoccupied the field of comparative politics that could and should also be inserted into these discussion of informality. Let us take the case of India, which is not only a relatively strong and stable democracy when compared to Turkey and perhaps even in Colombia, it also is a country with a well-developed and profoundly institutionalized bureaucratic sector whose organizational durability and high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the country's political party system owe to British colonialism, among other factors. In that sense, bureaucratic decision-making structures have long-standing and well-institutionalized codes of procedural conduct making them perhaps much less subject to political party capture than in Turkey or even in Colombia. In standard political science parlance, such differences might be captured by invoking concepts like strong and weak democracies, weak institutions, or robust state capacity. But one might also frame these differences through a more historical sensibility and a focus on the relative autonomy of the bureaucracy, itself strengthened by the long-standing institutionalized tradition of a strong civil service (the latter of which is less common in Latin America as well as other parts of the global South).

Likewise, there might be other analytical entry points for understanding the variation in outcomes between urban Turkey and Colombia. Although Bozcaga and Holland tend to focus most of their attention on bureaucratic actors and whether their priorities

and capabilities may be upended by mayors, they say very little about the larger partisan political dynamics in which bureaucratic and other non-elected state actors are operating, both locally and nationally, and about the ways that electoral contests or ideological battles in certain cities may be part and parcel of contentious national political debate that impact bureaucratic behavior. In fact, with the exception of a superficial reference to urban elections in Turkey and the fact that they are quite contested—despite the presence of the AKP as the dominant force in Turkey's so-called "competitive authoritarian regime"—the focus is primarily on urban governance conceptually understood as if were unrelated to party contestation. Granted, the aim of the paper is in some ways to test this proposition. But it may be difficult to do that without purposefully seeking to understand the ways that these particularly political contexts empirically situate the analysis. In the case of Colombia, similarly, there is hardly a mention of the impact of the long-standing civil war and the political fallout of the conflict between partisan forces over the prospect of peace, despite recognition of the fact that squatting is a contested issue because many informal settlements are populated by citizens displaced from the civil war. All these raise the question of whether it is wise to seek generalizations about bureaucratic forbearance or dilution without recognizing that urban governance regimes may themselves be embedded in these larger national conflicts in ways that directly impact bureaucratic behavior.

The nature of the city being governed might also matter. Indeed, one might also ask whether the relative support for dilution or forbearance among bureaucrats employed in a capital city might be determined by logics different from those in cities not existing in the shadow of the national state? How about a commercial city versus an industrial city, or an economically prosperous city versus a declining city? The obvious point here is that all cities are not alike—geographically, economically, culturally, and politically, and these differences might impact bureaucratic logics generally and the relative autonomy of bureaucrats from mayors in particular. If we take such specificities seriously, we should also pay scholarly attention to the fact that observations about the mix of forbearance and dilution in Colombia are drawn primarily from its capital city, while in Turkey, findings are derived from a focus on two cities with a very different political-economic logic (the political capital Ankara on the one hand, and Istanbul on the other, with both these cities evidencing different cultural, economic, and urban developmental aspirations. This is significant because one would presume that elite powers structures and stakeholders differ considerably both respect to their embeddedness in national politics, and with respect to how they might choose to enforce regulations on building permits and squatting.

The point here is that scholars might want to insure that greater attention to cities and their urban, governance, and economic developmental profiles is placed into the discussion of the comparative politics of forbearance versus dilution, or the deployment of bureaucratic versus political logics, because different city-specific urban development priorities and constraints may have some bearing on the relative balance between these urban governance strategies. This is particularly so with respect to whether the urban developmental aspirations of a city are embedded in a political agenda that might be national as much as local.

The potential relevance of focusing on national political conditions and how they influence urban governance postures, or vice-versa, could be applied to the case of Colombia. What initially struck me when reading the case of Bogota was the fact that urban governance in Bogota has long been connected to national political debate over the

ongoing civil war, over the appropriateness of negotiating a peace settlement, and over what to do with respect to the large number of urban migrants that have been displaced by violence in the countryside—whether demobilized paramilitaries, guerrilla forces, or those victimized rural populations caught in the violence. Among those who settle informally in the poorest neighborhood inside and outside the city, all three groups are represented to a certain degree, although in which particular barrio they reside often differs, and thus might have a bearing on how bureaucrats or mayors accommodate informality.

Complicating matters, many of the mayoral administrations governing Bogota in the last several decades have been voted into power precisely because they ran as independents or in opposition to the standard Liberal and Conservative parties, both of whom had relatively clear—but opposite—positions on the nature of violence and who was most to blame. Since the end of the 1990s, Mayors Enrique Peñalosa, Antanas Mockus, Luis Eduardo Garzón, and then Samuel Moreno Rojas all ran for office on platforms and parties that took positions departing in significant ways from much of the national discourse. Moreno Rojas, who governed during the period of Bozcaga and Holland's study, ran representing the far-left Alternative Democratic Pole (ADP), and was followed immediately by a former M-19 guerrilla, Gustavo Petro, as Bogotá's Mayor.

With such controversial politicians at the helm, governance decisions in and about the city were frequently debated not just locally but also nationally—a fact reinforced by Bogota's status as the nation's capital, and parliament home to all political parties with national aims. One could easily imagine that any framing of the city's urban governance priorities—particularly with respect to displaced populations residing in the city's squatter settlements—would be hard to undertake without some reference to the larger national debate about post-conflict reconciliation and the fate of victims of violence in mind. This was particularly clear during the administration of Mayor Petro, in fact, who actively and controversially sought to present himself and the city's urban servicing agenda as both a far-left policy and a far-left political alternative, also tying his programs to a particular position within the ongoing national discourse about the peace process.

In short, one could easily imagine that any framing of the city's urban governance priorities—particularly with respect to displaced populations residing in the city's squatter settlements discussed in the paper, no matter which party ruled the city—would be having a major bearing on the decision to opt for forbearance versus dilution of the law. And although the paper's findings could be seen as quite consistent with this framing, one cannot help but suspect that the emphasis on the more abstract notions of mayoral prerogative and weak state capacity might inadvertently sidestep the relevance of these larger dynamics. For this reason, it is important to situate these and other theoretical reflections about informality and how it is perceived in administrative and political time as much as in urban space, with eyes always open to the specificities of local-national politics in which any administrative actions are embedded.

My aim in sharing these reflections is not to challenge any of the findings in this or the other symposium papers, but to encourage scholars to think more about what it would take to move dialogue and debate about the governance of informality one step further so as to open out a larger set of questions for the field of comparative politics. This would require continued collective scholarly efforts to situate urban servicing decisions made by bureaucrats and mayors into both the local and national context of political party dynamics, into larger intractable political conflicts, into both spatial and temporal context, and after doing so to determine whether and why they may have the impacted urban governance of informality.

State vs. Citizen-Focused Research Strategies: Finding Common Ground

Attention to the larger political landscapes that frame servicing priorities of marginal or informal populations could also be applied to the findings of the final two papers in this symposium, by Auerbach and Thachil, both of whom use novel methodologies to capture the views of citizens and how they demand or respond to local conditions. In combination with the papers that focus on state and bureaucratic actors, we are able to grasp the importance of understanding both bottom-up and top-down logics when it comes to the experience of urban marginality and informality. In combination, all four papers lay a robust foundation for future comparative politics scholarship on the dynamics of informality that can recognize the complex, interactive, and iterative relationships between citizens and the state. The value of such a framework is made most evident in the chapters by Auerbach and Post et al., because both papers demonstrate that citizen demand-making must be understood as both product and producer of bureaucratic actions with respect to servicing poor residents. In this sense, political science could engage more with sociology and even critical legal studies when it comes to studying informality, precisely because citizen claims for servicing informal areas can itself transform the formal contours of the law and state power—or at least that has been well demonstrated with respect to land tenure formalization and property rights (Azuela 1987).

I find Auerbach's paper particularly helpful in revealing the contested nature of these dynamics because he takes a purposefully historical approach, showing how citizens' claims and bureaucratic responses (or their lack thereof) unfolded in struggle over time. With this methodology, he is able to present findings that echo the path-dependent sensibility of Bozcaga and Holland. And in advancing a more historical way of understanding the politics of informality, Auerbach's paper can also be situated in the context of recent scholarship suggesting that the relations between citizens and the state in negotiating informality must be considered a form of governance, which by its very nature serves as a fundamental axis of state formation (Boudreau and Davis 2017; Davis 2017a). This, in turn, suggests recognition of the fact that informality impacts the nature of the state and its bureaucratic apparatus, and not merely vice-versa.

Although also focused on citizens rather than the state, the study by Thachil pays less attention to active demand-making and is more concerned with revealing citizen preferences and the complex cultural and social dynamics that might produce fissures among informal sector workers. His paper seeks to underscore the value of ethnographic research strategies for better refining surveys—so as to access conditions on the ground, presumably with the aim of disseminating this information to bureaucratic decision-makers so as to improve urban service provision and governance decisions. In this sense, the Thachil paper may be the least institutionalist of the group, at least in terms of its analytical framework. Having said that, it clearly produces material with considerable relevance for bureaucrats and their institutional mandates. Indeed, his adoption of ethnographic methods allows a deeper understanding of the ethnic and religious conflicts among informal workers, and how they reveal themselves in everyday urbanism, including preferences for housing arrangements. This grounded information about local tensions and living habits will be valuable in explaining how and why a group might be organized enough internally to make forceful claims on local authorities, as well as why bureaucrats might be willing to respond (or not) to their demands.

Indeed, Thachil's identification of the different urban livability priorities of Hindus and Muslims among informal sector workers in the same industry (construction) produces

valuable insight into how and why certain local bureaucrats charged with servicing neighborhoods might respond differently to constituents' claims depending on the larger political context, including whether local mayors were allied with the BJP-led municipality. As in the earlier discussion of the India, Colombia, and Turkey comparisons, attention to political parties, to larger national political discourses, and ongoing intractable political conflicts (in this case ethno-national) can be combined with grounded ethnographic material to contextualize bureaucratic postures with respect to servicing informal neighborhoods.

It goes without saying that all four authors have managed to produce fascinating accounts of the interaction between local states and citizens who are situationally vulnerable and thus may be less likely to use the ballot box to express political grievances. And it also is worth noting the fact that they have skillfully shown how these interactions mold urban service provision without ever really resorting to discussions of clientelism. This in some ways is precisely the point. But it is worth underscoring precisely because we need to be identifying a wide range of motivations that link citizens and the state to each other, in ways that differentially produce both urban servicing and political outcomes as well as their relationship to each other. This is particularly necessary in today's rapidly urbanizing world, where urban and rural class structures are changing in surprising ways and where a wide range of social and cultural identities drive citizen demand-making, old practices and institutions based on political party structures associated with corporatism or work-based class grievances—or perhaps even labor or peasant constituencies—may not be playing the same role in mediating the urban informal populations' political relationships to the state.

It may be that in contrast to the past, urban citizens' most pressing concerns and claims will be less focused on the work place or party affiliation or even the abstracted notion of democracy and more focused on the conditions of everyday livability. And while this may be a function of the times, it will be even more likely to govern the demands of informal settlements and marginalized populations, particularly if they produce their own livelihoods rather than rely on wage employment. It goes without saying that those who are less likely to be employed in the formal sector are also less likely to be integrated into those long-standing political institutions—party or state-specific—that offer well-established and relatively transparent mechanisms for expressing preferences. This may be precisely why citizens' futures depend so much on negotiated, situational interactions with individual urban service regulators and providers. But in order to understand why this is the case, it might be helpful to ask whether relations between bureaucrats and marginal populations are the same in informal neighborhoods where residents have a wage job, as opposed to informal neighborhoods where residents are self-employed (and perhaps even in the informal economy). My point here is that some attention to the definition of informality if in order. A settlement can be informal in terms of land tenure, but have formally employed residents. Might this change theories or claims about the conditions under which state actors responded to their servicing demands?

Where to Next?

Clearly, the authors of these papers have already started to carve out new lines of research to document, analyze, and interpret servicing of marginal and informal populations in ways that focus much needed attention on local state actors, including bureaucrats, and the logic of their political relationships to citizens. So what else is to be tackled? In addition to

some of the suggestions noted above, one pother possible line for future research would be to take these and other findings about how state actors and institutions insert themselves into the politics of informality, and more purposefully situate them in comparative-historical context. With three papers focused on India, there may not have been sufficient variation in the nature of political regimes and their institutional architecture to be able to assert more robust claims about the politics of informality. Closer examination of a range of countries across the global South, ranging from the rest of Latin America to Africa and other parts of Southeast and East Asia would make sense.

Just as more attention to the methodology of comparison could be valuable, the field of comparative politics might benefit greatly from a deeper historical framing of the issues addressed here. The paper by Auerbach already reveals archival evidence from as early as the 1970s about citizen advocacy for upgrading in informal settlements. But this type of material only makes one want to know more about whether even these tactics departed from those used in earlier periods of India's democratization, whether and how liberalization in contemporary India may have fundamentally altered in the present era, and whether large-scale political transformations in Indian politics have filtered down to slum politics in different ways—depending on who is involved and what is at stake in terms of local property development and urban land use transformation. Again, this is just one framing of the ways in which an historical approach to the politics of informality might lay the groundwork for larger discussions of the nature of democracy in India more generally.

Likewise, as a scholar of Latin America, I would encourage political scientists to compare citizen-state negotiations and interactions over at least the last several decades, and how they might have unfolded differently in earlier periods when the transition from authoritarianism coincided with even more rapid urbanization. (This too could be compared to a context like India, where rural migration has only recently shifted the population balance to cities, despite the earlier transition to democracy.) Latin America has long been urban, beginning in the transition to Fordism, continuing through the shifts to post-Fordism, and now in the context of neoliberalization and state downsizing. Informal settlements and marginal populations have persisted across these different phases, although they now exist in a very different urban, spatial, and political-economic context. The question is how have the relations between these populations and local authorities changed, and would we expect to see a convergence with respect to other developing countries, say India, or a pursuit of different citizen-state arrangements depending on country context, and why?

As the papers in this symposium reveal, there does not appear to be a single path followed by local authorities in their regulatory approach to informality across our three cases, or even over time in the same city. The question is why. Does it have to do with changes in urbanization, democratization, or some combination of the two? Generating more knowledge of how and why informal practices still exist will not only enhance our theoretical and empirical understanding of urban governance; it might also help us grasp why nation states, political systems, and local authorities in so many parts of the developing world are facing a legitimacy crisis. After all, if the politics of informality is situational and constantly under negotiation, would we not say the same about the rule of law? And if that is true, it is no surprise that faith in formal politics and the democratic franchise is on the decline. I encourage the authors of this symposium and political scientists more broadly to consider these bigger questions in future research. I am sure they will have something new to say about these time-honored questions in the field of comparative politics, and we will all be listening.

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