Veronica Herrera, *Water and Politics: Clientelism and Reform in Urban Mexico*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017. Figures, tables, acronyms, appendixes, bibliography, index, 280 pp.; hardcover $75, ebook.

Water and Politics deals with municipal water sector "reform" (defined roughly as putting utilities on a sustainable footing to provide adequate water and sanitation services) in areas of Mexico where opposition parties came to power during democratization. Given the legacy of clientelism and politically motivated side deals for water provision that opposition parties at the local level inherited from decades of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), reforms frequently entailed politically unpalatable decisions. For instance, reformers often had to impose rate hikes, cut off services to nonpaying customers, eliminate widespread illegal connections to the water system, and end featherbedding—as well as adopt somewhat less contentious measures like technical upgrading, installing meters, and professionalizing customer service. For reforms to take hold, politicians not only had to choose them in the first place but also to defend them and ultimately to insulate them as much as possible from future political interference (for instance, by creating citizen water boards with staggered terms).

Veronica Herrera identifies three conditions (independently necessary and jointly sufficient) for such restructuring: the electoral victory of reform-minded politicians, the presence of a large middle class in the municipality, and water-intensive industries (especially those that must rely on city-supplied water). Where one of these elements was missing, only ad hoc reforms were ever attempted, usually in response to a crisis in water provision; more systematic restructuring was stymied if it was even attempted. Herrera illustrates these dynamics through a comparison among eight Mexican urban centers in three states: León, Irapuato, and Celaya in Guanajuato state; Naucalpan, Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, and Toluca in Mexico state; and Xalapa and the municipalities that form Veracruz City in Veracruz state.

This being Mexico, the mayors who pursued reforms hailed almost exclusively from the center-right National Action Party (PAN), whose core constituency included the middle class. However, Herrera takes pains to show that other parties sometimes undertook minor piecemeal measures and that the PAN did not undertake reforms when confronted with politically less auspicious circumstances (as in Toluca and Veracruz City). Furthermore, PAN politicians adopted different strategies—some more open to civil society participation than others—depending on the political circumstances in their municipality. In fact, within the larger framework of her argument, the case studies reveal more than one path to reform: the initiative of a single leader in Naucalpan, a consensus of the business and civic community in León, a coalition of partisans and technocrats in Celaya, etc. For all these reasons, "reform" did not simply equate with PAN victory.

Ultimately, Herrera's theory and empirical material are novel, and they offer lessons for a range of other countries. In the absence of systematic data both on attempts at reform and on the actual performance of water authorities—which she convincingly demonstrates do not exist—the empirical strategy of case comparisons

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that she adopts makes sense. The cases themselves draw, among other things, on extensive fieldwork.

Herrera has written an important book. It illuminates a crucial and hitherto undiscovered dynamic in a crucial policy domain. The author demonstrates a command of the technical issues in water provision, as well as its politics (which is the principal focus). The empirical material is also well anchored in the Mexican context: chapter 3, for instance, offers a nice history of Mexico's old regime through the prism of water policy, and chapter 4 includes a beautiful depiction of how León's history of antiregime civic activism shaped water sector reform under the PAN. The volume is accessibly written and (with the exception of chapter 1) largely jargon-free. All told, it should be required reading for those who care about water policy, public service provision in the developing world, or Mexican politics.

No book is perfect, of course. Like many first books by a promising scholar, parts of this one still have the feel of a dissertation. For instance, chapter 1 contains some unnecessary throat-clearing (about clientelism, decentralization, the relationship of administrative reform to democratization, and research method) and excessive complexity of argumentation as Herrera links her findings to larger literatures on these topics. Readers should forge ahead through—or skip—much of this section in order to get to the rich empirical material that fills the rest of the book.

Another critique concerns the way Herrera presents her three conditions. An economic reductionist might start from the assumption that low-end utilities like water require two things: a cross-subsidy between large commercial users and poor residential users and a sufficient number of billable users on the residential side. This is a slightly different way of framing things from the more "political science" explanation Herrera employs (private sector support for reform and the existence of a middle-class constituency). For instance, her discussion in the case studies of firms' access to their own boreholes and the water-intensiveness of their operations suggests a more precise explanation than the blunter variable of "private sector support" that she invokes in her summary chapters. But this critique is mainly a question of conceptual elegance, not a fundamental flaw in her argument or her findings.

On the purely political side of things, one cannot help wondering if the distinctive features of the PAN as a party—at least at the time of transition in the 1990s—get short shrift in her summary chapters, compared to the work they do in her case studies. In my view, it is hard to imagine reform happening as fast or as thoroughly if the PAN were just any party competing for a middle-class constituency, rather than one whose longstanding commitment to "good government" and rejection of clientelism had been developed over decades as a "club" party. As noted above, Herrera convincingly shows that some PAN governments did not pursue water sector reform, but all of her cases of major reform involved the PAN rather than another opposition party (or a renascent PRI), and the municipalities where the PAN failed to pursue reform also happen to be those in which another party controlled the state government. (In the case studies, Herrera provides plenty of examples of how intervention from state governments could matter.) My read of her Irapuato case study, in which business support for reform was much weaker

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than in León, suggests how important the PAN's ideology was to the initial decision to undertake reform.

In a related vein, I found Herrera's lower-class-versus-middle-class (or "elite") dichotomy to be a bit too strong. There may be many losers among the lower classes in a particularistic system of distribution, even when it comes to a commodity like water (which is very broadly provided). Some poor neighborhoods may lack connections. Conversely, working-class residents employed by industries that depend on a reliable water supply (from the leather curers in León to waiters in tourist restaurants) would have a material interest in water sector reform, because the additional cost they paid for water at home would be smaller than the potential loss of income they faced if the businesses that paid their salaries failed. The right dichotomy, then, might not be "elites" versus "the poor" but winners and losers from a particularistic system of water distribution.

One final critique concerns how Herrera's argument will travel to other contexts. It is tempting to draw from the travails that reformers confronted in Herrera's case studies the discouraging conclusion that restructuring is almost impossibly daunting and unlikely to be undertaken except under rare circumstances. I suspect that such a lugubrious conclusion has to do with the starting point in Mexico at the time opposition parties took power at the local level: an already overstretched infrastructure, entrenched clientelism and corruption, and underdeveloped mechanisms for monitoring municipal government. Although these conditions exist in many parts of the world, they are not universal. The requisites of reform may therefore be different in other places, and Herrera's lessons for other contexts would be sharper if she were more explicit about the scope conditions in which the dynamics she identifies would operate.

At the same time, the details of the political challenges that reformers face should serve as a crucial rejoinder to those (including well-meaning evangelists from international development agencies) who believe reform can fit all contexts. Politics is crucial and pervasive; reformers had to play the political game as much as their rivals. They were only inclined to push for reform—and only able to succeed at it—under certain political circumstances. It is this marriage of the politics of water with the policy issues at stake that makes Herrera's book a particularly salient contribution.

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