

**Evading the Patronage Trap: Interest Representation in Mexico.** By Brian Palmer-Rubin. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022. 342p. \$90.00 cloth, \$42.95 paper.  
doi:10.1017/S1537592723000415

— Joy Langston, *Centro de Estudios Internacionales, El Colegio de México*  
jlangston@colmex.mx

One of the central questions of clientelist exchange in the political science literature is why it does not abate as economies grow and democratic institutions become more common. Brian Palmer-Rubin, in his new book, *Evading the Patronage Trap: Interest Representation in Mexico*, offers an interesting answer to this question that delves into how interest organizations and political parties negotiate their linkage strategies, either through programmatic demand making or patronage exchange of jobs for votes. The book examines both organized rural landholders and business interests and how they are represented by parties to understand their effects on Mexico's relatively new democracy.

The author concentrates first on the organizational side (chaps. 3–5) to understand whether producer groups can demand economic and social policies that will improve long-term economic prospects or whether they employ short-term government resources to keep their groups afloat. Organizational survival, especially for groups representing poorer interests, is often difficult because many do not have access to resources from membership dues, paid services, or international funding groups. One of the easiest and most acceptable ways to gain money and necessary goods is to exchange their members' votes for government goods and services. Once organizations have become accustomed to these types of links, it is relatively difficult to secure other types of resources, and it becomes difficult for organizations and their members to make programmatic demands and then vote accordingly. This is the patronage trap.

For governments to implement programmatic policies, both organizations and political parties must find benefits from doing so. The possibility of this strategy depends on how the organization funds itself and how it can recruit and mobilize members. If the organization can internally fund its activities, as many (but not all) business groups can do, then it should be able to retain the ability and autonomy to make programmatic demands of their political allies.

Palmer-Rubin maintains that the best combination for competitive electoral environments is to make long-term connections to core interest organizations, based on programmatic demands and patronage benefits to noncore groups at election time. For parties, one of the strongest indicators as to whether they are willing to offer programmatic benefits is whether they were first formed outside government and were thus able to survive without immediately winning elections, or whether they were formed with all the benefits of state access and were forced to win

elections quickly. If this is the case, then parties will be less likely to exchange programmatic promises in return for votes.

Parties that were formed outside of power can rely on allied organizations that make programmatic demands, while those that are formed while enjoying access to state benefits find themselves striving to win elections more rapidly, and therefore having to use clientelist goods, which prevents them from developing programmatic ties with their core organizations.

When both organizations and parties “converge” on a specific strategy, they will “enter into self-reproducing cycles of policy representation” (p. 253), and the author acknowledges that the strongest linkage pattern is based on patronage or clientelism, as it is difficult to find parties formed outside of power or organizations that can generate their own resources and services for members. This convergence around clientelist exchange helps to explain why Mexican parties continue to rely on patronage exchange.

Palmer-Rubin makes several important contributions to the literature on both Mexican politics and the ongoing success of clientelist exchange in middle-income nations. First, I believe the comparison between rural producer organizations and business associations, if not the first of its kind, is the first in many years, as authors mostly treat these two types of groups as completely different in that they share few attributes, strategies, or goals. In fact, we know little about business associations in general because not much has been done from a political science perspective on this topic for decades. The author, however, clearly delineates how these groups are comparable to peasant and small producer groups in their ability to negotiate with governments.

Another important contribution of *Evading the Patronage Trap* is the case studies that employ both internal variation within a type of organization, and then external variation across the two kinds of groups. This design allows the author to make suggestive comparisons to highlight causation: some smallholder groups can make programmatic demands while some business associations lapse into more patronage-exchange strategies.

Finally, scholars working on Mexican politics have not written many works that focus on interest organizations as a central part of electoral representation, as most now rely on public-opinion polling, which cannot fully capture how one's membership in a producer group leads to vote choice. The central argument of this work is that, in fact, belonging to a social organization that has close ties—to either type—to a party will lead its members to vote for that party's candidates. No doubt this is true and the political effects of organizational membership need to be explored.

However, this discussion of interest groups and political parties also highlights certain empirical and methodological limitations with the book. One is that not many voters are represented by either small landholder or business

organizations. Even the once-powerful National Peasant League (CNC) no longer controls millions or even hundreds of thousands of votes, as it once did, nor can business groups and their membership form the base of a party victory. Grouping together hundreds of the associations in a state (which is not part of the author's argument) would still probably not produce a victory in state elections because of the millions of votes needed for victory. Interests can be organized in many ways in different societies; and most Mexicans do not participate in any type of organization, and thus would not vote, according to the author's argument. As a result, the work does not shed light on the relation between organizational representation and neighborhood-level clientelism, which is rampant in Mexico and many other nations in Latin America.

Another major question is whether the author is referring to how political parties or government officials link with societal organizations (chaps. 6 and 7). More detail is needed to capture which agent is strategizing and negotiating: Is it the party leaders who can then rely on their party's elected

members of government to comply with their promises? Or is it government officials who do not require any input from party officials? It is not clear to this reader whether parties as such are important actors in Mexico, or whether they simply exist to help candidates win elections. The author writes in the conclusion that the death knell of parties in Latin America may be exaggerated (and he may well be correct), but the evidence offered in the book does not necessarily lead to that conclusion if the actors involved in strategizing and negotiating are not party leaders but government officials.

Regardless of such concerns, the book is well worth reading and it can be used to think about how parties and organizations interact. The subject matter is crucial—almost all parties now employ clientelist exchange in all levels of electoral competition, despite Mexico's growing urbanization. It is increasingly important for the nation's development and democratic well-being to understand why certain groups can resist the temptation of patronage payoffs. Palmer-Rubin takes meaningful strides toward that end.

---

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

---

**Change in Global Environmental Politics: Temporal Focal Points and the Reform of International Institutions.** By Michael W. Manulak. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 280p. \$110.00 cloth.

**Fixing the Climate: Strategies for an Uncertain World.** By Charles F. Sabel and David G. Victor. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022. 256p. \$24.95 cloth.  
doi:10.1017/S1537592723000014

— Robert Falkner , London School of Economics and Political Science  
r.falkner@lse.ac.uk

Given the urgency of the global environmental crisis, it is unsurprising that international relations (IR) scholarship on global environmental politics (GEP) is overwhelmingly presentist in nature. Faced with accelerating global warming and rapid biodiversity loss, GEP scholars have good reasons to focus on the here and now of global environmental protection efforts, be it in the form of intergovernmental negotiations or transnational action. But is there anything that we can learn from the history of international environmental efforts? And if so, should students of GEP spend more time researching the origins and evolution of this international policy domain?

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the roots of international environmental diplomacy and global environmental action, not just among environmental and international historians but also in the IR discipline. These two books, although different in style and focus, demonstrate why viewing GEP through a historical lens can yield

important insights into the successes and failures of international efforts to save the planet.

Michael Manulak's book, *Change in Global Environmental Politics*, deals with the two big, epoch-defining events in the evolution of international environmentalism: the first UN environment conference in Stockholm in 1972 and the "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. He also examines other notable conferences that were less consequential, such as the 1982 UNEP Nairobi conference, the UN session debating the 1987 Brundtland Commission report, and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. His main research interest is in understanding why some of these high-level summits produced lasting institutional change while others failed to have the same effect.

Most explanations of profound institutional change in international relations focus on exogenous shocks (wars, economic crises), but these largely fail to explain the emergence of international environmental politics in the early 1970s and the acceleration and shift in international environmental institution building in the early 1990s. Manulak's book offers a different explanation, one that points to the ability of international actors to produce lasting international change out of gradual but significant shifts in international contexts. Historical institutionalists would have us believe that, without external shocks, actors are locked into a path-dependent evolutionary pattern. As Manulak shows, however, it is possible to produce endogenous, non-incremental change out of a convergence of expectations at certain critical points. For this to happen, however, "temporal focal points" (TFPs) are needed to stimulate such convergence processes. Both