

## Governance Uncovered Episode 64 – Transcription

### Claim-Making in Comparative Perspective

Hello and welcome to Governance Uncovered, a podcast brought to you by the Governance and Local Development Institute (GLD) at the University of Gothenburg. This podcast is supported by the Swedish Research Institute.

In this episode, we are joined by **Gabrielle Kruks-Wisner** to discuss her Cambridge Element, *Claim-Making in Comparative Perspective: Everyday Citizenship Practice and Its Consequences*, co-written with Janice Gallagher and Whitney Taylor.

Gabrielle and Ellen explore how everyday claim-making strategies help citizens fulfill their rights. Gabi highlights that claim-making is often overlooked in political behavior studies, which usually focus on elections, mass protests, high court decisions, and legislative actions. This raises the question: **What about the politics of the everyday?**

The Element and this interview address this question through research from Colombia, South Africa, India, and Mexico. Examples include families in Mexico seeking information about disappeared loved ones, citizens in rural India securing basic services like clean drinking water and education, and the fight for housing and healthcare rights in Colombia and South Africa.

Despite different contexts, all these cases highlight the persistent, often mundane efforts of citizens engaging with bureaucrats and appointed officials to claim their rights.

We hope you find this episode insightful!

So Gabi, thank you for joining us. I'm excited to talk to you about your Element that just came out. It's called Claim Making and Comparative Perspective, Everyday Citizenship Practice and its Consequences. And you've written this with Janice Gallagher and Whitney Taylor. And I think it's great because the three of you have like very deep and rich experience in very different parts of the world. So this is bringing together field work and insights from Colombia, Mexico, India and South Africa. Rich and and interesting work in and of itself, and then when you bring it together, I think you have a lot to say. So thank you for joining us to talk about it.

Oh, thank you for having me. It's really great to have a chance to talk about this and I wish that that Whitney and Janice were also here with us, but we will give their give their voices as well.

Thank you. So I want to just start with like the very basic question: you talk about claim making, right, and you sort of juxtapose it into the ways we generally think about participation and things like elections, and you know, maybe petition signing etcetera and you talk about it as a form of kind of making claims for citizenship so. Let's start with just the the basic question of what is claim making? What does it look like?

Yeah, so I guess, and it's not simple term the way we understand claim making is that it is the everyday efforts of ordinary citizens as they are attempting to petition, seek demand, goods, services, entitlements, rights from the state. That's sort of a a basic working definition, but it's also very broad. And as you said, we both situate claim making within and broader arenas of political participation, but we also try to distinguish it from other more well studied forms of participation, like voting behavior or social movement mobilization. And for us, the thing that most distinguishes claim making from other forms of participation is its everyday nature. It's quotidian nature. And what this means is what claim making looks like is a lot of stuff that can seem quite mundane, right? Can be standing in a long line outside of the bureaucratic office. It can be filing sheets and sheets of paper to make different kinds of petition. It can be attending local meetings, attending local hearings, going to grievance redressal complaint platforms, all these kinds of things. None of them sound very exciting or dramatic. And in fact, we think that's partly why they get understudied, right? It's not as high profile or dramatic as a mass movement, and it's not as attention grabbing as an election that happens every four or five years. But it is in fact the bulk of what most ordinary humans do most of the time when they need things from their governments, particularly at the local level. And that's why we kind of wanted to delineate claim making and call attention to it as a form of political participation in and of itself. So we think that, first of all, it's distinguished by its everyday nature, but another thing that really distinguishes claim making is that it's very often direct. It means actually citizens entering and engaging in different government offices, different public spaces to directly articulate and make their claims and demands on public officials. And most notably, those public officials are very often appointed, not elected. And so this means citizens engaging in administrative arenas and judicial arenas, talking to bureaucrats, talking to public personnels, talking to appointed judges and law clerks, and basically trying to navigate their way through these different kinds of arenas in order to make their

demands and their claims be heard by officials who are not elected. So we think that distinguishes it from a lot of other kinds of political behavior and political participation, but we still situate it within that broader arena of different forms of participation.

You make two more distinctions I thought were really interesting, so one was that there's times when this is done as individuals, right, and times when it's being done as groups. So it's another way that we can think about, you know, how it situates be to be something like elections. And the other thing that you draw our attention to is sometimes, it's about something like getting housing or health care. In other times, you know the case of Mexico, where it's about women who are trying to understand and seek both information about husbands and sons who have disappeared. So it has a really broad sort of gamut in terms of the issues that people are engaging over.

Yeah, absolutely. And in fact, that's sort of what drew us as three co-authors to this project collectively. We started thinking about both the really dramatic differences in our bodies of work and projects, and then also the, the, the sort of strange and unexpected commonalities. So to give an example, Janice Gallagher works on the crisis of disappearances in Mexico. And she's worked for decades now alongside families that are seeking information about their disappeared ones, and I've worked for decades now in rural India, observing how ordinary citizens are doing things like trying to get drinking water, pumps repaired to guarantee clean drinking water supply to their communities, or are trying to figure out what to do when the school teacher is absent from the local school. And they sound like night and day scenarios, they're really, really different. In one setting, citizens are engaging around what you might think of kind of social and for rights, and then Janice is work in Mexico, they're engaging on civil and political rights and right to justice, the right to information, the right to investigation. These are really different rights arenas. But what was really striking as we spoke about these and Whitney's work in both Colombia and South Africa looking at housing rights, healthcare rights, we started to notice that we were all talking about very similar concepts, which was the sort of, again, the everyday, quotidian ways, often really time consuming, often quite boring and mundane and repeated and recurring, where citizens very doggedly and intentionally are seeking out largely appointed officials, bureaucrats, judges, clerks. This doesn't mean that elected officials, like politicians and different kinds of party actors, are not part of the landscape and part of the arena. But what was really striking to us across these really different cases and really different parts of the world is ordinary citizens seeking out bureaucrats seeking out judges standing in long lines to sort of articulate these demands and these claims in ways that don't center exclusively or even centrally on political parties at all times, and we thought this was a really important distinction to draw out.

And you just used the word landscape too, right? Which get us to us to thinking about the times in which we see citizens do this. So you talk about something what you call sort of the uneven terrain, right, and how that fosters this kind of claim making. Can you help us understand what you mean by that, but more importantly, under what kinds of conditions do we expect citizens to take these kind of actions?

Yes, now this is this is a great question, right. So all of us in our bodies of work, we're kind of grappling with, why do we see this kind of activity? Why do we see this kind of playmaking? And across all of these cases, right. If it's seeking information and state action to try to find out what happened to a disappeared loved one, if it's demanding a local water engineer shows up and repairs the water source, if it's going to a local hearing and talking to a judge about how you have a right to blood pressure medication in the in the case of healthcare rights in Colombia. In all of these cases, what citizens are doing is they are making demands on the state for rights and entitlements that are actually codified, they exist, they are established, they exist on paper. But the unevenness of the terrain that we refer to is the fact that in all of these cases, the actual realization of rights, the actual enforcement of law, the actual implementation of policy, is incredibly uneven. We don't say that it's absent because if it were absent, claim making would be something of a lost cause. It wouldn't be worth it to put enormous amounts of time and effort into repeated and recurring claim making. But the unevenness, the fact that sometimes these issues get resolved, sometimes the law is enforced. Sometimes the policy is implemented. Sometimes the state takes action is enough to kind of pull people into this activity because they see that it is both necessary. If you don't make claims, you're not likely to see resolution, you're not likely to see problems resolved, but also, worthwhile because they can see around them that there are enough instances of state responsiveness to make it worthwhile to keep engaging and claim making so that unevenness in the terrain by which we specifically mean broad and expansive, or at least expanding rights commitments that are written on paper. So, for example, the Mexican state has signed on to many international, you know, commitments and law and has a lot of laws on the book about how to deal with different civil and political rights and the crisis of disappearances. But that doesn't mean that those are being enacted in practice. Similarly, in India there is a right to work and a right to education and a right to food. These are codified. These are written. These are enacted through policy, but that policy is so unevenly implemented, and we we feel that that unevenness is incredibly important because it's what necessitates claim making, but it's also what motivates it in a large sense.

And when you're thinking about the motivation, you sort of say there's three channels to it, right? One of them you talk about is knowing that you can achieve something, which is a little bit along the lines of what you've just been talking about. Another thing that you talk about is, is what you think of as where there's no alternative, right. And then the third one, when you say that there's kind of a life and death. So it seems like that even within this impetus for claim making, that we do have this variation in both the reasons why people are doing it, but also to some extent, and what they might expect from it.

Absolutely. I mean, so this this comes very much to the fact that the nature of claim making will vary and the motivation for claim making will vary given the nature of the good or the right or the entitlement or the problem at hand. And so if this is the search for a missing loved one, this is literally life or death. There is, you know, so claim making takes on a logic of its own, because it is literally life or death. In some other settings, it's a sort of rational calculation about, well, is it worth my time to stand on this line and what do I think will happen if I stand on this line. And there this notion of a kind of comparative grievance, I can see that others are being better served than me and I have this sense that I too, and do responsive action from the state that sort of sense of comparative grievance might motivate someone to stand in the line and to fill out the forms and to spend the time to to get FaceTime with the Bureau. And in other settings, as you mentioned, claim making becomes baked in. It just becomes part of what people do. It becomes institutionalized to the sense where there there's a notion of there is no alternative. This is just what we do. This is how, if I live in Colombia and I'm being denied life saving medications the way that I access healthcare is to turn to the tutela. Which is a base that's been created within the legal system and within the courts, where local judges essentially hold office hours and ordinary citizens can walk in without legal representation without a lawyer, and talk to a judge about how they're being denied fundamental rights, in particular to health care, and that becomes baked in. People know that's what you do, and it's just what you do. It's what you do when you need your medication and it becomes sort of just part and parcel the institutional landscape.

It's very interesting and I'm wondering if there's a fourth reason why, especially when organizations make claims that they might do so. So I want to run this by you and get your reaction, and that is that it struck me that if you wanted to essentially demonstrate the ineptness of the state, or if you wanted to demonstrate and push demands as an opposition, that you also might make claims, especially very public ones, right, to essentially press the issue to show the unevenness, to show the inequalities that are associated with it, do we ever see that happening?

Yes, I think that's right. I think in fact there there's a big body of work in legal studies and law and society on the practice of kind of naming and shaming, which is very much about this publicity, right. So making claims, even if you think they might fail, but because you make them publicly and kind of get the state on the record, you get bureaucrats and officials either not acting and you have that on you have that on camera. You have a record of that or you have them denying your claims and you also have a public record of that. And this can be used to kind of push either for legislative changes and policy changes or to use the the tools of publicity and media and transparency to try to hold officials to account. I think we see some of that in the Mexican case where families with disappeared loved ones has been using publicity very effectively, trying very hard to call attention to the cases, partly because they hope that police and investigators and state bureaucrats will take action to assist them in trying to locate their missing loved ones, but partly because they want to call public attention to the broader crisis. And the hope is that overtime, this changes how the state responds. And in fact, in the case of Mexico, we see this incremental change. There's now something that citizens use very, very frequently called missus dibacco. These are participatory investigation meetings where citizens meet regularly every month with investigators, with federal police, with state police and discuss the cases of their missing family member. Those did not exist in institutions previously. They exist now because citizens created them through claim making, and then they've become codified and actually become part of how the state reacts to cases of disappearances.

You're talking a little bit too about the the ability to push the state and and the kind of the dynamic reshaping of the relations then between citizens and States and you talk about this in the element as well, right? The ways in which we can think about your kind of longer-term consent chances of these engagements, can you say a little bit about both? Why we should think of this even in the terms of citizenship, but also then what it means for citizen state relations over time?

So I love these questions. Why? Why should we think of claiming in terms of citizenship? There are a lot of ways to think about citizenship, right? I guess the one of the most fundamental ways is to think about citizenship as being membership in the political community. And if that's the case, it is also a status that confers a set of rights. And so here we're kind of drawing on a long tradition, maybe going all the way back to work by, for example, TH Marshall writing in 1950, who's writing about citizenship as a set of rights, civil rights, political rights and social rights and. So we're we're very much. Building in that tradition, when we think of claim making as being deeply connected to a

set of rights that. Are civil, political and. Social. But there's another way of thinking about citizenship, which is actually linked to practice, right? It's about participation in the political community, and this goes back to other intellectual traditions of those sort of thinking about citizenship as something that you, you kind of earn and enact through participation. And so if we want to connect those two ways of thinking about citizenship on the one hand being of rights bearing member of a political community and then, on the other hand, participating in that in that political. Community claim making is a way that that we bring those two together by. Thinking about the everyday, day-to-day ways in which citizens participate, to navigate and negotiate those kinds of civil and political and social rights. So for us, that's why it fits. In this broader framework about of thinking about citizenship. And it's also incredibly important because. It is fundamentally about citizen state. Patients. If so, we see claim making as part and parcel of distributive politics. Its citizens making claims on their governments, elected or unelected, to demand allocation, to demand distribution, the allocation of public personnel, time and energy, the distribution of public funds, the distribution of public goods and services. Demanding action from the state, whether it's for social protection or physical protection, this is distributed politics and it matters materially in terms of that allocation and that distribution, but it also matters for what citizens learn about what the state will and won't do, or what citizens come to expect from their governments. And so as citizens engage in claim making, they learn continually about what. What they should expect and what they can do. And so in a kind of iterative and longitudinal sense, this has an enormous bearing. How citizens opt in or opt out of participating in the political community, and so in the element we talk about feedback dynamics and feedback loops, and we try to think about how we can theorize these different kinds of dynamics over time. You can think about positive feedback dynamics where claim making begets more claim making because citizens engage in claim making, they see enough of a response, it seems worthwhile to keep going back and keep continuing, you can think about negative loops where there's a tipping point where people make claims and the state doesn't respond and at a certain point it seems too costly, too risky, and people opt out. And most of what we see is somewhere right in between and we call it an ambivalent loop, right? And an ambivalent set of feedback dynamics where there's partial responsiveness, not full responsiveness, and maybe enough to sort of keep people engaged up to a certain point. But it's a very fragile point where it could tip at any moment into opting out or in a negative set of dynamics and in our own research, our own empirical work, we see that most of the dynamics that we describe are deeply ambivalent.

In that sense, that's ambivalent in terms of the reaction, they're real worth in a sense, right, but also in how people start to think about them. Do I understand that correctly?

Absolutely right. Exactly. Android and two senses of the word. Right, that the outcomes of claim making. Maybe kind of ambivalent like did the problem get really get solved? Maybe we saw some incremental or partial progress. It's also ambivalent in terms of what this means with the ongoing dynamics longitudinally. Does this mean people will opt in and keep on making claims or doesn't mean people will opt out. Are we at some kind of tipping point? But it's also, as you mentioned, ambivalent from the point of view of claim makers from the point of view of claimants who. I'm not really sure how excited they feel about what they're doing, right? It's, you know, it's they're doing it because they have to do it, but they might feel deeply pessimistic about it. They might feel that it's what they do because it's what they have to do, that they might deeply wish that they don't have to do it in the first. In an ideal scenario, claim making wouldn't be necessary because you would have responsive governments fulfilling rights and obligations and duties without citizens need to knock on the door incessantly.

Exactly. And that's almost in the same sense of this kind of middle ground that you point to when we're thinking about the cases in which we see this. Right. So again, you call this kind of the uneven brain. But but you also draw attention to places where there have been the state has proclaimed that people have rights to healthcare or they have rights to housing or to other things. And at the same time, you know, either it's the states presence is uneven or their states, you know, willingness to actually respond is uneven. And so what we see is the proclaimed rights outpaced the actual experience of them without this knocking on doors and going to offices and trying to push the case.

I'm really glad you brought that up, actually. Right, that, that this notion of proclaimed or codified or written or established way, it's kind of outpacing their actual. Fulfillment is exactly what we see is in common across all of our cases, but we think this is a broader phenomenon, something that we write about and and we really hope we can encourage kind of further research to prove this beyond our cases is the sort of paradoxical push and pull of states that kind of in the same period of time have written down and established and made commitments to a broad and broadening array of rights and entitlements, civil, political and social. You sort of think about the UN Decade for Human Rights and its proliferation since the 1990s of rights, legislation and social legislation. Globally, right, and in particular across many countries in the global South and that's. The exact same time that we see a lot of neoliberal retention and a kind of pulling back and downsizing and hollowing out of different kinds of state capacity for implementation and for enforcement. And so you see this kind of push and pull, there's a pull of, there is more to claim. Because more has been codified and



written and established, and there's a push because those codified, written, established rights and entitlements are not being evenly fulfilled. And so that makes plain making necessary. And we think that this is that kind of uneven tension that is kind of paradoxical. The state is sort of doing two things at once that's creating this unevenness and that's pulling people into claim making.

You say that you, you know, think it's even broader than the cases you look at, which I totally agree with. I actually want to. Ask you if you think it might even be broader than the cases you claim. So you basically sort of restrict this to thinking about democracies and that makes some sense. I mean, obviously that's where we should think these kinds of rights exist and in participation. But of course, a lot of these rights have been proclaimed in autocracies as well, and we also see people. Using a lot of the same sets of instruments and strategies that you talk about in autocratic regimes. So I'm just curious to know, do you think that there's a way we could think about claim making under authoritarianism?

Absolutely. And I think that is so exciting to think through. And I really, I think this is kind of a a frontier for for new comparative research that could actually think about claim making across different types of regimes and different institutional landscape. You know from democracies to autocracies, to everything in between, including many, many places in the world that are hybrids and that have autocratic and and democratic dimensions kind of baked in with each other, and that's part again. I think part of this unevenness, right, that the state can act sort of democratic in one area and very authoritarian or autocratic in other areas, that also creates this kind of unevenness. Well, there's been an amazing amount of really rich scholarship on what you could call claim making in authoritarian contexts or in autocratic contexts. In particular, there's. A really rich body of work on citizen petitioning and. China looking for example at how people use dispute mechanisms. How people make? Petitions how people turn to the courts. These types of citizenship practice may be even more essential in autocratic settings where you don't have the ballot box and procedurally democratic institutions to turn. To. It means you have to turn to other kinds of arenas. You have to turn to the bureaucracy and climb inside there and try to find public personnel who will respond. Maybe you have to turn to the courts. And so it could be that the kinds of claim making that we described that particularly engage administrative and judicial. Arenas that we describe across our cases in India and Mexico and Colombia and South Africa in our element which are all developing democracies. But those types of behaviors I would hazard are just as present, if not more present and more in present and more important in more autocratic settings where. There are fewer. Procedurally, democratic institutions and citizens disposal.

And I would assume that in in autocratic as well as in the democracies we, I mean we see the ability of individuals to take advantage of these different mechanisms varies quite a lot. This sort of the responsiveness to different individuals varies quite a lot. So you talk about sort of the. Inequalities that both might affect claim making itself, but also that may result from claim making. Can you say a little bit more about that?

Yeah. So this is really important. I mean, if we situate claim making as a form of participation as a form of citizenship practice, like any kind of participation, it both. Reflects and responds to underlying inequalities, but it also has the potential to sometimes reshape those patterns of inequality, and we see we see. This in clean making. Too, there's a kind of paradox if you think about why people make claims on the state, it's because the state. Has. Failed to fulfill a promise or commitment. And and if you think about the structural inequalities that. Lead to these broken commitments and these broken promises. We know that those are uneven. We know that there's a lot of inequality in terms of who will need to make claims on the 1st in the 1st place. So it will be. Citizens coming from marginalized communities set apart by race, ethnicity, gender, class, other different kinds of social. Economic teachers who will have the most need to make claims in the 1st place and the paradoxes that those may be the very same citizens who have the fewest resources to expand on claim making claim making is costly. It takes time, it takes resources. You have to be able to stand in the line for a long time. You have to be able to travel. Instances to local offices. And this is a paradox that people. Who most need? To engage in claim making are often the least able to do so, and do so effectively, and so patterns of claim making can reinforce those existing types of inequality. We also see of course really effective claim making by very rich and powerful people. We see the sort of Nimbyism phenomenon not in my backyard, where affluent residents who don't want to see a certain kind of thing happen, make claims on the state they too are engaging in claim making. They're going to meetings, they're going to hearings. They're contacting bureaucrats. They're turning to the courts. That's claim making, but it's carried out by. The rich and the powerful. And so we need to be very cognizant that clean making is not sort of something that will in the sort of normative sense, address underlying inequalities in an automatic sense. It can also reinforce those kinds of inequality.

What's the policy implications of this when we think about what it means for people who are interested in? Either trying to address inequalities or people who are trying to address development issues in, you know, kind of lack of basic human resources and and human public public services. How should we think about what this tells us about how development specialists or policymakers should engage?

This is a great question, sort of from a practitioner standpoint. Whether those are practitioners in government or in civil society, how should we think about the implications of? This kind of. Call to pay more attention to claim making, right? And for me, the way to. Think about this is that. By. Calling attention to claim making, we are calling public officials and civil society actors attention to the things that citizens are already doing and doing a lot of, but that we sometimes have a sort of blind spot thinking about. So if you think, for example, maybe consider someone in government, a bureaucrat of local in in local government. Or maybe a more senior policymaker, a more senior politician? Who might think about the ways to build greater responsiveness and accountability to citizens? And if they think only about high profile things like elections, or they think only about high profile things about going out onto the street and meeting with the leaders of social movements, they're going to miss a lot of more quotidian, localized mundanes. Points of potential interface where the state can go out and meet and hear and listen and respond to city. And so from a policy perspective, this means thinking more about local platforms for grievance redressal. What do these different kinds of institutions look like? How can we build them? How can we amplify them? How can we publicize them so that more citizens are aware of them and want to enter them? And I think similarly from a civil society perspective, thinking about people and in within civil society organizations that are working kind of in the social accountability space, who are trying to support and Amplify citizen monitoring and kind of action from below by citizens to demand accountability. We need to also think about claim making because it isn't just a big high profile monitoring campaign, it's these day-to-day, quotidian, sometimes really boring inactive. Encounters with state officials. And so how do we think about recognizing those supporting those and amplifying those. So I think from a policy perspective, we want to think about what are citizens already doing and how do we create more space for it? How do we support it? How do we amplify it and just generally thinking about politics and development and like you said, citizenship from the perspective of the everyday person, right.

I think that that's actually what you turn our attention to and you do it so beautifully because across the element you're looking at very different types of people and groups and over different sets of issues and in very different contexts, and yet really, I think shining the light on the importance of claim making. So thank you so much for doing that. And for the for the element which is really a wonderful read, but also for talking to us.

Oh, thank you so much. Thanks for the conversation. And what we really hope is that the element, which is the tip of the iceberg, we hope that it sparks new and more

conversation and and research about claim making this a kind of understudied set of activities. Thank you.

Thanks.

Thank you for listening! For more on Gabi's, Janice's, and Whitney's work, check out episodes 63 and 28 of **Governance Uncovered**.