

A Municipal Future with Privatized Water?

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Abstract:

This proposal attempts to provide an explanation to whether or not water privatization significantly impacts the health of a municipal community in southern California by examining certain dependent factors as a result of random sampling.

Introduction:

Water is one of the most vital resources for a community, and issues like contamination and lack of access are problems that municipal governments need to deal with when providing this resource to its constituents. One relatively recent policy originating from the 1990s floating around in urban political circles is the idea of water privatization. Water privatization in itself covers a broad series of policies and ideas, from contracting operations to private firms to governments selling public assets to private companies, but in general focuses on pushing more authority over water resources to corporations rather than a public department (National Academy Press). In the United States, this debate has emerged as a binary political conflict between the involvement of private corporations in public services. For those who favor water privatization, they cite its bipartisan appeal among politicians, the universality of privatization efforts lowering municipal costs across multiple studies and the existing prevalence of privatization techniques in communities today (Moore). Those who argue against the benefits of privatization cite a lack of improvement from a privatized switch, notably with the case of water services in Flint, MI falling under the control of the multinational company Veolia, and the breakdown of democratic norms in government transparency when talking about water

privatization (Hudson). However, while the political and philosophical arguments are certainly an interesting debate, the more important discussion surrounding privatization relates to whether or not these policies have a positive impact on the health and costs burdened on a municipal community.

Background:

The evidence as to the effectiveness in water privatization combating perceived injustices resulting from poor water management has been widely either in favor or against water privatization, although the circumstances for those studies in favor of privatization do not generally relate to local community decisions as they do in top-down federal policy impacting towns and cities. In Argentina, for instance, a study from UC Berkeley showed that water privatization during the 1990s led to a decrease in child mortality across several communities compared to public water services, but made no conclusion regarding efficiency of services (Galiani et al.). For comparison, a journal article from the William & Mary Environmental Law and Policy Review argues that privatization posed a significant risk to municipal and state security when Georgia faced a water crisis in the mid-2000s, tying into larger geo-political conflicts, but stress the impact on resource valuing and lack of preparation for municipal communities in addressing certain crises. As of publication, we have not participated in a similar research project to those previously explained. we intend to expand the work of these studies by examining a larger pool of municipal communities with as many factors accounted for as possible when comparing and contrasting public and private water services specifically in southern California.

Methods:

Based on the aforementioned studies, we plan to conduct a study of two groups of fifty randomly selected different municipalities in Southern California, one group with private water and another with public water. The number of groups was selected to encompass a representative group of municipalities that are confirmed to have privatized water (Houtsma). To select these groups, a list of each groups of municipalities like from the Houtsma list of either public or private water will be assigned a number in alphabetical order of the second letter of the name of their municipality. A random number generator will select the first fifty municipalities with public water, and this process will be repeated with those communities with private water. Of the 211 municipalities in Southern California, each sample for public and private water would represent around 22.6 percent of the municipalities available (Letsgoseeit.com). To add to the UC Berkeley study, not only do we plan to examine all EPA violations in these communities between the years of 2003 into 2020 (drawing upon data from the Houtsma study) that would be collected from the public record, news reports and any other publically available data that wouldn't require asking private institutions like hospitals for information. The factor of an EPA violations was determined to touch upon the recent controversies of lead poisoning in Flint, MI that was tied to privatized water services and to have a clear marker for any problem arising from these water systems that could fit neatly into the system without having to specify during examination what these violations might be (Denchak). This analysis will be conducted from the date of this proposal's approval through one year into the future of 2020, with data from 2003 being supplemented from the public record.

Expected Results:

In conducting this experiment, we hope to have the most up-to-date records of health impacted/correlated with public and private water services in the communities that could conceivably represent southern California. Data will be presented through maps of the randomly selected communities with annotations as to any particular factors accounted for when analyzing the water treatment and delivery services (i.e., located to a superfund site or operates under a unique form of municipal government distinct from mayor-council or council-manager) as well as through a graphical representation of the statistical test used to understand the dependent factors impacted by the type of water service. Both line graphs and bar graphs with labeled standard deviations will be used to highlight specific violations like lead poisoning in these municipal communities over time and in any statistical difference to each other. As such, the statistical test used for the bar graphs will be a two-tail t-test.

Conclusion:

We hope to collaborate with the municipal governments in the southern California region, as well as with the LMU Seaver College of Science and Engineering, in analyzing the differences in quality and service as it relates to water privatization, a trend in urban policy extending from over two decades ago that continues to impact local communities in the U.S. in health, costs and community.

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