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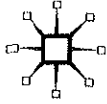
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CLIENTELISM IN EVERYDAY  
LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS

Edited by  
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## STATE POWER AND CLIENTELISM

## EIGHT PROPOSITIONS FOR DISCUSSION \*

*Jonathan Fox*

“What counts” as clientelism? For those who observe and experience clientelism, they know it when they see it. That approach is not enough for those who seek to analyze the political dynamics and impact of clientelism. Past approaches to the study of clientelism, often informed by anthropology and sociology, focused on microlevel, imbalanced, exchange-based, power relations, infused with rituals of affect, favors, and gifts. More recently, political scientists have addressed their concern with larger-scale, more generalizable patterns by focusing on more bounded indicators of exchange relationships. In the process of emphasizing measurability, this trend applies definitions that narrow the scope of “what counts” as clientelism, e.g., to vote-buying or to social programs that distribute “private goods”.

Cutting across these approaches is a concern for understanding how informal power relations infuse the behavior of formal institutions. Specifically, the authors in this volume share a concern with understanding how clientelistic relationships persist under elected democratic regimes, in spite of clientelism’s longstanding association with relations of domination that appear to undermine basic principles of political equality.

The main challenge involved in defining clientelism is how to distinguish this particular power relationship from other kinds of political exchanges. I described clientelism as “a relationship based on political subordination in exchange for material rewards” (Fox, 1994, 153). Yet this definition was too broad to meet the challenge of disentangling clientelism from other reciprocal exchanges between actors of unequal power—an idea that describes most political bargaining.

If the definition of clientelism becomes so broad so as to encompass all political bargaining between unequals, then it loses its conceptual value-added. In other words, the issue is how to “bound” the concept—that is, how to avoid what Sartori (1970) called “conceptual stretching” (see chapter 9, Hilgers, this volume). Where, then, does one draw the line? This volume’s editor responds to this definitional question by emphasizing the long-term, iterative nature of the political-material exchange relationship—as distinct from a one-off transaction (see chapter 9, Hilgers, this volume; Hicken, 2011). This focus on the *relationship* underscores the role of agency within clientelism, in contrast to the transaction-driven approach, or an exclusive focus on the intent of political “investors.”

Two decades ago, this author’s response to the dilemma of how to distinguish clientelism from other kinds of political bargaining among unequals was to sharpen the analytical and empirical focus on specifically *authoritarian* forms of clientelism, relationships in which the political subordination of clients is enduring and reinforced by the threat of coercion (Fox, 1994). The goal was to underscore the difference between specifically anti-democratic exchanges from political bargains that may be normatively questionable but are not inherently anti-democratic. The focus was both micro and macro.

At the microlevel, the political construction of the right to associational autonomy was a relevant and under-recognized step in the establishment of the minimum conditions for political democracy (Fox 1994). This is why access to perceived ballot secrecy was crucial for undergirding the transition from authoritarian clientelism to citizenship, to allow those voters who engaged in political transactions to still express their political preferences without fear of possibly coercive reprisals (Fox, 1994; 2007). This issue of citizen-level access to political rights scales up to the macro level through the changing size and shape of the free versus the “captive” electorate.<sup>1</sup> Some analysts refer to persistent authoritarian enclaves, but if captive subnational electorates determine the national balance of political power, then the term “enclave” may underestimate their national significance. Indeed, if any fraction of an electorate is captive, then the regime may be electoral and competitive, but it is by definition not democratic—if one accepts that (free and fair) *universal* suffrage is a minimum condition for democracy.

Now that many more regimes have made transitions to competitive electoral democracy, the scope and depth of overtly authoritarian clientelistic practices have been substantially reduced (though not completely eliminated or irrelevant to national politics, as many

assume, a priori). Yet as the chapters in this volume show, clientelistic practices continue under democratic regimes, and in some cases the bargaining processes involved lead to learning political skills that may be conducive to democratic engagement (e.g., chapter 8, Canel, this volume; Hilgers, 2009). Questions that follow include: When and how does clientelism transform democracy, and when can democracy transform clientelism? In this context, many of the chapters in this volume specify both the ways in which clientelism undermines democracy, as well as the ways in which they could turn out to be compatible (e.g., Shefner, 2001; this volume: chapter 3, Shefner; chapter 2, Roniger; chapter 5, Gay; chapter 6, Montambeault; chapter 7, Durazo Herrmann).

Most recent political science studies focus on one dimension of clientelism, political parties’ use of material incentives to influence electoral behavior, often in the context of a single election (e.g., Hicken 2011).<sup>2</sup> Yet this exclusive focus on political parties does not directly address the many ways in which *state* actors use their control over access to public resources to manipulate citizens. For example, clientelistic relationships can involve access to public employment, as in the case of teachers’ unions embedded in the administration of education.<sup>3</sup> Here is the key difference between the focus on parties and states: for parties to allocate their resources based on partisan calculations intended to win and keep the loyalty of specific constituencies is not inconsistent with democracy, whereas states that operate under the rule of law should allocate public resources primarily based on rights and rules-based entitlements rather than to reward or punish specific constituencies based on loyalty.<sup>4</sup>

For analysts who focus on politicians’ distribution of favors and gifts during election campaigns, the main problem is the distortion of voter preferences and the integrity of the electoral process. Yet this partisan manipulation could in principle unfold without recourse to public resources. For analysts who focus on the politicization of access to social programs, in contrast, the main concern may be the manipulation of *public* funds, as well as the poverty implications involved in unequal access to safety net programs. Parties’ capacity to influence the allocation of government resources for clientelistic purposes depends less on the parties’ *intent* than on the degree to which the state operates according to partisan logics versus consistent institutional rules. Any state’s application of such rules depends, in turn, on whether it has relevant accountability mechanisms that can identify and sanction undue politicization of the use of public resources.<sup>5</sup> If the rule of law and civil society oversight manage to combine to

eliminate the politicization of access to public programs, that could limit the scope of party-led clientelism.

This is the rationale for this chapter's focuses on analytical issues raised by one specific dimension of clientelism, the interface between states and citizens. Where political parties use their control over access to state resources as a campaign tool, these two approaches overlap, but the focus here is on the political dynamics of public resource allocation to individuals and groups. The chapter is organized in terms of eight interlocking propositions for discussion.

**PROPOSITION 1: THE PERSISTENCE OF CLIENTELISM IN DEMOCRACIES UNDERSCORES THE RELEVANCE OF THE ANALYTICAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN REGIME AND STATE.<sup>6</sup>**

Transitions to democracy involve both continuity and change, which is a reminder of the relevance of the broad conceptual distinction between the political *regime*—the set of public institutions that determine who governs—versus the *state*—the broader set of public institutions that also govern society and the economy *in between* elections.<sup>7</sup> Most of the political science literature on democratic transitions and governance focuses on electoral and elected institutions, yet a citizen's point of view suggests attention to the power relations that characterize the broader state-society interface.

If clientelism poses a problem for democracy because it interferes with citizens' capacity to hold the state accountable to the public, then the widespread failure of electoral regimes to consolidate accountable governance should lead analysts to look beyond the conventional institutions of political accountability—competitive elections and the separation of powers. If electoral democracy leads to highly uneven and inconsistent degrees of accountable governance, then it may be useful to think in terms of “transitions to accountability”: transformations of the state that are analogous to but distinct from regime transitions. The study of “transitions to accountability” is today where the analysis of transitions to democracy was in the early 1980s. Political scientists still lack robust explanatory frameworks for how accountable governance becomes *stronger*, or how it *spreads* from enclaves across entire state apparatuses, or how accountability *expands* vertically, from the local to the national or vice versa.

Embedding accountability into the state is an inherently uneven, partial, and contested process. Citizens' struggles can leave cracks in the system that serve as handholds for subsequent campaigns seeking

to open up the state to public scrutiny. The construction of public accountability is driven by cycles of mutually reinforcing interaction between the thickening of civil society and state reformist initiatives. Such state-society synergy remains the exception rather than the rule in most countries.<sup>8</sup> These processes tend to unfold outside the realm of the national elections and political parties that occupy most studies of democratization. As a result, questions about accountability require disentangling states from regimes.<sup>9</sup>

Accountability politics refers to the process of conflict over whether and how those in power are held publicly responsible for their decisions (Fox 2007). This process is both logically and empirically independent of electoral competition. Accountability politics involves challenging who is accountable to whom, as clients become citizens and bureaucrats become public servants. Struggles for accountability can overlap with pro-democracy movements, but are not limited to them. Struggles for accountability often involve protest, but are not limited to contestation. Constructing accountability involves challenging the state, but also transforms the state. Analysis of the construction of accountability also involves attention to its social foundations. In the state-society synergy framework for understanding how public institutions change, the main cleavage is not between ostensibly dichotomous and implicitly monolithic state versus society, but between proaccountability and anti-accountability forces embedded in *both* state and society.

**PROPOSITION 2: CLIENTELISM MAKES PRINCIPAL-AGENT RELATIONS BIDIRECTIONAL**

Political science models of representative democracy posit that voters are principals who elect representatives to be their agent. This parsimonious approach has advantages as long as the power relationship goes in one direction. When the power relationship becomes two-way, however, if principals become agents and agents become principals, then the conceptual leverage of the model is weakened. Clientelism poses precisely this dilemma, insofar as it is based on two-way transactions: exchanges of political support (notably votes) for material rewards. Stokes (2005) refers to this dynamic as “perverse accountability,” in which voters become responsible to their representatives, rather than vice versa.<sup>10</sup>

Vote-buying contradicts ostensibly one-way principal-agent power relations. Vote-buyers engage in an implicit contract in which they

are ostensibly the principals and the voters are the agents. According to conventional wisdom about electoral representation, the arrow goes the other way when ballot secrecy is not perceived by voters as guaranteed and fear may be a factor, vote-buyers' capacity to enforce deals can be high, in which case they are indeed principals. The point here is that political clients can have widely varying degrees of bargaining power in their transactions, and the differences matter for democracy.

In spite of the apparent paradox that bidirectional power relations pose for principal-agent models, one approach to clientelism defines the concept as "a particular form of 'exchange' between electoral constituencies as principals and politicians as agents in democratic systems" (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007: 7). This use of the principal-agent model is internally contradictory, since in the definition the clients (voters) are the principals, whereas in the analysis the politicians are the principals who attempt to influence the voters (Hicken 2011: 292). In other words, this definition assumes what needs to be demonstrated—that it is clear who the principals are and who the agents are. Moreover, the authors explicitly assume that, by definition, clientelism operates only in democratic political systems.

This puzzle of who is the principal and who is the agent also arises when one looks at a different set of electoral relationships through the lens of patron-client relations. Consider the relationship between wealthy donors and politicians who seek them out as a source of campaign funds (especially in regimes with market-based determinants of electoral media access). If one applies a principal-agent model to political investors, then the donors are the patrons and the politicians are the clients.

### PROPOSITION 3: CLIENTELISM IS ONLY ONE OF MANY STRATEGIES FOR USING MATERIAL RESOURCES FOR POLITICAL MANIPULATION

Clientelism is only one of many strategies for using material resources for political manipulation that can undermine freedoms of expression and association, as illustrated in figure 10.1. Though these approaches overlap in practice, they are distinct. In practice, coercion and/or other political uses of money may be much more significant than clientelism, either in terms of the share of the population affected or the depth of their political impact. The geographic targeting of specific constituencies, known in the United States as pork barrel politics, is

sometimes seen as conceptually distinct from clientelism. Yet in practice, it is difficult to find the boundary between pork barrel politics and clientelism when both involve precisely targeted material rewards in exchange for political loyalty.

The framework for disentangling different political manipulation strategies illustrated in figure 10.1 leaves aside the outright use of electoral fraud, since that strategy involves manipulating the actual votes rather than the voters. If some mix of the political use of money, clientelistic relationships, and the perceived threat of coercion "works," in the sense of influencing the voters' intent, then fraud is not necessary to shape electoral outcomes. At the same time, political contenders cannot be sure in advance of the efficacy of their efforts to manipulate voters, and therefore it is quite rational for them to also resort to at least some fraud, where impunity is possible (especially in close elections). In other words, recourse to fraud is evidence that other forms of political manipulation are insufficiently reliable.

Note where figure 10.1 locates vote-buying—it is often *not* backed by perceived threats of coercion. However, when it is, not much actual coercion is necessarily required. The *perceived* threat of reprisals for noncompliance is sufficient to count as a violation of basic democratic rights, hence the importance of ballot secrecy (see below).

Figure 10.1 also suggests that the relative significance of vote-buying—compared to other mechanisms of manipulation—is

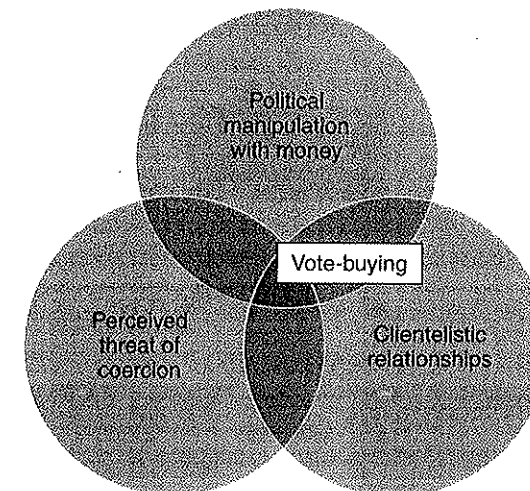


Figure 10.1 Overlapping Strategies for Political Manipulation.



not always clear. Political scientists often argue that vote-buying is by nature undemocratic, but these transactions are usually discussed outside of the broader context of the systemic uses of money to manipulate politics. These other forms of intervention may be “less illegal,” depending on the local context, but that does not make them any less undemocratic.<sup>11</sup> When political investors pay for legislators’ loyalty, for example, they are buying not just individual votes, they are in effect buying the votes of *many* individuals at the same time. In this sense, large-scale campaign contributions in exchange for quid pro quo are a form of *wholesale* vote-buying, in contrast to the conventional retail variety.<sup>12</sup>

As figure 10.2 indicates, clientelism is one way to invest in retail voter mobilization, which in turn is one of several strategies for using money in politics. From the perspective of political investors, the political use of the broadcast media represents another wholesale investment (in political systems that allow market forces to determine the electoral use of the media). The influence of money on politics through the media also depends on whether the use of lying by intensive media campaigns is regulated. Even if nominally illegal, actual sanctions for overt lying may be rare—or may be applied only after the election (as in Mexico in 2006). This form of political manipulation is distinct from clientelism in at least two ways. First, its wholesale scope is vast, compared to the sum total of retail clientelistic transactions. Second, noncoercive vote-buying is at least a negotiated two-way transaction, whereas the wholesale manipulation of the broadcast media is a one-way political intervention in which the targets lack agency.

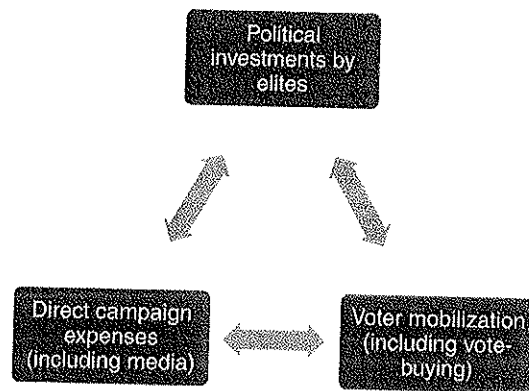


Figure 10.2 Clientelism in the Context of Political Investment Strategies.

#### PROPOSITION 4: PERCEIVED BALLOT SECRECY IS NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT TO ALLOW VOTERS TO EXERCISE THEIR POLITICAL RIGHTS

Few researchers have documented the nature and scope of the violation of the secret ballot.<sup>13</sup> Yet an exclusive focus on the “direct” violations of ballot secrecy is too restrictive to appreciate their full political significance. To influence voter decisions, not every voter needs to be directly watched by patrons; voters can be influenced if they have reason to think their vote *might* be observed. Therefore, only the *perception* of a lack of guaranteed ballot secrecy is necessary to have the desired effect. To influence the outcomes in close elections, the secrecy guarantee needs to be perceived as weak only in a small fraction of polling places in order to influence the outcome. For example, a large-scale UNDP survey of 2006 Mexican voters asked them to what degree they trusted the secrecy of their ballot. Only 54.4 percent reported that they had “total trust”, 25.6 percent reported “some trust”, 12 percent had “some mistrust”, and 5 percent were “totally mistrusting” (N = 2,782, UNDP, 2009, cited in Fox and Haight 2009, 88).<sup>14</sup>

In the literature on vote-buying and clientelism, the discussion of ballot secrecy is often framed in terms of the puzzle of why vote-sellers would keep their part of the bargain if in practice, behind the curtain, they have the freedom to vote their conscience (Schaffer 2007). This is a very reasonable question, and, as noted in studies cited above, the answers range from clever monitoring tactics on the part of vote-buyers to cultural expectations of keeping one’s word. For example, Stokes (2005) stresses the role of partisan brokers’ dense social networks as enforcers. Nichter (2008) finds that clientelism is more relevant for mobilizing voter turnout than for actually changing voter preferences. The efficacy of trust as an enforcement resource is widely seen as embedded in cultural norms, but it is easy to overstate its power. For example, Wang and Kurzman (2007) found in Taiwan that at least 45 percent of vote-sellers voted for a candidate different from the one who bought their vote.

Yet the individualized approach to ballot secrecy is insufficient to address the principal-agent puzzle involved in analyzing vote-buying for two reasons. First, if a vote-seller follows her or his truly preferred candidate’s advice and takes the money while voting their conscience, they still may face consequences from local political brokers if they exercise their *other* citizen rights to express their views and to publicly associate with the opposition. Second, even if individuals exercise

the freedom allowed by ballot secrecy while keeping their views to themselves, the election results at the level of the polling place are still public. If polling place level results reveal opposition sympathies, they may be subject to *collective* reprisals from local bosses, or from public authorities who are deciding where to put the next school or sewer system (or whether to ever repair the existing one). This is inverted “pork-barrel” politics. For example, Hicken 2011 notes this in Singapore, where votes are counted at the ward level, which corresponds to an apartment block (295). Since most housing is public, the government can calibrate service provision to reward electoral loyalty. In other words, the secret ballot is not enough to defend citizens’ political rights from patrons’ sanctions for disloyalty.

**PROPOSITION 5: POLITICIZED RESOURCE ALLOCATION AND PROGRAMMATIC/ ENTITLEMENT-BASED APPROACHES ARE OFTEN ASSUMED TO BE INHERENTLY MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE, YET IN PRACTICE THEY OVERLAP**

Many definitions of clientelism focus on the subset of political bargaining relationships that involve the exchange of private goods, in contrast with programmatic political appeals, often associated with public goods (e.g., NDRI 2010; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007). In principle, the distinction appears to be quite straightforward. Private goods are considered more vulnerable to politicized discretion, whereas the public goods approach to resource allocation is ostensibly rules-based and therefore is seen as less prone to politicized manipulation.<sup>15</sup> Although these two approaches certainly capture ideal-types, they are not necessarily dichotomous, for both conceptual and empirical reasons discussed below.

Politicized resource allocation refers to processes that seek to induce loyalty by targeting specific constituencies. This involves rewarding supporters, punishing opponents, and attempting to win over undecideds. Some forms of politicized resource allocation are widely considered to be within the democratic rules of the game, such as geographic targeting. Vote-buying, in contrast, is usually considered beyond the pale—though some would consider pork-barrel politics to be a form of collective clientelism, insofar as it rewards a bounded group of supporters with public spending, often as part of an ongoing relationship. For those who see an inherent dichotomy between clientelistic and programmatic appeals, the implicit assumption is that, in the absence of clientelism, low-income citizens would

favor political alternatives that promote universalistic, redistributive policies. These assumptions need to be unpacked.

First, these ideal-types conflate two distinct principles for resource allocation: *discretionary versus rights or entitlement-based criteria* on the one hand, and *individualized versus collective* resource allocation on the other. These two sets of criteria vary independently. Table 10.1 illustrates the differences between these two overlapping sets of principles, which can be described as “terms of engagement” between the state and society. For example, entitlement-based resource allocation can be either individualized (e.g., transfer payments) or collective (e.g., public clinics). Conversely, politicized resource allocation can also either be individualized (e.g., vote-buying) or collective (e.g., pork-barrel).

The contrast between pork-barrel projects and public goods appears straightforward in principle, but when one probes more deeply to examine the principles under which public goods are allocated, one rarely finds consistently formula-driven or need-based criteria. National authorities rarely make specific local social investment decisions, often delegating block grants to state governments, which in turn assign them to local governments, which in turn allocate investments to specific projects within their jurisdictions. Programmatic resource allocation formulas that weigh various criteria may be involved at various levels, but it would be difficult to find a developing country where the process for allocating social spending, whether for service provision or infrastructure, is completely rule-based, with no room for political discretion. In other words, if fiscal and institutional constraints make full universal coverage of rule-based, entitlement-driven programs impossible, then some degree of discretionary resource allocation is involved.

Since few public goods are truly universal, there is therefore room for political discretion in the allocation of local public goods, through

**Table 10.1** Contrasting Principles for Allocating Public Resources: Discretionary, Formula-Based, or Demand-Driven

| Scope          | Discretionary/from above                        | Rights/entitlement/demand-based   |
|----------------|---|---|
| Individualized | Election-time gifts, vote-buying                | Access to broad social programs, such as conditional cash transfer payments |
| Collective     | Pork-barrel community projects, partisan-biased | Public goods (schools, clinics, water, sewage)                              |

the geographic targeting of social service provision or infrastructure.<sup>16</sup> The key difference for clientelism, therefore, is not whether the public investment takes the form of public or private goods, but rather whether the allocation process is consistently and transparently rule-based—and whether citizens have access to effective channels for recourse in the case of political abuse.

A second approach to categorizing different principles for resource allocation distinguishes between different channels (private versus club, local public and public goods) on the one hand, and whether they are distributed based on discretionary versus rule-based criteria on the other.<sup>17</sup> Table 10.2 illustrates this distinction, showing how, in practice, access to state resources can be politicized even if programmatic conditions of “targeting” and “eligibility” are respected. Politicians can advocate for broad programs that sound programmatic but are also designed to create room for political discretion and conditionality in the allocation of resources. Access to “programmatic programs” can be conditioned on partisan affiliation through means shrouded by bureaucratic discretion long before election day and therefore far from the eyes of election observers.

Yet even this “unpacking” of different resource allocation strategies fails to capture important political dynamics. During periods of contested democratization, there may be cases of public resource distribution that are discretionary, yet not clientelistic. When autonomous social organizations challenge state agencies with their demands, and those state agencies recognize them as legitimate interlocutors, the state actors are exercising political discretion without necessarily imposing partisan conditionality. Although these social organization claims often involve public goods, as in the classic cases of basic social infrastructure and services, they can involve private goods as well—in the case of microloans for women, for example, or funding to increase peasant farmer productivity. If the women or small producers are organized, then the newly-accessed public resources would constitute club goods. Moreover, if these social organizations get sufficient clout to gain access to agency resources without having to sacrifice their political autonomy, then they are still likely to have to follow agency rules to formalize their access to the resources. In other words, the conventional assumption that discretionary private (or club) good distribution is inherently clientelistic excludes the possibility that the political conditioning of access to public resources may be contested from below.<sup>18</sup>

From the point of view of undemocratic manipulation, those with the power to grant access to social programs are offering a much more

Table 10.2 More Contrasting Principles for Allocating Public Resources: Discretionary Versus Rules-Based

| Allocation criteria   | Private goods (individualized)   | Club goods (excludable)   | Local public goods  | Public goods   |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| Clientelistic discretionary (rewards loyalty, mobilizes supporters or tries to sway swing constituencies) | Discretionary, politicized criteria for allocation to individuals (though the process may follow formal rules)                             | Discretionary, partisan/politicized criteria for allocation to membership groups                        | Politicized geographic targeting (pork barrel politics)               |  |
| Rules-based (follows programmatic logics)   | Allocation to individuals or families based on objective indicators of need, membership in under-represented groups and/or qualifications. | Demand-driven, based on match between qualifications, proposal and policy priorities, to organizations. | Policy-driven geographic distribution criteria (i.e., need, balance). | Broader policy-driven priorities (i.e., human capital, public and environmental health, equitable public security) |

significant incentive for subordination than a mere election-time gift, insofar as these programs offer a steady stream of benefits—as well as a spigot that can potentially be shut off should the clients defect by exercising their full citizen rights. In principle, these forms of manipulation could be offset by effective, social accountability mechanisms that provide recourse for those who are excluded. Yet these promising institutional innovations to promote citizen voice tend to be weak or nonexistent. Even in the paradigm case of Mexico's Oportunidades cash transfer program, where its "Citizen Attention" social accountability window has some clout and a constituency, it has no teeth (Fox, 2007).

To sum up, it is useful to distinguish between three different processes for allocating public resources: (a) formula-based, (b) politically discretionary, and (c) demand-driven or deliberative, as suggested in figure 10.3. The first logic is based on ostensibly objective criteria, such as algorithms that determine whether families surveyed qualify for means-tested social programs, as in the case of conditional cash transfers. Such consistent criteria can be incomplete, applied only to the amounts allocated to given jurisdictions, but not to the specific projects or constituencies within those jurisdictions. The second logic involves political discretion by elites, which is usually associated with raw bargaining but can also inform the construction of formulas, often through the opaque mechanisms of assigning weights

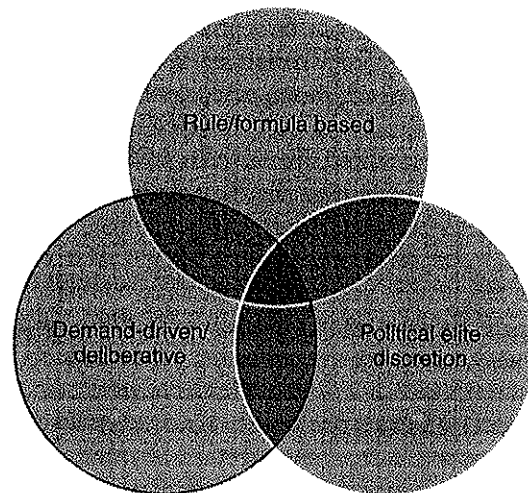


Figure 10.3 The Potential for Politicization of Allocation of Public Goods: Three Overlapping Principles.

to politically significant variables, such as urban versus rural jurisdictions, or poverty levels. The third logic of deliberation also involves political discretion, but is driven from below, either by demands by autonomous constituencies (as in the case of many social funds) or by institutionalized processes of participatory consultation.

Participatory budgeting would seem to be a "paradigm case" of the potentially consistent application of rules in "programmatic" public goods allocation. Yet deliberative resource allocation processes may involve overlap between the principles of deliberation, rules, and elite discretion. Even though deliberative processes are often governed by rules and formulas, they are not invulnerable to the politicization of the application of those rules. For example, the degree of partisan politicization of participatory budgeting varies empirically (see chapter 6, Montambeault, this volume). This suggests the existence of an important gray area that is neither clientelistic nor strictly rule-based in the posited sense of a universal, consistently applied, programmatic approach to resource allocation.

#### PROPOSITION 6: ACCESS TO SOCIAL PROGRAMS THAT BEGINS WITH POLITICIZATION CAN EVOLVE INTO PERCEIVED ENTITLEMENTS

Clientelistic access to the state can change over time. Democratic transitions can weaken the effectiveness of social programs as instruments of political control.<sup>19</sup> For example, as Durazo Herrman argues, in 1995 indigenous municipalities in Mexico's state of Oaxaca gained legal recognition of their right to self-governance without political parties, as part of a political bargain in which they were expected to accept the rest of the status quo (this volume). Yet more than a decade later, many voters in these municipalities gained capacity to express their autonomy by voting for challengers for state and federal office. Consider the case of Procampo, a farm subsidy program that provided checks to more than two million peasants to buffer the costs of subsidized US corn imports after NAFTA—right before Mexico's 1994 elections. The ruling party's peasant organization influenced which producers were allowed to sign up for the program (Merino 2010).

In conceptual terms, Procampo was launched as an ostensibly programmatic club good. In practice, however, Procampo distributed private goods with political discretion. Enrollment has remained largely fixed since its launch in 1994. Yet its political character has changed. In the 2000 elections, Procampo beneficiaries were

disproportionately subject to ballot secrecy violations. A large survey found that 20.7 percent of those in Procampo reported that they were “exposed to the buying or conditioning of the vote” (“coacción”), in contrast to 11.6 percent of those not in the program (Aparicio and Corrochano 2005, 385). By the 2006 presidential election, according to a survey carried out by Civic Alliance that targeted potential problem regions, Procampo beneficiaries’ reported 7.8 percent rate of politicized resource allocation was still higher than for Oportunidades (6.2 percent) but lower than for state government programs (11.5 percent) (Fox and Haight 2009, 82). Remarkably, however, a large-scale United Nations–sponsored public opinion survey at the time of the 2006 elections found that 69.5 percent of Procampo recipients saw the payment as a right rather than as a favor, while only 1.8 percent reported having been pressured to vote for a specific party (PNUD 2007, 179, 189). More and more “beneficiaries” came to see their access to the program as an entitlement—perhaps a gift, but not one conditioned on political subordination (Maldonado 2010). Similarly, Schedler (2004) finds that the share of Mexican voters with the will and capacity to resist vote-buying has increased over the course of Mexico’s political transition

**PROPOSITION 7: HOW SOCIAL PROGRAM  
BENEFICIARIES VOTE IS A NECESSARY  
BUT NOT SUFFICIENT INDICATOR OF  
VOTE-BUYING OR CLIENTELISM**

The powerful and evocative legacy of clientelism leads many critics to assume that social programs buy votes even when access is not, in practice, politically conditioned. The case of Mexico’s cash transfer program is a notable example in which access to a social program was consistently rule-based. Yet that did not necessarily mean that the rules were applied consistently. Indeed, the application of the rules governing access was biased by factors other than electoral manipulation, leading to the exclusion of millions of officially eligible citizens in the late 1990s. This exclusion was the result of perverse incentives created by the outsourcing of the household surveys. Private firms were paid based on numbers surveyed, regardless of whether they actually reached entire communities, so they tended to limit surveys to homes close to paved roads, excluding many of the poorest. The 2000 change in the party in power permitted a quiet reform, led by a new team of program managers recruited from pro-democracy organizations. They substantially corrected this problem with a “densification of the rolls; this process revealed that Progresá’s

initial, ostensibly rule-based, programmatic enrollment process had *excluded* 1.7 million families who met the means test” (Fox 2007, 273). At the time, most independent observers of Mexico’s flagship conditional cash transfer program were most concerned about possible clientelistic manipulation, but in practice, its main exclusionary impact was the result of a hidden, flawed technocratic assumption about how its enrollment process would work in practice.

The 2006 party preferences of Oportunidades beneficiaries provide a powerful indicator of the degree to which access to this program had come to be seen as an entitlement rather than a political favor. Only 41 percent supported the incumbent PAN, according to exit polls—while 25 percent supported the PRI and 29 percent supported the PRD.<sup>20</sup> Contrast this 41 percent with the very similar 2006 national vote share for the PAN among all women voters: 38 percent (most Oportunidades beneficiaries are mothers). This suggests that it would be hard to claim that there was a systematic politicization of access to Oportunidades—or if there was, it did not work. In addition, considering that Oportunidades increased family income by an average of 30 percent (for five million families), it is remarkable that the PAN was not rewarded with an even larger share of the beneficiaries’ vote.

Yet this conditional cash transfer program is only one of many Mexican social programs, and many of the others were still at least partially politicized—to the degree that the number of citizens that the Social Development Ministry officially acknowledged, before the election, as vulnerable to manipulation was larger than the PAN’s eventual margin of victory.<sup>21</sup> When it comes to clientelism and how to see it, measure it and weigh it—in the end, if democracy is defined in terms of one person, one vote and full universal suffrage, then every little bit matters.

**PROPOSITION 8: LET US “PUT CLIENTELISM IN ITS  
PLACE” BY LOCATING IT IN THE BROADER CONTEXT  
OF THE POLITICIZED USE OF GOVERNMENT  
PROGRAMS AT DIFFERENT SCALES**

Clientelism is a subset of the broader category of the politicization of social programs, and one can see the differences between distinct strategies if one brings in the dimension of scale. The idea here, as in much of this chapter, is to “put clientelism in its place.” Much of the discussion of clientelism has focused on “what counts,” or just “how clientelistic” the exchange of favors for support is, with less attention

to “how much?” A conceptual framework that distinguishes clientelism from other forms of political use of social programs can help to inform the question of how to measure it.

The first step in this exercise of bringing in scale is to distinguish between the level and the logics of the political use of social programs. The idea of different “logics” underscores the difference between positive and negative incentives. For example, politicians can use negative incentives—the threat of loss of access to a program—to build support from constituencies, yet at the micro level this is a clientelistic threat while at the macro level this is just democratic political competition (i.e., budget cuts). Both kinds of threat involve fear, but they refer to politically different kinds of fear.<sup>22</sup> National programs that deliver benefits to generate political “rewards” from constituencies but without conditional targeting are simply conventional programmatic politics. Once one has distinguished between the political logics of rewards versus threat, to “locate” conditional targeting, one must distinguish between how programs operate at subnational and local levels—described in table 10.3 as “meso” and “micro” levels.<sup>23</sup>

Once one differentiates political strategies by scale by differentiating between the meso and micro levels, one can see more clearly where programmatic politicization of social programs blends into clientelistic approaches. At the meso level, one can see how programs can provide specific regions or constituencies with positive or negative incentives. At the micro level, specific individuals can be rewarded with access or threatened with exclusion. Table 10.3 shows how these diverse patterns of politicization in turn have very different impacts on the democratic character of electoral competition.

To bring in the notion of the “level” of politicization is just a first step toward addressing the role of scale. The next step, illustrated in table 10.4, is to distinguish between the varied scales of politicization (national, meso, and micro) on the one hand, and its actual reach, its area of influence in practice, on the other hand. For example, a national program may be politicized in only a few regions. Here what may look like national politicization is, in practice, limited to the subnational (though it could be enough to determine the outcome in a close national election). Put another way, what looks like a meso level political strategy of favoring specific regions or organized constituencies could be fully national in its reach. Similarly, evidence of microlevel politicization that targets specific individuals with rewards or threats is insufficient to determine whether its actual reach is limited to a small number of local initiatives, systematically subnational,

Table 10.3 The Political Use of Social Programs: Unpacking Distinct Levels and Logics

| Political logics (for targeted constituency) | Political scales   |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
|  | Macro (national)   | Meso (subnational region)   | Micro (individual)   |
| Positive incentives                          | Reward for policy: Social program produces support for associated political party                                  | Socially or geographically targeted reward: Social program targets distinct region (local public good) or organization (club good), often in core or swing constituency | Individual reward: Family access to material benefits in exchange for political support (an informal contract often reinforced by monitoring mechanisms) |
| Negative incentives                          | Fear of possible policy change: Support is lessened for a political party associated with cutting a favored policy | Socially or geographically targeted punishment: Reduction or denial of resources to region or constituency perceived as opposition                                      | Individual threat: Perceived risk of loss of access to material benefits if associated with opposition (reinforced by monitoring)                        |
| Relationship to electoral competition        | Conventional programmatic democratic electoral competition   | Politicization of policy, though illegality is contingent   | Authoritarian politicization of policy   |

Table 10.4 Political Use of Social Programs: Unpacking Distinct Scales and Impacts

| Impact of politicization | Scale of politicization  |   |   |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|
|                          | Macro (national)   | Meso (subnational region)   | Micro (individual)  |
| National                 | Systematic electoral use of budgeting and/or media to induce political support for party associated with program | Social programs with national coverage systematically favor or target partisan constituencies                               | Individual access to programs widely perceived to be biased by partisanship                                       |
| Regional/organizational  | Intensive budgetary and/or media targeting of specific regions and constituencies                                | Subnational politicization: Access to social programs is conditioned on political loyalty within specific regions or states | Partisan organizations control individual level access to government programs                                     |
| Local                    | Highly localized partisan publicity linked to program at citizen interface (e.g., at agency offices)             | Retail delivery of program benefits controlled by partisan operatives in specific regions                                   | Without coordination, local government officials take their own initiative to condition program access on loyalty |

or fully national in its reach. In brief, the goal of table 10.4 is to distinguish between the *scales of politicization* of government programs, their political logics and instruments of control on the one hand, and their actual political *impact*.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

In conclusion, clientelism continues to be an elusive concept—difficult to pin down in terms of a precise definition that travels well, yet we tend to know it when we see it (or we think we do). The biggest challenge to comparative analysis remains the difficulty with operationalizing the concept by developing indicators of clientelism that can be consistently measured across different political contexts. Studies that are based on large N opinion surveys of actors have made substantial advances (Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004; Stokes 2005; Nichter 2008). One of the most creative recent uses of statistical indicators of clientelism takes as its proxy the percentage of rural families whose specific land tenure relationships render them dependent on landlord patrons, measuring district variation in relation to the state's uneven investments in basic services (Joshi and Mason 2011). Yet the frequent use of indirect indicators of state resource allocation as proxies for clientelism involves assumptions that warrant empirical scrutiny. For another example, Hicken's (2011) review essay mentions the size of public employment as a proxy for clientelism, which assumes both that more public employment means more patronage, and reduces clientelism to patronage (304). Other studies assume that the clientelistic-programmatic distinction maps directly onto private versus public goods, by definition, as noted earlier. This imbalance suggests that the empirical study of clientelism has made more progress analyzing party-citizen relationships than state-citizen relationships.

From the point of view of disentangling the role of the state in perpetuating or reinventing clientelism, this persistent imprecision makes it difficult to specify just how undemocratic it is, versus whether it becomes another form of politics. For many, clientelistic ties that are voluntary may often be the most viable form of access to distributive programs, while the assumed alternative of redistributive, rules-based programs may be struck in the realm of the hypothetical. Latin American experiences clearly show that left-wing, programmatic redistributive discourse is no obstacle to the reproduction of clientelistic ties—whether in the case of the PRD in Mexico City (Hilgers 2009), the Misionés social projects in Venezuela (Penfold-Becerra

2007) or even the Landless Movement's agrarian reform settlements in Brazil (Friere Mello 2010). Yet the main question is not whether clientelism persists, but rather to what degree it interferes with citizens' exercise of their democratic rights.

One of the most notable features of clientelism is its coexistence with other forms of state-society engagement, which makes it empirically problematic to refer to entire systems as clientelistic or not. The key questions are, rather, clientelistic to what degree, where, and within which state-society interface? Subnational comparison is key to pinning this down (e.g., Snyder 2001b).

Democratic regimes were expected to eliminate clientelism, so its reproduction sends us back to the drawing board (especially if one wants to avoid "culture" as the default/residual category explanation). Since political parties can be expected to resort to the tools at their disposal, the eventual dismantling of clientelism may be driven primarily by the uneven advance of the rule of law. To sum up, since we still lack precise tools for defining and measuring clientelism, we are still several steps behind having consistent explanations for what drives its persistence, transformation, or elimination.

## NOTES

\*Thanks very much to Tina Hilgers and Kent Eaton for comments on earlier versions.

1. For example, Colombian pro-democracy activists refer to the segment of the electorate that is relatively free from the threats and promises of clientelism as the "opinion vote." Before his recent election, the new governor of Chocó recently estimated that only 30–40 percent of that province's electorate follows an "opinion vote," and the rest are subjected to varying combinations of vote-buying and threats (personal email communication, Luis Gilberto Murillo, June 20, 2011).
2. See Hicken (2011). Note Stokes's (2007) definition of clientelism "as a method of electoral mobilization... the proffering of material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (will you) support me?" (604–605). This definition does not include the sustained relationship and power imbalance dimensions that many analysts consider to be central. Stokes (2007) later recognizes "that clientelist relationships are ongoing—that the dyad is embedded in a social network – is theoretically important," mainly to inform partisan brokers' mobilization strategies (2007:612–613).
3. See Eaton and Chambers-Ju's analysis of how anti-clientelism initiatives in Colombian teachers' unions ended up becoming clientelistic (forthcoming).

4. Note that the distinction between ostensibly universal rights and more limited-access entitlements is blurred, but in principle, access to entitlements is based on the non-politicized, consistent application of objective criteria (as in the case of geographically-targeted or means-tested social programs).
5. For discussion of how civil society campaigns have pro-accountability impacts primarily by activating the state's own horizontal accountability mechanisms, see Fox (2007).
6. This section draws on the introduction to Fox (2007).
7. The classic analysis that makes this distinction is Cardoso (1979, 38–40). Here, regime referred to the rules that link the political system, the party system and the citizenry, whereas the state refers to the underlying "pact of domination" and relations between social classes. This framework also highlighted continuity in state-society (and state-economy) relations in the process of political regime change.
8. The state-society synergy approach seeks to identify the dynamics and impacts of the mutual empowerment of actors in state and society. See Evans (1997), as well as Fox (1992) and Migdal, Kohli, and Shue (1994), among others.
9. Note that these processes of state-society interaction may transform rather than eliminate clientelism. This pattern may be associated with decentralization, which can shift the power of patrons downward, to "municipalize clientelism" (see Eaton and Chambers-Ju, forthcoming and chapter 6, Montambeault, this volume).
10. See also Fox (2007: 41ff) on "upward vertical accountability," which goes beyond partisan loyalties to refer to state actors that hold citizens unduly "accountable" for political dissent, insubordination, or culturally proscribed activities.
11. Indeed, Callahan's (2005) research in Thailand, where vote-buying is widespread, leads him to suggest "it is necessary... to examine just what this focus on vote buying stops one from seeing." He refers here to elitist biases of some political reform campaigns, as well as "deeper issues of rural poverty and the institutional corruption of the Thai civil service" (95–96).
12. Stokes (2007) considers these campaign finance relationships to be distinct from clientelism because the directionality of the flow of funds is *to* the politician rather than *from* the politician, but they fit her most abstract definition of clientelism as a method of electoral mobilization based on material goods in exchange for electoral support (605). One could argue that recognition of the role of those who fund the politicians (thereby allowing them to become patrons) simply adds another patron "upstream," to the chain of intermediaries. This proposition holds where private funders are sufficiently concentrated and politically unified to constitute a set of principals.
13. For notable exceptions, see the authors in Schaffer (2007) and Wang and Kurzman (2007). For a more typical example, see the international



- election observer report on Colombia's 2007 local elections (OAS 2007). This report characterized the problem only in the most general terms, as "recurrent and generalized" on election day, the delegation received "innumerable denunciations...from almost the entire country" and affected "an important percentage of the population" (OAS 2007 22-23). Overall, however, the report dedicated slightly more than one page to vote-buying and the associated problem of the lack of ballot secrecy.
14. What was perhaps most striking about these findings is that they are limited to those voters surveyed who were *not* beneficiaries of government social programs. The UNDP had divided its survey group in two, and inexplicably neglected to ask the ballot secrecy question of social program beneficiaries.
  15. For example, Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, and Estevez (2007) frame their analysis of clientelism by contrasting vote-buying through "the provision of particularistic, excludable private goods, rather than through universalistic, non-excludable public goods" (182). They also subsume club goods under private goods (contra Cornes and Sandler, 1986).
  16. Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, and Estevez (2007) recognize this, but they argue that local public goods are still not subject to clientelism because "once delivered, a public good cannot be withdrawn, as is clearly the case with private resource transfers" (185). Yet public goods that take the form of services can indeed be withdrawn from above by cutting staff or materials (to the clinic or school), or by not paying for repairs to broken water systems or damaged roads.
  17. Note that the dichotomy between public and private goods is complicated by the recognition of two kinds of public goods, developed in response to the recognition that some are "impurely public," as economists put it (Cornes and Sandler 1986, 7). Unlike pure public goods, club goods are excludable (to those who are not members of the club). Just how public club goods are depends on how open a given club is in practice. Local public goods are more purely public, but only for those in a given locality. This complicates the widespread assumption that public goods are necessarily nondiscretionary, and therefore inherently invulnerable to clientelistic manipulation.
  18. Note the experience of Mexico's National Solidarity Program (1989-1994), a large-scale social investment program whose politicized intent was contested by autonomous social organizations. (Cornelius, Craig, and Fox, 1994). Their campaigns, together with reformist allies, opened up meso-level arenas of nonclientelistic terms of engagement (in the sense of state respect for associational autonomy) in a minority of programs, regions, and budgets (Fox 1994, 2007). At the same time, the program's end, most of its local public goods allocation decisions were turned over to partisan state and local governments.
  19. This is the implication of Anderson and Dodd's (2005) analyses of the evolution of the Nicaraguan electorate over time.

20. "Pintan en dos la Republica," *Reforma*, July 3, 2006, p. 14. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/news/docs/Exitpercent20Pollpercent200314.pdf>
21. In preparation for the 2006 presidential election, the Social Development Ministry partnered with the public interest group Fundar to monitor the possible manipulation of social programs during the 2004 and 2005 state elections. Fundar estimated the size of the electorate considered vulnerable to clientelistic manipulation to be between one and four million voters. Federal authorities differed, but they recognized that 2.6 percent of those enrolled in federal programs could be subject to manipulation. Yet the eventual margin of victory in the 2006 presidential election was approximately a quarter of a million votes. Considering that the 2.6 percent preelection estimate of vulnerability refers to a universe of ten million families and possibly as many as twenty million voters, the size of the electorate officially recognized to be vulnerable to vote-buying pressures was significantly larger than the margin in the presidential election (Fox, 2007, 349).
22. For analysis of how the concept of the "fear vote" subsumes these two very different kinds of fear, see Fox (1996).
23. Tables 10.3 and 10.4 draw from Fox and Haight (2009).