

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86505-0 - Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

Edited by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1 Citizen–politician linkages: an introduction

Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Since the 1970s, the “Third Wave” of democratic transitions has, by greatly enlarging the number and type of democracies, raised a host of new research questions on the dynamics of democratic accountability and responsiveness. After an initial period of scholarly attention to the process of regime transition, there has recently been a major effort to explain the origin and effects of democratic institutions, such as electoral laws, federalism structure, or presidential and parliamentary systems. After more than a decade’s worth of research, however, it now seems that the explanatory power of formal democratic institutions for democratic process features is more limited than many had hoped. Party systems vary tremendously even among single member district plurality electoral systems. Furthermore, institutional arguments have little to say about the substantive alignments that rally citizens around rival contenders or the strategic appeals made by leading politicians in each camp.

One important area that has not received sufficient attention is the wide variation in patterns of linkages between politicians, parties and citizens. The political science literature has, since the 1950s, been dominated by the “responsible party government” model, the logic of which forms the basis of both rational choice theories (Downs 1957) as well as historical-comparative approaches (e.g., Lipset and Rokkan 1967). This model sees politics as the result of interaction of principals (citizens, voters) and agents (candidates for electoral office, elected officials), characterized by five essential ingredients. First, voters have policy preferences over a range of salient issues to allocate or redistribute scarce resources through state action. Second, vote- or executive office-seeking politicians and parties bundle issue positions in electoral platforms or programs they promise to enact, if elected into office. To simplify matters for information misers in the electorate, such programmatic bundles can be aligned in a minimally dimensional scale, with a single “left-to-right” dimension. Third, voters relate their own preferences to those offered by the partisan competitors and opt for the most compatible programmatic basket, weighted by strategic considerations such as the electability of the party and the credibility

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86505-0 - Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

Edited by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Excerpt

[More information](#)2 *Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson*

of its promises given its past performance.¹ Fourth, victorious parties or coalitions of parties with relatively similar programs then implement their promises, with an eye on the evolving preferences of their constituencies. Fifth, at the subsequent election, voters hold incumbents and opposition parties accountable for their performance during the electoral term, based upon their effort and performance.

This model of democratic representation clearly captures many of the ways in which parties' appeals and programs reflect and sometimes lead their constituencies' preferences in affluent capitalist democracies (cf. Powell 2004). Consistent with the standard responsible party model, several studies have found that the partisan complexion of governments does indeed make a difference for a wide range of social and economic policies in advanced capitalist democracies (see, e.g., Castles 1982; Esping-Andersen 1990; Huber and Stephens 2001; Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994). In a similar vein, scholars have explored patterns of political representation according to the partisan government model and the variability of such citizen–politician relations contingent upon electoral rules and party system formats in a democratic polity (cf. Lijphart 1999; Powell 2000).

What the responsible-party model ignores, however, is that a quite different type of *patronage-based, party–voter linkage* exists in many countries, including some advanced industrial democracies. In many political systems citizen–politician linkages are based on direct material inducements targeted to individuals and small groups of citizens whom politicians know to be highly responsive to such side-payments and willing to surrender their vote for the right price. Democratic accountability in such a system does not result primarily from politicians' success in delivering collective goods such as economic growth, jobs, monetary stability, or national health care, nor does it rest on improving *overall* distributive outcomes along the lines favored by broad categories of citizens (e.g., income and asset redistribution through taxes and social benefits schemes). Instead, *clientelistic accountability represents a transaction, the direct exchange of a citizen's vote in return for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods, and services.*

The need to understand such clientelistic linkages is particularly pressing now for three reasons. First, studies of the new democracies in Latin America, post-communist Europe, South and Southeast Asia, and parts

¹ Spatial models of competition (in which voters calculate the proximity of party programs to their own preference vector in terms of Euclidean distances) and directional models where they employ scalar products to gauge the distance are both only minor variants of the responsible partisan model.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86505-0 - Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

Edited by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

of Africa have made it increasingly obvious that our general theoretical models of responsible party government fail to account for a lot of the observed variation in citizen–politician linkages. In the new democracies not all parties compete for voters based on coherent programmatic packages that can be arranged neatly on a left–right dimension or some other low-dimensional depiction of strategic configurations among parties. The programmatic positions of parties are often diffuse and erratic, but they can nevertheless attract solid support, even when emotional ties of “party identification” or a past record of competent management of economic growth appear to be unlikely sources of citizen–politician linkage.

A second theoretical reason to study clientelism is that, despite the view in the 1950s and 1960s that clientelism was a holdover from pre-industrial patterns that would gradually disappear in the modernizing West, clientelistic structures seem to have remained resilient in established party systems in advanced industrial democracies such as Italy, Japan, Austria, and Belgium. Why have these systems not made the expected full transition from patronage politics to programmatic policies?

A third reason why it is important to study clientelistic linkages now is because their pervasiveness has clear implications for economic growth and prospects for economic reform. In states in which clientelistic linkages are well entrenched, international financial institutions’ attempts to liberalize developing economies and reduce the size of their states have been resisted by politicians who, not surprisingly, are determined to subvert reforms that threaten their patronage and hence their ability to win elections and stay in power. The current World Bank and bilateral donor focus on governance and transparency, in our view, is doomed to failure unless it takes more account of the often directly opposing incentives facing politicians charged with implementing reforms in patronage-based systems from Nairobi to Kuala Lumpur to Tokyo. Why should politicians dismantle the patronage networks that keep them in power in order to satisfy financial institutions whose threats to withhold aid often sound hollow and whose policy priorities and conditionality requirements seem to change every few years in any case?

There have been surprisingly few systematic comparative studies on clientelism, partly because of the origin of research on clientelism in in-depth anthropological and sociological studies. From these disciplinary perspectives, political clientelism was only a special case of a much more widespread pattern of social affiliation found in “traditional” societies from Southern Italy and Senegal to India (Clapham 1982; Cruise O’Brien 1975; Fox 1969). Clientelism was seen as a durable, face-to-face, hierarchical and thus asymmetrical exchange relation between patrons and

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86505-0 - Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

Edited by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Excerpt

[More information](#)4 *Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson*

clients supported by a normative framework. In contrast to comparative political research design, sociological and anthropological investigations favored detailed case studies and general social theory rather than “middle level” theorizing of a comparative nature about the varied incidence of clientelism across time and space.²

The few political scientists who examined clientelism in the late 1960s and 1970s did begin to provide a comparative perspective that examined the embeddedness of clientelistic politics in different political regimes (cf. Scott 1972; Tarrow 1977). They also realized that the stable, normative, and hierarchical character attributed to clientelism was only a special case that does not prevail at least in environments of democratic electoral competition. Electoral enfranchisement and party competition provided clients with an exit option from an existing relationship to a patron. Democracy strengthens the clients’ bargaining leverage *vis-à-vis* brokers and patrons (Piattoni 2001: 7). Furthermore, electoral competition promotes a scaling up of clientelistic networks from local politics with personalistic, face-to-face relations to the national level of hierarchical political machines, starkly distinct from patrimonial political organization (Scott 1969: 1158). In the context of democratic institutional settings, clientelism thus evolves into a more symmetrical (rather than asymmetrical), intermittent (rather than stable and continuous), instrumental-rational (rather than normative) and broker-mediated (rather than face-to-face based) exchange relationship (Scott 1972; Weingrod 1968).

With some simplification, we can say that the first generation of studies exploring the causes of variance in democratic mechanisms of accountability focused on absolute levels of economic development and rates of change of economic development as the underlying conditions that induced actors to construct diverse principal–agent linkage mechanisms. In the 1970s and 1980s, this generation was displaced by a second generation of researchers with a *statist and an institutional emphasis*. Such scholars detailed how the timing of the emergence of state institutions (bureaucratic professionalization) and the nature of formal democratic institutions (electoral laws, legislative-executive relations, and political

² As documentation of the crushing predominance of case studies and general theory, see Roniger’s (1981) impressive bibliography and even Eisinger and Roniger’s (1984) massive tome on patron–client relationships. It develops dimensions of variation in clientelism (chapter 7) and covers just about every region on earth, but lacks a systematic analysis of how, why, and when specific forms of clientelism come into existence or fade away. Examples in political science are Banfield’s (1958) study of Southern Italy and Banfield and Wilson’s (1965) monograph on political machines in US cities, although the latter offers at least a subnationally comparative perspective.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86505-0 - Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

Edited by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

decentralization) may affect principal–agent relations in democracy.³ Chief among these studies was Martin Shefter's (1977, 1994) important comparative study of the United States, France, and Britain. First of all, Shefter's work was distinctive because he did not sample on the dependent variable, but compared clientelistic linkage mechanisms in both democracies and non-democracies. Second, by confining the comparison to polities at roughly equal levels of economic development, Shefter shows that a developmental perspective cannot be all there is to the explanation of variance among democratic linkage mechanisms. Instead, he highlights the critical role of state formation in interaction with patterns of social mobilization and political enfranchisement as key factors shaping the presence or absence of clientelistic linkage under democratic conditions. Where the rise of bureaucratic absolutism professionalized the career of state officials before democratization and made administrative office unavailable to a spoils logic of distributing benefits among supporters of the electorally successful party, parties had to compete for voters with programmatic appeals rather than with material side-payments to individuals and communities. Extension of the suffrage after the advent of industrialization and social mobilization further undercut clientelism. New "external" mass political parties, supported by working-class people who were not entitled to vote and led by politicians who could not obtain seats in parliament, had to rely on their own internal resources and their purely ideological programmatic appeal, because they had no access to state resources. After the extension of suffrage, the presence of such mass programmatic parties undercut the spread of clientelistic practices, even where bureaucratic state professionalism was vulnerable.

Shefter's perspective fed into the backlash against modernization theory and the state- and class-centered perspective advanced by comparative political theorists in the 1970s and 1980s. Unfortunately, it was published at a time when the institutional inclinations of comparative politics directed attention away from the comparative study of mass political behavior, political parties, and elections altogether. Rather than developing Shefter's arguments further, comparative theorists with a class and statist persuasion abandoned the whole research topic and instead turned to comparative political economy as the main preserve of comparative

³ The critical contribution of this era is Shefter (1977; 1994). Where bureaucratic professionalization precedes both industrialization and democratic suffrage expansion, "external" parties representing peoples not permitted to vote organize programmatic parties, while "internal" parties in the legislatures of traditional authoritarian regimes prefer clientelistic payoffs, if they could avail themselves of state assets to hand out to electoral constituencies.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86505-0 - Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

Edited by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Excerpt

[More information](#)6 *Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson*

theorizing and empirical analysis. As a consequence, between 1978 and the late 1990s very little of theoretical consequence has been written about clientelism, except in a rather isolated literature on the effect of electoral laws on personalism and intra-party factionalism in party systems. In as much as state- and class-oriented comparative political scholars attended to political parties, their work was explicitly or tacitly steeped in the responsible party government literature and spatial models of inter-party competition based on programmatic linkages.⁴

The only notable exception to this general inattention has been an excellent recent volume edited by Piattoni on the historical origins of clientelistic democratic politics in Europe. This book combines case studies covering a much larger range of countries than those considered in Shefter's original paper with comparative historical analysis of clientelism across European politics (Piattoni 2001). These valuable studies, however, also reveal the limits of Shefter's explanatory account. The articles show that some pre-democratic legacies of bureaucracy, such as in the French case, were not as professional and impervious to clientelism as Shefter's argument suggested. Moreover, the advent of democracy may make bureaucratic professionalization reversible and endogenous to political competition that favors clientelistic patronage environments, a development also suggested by the French and Indian cases.

One aim of our book is to reorient the causal analysis of democratic accountability and responsiveness once again, and move beyond the current focus on structures and institutions. First, as in the recent literature on democratization, we propose a return to broadly *developmentalist perspectives*, but only provided this can be achieved with greater theoretical sophistication than in the past.⁵ This implies close attention to the mechanisms of citizens' and politicians' strategic conduct that link their asset endowments and preferences to individual strategies and collective outcomes of political action manifesting themselves in diverse principal-agent relations of accountability and responsiveness. It also implies examining relations of contingency and endogeneity that link economic development to other attributes of democratic politics and processes affecting

⁴ This applies, for example, to the literature on the electoral career of leftist parties, such as Przeworski and Sprague (1986) and Kitschelt (1994).

⁵ In this vein, Przeworski *et al.* (2000) return to a perspective that treats development as the major predictor of democracy, albeit with amendments that concern the difference between transition rates to democracy and persistence of democracy. In a way, Boix (2003) and Boix and Stokes (2003) push the conditionality of development as a causal variable in a somewhat different direction by focusing on patterns of inequality as the mechanisms that link economic asset availability and control to political regime choice.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86505-0 - Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

Edited by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

democratic principal–agent relations. It is the focus on these additional processes and mechanisms that constitutes the second analytical shift in the study of democratic principal–agent relations proposed in this volume. A critical mechanism shaping principal–agent accountability relations concerns the *competitiveness of democratic elections*. As we argue below, competitiveness and levels of economic development interact in contingently shaping accountability relations. In a similar vein, *political-economic governance structures and property rights regimes* mediate between development and principal–agent linkage mechanisms. Third, the mobilization of *ethnocultural divides* plays an independent role in shaping principal–agent linkages and also interacts with development and political-economic governance structures.

This introductory chapter consists of two major sections. In the first section, we conceptualize alternative democratic principal–agent linkage mechanisms of accountability within a rationalistic framework of direct (clientelistic) and indirect (programmatic, program-based) exchange. In the subsequent section, we flesh out the factors that account for variance in principal–agent linkage mechanisms across time and space.

Identifying clientelistic and programmatic linkages

We define clientelism as a particular mode of “exchange” between electoral constituencies as principals and politicians as agents in democratic systems. This exchange is focused on particular classes of goods, though the feasibility and persistence of clientelistic reciprocity is not determined by the type of goods exchanged. For the purposes of this volume we use the terms *patronage* and *clientelism* interchangeably, though we recognize that some authors use patronage in a narrower sense to refer to an exchange in which voters obtain public jobs for their services to a candidate. One problem both clients and patrons face is that the clientelistic exchange between principals and agents is not usually simultaneous, but takes place over time. This raises the obvious threat of opportunistic defection, in which either the voter or the politician reneges on the deal once he or she has been “paid.” Programmatic politics does not run into this problem because the implicit exchange of votes for policies does not rely on the specific conduct of individual voters and small groups of voters. With regard to politicians, mass publics must have the possibility to observe their activities, e.g., through surveillance by free and independent mass media.

Clientelism, however, as a form of direct, contingent exchange, requires more specific contractual performance by the involved parties than programmatic linkage. Moreover, the critical contributions of the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86505-0 - Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

Edited by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Excerpt

[More information](#)8 *Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson*

participants in exchange bargains may be unobserved or unobservable. As a consequence, clientelism can persist only if one or both of the following conditions is in place. In some instances, politicians have good reasons to expect that the target constituencies for clientelistic bargains will behave in predictable fashion and refrain from opportunism. Here, a *cognitive condition* – knowledge of the other side’s motivations and payoffs from alternative courses of action – and a *motivational condition* – voluntary, spontaneous compliance of constituencies with clientelistic inducements – ensure the viability of clientelism. Absent these two conditions, politicians may develop ways to monitor defection from the bargain and capabilities to punish free-riding groups and individuals based on that knowledge. In order to do so, they have to build expensive organizational surveillance and enforcement structures.

Hence, in the case of clientelism, under conditions of democratic enfranchisement the major cost of constructing such linkages is that of building organizational hierarchies of exchange between electoral clients at the ground floor of the system, various levels of brokers organized in a pyramidal fashion, and patrons at the top. Politicians have to identify resources they can extract and offer to clients in exchange for contributions to their electoral efforts. Moreover, they must construct organizational devices and social networks of supervision that make direct individual or indirect group-based monitoring of political exchange relations viable. In this process, clients and politicians gain confidence in the viability of their relationship by iteration, i.e., the repeated success of exchange relations that makes the behavior of the exchange partner appear predictable and low risk. The evolution of party organizational forms that manage clientelistic relations is a drawn-out process, not an instant result of rational strategic interaction in single-shot games.

Under conditions of democratic competition with full enfranchisement, local exchange networks will rarely suffice to win national elections. Politicians need to organize the flow of material resources across the complex pyramidal network of client-broker-patron exchanges. By coordinating large numbers of political operatives, they must overcome challenging problems of collective action and principal–agent conflicts through finely balanced systems of incentives. For example, higher-level brokers will wish to divert as much as possible of a party’s electoral resources to their private use rather than to confer them on lower-level brokers who then are in turn expected to restrain their own income-maximizing self-interests and reward external electoral clients with resources that induce the latter to contribute generously to the party through votes, labor, and financial

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86505-0 - Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

Edited by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

contributions.⁶ It takes complicated internal mechanisms of monitoring and control to limit the predatory behavior of party agents sufficiently so that external clientelistic exchanges can still generate the resources needed to enable a party to win electoral office and to dominate the benefits-dispensing government executive.

Programmatic exchange relations, like clientelistic exchange networks, require heavy investments on the part of politicians and voters, although each practice requires somewhat different techniques. Because programmatic party competition does not necessitate direct individual or indirect social-network-based monitoring of voters' electoral conduct, it is cheaper to construct organizational machines than in the clientelistic case. After all, programmatic parties need fewer personnel to manage exchange relations. The lower transaction costs of erecting large-scale flows of material resources up and down the organizational ladder, however, are outweighed by the imperative that the party must speak with a more or less single collective voice in order to create a measure of confidence among voters that it will pursue the policy objectives after elections it has announced before an election. Creating a common collective party program is what Aldrich (1995) calls the solution to the problem of collective choice, i.e., create agreement on and compliance with a collective partisan preference schedule that may be somewhat at variance with the many diverse preference schedules of all the party members. It takes constant "ideology work" to establish or maintain the collective preference function against the centrifugal tendencies of all individual party activists to assert their own individual or factional preference schedules. Just like clientelistic exchange networks, programmatic techniques of partisan political accountability are path dependent. In new democracies, they require pre-democratic legacies or earlier episodes of democratic competition that enabled political actors to take steps towards solving problems of social choice in the construction of programmatic alternatives. If such preconditions are absent, programmatic party competition requires the iteration of electoral contests under democratic conditions in order to allow politicians and electoral constituencies to incur the cost of overcoming problems of social choice through "ideology work."

Let us now turn to the three components that we define as constituting clientelistic exchange: *contingent direct exchange*, *predictability*, and *monitoring*. First, the exchange between principal and agent is contingent and

⁶ For example, the Republican Party machine in Philadelphia in the 1930s complained about ward leaders who used resources to help their friends and families rather than help the party keep control of the city (Kurtzman 1935: 44).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-86505-0 - Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

Edited by Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson

Excerpt

[More information](#)10 *Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson*

direct. It concerns goods from which non-participants in the exchange can be excluded. Second, such exchanges become viable from the perspective of politicians, if voter constituencies respond in predictable fashion to clientelistic inducements without excessive opportunism and free-riding. Third, short of constituencies' spontaneous and voluntary compliance with the clientelistic deal, politicians can invest in organizational structures to monitor and enforce clientelistic exchanges.

Contingent direct exchange

All politicians in democratic systems target benefits to particular segments of the electorate, based upon their perception that particular groups of voters will prefer policy packages from which their own group will benefit. In a system of programmatic party competition, however, politicians announce and implement policies that create beneficiaries and losers without verifying that the beneficiaries will actually deliver their votes. Programmatic linkage therefore directs benefits at very large groups in which only a fraction of the members may actually support the candidate. In other words, politicians enter a *non-contingent, indirect political exchange*. They devise policy packages knowing that they are *likely* to benefit particular groups of voters (typically, a party's swing voters) rather than others, and that this in turn will make it more likely in general that members of these groups will vote for the party. But this policy targeting is neither accompanied by monitoring or sanctioning of voters who defect from the politician's partisan camp, nor by precise knowledge of who in the target constituency will vote for the party delivering the benefit.

In a clientelistic relationship, in contrast, the politician's delivery of a good is *contingent upon* the actions of specific members of the electorate. Here is the first difference (necessary but not sufficient) between programmatic and clientelistic politics. What makes clientelistic exchange distinctive is not simply the fact that benefits are targeted. Rather, it is the fact that politicians target a range of benefits *only* to individuals or identifiable small groups who have already delivered or who promise to deliver their electoral support to their partisan benefactor. Voters dedicate their votes *only* to those politicians who promise to deliver a particular mix of goods and services to them as individuals or small groups in return. Thus it is the contingency of targeted benefits, not the targeting of goods taken by itself, that constitutes the clientelistic exchange.

The *nature of the goods* supplied by the patron politician or party only in some cases provides definitive evidence about the nature of the linkage type at work, but not in others. For example, the politicized allocation of *private goods* that accrue to individual citizens – such as public sector

2 Why is media a linkage institution? Media educates citizens and politicians For politicians, candidates, and interest groups: " They use media to communicate a message integral to political success Politicians want to: gain control of and influence the political agenda.

3 Media Events! Politicians will often hold media events to communicate an image Typically, a candidate will spend 60-70% of his/her campaign funds on television ads, commercials, print media, etc. Media Event example: " President Barack Obama "

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-QDfEMXAgk> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-QDf> (2007) Citizen-politician linkages: An introduction. In: Patrons, Clients, or Policies? Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition. Party Politics 2 (1): 5-30. CrossRefGoogle Scholar. Morlino, L. (1998) Democracy between Consolidation and Crisis. Parties, Groups, and Citizens in Southern Europe. Oxford: Oxford University Press. CrossRefGoogle Scholar. Morlino, L. and Tarchi, M. (1996) The dissatisfied society: The roots of political change in Italy.