Introduction

Clientelism has been defined to be a political system that entails the exchange of goods, money or services in order to gain support. It often involves a ‘patron-client’ relationship which is asymmetric in nature. A key to understanding clientelism might come in stressing not only the mutually beneficial relationships of exchange but also asymmetries in power or standing. Implied is a certain selectivity in access to key resources and markets. Those with access, the patrons (or brokers), rely on the subordination and dependence of the clients. In return for receiving services, the clients are expected to provide political support. In order to reach a viable solution, the committee’s main focus regarding this issue will be on “patron-client” relationships between politicians and voters.

The origin of clientelism can be traced back to the advent of Democracy in Rome where tyrants and political leaders would distribute goods in order to gain the favour of their people. However, in recent years Clientelism has not only been employed by the tyrants but also politicians that aim to help people. Often, clientelism can be a form of populism, thus hindering the form of democracy. According to the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato, democracy because of populism can become a tyranny or at the least degrade into an inferior political system. Moreover, politicians in order to gain support from the public, often in the form of votes, offer benefits to them. This leads to the erosion of democracy due to the degradation of the secret ballot system, a disregard for public services and a diminution of the accountability relationship between the people and their government.

Thus, it has come to the First Sub-Commission of the Special Conference on Securing and Advancing Democracy to effectively combat clientelism in order to safeguard democracy.
Definition of Key Terms

Clientelism

Clientelism is a political system where ‘patrons’ or political leaders give material goods in return for electoral support, for example, votes. It often follows a ‘trickle-down effect’ where patrons grant favours to their colleagues in return for the promise of their blocks of votes. These colleagues then pass on a proportion of the favours to their middlemen, who return the service by ‘delivering the vote’ for the candidate of the governing clique.

Vote Buying

Vote buying is a form of electoral fraud, and a subset of clientelism where candidates gain votes by offering money, goods or services to the voters in exchange for electoral support.

Patronage

Patronage is often viewed as a subset of clientelism and is a process where politicians hand out public resources, most often in public employment, in return for electoral support. It’s a non-meritocratic process, i.e. it is a process where merit is undermined, and people get positions based on wealth or social class.

Corruption

It is a form of dishonest behaviour which entails the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. A simple instance of this may be a government official accepting free gifts from people even though it is unethical to do so while on a government mission since it can lead to biases. Such an act is an impediment to good governance and leads to the erosion of democracy. Examples of corruption may include, but are not limited to, bribery, patronage, influence peddling, embezzlement and nepotism.

Swing Voters

Swing voters are voters that are not necessarily affiliated with a specific political party during elections and as such may lean towards any of the parties. These voters are at times the main targets of candidates during elections and often are subject to their clientelist policies to obtain votes.

Populism

Populism is a political ideology that strives to appeal to the working class. Under this ideology, the workers or “the people” are presented as a good entity where as “the elite” are perceived to be selfish
and corrupt. Politicians often utilize this to appeal to the masses to obtain votes, and in the process also use clientelism as an easy way to gain votes.

Pork barrel

“Pork Barrel” is a metaphor in politics for the utilization of public funds in such a way that pleases the public to gain electoral support. Politicians are said to use pork barrel politics when they spend excessive government money on a local project in order to gain votes from the people who live in that area. This is an instance of clientelism since there is an exchange of services between the politicians and the public.

Turnout buying

Turnout Buying is a practice where candidates offer people compensation whether that be in the form of funds, goods or services when they ‘turn out’ for voting for elections. This helps increase the votes for the candidates since it is firstly, indirect bribe and also increases the probability of them being voted for.

Abstention buying

This practice is opposite of vote buying, where candidates offer either money, goods, or services to people to ensure that they do not vote. Though this is an option that is more feasible for an open ballot system, which is a system where the voters vote openly, it is often also employed by political candidates in a secret ballot system, where voters’ votes are confidential, so that they can reduce the probability of them not receiving votes by making sure that non supporters don’t vote.

Quid pro quo

Quid pro quo, which is a phrase derived from Latin, can be translated to “favour for a favour”. It usually refers to an item or a service that has been traded in return for something of value. In this context, resources being traded by politicians in exchange for electoral support from voters.

Background Information

Origin

The issue of clientelism seems to be deeply entrenched with a basic concept of a democratic state: the search for votes and its effect in the distribution of resources. Though the concept was coined much later, it has existed since the advent of democracy in ancient Rome where tyrants and rulers would
bribe the public and endow upon them gifts in order to gain their support and approval. However, over the years, Clientelism has had different “waves”. While before it was centred around regimes, now it is based around democracy.

**How it manifests today**

Despite there being a clear asymmetry in clientelist relationships in politics, they still seem to persist. This relationship is both voluntary and from the perspective of the client, exploitative. To effectively combat clientelism, it is imperative to understand why such a system has lasted for so long and why it works.

One reason as to why clientelism works is its reciprocal nature. When patrons bestow benefits and resources upon the clients, it creates a sense of obligation that those ‘gifts’ must be reciprocated. Often, this is in the form of votes. Moreover, a feeling of mutual expectation is created. Thus, a cycle is formed where the patron gives gifts in return for electoral support. This also enables a political monopoly where voters may not want to vote for a politician out of office due to the benefits they receive. In cases of public employment, a monopoly is also created where the patron can either punish or reward people based on who voted for them. An example of this could be the system of electoral college for Presidential elections in America where in recent years there has been a geographic polarization of votes where urban areas are more likely to vote Democrat while rural areas seem to vote Republican, this combined with the gerrymandering has led to Republican’s winning elections in past years despite receiving less votes.

An alternate reason as to why clientelism works is the concept of fear, where the client is tied to the patron not by reciprocity but due to the fear that the flow of benefits might be cut off. The system of clientelism persists by creating a dependence of the client on the patron via goods, services or monetary aid. Moreover, this also creates debt. Both of these being effective discipline and loyalty mechanisms. Parties also don’t only focus on the core supporters but also appeal to swing voters through ideology and benefits in order to garner more support.

**Effects on democracy**

Clientelism is an especially dangerous system due to how it negatively affects systems of governance. Clientelism degrades a democratic society by diminishing the accountability relationship
between the government and the public and in the process, administrative oversight is also diminished. Moreover, it also renders the secret ballot system obsolete since the public’s votes now are influenced by the benefits, they have received by candidates. In such a situation, the patrons’ focus now shifts to being able to obtain goods for maintaining these clientelist systems rather than good governance. This can also lead to potential disregard of public services by the patron, while they are in office.

Additionally, clientelism stifles the public sphere and inhibits effective scrutiny of politico-business elites. This was especially evident with the case of the Christian Democratic Party in Italy, which was known for its corrupt policies, which ultimately led to an increase in poverty, as well as, its ties to the mafia and other organized crime.

Its causes

To understand why clientelism exists and how to effectively combat it, it is imperative to analyse its causes.

Poverty is a major factor that leads to the existence of clientelism in political leadership. This is because, in countries with an unequal distribution of wealth, voters with a lower income status (poor voters) are more likely to be tempted by clientelist policies such as redistribution of wealth or monetary benefits.

The existence of social funds is another cause since Politicians can utilize these funds in a clientelist manner. For example, as seen in Venezuela in 2004 by former President Hugo Chávez, oil income was distributed amongst the poor in order to diminish electoral competition.

Politicized bureaucracies are institutions where politicians have the right to be able to exercise control bureaucracy. In other words, there isn’t a clear distinction between the political and the administrative machinery of the government. This leads to clientelism since politicians are given the chance to utilize public funds in such a way that is transactional in nature. Such a system also enables patronage. As a result, all their actions are conducted in order to garner electoral support.

Finally, candidate-focused elections are a cause since they allow candidates to create a tie with the voters which enables clientelism since personal relationships are forged.
How it differs from corruption

To effectively combat clientelism, it is important to differentiate it from corruption. While both notions reinforce each other and are prominent in multiparty politics, they are not the same. Corruption is defined as the “misuse of public office for private gain”. While clientelism is “the proffering of material goods in return for electoral support”. This means that, for clientelism to occur, there has to be a transaction of services, the reciprocal being votes. However, in the case of corruption, there is no transaction required. Clientelist actions may themselves be corrupt and clientelist politics may undermine accountability and the rule of law, thus making it more difficult to fight corruption. Clientelism may also increase the incentives for politicians to raise funds through corrupt methods. However, despite the similarities and the fact that they thrive in similar circumstances, they are not the same.

Lobbying and Clientelism

Political lobbying is a practice that is performed by either individuals or organizations to influence the decisions of governments. Often, it can also refer to attempts made to influence the votes of legislators. While lobbying does not lie under clientelism, often such practices can resemble, or even encourage and execute forms of clientelism. Therefore, delegates might want to take lobbying into consideration while coming up with solutions for the issue at hand.

An example of this would be lobbying groups in Brussels, in the European Union. Lobbying which also goes by the term “Interest representation” where stakeholders such as private enterprises, law firms, and non-governmental organizations come together to express their views on every legislative procedure. They then release a draft directive called a “green paper” as a basis of the legislation. All these actions are legal and protected by the Treaty of Lisbon which provides a basis of interest representation. This process resembles clientelism since citizens are now mobilized and roles are in a way reversed. Lobbyists declare a range of money they would like to spend on their efforts, and this determines the likelihood of them shifting the bloc’s priorities. Much like how the number of services politicians endow upon the public determines the amount of electoral support they receive. In other cases, such as lobbying in America through organizations such as ALEC (The American Legislative Exchange Council), the resemblance between lobbying and clientelism becomes even more uncanny where corporations are able to influence the legislators’ votes.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved
Argentina

Argentina is arguably one of the most affected counties when it comes to the issue of clientelism, with this ideology being deeply embedded in their history. The Peronist movement was founded in Argentina in 1947 and mainly focuses on the welfare of the working class. It has been hard to determine whether people have voted for the party because of their passion for the movement or because of favours provided by a given patron. Candidates from the Peronist party, whose ideology is underpinned by populism, often provide food and other resources to people who run grassroot offices for the party. In order to compensate, they “mobilize” people for rallies and encourage them to vote. Moreover, there is also evidence for the existence of a ‘Peronist problem-solving network’ which monopolizes information and relies on state resources to offer resources and services to people in destitution. Another way in which clientelism presents itself in Argentina is through government policies such as Plan Vida and Programma Materno that distribute food and resources to people living in rural areas and extreme poverty. All in all, Clientelism in Argentina is mainly grassroot level and is based around the notion of ‘favores por votes?” (“Favours for votes?”). However, no strong evidence of large scale clientelism has been found.

Brazil

Clientelism in Brazil exists in the form of government policies and is evident through programs such as Bolsa Familia (Family Grant), in Brazil, which is the world’s largest CCT (Conditional Cash Transfer) Program in the world. It is a government-run program that is mostly focused on alleviating poverty in low-income areas in Brazil. This can classify as clientelism since even though the federal government has the highest administrative authority, local governments are the main contact point, giving way to political brokerage between politicians and the public. Moreover, due to stark deprivation in targeted areas, people are prone to patronage appeals. Examples of this include the manipulation of federal programs by the subnational elite in the form of SUDENE and the Ministry of Education’s school lunch programme.

India

Clientelism in India is found to be prevalent in rural areas where elite political minorities buy the votes of the non-elite by promoting benefits to them. There is a direct quid pro quo between the patrons and the client, where political candidates offer the voters a promise of better lifestyle and resources and in some cases, directly offer resources to voters in order to gain votes. In the case of rural areas, where candidates are often employers or landowners, the clientelist undertaking takes the form of insurance for the workers.
Mexico

Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), in Mexico, is known for using clientelism to establish a relationship with citizens. In the past, the party has exploited the high rates of poverty and inequality in order to gain electoral support from the people.

United States of America

Despite being a developed country, the United States of America is not much different. Politicians frequently use clientelist policies such as offering benefits in order to convince people to vote for them. Patronage is also prevalent in the United States of America with organizations such as ALEC. Moreover, in the 2016 US presidential elections, Democrat candidate Hilary Clinton was allegedly accused of offering meetings in exchange for campaign donations.

Venezuela

Former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez was notorious for implementing clientelist policies such as creating a Unified Social Fund, whose main aim was to target the poorest areas in the country and provide them with health care and social services. His popularity went up from winning with 45% of the vote to 59% of the vote. However, in subsequent years, social security resources have become less available to citizens in need.

Timeline of Events

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tr>
<td>December 15th, 1943</td>
<td>The Christian Democratic Party in Italy or Christian Democracy is founded.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 1973</td>
<td>The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) is founded.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 1994</td>
<td>Plan Vida is launched by the Peronist Party in Argentina, it is a food distribution plan that works in the poorest slums of Buenos Aires.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Bolsa Escola programme in Brazil is established it is one of the world’s largest conditional cash transfer programs.</td>
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### Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

**UN Involvement**

The United Nations in the past has not taken any direct actions to tackle the issue of clientelism in political leadership. However, the UN does offer support to countries that request it, during elections. NGOs and UN associated bodies give specialized help and inform people about candidates and the importance of voting. Ideally this should mean that people are less influenced by those in power. However, this has not been the case. Therefore, it cannot be stressed enough that it is imperative that the United Nations get involved and take action now.

**Hatch Act of 1940 in the United States of America**

The Hatch Act was first enacted in 1939 in the United States of America and is an Act to prevent pernicious political activities. Under the Act employees in the executive branch of the federal government as well as certain employees of state and local governments whose positions are primarily paid by local funds, are prohibited from certain political activities which include using their influence to interfere in elections as well as soliciting or receiving political contributions. While its implementation may help reduce vote buying, it does not prevent patronage, which is another important aspect of clientelism. More
recently, people who have allegedly violated the Hatch Act have not faced repercussions severe than condemnation

**COMVIVE in Mexico**

COMVIVEs were implemented by the Mexican government in 1996 and were designed to be democratically run organizations without party affiliation and to prevent political parties from co-opting local leaders and from dominating the political activities of residents. This aimed to reduce clientelism in low-income areas. Though the thought behind the establishment of these organizations in areas of high poverty was one founded in good faith, it did little to solve the issue at hand. Approximately one-third of the residents withdrew their support from the COMVIVE within a year of its formation. Not only that but, Citizens also continued to support parties such as PRI and declared their loyalties to them. Due to the implementation and the subsequent failure of COMIVIVE, it is evident that reducing people’s dependence on political parties for resources cannot be done by giving them an organization to run. This is because, people’s political activities are predominantly influenced by their access to resources, goods, and information. Things that COMIVIVE did not directly address.

**Possible Solutions**

Though the issue of combatting clientelism in political leadership is a daunting one to solve, there are certain solutions that the delegates may choose to consider.

Firstly, a way to solve the issue could be the implementation of measures to reduce the dependency of people on political parties, as well as, other power. By implementing solutions which tackle the issue at its very origin. Clientelism can be combatted, the general public would be more independent socially, as well as, financially which means that practices such as vote buying, or patronage would be hindered.

Other solutions that the delegates could consider are the massive privatization of state-owned enterprises, liberalization of markets, downsizing of government bureaucracy, fiscal budget restraints, and slash of subsidies and tariffs. Though radical, such measures would decrease the number of public resources available for patronage and clientelism. As a result, political parties and individual politicians would have fewer resources to distribute, in order to gain electoral support.
Targeted social programs are one of the most attractive and/or necessary resources for building electoral support by drawing electoral constituencies or punishing the opposition. Efforts should be made by the delegates to regulate such programs to prevent any forms of clientelism.

Finally, delegates may propose to make abstention from voting during elections illegal/have a fine, which renders turn out buying obsolete and abstention buying impossible. Both of these processes are like the legal form of bribery and perpetuate clientelism, therefore they must be tackled in order to combat clientelism.

Bibliography


March 19, 2017 · by fixler.8 · in Week 11: Illiberal Democracy. “Political Clientelism: Are We So Different?” *Latin American Politics SP17*, u.osu.edu/latampolitics17/2017/03/19/political-clientelism-are-we-so-different/


Appendix or Appendices

I. Treaties on Crime and Corruption

II. Clientelism and the Economy

III. Political Clientelism