

# **GOOD GOVERNANCE, CLIENTELISM, AND PATRIMONIALISM: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON OLD PROBLEMS**

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***ABSTRACT:** This article examines why patron-client systems of governance persist around the world despite efforts to fight them through economic liberalization, democratization, decentralization, and civil service reform. Aid donors want developing countries to abandon clientelism to encourage production of public goods. However, our reexamination of the case literature finds that clientelism may have hidden positive externalities, such as the appeasement of elites and the integration of people into the state, which can make it attractive. There also is a collective action problem: individuals might prefer an alternative to clientelism, but they support the status quo as a safety-first strategy. We propose an analytic framework for diagnosing patron-client systems and suggest programming options for donors. Despite the obstacles, governance institutions have been improved selectively around the world, as a result of emerging political parties competing based on generalized appeals to interest, through the activities of policy entrepreneurs, or through advocacy by civil society organizations.*

As poor countries attempt the difficult transition to democracy and open markets, they need to make many reforms in the realm of governance. Around the world efforts are now underway to reconfigure public institutions, trying to build governance systems that are responsive and accountable to citizens and that effectively support economic investment and growth. International donors have established good governance as one of the criteria for deciding which countries will receive assistance; the Bush administration's proposed Millennium Challenge Account is a recent example. Among the impediments to new forms of governance are underlying or resurgent patron-client networks, which are blamed for stifling popular participation, subverting the rule of law, fostering corruption, and a host of other political and economic ills.

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This article explores why clientelistic practices in governance persist, and why the conventional strategies for tackling them usually fall short. We start from a micro-level perspective that emphasizes individual gains and losses. Our reexamination of the worldwide literature on patron-client systems finds evidence of a classic collective action or free-rider problem: What might be rational at the level of society (a fairer political and administrative system for all) makes less sense at the level of the individual, and creates disincentives for people to go along with changes in patron-client systems that would benefit the majority. Field studies show that clientelistic traditions and practices are constantly evolving and being adapted to new circumstances as countries urbanize and industrialize. Those that live on generally do so because they provide some value to people, or else they would disappear through disuse.

A full understanding of patron-client systems, however, also requires analyzing them from a macro-level perspective. Individual-level incentives only explain why these systems tend to be reinvented over time; they do not tell us how harmful any given system is for the larger society that lives under it. Private clientelistic transactions may produce social costs such as a lower rate of economic growth or a skewed distribution of income, but they may also produce positive, though difficult to measure, externalities. At the level of society, for example, there may be largely unrecognized collective benefits such as the appeasement of elites and the integration of ordinary people into the state or the larger community. Before anyone recommends a country embark on a program of governance reform, it is a good idea first to try to estimate the total social gains and losses generated by existing patron-client institutions. The net burden on society, and the probability of successful replacement with rational-legal institutions, will determine which reforms are worth the effort to undertake. That issue must be addressed case by case.

Because clientelism and patrimonialism are always functional in some sense, donor agencies have found patron-client systems frustratingly difficult to contain in aid-receiving countries. This is not for lack of trying. Economic liberalization, democratization, decentralization, and civil service reform have been used as broad approaches for fighting clientelism and patrimonialism. Our sampling of recent evidence from around the globe shows these approaches hold some promise for changing the individual incentives to join clientelistic networks, but they have also produced many unexpected, sometimes negative social outcomes in different countries. We propose in this article an analytic framework for diagnosing patron-client systems and assessing their tradeoffs in any given society. Finally, we suggest programming options for international assistance agencies and nongovernmental organizations that wish to help countries loosen the grip of clientelism.

### **CLIENTELISM AND PATRIMONIALISM**

Politics has been defined as the system that determines who gets what in society (Lasswell 1958). To help understand who gets what in developing countries many political scientists in the 1970s began to apply the concept of clientelism, first elaborated by anthropologists and sociologists to describe the hierarchical social relations that have long marked the countryside in peasant societies. It is now widely

acknowledged that the patron-client model of politics permeates contemporary political systems around the world, often reducing the amount of public investment in health, education, and transportation. The phenomenon is ubiquitous but most notable outside of Western Europe and North America.

Clientelism refers to a complex chain of personal bonds between political patrons or bosses and their individual clients or followers. These bonds are founded on mutual material advantage: the patron furnishes excludable resources to dependents and accomplices in return for their support and cooperation. The patron has disproportionate power and thus enjoys wide latitude about how to distribute the assets under his control. In modern politics, most patrons are not independent actors, but are links within a larger grid of contacts, usually serving as middlemen who arrange exchanges between the local level and the national center (Kettering 1988). Patrons disregard the long-term national interest and focus on helping their clients; anyone outside the favored group can expect little from government. Present-day clientelism tends to flourish in insecure political and economic environments, both rural and urban, and is integral to the politics of survival for both patrons and clients (Migdal 1988). Typically, the poor and marginalized members of society are drawn into these problem-solving networks as a pragmatic means to find solutions to their everyday concerns, since they often have limited access to formal sources of assistance (Auyero 2000).

Well-known contemporary examples of clientelism include Mexico's system of *caciquismo*. During the era of one-party rule that recently ended, *caciques*, or local power brokers, were critical cogs in the party machinery (Fox 1994). *Caciques* provided plots of land and loans, acted as intermediaries for peasants looking to sell their crops, and ran local shops and businesses. They often used strong-arm tactics to reinforce their power. In exchange for services and security, peasants voted for the dominant party at election time. Senegal's *marabouts* perform a similar function (Fatton 1986). These local holy men and teachers deliver the votes of their followers, whom they repay with farm implements and other gifts.

Clientelism takes on a bewildering variety of forms in other cultural settings. Sometimes it reflects ethnic, clan, geographic, or religious undertones, sometimes not. The social impact differs dramatically, depending on the amount of resources involved, the allocation of divisible benefits and the way gains are invested, among other factors. As Hutchcroft (1997) observes, certain patterns of clientelism are complementary to socioeconomic development and others are obstructive. One of the challenges for international donors is to separate clientelistic institutions that serve, or at least do not contradict, the majority's needs from similar-looking institutions that harm the greater part of society.

While such wide-ranging phenomena are very difficult to generalize about, a common denominator of modern clientelism is that it rests on a rational economic calculus more than on blind or reflexive personal loyalty. Clientelism is a type of instrumental friendship, though an unevenly balanced friendship, because patrons target the poor and take advantage of their limited information and autonomy. All the same, each participant in the exchange does get something of value. When asked what party leaders offer them in return for electoral support, Mexican voters come up with an impressive list: cash, caps, tee-shirts, pencils, lighters, dictionaries, bags of basic foodstuff, breakfasts, cactuses, fruits, vegetables, beer, washing machines, bags of

cement, cardboard, sand, shovels, pickaxes, machetes, hoses, fertilizer, seeds, chickens, cows and sheep (Schedler 2002). Villagers in Senegal pay tithes to their *marabout* in cash, in groundnuts, or by helping to work the *marabout's* fields. In return, the religious leaders provide their disciples with credit, seeds, and emergency relief in times of need (Boone 1992, 41).

A recurrent complaint leveled at clientelism is that a coercive element underlies these exchanges. A patron may turn to intimidation or violence to prevent defections among followers. Sometimes the best that a follower can expect is to be left alone (the protection racket), which is not much of a gain. Should the patron have a monopoly on important resources, as is often the case, defection may be a moot issue anyway. Followers will not find a better deal somewhere else, trapping them in relationships that are exploitative and impoverishing.

Clientelism is at its core a means for setting policy about who gets what. Governments also need ways for carrying out policy, for making sure that people actually get the goods they have been allocated. Weber (1947) coined the phrase *patrimonialism* to describe situations where the administrative apparatus is appointed by and responsible to the top leader. Deputies are delegated jurisdiction over certain domains, and given wide leeway regarding how to act. These measures are mostly informal or off the record. *Patrimonial administration* is closely associated with *clientelistic politics*, for administrative jobs are among the choicest plums a boss or patron can offer his protégés. Treated as a type of income-generating property, such jobs are more valuable than the equivalent posts in a state that has carefully circumscribed job descriptions.

Many developing and transitional countries have set up a superstructure of rational-legal administration, which nonetheless continues to rest on a deep foundation of *patrimonial rule*. Appearances and juristic procedures to the contrary, they implement policy mainly through networks of personal retainers and dependents. The term sometimes applied to administrative systems that look modern and bureaucratic but are not is *neopatrimonialism*.<sup>1</sup>

The individualized benefits and paybacks of patron-client systems help explain opposition or indifference to well-intended efforts to change them. Entrenched elites put up resistance because they face loss of power and privilege. Governance reforms may also seem threatening from the perspective of someone on the bottom rungs of society who has adapted to a particular assortment of governance institutions. It is critical to avoid the presupposition that low-income people see clientelism in wholly negative terms. Slum dwellers and other marginalized groups turn to patron-client networks as informal insurance mechanisms when they have no other realistic choices or when they lack confidence in the public sector to provide social services in an evenhanded manner.

There may be a prisoner's dilemma, where most people prefer an alternative to clientelistic policies, but they support the status quo out of fear of being shut out from the perquisites of clientelism. Such behavior is not always based on false consciousness or traditional values, but often on a reasonable assessment of risk. Unfortunately, what might be the safest strategy from an individual perspective might not be the best strategy from a collective perspective. The prisoner's dilemma is a dead end unless people figure out ways to mobilize themselves for programmatic politics or other collective benefits. We have come across encouraging tidbits of evidence that in some

societies people are altering their risk assessments and willingness to trade political rights for material favors. Schedler (2002), for example, finds that Mexican voters have come to reject clientelistic practices and demand universalistic policies. In Senegal, however, voter preferences still have little to do with policy choices or concepts of the public good, and continue to revolve around expectations of material paybacks from the victorious candidates, according to Schaffer (1998). The great challenge for international donors is to find means to induce low-income people to move away from stultifying types of clientelism without triggering repercussions that make everyone worse off on average. There are no cookie-cutter solutions to that problem.

### **THE TRADE-OFFS IN PATRON-CLIENT SYSTEMS**

The mainstream view among policy analysts is that clientelism and patrimonialism are inefficient for society because they reduce expenditures on true public goods, which, in turn, are essential for sustained economic growth and social advancement. However, this view overlooks the question of governability, which is a public good in its own right. Where society is divided or administration weak, clientelism and patrimonialism may provide second-best (but practicable) outcomes. It is important to be aware of the tradeoffs in governability before trying to overhaul a patron-client system and replace it with more democratic or rational-legal institutions.

The key to evaluating any given set of clientelistic institutions is the degree of reciprocity, or how much citizens get back from these customs and relationships, both as individuals and collectively. Merton (1968), in a famous essay on urban party machines in the United States, labels such compensating benefits latent functions. Party machines are manipulative and repressive. They are run largely for private rather than public ends. However, Merton points out that these clientelistic organizations also help newly arrived immigrants find jobs and establish themselves both socially and economically. They contribute to peaceful development by playing down divisive, collective issues. Efforts to alter this type of urban administration do not necessarily lead to improved conditions for the poor, who may in fact fare better with the benefits and protections afforded by machine politics.

Political patronage also has latent functions. On the downside, firing staff as part of a spoils system is disruptive and leads to loss of organizational memory; replacing staff with unqualified political hacks cripples government capacity. Favoritism in personnel decisions encourages toadyism and discourages underlings from speaking their minds or using their expertise if it threatens their career (Prendergast 1993). However, patronage is also a means of gaining or maintaining control. One of the best ways for a political leader or agency manager to stay in control is to be surrounded with loyal people. He or she may calculate that some inefficiency is a small price to pay for loyalty. Patronage allows leaders to build a temporary team of public managers who share the leaders' policy agenda and who can be trusted not to sabotage or delay important programs, which is critical for democratic accountability.<sup>2</sup> Arranging jobs for supporters is also one of the instruments that leaders have to strengthen political parties. Since party organizations are needed to mobilize public participation in civic affairs, party building

is an additional latent function of patronage that has positive social spillovers (Shefter 1994).

Merton's theory of latent functions should not be misinterpreted to say that one governance system is as good as another. While patron-client networks are an important social safety valve, there are alternative means of serving the same functions more fairly or efficiently. After all, it is more cost effective to supply public goods directly rather than as a roundabout byproduct of clientelism. What Merton's theory does imply is that every governance practice be looked at carefully from all sides. International development agencies should be wary about their ability to improve on existing clientelistic arrangements and be prepared for unexpected outcomes from attempted governance reforms.

### **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PATRON-CLIENT SYSTEMS**

Table 1 outlines how to assess the patron-client systems that exist in different countries. Because clientelistic politics are most common in conditions of low productivity and high inequality, the first analytic task is to understand the cultural and sociopolitical context of the country, including underlying social relations and traditions, basic characteristics of the state and the economy, and the range of choices available to citizens. Regarding culture and social relations, it is useful to appreciate the balance of power among social groups, the depth of dependency relations, and the extent to which poor people rely on elites for land, credit, and other resources. These factors create a social setting in which clientelism is likely to thrive. This is especially so where the private sector is relatively impoverished and the public sector is a major source of money and help. Concerning the contextual variables related to characteristics of the state, its governance systems, and the economy, it is important to identify the structures and incentives that limit or encourage clientelism and patronage. For example, do policymaking and resource allocation take place transparently and more or less according to written rules? Has the state been captured by particular segments of society, or is it being used by leaders for pillage and personal aggrandizement? How distinct are the boundaries between public and private?

The next category of questions looks at clientelistic governance practices in action. The aim here is to identify the prevalence and distribution of these practices, ascertain which societal actors are involved, and figure out the pattern of winners and losers. For example, to what extent are public health services or agricultural loans provided according to pull or influence, as opposed to being offered to people based on objective criteria of eligibility? How evenhanded is the hiring for rural road repair or food-for-work projects? Is there an orderly and needs-driven system for deciding where to build or renovate schools, clinics, and community centers? Do certain people have to make under-the-table payments to teachers, health workers, or police officers to obtain services? Useful techniques for assessing actions and actors are stakeholder analysis and political mapping (Brinkerhoff and Crosby 2002). Another important aspect of this step in the assessment is to identify where there are actual or potential constituencies for change. Are there political leaders who have expressed commitment to address governance issues related to clientelism, abuses of patronage, or corruption? Are there

**TABLE 1**  
**Diagnostic Tool: Analyzing Patron-Client Systems**

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**CONTEXT**

*Culture, social relations, and tradition*

- How extensive are poverty and lack of ownership of or access to productive assets?
- How stable are incomes?
- What is the degree of social and ethnic heterogeneity? Are there marginalized minorities?
- What is the relative balance of power among social/ethnic groups?
- What is the degree of elite monopolization of economic resources?
- What dependency relations exist between elites and the poor?
- Is there religious or historical legitimation of clientelism?
- Are ethnic or familial ties important to political and economic decision making?
- Are social relations primarily hierarchical and vertical, or egalitarian and horizontal?

*Characteristics of the state and the economy*

- To what extent do public agencies operate as rational-legal bureaucracies? What is the proportion of political appointments in the civil service relative to regular career employees?
- How clear are the boundaries between the public and private sectors? Do leaders see state institutions mainly as a means for rent-seeking and personal corruption?
- Does the state dominate economic decision making? How large and important is the public sector in comparison to the private sector, especially the informal sector?
- How scarce or abundant are government resources? What assets are actually or potentially available for patronage?
- Is decision making monopolized by one or more social/ethnic groups? Do policies and programs regularly favor/exclude certain groups?
- How transparent are government regulations and procedures? Do citizens know what services they are entitled to? How accountable are government agencies for the application of regulations and procedures?

*Agents of restraint and enforcement*

- Do changes of government take place through open and fair elections? What is the degree of vote buying, coercion, or other irregularities?
- Are there alternative political parties, and are they programmatic or personalized? Are there effective community organizations? What other interest groups exist that act or could act as a countervailing power to patron-client networks?
- Do people have choice among competing patrons or are they locked into monopolistic dependency relationships? To what extent are new patrons emerging or likely to emerge?
- What is the relative balance of power among the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of government?
- What other institutional and legal checks and balances exist that inhibit clientelistic practices? Ombudsmen? Secret ballots? Others?

**ACTORS/ACTIONS**

- How prevalent are favors and special considerations for constituents? How widely are patronage jobs and contracts distributed? Who is appointed?
- What is the frequency of demands for bribes and kickbacks in return for service delivery?
- Are there particular sectors that exhibit high degrees of clientelistic practices?

**TABLE 1**  
Continued

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What is the distribution of public goods and services? Do many people/groups have a chance of being assisted by government? Who is left behind?

Who are the patrons? Intermediaries? How personalized are patronage relationships? Direct to national leaders? Mediated by political parties, by ethnic or religious groups, or by lower-level administrative officials?

What constituencies exist for reforms? Where are they located (state, civil society, private sector)? Are they mobilized (what actions will they take to support or oppose change)?

**OUTCOMES**

*Apparent functions and reciprocity*

How much do clients give up in these relationships, and what do they get in return?

For patrons, are the economic impacts of clientelism and patronage perceived as substantial or marginal?

Are the resources channeled through clientelistic networks consumed or invested? Are they employed locally or transferred abroad? If consumed, is this in the form of quasi-public goods (political pork) or mainly individual favors?

What is the perceived impact of clientelism on private investment, both domestic and foreign?

Are the current levels of patron-client relations accepted as tolerable or is there widespread outrage?

Have the current levels and patterns of clientelism led to social/ethnic tensions and unrest, cynicism, and political apathy?

*Latent functions and hidden outcomes*

Are there hidden or unintended social benefits of patron-client networks? For example, is clientelism an essential social safety valve? A means of integrating new groups into the larger society? A way to co-opt elites?

Do the recipients of patronage do their job regardless of how or why they got it?

Does clientelism compromise core state functions? For instance, is the central bank politicized? Is clientelism so bad that a technocratic elite has not emerged within the civil service?

How large is the net cost of clientelism to society as a whole? To poor people in particular?

Are these relationships breaking down or evolving? If so what is replacing them?

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members of the business community and civil society who are opposed to these practices? What actions have they taken to express or act upon their opposition?

The last two sets of questions about patron-client arrangements have to do with how one-sided the outcomes are and the net effects on society and the economy. The aim is to use the results of the contextual analysis and identification of specific actions and actors to provide clues as to whether the net social outcomes are negative, and if so, the perceived magnitude of the cost. If members of a particular ethnic group or political faction monopolize patronage and other government benefits, the social cost of clientelism is probably high. This kind of situation can lead to increased poverty among groups marginalized by these dynamics, and can provoke social tensions that can erupt into conflict and violence. If, on the other hand, meaningful competition occurs and

many different types of people share government benefits, or if marginalized groups gain access to services and social exclusion is reduced, then the social cost may be much lower or even represent a net social gain should enough people participate.

After studying a country's social and economic structure, identifying the actions and actors associated with clientelistic practices, and examining the social and economic costs and benefits, policymakers can begin to devise targeted strategies for improving governance. They may see little payoff, for example, in trying to reform a political machine if that organization delivers many individualized services to poor people or shows a bias for building pork-barrel projects in disadvantaged neighborhoods. On the other hand, if that political machine uses extensive violence to maintain control, steals vast sums for its leaders to spend on themselves and to export abroad, or shuts out minority groups, then the case for governance reform is much stronger. In other words, international donors and their local allies have to be selective. Governance is enhanced by trying to eliminate clientelistic practices that are injurious, not the ones that are relatively inoffensive or benevolent.

### **MAJOR STRATEGIES FOR REFORMING CLIENTELISTIC SYSTEMS**

The major strategies deployed to improve governance in the twenty-first century are economic liberalization, democratization, decentralization, and civil service reform. Though different in their particulars, these strategies all try to replace patron-client systems with objective or impersonal rules and laws. Given the individual attractions of clientelism, it should come as no surprise that new procedures do not automatically or instantaneously lead to substantive change in political actors' behavior.

#### **Economic Liberalization**

Economic reform is central to the struggle against destructive patron-client arrangements. Measures that reduce the monopoly and discretionary power of governmental officials are thought to favor democratic, rule-based governance. The assumption is, get the prices right and most economic rents will disappear. By shrinking the state and putting an end to protectionist trade policies, economic actors will lose both the opportunity and the motivation to seek handouts and special deals from government. The state will become less vulnerable to elite capture (Frischtak 1994). Loosening the straitjacket of regulation will open the economic playing field to new, often small, business entrants, and competition will punish politically connected existing companies if they do not learn to become efficient.

Because neither blandishments nor threats form the basis for a stable relationship, patron-client networks are vulnerable to anything that disrupts the flow of material benefits to clients and supporters. Liberal economic reforms can shake up a clientelistic political system by reducing politicians' access to patronage. Benton (2001) reports that in Argentina, Mexico, and Venezuela, voters have abandoned established parties, leading to a rise of new ones. The shift away from state-led economic development in the 1980s undermined the capacity of established parties to cultivate support by distributing particularistic benefits. As a result, parties in these Latin American countries are, of

necessity, growing more policy oriented and programmatic. In South Korea, small business has recently emerged as a voice for change, successfully making claims for economic incentives previously denied to them and supporting democratization (Nam 1995). These smaller companies now stand as a countervailing force that is disrupting the longtime symbiotic ties between large companies and the Korean state, in which favored monopolies were given lucrative business opportunities in exchange for political cooperation.

Nonetheless, we should not have exaggerated expectations about how quickly economic reforms will work to curtail clientelism and crony capitalism. As often as not, patrons and bosses figure out ways to take advantage of economic reforms, at least temporarily. Privatization of state-owned companies in Africa, for example, often yields sweetheart deals for government confederates who pick up public assets at bargain prices (Tangri 1999). Deregulation of capital accounts may make it easier to ship ill-gotten wealth abroad. Liberalization of foreign investment rules may attract multinational companies, especially in extractive industries, that are willing new sources of political contributions and kickbacks. Russia typifies many of these disappointing trends. As stated by Hellman (1998), leaders there exploited market distortions during the early stages of the transition to capitalism, siphoned off the gains, and then blocked further reforms that would undermine their special advantages.

Even if economic liberalization does not fizzle as it did in Russia, people at the bottom of the economic ladder may be thrown back into the arms of their patrons. This is counter to what neoclassical theory predicts. Competitive markets are supposed to produce a range of options not available before. The poor are supposed to be freed from depending solely on the local landlord, moneylender, and merchant for resources. However, even as competitive markets sometimes stimulate economic growth, they usually add to income inequality and heighten people's sense of insecurity and dispossession. That may make clientelistic ties more important than ever, particularly during periods of economic slump. Painter (2001) argues, for example, that an indirect consequence of the 1997 financial crisis in Malaysia has been to entrench the insider dealing that unites that country's political and economic elites.

Another unforeseen scenario is for economic liberalization to drive elites to find to new sources of patronage. Budgetary austerity and privatization have often devalued the state sector jobs traditionally used to reward supporters. In countries such as Kenya or Zimbabwe, land has emerged as an alternative resource, made attractive partly because land is less subject to international scrutiny and adjustment conditionalities (Klopp 2000). Because it involves redistribution, land-based patronage often goes together with growing political violence.

Chua (2002) argues that the introduction of market competition tends to create ethnic resentment and strife anywhere, as in many societies one identity group owns disproportionate assets or is more active in business affairs. The disadvantaged majority gives vent to its frustration by attacking the outsiders in their midst. In Central Java, for example, economic liberalization has had the unintended effect of reestablishing minority-owned rural marketing networks, in so doing fueling intercommunal bloodshed (Galvan 2001).

Economic liberalization is usually expected to boost private sector demand for democracy (see the next section). Wanting a say in government policies, the business

community should support institutional changes that coincidentally open up the political process for everyone. That was the historical path in the West, but is not always the case in developing countries today. China's new business elite, for example, has been co-opted into clientelistic networks run by the Chinese government. Business success is heavily dependent on cultivating good relations with government officials. These informal connections restrain the business community's autonomy and interfere with the formation of cohesive interest groups. Thus, despite an accelerating rate of market-oriented economic reform, the private sector is not leading the call for greater political freedoms in China (Pearson 1997).

### **Democratization**

Democratic theory holds that giving ordinary people a say in public affairs will make government work for the majority, not simply for people who have the right connections. Reformers have come up with many practical ideas for how to translate this theory into practice. Since the Berlin Wall fell, multiparty elections have been introduced around the world. In a growing number of countries, leaders now face term limits, the press has been freed so it can play the role of watchdog, people are at liberty to organize political parties and advocacy groups, and they can vote against politicians who do not follow through on promises. Yet, the impact of democratizing reforms is usually limited where large disparities in wealth and social status exist. Entrenched patrimonial leaders may shake down potential supporters and manipulate the new electoral mechanisms to retain power. They often become political brokers, using patronage to hold onto low-income voters whom they deliver to the emerging national parties. Citizens may not trust that their ballot can make a difference, or that government programs will ever deliver what they propose.

Voting may reinforce ethnic tension. Under competitive conditions, political bosses need criteria to single out and reward followers and to exclude nonsupporters. Because ethnicity serves this purpose well, the patron has an incentive to build a winning coalition by steering benefits toward people who visibly share the same background or heritage. For their part, low-income voters may mobilize into ethnic blocs as a strategy for maximizing their chances of obtaining individualized benefits available from the state (Chandra 2004). Even as such benefits dry up, there is logic to voting for politicians from one's own tribal or linguistic group, on the grounds that such a politician will tend to defend the interests of the group as a whole. Wantchekon's (2003) field work in Benin, for example, demonstrates that clientelism can have a significant impact on voting behavior and tends to reinforce ethnic voting.

Even if ethnic identity is not the major wedge issue, elections may still create more conflict than cooperation wherever people are poor. Consider Jamaica. Party activists at the local level attach themselves to elected officials who provide them with government benefits, such as public housing. Rival party activists are shut out. Over time, public housing estates and land resettlement schemes have turned into a patchwork of reliably partisan constituencies. Regrettably, many also became armed garrison communities that are breeding grounds for political gangs (Figueroa and Sives 2002). Violence and organized crime are Jamaica's greatest obstacles to development.

Taiwan provides another illustration of how the formal institutions of democratic governance can inadvertently reinforce the informal practices of clientelism. The monopolistic Kuomintang party drew on local factions for support. With the advent of party competition in the 1990s, these factions grew in influence rather than declined, as might have been expected. The subdivided system of electoral districts encouraged the factions to diversify, build new alliances and mobilize members to support favored candidates, using misappropriated funds from local farmers' associations and other groups. Official sanctions against vote buying and corruption are toothless or enforced selectively, and political pluralism has deepened the patron-client networks in Taiwan, as reported by Göbel (2001).

The structure of the party system itself can be part of the problem. In Bolivia, the fragmentation of political parties perpetuates the widespread use of patronage appointments. Bolivian society is deeply divided, and the electoral process has an overwhelming tendency to produce coalition governments. Given the lack of clearly differentiated policy programs, parties negotiate coalition arrangements with explicit agreements for sharing patronage jobs. According to the World Bank (2000), this practice has been the basis for the formation and maintenance of governing coalitions, and thus of democratic stability, so it is not all bad. But it does make it hard to rationalize the public service (see the section on civil service reform, below).

### *State Capture*

The growing demand for campaign funds that accompanies democratization can also reinforce the influence of political patrons. This has been a serious issue in recent South Korean elections, for example. Most political party income comes from private business support groups called *huwonhoe*. Corporations donate to legislators whose committee assignments are important to the firm. Huge amounts of funds are said to go unreported (Jaung and Mo 2001). Similar problems are recounted in central and eastern Europe. Campaign finance is difficult to keep within bounds in a multiparty system, since politicians need to raise money to win elections. Office seekers may find themselves beholden to wealthy patrons in the private sector. Kaufmann et al. (2002) refer to this phenomenon as state capture, when powerful groups buy influence and shape the laws to their benefit.

State capture also may entail malfeasance during implementation, often involving low-level bureaucrats or locally elected leaders who have authority to distribute state resources. Take, for instance, the case of cane societies in North India (Jeffrey 2002). These organizations act as intermediaries between cane farmers and the sugar mills. Established in the late 1930s to reduce the large cut taken by middlemen, each cane society is charged with organizing the supply of sugarcane to the corresponding mill. The cane societies, which also provide loans to farmers to buy equipment, seed, and fertilizer, have local elected officials and permanent staff who are recruited by the government. The elected officials are responsible for overseeing the supply of sugarcane and decisions regarding the disbursement of loans to cultivators. Members of the cane society's staff are charged with more specific tasks, such as accounting, weighing cane, and sending out supply slips to farmers when it is their turn to deliver cane. These slips reflect each farmer's quota for the season and are administered until the quota is filled.

Unless a farmer has influence, the society's officers may not issue a supply slip until the farmer pays a bribe. Clerks who are responsible for remunerating farmers for the cane supplied often withhold payments until a bribe is paid, while those whose job it is to weigh sugarcane at the point of delivery also extract large illegal payments. Farmers recognize that these officials can have a significant impact on what they are paid for their sugarcane, either by underestimating the weight of the crop or by falsely declaring it to be a particularly valuable variety of cane.

Rich farmers are best able to manipulate this system. They often attempt to foster relationships of trust and friendship with employees of the cane society in anticipation of the need for future help. These proactive measures frequently involve inviting visiting officers to drink tea and gossip about politics and village affairs. A more reactive strategy after failing to receive a supply slip or payment is to take up the matter with an official in the cane society office. The speed with which a person's complaint is addressed and the likelihood of success depends on his or her capacity to bribe an official and perceptions of the person's political clout.

### *Vote Buying*

A divergent problem that afflicts most fledgling democracies is vote buying. Rather than firms or other wealthy private interests capturing the politicians whose campaigns they fund, the problem is politicians who use their influence over state resources to pay supporters, suborn opponents, and manipulate elections. In its most benign forms, politicians simply demand electoral support as a condition of individual help.

Ghana is a good illustration, with competitive politics accompanied by increasing distribution of divisible benefits (known locally as chop money). Members of Parliament help constituents with money for school fees, electricity and water bills, funeral and wedding expenses, and by distributing cutlasses and other tools for agriculture. They reportedly wake up almost every morning to face a queue of constituents that expect MPs to take time to address their concerns and provide various sums of money (Lindberg 2003). Similarly, Pakistani legislators who competed in majoritarian electoral systems have been found to devote most of their time to the direct satisfaction of individual constituent demands. Voters find it in their rational self-interest to elect legislators who know how to get things done to help them personally (Wilder 1999). In many countries, people probably prefer getting special favors to the enactment of government programs whose beneficiaries are defined by universalistic or generic categories. Broad programs might theoretically be better for them, but as a practical matter, it is prudent to discount the promised payoffs and carry on with the surer bet of individualized clientelism.

### *Changing Incentives*

While the promise of democratization is often oversold, the empirical record is not that the introduction of formal democratic institutions never makes a meaningful difference in people's political calculations. New formal institutions sometimes do weaken clientelism on the margin. For example, the situation of the cane farmers may be changing for the better in northern India due to the increasing influence of a low-

caste political party. Since taking control of the state government, that party has been encouraging a more transparent system for the disbursement of supply slips. The face-to-face system of organizing cane payment has been replaced by the direct crediting of farmers' bank accounts. Many farmers said this has reduced delays in receiving remuneration for the delivery of cane (Jeffrey 2002).

In other countries, we observe a subtle shift in the terms of exchange for votes that favors the client or voter. This is an improvement, even if not quite up to democratic ideals. In Escobar's (2002, 36-37) study of Colombia, she shows how the introduction of the secret ballot in 1991 greatly increased the cost of paying for votes on election day. Many voters rob the political brokers by accepting money and then voting for another candidate. The same practice is widespread during elections in Philippines, according to Schaffer (2001). In general, vote buying may not be a very stable basis for political power due to the patron's difficulty monitoring the client's behavior at the ballot box, and the lack of certainty that money will produce the intended electoral results. Procedural electoral reforms may thus slowly open the door to substantive participation and empowerment despite active resistance from above.

Another auspicious development has occurred in some of Brazil's *favelas*, or shantytowns, where community groups have begun to negotiate collectively with politicians for public services and infrastructure improvements in exchange for bloc voting. According to Gay (2001), during the most recent period of military rule, the leaders of one neighborhood association in Rio de Janeiro routinely had thrown their support behind candidates for political office in the hope that, as representatives of the *favela*, they would receive something in return. Few attempts were made to negotiate on behalf of the neighborhood, and little of collective value materialized. Then, in 1979, local activists from the Catholic Church encouraged a group of disgruntled residents to take legal action to have the leaders of the ineffective neighborhood association removed. It was the activists' intent to bring to an end the practice of clientelism in the *favela*. The president who was subsequently elected to the neighborhood association made it his business not to end the *favela's* relationship with politicians, but to change the nature and the terms of the deal. Instead of encouraging residents to vote in the hope of individual rewards, he let it be known that the *favela's* support would go to whatever candidate bid and delivered the most for the community prior to each election.

### **Decentralization**

A corollary of democratization is decentralization. Decentralization deals with the allocation between center and periphery of power, authority, and responsibility for political, economic, fiscal, and administrative systems. Decentralization is not an either-or proposition. Governance systems combine centralized and decentralized components, often in complex ways. By decentralizing, reformers hope to improve public policies and resource allocation so they better reflect the needs and capabilities of citizens, and take account of local knowledge held by those who have the most relevant information.

There are many instances in developing countries where decentralized participation and mobilization of citizens for civic action have reduced local clientelism and cronyism. One reputed successful case of decentralization is the state of Kerala, India,

which has seen a large increase in the number and activities of grassroots groups taking part in policy formulation (Heller 2001). Numerous cases have been noted in Latin America where community organizations have made inroads in reducing rural elite dominance of local government. In one Brazilian city, Porto Alegre, a system of popular councils in neighborhoods and workplaces has unseated the older system of closed, patronage-based area associations (Abers 1998; De Sousa Santos 1998; Baiocchi 2001). Likewise, Stokes (2003) reports that many residents in Mar del Plata, Argentina have opted for participatory civic governance. Interviews indicate that they no longer want to be bought off by the small, individualized inducements of clientelism, which tend to come at the cost of the provision of public goods.

Attractive as grassroots influence and self-management can be, the truth is that small is not necessarily beautiful when it comes to government. There are economies of scale that make many regimes reasonably pluralistic at the national level but monopolistic at the local level. In the periphery, press scrutiny is generally less intense than at the center. Electoral fraud and financial chicanery may be easier to pull off at this level. Most local governments are short on finances and expertise. Community members may be too apathetic to take part in politics, or too intimidated. Under these conditions, it is easy for a mayor, police chief, or large landowner to manipulate the poor, taking advantage of their need for immediate benefits and their limited information and autonomy. Sometimes the problem is simply the way laws are written. According to Ribot's (1999) account, many of the new statutes being carried out in the name of decentralization in West Africa fail to enfranchise local people. These laws are in fact structured to make local authorities upwardly accountable to the central state, rather than being downwardly accountable to the community. In the absence of financial controls, decentralization may increase the opportunities for corruption, as well.<sup>3</sup>

At any rate, turning official power over to lower levels does not guarantee that government will grow more representative and accountable. It may simply enhance the power of local elites. The triangles of accommodation discussed by Migdal (1988) often connect local officials, politicians, and strongmen in tight networks, limiting citizen access to government through the formal mechanisms of government. In some cases, the local penetration of the state is so weak that strongmen can predominate with little outside interference. For example, in Brazil drug gangs have taken effective control of some *favelas*, forming a type of parallel state. The gangs administer a rough justice that meets grudging approval, though many slum dwellers live in fear and have no way to voice complaints to gang leaders (Leeds 1996).

The former socialist countries illustrate how hard it can be to dislodge influential people through decentralization and local government reform. Before 1989, interlocking networks of national and local Communist Party officials and state bureaucrats dominated governance behind the Iron Curtain. This meant real decision-making power at the local level resided with the *nomenklatura*, select members of the Communist Party. Accountability of the local and regional administration to the citizens was perfunctory. When the Soviet system collapsed and reforms to democratize and decentralize governance were introduced, the *nomenklatura* moved into the political and administrative vacuum by using connections and acquaintances to build a new

power base (Matsuzato 2001). In many parts of the old eastern bloc, there is not yet much meaningful engagement of citizens in local affairs.

Fiscal decentralization has been particularly controversial. Allowing a subnational government to raise its own revenue theoretically shifts its decisions in favor of public goods over rent seeking and corruption (Weingast 2003, 25). For example, scholars have attributed China's rapid growth to its high local tax retention rates, and have blamed Pakistan's stagnation on the low level of taxes locally retained. However, Treisman (2003) shows that such arguments hold only if the central government is ignored. Any reduction in local corruption is likely to be accompanied by an increase at the center. The net result may merely be to transfer individualized payoffs from one level of government to the other, leaving unchanged the amount of public goods provided.

### **Civil Service Reform**

Civil service reorganization and reorientation play a part of most efforts to curb patrimonial rule. Having government agencies that employ meritocratic recruitment and offer predictable careers is closely associated with economic growth and modernization. Civil service reform is important to depoliticize and professionalize the bureaucracy, but this always encounters resistance. In the U.S., for example, Progressive Era reformers introduced laws to reduce the number of positions available to political machines for patronage. They established permanent civil service commissions to oversee and administer the state and federal civil service system, required open and competitive examinations for all appointments, and prohibited fundraising from government employees. Civil servants could only be discharged for just cause, not their politics. These reforms took decades to fully carry out despite continuous political pressure from civic organizations.

Most developing and transitioning countries have adopted comparable reforms to control administrative costs and increase staff performance. The World Bank and other donors have supported these cost-cutting and performance-enhancing initiatives. The first steps are usually wage and hiring freezes, followed by the more politically difficult steps of early retirements and layoffs. Efforts may be made to develop clearly defined job descriptions and performance standards. There may be arrangements to introduce or strengthen the office of ombudsman, a public official who investigates complaints about the activities of government agencies. Officials may be required to submit financial disclosure forms. A code of conduct may be established and backed by an ethics commission or inspector general's office.

One noteworthy trend in Africa is the merger of customs and income tax departments into national revenue authorities. Allowed to operate on a self-financing basis, these bodies have raised wages, shed poorly performing workers, and established revenue collection systems that limit the opportunities for rent seeking and abuse of authority. While it remains to be seen if such efforts can succeed in the face of entrenched corruption, such enclaves may have desirable spread effects for civil service reform.

Some success has also been had with ideas adapted from New Public Management or the reinventing government movement (see Manning 2001). New Public Manage-

ment promotes performance over process and flexibility over rules. Organizations should be flatter and managers given more freedom. The focus is on satisfying the customer (citizen). Tendler (1997) finds in Brazil that government workers prove most effective if they are allowed to exercise discretion and feel accountable to the community in which they work.

The record of accomplishment of across-the-board civil service reforms, however, has been mixed. Politicians are reluctant to give up patronage and the influence it gives them over government agencies; bureaucrats are averse to acquiesce in changes that threaten their freedom of choice on the job. To take an example, informal practices based on clientelistic networks have continuously undermined Bolivia's efforts at civil service reform. Meritocratic and performance-oriented programs in public administration often split between observance of rules and covert pressures to bend the rules and get things done (Molina and Chávez 2002). Turkey has had similar difficulties. As part of its structural adjustment policies, the government has attempted to transform its bureaucracy into a rational-legal organization. It brought outsiders, many of them engineers, into top positions. However, the political leadership undermined its own efforts by continuing to pay more attention to political loyalty than merit, and Turkish administrative reforms have fallen short of expectations (Heper and Sancar 1998). According to the World Bank's (1999) evaluation of its administrative reform projects, only about one third had satisfactory outcomes. Moreover, those satisfactory outcomes were hardly ever sustainable. There was little evidence that civil servants stuck with the new codes of conduct.

### **PROGRAMMING FOR BETTER GOVERNANCE**

Economic liberalization, democratic reform, decentralization, and civil service reform have the potential to improve governance under the right time and circumstances, though as we have documented, positive results are by no means guaranteed. Is there anything that can be done to improve the odds for establishing participatory political institutions and efficient public services, which adhere to standards of fairness and equal access for everyone? Governance reform is mainly a domestic matter. Only a nation's citizens can reconstitute their national institutions, and even powerful external actors have no more than a supporting role to play in curbing patron-client abuses. Nonetheless, the international community can prompt this process and support anti-clientelistic forces in various countries. We see four generic strategies that are available. Development assistance agencies and nongovernmental organizations may pursue these strategies individually or, in some circumstances, in tandem or sequentially.

#### **Containment**

This strategy type is essentially the do no harm default option, and involves avoiding intervention in situations where the injection of resources is likely to feed clientelistic governance with little or no social benefit. Containment may make sense in highly predatory or failed states such as Sierra Leone, where the political and administrative systems are too deeply compromised to be trusted to function in a reasonably transparent and honest way. Rebuilding governance systems is a task fraught

with potential to foster unintentional harm as a country emerges from conflict. For example, development assistance agencies may provide resources to host country groups during peace and reconciliation work, which inadvertently fall into the hands of the privileged few for use as patronage (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2002). In this situation, a containment strategy would entail steps to assure that no single group monopolizes reconstruction resources or the access channels to those resources.

For donors, a containment strategy could also mean limiting contact with corrupt government institutions while working with civil society organizations to provide needed social services or to build constituencies for reform. Over time, containment may blend into the strategy of building alternate power nodes, if the security situation improves in the country and conditions are ripe to begin building wider accountable governance systems. Containment may also be appropriate in a situation where insufficient information exists to support the other strategies and thus may be coupled with additional assessment and analysis. An important focus of further study would be to distinguish between highly negative clientelistic practices and those that may be relatively benign.

### **Information Dissemination and Civic Education**

This strategy centers on information dissemination campaigns aimed at attitudinal change similar to programs that inform citizens and policymakers about the costs of corruption. It could lead to efforts to target citizens to modify their attitudes about patron-client relations through civic education. The themes of such outreach campaigns might be how the exchange of individualized favors through the public sector distorts service delivery and hurts everyone. As Roniger (1994, 213) notes, “changes in the perception of patronage, if they occur, may be of special consequence for clientelism if they lead to the institutionalization of mechanisms through which citizens can press for their rights and entitlements . . .” These messages could be transmitted via the media as well as through various specific events and forums. Such activities would introduce new perspectives, values, and beliefs into a society that may challenge entrenched ways of doing business and serve to lay the groundwork for mobilizing constituencies for policy and administrative reforms. Training for journalists is an important input into the success of the information dissemination and civic education strategy.

### **Pockets of Reform/Islands of Alternative Systems**

This strategy supports comprehensive changes in a few key public agencies and helps them lead by example to bring along other organizations. Often, domestic constituencies against clientelism will mobilize for such goals. A case in point is the homegrown participatory budget process in Brazil, which has now spread to many cities and has influenced decision-making structures at the state level.

For external actors, including nongovernmental organizations, the pocket of reform approach might entail working with carefully chosen entities (autonomous governmental agencies, ministries, advocacy groups, watchdog organizations) to establish clarity around decisions, set ethical standards, and raise the bar for excellence in governance. The choice of which organizations to work with can be critical; it may be

difficult to work simultaneously with government and civil society entities if the level of mutual suspicion is high.

Another example of the creation of islands at the local level is strengthening democratic local governance to break up triangles of accommodation among bureaucrats, politicians, and local bosses where they disadvantage the poor. Democratic local governance involves: a) increasing representation of marginalized groups on local councils and other governing bodies, b) empowering these groups to express themselves and mobilize political pressure, and c) influencing the distribution of services and benefits so as to modify existing clientelistic patterns. Progress with democratic local governance is possible, although building the capacity of disadvantaged groups is a slow process, particularly where patronage relationships are longstanding and entrenched, as for example, in Philippines or the Indian state of Karnataka. Increased accountability through the combined effort of civil society, media, and political parties is important to translating expanded representation into empowerment and real influence (Blair 1998).

### **Increased Competition to Generate Multiple Nodes of Alternative Political Power**

This strategy provides backing to civil society groups, political parties, or other organizations that may emerge as countervailing forces against entrenched patron-client networks and/or seeks to make procedural changes in electoral or administrative systems that encourage alternate sources of political power. For example, a reform of electoral systems to shift from voting for a slate of candidates to voting for individuals could help to reduce the ability of national-level powerbrokers to provide patronage to their supporters. Political party development that facilitates the replacement of personalized political fiefdoms by issues-based political platforms is another example. The Indian cane farmer example demonstrates this strategy, where one of the political parties is successfully bringing pressure to make agricultural marketing services fairer and more transparent for small farmers. The existence of a reform-oriented political party also was instrumental to participatory municipal budgeting in Brazil. The broad goal might be to consolidate these countervailing power bases by helping to ensure that they are positioned to solve problems, deliver services, and compete successfully for constituent support against patron-client networks and resource flows. The idea is to cultivate institutional options for people to meet their day-to-day needs.

This last option of supporting competition may offer some of the most promising ways of leveraging a donor's scarce resources. This might be most feasible at the community level, provided effective advocacy groups have emerged and mobilized the poor for collective action and self-help. These groups are unlikely to eliminate favoritism and cronyism altogether, but they may be able to demand a wider distribution of public services and less opacity around government decisions.

### **CONCLUSION**

This article has reconsidered the sources of clientelism and patrimonialism in governance. We have seen that patron-client networks thrive in situations of scarcity

and uncertainty, and tend to become less important when resources are plentiful. However, clientelism and patrimonialism never vanish from human societies; they are resilient and pervasive institutions that evolve and take new forms as societies change. Typically, reforms in official procedures and institutions drive patronage networks underground, disrupting but not eliminating them. Sometimes the evolving patron-client relationships hurt the larger society to which the patron and client belong, but not necessarily. Clientelism and patrimonialism are bad for development when they deter the entry of political challengers or when they create indifference among officials in public investment. Depending on the circumstances, though, some clientelistic activities may be compatible with, or conducive to, economic growth, poverty reduction and rising levels of productivity—for example, when the clients begin to bargain for collective goods such as a new road or community center.

Even when they mostly obstruct economic and social betterment, patron-client institutions of governance are hard to dismantle because they serve the immediate needs and narrow interests of many individuals. Elites are highly motivated to block, slow down, or dilute any statutory changes that imperil the informal set of connections from which they benefit. The potential beneficiaries of democratic, rational-legal institutions tend to be a diffuse, latent group, uncertain where their interests lie. Aid donors should be aware of these impediments to reform, and recognize that some efforts to increase competition and limit discretion will create a backlash.

Fortunately, the evidence also shows that people can overcome their inertia and make government work more fairly and openly. We find cases of improved political and administrative institutions across all regions, which impede the ability of elites to perpetuate imbalanced and self-serving clientelistic networks. These changes may occur as a result of political parties competing based on generalized appeals to interest, through the activities of policy entrepreneurs trying to remake the system, or through advocacy by civil society organizations. International development agencies can help by providing technical assistance to the agents of reform, both in government and in civil society. However, progress takes place with incremental gains and small victories.

For governance reforms to be sustained they need political support within the country. The support may come from the center, with reform-minded leaders bargaining among themselves for more open and competitive systems. Reform at the center may have little practical effect on people in the hinterlands, however. Productive change can come from the periphery, as well, with community organizations taking the lead. This is possible even in societies that are authoritarian and closed at the national level. The greatest progress toward democratic governance and efficient public service is likely where pressure for reform comes from both directions.

## NOTES

1. Such practices are rife even in supposedly modern and democratic countries. A recent article in the *Washington Post*, for example, reports that 7,425 of Maryland's state job holders serve at the will of the governor or a cabinet secretary. This equals 12 percent of the state workforce. In addition to Maryland's political positions, 5,000 or so positions are parceled out on state boards and commissions. Most of these jobs are unpaid, although a few come with healthy salaries, and many have substantial power (Arscott 2003).

2. Interestingly, the original intent of U.S. President Andrew Jackson's spoils system in the early nineteenth century, referred to by advocates as rotation in office, was to combat elitism and increase government responsiveness to citizens (Dionne 2001).

3. Decentralization's negative effects in facilitating political corruption are not restricted to developing countries but are found in Europe, too. See Warner (2003).

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