

**Conceptualizing Political Clientelism:
Political Exchange and Democratic Theory**

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Introduction

In very basic terms, political clientelism describes the distribution of selective benefits to individuals or clearly defined groups in exchange for political support. With rare exceptions, academic researchers and other observers have perceived clientelism in almost entirely negative terms. On the one hand, it appears to be associated with pre-modern social contexts and is therefore connotated with cultural and economic ‘backwardness’. On the other hand clientelistic dynamics are also found in ‘advanced’ socio-economic contexts, as attested by the abundant scholarly literature on ‘pork-barrel’ political exchange and ‘special interest politics’ in the contemporary United States. This paper examines the reasons for clientelism’s bad reputation by attempting to unpack the key analytical features of clientelism as practiced in electoral democracies, and by briefly outlining the implications of ‘populist’ and ‘liberal’ democratic theories for clientelistic practices. The aim is not necessarily to let clientelism ‘off the hook’, but instead to offer a clearer statement of the challenge clientelism poses to democracy.

Standard Definitions of Clientelism

The concept of clientelism creates confusion and controversy because of the wide and diverse range of political exchanges which can be accommodated by the term. Stripped down to the essentials, clientelism is a form of personal, dyadic exchange usually characterized by a sense of obligation, and often also by an unequal balance of power between those involved (see Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984: 48-9, also Piattoni 2004). This definition reflects the origins of the concept as a descriptor of hierarchical patron-client relationships in traditional rural societies (Piattoni 2001: 9). These relationships involve ‘the patron providing clients with access to the basic means of subsistence and the clients reciprocating with a combination of economic goods and services (such as rent, labor, portions of their crops) and social acts of deference and loyalty’ (Mason 1986: 489). In other words, clientelism is a way of describing the pattern of unequal, hierarchical exchange characteristic of feudal society, in which patrons and clients were tied to durable relationships by a powerful sense of obligation and duty.

This kind of ‘notables’ clientelism (Tarrow 1967) – which is also referred to as ‘old clientelism’ (Weingrod 1968) – survived into the modern democratic age in many parts of the world, and therefore became enmeshed in the dynamics of electoral politics. In clientelistic contexts patrons, or their agents, stand for election and their clients vote for them, sometimes out of a general sense of obligation and attachment, sometimes as part of a specific exchange for services rendered or promised. In some cases, clientelism has evolved into something quite different from this kind of traditional social exchange. Studies of postwar Italy in particular have suggested the emergence of a ‘new clientelism’ (Tarrow 1967, Weingrod 1968, Caciagli and Belloni 1981), in which political behaviour is still characterized by patterns of exchange, but of a new kind. Socio-economic modernization brought greater geographical mobility and urbanization, higher levels of education, the replacement of agrarian by industrial employment, and the decline of traditional rural elites. These developments weakened traditional patron-client ties, which made way for new forms of exchange. Organized political parties, with relatively bureaucratized structures, replaced landlords and local notables as patrons. Clients, enjoying higher living standards and less instinctively deferential, demanded more immediate material benefits in exchange for their votes. In this new, ‘mass party’ clientelism, patrons have to ‘buy’ votes by distributing concrete excludable benefits and favours to individual voters or groups of voters. In the Italian context this is referred to as the ‘vote of exchange’ (Parisi and Pasquino 1979, Katz 1986).

This new clientelism shares some of the features of the old. The relationship is still instrumental, and the benefits provided to clients are still largely private and excludable. But there are also important differences. First, the relationship is less hierarchical, more ‘democratic’. There remains an imbalance of power, in that the patron has control over resources that the client needs, but there is less of a sense of deference and dependency on the part of the client, who feels increasingly free to use her vote as a commodity to be exchanged for whatever maximizes her utility. Second, as a result of this less hierarchical and personalized context, the new clientelism is more conducive to fluidity and change in electoral behaviour, opening up possibilities of greater competition and elite turnover.

The differences between these two types of clientelism are significant enough to undermine the precision of the concept. The client who votes automatically for her patron

out of a sense of deference, and the implicit and imprecise promise of protection and aid, is a very different social actor from the client who shops around for the patron that offers the best deal, and may even switch patrons if the flow of benefits dries up (see Allum 1997). The old clientelism is very much a form of social and political exchange, in that it ‘involves the principle that one person does another a favor, and while there is a general expectation of some future return, its exact nature is definitely *not* stipulated in advance’ (Blau 1964: 93). The new clientelism instead resembles ‘economic’ or ‘market’ exchange, in which the client seeks to maximize utility irrespective of any sense of obligation towards or identification with another actor. Gellner draws the distinction with striking clarity:

Economic benefits are, at least ideally, calculable, noncommittal and single-shot: hence an economic operation is isolable, and does not need to give rise to any permanent relationship. (...) By contrast, the long-term imponderables which are being ‘exchanged’ in a political relationship, ipso facto give a much deeper colouring to the links between the parties to the transaction (1977:5-6).

Although clientelism will rarely be exclusively of one kind or another, the extent to which ‘economic’ dynamics prevail has major implications for party democracy. If the only reason for supporting the party is a direct economic exchange which excludes feelings of loyalty or ideological affinity, there is little to anchor the clientele to the party if benefits are not forthcoming. This opens up the possibility of political instability and upheaval, rather than the continuity or even stagnation more often associated with clientelistic political systems. Moreover, this ‘market exchange’ type of clientelism lacks the kind of hierarchical characteristics which are a key feature of some existing definitions. This suggests a need for a more parsimonious conceptualization if ‘old’ and ‘new’ clientelisms are to be accommodated by the same concept. At the same time, parsimony runs the obvious risk of glossing over interesting and important distinctions. The approach adopted here is to assess a variety of forms of political exchange, examine how they relate to standard understandings of clientelism, and speculate on their implications for contemporary democracy.

Forms of Political Exchange: A Typology

Without claiming for a moment to offer the final word, this section aims to offer a straightforward, but hopefully precise, conceptualization of political exchange in electoral democracies capable of distinguishing the variety of clientelistic and non-clientelistic types of political mobilization. Political clientelism is a form of direct exchange between citizens and holders of political authority. In the electoral sphere, this characteristic of direct exchange distinguishes clientelistic behaviour from more widely accepted phenomena such as issue voting or class voting. This section aims to identify types of political exchange which can be described as clientelistic, and contrasts them with other kinds of political exchange in the electoral arena. This analysis proceeds by identifying two dimensions on which voter and office-holder behaviour varies from more to less clientelistic.

The classic type of ‘old’ clientelism involves an exchange between individuals – a patron and a client – and this individual exchange can develop into a durable and predictable relationship. The new ‘party’ clientelism however is less individualized, with voters entering into less durable patterns of exchange with individual office-holders and their party organizations. The less individualized is the exchange between voters and office-holders, the less clientelistic the political relationship. In cases where voters give their support to a party or candidate without having any kind of personal contact, it is difficult to describe such dynamics as clientelism, even where some kind of exchange implicitly emerges (for instance where high-income voters tend to support a party or candidate advocating a tax cut). Let’s call this dimension ‘patron-client proximity/distance’.

A second important dimension regards what is being exchanged. Here we can draw on the voluminous literatures about collective action and redistributive politics. Classical clientelistic exchanges involve more or less private, excludable goods. At least as regards electoral politics, the resource usually available to the client is the vote, cast in favour of a candidate or a party (particularly the former). However, the client can also offer other services, such as help with electoral campaigning, or ‘packages’ of votes from friends, relatives or work colleagues. The more these goods are provided to an individual candidate, rather than to a faction or party organization, the more clientelistic the

relationship. Similarly, the patron (candidate or party) can offer goods of varying degrees of excludability. Public goods, such as a competent management of the economy or an effective foreign policy, provide diffuse benefit and are therefore ineffective as a reward for a client's guarantee of support. Club goods, such as fiscal or regulatory advantages for particular industrial sectors, or public investments for specific territories, are collective goods, but of more narrow scope than the purer public goods mentioned just now. Such goods can be conducive to clientelistic exchange, but at a group, rather than an individual level. Private goods which provide selective benefits at the individual level are ideal for generating clientelistic exchange, in that the client is left in no doubt that his or her support is repaid in a direct and concrete fashion. Such selective benefits include help in the labour market, for instance allocation of public sector jobs, help acceding to welfare benefits, or favouritism in administrative decisions (exemption from military services, building permits etc). Again, the more excludable the goods offered by the patron, the more clientelistic the relationship.

This conceptualization of clientelistic and non-clientelistic forms of political exchange is laid out in Figure One, which typologizes political exchange in terms of the two dimensions of patron-client proximity/distance and the scope of the benefits offered by patrons in exchange for the client's support.

Figure One

Proximity/Distance

| | | | |
|-------------------|------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Scope of benefits | | Durable relationship | Market Exchange |
| | Selective | 'Old' clientelism | 'New' clientelism |
| | Club | Corporate/Ethnic | Lobby |
| | Collective | Class voting | Issue voting |

The most clientelistic types of exchange involve a stable patron-client relationship in which excludable goods are exchanged. The less durable and more conditional the relationship, and the less individualized the benefits involved, the less clientelistic the nature of the exchange. This typology allows us to chart a range of possible relationships between citizens/voters and candidates/office-holders, each with differing implications for the quality of governance and sustainability of democratic institutions. In the remainder of this paper, I will illustrate these types with empirical examples, and then turn to a brief assessment of their normative implications.

Varieties of Clientelism: Patterns of Exchange in Electoral Politics

It is difficult to measure the role of clientelism in party politics in a given political system accurately (Wantchekon 2003). Some statistical analyses, particularly for the United States, have studied budgetary allocations across territory in order to estimate the flow of selective, excludable benefits to particular localities (for example Stein and Bickers 1995, Frisch 1998). However, such analyses focus on benefits to groups of varying size, and can rarely detect the kind of personalized, one-to-one exchange that is characteristic of much clientelistic politics. Most of our knowledge and understanding of clientelism in its most personalized form therefore comes from case studies which have used an ethnographic approach to identify the presence of clientelistic dynamics (for collections of such work, see for example Gellner and Waterbury 1977, Eisenstadt and Lemarchand 1981, Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984, Piattoni 2001). Such case studies, naturally enough, select on the dependent variable, leaving us with little basis on which to assert that some political systems are more clientelistic than others. However, it is

broadly held that advanced Western democracies are less clientelistic than developing countries, and that amongst the advanced democracies, those in Northern Europe and in the English-speaking world are the least clientelistic, although there is little in the way of hard comparative evidence to back up these claims. In any case, the literature on clientelism does give a basis on which to evaluate the usefulness of the typology presented in the previous section.

The 'old clientelism', combining patron-client proximity and excludable, selective benefits, has been identified by a variety of studies, mostly into developing countries. In the most traditional contexts, clientelism could draw on age-old reserves of loyalty and deference, so that patrons could obtain political support from their clients without providing too many concrete benefits. Banfield's famous study of the Southern Italian village of 'Montegrano' in the 1950s found that 'just before elections the Christian Democratic party distributes small packages of pasta, sugar, and clothing to the voters' (1954: 26). In situations of dire poverty, such gifts may be enough to buy votes, particularly if there is a pre-existing foundation of deference towards the patron. The patron-client relationship in the rural context is therefore not strictly reliant on the distribution of specific material benefits. However, this does not mean that the patron does not have to provide anything in exchange. Instead, the patron is expected, indeed required, to provide diffuse protection to clients; the patron is 'a support in time of famine, his advice will be formally sought before marriages and land purchases, and he is asked for recommendation in the peasant's frequent encounters with the bureaucracy' (Tarrow 1967: 68). Where this type of 'old' clientelism is well entrenched, the establishment of democratic politics will be conditioned by the local notables' mediating role between voters and the state. Patrons become proprietors of 'packages' of votes, and are able to trade these votes with the leaderships of the political parties, linking themselves with a larger network of clientelistic relationships. These relationships at one remove from the individual voter will tend to be more dependent on concrete and identifiable material exchanges.

The 'new' clientelism, in which there is less proximity between patron and client, but more emphasis on the provision of excludable selective benefits, is characteristic of more economically advanced settings. Whilst the local notables of the 'old' clientelism are sources of political legitimacy in and of themselves, the local party bosses in the

'new' clientelism have far lesser autonomy. Their power depends on their party affiliation, which gives them access to the resources necessary to reward supporters and maintain their clientele. The 'machine politics' of the American cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries illustrates this point. Banfield and Wilson's description of the big city machines in the 1950s shows how the party representatives are embedded in a formal organization with its own hierarchy and career structure:

the job of the precinct captain is to get out the vote for his party's slate (...) (he) is chosen by and works under the direction of a ward leader, usually an alderman or elected party official (...). It is up to him to (...) dispense the larger items of patronage, favours, and protection to those who have earned them. (...). Captains are often "payrollers", that is, they have appointive public jobs that they could not get or keep if it were not for the party (...). The hope that the party will in due course run them for alderman keeps these captains at work (1963: 118-9).

In the new clientelism, the patron is the party organization, rather than any individual within it. Clientelistic favours are distributed by members of the party organization, who in turn receive authorization for this activity from the upper tiers of the party hierarchy. Clientelism therefore becomes bureaucratized, and less personalized, although the personal contact between party representatives and individual voters remains important for maintaining the relationship. In this respect, mass party clientelism is a significant departure from notables' clientelism: it is less clientelistic because of the distance and lack of commitment between patron and client.

The new clientelism is closely associated with the expansion of the economic and social role of the state. In traditional contexts, the state often has a more limited role, particularly in regard to its expenditure. Notables are often deployed by their clients to help with the bureaucratic requirements of the state, such as conscription, rather than to access material benefits. As the state's role has expanded in much of the world to involve a detailed regulation of economic activity and the provision of a wide range of financial benefits (welfare and pensions, industrial and agricultural subsidies, public housing) and public services (education, health), the parties governing the state have had a greater ability to manipulate and channel these resources in exchange for political support. Often,

the parties seek to make the criteria for the access to resources deliberately opaque, in order to enhance the discretionary nature of the distribution and extract greater political returns (Tanzi 2000, Golden 2003). The Italian case is one of the best documented: standard practices ranged from strictly partisan allocation of jobs in the state-run postal service or railways, to the selective distribution of bogus sickness pensions and a variety of subsidies and development projects of questionable utility. Similarly, in Spain, the Socialist party established a rural employment subsidy (the PER – Plan for Rural Employment) which was directed at its own electoral strongholds in the South, and which gave local mayors a large degree of discretion over the allocation of the money (Hopkin 2001: 128).

The growth in the role of the state has also led to a vast expansion in state personnel, which in many cases has been exploited by political parties to give jobs to their activists and supporters – what Lyrantzis, in his analysis of the Greek case, calls ‘bureaucratic clientelism’ (1984). A high profile example of this is the case of Jacques Chirac’s tenure as Mayor of Paris, during which his party allegedly gave ‘no show’ council jobs to a number of activists who actually continued to work full-time on party business. In Austria, jobs in the state bureaucracy have been routinely allocated on the basis of party affiliation (Mueller 1989). The Spanish Socialist Party, which won power in 1982 at a very early stage in its organizational development, by 1987 had appointed around 25,000 new state functionaries bypassing the public administration’s normal recruitment procedures; many of these jobs went to party supporters (Hopkin 2001: 126). Although patronage in the allocation of state jobs can be extensive, it cannot alone underpin a clientelistic electoral strategy, and in the European case at least, it seems to have been deployed most often to shore up party organizations by providing salaries for committed party workers and facilitating party control of policy implementation.

What these old and new versions of clientelism have in common is their provision of excludable benefits in exchange for support. Other forms of political exchange involve more diffuse benefits, in which groups of varying size, rather than specific named individuals, are the beneficiaries of redistributive policies. The typology proposed in this paper distinguishes between club goods and collective goods. Club goods are collective goods in the strict sense, but with rather clear boundaries between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. A tariff, regulation or tax break protecting a particular industry or

occupational group, or some kind of welfare benefit made available to a particular social category, are good examples. Of course, the distribution of such benefits does not require strong clientelistic ties. The typology distinguishes between cases where club goods are made available to a group with a durable and close relationship with the patron, and cases where benefits are acquired on an *ad hoc* basis in return for short-term political support, or often money (campaign contribution etc). The latter case is straightforward lobbying, best understood as a kind of market exchange in the political arena, rather than clientelism as such. The former, described in the typology as ‘corporate/ethnic’ exchange, is at the confine between clientelism and constituency politics in the broadest sense.

Corporatist political exchange involves a particular group establishing long term ties with a patron, such as the close relationship between the *Coldiretti* (Small Farmers’ Association) and the Christian Democratic Party (DC) in post-war Italy. The DC built close ties to the smallholders, establishing a track record of policy favours and winning consistent support from this group of voters. This type of exchange is distant from the ‘old’ clientelism on both dimensions: first, the individual voter’s relationship with the patron works at one remove, mediated by an interest organization; second, the individual smallholder enjoys no excludable benefits denied to other smallholders. The beneficiary is a group rather than an individual, weakening the exchange relationship. Similarly, patrons can develop a clientele along ethnic lines, either by providing policy benefits to a particular ethnic group (eg resources for religious schools or symbolic benefits for an ethnic group), or by favouritism in allocating resources to a particular territory with some ethnic distinctiveness. Again, the direct exchange relationship works at a group level.

What distinguishes these two cells (corporatist/ethnic and lobby) of the typology in Figure One from the ‘old’ and ‘new’ clientelism of the first row is that the lower degree of excludability of the client’s benefits has the potential to undermine the exchange relationship. Except in cases where patrons can develop sophisticated monitoring techniques on the basis of electoral returns (Furlong 1976), there is almost nothing to prevent the client from defecting by denying the patron his or her vote, or even by not bothering to vote at all (although the latter can be monitored more easily). If the patron delivers on the deal, the individual member of the client group will enjoy the benefits anyway, as the club good is a collective good to members of the group. The patron is more exposed in these cases: failure to deliver the policy benefits is more visible

to the client group, which can shift its support elsewhere. Building and maintaining these forms of exchange is therefore more problematic than in ‘old’ and ‘new’ clientelisms.

The third row of the typology identifies forms of exchange which are most distant from the concept of clientelism. In the case of class voting, the members of a very broad social category (industrial workers and their families, middle and upper income groups, practising Catholics, etc) vote for a political party which provides highly non-excludable collective goods which will tend to benefit them more than other groups. The mass parties of the left and the conservative or Catholic right in twentieth century Western Europe are good examples of this form of exchange. However, unlike in clientelism, the exchange is, at least at the individual level, largely symbolic – individual votes will make a negligible contribution to the party’s electoral success, and individuals cannot be denied the benefits of the party’s policy choices. At the collective level, the exchange can appear very real, and there is abundant evidence of durable patterns of class or religious voting which are consistent with such an exchange. Of course the most elementary reading of collective action dilemmas suggests that the exchange is not robust and can easily break down whenever alternative selective incentives are presented to voters. These kinds of electoral clienteles are therefore most likely to survive when the implicit exchange is backed by a strong grassroots organization which can mobilize support by using ideological or emotional appeals. Finally, issue voting is the most distant pattern of electoral exchange from ‘pure’ clientelism. Voters offer support to candidates in terms of their policy preferences, but lacking any ideological identification, are less likely to build any kind of emotional ties to the patron party or candidate, and programmatic changes can easily undermine the exchange, which is just as symbolic as class voting, but lacking its emotional charge.

Clientelism and Party Democracy

Most scholars have stressed the negative implications of clientelism for party democracy. Positive interpretations, noting clientelism’s ability to link political representatives to citizens, and to provide a mechanism for ensuring ‘constituency service’ (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1987) and party response to immediate citizen needs, have been far less common. The main reason is that the use of the vote as a

currency to buy material benefits subverts the ostensible purpose of the electoral process in a representative democracy. Many populist conceptions of democracy envisage that citizens cast their votes in terms of their own understanding of the ‘public interest’, and that the most widely shared view of this public interest will inform political decision-making through the workings of the representative institutions. To this extent, the forms of political exchange in row three of Figure One – those in which the exchange becomes purely symbolic – are those deemed most normatively acceptable to popular understandings of democracy. In fact, this idealized view is conceptually problematic, as the social choice literature has shown: according to Kenneth Arrow’s ‘impossibility theorem’, there is no adequate decision rule for aggregating individual preferences, and therefore no way of establishing what the ‘public interest’ actually is (Arrow 1954, also Schumpeter 1994). So where do democratic theorists stand on clientelism? Here I offer a very brief sketch of how populist and liberal theories (see Riker 1982) could be expected to interpret political clientelism.

Amongst populist theories of democracy, perhaps the clearest critique of clientelism could come from the position of participationist theories. Participationist theories which emphasize process over outcome value the opportunities elections provide for personal development through political involvement, whilst outcome-oriented participationist theories value the way in which electoral campaigning and mobilization provide opportunities for citizens to communicate their preferences to political leaders, and in developing public-spiritedness (as for instance in Rousseau and Mill). Clientelistic voting behaviour appears to fail on both counts, as a personalized and instrumental view of political participation: voters simply use their vote to sustain their patrons, thus earning the patrons’ protection and help. The ‘virtue-inducing’ quality of democratic participation suggested by Mill is dulled by clientelist exchange. Voters therefore neglect the broader political consequences of their electoral choices, and representatives elected through clientelistic mechanisms cannot credibly claim a mandate to pursue a broad programme of public policies. Moreover, if votes are cast purely in terms of the benefits received, then this leaves governing parties free to disregard popular opinion in all policy decisions which do not relate to the direct allocation of resources in exchange for votes. For this reason clientelism has often been associated with authoritarianism.

From a broader populist position, clientelism is criticized because it gives primacy to the distribution of individual, selective benefits to citizens, to the detriment of the provision of collective goods. This is a big problem for collectivist notions of popular sovereignty, in which the popular will is synonymous with the will of some interpretation of the ‘people’, such as the industrial working class in socialist theories, or the ‘national interest’, as in some conservative interpretations (Katz 1997; also Hopkin 2004). If individuals cast their votes in terms of private, selective gains, collective expression of the popular will cannot be achieved through the vote, and election results become a very unreliable guide to what the people want.

Clientelism is less obviously a problem under an individualistic conception of popular sovereignty in which the popular will must derive from individual wills. Cumulative individual exchanges between clients and patrons could be understood as providing some kind of expression of the popular will, as long as it is not pretended that individual preferences must take into account broader public concerns. However, this can only work as a form of democratic expression if the benefits provided by the patron constitute an adequate response to the range of political preferences held by the client. In cases where citizens are essentially ‘bribed’ or ‘blackmailed’ into supporting a patron (eg by a job offer, or promise of help obtaining such much needed benefit), and do not expect to influence decisions beyond those that directly affect them, it is difficult to claim that the democratic process allows a full range of citizen interests to be represented.

Most populist theories emphasize equality of access to the political process, and the very unequal distribution of benefits in clientelism also violates this principle. To take one example, the expansion of the welfare state in clientelistic polities has led to a wide range of inefficiencies and injustices, with some individuals and groups benefiting disproportionately at the expense of others, for the sole reason that their votes were deployed in clientelistic exchange. These problems, added to the well known theoretical difficulties faced by the popular sovereignty theory of democracy, strengthen the case of liberal theorists who dismiss notions of collective interest and instead stress the sovereignty of individual choice in electoral politics.

For liberals, political equality means equal rights and equal freedom, rather than equal representation, and liberal theories of democracy dismiss as futile attempts to engineer a ‘true’ expression of the popular will. As Shapiro puts it, ‘liberals, who

typically regard individual freedom as the greatest good, characteristically focus on devices to protect the individual from the realm of collective action' (1997: 217). To this extent, clientelism, which is inimical to collective action and takes the form of relatively self-contained exchanges between individuals or relatively small groups, is perhaps less troubling than the idealistic notion of popular sovereignty inherent in class voting. The emphasis on individual freedom would legitimize citizens' freedom to enter into political agreements with patrons, and the use of the vote as the main resource available to clients ensures that basic political equality is not violated.

Liberal theorists are less concerned with the inequality of outcome characteristic of clientelistic resource distribution. However, liberal theory does tend to stress equal citizen rights, and therefore liberals can object to clientelism on the grounds of the differential access to the political process that results from clientelistic exchanges. A further and more powerful liberal objection is that clientelism has often involved the extensive deployment of government resources to satisfy clientele, which implies heavy government intervention in private property rights in order to raise the necessary revenues. However, such state growth is a likely, but not inevitable consequence of clientelism. Indeed, often clientelism and lobbying in the United States context has involved the selective removal of state constraints (deregulation, fiscal exemptions etc) rather than an increase in the scope of state action. It can therefore be argued that clientelistic exchange, provided it does not redistribute resources against the thread of market outcomes, is consistent with liberal theories of democracy and the economy.

The area in which liberal theories are most likely to be concerned about clientelism is in its effects on the competitive nature of electoral politics. Clientelism is probably broadly inconsistent with Schumpeterian democracy, in which competition between two teams of ambitious politicians is regarded as the best way of both preventing tyranny and providing responsive government (Schumpeter 1994). Schumpeter's approach is unashamedly elitist, and implies that party leaders should retain a much greater degree of autonomy than populist democratic theory envisages. Elites do respond to popular demands in his theory, but this responsiveness does not require mass parties to interpret the popular will. Instead, it is the competitive nature of the electoral process, rather than the party leadership's connection with the masses, which provides responsiveness. Clientelism is a problem for the Schumpeterian approach not because it

imposes a popular mandate, but because it may interfere with the competitive nature of the electoral process. If longstanding clientelistic ties insulate politicians from the consequences of their mistakes or abuses of power, then the electoral process will not be able to fulfil effectively its function of providing a retrospective judgement on elite performance which prevents tyranny and assaults on individual freedom.

The picture is more ambiguous from the point of view of the practical implications of clientelism for democratic politics. Clientelism has been associated with excessive continuity in political personnel. The rigid and unchanging nature of traditional clientelism undermines the 'feedback' function of electoral politics, making alternation in political power an artefact of elite decisions (as for example in the *turno pacífico* of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Spain, or the *trasformismo* of Italy in the same period). Paradoxically, however, clientelism has also been blamed for dramatic upheavals in party systems. The examples of Italy and Austria provide a neat illustration of this ambiguity: until the 1990s both countries were widely perceived as being locked into an immovable party system cartel by the mechanisms of patronage, clientelism and interparty collusion (Mair 1997). But in the 1990s, both party systems underwent turbulent changes (spectacularly so in the case of Italy), changes which were widely interpreted as the result of voter protest against the clientelistic party cartels. However, periods of stifling continuity followed by abrupt change have also been noted in apparently far less clientelistic party systems (for instance the UK). There is little strong comparative evidence to blame clientelism for the difficulties facing party democracy in advanced industrial democracies.

Concluding Comment

Clientelism is essentially a variant of 'special interest politics' - a mechanism through which political parties and their representatives can obtain political support in exchange for selectively allocating benefits through state institutions. In many ways, it gives less cause for concern than the opaque money-raising practices of many contemporary parties which are willing to tailor public policies to corporate interests and various other lobbies in exchange for money. Corrupt party financing subverts citizen inequality by allowing the wealthy to buy political favours which redistribute further

advantage to them. Clientelism instead often allocates benefits to the least privileged, and since these clients often have little more than their vote to trade, the redistributive consequences of any specific clientelistic exchange will tend to be less significant. However, mass party clientelism on a large scale is ultimately both inegalitarian (because it does not respond to universalistic criteria) and economically unsustainable (because it feeds a continuing demand for redistribution). The case against clientelism as a form of linkage in party democracy therefore remains strong and clientelism is generally an unwelcome phenomenon from the point of view of mainstream normative democratic theory.

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