



Clientelism: Concepts, Agents, and Solutions

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SERIE DOCUMENTOS DE TRABAJO

No. 207

Noviembre de 2017

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November 29, 2017

Abstract

In this chapter, we discuss some of the main issues pertaining to the literature on political clientelism. After defining some of the basic concepts associated with this topic, we support the claim that much of the literature has excessively focused on the problem of vote buying, while ignoring other (perhaps) more important aspects of the process, such as patronage and prebendalism. Afterwards, we underscore the importance that brokers and clientelistic networks have in order to understand the structure of patron-client relationships. Finally, we review some of the short- and medium-term solutions to the problem that have been explored mainly through experimental methods, which include mechanisms related to institutions, deliberation, and information.

1. INTRODUCTION

Clientelism is a pervasive problem that characterizes distributive politics in many developing countries around the world. It has attracted the attention of scholars for several decades because its prevalence has notorious effects on the way resources are distributed in a society and on the quality of the public services delivered by governments (Khemani, 2015; Colonnelli, Teso, and Prem, 2017). It produces excessive tactical redistribution (Dixit and Londregan, 1996), at the expense of public service delivery, distorting some of the basic roles of the state. In places where clientelism prevails, programmatic politics is weak and

*Chapter elaborated for the Routledge Handbook of Democratization in Africa, edited by G. Lynch and P. VonDoepp. Corresponding author: Jorge Gallego (jorge.gallego@urosario.edu.co).

some of the basic tools of political accountability work in a less efficient way or do not exist at all.

Some of the causes and consequences of this phenomenon have been analyzed in various contexts and in places with different characteristics, such as Argentina (Auyero, 2000; Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes, 2004; Calvo and Murillo, 2004), Italy (Golden and Picci, 2008), Colombia (Leal and Davila, 2010; Gallego, 2017; Rueda, 2017), Mexico (Simpser, Forthcoming; Greene, 2007; Diaz-Cayeros et al. 2006; Cantu, 2016), India (Chandra, 2007; Chauchard, 2016), Southeast Asia (Scott, 1969), the Philippines (Wantchekon et al., 2017), Benin (Wantchekon, 2003; Fujiwara and Wantchekon 2013, Guardado and Wantchekon, 2016), Ghana (Lindberg and Morrison, 2008), Sao Tome and Principe (Vicente, 2014), Nigeria (Lemarchand and Legg, 1972; Bratton, 2008; Omobowale and Olutayo, 2010), Uganda (Conroy-Krutz and Logan, 2012), Kenya (Krammon, 2009), among many other places. Naturally, a big number of studies have focused on Africa, as leaders of this continent still rely on the distribution of personal favors in exchange for political support (Wantchekon, 2003). Therefore, the study of electoral politics in Africa necessarily includes understanding the way in which patron-client relationships affect decision-making and public service delivery.

Even if many studies have been conducted on this topic so far, both in terms of regions analyzed and of topics included, there are some open questions that have not been addressed satisfactorily. In this chapter, we present a critical survey of some of the literature pertaining to the problem of political clientelism, both in Africa and in other regions of the world. We do not pretend to be exhaustive, but instead, we refer to some of the key studies that help us develop our arguments.¹ To do so, we initially distinguish between the different concepts associated with this phenomenon, which include familiar terms such as vote buying, patronage, prebendalism, pork-barrel, and machine politics. Then, we claim that much of the contemporaneous literature on clientelism has focused mainly on vote buying and on the electioneering component of the process, ignoring other aspects that seem to be more relevant if we want to understand the pervasive consequences of this phenomenon and the strategies to overcome it.

In doing so, we review some of the literature that challenges the assumption that vote buying is a complete transaction between candidates and voters, meaning that if the citizen receives cash or private goods in exchange for political support, he necessarily complies and votes for the buyer. Following this discussion, the chapter underscores the reasons why

¹For other reviews, see Stokes (2007), Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007), Schaffer (2007), Hicken (2011), or Gallego and Wantchekon (2012).

some other forms associated with clientelism, such as patronage and prebendalism, deserve more attention from scholars. In this way, the strong connection between clientelism and corruption is highlighted, as both of them reinforce to each other and tend to be part of the same problem. Those who buy votes often come into power to enrich themselves.

The next section of the chapter focuses on brokers and clientelistic networks. Early models of political clientelism described it as a dyadic relationship between a voter and a candidate, but more recent accounts, both theoretical and empirical, introduce intermediaries and explain why their role is crucial to both understand the problem and to look for solutions to overcome it. We devote the final section of the chapter precisely to this topic: strategies for overcoming clientelism. The conventional wisdom in much of the literature on this topic has been that patron-client relationships will weaken once countries achieve certain levels of economic and political development. Of course, this is not a satisfactory answer, because short and medium-run strategies are necessary in order to break the poverty trap that clientelism represents. Consequently, we review some of the studies that have focused on the role played by deliberation, information, and institutions, as potential mechanisms for overcoming clientelism.

2. THE MANY FACES OF CLIENTELISM

Definitions vary from author to author, but in general, clientelism tends to be understood as transactions between politicians and citizens whereby material favors are offered in return for political support (Wantchekon, 2003; Stokes, 2007; Hicken, 2011; Gans-Morse et al. 2014). In general, (political) clientelism is understood as a relationship in which a patron (politician) offers material benefits to a client (voter) in exchange for support, which may include the vote (Gallego, 2014). A close look at this definition reveals that it serves as an umbrella term for different political practices in which unequal vertical relationships take place. There are several ways in which these various forms could be categorized, for instance, in terms of the level of development of the state (van de Walle, 2007).² But there are other traits of the political process that might serve to distinguish between the various faces of clientelism: for instance, the timeframe in which the relationship occurs.

²For the case of African countries, van de Walle (2007) argues that the economic structure and the nature of the political regime determine the form of clientelism that prevails in a society. Using this distinction, he describes three forms of clientelism: tribute, elite, and mass clientelism. For the modern study of this topic, elite and mass clientelism seem to be more relevant.

It is important to determine if the connection between the patron and the client is centered around the election or not, and how far it extends from this event. In general terms, vote buying, often called electoral clientelism (Gans-Morse et al., 2014), is the typical scenario in which the candidate, usually through intermediaries, intends to buy votes (Hicken, 2002; Stokes, 2005; Lehoucq, 2007; Schaffer, 2007; Vicente, 2014), turnout (Nichter, 2008), voters (Hidalgo and Nichter, 2015) or abstention (Gans-Morse et al. 2014), around election day.³ The main distinction is that when vote buying occurs, the benefits of the relationship are distributed during the electoral campaign. Electoral handouts (Guardado and Wantchekon, Forthcoming) can take various forms, being cash perhaps the most popular, but may include food, alcohol, medicines, construction materials, and other gifts.

Perhaps, more interesting than vote buying itself is what happens during a longer period of time and not necessarily in the midst of the electoral campaign, as we will argue in the next section. Clientelism becomes self-enforcing (Gallego, 2014) and deeper distortions of the public service delivery process take place (Robinson and Verdier, 2013) when patronage and prebendalism consolidate as political systems. Patronage includes the allocation of public resources, such as jobs or contracts, in exchange for political support (Colonnelli, Teso, and Prem, 2017). Hence, it differs from vote buying in several ways. First, the transaction spans a longer period of time and does not limit to the electoral campaign. Second, the prize that clients receive is more attractive, because rather than being a mere stock that gets consumed in the short run, it is an inflow of resources that last for a longer period of time.

Contracts and jobs represent a stream of benefits, in contrast to cash or food distributed on election day, and of course, this condition makes a big difference. An inflow of resources is more valuable, but at the same time, creates more distortions to the economy. Consequently, patronage cannot be universal. Usually, it does not involve mere citizens whose only asset is their vote. Patronage jobs and contracts are secured for influential agents, those who are able to mobilize blocks of voters and that really are pivotal in an election (Smith and Bueno de Mesquita, 2012). Jobs and contracts are usually given to significant brokers, as we will discuss in section 4 of this chapter.

On the other hand, prebendalism is an extreme version of patronage. It also implies granting clients access to public resources. The difference is how they are exploited. Under

³According to these definitions, vote buying occurs when candidates offer material goods or cash to citizens that otherwise would have voted against the candidate; under turnout buying, these resources are offered to followers of the candidate that otherwise would have abstained; in the case of voter buying, gifts are delivered to bring new voters to an electoral district; and abstention buying occurs when resources are used to refrain some people from casting their votes.

patronage, some form of public service delivery takes place, albeit inefficiently, on the side of the broker. When prebendalism takes place, the client simply extracts public resources on its own benefit, leaving little or nothing to the community. Under prebendalism, the patron loses almost any type of control over the public office, which is then used by the client almost completely for personal enrichment. Professional civil service is undermined when prebendalism is the way of doing politics. Politicians do not choose the best people for each public position: they simply pay favors with public jobs to those who provided resources or votes during the electoral campaign.

Naturally, the rule of law, formal, and informal institutions and state capacity deter conventional forms of patronage evolve into prebendalism in a given country. Rather than taking these two concepts in a binary way, it makes more sense to think of it on a continuous scale, being prebendalism the extreme case in which the deepest forms of corruption take place. Following van de Walle (2007), an example might clarify this distinction: hiring a strategic broker to occupy a senior position in the customs office is patronage. Allowing him to manipulate import and export taxes so that he can enrich himself is prebendalism. That is the difference between developed and developing countries. In the former, institutions tend to prevent conventional patron-client relations evolve into corrupt and malfeasant alliances.

Clientelism and its various forms are often associated with some other concepts widely used in the study of American politics: pork barrel relations and machine politics. Pork barrel politics, a phenomenon extensively studied in the context of the American Congress both theoretical and empirically (Cox and McCubbins, 1986; Lindbeck and Weibull, 1987; Dixit and Londregan, 1996; Cox, 2006), refers to the distribution of discrete and highly divisible benefits targeted to specific populations, like for example districts or states (Evans, 2011). The distinction between distributive politics and pork barrel benefits is similar to the comparison between clientelism and programmatic politics: pork barrel is an inefficient form of redistributive policy (as in the case of clientelism) because the cost of these projects tends to exceed the benefits. Then, why is it conducted, to begin with? Again, the rationale behind its use is to increase the probability of reelection of incumbents (Mayhew, 1974).

In this context, what differentiates clientelism from pork barrel politics? The ends are the same, but the means are strikingly different. As we said before, formal and institutions trace the boundaries of the type of strategies available to politicians in their quest to remain in power. In contexts in which institutions are weak, state capacity is low, and the judicial system is inefficient or has been captured by interest groups, clientelism evolves into patronage, or even more, prebendalism. In weak states, professional civil service is less

developed and prone to patronage, such that allocation of employment in the public sector based on favoritism is one of the major strategies for winning elections. As we claimed above, prebendalism is the extreme version of this phenomenon. Strong institutions prevent these forms from happening in developed countries like the U.S., in such a way that politicians have to reward their brokers through pork barrel projects instead.

A final word on machine politics. The term, usually used in the context of urban politics in the U.S., especially by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, refers to the system in which political parties distributed benefits to their constituency in exchange for political support (Scott, 1969). Of particular interest have been the cases of political machines in cities like New York, Chicago, Kansas City, among others. Hence, the term is strongly connected to clientelism, both during the electoral campaign and outside of it. In fact, many accounts of how machine politics works resemble patronage relationships, while others end up describing typical vote buying transactions. Interestingly, this concept represents a bridge between the way politics was conducted in the US several decades ago and the way it is done nowadays in many developing countries.⁴

3. IS VOTE BUYING REALLY IMPORTANT?

In recent years, research on clientelism has become popular, with new theoretical and empirical insights proposed to answer old and new questions. However, most studies have mainly focused on vote buying, or as we defined it in the previous section, on transactions that take place around election day and during the electoral campaign (see, for instance, Brusco et al., 2004; Finan and Schechter, 2012; Kramon, 2009; Stokes, 2005; Stokes et al., 2012; Nichter, 2008, among many others).

We claim in this chapter that this route followed by the literature is unfortunate, for two reasons: 1) It is not completely clear if vote buying really represents a complete transaction between buyers and sellers, as most studies have focused on the demand side of the relationship ?why and how politicians do it? while ignoring the supply side. Therefore, determining whether citizens comply and honor this tacit agreement remains an open question. 2) Even if vote buying materializes into a complete transaction, other manifestations of clientelism seem to be more important. As we argued above, common practices in developing countries, like patronage and prebendalism, distort in important ways the distributive process and

⁴Arguing about new states in Africa and Asia Scott (1969, p.1143) states: “[T]he social context that fostered ?machine politics? in the United States is more or less present in many of the new states”.

are strongly connected with other undesirable phenomena, like corruption and malfeasance. Therefore, the negative consequences that are frequently indulged to clientelism seem to come directly from these practices, more than from vote buying itself.

Guardado and Wantchekon (Forthcoming) argue that while there is ample evidence that candidates target voters with handouts that often include cash, it is unclear if these gifts cause an increase in turnout and/or votes in favor of the distributing politician. To study this problem, the authors use some post-electoral surveys from African countries, including an original one in Benin after the 2011 presidential election, round 3 of the 2005 Afrobarometer series conducted in 18 countries, and round 5 of the 2012 Afrobarometer section conducted in Benin. Using matching techniques resembling the inclusion of district fixed effects,⁵ the authors find that cash handouts have no effects on votes or turnout.

This evidence provides support to the argument that in many cases vote buying transactions are incomplete. Citizens, even in the African context and in countries in which electoral institutions are weak, still consider that the vote is secret.⁶ Consequently, if monitoring the vote is difficult for candidates and political machines, it comes to no surprise that compliance may not occur in many cases. The situation is even worse if more than one candidate competes for the vote using electoral handouts. In such case, at least one of the possible sets of transactions is incomplete.

In a similar fashion, other authors have found that vote buying is indeed, in some cases, an incomplete transaction (Lindberg and Morrison, 2008; Bratton, 2009; Conroy-Kurtz and Logan, 2012). Using information from a survey in two recent elections in Ghana, Lindberg and Morrison (2008) find that only one in ten voters in this country is decisively influenced by clientelism or ethnicity when casting a vote. In the context of Nigerian election campaigns, Bratton (2009) shows that most citizens consider that vote buying and electoral violence are infractions of public morality and that when confronted with these situations, voters defect to the agreement. In other words, people do not comply and either abstain or support a candidate different to the one offering handouts. Similarly, Conroy-Kurtz and Logan (2012), using information from the Afrobarometer, find little support for the claim that in 2011 Uganda's president Museveni got benefited significantly from vote buying strategies. According to the data, self-reported recipient beneficiaries of handouts during the election, are not more likely to have supported Museveni at the polls. Naturally, these

⁵Succinctly, the authors match only on individuals that live in the same electoral district as the treated units. In this way, the guarantee higher levels of comparability and a more valid counterfactual.

⁶According to the 2012 Afrobarometer, across 31 African countries 82% of the respondents consider it is unlikely for powerful actors to find out how they voted.

results have to be interpreted with caution, given the known effects that social desirability bias exerts on respondents when asked directly about vote buying (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012) and the lack of proper identification strategies.

All these findings raise the concern of why candidates would distribute cash, to begin with. Scholars exploring this puzzle have proposed different explanations. Schaffer (2002) and Keefer and Vlaicu (2008), for instance, claim that handout delivery is necessary to enhance credibility. Kramon (2016) suggests that they serve to signal the commitment to future redistribution. Hence, handouts serve as signals in a context of uncertainty and lack of trust (Banegas, 2002; Nugent, 2007; Schaffer and Schedler, 2007). Others, like Chauchard (2016) and Guardado and Wantchekon (Forthcoming), argue that handout delivery, even if ineffective, is the result of a political equilibrium in which candidates cannot deviate, as other parties are following the same strategy and the costs of defecting are higher than the benefits.

Given this evidence, it is somehow surprising that some studies take the completeness of the transactions for granted. But more surprising is the fact that research has not focused on the most important components of the phenomenon. As it was argued above, patronage and prebendalism are manifestations of clientelism that distort in many important ways the process in which income is redistributed. Robinson and Verdier (2013) argue that employment in the public sector is a credible, albeit inefficient, method of redistribution that ties candidates to voters in a context in which political commitment is challenging. According to the authors, this form of clientelism generates underprovision of public goods, so that citizens become more dependent on the politician and find employment in the bureaucracy more attractive. Moreover, their model shows that clientelism is more likely in societies with low levels of productivity and high levels of inequality because in such places voters are cheaper to buy with jobs and public sector positions are more valuable.

However, this theoretical account deals unsatisfactorily with the fact that jobs are scarce resources for governments, and consequently are allocated strategically to key actors in the society –precisely to those that guarantee the highest rewards to the politician. Related to this issue, we focus on the role of brokers and clientelistic networks in the next section. Moreover, credibility is not the only reason why patronage is an effective strategy in a clientelistic context. Patronage frequently evolves into corruption and prebendalism, in such a way that the strategic allocation of public positions and contracts to friends and allies, not only guarantees higher odds of staying in power but also direct or indirect access to public resources for personal enrichment (van de Walle, 2007). Therefore, underprovision of

public goods is not the only reason why patronage generates distortions and inefficiencies. A transparent and competitive civil service is incompatible with a political system dominated by patron-client relations, and the risk of malfeasance is higher in this type of scenarios. Consequently, future research on this area needs to establish in a clearer way the connection between clientelism and corruption.

In line with this argument, another strand of the literature shows that parties that rely on patronage are less interested in promoting reforms that might enhance meritocratic civil service. Clientelistic politicians do not find appealing the approval of reforms that may limit their discretion in the distribution of pork (Cruz and Keefer, 2015). Authors like Grindle (2012), Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) and Golden (2003) argue that in clientelistic settings politicians prefer legislation and rules that leave the maximum level of political discretion in the allocation of public resources, especially jobs. In sum, research focusing on the political and economic consequences of patronage has emphasized on three elements: 1) The perverse incentives that politicians face in order to keep the economy unproductive and unequal to make employment in the public sector more attractive; 2) The possibility of using public office for prebendalism and corruption, especially in a context of weak institutions and low levels of state capacity; and 3) The reluctance of parties to implement administrative and civil service reforms that may diminish their discretion over the allocation of public resources. Naturally, these three mechanisms are strongly related to each other, and one of the main challenges of research on clientelism is to find what type of short and medium-term strategies are more effective at deterring these negative consequences of patron-client political relationships.

Finally, we would like to underscore that societies, in the middle and the long terms, are experiencing important structural changes that affect patron-client relationships and that the current literature on vote buying is not fully capturing. First, migration –especially from the countryside to the cities– drastically alter the nature of clientelism. In urban and dense contexts face to face interaction between candidates and voters is less likely. But this fact does not imply that clientelism becomes unfeasible. On the contrary, new agents become more important and relations more complex. But it also means that programmatic politics occupy a more important role that tends to be neglected by studies.

Second, democracy in developing countries differs in many important aspects from democracy in developed countries, but many theoretical accounts of vote buying relations deal unsatisfactorily with this fact. For instance, electoral competition is complex in developing democracies, and it is often the case that a plethora of parties and political movements co-

exist in a context in which traditional parties are weak. Therefore, the traditional “machine politics” account might be inappropriate for some of these cases. This is an important fact because if parties –or at least their labels– are unstable, the traditional assumption that patron-client relations are better modeled as repeated interactions needs to be reconsidered. Either clientelism fails as a political equilibrium more often than we think and programmatic politics is more common than it is usually assumed, or there are other disciplining mechanisms that we do not fully understand yet.

And third, the methods used for political communication have been changing drastically in the past few years, and this phenomenon is not exclusive of developed countries. In developing democracies, platforms like Twitter and Facebook are also consolidating as important channels used by politicians to establish more direct links with citizens. In principle, this could raise optimism, as candidates with no access to traditional media, public resources, powerful brokers, or consolidated machines, might have the possibility of contacting potential followers through other channels. Hence, one may think, in principle, that this change might diminish clientelism, increase deliberation, and help put programmatic politics at the center of the debate. But the proliferation of echo chambers in social media, in such a way that users only follow like-minded people and consume information that serves to confirm their original biases, raises concern on the real effect that social media may have on clientelism. In any case, all these issues remain as open questions.

4. BROKERS AND NETWORKS

For a long time, clientelism was defined as a dyadic relation between a patron and client (Lande, 1977; Stokes, 2002). However, in recent years the literature has focused more on the role played by intermediaries and brokers, disentangling the structure of clientelistic networks (see Baland and Robinson (2008) and Keefer and Vlaicu (2007) for early accounts). Perhaps in agrarian and less developed economies, the notion of dyads makes more sense, because in such contexts it was easier for patrons to establish direct relations with clients. But with industrialization, urbanization, and population growth, direct links between politicians and their constituency become scarce, in such a way that brokers consolidate as unavoidable actors of the political process.⁷

⁷Although the issue of whether brokers are more important in agrarian versus industrial societies, or urban versus countryside settings, remain as open questions. For an interesting discussion, see Gingerich and Medina (2013).

In most cases, the literature has focused, once more, on the role of brokers in the context of vote buying relations or its variations. In other words, intermediaries have been studied in relation to their capacity to increase the probability of political survival of patrons around election day. Some authors have focused on the relationship between candidates and brokers, while others on that of brokers and voters. Larreguy, Marshall, and Querubin (2016), for instance, study voter mobilization through hired brokers, emphasizing on the moral hazard problem faced by politicians when relating with intermediaries. Brokers have incentives to shirk, and in their theory, parties obtain higher benefits from this relationship when monitoring capabilities are higher and when intermediaries are able to mobilize citizens that otherwise would not vote. Also, exploring the connection between parties and intermediaries, and in the context of Mexican elections, Larreguy (2013) explores how the PRI uses electoral results data to monitor brokers, while Larreguy, Montiel, and Querubin (2017) underscore the role that partisan attachment plays at disciplining brokers.

Stokes et al. (2013) also analyze the relationship between brokers and parties around election day, but in their account, the relevant informational problem is adverse selection: political alignment between intermediaries and candidates is taken for granted, and consequently the party's problem is to select the best brokers. In turn, Camp (2015) analyses the collective action inherent to the relationship between parties and brokers, as the latter can only cultivate small groups of voters, so that their individual efforts only marginally affect the probability of victory of their candidates. Interestingly, this study formalizes the intuition of how parties solve the collective action problem: they offer private rewards, such as career advances or pecuniary resources to brokers, in exchange for blocks of votes. Moreover, the model shows how these incentives can turn against the machine, as brokers with more followers have more bargaining power and may threaten the party to take their votes somewhere else.

Other authors have focused instead on the relationship between brokers and voters. Rueda (2014) shows that brokers make voters comply by conditioning future bribes on candidates achieving an optimal threshold of votes. In Gingerich and Medina (2013) discipline is achieved through the promise of a fixed benefit to a group of individuals sharing a common trait, being contingent on the candidate being elected. Empirically, authors like Brusco et al. (2004), Chandra (2004), or Calvo and Murillo (2010), have defended the argument that brokers condition the allocation of private goods to observable characteristics of (groups of) voters. In sum, this nascent literature on the role of brokers underscores an important trait of clientelistic transactions, although more attention needs to be paid to the non-electioneering

component of these relations and the pervasive consequences in terms of civil service quality and public goods provision.

The role of voter social networks has also been studied recently. Cruz (2017) shows that at least five reasons explain why machines prefer to target voters with larger social networks (friends and family ties): 1) they are easier to identify and engage with, which reduces logistical costs (Wang and Kurzman, 2007); 2) the social multiplier effect is higher, resulting in larger positive externalities for vote buyers (Schaffer and Baker, 2015); 3) social ties signal reciprocity, and reciprocal voters respond more to clientelistic transactions (Finan and Schechter, 2012; Lawson and Greene, 2014); 4) social ties may facilitate, in fact, direct connections between voters and clientelistic actors such as brokers and candidates (Cruz, Labonne and Querubin, 2017); and 5) the costs of monitoring can be lower when ties abound (Cruz, 2017). There is no doubt that this is a promising research agenda, but as we argued above, more emphasis should be placed on the underlying social networks of patron-client relations that derive in higher distortions, as opposed to those related to election-day vote buying.

One final strand of the literature on clientelistic brokers is the one that studies the connection between illegal armed groups and political parties. Armed clientelism (Gallego, 2017) is a particular form of patronage in which violent organizations, such as cartels, mafias, guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, etc., act as brokers between candidates and voters. This particular form of clientelism has been reported in diverse settings, such as U.S. cities in the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th (Gosnell, 1937) or even today,⁸ favelas of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil (Hidalgo and Lessing, 2015), districts in Jamaica (Haid, 2010), or Colombian municipalities (Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos, 2013; Gallego, Forthcoming). The main feature of armed clientelism is that when illegal organizations control entire regions of a country, they can mobilize votes in favor of candidates in exchange of favorable legislation, lower levels of prosecution, or more economic opportunities in legal and illegal markets.

⁸See, for instance: <http://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/January-2012/Gangs-and-Politicians-An-Unholy-Alliance/>

5. OVERCOMING CLIENTELISM: DELIBERATION, INFORMATION, AND INSTITUTIONS

The final section of this chapter is devoted to a topic that should be at the center of the debate: what type of strategies are more effective for overcoming clientelism? Early scholars have studied those structural factors that make societies more prone to patron-client relationships. The usual suspects have been underscored, as authors have studied the role played by poverty, inequality, low productivity, ethnicity, among others. Then, how can a country overcome clientelism and make programmatic politics the *modus operandi* of its political system? Development and economic growth have been the common answer. In the end, the common explanation of why in developed countries redistributive politics is less inefficient and does not end up in prebendalism and corruption, is that states are strong, there is rule of law, and institutions prevent this undesirable behavior. But then, what should leaders and citizens in developing countries do in the meanwhile? Patiently wait until their countries achieve “acceptable” levels of development and growth? Are there any short and medium run strategies to overcome clientelism?

There is no doubt that these questions are difficult to answer and that nobody has a clear prescription of how to cure a nation suffering from clientelism. But in recent years interesting studies, most of them using experimental methods, have tried to find solutions to the problem. We review some of these approaches in Gallego and Wantchekon (2012). The major topics that have been analyzed on this front are institutions, information, and deliberation. We discuss these approaches in the remaining lines of this chapter.

Fujiwara and Wantchekon (2013) explore the role that public deliberation has on diminishing clientelism. For this purpose, the authors conduct a field experiment in the context of the 2006 presidential election in Benin. With the cooperation of the leading presidential candidates, authors randomize the type of electoral campaign conducted in certain villages. In control locations standard clientelistic strategies were used, which in essence correspond to political rallies in which food and cash are distributed and little or no space is devoted to the discussion of public policies. In contrast, in treatment villages, public deliberation was enacted, in such a way that first, party delegates presented candidates’ policy platforms, and then citizens had the chance of publicly deliberating on those issues they considered more important for their communities. Overall, the experiment finds that in treatment locations people self-report lower levels of clientelism and a reduction in the votes for the “dominant” candidate occurs. Fujiwara and Wantchekon (2013) interpret this result ar-

guing that in clientelistic environments dominant candidates have more opportunities for buying votes, and these new mechanisms, that provide information and enable deliberation, counteract their competitive advantage.

The heterogeneous treatment effects found by the authors are quite interesting as well. They find that in places in which the treated candidate dominates and implements the deliberation strategy, his share of votes goes down. But the opposite happens in places where he is the contender and does not dominate. This is an important fact because it means that in every election there will always be at least one candidate that will have incentives to use public deliberation, in order to weaken the dominant party and increase his likelihood of winning the election. Then, less clientelism, more information, and more empowerment of citizens through deliberation can be the result of a political equilibrium. The question, of course, is how to endogenize the adoption and use of this type of institutions.

In fact, in a related experiment, Wantchekon et al. (2017) show that in the context of Congressional elections in the Philippines, town hall meetings in which citizens publicly deliberate on policy platforms are beneficial for party-lists implementing them. As opposed to the previous experiment, in this one, the authors keep constant the policy platforms debated by parties, and just change the mechanism used to deliver it. Moreover, in this study, the authors claim that deliberation is an effective way of delivering campaign messages not only because they induce changes in attendees' attitudes and behavior, but also because positive spillovers take place as messages are shared by participants with non-attendees.

Also, this study shows that the effect is higher in voters aligned with the party-list embracing the deliberation strategy –women in the case of feminist platforms and low-income voters for pro-poor platforms. This result suggests that the positive effect of town hall meetings is mainly driven by attitudinal changes on voters, as they become aware of the programmatic policies that matter the most for them. Overall, the results of Wantchekon et al. (2015) are in line with those of Esterling, Neblo, and Lazer (2011), who in the context of Congressional elections in the U.S., find that citizens that debate and deliberate with candidates are more likely to become informed about policy-relevant issues.

In sum, these deliberation experiments show that meetings and debates with candidates or party representatives may serve to counteract clientelistic strategies and enhance programmatic politics. However, it is not completely clear what is driving this result: the fact that people are feeling empowered as now they can publicly express their opinions; or the fact that in these meetings information is provided, and in turn, citizens become aware of those issues that are more salient and important for them. In fact, another strand of the

literature on clientelism and vote buying (Vicente, 2014; Banerjee, Kumal, and Su, 2011, Green and Vasudevan, 2016), in line with several studies that have focused on the relationship between information provision and voting behavior (Ferraz and Finan, 2008; Gerber, Karlan, and Bergan, 2009; Banerjee et al., 2014; Chong et al., 2015; Kendall, Nannicini, and Trebbi, 2015; Dewan, Humphreys, and Rubenson, 2014), has explored the role that information provision plays in order to reduce clientelism.

In a seminal study conducted in the two-island country of Sao Tome and Principe, Vicente (2014) analyzes the effects of a voter education campaign against vote buying. In collaboration with the National Electoral Commission of the country, the author randomizes, at the enumeration level, the distribution, and discussion of leaflets that stressed the illegal nature of vote buying. The results are quite interesting, as the campaign increases the self-reported perception that voting was conducted in good conscience while decreasing the idea that money offered by candidates affected the results. Also, in areas treated by the campaign, turnout is lower, as well as the vote share of the challenger, while the participation of votes of the incumbent increases. Vicente claims that this result reflects the fact that the campaign reduces vote buying because, in a country like Sao Tome and Principe, the delivery of cash in exchange for votes is a strategy typically available for challengers. Incumbents are readily able to establish other clientelistic relationships, such as patronage.

Green and Vasudevan (2016) conduct a similar experiment that uses an information campaign to reduce support for politicians that buy votes. This time, in the context of Indian elections, the authors use advertisement in radio stations to provide voters with information regarding the negative economic consequences of supporting vote buyers. This is an interesting strategy in countries in which it is not possible to conduct door to door campaigns as in Vicente (2014), especially because in many places the radio is a highly popular mass medium, widely used in rural and low-density settings, where high levels of vote-buying tend to prevail. The authors find that the ads reduce, from 4 to 7 percentage points, the vote share of parties previously identified by a team of journalists as prone to use vote buying strategies.

These studies reveal that information campaigns might be effective at reducing the propensity of certain types of voters to sell their votes. However, it is unclear in which way machines may respond in the medium and long run. If they lose votes because some citizens get informed, it is likely that certain brokers—especially those that are able to mobilize voters independently of their levels of information, such as the violent brokers that prevail under armed clientelism—will become more important. This crowding-out effect might

have the unintended consequence of diminishing vote buying but augmenting other types of clientelism, like patronage and prebendalism. If incumbents face more stringent conditions for getting individual votes, office-selling, jobs, and contracts will readily appear as substitute strategies in order to win elections. Naturally, all these arguments are merely suggestive, and we need more research on what type of campaigns are effective not only at reducing vote buying, but also patronage and prebendalism.

A final word on institutions. To some degree, whether communities naturally engage in participation and deliberation, and whether they have access to relevant information on politicians and public policies, depends on existent formal and informal institutions. In particular, social norms determine to a great extent the levels of civic engagement achieved by communities, which in turn affect the effectiveness of bottom-up accountability mechanisms to discipline candidates and bureaucrats. Dasgupta (2016) shows how in rural India, villages' access to public services, and the level of effort exerted by politicians to provide them, heavily depend on the degree of civic engagement of the communities. Broad-based participation, direct contact with ruling party representatives, and speaking in community affairs, are crucial in order to increase access to government programs and services. Naturally, an open area for future research on this topic is on determining what type of institutions may increase the levels of engagement within a community.

6. CONCLUSION

The literature on clientelism and vote buying has grown at a rapid pace in the last decades. Yet, many important questions remain unanswered. In this chapter we have reviewed some of the main topics that have been addressed by these studies. We started with a discussion of some of the basic concepts that relate to the umbrella term of clientelism. We traced the differences and commonalities between popular concepts such as vote buying, patronage, prebendalism, pork barrel politics, and machine politics. We saw that in all cases the concept refers to a relationship in which goods and services are provided in exchange for political support. However, the timing, the nature of the rewards, and the consequences of these practices, delimit these various forms of clientelism.

Later, we argued that the contemporaneous literature has focused excessively on vote buying, i.e. transactions that take place in the midst of the electoral campaign. This problem is important, without hesitation, but it is crucial to determine if, to begin with, vote buying represents a complete transaction. But also, other manifestations of the problem, such as

patronage and prebendalism, should not be ignored as great part of the distortions are produced by these habits.

In recent years, brokers have been studied in greater detail, despite the initial dismissal of their strategic role. Some scholars have focused on the relationship between politicians and brokers, while others have studied the connection between brokers and voters, and a burgeoning literature is trying to understand the nature and characteristics of clientelistic networks. While all these studies are valuable and useful for a complete understanding of the problem, we claim, once more, that less emphasis should be placed on the way of brokers help greasing vote buying machines, and more on the place they occupy in systems that operate through patronage, prebendalism, and corruption.

Finally, some recent studies have proposed strategies and mechanisms for overcoming clientelism. We cannot wait until poor countries achieve acceptable levels of development and growth, in order to see a transition from clientelism to programmatic policies. In contrast, we need to learn more about the potential positive effects that innovations in terms of deliberation, information, and institutions can bring to clientelistic societies.

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