Patrons, Clients, and Policies

Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition

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

One important area that has not received sufficient attention is the wide variation in patterns of linkages between politicians, parties and citizens. The political science literature has, since the 1950s, been dominated by the “responsible party government” model, the logic of which forms the basis of both rational choice theories (Downs 1957) as well as historical-comparative approaches (e.g., Lipset and Rokkan 1967). This model sees politics as the result of interaction of principals (citizens, voters) and agents (candidates for electoral office, elected officials), characterized by five essential ingredients. First, voters have policy preferences over a range of salient issues to allocate or redistribute scarce resources through state action. Second, vote- or executive office-seeking politicians and parties bundle issue positions in electoral platforms or programs they promise to enact, if elected into office. To simplify matters for information misers in the electorate, such programmatic bundles can be aligned in a minimally dimensional scale, with a single “left-to-right” dimension. Third, voters relate their own preferences to those offered by the partisan competitors and opt for the most compatible programmatic basket, weighted by strategic considerations such as the electability of the party and the credibility
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of its promises given its past performance.\footnote{Spatial models of competition (in which voters calculate the proximity of party programs to their own preference vector in terms of Euclidean distances) and directional models where they employ scalar products to gauge the distance are both only minor variants of the responsible partisan model.} Fourth, victorious parties or coalitions of parties with relatively similar programs then implement their promises, with an eye on the evolving preferences of their constituencies. Fifth, at the subsequent election, voters hold incumbents and opposition parties accountable for their performance during the electoral term, based upon their effort and performance.

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

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

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

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

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

There have been surprisingly few systematic comparative studies on clientelism, partly because of the origin of research on clientelism in in-depth anthropological and sociological studies. From these disciplinary perspectives, political clientelism was only a special case of a much more widespread pattern of social affiliation found in “traditional” societies from Southern Italy and Senegal to India (Clapham 1982; Cruise O’Brian 1975; Fox 1969). Clientelism was seen as a durable, face-to-face, hierarchical and thus asymmetrical exchange relation between patrons and
clients supported by a normative framework. In contrast to comparative political research design, sociological and anthropological investigations favored detailed case studies and general social theory rather than “middle level” theorizing of a comparative nature about the varied incidence of clientelism across time and space.\(^2\)

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

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

\(^2\) As documentation of the crushing predominance of case studies and general theory, see Roniger’s (1981) impressive bibliography and even Eisinger and Roniger’s (1984) massive tome on patron–client relationships. It develops dimensions of variation in clientelism (chapter 7) and covers just about every region on earth, but lacks a systematic analysis of how, why, and when specific forms of clientelism come into existence or fade away. Examples in political science are Banfield’s (1958) study of Southern Italy and Banfield and Wilson’s (1965) monograph on political machines in US cities, although the latter offers at least a subnationally comparative perspective.
decentralization) may affect principal–agent relations in democracy.\textsuperscript{3} Chief among these studies was Martin Shefter’s (1977, 1994) important comparative study of the United States, France, and Britain. First of all, Shefter’s work was distinctive because he did not sample on the dependent variable, but compared clientelistic linkage mechanisms in both democracies and non-democracies. Second, by confining the comparison to polities at roughly equal levels of economic development, Shefter shows that a developmental perspective cannot be all there is to the explanation of variance among democratic linkage mechanisms. Instead, he highlights the critical role of state formation in interaction with patterns of social mobilization and political enfranchisement as key factors shaping the presence or absence of clientelistic linkage under democratic conditions. Where the rise of bureaucratic absolutism professionalized the career of state officials before democratization and made administrative office unavailable to a spoils logic of distributing benefits among supporters of the electorally successful party, parties had to compete for voters with programmatic appeals rather than with material side-payments to individuals and communities. Extension of the suffrage after the advent of industrialization and social mobilization further undercut clientelism. New “external” mass political parties, supported by working-class people who were not entitled to vote and led by politicians who could not obtain seats in parliament, had to rely on their own internal resources and their purely ideological programmatic appeal, because they had no access to state resources. After the extension of suffrage, the presence of such mass programmatic parties undercut the spread of clientelistic practices, even where bureaucratic state professionalism was vulnerable.

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

\textsuperscript{3} The critical contribution of this era is Shefter (1977; 1994). Where bureaucratic professionalization precedes both industrialization and democratic suffrage expansion, “external” parties representing peoples not permitted to vote organize programmatic parties, while “internal” parties in the legislatures of traditional authoritarian regimes prefer clientelistic payoffs, if they could avail themselves of state assets to hand out to electoral constituencies.
theorizing and empirical analysis. As a consequence, between 1978 and the late 1990s very little of theoretical consequence has been written about clientelism, except in a rather isolated literature on the effect of electoral laws on personalism and intra-party factionalism in party systems. In as much as state- and class-oriented comparative political scholars attended to political parties, their work was explicitly or tacitly steeped in the responsible party government literature and spatial models of inter-party competition based on programmatic linkages.4

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Identifying clientelistic and programmatic linkages**

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

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

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

Under conditions of democratic competition with full enfranchise-ment, local exchange networks will rarely suffice to win national elections. Politicians need to organize the flow of material resources across the complex pyramidal network of client-broker-patron exchanges. By coordinat-ing large numbers of political operatives, they must overcome challenging problems of collective action and principal–agent conflicts through finely balanced systems of incentives. For example, higher-level brokers will wish to divert as much as possible of a party’s electoral resources to their private use rather than to confer them on lower-level brokers who then are in turn expected to restrain their own income-maximizing self-interests and reward external electoral clients with resources that induce the latter to contribute generously to the party through votes, labor, and financial
contributions. It takes complicated internal mechanisms of monitoring and control to limit the predatory behavior of party agents sufficiently so that external clientelistic exchanges can still generate the resources needed to enable a party to win electoral office and to dominate the benefits-dispensing government executive.

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

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

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6 For example, the Republican Party machine in Philadelphia in the 1930s complained about ward leaders who used resources to help their friends and families rather than help the party keep control of the city (Kurtzman 1935: 44).
direct. It concerns goods from which non-participants in the exchange can be excluded. Second, such exchanges become viable from the perspective of politicians, if voter constituencies respond in predictable fashion to clientelistic inducements without excessive opportunism and free-riding. Third, short of constituencies’ spontaneous and voluntary compliance with the clientelistic deal, politicians can invest in organizational structures to monitor and enforce clientelistic exchanges.

**Contingent direct exchange**

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

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

The nature of the goods supplied by the patron politician or party only in some cases provides definitive evidence about the nature of the linkage type at work, but not in others. For example, the politicized allocation of private goods that accrue to individual citizens – such as public sector...
jobs and promotions or preferential, discretionary access to scarce or highly subsidized goods such as land, public housing, education, utilities, or social insurance benefits (pensions, health care), and specific procurement contracts to private enterprises — signal clientelistic relations almost by definition. As well as material goods (money, jobs, other tangible goods), parties and patrons can offer clients the less immediately tangible but no less valuable private goods of power and influence. In states where individual officials and politicians have a high degree of discretion in how they enforce rules, many people regard it as crucial to have sustained access to a powerful patron who can ensure that the agents of the state either deal with the client honestly, or when required dishonestly, for example by ignoring tax regulations, building codes, anti-squatter legislation, proper procedures for charging for water and electricity, or by giving favorable legal judgments (e.g., Milne 1973).

Whereas the provision of private goods through political exchange invariably signals the existence of clientelism, public goods that are desired by everyone in society and from whose enjoyment no one can be excluded, regardless of whether they contributed to the production of the good or not, can by definition not be traded through clientelistic exchange. Public goods include the provision of external and internal security, macro-economic growth, full employment, low inflation, and a clean environment. Just about everyone benefits from these goods. They are “valence issues” in the sense that they exhibit a popular distribution of preferences heavily skewed to one extreme. Hence politicians compete not by offering different packages of such goods, but by trying to trump each other in terms of making credible their competence and capacity to deliver such goods, if elected to office.

Many important benefits that politicians allocate through the political process have neither public nor private goods status. They belong to the murky middle ground of “club goods” that provide benefits for subsets of citizens and impose costs on other subsets. Citizens external to certain group boundaries can be excluded from the enjoyment of such benefits, but none of those inside the boundary. Club goods typically redistribute life chances across groups in society, and politicians engineer such redistribution so as to solidify and increase the size of their electoral coalitions. Club good character accrues to all schemes of income redistribution through the tax code and social policy insurance schemes, whether obvious or not. Redistribution is also involved in the public regulation of goods and services industries, e.g., to the advantage of consumers or producers.

When it comes to club goods, politicians can try to organize linkages to their constituencies based either on programmatic or clientelistic
relations. If they go the programmatic route, they frame the disbursement of resources in terms of general rules with highly specific stipulations for policy implementation by which both administrators of the policies and recipients of the benefits have to abide, regardless of their personal party preferences. Politicians then simply hope that the distributive impact of the policies will create enough support for their party or their personal candidacy to ensure reelection. Programmatic politicians have to cast their net wide and hope for a moderate electoral yield among all the people who benefit from their office incumbency.

Clientelistic politicians, by contrast, prefer rules and regulations for the authoritative allocation of costs and benefits that leave maximum political discretion to the implementation phase, i.e., have as few precise rules of disbursement and entitlement as possible. Politicians then may cast their net narrowly and aim at identifying particular individuals and small groups whose support can be obtained by material inducements tailored to their personal needs and serviced by political appointees in public bureaucracies who do the governing parties’ bidding. Rather than dispersing moderate benefits across a broad audience, clientelistic politicians concentrate a high proportion of benefits on a critical mass of voter constituencies whose support they expect to bring them victory in the next electoral contest. For this focused, concentrated strategy to work, however, either certain cognitive and motivational preconditions are vital and/or politicians must have ways and means to monitor and enforce terms of the clientelistic bargain.

Voluntary compliance as a condition of contingent exchange: predictability and elasticity of citizens’ conduct

What knowledge allows politicians to be more confident when offering electoral constituencies a direct exchange involving targeted club and private goods? At a minimum, politicians need to be confident in their prediction that voters who actually receive the benefits of their actions will vote for them (“predictability” of citizens’ conduct). Furthermore, politicians will go to the trouble of crafting clientelistic relations only if the direct, targeted clientelistic exchange actually makes the difference between people voting or not voting for them. Politicians would waste their scarce resources were they to focus clientelistic benefits on constituencies that support them in any case, regardless of tailored material inducements. Only where there is strong effective “elasticity” in voters’ electoral conduct, contingent upon the provision of clientelistic goods, have politicians a reason to supply such goods. Vote choice predictability may be a function of the magnitude of the benefit enjoyed by the target
constituency. Vote choice elasticity is a function of the probability that some competitor could offer the same or even more valuable targeted material goods to the constituency. Iteration of the political game may affect the credibility of competitors offering to deliver the club good in clientelistic fashion. Where one party or politician has done so for many rounds of the competitive game, it may be difficult for some challenger to establish credibility as a potential alternative source of benefits.

Where the conduct of individual voters or small groups of voters cannot be predicted easily, or when predictable electoral conduct is inelastic, politicians have incentives to engage only in programmatic linkage strategies with indirect, non-specific exchanges that disburse club goods to large groups of voters in the hope of swaying enough voters by the politicians’ actions to win re-election. Alternatively, politicians may engage in programmatic valence competition trying to prove their competence in delivering collective goods demanded by all citizens in a polity (e.g., good economic performance) or at least club goods requested by all citizens living in a particular district (“pork”). In all of these instances, politicians save the transaction costs of monitoring and enforcing the actions of clients, but operate under conditions of uncertainty and unpredictability. Because their policy benefits are less specifically targeted and lack contingency when compared to those in clientelistic relations, they will accrue to many citizens who do not support their reelection.

Let us illustrate the impact of high predictability and elasticity in facilitating clientelistic politics with the case of the voters in the Fifth Election District in Gunma, Japan. The local economy in Gunma relies heavily upon agriculture and in particular on the local yam industry, which accounts for 80 percent of Japanese production. The Gunma yam industry is highly inefficient by international standards, and could not survive without the government’s 990 percent tariff on imports. People in the district have voted overwhelmingly for the Liberal Democratic Party, which has offered strong support for the yam industry as well as for the public works projects vital to the local construction industry.7

Is the LDP’s delivery of a club good (the yam tariff) to the voters of Gunma a clientelistic practice or not? A reasonable decision rule is to classify such a transaction as clientelistic if it satisfies the following conditions of the direct exchange: (1) Predictability: for the people of Gunma, protection of their local yam industry is decisive for their electoral choice. Given the size of the tariff and the profile of income sources in the district, this result is a pretty good bet. Furthermore, the fact that there have been many iterations of the electoral bargain between

LDP and Gunma district voters increases the predictability of political action. (2) Elasticity: the salience and material importance of the good’s provision (tariff) for the local economy is sufficiently high for members of the target group to tip the balance of most group members’ voting behavior in favor of the party that promises to provide the good. It is plausible that the extraordinary magnitude of the benefit all but certainly creates elasticity around the issue. (3) Competition: were the LDP to stop provision of the benefit, or were alternative credible parties promising to supply the same or a greater benefit, it is all but certain that the local voters would switch sides to other parties. With national competition among parties intensifying in Japan in the 1990s, LDP politicians know that they probably would lose the support of the local constituency were they to abandon the tariff.

By these criteria, the citizen–politician linkage in Gunma is clearly clientelistic: newspaper reports suggest local citizens vote for the powerful LDP family that controls the seat because of its fierce support for the tariffs that protect the prefecture’s main crop, as well as the LDP’s support for the local construction industry, both of which are the pillars on which other local services (such as banking, insurance, farm supplies) rely. While the LDP has been prepared to reduce other agricultural tariffs, the party has kept the yam tariff because of the high salience and economic importance of the issue in this one politically important district, which has produced a string of powerful LDP leaders, including former prime minister, Keichi Ozumi.8

Counteracting opportunism in clientelistic exchange: monitoring and enforcement

Monitoring voter behavior is often difficult, but without such monitoring from one election to the next, politicians run the risk of misdirecting resources to voters who will defect: in other words, take the money and run. As it turns out, there are many options to achieve this objective short of reliance on crude, coercive, violent, and therefore costly punishments of citizens’ defection from clientelistic bargains. Some of them are explored in detail in the contributions to this volume by Chandra, Hale, and Levitsky. Politicians of course prefer lower-cost methods of monitoring to those that require large investments of time and money, and this biases them toward group rather than individual monitoring, and public methods of monitoring rather than reliance upon a network of private informants. First, monitoring how a group votes is less costly

8 Ibid.
than monitoring how individuals vote, so individual monitoring will be used more often where the number of voters is small (hundreds or thousands, rather than tens of thousands) and geographically compact rather than dispersed. Second, private promises of support from an individual are much less valuable to a politician than public pledges, or the display of badges, party colors or signs. The advantages of requiring those who claim to be supporters to publicly pledge or display their support are obvious. This especially applies to members of ethnic, religious, or clearly identified social groups, because public pledges by influential members of these groups have multiplier effects on the voting preferences of the group as a whole. By forcing members of a group to publicly pledge support to the incumbent party rather than the opposition, for example, group members are effectively then cut off from any expectation of rewards if the opposition should win. This increases the probability that group members in general – including those who may not have agreed with the decision of their peers to support the incumbent party – will actually vote for the incumbents in order to avoid punishment if the opposition wins and increase their chances of a reward if the incumbent is reelected. We should note here that continued interaction and exchange between patrons and clients over time – for example at local celebrations – may eventually make such regular monitoring of voting unnecessary because (a) regular interaction and exchange alone effectively cuts off the clients from any expectation of rewards from a different client; (b) the interaction may be sufficient to induce cultural expectations of reciprocity inherent in any gift giving situation (see below).

Monitoring individuals

The simplest way to monitor individual voters, but also one that is relatively costly in terms of party resources is by violating the secrecy of the ballot, or as Chandra explores in this volume, by giving voters the impression that one has violated the secrecy of the ballot. For several hundred years in Europe and North America, of course, voting was public by law, allowing patrons to match punishments and rewards precisely to voter behavior, and also in some cases to maintain their hold on political power long after the underlying distribution of voters’ preferences had shifted away from them (Whyte 1965: 741–49). Laws that mandated open voting, not surprisingly, were often endogenous to political elites’ calculations about likely voting patterns under open and secret ballots. Dahl, for instance, describes how members of the Protestant elite in early nineteenth-century Connecticut, worried about losing power as the franchise expanded, instituted a “stand-up law” in 1801 to make voting public
so that they could retaliate against new voters who voted the wrong way (Dahl 1961: 16).

Even where politicians were unable to block the introduction of a secret ballot they developed many methods to monitor voters so that they could then reward or punish people who supported or opposed them. Studies of voting in the USA in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries describe the widespread use of such tactics as marked or pre-printed ballots, party workers forcing voters to ask for help in the voting booth because they were “disabled” or “illiterate,” or voting systems that required voters to publicly identify themselves if they did not wish to vote for officially approved candidates (Dahl 1961: 16; Kurtzman 1935: 121, 133–35). Political reformers and opposition politicians tried to challenge incumbents by pressing for the introduction of voting machines that, it was hoped, would make such monitoring impossible. Incumbent party machines, predictably, fought against the introduction of such technologies; for example, the ruling Republicans in Philadelphia made great efforts to fight off reform by “proving” that new voting machines were costly, complex, and unreliable. But in practice even such apparently threatening technologies as voting machines could sometimes be adapted to politicians’ need to monitor the way people voted. For example, in some cities machines were configured so as to allow a straight party ticket to be voted quickly with a distinctive ringing sound, whereas voting for the opposition or for a mixed slate required additional time with no accompanying ring, a combination that clearly signaled one’s preferences to those outside the booth (Kurtzman 1935).

There are other methods of monitoring how individuals vote that do not require violating the secrecy of the ballot box. Door-to-door canvassing allows politicians to acquire good information on voters’ party preferences, because most people either do not like to lie or else are not very good at it. Ethnographic studies of elections indicate that party workers quickly become skilled at determining from brief interviews whether particular voters support their party or not. The intentions of those who try to mask their preferences can be further uncovered by asking individuals to accept party literature, be contacted in the future, or show their support by wearing badges or displaying party colors and signs. In many electoral systems party workers also pass out goods such as sweets and liquor to their supporters outside polling places, the object being to make voters publicly declare their allegiance to one party or the other.

9 As a result of these efforts Philadelphia spent more than ten times as much on the combined purchase and maintenance costs of each voting machine as nearby Delaware County. Kurtzman (1935: 121).
Another way in which politicians can monitor voters' preferences is by keeping track of how many voters from particular areas or groups come to ask them for favors based on their support for the politician (Kurtzman 1935).

We can think of mass party organization models as highly effective group devices for surveillance and mobilization, in which local party bosses closely monitor individuals’ conduct. Contrary to Shefter’s (1977, 1994) conceptualization of mass party organizations as the antithesis of clientelistic machine politics, mass parties provide the capabilities of serving clientelistic monitoring practices, provided they are placed in a democratic political context in which their leaders acquire access to public resources that fuel clientelistic distributive schemes – such as the power to appoint civil servants, to grant access to public housing, or to disburse pension and unemployment benefits.

**Monitoring groups**

Monitoring groups of voters – or having them monitor themselves and then rewarding or punishing the group – is much more efficient than monitoring and then rewarding and punishing individuals, especially where party organizations are weak and in elections with large numbers of voters dispersed over a wide area. In dealing with cohesive ethnic groups with clear hierarchies – the Lubavitch Hasidim in parts of New York State are a good example – the politician needs only to contract with the group leader to be assured of the support of the entire group. The certainty of the payoff to the politician helps explain why the Lubavitch Hasidim have enjoyed so much political patronage relative to their size. One Brooklyn politician described how “They go to synagogue and get their palm cards and they’re bused right to the polls. Mayor Daley would be proud of them . . . They are the last deliverable bloc in the city . . . They get heavy money from everybody because they can deliver votes. They want bucks. They want programs, because programs mean jobs and power in their community. They get tons of stuff, housing particularly.”

Even though many groups lack this level of cohesion, politicians have other options to monitor groups’ voting. Voting returns and opinion polls, if sufficiently disaggregated, can also provide sufficient information to politicians to enable them to verify a group’s support with a high level of accuracy – and low transaction costs – even in the absence of public or

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private pledges or private information on voting behavior. They can verify support and deliver rewards with very low transaction costs. Chandra, Hale, Scheiner, and Levitsky's articles in this volume all provide instances of geographic monitoring of groups, for instance through counting of ballots at the subdistrict level in Japan (Scheiner). Until 1971 ballots in India were counted at each local polling station, which enabled politicians to quickly determine whether a village had kept to its side of the political bargain. In Philadelphia and Chicago ward-level results similarly allowed supportive wards – often ethnically homogenous – to be rewarded and opposing wards to be punished. Opinion polls can also, if disaggregated by race, ethnicity, constituency, or other salient group attribute, facilitate clientelistic targeting by politicians. If a particular constituency, such as African Americans in the USA, ultra-Orthodox Sephardic Jews in Israel, or members of the Yadav caste in north India is known from opinion polls to vote for a particular party (the Democratic Party, Shas, the Samajwadi party) at a level of 80 percent or above, then patrons do not really need individual information on voting preferences in order to be (80 percent) sure of delivering benefits only to their supporters.

If the interaction between the patron and the clients is sustained over time, it may be unnecessary for the patron to continue to monitor the clients’ votes, and we can think of clientelism in these circumstances as a self-enforcing group equilibrium. The sociologist Javier Auyero (2000) provides a good example of such an equilibrium in his study of clientelism in Argentina. He shows how clientelistic brokers (Peronist Judicialist Party local ward bosses) have developed a web of services in which they deliver tangible benefits to individuals (from food and medicines via local jobs in the party machine and the municipality to the delivery of marijuana to rallies). Participants are immersed into a system of generalized, implicit exchange in which brokers expect and encourage, but do not enforce reciprocal acts. The clients participate in PJ party rallies (where they get booze and pot) and in turn vote for the party. This ongoing network of social relations generates widely held cognitive expectations about appropriate behavior that in turn reduce monitoring efforts (Auyero 2000: 122–23). The instrumental exchange aspect remains tacit and is concealed in the symbolic representations of the relationship by both brokers and clients. It is an ongoing, iterative process in which the past behavior of parties individuals, and communities influences present expectations of the obligations of patrons to clients and vice versa. The same type of relationships exist in voting in Thailand, where older voters who regularly participate in patron–client networks explain their actions

11 Assuming low geographical and social mobility on the part of the target population.
in normative terms and are reported to regard it as a *bap* (demerit) not to vote for a patron who has given them money or other rewards (Callahan and McCargo 1996). Historical analyses of voting in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England and Ireland also identify generalized ties of “deference” and “obligation” of tenant to landlord (and vice versa), sustained over time not just through reciprocal transactions but through continuing participation in local community affairs and events, as much more important in explaining voters’ choices than simple threats of coercion or promises of monetary rewards at the time of an election (O’Gorman 1984: 398–403; Whyte 1965).

The monitoring and enforcement of clientelistic citizen–politician linkages is not a simple process in which patrons at every step monitor their clients and intervene to punish free-riders. Clientelism involves a complex web of relations in which monitoring and enforcement is practiced in a highly indirect and concealed fashion. The concealment of clientelism may go so far as to lead to “preference falsification” on the part of all participants.12 Neither patrons nor clients are willing or even able to describe the clientelistic relationship as a quid-pro-quo exchange of scarce and desirable goods, but instead interpret it in flowery terms as an enactment of community relations and civic solidarity.

*Alternative modes of citizen–politician linkage*

Thus, clientelistic linkages are carried out either through single transactions, multiple discrete transactions, or – more frequently – through complex, continuing webs of exchange, obligation, and reciprocity. In many systems characterized by relatively high levels of poverty – such as Thailand, India, Pakistan, or Zambia – patrons directly purchase clients’ votes in exchange for money, liquor, clothes, food, or other immediately consumable goods (Callahan and McCargo 1996). Much more frequent than single-shot transactions of this nature, however, are webs of exchange, obligation, and reciprocity sustained over a longer period, in which patrons provide *private goods* or *club goods* to their clients.13

In general, politicians target specific constituencies with clientelistic benefits when they can predict the electoral behavior of that constituency

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12 We are employing here Kuran’s (1991) notion originally intended for citizens in communist regimes who deny that they even have a wish to abolish existing power structures, until it becomes feasible to do so.

13 Some money, alcohol, food etc. may be given by politicians to voters on polling day as part of these more generalized networks of reciprocity and exchange but in many cases it would be a mistake to see these gifts as sufficient in themselves to determine voters’ choices.
Table 1.1 Which conditional exchange relations are most valuable to politicians in clientelistic systems?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counteracting opportunism.</th>
<th>single-shot</th>
<th>ongoing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Predictability of exchange: single-shot or ongoing relations?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Locus of provision, monitoring and enforcement</td>
<td>groups</td>
<td>Weakest leverage of political agent over principals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>individuals</td>
<td>Intermediate leverage</td>
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</table>

in response to the stimulus. Furthermore, the effectiveness of clientelistic targeting increases with the precision of monitoring constituency behavior and enforcing compliance by sanctioning free-riding, even though these may be expensive undertakings. Predictability of client behavior increases, as citizen–politician relations unfold in an iterative process in which both sides can coordinate around a cooperative solution. The precision of monitoring increases from less expensive group monitoring to more expensive monitoring of individual behavior. Hence, as we can see in the $2 \times 2$ representation presented in Table 1.1, clientelistic relations become more valuable to politicians as a way to gain political leverage if they can be (1) easily targeted to individuals or small groups and (2) if they can be withdrawn if the voter does not keep up his or her end of the bargain.

Obvious examples of goods that offer high leverage over voters include permission to work a landlord’s land, or access to a local government job in systems without substantial civil service protections for employees. There are many historical examples, for instance, of landlords threatening tenants with the loss of agricultural credit, advances of seeds, loans, or the right to work the patron’s land if they dared to vote the wrong way (Whyte 1965). In classic US party machines jobs were readily targeted to known supporters of the incumbent party and these supporters knew that their jobs – and those of their relatives – were in immediate jeopardy if they switched their support or failed to vote in sufficient numbers to keep their party in power.\(^{14}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Strategic linkages</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programmatic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>valence policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Contingency of</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exchange: Benefit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>tied to vote?</td>
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<td>(“targeted”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>delivery)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Nature of goods</td>
<td>Collective and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>offered to voters:</td>
<td>club (“pork”)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private, club, or</td>
<td>goods (“valence</td>
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<tr>
<td>public goods?</td>
<td>competition”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Predictability:</td>
<td>Low</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compliance:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>of individuals/groups</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>responding to</td>
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<td>politician's actions?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Elasticity:</td>
<td>Small</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change in</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>constituents’ vote</td>
<td></td>
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<td>choice due to</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>politician’s stimulus?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5. Monitoring and</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>external</td>
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<td>enforcement of the</td>
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<td>exchange?</td>
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We are now in a position to compare clientelistic politics to other types of citizen–politician linkages in competitive party democracies (Table 1.2). We are depicting here only strategic linkages in which the actions of principals and agents are conditional upon each other in some fashion. We set aside here non-strategic linkages where voter constituencies display unconditional loyalty to politicians. This at least applies to the social-psychological version of “party identification” based on processes of socialization and affective bonding, not so much the strategic version of party identification as result of the cumulative “running tally” of policy actions parties have performed over long periods of time to endear themselves to particular voters. The strategic image also does not apply to voter-citizen relations based on
candidate personality traits ("charisma"), net of the candidate's policy preferences.

Among the strategic relations, we distinguish clientelism from two different types of programmatic policy voting, one dealing with a situation of valence goods with a skewed distribution of preferences and politicians trying to demonstrate their competence in delivering the club or collective goods most voters want, and the other dealing with plain directional and spatial competition among parties offering different programmatic packages and appealing to electoral constituencies with different policy preferences.

On two of our five aspects of the linkage relationship, there is a clear contrast between both forms of programmatic competition and linkage building, on one side, and clientelistic competition and linkage, on the other. Only in clientelistic politics are benefits implicitly or explicitly tied to delivery of political support (the vote, material contributions and time going to the party) in exchange for material benefits flowing from political office. Programmatic politicians do not engage in contingent exchange and therefore do not try to monitor and enforce conformity of voters with certain party preferences, while clientelistic patrons most definitely engage in such practices.

On the other three dimensions, we have a sliding scale ranging from programmatic valence voting via programmatic directional policy voting to clientelistic competition. Clientelistic linkages tend to involve goods with a smaller scale of disbursement and less opportunity for free-riding, but there is no hard and fast borderline. Local and regional club goods may be featured by politicians pursuing either clientelistic or programmatic linkage strategies. In a similar vein, even for programmatic policy strategies, the predictability of voters' response to policy initiatives may be sufficiently high to constitute a clientelistic exchange. Finally, while in general voter elasticity in response to programmatic initiatives may be lower than that in response to clientelistic inducements, this is a matter of degree and is often hard to measure.

The heuristic value of Table 1.2 is to clarify the conditions under which politicians may pursue clientelistic linkage building in a rational, instrumental fashion, taking the full political opportunity costs and benefits of this strategy into account. In this section, we have identified characteristics of clientelistic and programmatic linkages and institutional or behavioral preconditions for each to operate in democratic electoral party competition. Both modes of linkage building require considerable time and resources on the part of politicians to coordinate their teams of office-seekers as well as electoral constituencies around their preferred pattern of democratic accountability and responsiveness. Let us next
explore the conditions under which politicians choose programmatic linkage strategies as their preferred mode of operation and those that make politicians inclined to seek out clientelistic linkage systems.

**Explaining democratic linkage practices**

In the previous section, we have identified three attribute dimensions that distinguish clientelistic from programmatic principal–agent accountability. They are analytically distinct, but up to a point parties can, of course, combine elements of clientelistic and programmatic accountability in an encompassing “portfolio” package. First, clientelistic linkages target benefits to individuals (private goods) and small groups (local club goods) who have proven, or are expected, to be supporters of winning politicians with control over resources. Programmatic linkages deliver benefits to large groups (functional club goods) and the entire polity (collective goods). Targeting benefits also facilitates “credit claiming” by politicians for benefits reaching electoral constituencies. Second, clientelistic linkages rely on some kind of monitoring or enforcement of direct exchanges, and we have laid out the manifold techniques – from crude supervision of individual citizens in the voting booth and prepared ballot papers via organizational encapsulation of constituencies to sophisticated calculations based on precinct returns – that can achieve this objective in the end. Third, even where monitoring and enforcement may be weak or absent, a high predictability and low elasticity of constituency partisan affiliation as a result of the supreme salience of specific targeted benefits for the group may deliver a reasonably high level of certainty and contractual enforcement of direct exchanges, i.e., a low dissipation of politicians’ resources among citizens who do not support them through their votes. In the absence of facilities to monitor and enforce direct exchange or under conditions where the benefits that constituencies deem salient are sufficiently amorphous and distributed among voter groups and variable over time to increase elasticity and decrease predictability of voting behavior, it is likely that politicians rely more on programmatic accountability.

All this presupposes, of course, that politicians have the time and resources to engage in the arduous, slow, resource-intensive undertaking to build clientelistic or programmatic political parties. Both kinds of parties have to solve collective action problems in the process of building an

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15 See Kitschelt (2000b) and Magaloni et al. in this volume for a more extensive discussion of this topic.
elaborate organizational infrastructure. This infrastructure may be more extensive in the case of clientelistic parties. In addition to targeting public resources on their constituencies, clientelistic parties raise “private” resources from asset-rich, but vote-poor clients in exchange for favors and in order to dole them out to asset-poor, but vote-rich other client groups (Kitschelt 2000b). Conversely, programmatic parties have to make an investment in solving problems of social choice by setting up mechanisms to deliberate collective goals in the organization and enforce compliance with collective programmatic objectives by partisan politicians in electoral office. Where democracies were recently founded and politicians cannot build on organizational infrastructures that either precede authoritarian episodes or that could grow within authoritarian regimes, neither clientelistic nor programmatic parties will instantly appear. In that case, politicians’ accountability exclusively relies on short-term performance ratings (“retrospective voting”) or personal qualities (“charisma”).

In the following section, we lay out how different causal mechanisms may influence targeting/credit claiming for benefits, monitoring/enforcement of direct exchange, and the predictability/inelasticity of constituency vote choices. We begin with economic development and then consider its conditional relation to the competitiveness of democratic partisan contests. We then discuss institutional democratic rules, followed by the public control of the political economy and mobilized ethnocultural divides. While the democratic rules of the game should affect all parties competing in a polity in a similar fashion, all the other mechanisms we lay out may shape linkage mechanisms differentially for individual parties within the same polity or for all parties in the same way in that polity.

**The role of economic development**

Economic development is the most commonly confirmed predictor of differential modes of democratic accountability. Affluent democracies and parties appealing to affluent citizens in a democracy tend to operate more through programmatic accountability, while parties in poor democracies and parties appealing to the poorest electoral segments tend to practice clientelism.

**Demand side factors**

*D-1. Scaling up of social networks:* Development works through people’s involvement in markets beyond the local level. At extremely low levels, most local constituencies will be highly autonomous and self-sufficient
such that principal–agent exchange relations will be superfluous. Most residents of an area will be simply subject to political authority. As van de Walle (in this volume) explains, principal–agent relations of exchange will be limited to a small elite within which “prebendal” patrimonial exchange prevails. Scale upgrading and market commodification of social relations generates demands for societal coordination through centralized authoritative political decisions. This initially gives rise to new group loyalties serviced by clientelistic networks beyond the realm of kinship and family (Scott 1969, 1972). But as the process of further societal scale upgrading proceeds, clientelistic linkages – providing private and local club goods – become too narrow and give way to class, sectoral, and professional linkages in the formation of national and global markets. People demand goods from politicians who serve increasingly large clubs for whose members clientelistic linkages are too costly in terms of transactional arrangements. Some of these goods serve everyone in a polity (“collective goods”).

**D-2. Discount rates.** Poor people cannot wait for material rewards and therefore prefer targeted handouts to the distant benefits of policy change. But, as Lyne argues in her treatment of the voter’s dilemma, without further triggers originating on the demand and the supply side, even under conditions of high affluence voters should always prefer clientelistic exchange. It delivers benefits – both private and local public goods – with greater certainty than indirect exchange based on policy (large-scale club goods, collective goods). Citizens are stuck in a prisoner’s dilemma: people abandoning a clientelistic exchange opportunity may therefore be punished and left empty-handed, if too few voters become “suckers” and promote a winning programmatic party rather than their personal and local benefit, however modest. Programmatic parties are attractive only to voters who have enough assets (especially human capital endowments) to become entirely indifferent to clientelistic-targeted goods and therefore incur zero opportunity cost when their favorite programmatic party loses to a clientelistic contender.16

**D-3. Cognitive sophistication in the calculation of costs and benefits.** As a cognitive complement to the discount rate and opportunity cost

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16 Banfield and Wilson (1963: 106) came to a similar conclusion about the reasons for the decline of the American urban party machines of the second half of the nineteenth century, “[t]he main reason for the decline and near disappearance of the city-wide machine was – and is – the growing unwillingness of voters to accept the inducements that it offered. The petty favors and ‘friendship’ of the precinct captains declined in value as immigrants were assimilated, public welfare programs were vastly extended, and per capita incomes rose steadily and sharply in postwar prosperity. To the voter who in case of need could turn to a professional social worker and receive as a matter of course unemployment compensation, aid to dependent children, old-age assistance, and all the rest, the precinct captain’s hod of coal was a joke.”
arguments, poor people may have less education and therefore less capacity to understand and trace the lengthy causal process linking policy changes to personal benefits. This may make them ignore or understate the value of large-scale club or collective goods.

D-4. Ethnocultural group salience and the valuation of local club goods. Conventional modernization theory considers ethnocultural divides as endogenous to development (e.g., Gellner 1983). While modernization might reduce ethnic divisions in some instances (Weber 1976), in others it has clearly increased them. Colonial and post-colonial states, for example, have increased them by creating inter-group inequalities and creating new dimensions for comparison and competition within the same multi-ethnic state (Bates 1983; Horowitz 1985; Rudolph and Rudolph 1967). As a countervailing force to the propensity of development to reduce actors’ demand for clientelistic private and local club goods, ethnic divisions thus may boost clientelism even in the face of increasing economic affluence and modernization. Demand side conditions, however, do not tell the whole story. Politicians must be willing and able to mobilize resources and facilities that attract a constituency or may in the first place even create it.

Supply side factors

S-1. Network monitoring: Politicians will invest in clientelistic exchange under conditions of low development because citizens enjoy only limited spatial mobility and are entrapped in rigid, durable social networks increasing predictability and inelasticity of the vote. Programmatic politics takes over when mobility increases and makes the delivery of clientelistic goods unreliable.17 For some stretch along the way to greater affluence, politicians counteract the erosion of their capacities for monitoring/enforcement and predictability of voter behavior by making investments in the organization of partisan machines. Contrary to Sheffer (1978), mass party organization may help, not hinder, clientelistic politics.

S-2. Constraints on acquiring resources to deploy in clientelistic exchange. In affluent societies, votes become exponentially more expensive to purchase, while economies may become increasingly vulnerable to the market

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17 This is not of course to claim that clientelism is incompatible with migration as such. When migrants in the nineteenth century moved from one country to another, clientelistic machines such as New York’s Tweed ring were highly effective at integrating them into their new permanent homes. Immigrants were the source of clientelistic network growth, but only because they settled in ethnic neighborhoods once in the USA, in which dense social networks facilitated clientelistic monitoring activities.
distortions such authoritative resource reassignments to rent-seekers are generating. Building on Lyne’s contribution, one might suggest a Malthusian law of democratic principal–agent linkages: whereas the costliness of clientelistic exchange increases exponentially with development, politicians’ effective acquisition of resources grows only in a linear or asymptotic fashion. The initial response of politicians is to lean more on their asset-rich, but vote-poor clients to surrender private resources. This fuels corruption. Corruption, in turn, may restrain economic growth and indirectly reduce public revenues, generating an unsustainable vicious cycle.

S-3. Strategic dilemmas due to constituency heterogeneity. Relative scarcity of politicians’ asset control and heterogeneity of constituencies with some favoring and others rejecting clientelistic exchange makes it difficult for politicians to maintain coherent parties. They may ultimately cut loose the remaining constituencies seeking clientelistic benefits.

S-4. Ethnocultural divisions facilitate supply of clientelistic linkage under conditions of economic development. The presence of clientelistic markers and of associated networks is relatively resistant to development and enables politicians to sustain clientelistic linkages much longer and at lower cost than in homogeneous societies. Even where networks break down or are less relevant at higher levels of political aggregation – towns, assembly and parliamentary districts, states – where there is more uncertainty about the efficacy of alternative networks to organize clientelistic exchange, risk-averse politicians and electoral constituencies may be more likely to rely on ethnocultural markers. Thus, in Chandra’s chapter in this volume appeals to ethnicity are more successful because voters lack faith that they are being fairly compensated by other ethnic groups at these higher levels of geographical aggregation. Because trust in non-ethnic patronage networks wanes as well, voters and politicians may rally around ethnocultural clientelistic networks. Evidence from Madhya Pradesh (Singh, Gehlot, Start, and Johnson 2003) and New Haven (Johnston 1979: 389) illustrates that in clientelistic networks the patrons consistently overpay co-ethnics.

S-5. Media exposure of clientelistic politics. When large electoral constituencies have anti-clientelistic preference schedules and consider clientelism scandalous, the media will feed on reporting clientelistic practices, particularly where they are expensive and target highly exclusive rent-seeking constituencies. What were established practices of clientelistic political accountability now are framed as variants of cronyism, nepotism, corruption, fraud, and favoritism.

Development-based supply and demand mechanisms do not consider that politicians are immersed in differential competitive contests with
rival parties. Things become more complicated, and clientelism may be sustained at higher levels of development, when certain competitive configurations prevail.

The effect of party competition

Parties make more effort to build principal–agent linkages of accountability whenever “competitiveness” is intense. Whether this competitiveness translates into more clientelistic or more programmatic responsiveness, however, is contingent upon levels of development. Competitiveness is a hard-to-specify concept and the party system literature often associates it in misleading ways with party system fragmentation and volatility.18 We define party systems as competitive when citizens and politicians have strong incentives to try hard to win supporters at the margin for one or the other partisan camp. This is the case, when (1) elections are close between rival blocs of parties identifiable to voters as alternative governing teams ex ante (before elections) and (2) there is a market of uncommitted voters sufficiently large to tip the balance in favor of one or another partisan bloc. But elections must also be relevant from a perspective of resource control by the government. They are competitive only if small changes in electoral support might bring about large shifts in public policy or control of patronage.19 In other words, there must be some programmatic distance between alternative party blocs competing for executive office (“polarization”) and governments must have considerable institutional leverage to shift resources (e.g., among clients). Neither measures of party system fragmentation nor electoral volatility capture this conception of competitiveness well. What matters is the location of floating voters, not the size of the floaters’ market that is revealed by electoral volatility. In a similar vein, not party system fragmentation, but the identifiability of alternative governing blocs is the critical ingredient of competitiveness.

Competitiveness is most intense under oligopolistic conditions when only a very small set of alternative (coalition) governments is feasible and has unimpeded control over the authoritative allocation of public resources. Competition is less in a highly fragmented and fluid party system with multiple coalition opportunities and in a hegemonic party system. It is under conditions of oligopoly that politicians have the greatest

18 For an earlier more sophisticated effort to conceptualize competitiveness, see Strom (1990). More recently, Franklin’s (2004) conceptualization is useful. For an extension of this literature, see Kitschelt (2006).

19 This may entail, for example, the absence of institutional veto players that arises in systems with a division of power between independently elected executives (presidents) and legislatures and in many federalist and bicameralist systems. Cf. Tsebelis (2002).
incentive to reach out to uncommitted voters floating between the rival camps. Politicians will generally make less effort to extend benefits to “captive” segments of their electorate they can be sure will support their own party. Instead, under conditions of scarcity, they will focus their investments on marginal voters who make the difference between electoral victory and defeat.\textsuperscript{20} As competitiveness intensifies, politicians will first target voters whose demands they can combine with those of their core electorate with the least effort in resource expenditure and/or policy concessions, and with comparatively high predictability. In policy terms, this means they will target “leaners” toward their own party rather than “indifferents.”\textsuperscript{21} Only under conditions of extreme competitiveness will politicians feel compelled to target highly uncertain and indifferent electoral prospects. In clientelistic terms, chasing uncertain prospects is likely to dissipate a great deal of resources. Politicians’ expenses may go up exponentially for each additional marginal vote, whereas the cost of programmatic commitments may go up only moderately. Particularly under conditions of high development, where many voters have low regard for clientelistic inducements and thus command a very high price to be bought off, clientelistic linkage may lose its feasibility in the presence of intense competition and an expenditure constraint on politicians.

Consider our rendering of the development/competition interaction as a qualification and extension of what Geddes (1991) discussed as the conditions under which parties abandon administrative patronage – as a specific technique of clientelistic linkage – in favor of professional bureaucracy. On the face of it, her game theoretical set-up suggests that intense, balanced competition between two rival party blocs of almost equal size and probability to win elections induces politicians to abandon clientelism. Upon closer inspection, however, what tips the balance in favor of a competitive race to embrace professionalization is that politicians in at least one party must perceive a small electoral incentive to propose and make salient administrative reform in a tight electoral race in which small shifts of voters may make the difference between winning and losing. We interpret this to imply that demand side preference changes, induced by higher levels of development (resulting in human capital endowments, private sector labor market options, etc.) and a decreasing valuation of clientelistic payoffs among the more affluent, in the fashion introduced by Mona Lyne, drive the switch in office-seeking parties’ linkage strategies. Competition

\textsuperscript{20} For a detailed theoretical logic along these lines, see Lindbeck and Weibull (1987) and Dixit and Londregan (1996). Empirical confirmation can be found in Schady (2000) and Dahlberg and Johansson (2002).

\textsuperscript{21} For the distinction between these types in a model of voting, see Stokes (2003).
is not the unique cause, but the catalyst of such strategic transformations of accountability and responsiveness.  

Politicians’ response to intensifying competitiveness of a party system thus depends on the interaction of socioeconomic development in a polity with patterns of competition. We summarize this pattern in Figure 1.1 (a,b,c). Everywhere intense competitiveness makes politicians pursue less promising bets, subject to budget constraints. But under conditions of low development, this will induce politicians to spend marginally much more on clientelistic politics and only moderate additional amounts on programmatic commitments, starting from a negligible baseline (Figure 1.1a). Given the low cost of marginal voters, politicians may in fact not worry much about the dissipation of direct clientelistic benefits to some voters who end up supporting their competitors. By contrast, under conditions of high development, increasing competitiveness may shift outlays almost entirely in favor of programmatic commitments and may make clientelistic responsiveness all but vanish (Figure 1.1b). In addition to resource constraints, here the intense aversion of many voters to clientelistic targeting, particularly among voters not firmly committed to an existing partisan camp, may compel politicians to give up on clientelistic responsiveness altogether. Under conditions of intermediate development, politicians are likely to engage in “menu diversification” contingent upon the electoral segments and the specific poverty or wealth of the location they are dealing with (Figure 1.1c). At the margin, electoral expenses and commitments in a clientelistic and programmatic fashion may initially go up, as competitiveness increases. Once very intense levels of competitiveness are reached and parties chase highly uncertain prospects among the electorate, they may rely more on intra-party investments in solving problems of social choice and demonstrating sincere commitment to programmatic objectives than additional clientelistic handouts. Nevertheless, clientelism remains an important ingredient in party strategy in many places.

22 Because of the competitive nature of the process, not just one, but all major parties may abandon patronage at once to gain marginal voters and to protect their core constituencies hitherto benefiting from clientelism. In the USA in 1884, for instance, senior civil servants appointed under Republican patronage lobbied to have themselves demoted to lower-paid positions protected under new professional civil service rules, when President Cleveland’s new Democratic administration came in. See “Charm in Civil Service Rules,” New York Times, December 8, 1884.

23 This resolves the at first sight so puzzling practice of candidates who hand out money and gifts to passers-by in public places in a candidate’s electoral district in all but indiscriminant fashion.
Figure 1.1a Policy mix at low levels of economic development

Figure 1.1b Policy mix at high levels of economic development
A critical question is whether competitiveness is endogenous to linkage strategies. For example, does the existence of clientelistic politics keep clients dependent on their patrons and prevent political defection to a competitor because that competitor has little credibility to deliver the benefits guaranteed by the long-term incumbent? There is no doubt that asymmetrical relations exist in which only one party ever controls the assets of government and has additional access to private resources from wealthy, but vote-poor supporters. At the same time, the existence of highly competitive clientelistic polities with regular alternation in governing parties and intense efforts by the contenders to supply goods and to make credible their ability to supply such goods makes the endogeneity argument unlikely. From Bangladesh to Jamaica, clientelistic politics has operated through party competition. Especially among poor countries, competition enhances clientelism. Because competition intensifies ethnocultural mobilization (Wilkinson 2004), and ethnic groups promote clientelism, politicians will move to employ every imaginable strategy of attracting constituencies, subject to a general budget constraint. Within this envelope, ethnocultural mobilization
induces a net increase in clientelistic patronage, amplified by democratic competition.

This point is impressively driven home by Carl Stone’s (1986) and Obika Gray’s (2004) splendid political-anthropological fieldwork on the power of the urban poor in the intensely competitive Jamaican partisan polity. Competition allows the urban underclass and its criminal elements to extract substantial rents from rival politicians who organize conflicting clientelistic networks. In a similar vein, municipal leaders of the urban poor in Brazil “auctioned off” the votes of their communities to the highest bidders in the electoral contest, taking pre-election tangible benefits and credibility of post-election promises into account (Gay 1994: 101–14). Multiparty competition and clientelism are also closely intertwined in Ecuador (Burgwal 1995).

How is it possible that hegemonic clientelistic systems become competitive? One path is that clientelism emerges only after democratization already in a competitive situation in which two or more parties have built up reputations to govern and deliver benefits to their constituencies before clientelism becomes a major currency of linkage building. Another path is that a clientelistic hegemonic ruling party stays in power after full democratization, but then decays both in terms of its capacity to attract private assets from wealthy supporters as well as to deliver spoils of government, for example when a country’s economy faces hard times. In that instance, opposition parties with clientelistic aspirations may take over, or the clientelistic incumbent may be displaced by parties relying on different linkage strategies. In fact, very wealthy business owners, if sufficiently antagonized and disgruntled by the governance of the hegemonic party, may bring to bear their own resources on the construction of a new party that prolongs clientelistic linkage building.

Under conditions of democratic contestation also ethnocultural pluralism may be a powerful catalyst of intensifying clientelism, as competition between parties appealing to different ethnic segments heats up. The fiercer the competition, the more ethnic politics may rely on clientelistic bonds. As support of an ethnocultural group becomes decisive for a band of politicians to govern, they tend to offer increasing amounts of targeted clientelistic favors to assemble a winning electoral coalition. This may be one of the mechanisms that accounts for what Horowitz (1985: 306–11, 334–40) observes as an empirical reality, namely that in most polities the rise of ethnic parties drives out other non-ethnic divides based on economic class or sector. Politicians simply cannot make credible commitments to universalism in an ethnically complex polity in which some ethnic groups begin to organize in an exclusive fashion. All state assets, including the bureaucracy, instead of being
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seen as neutral vehicles of programmatic policy implementation, are
instead perceived as deeply partisan toward one ethnic group rather than
another.

The critical ingredient to bring about this dynamic of “deepen-
ing” clientelism under conditions of intensifying inter-ethnic party
competition may not be necessarily the existence of ethnic markers, but
the presence of dense organizational networks configured around particular
interpretations of ethnicity. Even though ethnocultural markers may gener-
ate particularly strong social networks, as Chandra argues in her contribu-
tion, sometimes class, sector, or regional organizations may achieve equiv-
alent levels of network properties. Krishna in his contribution therefore
emphasizes the role of cross-caste village networks led by educated “new
leaders” in wrestling power away from traditional village-based landed
elites in India.

Nevertheless, ethnicity may be a particularly powerful bond of net-
work construction and political organization promoting clientelistic link-
age building. It is therefore not by accident that most of the established
affluent democratic polities with “pacified” ethnocultural divides that
Lijphart (1977) refers to as “consociational” polities tend to have been
heavily clientelistic, even though not all clientelistic democracies are plu-
ral in ethnocultural terms.24 The close link between clientelism and eth-
ocultural divides applies to Austria and Belgium, and used to charac-
terize the Netherlands, where since the early 1960s cultural pillarization
decayed in tandem with a clientelistic carving up of the state. The decline
of ethnocultural divides in all three countries, in fact, may be related to
the increasing political-economic difficulties these countries encountered
in satisfying clientelistic claims.25 Political-economic difficulties, in turn,
boosted the salience of non-cultural divides. We will return to political-
economic constraints on linkage formation shortly.

The pursuit of alternative strategies of principal–agent accountability
and responsiveness at different levels of development in interaction with
different modes of competition is prominently represented in many con-
tributions to our volume. Medina’s and Stokes’s chapter characterizes
clientelistic partisan strategies under low competition and low to inter-
mediate development in general conceptual terms. Krishna and Wilkinson
demonstrate with data and narratives from India that competition and

24 Consider Ireland, Italy, and Japan itself.
25 In the Netherlands, the “Dutch disease” of dependence on natural resource rents (gas)
already triggered this crisis of clientelism in the 1960s, whereas in Austria and Belgium
the erosion of clientelistic politics had to await the crisis of the heavy industry in the
1970s and 1980s.
clientelism go hand-in-hand in comparatively poor countries. Nevertheless, this does not lead us to deny that under conditions of single party hegemony, clientelism may flourish and persist in the manner analyzed by Medina and Stokes. This configuration just does not compel politicians to disburse as much in resources to their clients as does a highly competitive partisan contest.

Contributions to this volume examining polities with diverse, and on average intermediate development, powerfully demonstrate the logic of portfolio diversification between clientelistic and programmatic linkage strategies and the progressively greater propensity to support programmatic linkages, where competition creates uncertainty and interacts with intermediate levels of development. Portfolio diversification prompted by locally varied competitive configurations and popular demand profiles induced by differential levels of development are the main themes of Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, and Estévez studying Mexico, Levitsky analyzing Argentina in comparative perspective, and Hale examining the regional politics of national and sub-national electoral contests in Russia. Levitsky shows how the Argentinean Peronists paid off poor communities with clientelistic compensation, while targeting the urban middle classes with the national programmatic policy objectives of economic liberalization. In Mexico, while sub-national levels of development almost invariably correlate with more programmatic and less clientelistic politics, competition and what Magaloni et al. conceptualize as “electoral risk” can actually be positively related to clientelism at comparatively weak or intermediate levels of development. In a similar vein, Hale detects a net effect of local competitive structures on clientelism in Russia’s regions, holding constant for indicators of economic development and industrial structure.

Under conditions of high development, finally, clientelism can hold on as long as hegemonic parties or party alliances – in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, or Japan – remain more or less unchallenged and control a political economy penetrated by partisan politics (see below). Societal change of preferences and performance problems in the politicized economy often contribute to an intensifying competitiveness in the party system that translates into a partial or complete erosion of clientelistic linkage mechanisms, as Scheiner shows for Japan, and Kitschelt develops for a more inclusive comparison of advanced post-industrial economies and polities. In these polities, increasing competitiveness makes clientelism prohibitively expensive just at the same time as political-economic difficulties constrain the clientelistic largesse of the governing parties in any case.
THE LOGIC OF CLIENTELISM IN ARGENTINA:
An Ethnographic Account*

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Abstract: Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a shantytown in the outskirts of Buenos Aires, this article studies the workings of Peronist "political clientelism" among the urban poor. It analyzes the web of relations that some slum-dwellers establish with local political brokers to obtain medicine, food, and solutions to other everyday concerns. The article also explores the main functions of the "problem-solving networks," which are resource control and information hoarding, and pays particular attention to an underexplored dimension of the operation of clientelism: clients' own views on the network.

Thirty-four-year old Norma lives in a slum in the city of Cóspito, in the Conurbano Bonaerense.1 She has no stable job, and her husband has recently lost his as a construction worker. They have a handicapped baby girl and a teenage boy who dropped out of the neighborhood public high school. In September 1996, they opened a grocery store in the front part of their house. Norma told me in our interview, "You know, things were not working very well, so I decided to open an unidad básica (a grassroots office of the Peronist party) and see what happens!" Their decision coincided with the ascending career of Gustavo Pedele, a Peronist councilman trying to make inroads into the slum to launch his 1998 mayoral campaign. Pedele...

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1. The Conurbano Bonaerense is the area comprising the nineteen districts in the Argentine industrial heartland surrounding the Federal Capital of the country. Names of locations and persons have been changed to ensure anonymity.
now pays Norma’s utility bills and provides her family with small amounts of cash. Norma is now Pedele’s broker (his puntera) and Pedele is Norma’s political patron (her referente).

Every week, Norma’s unidad básica (UB) distributes powdered milk from the Programa Materno-Infantil (a nutritional program funded by the national welfare ministry) and food from the local municipality to more than fifty slum-dwellers. Norma explained, “Every month, at the party meetings, the mayor informs us [the brokers of the 140 UBs who usually attend the meeting] of the date when they are going to give out food at the municipality. . . . We tell the neighbors.” Because Norma is “just starting with this party thing,” her access to state resources is for the time being restricted.

But Norma admitted that she “compensates” for this limited access “with other things,” such as organizing short trips for the slum-dwellers and other recreational activities. Councilman Pedele provides her with a bus or two and with bread and meat sausages. Once a month, she takes approximately thirty children from the slum to a nearby beach resort or a park. “They are really happy,” she told me. I replied, “They surely are, but isn’t it a lot of work, to get the buses and the food and to take care of the kids?” Norma responded confidently, “It’s not so difficult to obtain goods. You have to know how to pull the right strings, knock at the right door. The most important thing is to know the right person.” For the present, Norma knows the right person, and if Councilman Pedele advances in the local political field, she will surely obtain access to more resources. If she is able to “mobilize people” for her political patron (mobilization means attending Peronist rallies and voting in internal elections), she will have more goods and more information. What happened to her awhile back would not occur again: “You know . . . , I missed the Plan Vida [food distribution program], but I have the Programa Materno.”

2. The Plan Vida (Life Plan) was inspired by the Chilean Plan de Alimentación Complementaria and the functioning of the Cuban Comités de Defensa de la Revolución. The Plan Vida is the largest food-distribution program currently operated by the government of the Provincia de Buenos Aires. As a pet project of the governor’s wife (“Chiche” Duhalde), it was launched first in one of the poorest districts of the Conurbano Bonaerense in November 1994. According to official figures released in November 1996, the Plan Vida reaches thirty-eight districts in Buenos Aires that contain 644 poor neighborhoods and slums. The program is funded by state resources from the Consejo Provincial de la Familia y Desarrollo Humano, which is presided over by “Chiche” Duhalde. She is also the president of the Rama Feminina (Women’s Branch) of the Peronist party. The Plan Vida distributes milk, cereal, and eggs to almost half a million preschool children and to pregnant women. They live in neighborhoods that the official “Mapa de la Pobreza” defined as areas with “unmet basic needs.” The daily distribution of milk and the weekly distribution of cereal and eggs are carried out by “block delegates,” who are known as manzaneras (blocks in Buenos Aires are called manzanas). The manzaneras receive no monetary remuneration for their work except a half-liter of milk per day and the weekly allowance of eggs and cereals allotted to all beneficiaries of the program.
During the summer of 1989, Norma attended the launching of President Carlos Menem’s electoral campaign in Mar del Plata, the main beach resort in Buenos Aires. That was the first time that Norma saw the ocean: “It’s so nice.” The Partido Justicialista (the Peronist party) paid for her bus fare, and she stayed at the Transport Union’s hotel where, Norma related, “we even had hot water.”

Norma’s story is a typical example of the workings of Peronist political clientelism in contemporary Argentina. In contexts of extreme material deprivation and sociocultural destitution, la red peronista operates as a problem-solving network that institutes a web of material and symbolic resource distribution. It functions as a source of goods and services, a safety net protecting against the risks of everyday life, one of the few remaining paths of social mobility, and a solidaristic community that stands in opposition to the hardship and exclusion visited on those living in poor and destitute areas. This net concentrates (monopolizes) information and depends to a great extent on state resources. My goal in this article is to provide an empirical description of the relevance of the Peronist problem-solving network within enclaves of urban poverty in Buenos Aires and to analyze its forms, functions, tensions, and resources.

“Political clientelism” has been defined as “the distribution of resources (or promise of) by political office holders or political candidates in exchange for political support, primarily—although not exclusively—in the form of the vote” (Gay 1990, 648). Such clientelism has been a recurrent theme in studying the links between the poor masses and political elites in Latin America (De la Torre 1992; Stein 1980; Menéndez Carrión 1986) and in analyzing the shortcomings of democratic institutions (O’Donnell 1996a; Fox 1994; Gunther, Diamondouros, and Puhle 1996). Clientelism has been examined as one of the possible relationships between political parties and organized popular groups, with a focus on the efforts made by popular organized groups to “bypass traditional mechanisms of political co-option” (Cardoso 1992, 292; see also Escobar 1994; Vélez-Ibáñez 1983). Political clientelism has also been examined as a form of atomization and fragmentation of the electorate or “the popular sector” (Rock 1975; O’Donnell 1992).

Specialists on Latin America and students of political processes in Argentina are familiar with the stereotypical images of a “captive clientelist electorate” conveyed by the mass media. This phenomenon has been depicted with more subtlety by novelists, as in Beatriz Guido’s well-known description of a political boss in the Argentina of the 1930s in Fin de fiesta or the more recent oblique portrayal of the life of a Mexican cacique in

3. Gerrit Burgwald’s ethnographic analysis of clientelist networks in a squatter settlement in Quito, Ecuador, showed that fragmentation and atomization do not inevitably result in cases of “collective clientelism” (Burgwald 1996).
Angeles Mastretta’s *Arráncame la vida*. Clientelist politics have also been portrayed by quasi insiders, like Alcides Greca in the little-known but outstanding *Cuentos del Comité*.

Despite such attention, the actual operation of clientelism at the grassroots levels remains largely unexplored in Argentina. To date, understanding of the workings of this “relationship based on political subordination in exchange for material rewards” (Fox 1994, 153) has been derived more from popular imagery than from serious research. No strong evidence exists of a quid pro quo exchange. Is it possible to detect empirically the exchange of “*favores por votos*” that much of the literature on clientelism takes for granted? How do researchers know that votes and loyalty come as a result of goods and services? The case analyzed here is Peronism, a social and political movement that has been in and out of state power for the last fifty years, has been a major political actor in Argentina, and has generated resilient sociopolitical identities among popular groups. In this case, the question is more problematic still. Can analysts single out an occasion on which clients voted for a given patron because of the favors performed by him or her, and not because of their general loyalty to or identification with Peronism?

Political clientelism is undoubtedly a form of social and political control (Fox 1994; Bodeman 1988; Mouzelis 1985; Guasti 1977) as well as a form of cultural domination (Schepers-Hughes 1992; see also Scott 1977). But to understand how clientelism takes form and reproduces over time, analysts must examine its sociocultural logic and its intricate mechanisms. A necessary first step in a rigorous sociology of clientelism is to resist resorting to the prefabricated and stigmatizing images of the exchange of votes for favors. Clientelism must be approached through its least known and least spectacular side: the everyday dealings of political brokers, the practices and perspectives of so-called clients, and the problem-solving network that links “clients,” brokers, and political patrons.

The larger aims of this article are to contribute to the growing body of research on contemporary forms of political clientelism (Gay 1994, 1995; Burgwald 1996; Escobar 1994, 1997; Shefner 1997; Fox 1994; Vélez-Ibáñez 1983) and to shed light on the convergence of Peronism and clientelist politics. The unidades básicas are the sites of this convergence in providing its most crucial organizational support. Curiously enough, these institutions of popular life have been neglected in most studies of contemporary Peronism. The constricting view of political action that permeates much of the understanding of politics in Argentina has consistently overlooked this unspectacular and somehow hidden realm. None of the most cited studies of contemporary Peronism (or *menemismo*) have conducted primary field re-

4. For a review of the literary representations of brokers, caciques, and other manifestations of bossism in Latin American literature, see Nason (1973).
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search in the areas of highest support for Peronism, the places where poor people live. As a result, most of the studies are still dominated by the top-down view that permeated much of the research on the transitions to democracy. Given the state-centered orientation of current political studies being done on and in Argentina, it is no surprise that everyday forms of clientelist problem solving are habitually overlooked. This article constitutes a first attempt to redress this one-sided perspective.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this article centers on the relationship between brokers of the Peronist party and slum-dwellers in Villa Paraiso. The slum is located in the city of Cóspito, in the southern part of the Conurbano Bonaerense bordering the Federal Capital of Argentina. Villa Paraiso is one of the oldest and largest slums in Buenos Aires, with some fifteen thousand inhabitants according to the last population census (INDEC 1993a). The article draws on materials gathered during a year of fieldwork in the slum, in the unidades básicas there, and in the Secretaría de Acción Social of the municipality of Cóspito. Although the focus centers on five political brokers in one slum, I am confident that the validity of the analyses extends beyond the monograph. Recent research undertaken by other scholars (Levitsky 1996, 1997) confirms the findings reported here.

Fieldwork was carried out from December 1995 to February 1996 and from July 1996 to January 1997. It was based on participant observation in Villa Paraíso. I participated in many rallies of the Peronist party, attended party meetings, and interviewed local brokers, party activists, public officials, social workers, and community activists. I conducted more than forty in-depth interviews, collected fifteen life stories from residents of Villa Paraíso, and took a survey based on a stratified random sample of three hundred cases. The survey, interviews, and life stories focused on various aspects of individual and collective problem solving. Finally, I interviewed all the block delegates of the largest state-funded food-distribution program operating in Villa Paraíso, the Plan Vida. This article also draws on secondary resources such as statistical data provided by the Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censo (INDEC) and my reading a year’s issues (for 1996) of La Unión, the main local newspaper of the south of the Conurbano Bonaerense.

5. See, for example, Borón et al. (1995), Palermo and Novaro (1996), and Sidicaro and Mayer (1995). For a sympathetic view, see Muncck (1997). For an exception, see Martuccelli and Svampa (1997). Although “electoral volatility” has increased during the 1990s, according to Levitsky, “such ‘de-freezing’ has occurred almost exclusively on the anti-Peronist side of the Peronist-anti-Peronist cleavage. . . . [T]he Peronist electorate, both in terms of its size and its composition, has remained relatively stable” (Levitsky 1997, 4). A majority of the Argentine poor continue to vote Peronist.

6. As Tilly perceptively noted, many of the theories of democratization have given little place to popular collective action and have accentuated instead “instrumental maneuvers and bargains among elites” (1994, 4).
First, I will provide a few empirical indicators to assess the exclusion and hardship faced by the inhabitants of Villa Paraíso and describe the process of increasing overlap of informal networks of survival and political networks in the slum. Then I will analyze the Peronist problem-solving network in the slum, the web of relations that some neighbors establish with local political brokers to obtain food, medicine, and solutions to other everyday concerns.

The second part of the article illustrates the two main functions of the problem-solving network in Villa Paraíso: resource control and information hoarding. Both practices have helped make the Peronist network a domination network. The third part of the article focuses on the clients' perceptions of the network and outlines for future research central elements in the everyday construction of the legitimacy of clientelism.

This analysis of the social logic of clientelism will present the reader with a paradox. At a time when public discourse is dominated by neoliberal rhetoric that stresses the salutary retreat of the state from markets, my article will illustrate one of the ways in which politics (and personal ties) are increasingly important for gaining access to resources. In fact, a strong functionalist argument can be made out of this paradox: clientelist networks are important precisely because they fulfill the functions that the state is abandoning.

SURVIVING IN THE SLUM: HYPER-UNEMPLOYMENT

Widespread material deprivation, persistent joblessness and misery, and unmerciful economic pressure in the working-class neighborhoods and slums of Argentina have been caused by a combination of factors: the languishing of the wage-labor economy; the casualization of blue-collar jobs (Cieza and Beyreuther 1996; CEB 1995; Lozano and Feletti 1996; Murmis and Feldman 1996; Beccaria and López 1996); and the particular combination of malign and benign state neglect provoked by structural adjustment policies (Golbert 1996; Lo Vuolo and Barbeito 1993; Cetrángolo and Golbert 1995; Prévot Schapira 1996; Lloyd-Sherlock 1997). Widespread unemployment is the most significant defining characteristic of Villa Paraíso. Sixty percent of its economically active population are currently unemployed and underemployed, 50 percent have unmet basic needs, and about 70 percent have incomes below the official poverty line.

7. This paradox was highlighted in the comments of one anonymous LARR reviewer.
8. Robert Merton made the same argument in his pathbreaking analysis of U.S. political machines (Merton 1949).
9. The data come from INDEC (1993a, 1993b) and from my survey based on a stratified random sample (three hundred cases), carried out in September and October in Villa Paraíso.
In this context of outright deproletarianization, how do neighbors with little or no income and no pension or other benefits manage to obtain the means of subsistence: food and medicine? Are there any institutions or persons within the slum to whom they can turn to obtain help? What contacts do they establish to obtain these means of subsistence? Who has contacts with whom?

It is hardly news that networks of reciprocal help abound in poor neighborhoods in Argentina and throughout Latin America. Enzo Mingione coined the term popular economy, by which he means “the combination of activities undertaken for direct subsistence and for low monetary income” (Mingione 1991, 87). In Villa Paraíso, these activities include raising animals, operating food stalls, undertaking self-help repairs and buildings, and industrial home-working in subcontracting chains. Family and neighborhood networks “have always made it possible for these various activities to coagulate into a poor but socially protected way of life” (Mingione 1991, 87). Larissa Lomnitz showed in her study of a Mexican shantytown that social networks based on residence and kinship function as a surrogate system of social security for individual survival among the residents (1975, 1988). What Friedman and Salguero called “proximate networks of reciprocity with neighbors and kin” (1988, 11) are thus well-studied elements in understanding how individuals confront the challenge of survival and the kinds of relations they establish in the process. Those informal networks have been thoroughly examined in Latin America, often as the source of the survival strategies developed by the urban and rural poor (Lomnitz 1975, 1988; Hintze 1989). Political networks have also been studied in Latin America and all over the world (Conniff 1981; Burgwald 1996; Kornblum 1974; Guterbock 1987; Katznelson 1981; Knoke 1990). But the relationships between informal networks of reciprocal help and political networks have been underexplored.

In Villa Paraíso and many other poor neighborhoods in the Conurbano Bonaerense, informal networks of survival and political networks increasingly overlap. There the unidades básicas, political brokers, and state-funded programs have become the sources of resources that circulate in the informal networks of survival. The withering away of paid formal and informal work (most of those currently unemployed had lost their jobs dur-

10. The rate of unemployment in the Conurbano in 1995 was 22.6 of the economically active population (843,840 persons). Unemployment and underemployment amounted to 33.8 percent of the population. In the 1990s, the Conurbano Bonaerense lost 5,508 industrial plants; and between 1991 and 1995, the manufacturing industry eliminated 200,000 jobs (CEB 1995; Lozano and Feletti 1996). Due to the strong correlation between unemployment and poverty (Murnis and Feldman 1993), poverty and inequality have accompanied this growth in unemployment. In 1980, 11.5 percent of the households lived below “the poverty line” in Greater Buenos Aires. In 1994, 20.4 percent of the households were below the line, and in 1995, 25.8 fell into this category (Golbert 1996).
ing the previous two years and had not been able to find new ones) has drained the slum economy, causing informal reciprocal networks to bleed to death. The formerly employed, once able to support their relatives, friends, or kin who were temporarily jobless, are now unemployed themselves. Slum-dwellers resort to the local state or the nearest Peronist committee or broker (which almost amounts to the same thing) to obtain food or medicine. In other words, Villa Paraíso survival strategies are increasingly embedded in political networks.¹¹

The expanding relevance of political networks does not mean that networks of reciprocal help have disappeared, however. In Villa Paraíso, these proximate networks remain central in the survival strategies of the slum-dwellers. Twenty-three percent of those consulted in a survey based on a stratified random sample of three hundred cases mentioned their relatives as sources of help when they need medicine. Thirty percent of those interviewed relied on kin and friends whenever they ran short of food. Thus reciprocal favors abound in the slum economy, much as they do in other poor neighborhoods across the Americas (Stack 1974; Edin and Lein 1997; Lomnitz 1975). But with the escalation of unemployment and underemployment and the generalized reduction of income, these networks are being progressively emptied of their resources. The avenues that formerly linked the slum economy to outside wage work are now disrupted, and the money that used to come into the slum as the lifeblood of those reciprocal networks has become a trickle. When rejection from the labor market ceases to be temporary and income reduction affects every job that the unskilled residents of Villa Paraíso can obtain,¹² the social economy of the slum loses its traditional function as a buffer that helps cushion the impacts of economic hardship.

Forty percent of the slum population receive food for themselves or their children from one or more state-funded assistance programs serving Villa Paraíso. These programs distribute milk, eggs, noodles, and cereals from the Plan Vida; powdered milk from the Programa Materno-Infantil; noodles, corn oil, polenta, yerba mate, lentils, and the like from the Plan Asoma; and cheese, vegetables, noodles, corn oil, polenta, and several other products from the Plan Pro-Bienestar. In addition, some residents

¹¹. My usage of political networks follows Knoke (1990) and Granovetter (1973): a set of regular contacts or similar social connections among individuals or groups in which at least one of those is a member of a political party or an official of the state. Survival strategies are thus embedded in a political problem-solving network because they are expressed in the interactions between party agents or local officials and slum-dwellers.

¹². Jobs in domestic service and the construction sector were the predominant occupations among women and men in the slum. Workers in these sectors have been particularly hurt by what Kessler (1996) called "the epidemic disease" of hyper-unemployment. These two categories represent 13.9 percent of the employed population in Buenos Aires and 19.8 of the unemployed (Murmis and Feldman 1996).
go to the municipal building, where twice a month the Secretaría de Acción Social distributes eight items of food per person (sugar, rice, flour, noodles, polenta, lentils, corn oil, and yerba mate). Nearly half the population of Villa Paraiso (46 percent) know about this food distribution carried out in the municipal building. Thirty percent of those have gone to obtain the “nine kilos” at least once during the last year. For medicine, almost a third of the residents of Villa Paraiso rely on relatives (31 percent). Those who are employed (30 percent) rely on their obra social (social security related to their formal job). Others resort to the municipality, the local public health center (28 percent), or a Peronist grassroots committee or Peronist broker (11 percent).

Evidence of the dramatic deterioration in living conditions of the slum population is the opening of a soup kitchen by the Catholic Church. Nearly ninety children and women now eat their lunch there every weekday. It is important to note, however, that this soup kitchen is funded mostly by the welfare department of the municipality, where many local Peronist brokers work. Caritas, the charity organization of the Catholic Church, is also multiplying its activities. Every month, Caritas assists about a hundred families with food and clothes, and it also sells donated clothes at low prices. Mariano, the local priest, and Nora, the woman in charge of Caritas, agreed that during the previous year, demand for food and medicine had substantially increased. Mariano commented, “In Caritas, we used to help some families for limited periods of time, let’s say for three months until they were able to resolve the difficult situation in which they found themselves, as when they were laid off. But now we don’t stop helping them, and there are more people coming, and we are overwhelmed.”

Although Mariano and Nora did not fully acknowledge their increasing dependence on state resources, they admitted that their own resources are decreasing. Both conceded that the Catholic Church is not keeping pace with the increasing demand for aid, and they point to the local Peronist grassroots committees (UBs) as the source of possible solutions for the extreme scarcity endured by the slum-dwellers.

In Villa Paraiso, as in many poor neighborhoods in the Conurbano Bonaerense, one of the most reliable means of satisfying the poor’s basic needs for food and health care is through the political party that has direct access to the state’s resources—the Peronist party. As Levitsky observed, this party “is deeply entrenched at the base level. . . . Peronism is linked to its mass base through trade unions, neighborhood associations, and soccer

13. At the national level, Caritas is also enlarging its activities rapidly. According to the director, Monseñor Rafael Rey, the number of children fed by Caritas in its soup kitchen has soared from fifty thousand in 1993 to four hundred thousand in 1996. See Clarín Digital, 19 Nov. 1996.
clubs. The party is also linked to working- and lower-class society by means of clientelistic ties to local and neighborhood bosses, who serve as brokers between the municipal and provincial Peronist governments and the mass base” (Levitsky 1996, 20).

In poverty-stricken neighborhoods, squatter settlements, and slums, the unidades básicas constitute a key place where basic needs can be met, through which basic problems can be solved. These UBs provide incredible organizational strength for the Peronist party (Levitsky 1998) and are the sites where Peronist brokers operate.

**BROKERS AND THEIR NETWORKS**

Villa Paraiso counts five Peronist brokers (known as punteros): Matilde, Juan, Cholo, Andrea, and Norma. Brokers usually do favors such as distributing food and medicine for their potential voters and others.\(^\text{14}\) They are not alone in their work, however, because they almost always have an inner circle of followers. A broker is related to the members of his or her inner circle through strong ties of long-lasting friendship, parentage, or fictive kinship. Both Matilde and Juan (the two most powerful local leaders) maintain this kind of effective network around them, individuals with whom they interact regularly and intensely.

Matilde has a circle of men and women who visit her on a weekly basis. For example, forty-five-year-old Lucia used to be Matilde’s cleaning lady. Two years ago, Lucia had a stroke, and Matilde (then the Secretaría de Acción Social de Cóspito), obtained a pension of 110 dollars a month for her. Lucia now receives daily medicine for her high blood pressure from Matilde. She spends almost every afternoon at the neighborhood’s Centro Cultural (where Matilde’s son Paco serves as the president), in the front part of Matilde’s house, a half-block from the UB. There Lucia makes puppets that the Cultural Center sells or gives away on special occasions among the children of the slum. Adolfo (Matilde’s husband and the Under-Secretary of Public Works) got Lucia’s husband a job at the municipality.

Lucia and her comadre Antonia fashion puppets with a sewing machine belonging to the Plan País. Launched almost ten years ago, this state-funded program is intended “to strengthen community organization” in poor neighborhoods through the subsidized development of productive micro-enterprises. In Cóspito the brokers captured part of the funds of the program, thus acquiring an extra source for their inner circles. Matilde obtained one of the subsidies and organized a group of women to work with (and for) her at the Cultural Center. Lucia considers herself a friend of

\(^{14}\) An extensive classical literature exists on the role of brokers as central articulating figures in the operation of clientelist systems. See the seminal analyses of Eric Wolf (1977), Sydel Silverman (1977), and John Duncan Powell (1977).
Matilde: “She always lends you a hand.” Lucia has known Matilde since 1984 and is a manzanera (block delegate) of the state-funded Plan Vida. Matilde also provides her with food.

Brigitte has taken Lucia’s place as Matilde’s cleaning lady. She is also the secretary of the Cultural Center, where she distributes the medicine and food packages that Matilde brings from the municipality. Brigitte is also a manzanera of the Plan Vida.15 Her grandmother recently suffered a heart attack, and Matilde provides her with part of the extremely expensive but vital medicine. Brigitte’s mother told me that she hoped that Matilde would soon get a job at the municipality for her daughter. The hope of a job serves as important glue within the inner circle. Although not everyone is employed at the municipality, the fact that someone gets a fixed-term contract or a part-time job has an important demonstration effect. If the others in the circle are diligent and “know how to wait” (saber esperar, according to Brigitte), sooner or later they will be rewarded with posts. Alfonsina, a member of Juan’s inner circle, got her job as a cleaning woman at a public school through his intervention. She told me in our interview: “When there is a rally, we (the people of the party) collaborate in any way possible. . . So maybe you can get a job there, but you have to be patient. . . Yes, I was patient, and with patience I got it. . . .”

Matilde’s circle has other circles within it, like Cholo’s network. Cholo explained that he “works for Matilde. . . . She coordinates what I have to do. . . .” Matilde provides Cholo’s UB with food packages and medicines to distribute among “his people” in another area of the slum. Matilde is his referente, his political patron. Cholo is what Argentines call a nioqui, a party activist who collects a paycheck as a ghost employee at the municipality of Cospito. He holds a fixed-term contract job that must be renewed every three months with the approval of Matilde. She also provided him with pipes to build the sewage system in “his area.”

Cholo reported, “When I started working with Matilde, she told me that the UB should be open every day of the year.” Matilde gave him a key resource to start. Through her contacts at the municipality, she managed to install the first public pay phone in the area in his UB. Residents go to Cholo’s UB to use the phone, to get powdered milk from the Programa Materno-Infantil, or to ask for some antibiotic or pain reliever.

Cholo is what Matilde terms “a key component of the group.” He is known in the area near his UB and has been praised by some as the one who has done the most to improve the slum. Cholo also works for the Plan Vida. Every morning (except Sundays), Cholo accompanies the Plan Vida’s

15. See note 2. Although officials constantly emphasize “the political impartiality” of the Plan Vida and the fact that the manzaneras emerge “naturally” from the community, twenty out of twenty-three manzaneras in Villa Paraiso were recruited by a Peronist party broker. Most meetings of the program were held at Matilde’s UB.
truck on its route through the slum and other poor neighborhoods of the area adjacent to Villa Paraiso. He and two other men distribute the milk, cereal, and eggs to the block delegates of the Plan Vida. He spreads news about the plan (such as a forthcoming rally to launch the program in which the governor or the governor’s wife will be present). Cholo also distributes the program’s newspaper and provides news related to the Peronist party (the time of the meeting for a rally, an invitation to a barbecue, el asado peronista). Cholo reports any problem a manzanera might have (a new member of the program, a dropout, a complaint about a shortage of food) to Mimi, Matilde’s daughter-in-law, who is the area coordinator of the program. For doing this job, he earns fifty pesos a week.16

In structural terms, Juan Pisutti’s inner circle is identical to Matilde’s. Yet the number of persons who have close relationships with Juan is smaller, making his inner circle smaller. His family does not participate in his activities as Matilde’s family does in hers. Alfonsina got her job at a public school through the intervention of Pisutti, Rosa receives medicine for her hemoplegy from him, and Carlitos gets packages of food through Juan’s timely mediation. As in Matilde’s inner circle, these problem holders provide problem solvers like Juan Pisutti with some services in return. The inner circle helps the broker to solve the everyday problems of slum-dwellers. They run the soup kitchens at the broker’s unidad básica and are normally in charge of opening, cleaning, and maintaining the locale. Members of the inner circle usually announce when the broker will be available at the UB to the outer circle and spread the news when food is being distributed at the UB or the municipal building. Unlike Matilde, Juan Pisutti does not have another UB working for him. His area of influence is much more limited than Matilde’s, covering only the four blocks that surround his UB.

Members of the outer circle (the potential beneficiaries of the brokers’ distributive capacities) are related to brokers by weak ties.17 They contact the broker when problems arise or when a special favor is needed (a food package, some medicine, a driver’s license, the water truck, a friend in jail). But those in the outer circle do not develop ties of friendship or fictive kinship with brokers. Although they may attend some rallies or gatherings

16. Matilde’s nuclear and extended families participate fully in her political activities. Her two daughters-in-law are the regional coordinators of the largest food-distribution program in the area. Her husband is the Under-Secretary of Public Works in the municipality of Cósptito. One of her sons is the president of the neighborhood cultural center (which effectively operates as another UB), and her other son serves as her husband’s private secretary at the municipality. In Peronist politics, this pattern is a common phenomenon. Further research is needed on the overlap between family kinship and political networks—and the prominent, although subordinated, role of women within them.

17. On the difference between strong and weak ties (in terms of the time, intimacy, and emotional intensity involved in the relationships), see Granovetter (1973).
organized by the broker or even vote for him or her in an internal election, they do not have an everyday intimate relationship with the broker. While the brokers' ties to their inner circles are dense and intense, their ties to the outer circles are more sparse and intermittent.

The bases for this strong relationship are multiple. Those who are part of the brokers' inner circle have known their brokers for a long time (usually more than four or five years), and the brokers have "lent them a hand" in a time of extreme hardship. In the life stories and interviews I recorded, most members of an inner circle highlighted a foundational favor that inaugurated this long-lasting and "very useful" relationship. Brokers are portrayed as "coming to rescue" them without ulterior motives. That foundational favor establishes a relationship of mutual help. The foundational transactions cluster into ties, which in turn concatenate into networks.

Domination Networks: Controlling Resources and Information

One standard English-Spanish dictionary defines network as red, malla, retículo. Red, in turn, has several meanings in English. The first is "net, particularly for fishing and fowling," but another meaning given is "snare."18

Problem-solving networks are neither frozen timeless structures nor the intended outcome of a politician's calculated or cynical action. They result from long-term regular interactions that, although usually inaugurated by a founding favor, must be continuously cultivated and practiced. Much like a university professor in the United States, Juan Pisutti holds his office hours at the UB twice a week. He spends most Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings assisting the stream of persons who show up at his UB. His inner circle is usually there, preparing mate, distributing powdered milk, catching up on recent news. Juancito takes time to listen to every dweller who comes to his UB. Although most come to ask him for something that is out of his reach (like jobs), he gives them some kind of useful information: a tip for finding food at the municipality, or the precise date when food will be distributed at the municipal building and how to proceed to obtain the "nine kilos of merchandise." Juan also uses his contacts at the local public hospital or his own health insurance to obtain medicine in an emergency.

Within the Peronist problem-solving network, Peronist brokers function as gatekeepers, acting as go-betweens between the flow of goods and services coming from the executive branch of the municipal power (the mayor) and the flow of support and votes coming from the clients. As in many other historical and geographical settings, gatekeeping is the most important function of Peronist brokers. As Carlos and Anderson observed,


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“a political broker can either obstruct or facilitate the flow of demands, favors, goods and services to or from some constituency” (1981, 172–73). Yet significant differences emerge among brokers. These differences stem from their control of resources from above (goods and services), which in turn determines the amount of resources from below (human beings) they can “control.”

Resources (food and medicine) move from the municipality to the unidades básicas, where the brokers have discretionary power to do what they want with the resources. The information concerning food distribution at the municipal building also circulates through the UBs, as the broker Norma explained. Employment at the municipality and membership in the Peronist party provide brokers with the access to knowledge about resource distribution. Although neighbors know in general about the food distribution at the municipality, they do not know the precise date on which the distribution will be carried out. Nor do they know the ever-changing procedures to obtain the “nine kilos.” Brokers know the dates and have the specially designed cards required to obtain the food. These cards are small tickets with a number on them, indicating the date when the holder can go to the municipal building. Whether the general population’s ignorance is “deliberately created” or “just happens” (Erickson 1996) I cannot know. The following episode from one of my first journal entries illustrates that on occasion, brokers intentionally confuse individuals to set themselves up as the only channels of information between the slum and the municipality.

At the beginning of August 1996, Juan Pisutti got in touch with the coordinator of the soup kitchen operating in the local Catholic Church, a women named Nora. He introduced himself as a municipal official who “is able to obtain dairy products and vegetables for the better functioning of the soup kitchen.” The Secretary of Social Welfare does not provide the soup kitchen with milk, cheese, or vegetables. Nora told him that she usually asks Graciela (a social worker at the Secretary of Social Welfare) if and when the soup kitchen needs anything. For whatever problems they have at the soup kitchen, Nora tells Pisutti, “we get in touch with Graciela.” Pisutti replies, “it’s exactly the same thing. You can contact me or Graciela.” The social worker was indignant about this episode. She believes that there is a lot of “confusion” concerning the “place” each one (she and Pisutti) should occupy.

This episode depicts the typical movement of Peronist punteros or referentes pursuing the core of brokerage: setting themselves up as the (only) channels that facilitate transactions or resource flows (Gould and Fernández 1989, 91).19 It also illustrates the obstacles that they have to con-

19. This constant effort to acquire and control most links between the community and the government is a major characteristic of other types of political brokers. As Cornelius described the Mexican urban cacique, he “seeks to monopolize all links between the community under his control and political and bureaucratic structures in the external environment” (Cornelius 1977, 347).
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front in this task. Social workers, nongovernmental organization agents, and other community activists are usually the most outspoken opponents of Peronist brokers.20

Whether the ignorance is deliberately created or just happens, it is structurally induced. In neighborhoods now almost devoid of social organizations, where dwellers are increasingly isolated from each other, individuals have few networks for obtaining information. Brokers and their inner circles, in contrast, have access to helpful, even vital information.

To the extent that many slum-dwellers depend on the broker for information and material resources not available elsewhere, it can be asserted that brokers enjoy “positional centrality” and thus “positional power” (Knoke 1990, 10). They occupy a structural location similar to a large banking or credit institution that from its monopolistic position can impose its own terms in its own interest for granting credit. In this way, brokers exercise what Weber would call “domination by virtue of a position of monopoly.”21 Brokers pursue their own political careers and try to accumulate as much political power as they can. To do so, they gather resources and hoard information vital to solving problems: they become “problem solvers.” They do not command directly the actions of poor people who must solve pressing survival needs (what Weber would call “domination by virtue of authority, i.e., power to command and duty to obey”). Yet only an approach that focuses on individuals rather than relations fails to perceive the structural domination effects in the position of Peronist brokers. In pursuing their own interests (ascending to higher positions in the local political field), some become quasi monopolists in solving problems. In so doing, they increase their capacity to constrain the possibilities of problem holders.

The relationships that brokers establish with their respective inner circles compose an intriguing qualification of the way in which domination is carried out. By supplying information and goods that appeal to their close followers’ self-interest, voluntary compliance is secured at low cost. In this sense, brokers’ power is economical. Yet the expectation of a larger benefit (like a public post) is also present in this relationship of authority.

20. Cardoso (1992) documented this same tension between clientelist politics and local neighborhood groups in São Paulo. For a similar argument in the case of Guadalajara, see Shefner (1997).

21. According to Max Weber, this type of domination is “based upon influence derived exclusively from the possession of goods or marketable skills guaranteed in some way and acting upon the conduct of those dominated, who remain, however, formally free and are motivated simply by the pursuit of their own interests. . . . The potential debtors, if they really need the credit, must in their own interest submit to these conditions and must even guarantee this submission by supplying collateral security. The credit banks . . . simply pursue their own interests and realize them best when the dominate persons, acting with formal freedom, rationally pursue their own interests as they are forced upon them by objective circumstances” (Weber 1968, 943).
In the latter sense, Peronist problem-solving networks resemble the classic party machines in U.S. cities. Both are “systems of domination, relying on both rewards and punishments to keep their entourages in line” (Knake 1990, 4). To get their problems solved, problem holders become increasingly ensnared within the Peronist web. That is to say, brokers’ power derives from their position within the network and from the position of the network itself in the larger social structure of the slum. The Peronist problem-solving network keeps expanding its influence, spreading within the slum like an oil slick that disperses gradually in the water.

**THE CLIENTS’ PERSPECTIVE**

On delving into the intricacies of grassroots clientelism, one can detect certain regularities that form a pyramidal structure of relations in which “clients,” brokers, and patrons interact. But to understand fully the logic of clientelist interactions (and the conundrum of their resiliency), one must focus on the objective meaning of practices but also investigate the subjective purposes of the actions of the actors involved (“ensnared”) in the web. Once the empirical focus of the analysis is not only relations but experiences, it can be seen that clientelist problem solving involves constructing personalized ties, an imagined solidaristic community, and a protective and predictable network that buffers the harsh everyday reality of the slum. The last section of this article will outline key elements of this “subjective” side of clientelism by focusing on the beliefs and evaluations of the members of brokers’ inner circles, elements that require further research.

**Nice and Helpful Friends**

Relations of clientelist domination exist in practice as relations that are useful from the clients’ perspective for solving problems, obtaining protection against the risks of everyday life, and making friends with someone who “really cares.” To the members of the brokers’ inner circles, brokers are not the unscrupulous and corrupt politicians whom most neighbors talk about. They are “helpful” and “sacrificing” and “good people” with whom problem holders have a personal relationship sometimes described as “friendship” but always as worth keeping.

Both Juan Pisutti and Matilde are viewed by many neighbors as “using the people” and thus “bad and corrupt” politicians who “play their own game.” They are sometimes blamed for the limited amount of resources that social assistance programs distribute in the neighborhood because “they always keep the goods for themselves.” Brokers are always accused of “deceiving the people.”
This view contradicts that held by those who solve most of their everyday life problems through a broker’s intervention. Rosa pointed out what an “excellent person” Juan Pisutti is: “the way he takes care of people, he is an exceptional human being. . . . He suffers because those who go there [to the UB] never leave without a solution to their problems. He has a solution for everyone. He willingly advises everyone. Many people ask him for money . . . , and he uses his own money. He never tells them that he doesn’t have any money.”

According to Carlos, “Juancito sacrifices himself for the people of the slum.” Helpful and self-sacrificing are also characterizations applied to Matilde: “She is always there when something happens.” “She is so good.” “Matilde pays attention to every single detail.”

The main point of agreement among members of inner circles about their brokers is that the brokers are personally responsible for the distribution of things. The organization that grants a pension, offers a job, or gives out medicine or a food package is not the local, provincial, or national government but Matilde or Juan. They are the ones who really care, who feel for others, who are their friends and are always available. Hundreds of pages of interview transcripts and field notes testify to one essential fact: it is not the state that is perceived as the distributing agency but Matilde or Juan or some other broker. And because they are the ones who distribute the goods, they are viewed as having no obligation at all to do so. They do it because they really want to, because they care, because they “sacrifice for the people.” Roberto, part of Matilde’s circle, summarized this belief: “People think its her obligation to give out things, and it’s not an obligation. She does it because she wants to. What’s her obligation? Who is she? Is she your mother? People get confused a lot. You do them a favor, and it seems like it is an obligation. And it is a favor.” And because Matilde is the one who dares to deliver the goods without having any obligation whatsoever to do it, the beneficiary cannot invoke any right to the thing given or the favor granted. There is no third party to which one can resort in order to enforce one’s claim, or what might constitute a right (see Tilly 1994). But in a personalized relationship out of which nothing can be obtained, no problem can be solved.

Brokerage as an Everyday Practical Activity

Some slum-dwellers believe in “a time of elections” when demands can be satisfied quickly and goods obtained promptly because politicians are eager to win their votes. As in many other settings throughout Argentina and Latin America, “the time for politics” is seen as something that occurs once in a while, something that breaks up the routine of everyday life in the slum (see Hirschman 1984 and Heredia 1996).
Rogelio, president of one of the few neighborhood associations, told me: “Matilde shows up when it’s the time for politics, when there are elections. That is when politicians show up. . . .” Horacio, president of one of the many soccer clubs in the area, agreed: “If we want to get something [like a sewage system], we will have to wait for the elections. At that time, we can demand something . . .; we provide so many [votes] that we might get something in return.” The belief that electoral times are an opportunity to solve problems is anchored in personal experiences. Both Rogelio and Horacio got aid for their respective organizations shortly before the past two elections. Horacio related, “Through politics, we got a plot of land for the club. . . . Now we need the bricks, so I will have to wait for the next election.” Whether restricted to electoral times or limited to the multiple rally days, politics are viewed as a discontinuous activity. Politics are also seen as “dirty” and “corrupt”: “a lucrative business,” “an opportunity to get ahead,” an activity that is “deceitful and manipulative.”

Such observations are hardly new. But in the same destitute neighborhood, strikingly contradictory evaluations of politics coexist. Almost everyone shares the idea that politics is something “I don’t do”—by implication, something that “others do.” All agree that politics constitute a universe with its own rules and might serve to improve one’s own lot, regardless of the common good. Yet some slum-dwellers highlight certain aspects of politics as worth exploring.

Some residents praise the work that brokers and the municipality do for the neighborhood, especially with the distribution of food, sheets of metal, and mattresses. As one interviewee elaborated, “There is a lot of help. . . ., the municipality always has an answer, not only with the food. If you need a metal sheet, they’ll give it to you. . . . In a UB, they used to give milk with a piece of bread. Here, there is a lot of help, anyone who says there is no help is lying. . . . What happens is that you have to go there and wait. Everything has its own time.”

Consonant with the perceived steady accessibility of the brokers of the Peronist party, some slum-dwellers do not believe that the aid coming from politicians increases during election periods, rather, “assistance” is an everyday personalized issue. When I inquired, “Some of your neighbors told me that the aid comes quicker during election time?” Victoria replied, “No, I don’t think so.” Adela added, “From my point of view, it’s always the same.”

Problem solving becomes personalized and part of the habitual knowledge of members of brokers’ inner circles. Those who receive things know that they have to go rallies and support their brokers. They are part of a universe in which everyday favors imply some expected return as the rule of the game, a rule understood as a “scheme immanent in practice” (Bourdieu 1977, 38), as a mandate that exists in a practical state. Relations between problem holders and problem solvers are “practical” insofar as
forces.

they are routinely “practised, kept up, and cultivated” through the distribution of things and the granting of favors (Bourdieu 1977, 38). Attendance at a rally is part of the stock of practical knowledge.

I asked Coca, “So when Matilde gets the medicine you need, does she come and tell you, ‘You have to come with me to the rally’?” Coca explained, “No, I know that I have to go with her instead of with someone else. Because she gave me medicine, or some milk, or a packet of yerba or sugar, I know that I have to go to her rally in order to fulfill my obligation to her, to show my gratitude. Because if I do not go to her rally, then when I need something she won’t give it to me. [She would say,] ‘Go ask the person who went to the rally with you.’”

The extensive literature on political clientelism has shown that trust (Roniger 1990), solidarity, “hopes for the future” (Ayata 1994), familial orientations (Tellis Novak 1983), and reciprocity (Gouldner 1977; Scott 1977) indeed exist in the relationships established among patrons, brokers, and clients. These experiences and feelings are verbalized by both clients and brokers when asked about them. They are remarked on time and again in brokers’ public speeches. Brokers of the Peronist party present their gatekeeping function as a special relationship with the poor, a relationship couched in terms of debt and obligation, special care for them, “the love they feel for them” to the point that bureaucratic indifference is to be eliminated (Auyero 1999a). Embodying and enacting a persistent Peronist tradition—that of Eva Perón as the “bridge of love” between Juan Perón and the poor masses—Peronist brokers present their political work not as a job but as “a passion for the people.” Their work is “all sacrifice” to the point of exhaustion in the post. The brokers insist, “We care about them.” Some of the clients say, “The brokers care about us.” Those outside the networks say, “The brokers care only care about themselves.”

This discursive emphasis on trust, solidarity, reciprocity, caring, and hope has particular effects. Insofar as the solutions, services, and protection provided by brokers (inseparable material and symbolic exchanges, in which a thing is given, a favor granted, and something is communicated) are inclined to legitimate a de facto state of affairs that is an unequal balance of power (a domination network), they can be described as ideological machines (following Bourdieu). The act of giving, the caring actions of brokers, and the trusting response of their inner circles transform (or attempt to transform) a contingent social relationship (helping someone who is in need) into a recognized (acknowledged as lasting) relationship: We solve our problem, and by the way, we recognize Matilde or Juan as our problem solver. This recognition underlies problem solving through political mediation. In an ideological environment of cooperation, companionship, and solidarity, ties are constructed that freeze a particular balance of forces.

The acceptance that members of the inner circle confer on the world
of problem solving through political mediation undoubtedly constitutes the strength of the brokers’ position. Ultimately, it is the expression of their legitimacy. Yet at the same time, such acceptance represents a major weakness. This legitimacy is produced by a close everyday bond between problem holder and problem solver, a relation that must be constantly upheld, personally practiced, and directly exercised. Keeping up the relationship depends on the capacity of the broker to maintain the strength of this tie, something largely contingent on his or her capacity to deliver. As it turns out, this capacity is finite and dependent on other factors. A broker can get jobs, deliver medicine, do “essential” favors, and assist someone as if he or she were part of the recipient’s family, but only for a restricted number of persons. The most powerful broker in the slum, Matilde, has no more than a hundred individuals bound to her through strong ties, out of a voting population of more than seven thousand. The broker’s capacity to maintain each tie is also contingent because it depends on the broker’s relationship to a third party (in this case, the mayor of Cóspito), who provides the broker with the goods to be distributed.

The scope and limits of the brokers’ capacities belie the presumably all-powerful character of clientelist politics. The image of an extended “captive” clientelist electorate (stereotypically portrayed by the media, and sometimes adopted unreflectively by scholars) is in this sense empirically shaky. The size of brokers’ inner circles, although significant, can scarcely account for the “conquest of the vote” and the “building of electoral consensus” usually attributed to clientelism. Yet this conclusion does not mean that scholars should stop studying political clientelism. This type of network reproduces domination and inequality and guarantees a somewhat stable number of hard-core voters who might prove decisive in internal elections.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the literature on political clientelism is varied and extensive, little is known about the actual workings of clientelist networks at the grassroots level in contemporary Latin America. In Argentina almost nothing is known about Peronist networks in areas of high poverty.22 The unidades básicas, the sites of convergence between contemporary Peronism and clientelist politics, have never been seriously studied.23 By focusing

22. Levitsky’s recent research (1996, 1998) may be the only exception to this lack of first-hand knowledge.

23. Bianchi and Sanchis’s (1988) study of the women’s branch of the Peronist party is, to my knowledge, the only serious research that includes some reference to the unidades básicas during the first and second Peronist governments (1946–1955).
on the form, functions, resources, and dynamics of the Peronist problem-solving network, I have sought to provide an initial analysis of the practices of real-life brokers and the experiences of real-life clients. The first part of the article examined information hoarding and resource control as two equally important practices in the functioning of clientelist networks.

The article also explored the “subjective dimension” of Peronist clientelism. The experience of clientelism proved to be a decisive element in the workings of this hierarchical social arrangement. Clientelist relations are experienced as legitimate, habitual, and taken for granted by a small portion of brokers’ followers, those clients with strong and everyday ties with Peronist local politicians. Thus the study has shown that the scope of the clientelist network is limited. Consequently, it appears that other kinds of politics are operating in conjunction with “clientelist politics” in the conquest of the Peronist vote.

Engaged participation in Peronist problem-solving networks reinforces sociopolitical identities as much as it provides goods and favors. The structure of relations among brokers, clients, inner circles, and state officials as well as the location of individual actors in the network are the bases for exploring their behaviors, perceptions, and attitudes. Problem-solving networks are one of the relational supports of the heterogeneous political cultures of the urban poor. Further research is needed on three issues: the perceptual and behavioral consequences that the location within these networks (and the relations between positions) engenders for agents involved in them; the capacity of these networks to reproduce and reconfigure an always ambiguous “Peronist identity”; and the effectiveness of this type of clientelist arrangement as a mechanism of electoral mobilization.

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