POLITICAL PARTIES AND PATRONAGE IN CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACIES: An Introduction

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First Draft
Introduction

The aim of this workshop is to explore the principles and practices of party patronage, both across time and across space, in contemporary democracies. The exercise of political patronage in the political world is not a new phenomenon, of course. It is usually conceived of as a form of exchange relation, between patrons and clients, which has existed in both traditional and modern societies, in both democratic and non-democratic regimes, in various types of organizations, and on the local, regional, national and even supranational level. Party patronage as such is also not a new phenomenon, but has generally been distinguished from political patronage more generally, in that the party, rather than an individual political leader, serves as the ‘collective’ patron in the exchange relation. In the European context, for example, access to patronage resources has sometimes helped to provide party leaders with the means to initially build, and later maintain, party organizations, by means of distributing ‘selective incentives’ (Conway and Fiegert 1968; Panebianco 1988; Müller 1989) to party activists and party elites in exchange for organizational loyalty or other benefits. Party patronage understood in this sense has also helped parties to develop clientelistic networks as a means of maintaining their electoral support (e.g. Mainwaring 1999; Blondel 2002; Hopkin 2006).

The aim of this introductory paper is twofold. First, we briefly review existing literature on party patronage and show how the term came to be almost exclusively defined as a form of exchange between the party on the one hand, and a supporter or a group of supporters on the other hand, in which state resources, or privileged access to those who control state resources, are traded for political support within the wider society. By doing so, we also point to two important variations on patronage, namely brokerage and clientelism. Much in line with the existing literature, we argue that these traditional forms of patronage are likely to decline in contemporary democracies, old or new. However, second, we offer a fresh perspective on party patronage in contemporary democracies by defining it as a power of parties to appoint people to positions in public and semi-public life. By doing so, we disentangle party patronage from both traditional exchange politics, as well as from corruption, instead placing it in the context of modern multi-level governance system, as the parties’ organizational resource. We contend that rather than declining, patronage thus
understood is likely to become an important strategy through which parties in contemporary democracies try to ensure their organizational survival and success.

**Patronage politics – a first overview**

Clientelistic practices and patronage politics have usually been seen as a product of early modern development and have been thought likely to disappear in the process of political and economic modernization. This is particularly true of clientelistic practices which, in Europe at least, are now seen to be less important as a mode of representation, or linkage politics, than was the case in the early postwar years. Recent developments in the patterns and processes of European politics have now led to a partial rethink of this familiar expectation, however. With the emergence of often weakly-structured parties and party systems in many newly-democratizing polities, for example, and with the continued favouring of personalistic ties in those systems in which voters are expected to choose between competing candidates as well as between competing parties, clientelism can take on a fresh impetus (Kitschelt, 2000).

It can also be argued that the declining intensity of ideological differences across parties in many modern democracies may even encourage a recrudescence of clientelistic links at the grass-roots level at the same time as it encourages a more personalized presidential-style leadership at the top (on this, see Poguntke and Webb 2005). Moreover, and somewhat paradoxically, it has also been argued that precisely because modernisation promotes an increase in the spread and scope of professional qualifications, it may also eventually encourage a return to clientelism. The greater the number of qualified personnel that becomes available, for example, the more difficult it is to select on the basis of objective criteria alone, and hence more personal or *ad hominem* factors acquire increased weight. Among the many postdocs with publications who apply for a tenure-track position in a Department of Political Science, for example, references, networks, and sheer personal charm can often prove more decisive than formal qualifications in making the final selection.¹

¹ See Abercrombie and Hill 1976, 423-4: “Professional careers show how patronage (...) is a central facet of an institution which is sometimes thought to be dominated by the principles of technical competence and achieved status….Professions’ monopoly supply situation and control over their internal affairs throw great power into the hands of elders, who control the career prospects of juniors in ways which are often independent of the market... The sponsorship of junior academics by senior professors is helpful at least, and more often essential, at each career stage.” We would like to thank Nicole Bolleyer for drawing our attention to this reference.
Patronage politics can also prove resilient and adaptable. In fact, as we suggest in this paper, party patronage is still likely to prove an effective strategy for dealing with problems of party organization and party building, particularly as the traditional representational links between parties and society become weaker. In other words, as modern parties become more entwined within the institutions of the state, and as they lose their traditional grounding within the wider society, patronage can become a key resource in anchoring the party presence within the political system and in controlling flows of communication. Through patronage, and through the appointment of party personnel to key agencies and institutions, parties can hope to gain an oversight of the likely demands posed to political leaders, as well as of the likely policies and programmes that are needed to meet these demands. Patronage can therefore compensate for otherwise decaying organisational networks, and rather than being eliminated by modernisation, it might well prove to be its by product.

Patronage understood in this sense differs from that conventionally associated with parties, however. In the more conventional understanding of the term, patronage is usually assumed to involve a more or less dyadic relationship between a party (or politician), on the one hand, and a supporter or group of potential supporters, on the other, whereby the party uses patronage in order to cement political support within the wider community. That is, parties use their own resources, or resources to which they gain privileged access in public institutions or other arenas, to compensate and reward individuals or groups who have played an important role in party life and party strategy. In some cases, this takes the form of a material reward, such as granting a favoured backer a position on a company board or semi-public institution which enjoys particular benefits or salary; in yet other cases, the reward is based more on status and title, as when key supporters or party fundraisers are rewarded with ambassadorships, titles, or judicial appointments. In other cases, selective incentives are offered on a wider scale to help tie new supporters to the party, such as when a particular public industry is located in a particular district, or when teachers, or taxi-drivers, or other groups of voters are offered particular benefits in exchange for political support or endorsement at a coming election, or when loyal party members gain preference when it comes to filling positions in the public sector. In other words, patronage here forms part of a spoils system, the use of which is often seen as having a dubious political legitimacy.
It is with this understanding of patronage that clientelistic practices are most closely associated. The patrons, who are the parties or politicians, have clients, who are voters or potential supporters, with the link between the two being vertical and dyadic, and being little different from the sort of patron-client relationships that are also found in non-political settings. In some cases, however, the phenomenon approximates more to brokerage than to patronage as such. The key difference here is that, unlike the patron, the broker does not directly own or control his own resources, but acts as an intermediary between those who do own or control the resources, principally the state and the bureaucracy, and those who require those resources, who are usually found amongst the urban or rural poor. The politician gains benefit by being reputed to be able to negotiate benefits for those who would otherwise be denied them. Politicians as brokers are valued for their expertise and know how, and, as Komito (1984: 174) noted in the Irish case, for their “ability to monopolise and then market their specialist knowledge of state resources and their access to bureaucrats who allocated such resources” (see also Boissevain 1969; Blok 1969; Abercrombie and Hill 1976; Bax 1970; Clapham 1982).

Both patron-client and brokerage linkages between politicians and voters have been shown to be particularly important in rural and less economically well-developed regions, as well as in political systems in developing countries, and it is precisely this form of linkage which is assumed to be challenged by modernisation, on the one hand, and by the development of the mass party organisation, on the other. The traditional literature dealing with these themes is rich and extensive, and need not be detailed here (see, for example, Weingrod 1968; Graziano 1976; Shefter 1977; Eisenstadt and Roninger 1980; Eisenstadt and Lemarchand 1981). Suffice it to note that the individualised processes of vertical integration and mobilisation associated with patron-client ties are undermined by the forms of horizontal mobilisation and integration promoted by class politics and cleavage structuring. In other words, as a society develops mass electoral alignments, the scope for individually based networks of supporters becomes more limited. Second, as the mass party itself takes over from pre-modern and cadre parties, and as appeals based on programmes and ideology replace those based on more personalised political representation, it also becomes more difficult to sustain patron-client links, and especially to build a distinctive clientele. Third, as polities modernise and professionalise, meritocratic systems of advancement become more acceptable and widespread, and hence objective rules,
exams and qualifications replace favours, friendships and networks in the process of career building. Here too, then, the scope for patronage becomes limited, in this case as a result of a shortage of supply – there is simply less available to distribute within the patronage system. Fourth, as economies modernize, local markets, especially in poor rural areas, become better integrated into larger regional, national, or even supranational units. The members of these initially isolated communities thus enter into commercial and social ties with persons in other places which, in turn, diminish demand for patrons and brokers to advance their interests at the centre. Finally, as societies also become richer and more educated, the demand for particularised benefits or favours is likely to diminish, while citizens also become more confident of their own ability to deal with the bureaucracy. In this sense, citizens begin to handle their own affairs more effectively, and hence have less need of a patron or a broker to work on their behalf.

All of this implies a more or less secular process, whereby patronage and brokerage practices are steadily eliminated in favour of more conventional patterns of linkage based on collective representation and accountability. Indeed, one of the key agencies in this process is the emerging mass party, which encourages horizontal rather than vertical integration, and which promotes the provision of universal rather than particularistic benefits. This is not to suggest that patronage practices cannot survive the advent of the mass party – on the contrary, as Shefter (1994) and others (Sotiropoulos 1996; Kristinsson 1996; Warner 1998; Golden 2003) have shown very effectively, mass parties have also been known to adapt these practices as a means of ensuring their own electoral survival. What this does suggest, however, is that these practices become more difficult to sustain in the era of the mass party, and prove more exceptional than conventional. In modern polities, the argument runs, the bias operates against patronage.

**Patronage as an Organizational Resource in Contemporary Democracies**

For the purposes of this paper, however, and of the workshop as a whole, we are less interested in these conventional forms of patronage, however important they might still be in many polities and areas (see, for example, Martz 1997; van de Walle 2003, Calvo and Murillo 2004), and more concerned with patronage as an organisational resource. That is, we are less interested in patronage as a form of vote gathering or as a means of establishing loyal clienteles, and we are more interested in how parties use
patronage as a strategy to build their organisational networks in the public and semi-public sphere; in other words, we are less interested in how a party might use positions for the benefit of its supporters and more interested in how the party uses these positions for the benefit of the organization itself. At the extreme, when patronage operates as a form of vote- or support-gathering, or as a from of exchange (Piattoni 2001; Müller 2006:189; Blondel 2002:241) the availability of patronage positions is likely to fall far short of the expected demand, and hence the positions are also likely to be highly valued. When patronage functions as a form of organization-building, on the other hand, it may sometimes be difficult for the party to fill the positions which it regards as necessary for its survival (see, for example, Sundberg 1994). This may be a highly relevant problem for parties in established democracies which have almost universally experienced problems with decaying organisational networks. It is also likely to be a dilemma for many parties in recently established democracies in which party organizations are being built up from scratch, and in which the low party presence on the ground serves as an obstacle in supplying the party in public office with political loyal and policy responsive personnel.

We are concerned here with what Hans Daalder (1966) once defined as the ‘reach’ or ‘permeation’ of parties within the state and semi-state sector – that is, with the question of how far within a given political system the allocation of jobs and other important public and semi-public positions is at least partly controlled by political parties. These positions include, for example, posts in the civil service, public sector companies and their governing boards, universities, advisory committees and commissions, quangos and other regulatory bodies. We would also like to explore the relative importance of the national, regional and local levels of public administration in the location and scope of patronage. Finally, we are also interested in any changes in the parties’ ability to exercise these patronage resources over time, and in the extent to which party patronage is exercised in a ‘majoritarian’ as opposed to a more ‘consensual’ manner – that is, whether the patronage resources are a privilege of particular parties in government, or whether they are shared much more widely and more proportionately across the spectrum of (mainstream) political parties.

We define party patronage as the power of party to appoint people to positions in public and semi-public life; we consider the scope of this patronage to be the range of positions so distributed. Further, we understand party patronage as related to, but theoretically distinct from both corruption, understood here as the illegal use of public
resources for private gains, and clientelism. The distinction with corruption is particularly important, for while there may sometimes be popular opposition to the exercise of party patronage, the sort of activities which concern us here need not be seen as corrupt or illegitimate, and are often quite overt and above board. The distinction with clientelism has already been underlined, but it is perhaps useful to emphasise once again that in this context we are not so much concerned with patronage as a reward for services rendered, or as a pre-payment for services to be provided in the future. In this sense, although we agree with Blondel (2002) that party patronage should be seen as part of party government, we do not share his focus on patronage as a form of exchange. We see it primarily as a way of governing rather than as a way of generating favours.

To be sure, it is very likely that several positions within the state and semi-state sector will continue to be distributed by political leaders as true rewards for services rendered within political parties. High elite positions in public office constitute valuable resources in the form of salaries, contacts, prestige and information. If parties have access to these resources, it is reasonable to expect they will at least partly distribute them in order to promote intra-party cohesion and organizational loyalty. But we must not overlook patronage as an instrument of political and institutional control. For example, Meyer-Sahling (2006) has recently argued that the increasing politicisation of the ministerial bureaucracy in contemporary Hungary can be traced back to the desire of governing parties to enhance the political control over the formulation and implementation of public policies under conditions of polarised political competition. In other words, rather than being solely an instrument for rewarding organizational or personal loyalty, patronage becomes an instrument of governance, a way of initiation and implementation of public policies.

The stimulus towards patronage

It is our contention that it is precisely this latter form of patronage which is now becoming more important, both as a phenomenon in its own right, and as a resource through which parties seek to ensure their organizational survival and success. In other words, rather than simply being eclipsed by the mobilisation of mass parties, the sort of patronage that we are concerned with here gains a new momentum
when the mass party itself begins to fade, and when parties loosen their roots within the wider society and become more closely engaged in the institutions of the state.

Party organizations in developed democracies have been far from static, and over the twentieth century have progressed through a variety of forms and stages, from the elite party in the early part of the century, through the mass party, the catch-all party, and later the cartel party (Katz and Mair 1995; 2002). Other models of party have also been mooted in recent contexts, including the modern cadre party, the business firm model, and the media party (see, respectively, Koole 1994; Hopkin and Paolucci 1999; Krouwel 2006). But while this plurality of models tends to suggest a growing diversity among organizational types, most analysts are agreed that one of the key organizational developments of the past quarter century has been the shift in the party centre of gravity from society to the state. That is, from a dominant mass party era in which party organizations were strongly rooted within civil society, and during which they laid great emphasis on their representative role, parties have now begun to take their principal terms of reference from within the political institutions, and have begun to define themselves primarily as governors. Interestingly, parties in developing democracies appear to have passed up the stage of mass party development altogether. In many of these new democracies of Southern and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa, political parties have been characterized by their relatively weak social anchoring on the one hand, and their strong presence within the state institutions on the other, from the very outset of democratization (e.g., van Biezen 2003; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Salih 2003; van Biezen and Kopecký 2007).

Whether in developed or developing democracies, therefore, the parties have become the parties of the public office; to put it another way, parties have become public utilities (van Biezen 2004). Correspondingly, contemporary parties are likely to have greater need of patronage than when they are organizations of mass integration. Moreover, in this context, patronage not only looks different, but it also serves a different purpose. Rather than being a means by which networks of support are sustained or rewarded – rather than being directed at the electorate of the party, in other words, or at the bases within society – patronage becomes a mode of governing, a process by which the party acquires a voice in, and gains feedback from, the various policy-making fora that characterise modern multi-level governance systems. Patronage constitutes one of the sinews of party government rather than being just a
means of distributing spoils. It belongs to the activities of the party in public office rather than to those of the party on the ground.

This form of patronage is also likely to be stimulated by the declining intensity of ideological differences across parties in many modern democracies. Kitschelt (2000) argues that declining relevance of ideology in party competition will lead into reappearance of clientelistic links at the grass-roots level. This may well be so. But our contention is that it is even more likely to stimulate tightening of parties’ reach and control within the state and semi-state sector via political appointments. In the absence of clear ideological demarcations, parties are likely to distinguish themselves from one another on the basis of their policy achievements, governing competence and managerial experience. At an extreme, this form of political competition may prompt politicians to take a back seat and give up on policy-solving capacity of parties altogether (see Mair 2005), instead deferring their authority to non-elected experts which are supposedly better equipped to deal with technicalities of modern public policy (see Majone 2003). If parties are to survive at all, however, or if they are to exercise any influence on government, it is more likely that they will resort to creating organizational networks of personnel which combine political loyalty with at least a modicum of technical expertise and which are capable of placement in key decision-making arenas once parties reach the office. As Theobald (1992:189) remarked in a slightly different context, “[I]n such a situation, the natural tendency is to surround oneself with supporters – ‘friends’ who can be trusted rather than ‘experts’ who merely have the right qualifications”.

Finally, the stimulus towards this form of patronage has also been enhanced in recent years by widespread processes of privatisation and marketization, on the one hand, as well as by the huge expansion in the number of agencies and non-majoritarian institutions that have now been given responsibility for the formulation, implementation and regulation of public policy. In other words, it has been enhanced by the changing nature of decision-making and of policy-making processes, or by the changing nature of the state in more general terms. The delegation of power from the core executive towards non-governmental institutions has already been aptly described by the burgeoning literature on new forms of ‘governance’ and ‘delegation’ (see, for example, Peters 2002; Thatcher and Stone 2002). If parties are to retain their grip on policy-making, even if only indirectly, then it is likely that they will need to exert influence on the form and composition of these bodies. As governance becomes
more dispersed, parties have a greater need for an organizational network that can reach through to the different levels and arenas. Decision-making may no longer be hierarchical, in the traditional party government sense of the term, but this makes it even more pressing for parties to seek to achieve coherence through their appointments policies and through their organizational networks.

**On studying party patronage**

All of this suggests that patronage as an organizational resource, or as a means of extending the reach of the party, has now become even more important than before. We must emphasis again, however, that patronage has not necessarily become more important as a means of rewarding supporters. Instead, we see it as a means of cementing the reach, control, and standing of the party organization in contemporary multi-level governance systems. This raises two final points relevant to the study of patronage.

The first point concerns the loci of party patronage. Despite the fact that many contemporary studies of patronage still focus on the core of the government and the civil service (i.e. the ministerial bureaucracy) as the key loci of political appointments (see, for example, Grzymala-Busse 2003; Sotiropoulos 2004, O’Dwyer 2004), our argument implies that we need to look outside the immediate confines of the executive, the legislature, and the bureaucracy. To the extent that the organization of modern state has changed, the importance of semi-state institutions, including advisory committees, various regulatory bodies, expert teams, governing boards of regulated companies and public utilities, foundations etc., must have correspondingly increased as the primary focus of party patronage. Interestingly, some have argued that factors exogenous to the domestic political system, mainly changing international economic and political environment, has led to the collapse of traditional patronage and clientelistic practices in many rent-seeking regimes (see Golden 2003). Our argument suggests precisely the opposite, at least as far as our understanding of patronage is concerned. For many of the institutional changes within the contemporary state that we see as an ideal opportunity structure for party patronage practices emanate to a large extent from the reform policies of international organizations, most notably the World Bank and the European Union.

The second point concerns methodological considerations. Patronage and clientelism have always been notoriously difficult to investigate empirically. Proxy
measures, such as the changes in spending on personnel budgets of ministries (e.g. Gordin 2002) and/or municipal governments (e.g. Brusco, Nazareno and Stokes 2005), or the changes in the size of the state administration (e.g. Grzymala-Busse 2003; O’Dwyer 2004) are often employed in the empirical analysis, not without considerable reliability problems (see, for example, Meyer-Sahling 2006). Corruption is also used on occasion as a proxy for patronage and clientelism (see Manow 2003), despite the clear analytical and conceptual differences between these two phenomena. Other studies employ interviews with party members or voters to tap into their motivations to join, or vote for, the party (e.g. Burstein 1976, Müller 1989). Yet another study infers scope for patronage from studying professional and partisan background of government officials (Geddes 1994).

In our view, the many problems and limitations of these measures can be traced to the emphasis on patronage as a form of exchange, and hence as something that is largely part of covert politics. Once patronage is defined as the power of party to appoint people to positions in public and semi-public life and the range of positions so distributed, on the other hand, it becomes possible to consider mounting a large-scale empirical inquiry into the phenomenon, even on a cross-national basis. Since party patronage ceases to be (exclusively) based on informal and unofficial practices, the potential reach of parties across an array of state institutions can be, in the first place at least, derived from the study of official rules and policies guiding appointments in these institutions. Thereafter, it should be possible to draw up a list of practices in the process of party patronage, and to see the extent to which these are more common in certain systems than in others, or during certain stages of party development rather than others. This is also one of the issues which we hope to discuss during the workshop.
References


