

Political Clientelism and the Quality of Public Policy

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Abstract

This workshop aims to examine the policy implications of clientelistic practices with respect to diverse societal groups and in different regions of the world. Though the decline of clientelism in democratic contexts has often been predicted, it has proven to be highly adaptive strategy of electoral mobilization and party building. Due to this persistence of clientelism in both new and old democracies it is important to study the effects of the phenomenon on different democratic institutions more thoroughly. Of particular importance for the present workshop are the consequences of clientelism for the quality of public policy. Arguments in the research literature allude to two implications of clientelism in this respect: Firstly, if parties in control of government focus their policy programs more likely on those voters that are not inclined to give their vote in exchange to material benefits, clientelism may lead to *distorted policy representation*. Secondly, if political elites face incentives to engage in rent-seeking and to generate targetable private goods, clientelistic practices like patronage may lead to *distortive implementation* of policy programs. Therefore, the workshop seeks to attract paper proposal with respect to three themes: (1) The general consequences of clientelism on the quality of public policy and public welfare. (2) The policy implications of clientelism with respect to specific voter groups. (3) The effect of clientelism on policy output and policy implementation.

Outline of the topic and relation to existing research

Since the Third Wave of democracy research on clientelism has experienced a revival. The puzzling persistence of clientelism in new and old democracies inspired researchers to investigate the microfoundations and causes of this phenomenon (e.g. Kitschelt 2000; Medina and Stokes 2002; Remmer 2007; Stokes 2005). Though the decline of clientelistic practices – such as vote buying and patronage – in democratic contexts has often been predicted, they have proven to be highly adaptive strategies of electoral mobilization and party building (e.g. Roniger 2004; Kopecký, Mair and Spirova 2012). Recent research even hints into the direction that clientelism at first increases with democratic consolidation (Kitschelt and Kselman 2012). Within the last two decades and by means of a mix of different theoretical and empirical approaches researchers uncovered the behavioural logic driving clientelistic actors' choices as

well as institutional contexts which favour such state-society relationships (e.g. Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Calvo and Murillo 2004).

However, recently scholars have turned their attention to the effects of clientelism on the functioning and quality of different democratic institutions. Noteworthy examples are the study of Keefer (2007) demonstrating the effect of clientelism on democratic performance in young democracies, Nichter's (2008) study on the relationship between clientelism and electoral turnout, as well as the volume edited by Hilgers (2012) on the relationship between clientelism and various aspects of democracy.

Of particular importance are the consequences of clientelism for the quality of public policy. Political representation ideally induces responsive behaviour of representatives – either individuals or political parties – to the policy interests of citizens (Pitkin 1967; Manin et al. 1999). But elected representatives will only respond to these policy interests if they are selected and judged by this logic. Thus, institutional mechanisms only structure political elites' scope of action but do not determine the substance on which base they are accountable and responsive to their voters (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). Unlike programmatic parties, clientelistic parties do not offer programmatic orientation to their voters nor do they provide for mechanisms of interest aggregation. Clientelistic practices aim at the exploitation of state resources for the benefit of few delimitable groups of voters and not at the implementation of general welfare-enhancing policies (i.e. non-targeted public goods). Hence, the connection between clientelism and low responsiveness of political elites to the policy interests of citizens seems to be intuitively straightforward. On these grounds, clientelistic parties in government have a greater "margin of safety" (Stimson et al. 1995: 544) to follow other policy interests than those of their voters and nevertheless become re-elected as long as they provide selective benefits.

Hence, clientelism may have two distinctive implications for the quality of public policy: (1) If parties in control of government focus their policy programs more likely on those voters that are not inclined to give their vote in exchange to material benefits, clientelism may lead to *distorted policy representation* (e.g. Calvo and Murillo 2004). (2) If political elites face incentives to engage in rent-seeking and to generate targetable private goods, clientelistic practices like patronage may lead to *distortive implementation* of policy programs (e.g. Chandra 2004).

In relation to this, qualitative as well as quantitative research on clientelism has identified two societal groups that are more likely to get targeted by clientelistic parties: poor voter groups and ethnic voter groups (Stokes 2005; Chubb 1982; Calvo and Murillo 2004; Chandra 2004). Concerning the former, the marginal utility theorem states that poor voters are more receptive to direct material incentives, because they value side payments more than future benefits from the provision of public goods (Dixit and Londregan 1996; Calvo and Murillo 2004). Hence, clientelistic parties have a genuine interest in maintaining the status quo of poverty or income inequality (Stokes 2007). Concerning ethnic voters another rationale applies. Especially in new democracies where uncertainty in the political realm is high, political parties may use ethnicity to identify and mobilize voters belonging to such categories (e.g. Chandra 2004; Birnir 2009). Thus, when ethnic voters elect representatives belonging to the same ethnic category, this fosters descriptive representation based on ethnic markers (language, religion, etc.). Thereby, ethnic elites may capture state institutions by promising to grant their ethnic group privileged access to state resources instead of catering for voter groups by specific policy programs (e.g. van de Walle 2007). Furthermore, neither poverty nor ethnicity are categories that circumscribe homogeneous groups. Other criteria like regional differences, class characteristics, or multi-ethnic fragmentation – to name just a few – may lead to different representation patterns *within* these groups of likely clients.

To sum up, we would like to examine similarities and differences of the policy implications of clientelistic practices with respect to diverse societal groups and in different regions of the world. The purpose of the workshop is to exchange experiences about the effects of political clientelism on public policy and to engage in discussions about possible solutions to inequality in policy representation and policy implementation.

Likely participants and type of papers

As the term clientelism is widely used and prone to conceptual stretching, we want to limit its conception for the purpose of this workshop to those practices which directly relate to the democratic process, like vote buying and patronage (see Hilgers 2011; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Piattoni 2001; Stokes 2007).

The workshop seeks to attract paper proposal with respect to three themes discussed above: (1) The general consequences of clientelism on the quality of public policy and public welfare. (2) The policy implications of clientelism with respect to specific voter groups. (3) The effect of clientelism on policy output and policy implementation. Papers may, for instance, address the following questions: Does clientelism lead to more redistributive social policies and in which direction does the redistribution go? What are the general consequences of clientelism on the development of impartial welfare states? Do clientelistic parties engage in policy deals with other parties that go clearly against the policy preferences of their voters? What are the consequences of clientelism along ethnic lines for ethnic groups' policy interests? Under which conditions are clientelistic elites able to induce distortive implementation of originally impartial public policy schemes?

We aim especially for a mix of regional perspectives on the topic and encourage empirical papers focusing on regions like Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Western Europe. Particular weight will be given to empirical papers – both single-case studies with a comparative approach as well as small- or large-n analysis.

Biographical note

Saskia Pauline Ruth is a Ph.D. candidate and research assistant at the Cologne Center for Comparative Politics, Chair of Comparative Politics, University of Cologne. Her principal research interest lies in the relationship between linkage strategies of political parties and the quality of democratic representation in Latin America. Her research deals, for example, with the consequences of different linkage strategies on policy congruence between political parties and their supporters, and with the impact of clientelism on left-right orientations of voters.

Maria Spirova is a lecturer of Comparative Politics and International Relations in the Institute of Political Science at Leiden University, Netherlands. She has published on issues related to party development, minority policy, ethnic politics and Europeanization in the post-communist world. She is the author of *Political Parties in Post-Communist Societies: Formation, Persistence and Change* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) and co-editor of *Party Government and Party Patronage in European Democracies*, (with Petr Kopecký and Peter Mair), Oxford University Press, 2012.

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