

# Clientelistic Politics and Economic Development: An Overview <sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the literature on political clientelism in the context of developing countries. We contrast this informal political institution with programmatic politics, its formal counterpart. Theoretical models that derive respective implications of these two institutions for the supply of public goods, redistribution and political competition and related empirical evidence are reviewed. We then discuss the process of transition from clientelism to program politics, and its interaction with the development process. We conclude with a summary of what has been learnt so far, and open questions that deserve attention in future research.

## 1 Introduction

Political clientelism represents a classic instance of an informal political institution that plays an important role in political economy of underdevelopment. The pervasiveness of vote-buying and clientelistic ‘machine’ politics in traditional societies has been extensively documented in various case-studies and political ethnographies.<sup>4</sup> Besides studies from 19th and early 20th century USA and UK and Italy in the mid-20th century (Kitchelt-Wilkinson (2007), Chubb (1982), Golden (2000)), they include contemporary practices in many middle and low income countries, such as vote buying

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<sup>4</sup>See Hicken (2011) for an extensive survey of these studies.

in Argentina (Stokes (2005)), practices followed by PRI operatives in Mexico (Rizzo (2015)) or political brokers in a Mumbai municipal ward election (Bjorkman (2013)).

While clientelism has sometimes been hailed for its redistributive impact and filling in gaps in social services provided by the state, most writers believe the broader systemic consequences undermine democracy and development in a variety of ways: lowering public goods, effective political competition and accountability of elected officials. Some writers have additionally argued broader pernicious effects of clientelism, such as induced incentives for elected politicians to selectively enforce regulations, enlarge informalization, and perpetuate insecurity of property rights in order to keep constituents poor and dependent. The descriptive literature has highlighted the following features of clientelistic politics:

- Monitoring voters and time lags between voting and service delivery creates enforcement problems on both (voter and party) sides. Hence clientelism requires a political culture involving long term relationships, reciprocity and trust between party operatives and voters.
- Political brokers or intermediaries (social patrons) play an important role in overcoming these monitoring and enforcement problems. This generates hierarchical interlinkage between political patronage and social patronage mechanisms, wherein social patrons act as brokers, delivering votes of their clients to parties in exchange for payments or post-election delivery promises by political parties.
- Clientelistic relationships tend to be directed to poor voters as their votes are cheaper to buy, thereby enhancing vertical equity.
- Political parties are motivated to target clientelistic transfers to narrow ‘swing’ constituencies, resulting in horizontal inequity.
- Clientelistic benefits are excludable by their very nature in order to be used to incentivize voters to lend political support, thereby generating an inherent bias in favor of private benefits or local (versus national) public goods.
- Among private benefits, some forms are better suited than others to overcome enforcement problems, resulting in biases in favor of short-

term public employment rather than cash transfers, and recurring rather than one-time benefits.

- Clientelism creates political incentives for weakening enforcement of property rights and regulations to permit selectiveness in their application: the phenomenon of *forbearance* (Holland (2016)), thereby creating a large informal sector, insecure property rights and an impression of weak state capacity.<sup>5</sup>

A systematic analysis requires a precise definition of clientilism that identifies its distinctive features, which helps derive analytical propositions that can be empirically tested and allow inferences concerning its normative consequences. The Wikipedia definition of clientelism states: "exchange systems where voters trade political support for various outputs of the public decision-making process". In other words, it refers to discretionary provision of private benefits by government officials and political parties selectively to particular groups of citizens, in exchange for their votes. Hicken (2011) argues that the key element is the contingent and reciprocal nature of the exchange.

However, descriptive accounts often include both vote purchases via upfront pre-election payments (which are unconditional), as well as post-election delivery promises conditional on political support: the preceding definition would include only the latter. Vincent and Wantchekon (2009) refer to these as 'vote-buying' and 'clientelism' respectively. The theoretical analysis of Dekel, Jackson and Wolinsky (2008) shows the two forms generate distinct implications for equilibrium bribes and policies chosen. Hence it is necessary to distinguish between the narrow definition (focusing on selective delivery of benefits by parties to those it believes supported them recently), from a broader definition which includes both.<sup>6</sup> In a multi-period setting, it is hard to draw a relevant distinction between pre-election and post-election delivery of benefits. As we elaborate further below, the critical issue is not the timing of benefits, but whether delivery of public services to citizens can be conditioned by politicians on their political support.

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<sup>5</sup>Holland therefore argues that weaknesses in state capacity may owe partly to unwillingness of elected politicians to enforce regulations rather than an inherent lack of capacity, with examples from a number of Latin American countries.

<sup>6</sup>The broader definition could be phrased as follows: "where political agents deliver benefits selectively to voters in return for their votes, or in a manner calculated to induce them to reciprocate with their votes".

Political clientelism needs to be distinguished from social ‘patron-client’ relationships. The latter refers to hierarchical social networks such as nexuses between landlords and tenants, employers and workers, community leaders and members, or brokers and their clients. Political clientelism by contrast involves exchanges between specific voter constituencies (or brokers representing them) and political parties, sometimes in a competitive market setting (where a constituency could choose between different political parties to sell their votes). However, there is often a close symbiosis between the two forms of patronage: social patrons are frequently appointed as brokers by political parties to mediate their transactions with individual citizens.

This paper focuses particularly on how clientelistic politics differs from programmatic politics, where delivery of public services to citizens is not conditioned on their political support. This distinction has often been blurred in the literature. Policy platforms in programmatic politics may be designed by political contestants to influence (future) political support from specific constituencies via pork-barrel programs. The line that divides pork-barrel politics from the wider definition of clientelism therefore seems rather thin. Partly for this reason we think it is helpful to focus on the narrower definition of clientelism: it enables a conceptually clearer contrast between the two forms of politics. Specifically, the key issue is whether the receipt of benefits by individual citizens is at the discretion of elected officials, or described by (well-defined) rules and (well-enforced) citizen entitlements. The hallmark of clientelism is the discretionary and informal nature of the decision made by a political agent to deliver a benefit to any given citizen. Indeed, there is a natural connection between clientelism and the informal sector, which can be defined as the set of citizens who lack clear entitlements to state benefits. This enables political agents to incentivize those in the informal sector to support them politically. Section 2 describes a range of mechanisms used by party operatives to monitor votes of individual voters in elections based on secret ballots.

By contrast, programmatic politics caters to citizens in the formal sector with secure entitlements defined on the basis of publicly observable characteristics such as location, age, gender, ethnicity, occupation or asset ownership, enforced by an independent judiciary and media oversight. It is the formal institution counterpart of clientelism, with codified rules of citizen entitlement enshrined in legislation and enforced by judicial institutions. Examples are social security and tax laws, or formula bound transfers to specific groups of citizens (e.g., local governments). Entitlements of those in the formal

sector (who have adequate documentation to establish their citizenship and criteria necessary to qualify for entitlements) are not subject to discretion exercised by political agents or elected officials. Political competition within programmatic politics therefore takes the form of rival contestants presenting policy platforms represented by explicit and enforceable rules defining citizen entitlements. When formal institutions such as citizen identification and courts are weak, rules defining entitlements are not transparent or clear; even if citizens may be aware of their entitlements it may be hard for them to seek redress when these are denied. With a large informal sector, the space then emerges for clientelistic practices to appear: *de jure* formal entitlements can be selectively honored by elected officials for their clients and denied to others. As we explain subsequently in Section 3, this can have profound consequences for the outcomes of electoral competition: clientelism thrives when the informal sector is sufficiently large relative to the formal sector, resulting in bias in favor of private benefit transfers particularly to poorer citizens, under-supply of public goods, pro-incumbency advantages and low political turnover. Section 4 reviews a growing literature using econometric analysis of large datasets testing these predictions.

We then turn to issues concerning institutional dynamics between clientelism and program politics in Section 5. Various authors have noted a tendency for clientelism to decline and be replaced by programmatic politics as countries develop, such as UK and US political history over the 19th and early 20th century (Cox (1987), Mitgang (2000), Acemoglu and Robinson (2000), Lizzeri and Persico (2003)). Contemporary middle income countries such as Mexico and Brazil have recently initiated programs to provide secure land titles and conditional cash transfers which have expanded the scope of programmatic politics. Development could both be a cause and effect of this institutional transformation. But such dynamics are not inevitable: countries such as Italy or Japan still exhibit clientelistic patterns, or local politics in various parts of the US (see for example Stanton (2003) for a vivid account of the state of Rhode Island between 1970-2000 under Providence mayor Buddy Cianci).<sup>7</sup> The nature and determinants of the transition of political institutions are less well understood than the static attributes and consequences. We review related theoretical models and empirical examinations

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<sup>7</sup>In some contexts a reverse pattern has been manifested: e.g., in Argentina, Levitsky (2002) argues that the decline in labor unions in wake of globalization, privatization and technical change in the late 20th century witnessed the metamorphosis of the Peronist party from labor politics to machine politics.

of this institutional dynamic.

Finally, Section 6 concludes with a summary of what has been learnt so far, and open questions that deserve attention in future research.

## 2 Enforcement Mechanisms and Political Culture

Any description of political clientelism has to explain how votes can be bought in democracies with secret ballots. In the narrower definition of clientelism, benefits are delivered conditional on their voting behavior; hence party operatives need to verify how a client voted. The broader definition includes vote buying via unconditional pre-election transfers: how do these affect incentives of recipients to vote subsequently? The literature has provided a number of answers to this question, with interesting implications for the distinctive ‘political culture’ of societies with pervasive clientelism.

In the context of vote buying, one answer is provided by social norms of reciprocity based on gift exchange and loyalty. Finan and Schechter (2012) provide supportive evidence from Paraguay, where recipients of political favors demonstrated greater tendency for reciprocity in experimental ‘trust’ games. In some contexts, (marked) ballots are handed out by party operatives; this is still legal in Argentina, Uruguay and Panama (Stokes (2007)). Modern technology can sometimes be harnessed creatively: there are informal accounts from southern Italy how voters are required to take a picture of their cast ballot on their cell phones and show these to party operatives in order to claim clientelistic benefits.

Group sanctions are sometimes brought into play: neighborhoods that vote against a party or candidate as revealed in constituency vote counts could be discriminated against collectively with respect to supply of local public or private goods. For this reason electoral authorities in India stopped providing public reports of vote counts at the booth level (Kitchelt and Wilkinson (2007)). More sophisticated mechanisms rely on public signals of political support to their patrons by individual voters (e.g., in the form of participation in election rallies), as in theoretical models of Bardhan-Mookherjee (2017) and Sarkar (2014). Each citizen is required to choose at one party or candidate to declare public support for. In turn parties would restrict benefit delivery among those expressing it support. Citizens would

then have a private incentive to vote for their chosen patrons, thereby obviating the need for any monitoring of their vote by the parties.

The most common accounts of clientelism assign a key role to intermediaries that act as brokers for the political transaction, in a hierarchical arrangement between political parties, brokers and voter groups. Parties deliver a given stock of benefits to brokers in exchange for delivery of votes from a specific group of voters. The broker distributes these benefits within the group on the basis of fine-tuned long-term relationships with individual voters, which enables them to establish their credibility and identify specific needs and preferences of individual citizens. In-depth interviews with political operatives and citizens by Bjorkman (2013) in the context of an Indian city and Rizzo (2015) in the context of Mexican elections reveal how brokers develop bonds of reciprocity with citizens and a reputation for providing them help and access to government services. As Rizzo argues, “brokers are not only instrumental in helping parties win elections, but in helping governments govern”.

Marcolongo (2017) develops a theoretical model of political brokerage which formalizes this. Politicians have an incentive to hire brokers in order to capitalize on the latter’s fine-grained information concerning specific needs and preferences of individual citizens, and reputation for honoring pre-election delivery promises *ex post*. They enter into a ‘deal’ with a local broker in which they promise to transfer a block of services (besides private rents or cash payments) for the broker to allocate within the group that the broker represents, if they happen to be elected in exchange for votes from this group. Brokers ‘shop’ on behalf of the voter group they represent across alternative candidates and ‘deliver’ the votes of this group on the basis of assessment of credibility/reputation of each candidate and the magnitude of promised benefits. Having selected a politician, the broker recommends to the voter group in question that they vote in favor of this politician. Following this recommendation is incentive compatible for the broker’s clients, since the benefits will only be delivered in the event that the politician that the broker has made a deal with, succeeds in winning the election. Consistent with Rizzo’s assessment, Marcolongo’s model illustrates that clientelism improves targeting by bringing better information to bear on allocating services among voters in the relevant jurisdiction. On the other hand it creates a policy bias in favor of private transfers at the expense of low public goods, and allows elected officials and brokers to appropriate higher rents.

Some empirical evidence consistent with these accounts of political bro-

kerage is provided by Larraguy, Marshall and Querebin (2015), who argue that politicians need to monitor performance of brokers in delivering promised votes by examining vote outcomes in the most closely matched constituency. They provide detailed evidence from Mexico that the PRI achieved greater political support in rural communal land areas with a better match between the jurisdictions of the communal areas controlled by brokers and electoral constituencies.

## 3 Static Theoretical Models

### 3.1 Abstract Models

Dal Bo (2007) provides a theoretical analysis of a specific form of vote-buying by an external party or Principal (such as an interest group) who bribes members of a committee to manipulate their votes on a specific decision. Outcomes preferred by the Principal can be induced at arbitrarily low cost via offer strategies where payments to each member are conditioned on the vector of votes cast. Payments are promised only to pivotal voters; these ensure voting for the outcome desired by the Principal is a weakly dominant strategy for every member. Hence every member votes for this outcome. No one ends up being pivotal, so no payments need actually be made. This form of manipulation requires all votes be observable. When payments can be conditioned only on individual votes, in conjunction with or alternately on the total vote count, costs of manipulation rise but may still permit manipulation to take place. Observing individual votes need not allow greater manipulation when the total vote count is observable. Collusion among voters (e.g., when they are organized into disciplined parties) can substantially lower costs of manipulation.

Dekel, Jackson and Wolinsky (2008) study a vote buying contest between two parties where parties and voters have exogenous stakes over the election outcome. Two specific forms of vote-buying are compared: upfront unconditional payments, and campaign promises (conditional on winning). These correspond respectively to all-pay versus winner-only-pay auctions. Either form of vote-buying results in outcomes that weight party preferences at the expense of voter preferences. Conditional payments result in higher vote payments to voters, and decisions that are partially based on voter preferences. Upfront payments result in negligible payments and election outcomes



determined entirely on the basis of party preferences. Hence conditionality of voter payments matters, and may be valuable to voters.

A common theme of these two papers is that vote-buying induces outcomes that weight party preferences more than voter preferences. They also explain how the efficiency implications of vote-buying are ambiguous, where efficiency is measured by aggregate surplus of parties and voters. If parties reflect narrow interest groups then efficiency falls. But if party stakes simply reflect an aggregate of voter stakes the opposite is true. Another feature of these models is that policies or collective decisions are made directly by voters, rather than by parties that seek to manipulate them. Hence they do not pertain to indirect democracies where voters delegate policy choices to elected politicians.

### **3.2 More Structured Models**

Stokes (2005) presents a model of repeated interaction between voters and a single party ‘machine’ which faces a single passive challenger. Policies vary on a single dimension; each citizen has quadratic preferences over the policy with an ideal point. The policy positions of the two parties differ exogenously. In the absence of any vote-buying, citizens will vote for the party whose policy is closer to their ideal point. The party machine can manipulate votes by offering upfront payments to voters with specific ideal points in exchange for their promise to vote for them. Such fine-tuned targeting is possible as machine party operatives (or their appointed brokers) can identify the ideal point of every voter and monitor their voting behavior stochastically. Those voters receiving payments and subsequently discovered to have deviated by voting for the challenger instead are punished by being forever denied any opportunity to sell their votes. The machine will then have an incentive to buy votes only from ‘swing’ voters, those with ideal points in an intermediate range. Purchasing the support of core supporters is unnecessary, while purchasing support of loyal supporters of the challenger is either infeasible or too expensive. It is worthwhile for the incumbent to target poor voters who have a mild intrinsic inclination to vote for the challenger, since they are less likely to deviate from the promise to vote for the incumbent, and their votes are relatively cheap to buy. The potential scope of such vote buying is higher the narrower the policy gap between the two parties, the higher the probability of monitoring, and the higher the value of the private reward to voters relative to their ideological values. Stokes concludes that clientelism

involving upfront payments will be more common with poorer voters located in low population communities with strong social networks that are weakly opposed to the machine party. She tests these predictions using survey data from an Argentinian province. However, the model focuses only on upfront vote-buying rather than the narrower definition of clientelism. By fixing policies exogenously, it does not examine implications of clientelism for policy choices of elected politicians. Nor does it allow for the challenger to behave strategically in response.

Robinson and Verdier (2013) examine consequences of clientelism for policy choices. They construct a model in which clientelism takes the form of promises to provide public sector jobs by an incumbent patron, conditional on winning the next election. Public sector job offers are credible because public enterprises generate rents for politicians; by contrast cash payments are not credible since these are costly *ex post*. Similar to Stokes (2005), their model is based on an asymmetry between the incumbent and the challenger: the latter is passive and unable to offer public sector job offers conditional on being elected. The model delivers over-employment in the public sector (as this enables the incumbent to garner more votes), as well as under-investment in activities that raise private sector productivity (as this helps relax incentive constraints for voters who are offered public sector jobs). These phenomena also appear in a version of the model where votes are unobservable — the incumbent credibly provides jobs only to a specific voter group conditional on winning; these voters are then incentivized to vote for the incumbent.

Politician credibility also plays a key role in the theory of Keefer and Vlaicu (2008), in which clientelism appears as an alternative to programmatic politics which is rendered infeasible when politicians are unable to credibly commit to deliver on promises expressed in electoral platforms. They argue this is an important problem in ‘young’ democracies, where politicians are yet to develop nation-wide reputations. Consequently they are forced into strategies of entering into clientelistic deals with brokers or patrons of specific voter groups that have sufficient credibility to deliver their votes in exchange for supplies of private benefits. This results in over-provision of private benefits and under-provision of public goods.

Bardhan and Mookherjee (2012) and Sarkar (2014) on the other hand construct models of clientelistic electoral competition that abstract from the problem of credibility of politicians. They focus instead on voter incentives and implications for policy outcomes and political competition. In the Bardhan-Mookherjee model, votes are monitored stochastically by party op-

eratives; those (amongst expressed supporters) discovered to have deviated to voting for the opposition party are denied the benefits. Effects of clientelism are contrasted with those of elite capture: a bias in favor of transfers of private benefits to poor voters in the former, in contrast to elites in the latter. In the Sarkar model, pre-election expression of support is observed by both parties (as it takes the form of public signals such as attendance in political rallies), whence voting for the party whose rally he attends is incentive compatible even in the absence of any party monitoring. Both models have the feature that (a) there is under-provision of public goods and over-provision of private benefits, (b) more private transfers are provided to poor voters as the marginal utility of these transfers is larger for them, making their votes cheaper to buy, and (c) vote shares depend on voter beliefs concerning which party will win the election (which Sarkar refers to as ‘contagious voting’). The latter feature implies possibility of multiple ‘sunspot’ equilibria, with different sets of self-fulfilling beliefs. A party that is more favored to win can buy votes more cheaply, as voters are more willing to enter into deals with them, and the favorite then does win with higher probability. Hence clientelist politics can give rise to reversals of fortune among competing political parties driven by fluctuating voter beliefs rather than changes in any fundamental characteristics. While such phenomena are known to be possible in models of strategic voting with three or more contesting parties, clientelism renders it possible even with two contestants.

Bardhan and Mookherjee (2018) present a theoretical model comparing effects of clientelistic politics with programmatic politics, which embeds the Dixit-Londregan (1996) theory of programmatic politics and clientelistic politics as special cases. Clientelistic practices are rendered possible owing to existence of a large informal sector, comprising households whose access to state services is at the discretion of elected politicians. This enables electoral contestants to threaten to withhold service delivery to informal sector citizens that do not extend their political support. Such strategies can be implemented by organizing pre-election rallies where attendance of citizens is publicly observable (or other means of public expression of support such as waving election banners in the streets or in one’s house); post-election service deliveries to individual citizens are conditioned on such public expressions of support. This dispenses with the need for candidates to monitor votes cast, since those attending the rally of a given candidate have a natural incentive to subsequently vote for that candidate. Decisions of informal sector citizens regarding which candidate to support has instrumental consequences for their

own access to state services, as the latter is jeopardized if the candidate they backed loses the election.

This generates two distinctive implications for the way citizens in the informal sector vote, compared to those in the formal sector. First, informal sector votes are unaffected by public good components of electoral platforms, or their perceptions of corruption of rival candidates. Second, they generate the phenomenon of ‘contagious voting’ described above. The first feature implies that politicians have low incentives to provide public goods or engage in less corruption. The second feature implies inherent lopsidedness of electoral competition resulting in large asymmetries in vote shares driven by voter beliefs rather than substantive differences among candidates. Equilibrium policy platforms diverge, with the favored candidate relying more on directed private transfers at the expense of public goods to mobilize voter support. Natural dynamic extensions of this model yield pro-incumbency advantages and low political turnover. In contrast, societies with a large formal sector are more likely to exhibit policy convergence even if one party has an advantage in terms of popularity on non-policy grounds; both parties select platforms involving higher supplies of public goods.

The model shows that welfare comparison between resulting outcomes of clientelistic politics and programmatic politics is ambiguous in general. Directed private benefits are biased in favor of poorer citizens, unless they are substantially less amenable to switch votes on the basis of material inducements. At the same time clientelism is associated with lower supplies of public goods which tend to benefit all citizens in a similar way. Hence clientelistic politics can result in greater redistribution. On the other hand, this can be offset by adverse welfare effects of lower supply of public goods. To the extent that growth rates are related more to public goods such as investment in infrastructure, public health or general education rather than private transfers, clientelistic societies can exhibit lower growth rates. The likelihood of a low-level societal trap is accentuated by reluctance of political incumbents to reduce the size of the informal sector, since this could mean jeopardizing an important component of their political support.

## 4 Empirical Evidence

### 4.1 Association of Clientelism Measures with Targeted versus Non-Targeted Program Delivery

Keefer (2007) tests the Keefer-Vlaicu theory of differences between young and mature democracies with respect to measures of targeted transfers (proportion of GDP accounted by wage bill and public investment) and non-targeted benefits (rule of law, bureaucratic quality, low corruption, government share of newspapers, secondary school enrollment rates). In a cross-section of nearly a hundred countries, these are shown to be significantly related to number of years of competitive elections as predicted by the theory, after controlling for population, GDP per capita, land area, age structure, percentage of rural population. The cross-country regression raises obvious concerns regarding omitted variables/alternative explanations and reverse causality (whereby non-targeted benefits enhance persistence of democracy). The author shows the results are unaffected by additionally controlling for a number of omitted variables such as political institutions, fractionalization, conflict and voter information.

These identification concerns are overcome in an RCT experiment in Benin by Wantchekon (2003), in which Presidential candidates were persuaded to alter their campaign speech in randomly selected villages. In one out of six villages per district they delivered a speech focusing only on transfers targeted to village residents (in the form of jobs, subsidies and local public goods); in another they focused on national goals (national unity, poverty reduction, growth, improving the judicial system, protection of environment and women/child rights). In the remaining four control villages, the campaigns focused on both sets of goals. Villages promised targeted benefits scored on average 10% higher votes than the control, while those promised non-targeted benefits scored 5% less than the control. However, this experiment pertains mainly to relative popularity of targeted versus non-targeted policy goals. It does not say much about voter support for clientelistic politics relative to programmatic politics, both of which are compatible with targeted transfers.

## 4.2 Household Survey-Based Evidence on Benefit Distribution

Stokes (2005) uses a survey of 1920 voters from three Argentina provinces during 2001-02 to test some of the predictions of her theoretical model. Across these voters, political patronage in the form of material goods received from political parties in a recent campaign, or promises of help and jobs when needed, were negatively correlated with voter income, education, housing quality and village population. They were positively correlated with receipt of ballots from party operatives, and expression of support for the Peronist party (the main source of benefits). With the exception of the correlation with ballots received, all the other correlations are also consistent with programmatic politics. Hence while the results are suggestive, they do not provide definitive evidence of the existence of clientelistic politics rather than programmatic politics.

Bardhan et al (2009, 2015a) conduct household surveys for 2400 households in 89 villages of West Bengal, India to examine how receipt of different kinds of benefits from local governments and political parties were correlated with expressions of support for alternative parties. They distinguish between recurring and one-time benefits. The former include employment in food-for-work programs, subsidized loans, agricultural inputs and help during personal emergencies, for which every household is eligible every year, irrespective of past receipt patterns. These are all private, directed transfers. One-time benefits include local public goods such as access to roads and drinking water, and private benefits such as provision of land titles, low-income houses, toilets or certificates that entitle recipients to food and fuel subsidies. Recurring benefits are more conducive to sustaining clientelistic relationships involving repeated interaction between parties and voters; a recipient of a one-time benefit has no incentive to continue to vote for the party that provided the benefit since continued provision of the benefit is not feasible. They find a significant positive correlation between receipt of recurring benefits and political support for the incumbent, while the corresponding correlation with receipt of one-time benefits is statistically indistinguishable from zero. These results obtain after controlling for village dummies and a large range of household characteristics.

However, these results are subject to two sets of concerns. First, while the correlations are consistent with clientelistic politics, they are also consistent with programmatic politics. In the latter, citizens may respond more favor-

ably to electoral platforms promising delivery of recurring benefits, as anticipated future benefits could be larger for recurring benefits in terms of their expected present value, even if the flows of these benefits are less significant than one-time benefits in any given period. Second, there could be concerns about omitted variables or endogeneity, as the studies did not attempt to isolate effects of exogenous sources of variation in benefit distribution. For instance, it is possible that incumbents distribute more recurring benefits to its supporters for ideological reasons, as in a citizen candidate model. In that case voter support would be positively correlated with benefits received, and one might erroneously infer the presence of clientelism.

One possible response to this concern is that under the alternative hypothesis, one would expect the incumbent party to also distribute more one-time benefits to its supporters. Hence assuming that one-time benefits are valued at least as much as recurring benefits by recipients, one would expect at least a similar correlation between one time benefits and voter support. Recent papers by Bardhan et al (2015b) and Dey and Sen (2016) directly address these endogeneity concerns in the context of services delivered by local governments in the Indian state of West Bengal. The former authors use a political redistricting shock as an instrument for variation in different kinds of benefits (interacted with household characteristics) by local governments. Local government jurisdictions that were redistricted into more competitive constituencies in state and national elections, and controlled by the same party at upper and lower levels, received larger budgetary allotments for recurring benefit programs than one time benefit programs. Such redistricting was created by an impartial judicial commission in response to past demographic shifts, and was thus plausibly exogenous. Using the combination of redistricting to more competitive constituencies and political alignment as an instrument, this permits the authors to examine the implications of resulting flows of different benefit programs on political support expressed by residents. Both the least squares and instrumental variable double difference estimates show a significant positive coefficient of recurring benefits received on political support expressed, while one-time benefits and local public goods exhibited a smaller correlation. Dey and Sen (2016) use a regression discontinuity approach based on outcomes of close elections in 2008 which changed political alignment between village councils and next higher tier of local governments. They show that aligned constituencies received larger allotment of benefits from employment generating schemes; this raised the vote share of the incumbent by 2% in the subsequent (2013) election

Direct evidence concerning vote-buying is provided by Khemani (2015) uses household surveys in a province in the Philippines. 38% of respondents were aware of vote-buying in their village, and 18% reported receiving offers personally. She shows that the village average proportion of reported vote-buying was significantly negatively correlated with health workers, projects and proportion of children with normal weight, across a sample of 60 villages. Controls included village poverty, population, location, road quality as well as measures of electoral competition, mayoral power within the village, municipal fiscal capacity and distance to municipal center. Similar results obtain from a cross-country study of 33 African states using Afro-barometer data. While the direct use of vote-buying prevalence represents an advance, the study is vulnerable to obvious concerns regarding interpretation, whether the vote-buying is a cause of low health service provision. In particular, there is no indication of sources of variation of vote-buying across villages, a question of interest in its own right.

Larraguy, Marshall and Querebin (2015) provides evidence concerning one plausibly exogenous determinant of variation in vote-buying across different parts of rural Mexico: the fit or overlap between rural communal land areas or ejidos and electoral constituencies. A closer fit permits political parties to more precisely evaluate vote delivery efforts of local brokers, rendering clientelistic contracts more effective as instruments of vote mobilization. Using data from local municipal elections between 1994-2010, they show that PRI votes are positively correlated with fit interacted with PRI incumbency at the state level, while provision of schools and teachers per capita are negatively correlated. Controls include overlap, PRI state-incumbency, municipality fixed effects and state-year dummies. Consistent with the identification assumption, fit by itself had an insignificant effect. While the sources of variation of fit are not explained, it is hard to come up with plausible alternative explanations for the results on the basis of programmatic politics hypotheses.

In summary, empirical work has shown evidence consistent with hypotheses of clientelistic politics both across countries as well as within developing and middle income countries such as Argentina, Benin, India, Mexico and Philippines. However, many of these studies are vulnerable to econometric concerns, besides the criticism that many of these patterns could be exhibited by programmatic politics as well. The literature has been progressing lately in various directions to address these concerns.

A number of recent experimental papers provide interesting insights into the political culture of clientelism, e.g., citizen normative assessments of vote-



buying practices and the role they play in measurement and incidence of the phenomenon. Under-reporting of vote buying is highlighted by Gonzalez-Ocantos et al (2012) in the context of Nicaraguan household surveys following the 2008 municipal elections. They design a ‘list experiment’ in which households are asked to report the total number of activities carried out by party operatives in their respective neighborhoods, from among a pre-specified list. The experiment contrasts responses between randomly chosen treatment and control groups who differ only with regard to vote-buying solicitations as a listed activity among others that do not raise significant moral concerns. Comparisons of the number of activities reported provides an estimate of vote-buying that is less likely to be biased, compared with direct questions enquiring about vote buying. Comparisons of the list estimate with direct household surveys provide a measure of under-reporting in the latter. The list estimate they obtain is 25% of the population who report having received vote-buying offers, as against only 2% in direct household surveys. Somewhat in contrast to most other studies, reported vote-buying is not higher for poorer or less educated voters.

Gonzalez-Ocantos et al (2014) provide evidence concerning normative evaluations of vote-buying by citizens of five Latin American countries, as expressed by responses to hypothetical questions. On average more than three out of four respondents consider the practice unacceptable, and between 5-10% consider it acceptable. Practices wherein parties reward loyal supporters are considered less objectionable than when they use benefits as bribes to purchase the loyalty of swing voters. In Uruguay and Bolivia, more educated respondents were more approving of low income citizens selling their votes, suggesting they trade off concrete redistributive benefits with adverse systemic consequences.

Leight, Pande and Ralston (2016) conduct laboratory experiments in the US and Kenya, which shows that vote-buying reduces voters’ willingness to punish politicians for corrupt rent-seeking; politicians in turn respond by appropriating more rents. Vicente and Wantchekon (2009) provide an overview of a number of RCT experiments in Benin and Sao-Tomas-Principe, which examine the effect of treatments varying in respect to campaign promises by electoral candidates, the role of citizen town meetings, and voter awareness programs. These experiments suggest the role of policies that empower women (who are less responsive to clientelist platforms than men) and voter education initiatives to reduce vote-buying.

## 5 Institutional Dynamics and Economic Development

Many scholars (Cox (1987), Mitgang (2000), Lizzeri and Persico (2004), Kitchelt and Wilkinson (2007), Camp, Dixit and Stokes (2014)) have noted that clientelistic political practices tend to decline along the process of development, e.g., in the context of 19th and early 20th century history of the UK and the US. However, clientelistic practices tend to persist in some countries and contexts (especially at the municipal or provincial level even within developed countries). The typical pattern is for clientelistic politics to be replaced by programmatic politics.

There is likely to be a two-way interaction between such institutional changes and economic development. There has been considerably greater discussion of why development may undermine clientelistic practices: these are elaborated below. Effects going in the opposite direction are also likely, given the arguments and evidence for how substitution of clientelistic by programmatic politics is likely to improve governance, raise spending on health and education, and generate public goods rather than directed private transfers.

Stokes (2005, 2007) and Kitchelt and Wilkinson (2007) describe a variety of reasons why development would cause clientelistic practices to erode:

- as voter incomes rise, their price goes up, rendering vote-buying more expensive for parties
- as areas become better connected and societies become more mobile, social networks in traditional rural societies become less effective, thereby lowering the ability of brokers to monitor voters and mediate clientelist transactions
- increasing size of the formal sector reduces dependence of citizens on elected officials for favors
- voters become less dependent on local community or party leaders for their livelihoods as opportunities to out-migrate rise
- as income and risk-bearing capacity increases, people are less dependent on the insurance functions provided by local patrons or caste/clan network

- citizen demand for public, non-targeted benefits (such as public health, education, infrastructure, low corruption, better governance quality) relative to targeted benefits increase as they escape extreme poverty and graduate from manual farm employment to self-employment particularly in non-agricultural enterprises
- citizens become more aware of mis-governance or social costs of vote-buying owing to spread of media and information through various sources
- costs of programmatic political advertising decline, owing to development of technology of mass media

In the context of 19th century Britain, Cox (1987) and Lizzeri and Persico (2004) argue that the extension of the franchise was an important cause of the decline in vote-buying: it made it progressively more difficult for legislators to win elections by purchasing small swing constituencies. This however gives rise to the question what motivated the franchise extension, an issue that has been the subject of a considerable debate (Acemoglu and Robinson (2000), Lizzeri and Persico (2004)). Cox (1987) also stresses other changes in political institutions, such as the growing power of the executive branch of government over the legislative branch.

While these are all plausible reasons, there is little solid empirical evidence on either of them, or assessing their relative strength. An exception is Vicente (2014) who uses a randomized experiment involving randomized roll-out of an education/awareness campaign concerning the ill effects of vote-buying in West African islands of Sao Tome and Principe, which succeeded in lowering reported levels of vote-buying.

An important factor contributing to the decline of clientelism is the growth of non-discretionary entitlement programs: growth of programmatic politics crowds out clientelistic politics. For instance, a popular account for the decline of clientelistic practices in local New York or Boston politics during the middle of the 20th century was the creation of social security in the 1930s, which delivered financial benefits directly to poorer sections of the population, rendering them less dependent on local party machines. A number of recent papers provide evidence from Mexico and Brazil of similar effects resulting from land reforms and CCT programs. De Janvry et al (2014) and Dower and Pfutze (2015) provide evidence that PROCEDURE, a program which created individual property rights in land in rural Mexico

between 1993-2006 caused a shift in votes towards PAN, a more right-wing party compared to the PRI which tended to be the incumbent party in most areas. They use a difference-of-difference regression utilizing the roll-out of the program across different parts of Mexico. De Janvry et al ascribe this to two possible reasons: those receiving titles became more market-oriented, and a decline in clientelism as local party officials could no longer allocate use rights on a discretionary basis depending on political support. The possible role of the former is suggested by the fact that the rightward shift was more pronounced in areas where the land was more valuable. Dower and Pfutze argue in contrast that most of the change can be ascribed to a decline in clientelism, as the effect appeared only in areas where the PRI had been traditionally entrenched. Moreover the effect was symmetric irrespective of whether the main opponent of the PRI was to the right or the left of the PRI, and the same mechanism with opposite results occurred in municipalities where some non-PRI party was traditionally entrenched.

Similar results have been observed in Brazil as a consequence of the recent growth of Bolsa Familia (BF), a large CCT program covering 12 million households. BF was designed to be a nation-wide formula-driven entitlement program administered by the Federal government, with cash transfers deposited directly into beneficiary bank accounts. Fried (2011) provides evidence that BF delivery was politically neutral: program coverage deviations from planned targets exhibited quantitatively small correlations of the ‘wrong’ sign with various political criteria such as local vote share of the federal incumbent party PT, measures of local political competition and swing characteristics. Frey (2015) examines the impact of BF coverage using an instrumental variable regression discontinuity design. He estimates that a 10% increase in BF coverage reduced incumbency advantage of local mayors by 8%, increased political competition (lowering victory margins by 6%, raising the number of candidates by 0.6, and educational qualifications of candidates), lowered private campaign contributions to incumbents by 40%, and increased health care and education spending shares by between 2-3%.

These studies give rise to the question of what drove the political motivation for incumbents benefitting from clientelistic practices to implement entitlement programs that would undermine those practices. One possible explanation is an intent to promote economic development, as a result of some external shocks, combined with a lack of concern or awareness for political consequences. De Janvry et al (2014) ascribe the motivation for PROCEDURE as appearing from suggestions of technocratic economists within the PRI

administration that were concerned to implement land reforms that would raise productivity of Mexican farmers and allow them to compete better with North American farmers as NAFTA came into effect from the mid-90s onwards.

Another explanation may lie in political incentives at the federal versus local levels. Mitgang (2000) describes Franklin D Roosevelt's decision as Governor of New York state to institute anti-corruption enquiries against Jimmy Walker, charismatic mayor of New York in the early 1930s, and head of the Democratic party machine from which Roosevelt had himself emerged. These enquiries were to lead to the political downfall of Walker and the party machine. Mitgang's account suggests that Roosevelt's motive was to raise his national reputation and credibility as a Presidential candidate. In similar vein, Larraguy, Marshall and Trucco (2015) provide evidence that CORETT, an urban land titling program in Mexico for squatters, generated political gains for the party that was incumbent at the Federal level, while resulting in political losses for the same party where it was the incumbent at the municipal level (and even larger losses for other parties that were local incumbents). These losses owed presumably to a decline in scope for clientelistic practices which tend to arise mainly at the municipality level.

## 6 Conclusion

In this overview of the existing literature, we focused mainly on political clientelism: how it differs from programmatic politics, and how development may be accompanied and aided by a transition from the former to the latter. There is a large literature in comparative politics on clientelistic politics in developing and middle income countries which is primarily descriptive, with limited formalization in terms of theoretical modeling and econometric analysis. More formal quantitative analyses have begun to emerge recently.

We argued the key analytical distinction between clientelism and programmatic pork-barrel politics in terms of discretion exercised by elected officials in the targeting of public benefits. Such discretion is facilitated in countries with a large informal sector, where property rights are not well-defined and judicial institutions are weak, leaving room for political favoritism in law enforcement. The models explain how clientelism generates lop-sided political competition, pro-incumbency and political hysteresis, greater biases in favor of directed private transfers to swing constituencies at the expense of

public goods, and in favor of public sector employment and other recurring benefits at the expense of one-time benefits. In terms of welfare consequences, the models predict that clientelism is likely to generate static redistribution in favor of the poor, at the expense of growth and long-term poverty reduction. It may also create a vested interest among political incumbents to perpetuate weakness of institutions that permit clientelism to thrive and their own grip on power to be perpetuated.

Empirical research has been plagued with difficulties in empirical measurement and identification, similar to most research on corruption. Most of the available evidence is indirect, but there are recent studies based on direct evidence and on plausible identification strategies. There are a few historical studies regarding the dynamics of clientelism along the process of economic and institutional development, which largely confirm theoretical expectations that a rise in programmatic politics (at the federal level) in the form of nationwide entitlement programs and property right reforms cause clientelistic practices (at the local level) to erode.

Future research is expected to provide more detailed and credible empirical evidence concerning prevalence of clientelism, its static and dynamic consequences. In addition, the following questions could also receive more attention:

- Are there any welfare or redistributive benefits from clientelism? The fact that clientelistic programs tend to be directed to the poor has been pointed out by many scholars and verified in a number of empirical studies. Holland (2016) argues that the related phenomenon of forbearance allows elected politicians greater opportunities to redistribute benefits to the poor, free from legislative or judicial oversight. Programmatic redistributive programs are bound by layers of bureaucracy and red-tape on account of their need to cope with such oversight. Munshi and Rosenzweig (2015) argue that ethnic politics in India where caste groups play an important role has the virtue of generating higher club goods to members of those groups based on threats of community sanctions. These overcome problems of free-riding and tendency of elected politicians to not honor pre-election promises. On the other hand, caste leaders tend to favor own caste members at the expense of other castes in the targeting of redistributive private goods. To the extent that there are clientelistic elements in caste-based politics, this suggests there are both welfare benefits and costs of such practices. In

particular, the threat of informal community based sanctions in political clientelism may provide some disciplinary role on elected leaders. Incorporation of such factors in the theoretical model developed so far would render ambiguous the implications of clientelism for public good delivery. This implies the need for further empirical studies on this issue.<sup>8</sup>

- The theoretical models and empirical evidence suggest that clientelism may induce greater static redistribution to poorer and more vulnerable groups, as their votes are ‘cheaper to buy’. But this could come at the expense of supply of public goods, which include infrastructure and better governance which thereby ends up lowering growth. Is there any evidence that clientelism is a possible source of such a trade-off between static redistribution and growth? What are the consequences for the dynamics of poverty?
- How does the presence of clientelism affect the tradeoff between political centralization and decentralization? Are regional parties or local governments more prone to clientelistic practices than national parties or the federal government? If so, decentralization may be associated with higher clientelism. This may provide an additional element to consider in debates concerning fiscal federalism, as argued in Mookherjee (2015).
- The welfare implications of political reservations on the basis of ethnicity or gender may depend on the prevalence of clientelism. For example, caste-based reservations of political office may generate greater clientelism, which may provide an explanation for effectiveness of such reservations in promoting targeting to disadvantaged groups (as argued by Bardhan and Mookherjee (2012)). However, it may also aggravate the welfare distortions associated with clientelism, such as bias in favor of recurring private benefits, lowered political competition and supply of public goods.
- Theoretical models predict that clientelism enhances tendency towards

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<sup>8</sup>In this connection, greater care should be taken to identify which publicly provided benefits are truly public and which are more in the nature of private transfers. For instance, how would one classify education, when a large part of government educational spending takes the form of high teacher salaries which may actually constitute private transfers?

strategic voting and multiple equilibria, even in a two party system, besides lowering political competition. It may also provide a source of incumbency advantages. These propositions could be tested empirically. There may also be deleterious effects of clientelism on incentives for political participation of citizens in the middle class who belong to the formal sector, on account of the induced incentives to politicians to ‘pander’ to poorer citizens in the informal sector.

- What are the implications of clientelism for selection of political leaders, or for the allocation of talent between private and public sector?
- Is there evidence concerning ‘forbearance’: might political incumbents have an incentive to deliberately prevent formalization of agents in the informal sector, secure (eg legally guaranteed) property rights, or rule of law, in order to preserve their incumbency via clientelistic means? More generally, might clientelism be a source of endogenous perpetuation of informalization and insecurity, and weak state capacity more generally?
- Much more work is needed on questions concerning the institutional dynamics of political clientelism. Why does clientelism tend to erode more in some countries than in others along the process of development? Is there evidence of the role of increased incomes, mobility, communications, literacy, citizen awareness in the decline of clientelism? To what extent does declining clientelism contribute to economic development, and what are the specific channels (e.g., greater spending on health and education, other public goods, lowered forbearance)?



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