Self-Enforcing Clientelism

Chappell Lawson
Associate Professor
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Kenneth F. Greene (corresponding author)
Associate Professor
University of Texas at Austin
kgreene@austin.utexas.edu

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Abstract

Recent research on clientelism focuses on deliberate exchanges between mercenary voters and strategic political brokers. In this “instrumentalist” view, clientelism is only sustainable where patrons can monitor voters’ actions – a situation that does not apply in many places known for machine politics. In this paper, we build a different theory of clientelism around the norm of reciprocity. If exchanges rely on clients’ feelings of obligation to return favors to their patrons, then machine politics can be self-enforcing and persist despite ballot secrecy. To support this argument, we draw on ethnographic reports, survey data, and experiments from a variety of countries, as well as split-sample experiments embedded in two new surveys on Mexico specifically designed to test our hypotheses. Our findings have implications for voting behavior, party organization, and the types of public policies that may prevent machine politics.
Political scientists have long been interested in relationships in which leaders exchange selective benefits for political allegiance. In developing countries, scholars typically group these relationships under the rubric of “clientelism”; followers are known as clients, leaders as patrons, and intermediaries as brokers. In the United States, analysts refer to these three groups as “constituents”, “bosses”, and “precinct captains”; the relationships among them are known as “machine politics” (Ostrogorski 1910, Gosnell 1937, Allswang 1977, Erie 1988). Despite extensive research in both contexts, however, political scientists have not produced a consensus on how such relationships are maintained or how they should be studied.

Recent theoretically oriented work on clientelism in political science argues that voters only comply with political brokers’ wishes if they believe that their vote choices are monitored. This instrumentalist approach focuses on deliberate exchanges between mercenary voters who seek to extract benefits and strategic political brokers who want to increase their vote share as cheaply as possible (Dal Bó 2007; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007b; Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005). Such arguments emphasize the degree to which careful surveillance – or at least the credible threat of such surveillance (Chandra 2007) – ensures that constituents follow-through on their part of the clientelist bargain.

Politicians or their brokers engaged in such tactics face three potentially serious challenges. First, exchanges are typically asynchronous: brokers distribute benefits before an

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1 In keeping with recent work (e.g., Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007b), we consider benefits to be “selective” if they are excludable goods distributed in a discretionary fashion. We think of clientelism as an embedded and long-term relationship between patrons with access to resources or other forms of power that they trade for political support and clients in need of gifts, services, favors, or protection. We think of vote-buying as one possible manifestation of clientelism in which benefits are exchanged for votes (Stokes 2007).
election in hopes of generating support on Election Day. That fact means that clients may “defect” from the agreement after receiving their payoff. Second, patrons must be able to monitor voters’ behavior – a tall order if voting is secret. Third, politicians and brokers must be able to sanction *individual* voters who defect. Unless individual voters are monitored, brokers cannot know which voters to sanction by withdrawing benefits in subsequent elections (Dal Bó 2007). Sanctioning groups is not a feasible solution because brokers are forced to withdraw benefits from some supporters, leading to acute problems in the repeated interactions that are a key element of clientelism (Levine and Pesendorfer 1995; also see Finan and Schecter 2009).

Some countries use partisan ballots or permit party operatives in polling places, conveying the perception of monitoring. In other places, brokers may be able to guess who failed to support them, to foil the secret ballot, or to overcome the problem of asynchronous exchange with clever work-arounds. For instance, operatives from Italy’s Christian Democratic Party reportedly distributed left shoes to its clients before elections with the promise of delivering the right shoes if it won (Chubb 1982). In many settings, however, political parties have limited capacity to monitor individual votes, allowing instrumentally motivated voters to “take the money and run” and ultimately undermining machine politics. Thus, difficulties in monitoring and sanctioning voters pose a serious challenge to instrumentalist theories of clientelism where the vote is secret.\(^2\)

We propose a different argument for the persistence and pervasiveness of machine politics, based on norms of reciprocity. Specifically, we argue that the receipt of gifts, favors, services, or protection from political brokers creates feelings of obligation among voters, who spontaneously comply with political brokers’ wishes. Under such circumstances, clientelism is

\(^2\) Recent work on clientelism recognizes the problem of voter commitment (Stokes 2005; Piattoni 2001: 7; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007: 8; Magaloni 2006).

The degree to which normative factors sustain clientelism has important implications for mass behavior and party organizations. One striking implication is that machine politics can persist in the absence of active monitoring. As a result, parties may not need the large-scale, deeply embedded organizations that would otherwise be required to monitor voters (Gyrzmala-Busse 2005; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007b; Stokes 2005, 2007). Our norms-based approach also carves out a place for purely retrospective voting that cannot be accommodated within instrumentalist perspectives. Because clientelism rests on voters’ responses to past favors, failure by politicians to deliver selective benefits will erode the “moral economy” of machine politics (Wolf 1969, Scott 1976), provoking not only detachment from clientelist parties but also a sense of moral indignation among those who were part of the clientelist network. This sort of reaction – known as “altruistic punishment” – could motivate voters to actively oppose their erstwhile patrons (Arnold 2001, Fehr and Gächter 2002). Finally, machine politics may not be the only way in which politicians can distribute selective benefits to garner support. Other activities in which politicians routinely and legally engage – constituency service, intervention with the bureaucracy, and pork-barrel politics – could also generate electoral support by activating feelings of obligation.
The extent to which clientelism depends on obligation also has policy ramifications. Clientelism may be much more entrenched than existing analyses would lead us to believe and will not necessarily disappear rapidly once ballot secrecy is enforced. Rather, ending machine politics may require limiting political parties’ access to discretionary resources as well as a normative component – specifically, citizens’ attitudes so that they reject clientelist overtures on principle.

The next section of this paper provides a systematic rationale for the “norms-of-obligation” interpretation of clientelism. In the third section, we discuss key observable implications of this approach and compare them to those of instrumentalist models. In the fourth section, we test the contrasting predictions of the two approaches using data from ethnographic studies, surveys, and experiments covering a variety of countries, as well as two new surveys from Mexico that include split-sample experiments specifically designed for the task. The concluding section returns to the implications of our findings for electoral behavior, party organization, and public policy.

**Reciprocity and Obligation in Clientelist Exchange**

The foundation of our approach is that powerful and innate instincts of reciprocity cause people to feel indebted to those who provide them with benefits of more than token significance. When the recipient cannot discharge this debt of obligation, patron-client relationships emerge.

Reciprocity is a fundamental element of human social interaction. Norms of reciprocity are recognized at a very young age (Harris 1970, Dreman and Greenbaum 1973, Birch and Billman 1986) and, although culture can influence the expression of these norms (Herrmann et al. 2008, Gächter and Herrmann 2008), the concept and practice of reciprocity are essentially universal (Heinrich et al. 2005). Indeed, this component of human nature appears to be evolutionarily “hard-wired” (Hammerstein 2003, Gintis et al. 2003, Berg et al. 1995, Ornstein

Instincts of reciprocity, and the social norms that spring up around them, are sufficiently powerful that they regularly moderate self-interested behavior (see Fehr and Fischbacher 2002, Elster 1989: 192-214; Dawes and Thaler 1988: 195). As two behavioral economists put it,

When one hands over money to buy something at a store, one seldom worries that the storeowner will refuse to hand over the purchased articles. The obligation to reciprocate is so strong that we take it for granted (Carmichael and MacLeod 1997: 502).

Experimental research confirms that people often treat others fairly even when they face an incentive to do otherwise (McCabe et al. 1996, McCabe et al. 2003, Berg et al. 1995).

Instincts of reciprocity lead people to feel indebted to those who provide them with gifts, services, favors, or protection (Mauss 1990, Sherry 1983). Among individuals of similar status, obligations are normally discharged by providing a good of comparable worth to the original "gift" or by maintaining a long-term relationship in which mutual assistance is taken for granted. These exchanges can be episodic and asynchronous; gifts provided at one point in time may be repaid much later, as in the case of wedding presents (Caplow 1984, Johnson 1974, Yan 1996). Felt obligation can thus be responsible for a range of exchanges, from quotidian social intercourse to irregular interactions separated by long periods of time.

The vertical networks of obligation that underlie relations between patrons and clients arise when individuals are unable to pay back gifts in kind and instead discharge their debt by according the giver greater social status, esteem, or loyalty (Weinstein et al. 1969, Bienenstock and Bianchi 2004). This process creates a status hierarchy and, for those giving gifts, a

In the political sphere, recipients typically reciprocate through outward manifestations of allegiance and shows of solidarity (Forster 1963; Scott 1972, Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984), such as voting for a particular candidate and attendance at rallies. As Lomnitz puts it (1988: 47):

Loyalty in unbalanced exchange relations is the basis for political support…The patron provides security of employment, political protection, and dependability in unexpected circumstances of need in exchange for loyalty, expressed through personal commitment to the patron in labor, political support, and ideological allegiance.

Clientelism arises when recipients believe that they can never repay these benefits in kind, making one group perpetual recipients of material goods, services, favors, or protection and another group perpetual providers. As Scott writes, the “patron is in a position to supply unilaterally goods and services which the potential client and his family need for their survival and well-being” (1972: 93).

Membership in such vertical reciprocity networks may come in degrees. At the core of

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3 In some accounts, leaders are portrayed as motivated by instrumental considerations, whereas followers are portrayed as being inspired by reciprocity. “Upward” gift-giving, however, makes it clear that followers can also exploit obligation strategically. Conversely, some patrons or brokers may be motivated at least in part by feelings of duty to their followers, rather than by purely instrumental calculations.
the network, where exchanges occur on a regular basis, loyalty from followers and assistance from bosses will be taken for granted. As interactions become less frequent and personal attachments more diffuse, some sort of accounting is typical; that is, the distribution of specific benefits at specific times is associated with specific acts of allegiance at others (Johnson 1974). For instance, a politician may show up at specific events like funerals and weddings bearing gifts of cash, and his constituents may dutifully cast their ballots for him on Election Day (Curtis 1971). At the fringes of the clientelist network, transactions might take the form of episodic, one-off exchanges, such as the explicit purchase of votes or attendance at a rally – what one observer of Mexican politics described as “the politics of a sandwich” (Centeno 1997: 222).

Despite the role of reciprocity in activating clientelist relations, the power of obligation is not unlimited. Not all gifts automatically activate such feelings. Token items (e.g., a pen bearing a party logo) may be taken as a gesture of introduction or courtesy, rather than as the “quid” in a quid pro quo. Items distributed to everyone who happens to be on a street corner at a particular moment could be interpreted similarly as materials meant to attract attention or to announce a candidate’s presence, rather than as part of an exchange relationship. Gifts offered by political machines may also be insufficient to generate clientelist support; the obligation they create may not be deemed “worth” a vote (or some other display of adhesion).

Obligations stemming from reciprocity, like other obligations, are also not necessarily morally conclusive; they do not necessarily dictate the normatively correct decision when all factors are taken into account (Klosko 1990). A citizen may feel an obligation to her family to accept groceries from a political party in return for his vote, and this exchange may in turn generate an obligation to vote for that party. However, that new obligation may conflict with some existing obligation, such as a promise to a friend to support a different party, the personal conviction that she should to vote her conscience, the belief that others are doing so, and (assuming vote-buying is illegal) the moral obligation to obey the law. Thus, factors like a voter’s
ideological attachment to the competing parties, the history of machine politics in her community, and her respect for the law may affect the extent and durability of clientelism.

Obligations stemming from reciprocity are also not necessarily decisive; some people may ignore them at least some of the time for a variety of self-regarding reasons. For instance, people who feel morally obligated to attend a rally may end up playing hooky out of laziness or selfishness. Thus, reciprocity will not perfectly predict behavior because obligations stemming from it must compete with both pragmatic and countervailing moral considerations.

**Observable Implications of the Reciprocity and Instrumentalist Approaches**

Although both instrumental and normative motivations for clientelism may be present within a given system, the two approaches do rest on different foundations and yield a number of different predictions. Because the two have not yet been contrasted against each other directly (Brusco et al. 2004:81), Table 1 presents a number of testable propositions from each.

| Table 1 about here |

The most basic implication of the reciprocity framework is that the provision of benefits by politicians should induce feelings of indebtedness among recipients, and larger gifts should engender more intense feelings of obligation. As the value of a particular benefit rises in the mind of the recipient, he should become a more reliable client.

The instrumentalist approach to clientelism generally discounts citizens’ attitudes, because such attitudes neither enhance nor diminish the likelihood that voters will act in instrumentally rational ways. In the norms-based approach, however, civic values present

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4 The instrumentalist and norms-based models contrasted here are not synonyms for “rational choice” and “cultural” approaches. Voters motivated by obligation still engage in ends-means reasoning; they simply do so to different ends.
conflicting obligations that should make voters less likely to participate in clientelist arrangements or follow through on a clientelist bargain once it is struck. Civic-minded voters are more likely to see clientelist exchanges as illegitimate, to reject proffered benefits, and to perceive a value conflict between clientelist and civic obligations. Similarly, citizens in societies where the law is widely respected will feel a greater countervailing obligation against engaging in an explicit electoral *quid pro quo* than those in areas where electoral shenanigans are commonplace.

As noted above, the two approaches to clientelism – instrumental and norms-based – also yield contrasting predictions about the importance of monitoring voters’ actions. If instrumental models are correct, machine politics is limited to contexts in which patrons can credibly threaten to punish their followers for non-compliance (Dal Bó 2007; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007b; Nichter 2008; Stokes 2005). By contrast, clientelism based on reciprocity may persist even where voters do not believe that they are actively monitored.

Finally, the two approaches yield competing predictions about retrospective voting. In the instrumental view, voters care exclusively about prospective costs and benefits (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007b: 25, 342; Lyne 2007; Stokes 2005). Although their perceptions of what benefits they may receive in the future are likely informed by what they have received in the past, rational and self-interested voters will care only about what they stand to gain in the future. Clients motivated by obligation, however, may demonstrate loyalty to leaders who did right by them in the past, as a means of repaying a favor rather than as part of a calculation about what they can expect to receive in the future. They may thus cast their ballots based on *purely* retrospective considerations (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979, Fiorina 1981, Cain et al. 1987). They may also engage in “altruistic punishment” by reciprocating perceived injuries and injustices – violations of the moral economy of machine politics – even if they incur a personal cost in doing so (Fehr and Gächter 2000, Fehr and Gächter 2002, de Quervain et al. 2004).
Testing the Norms-based and Instrumentalist Approaches to Clientelist Exchange

The various methods of investigating relations of clientelism, including ethnographic studies, experiments, and surveys all have well-known advantages and limitations – selection bias in the case of ethnographic research, external validity in the case of experiments, and conditioning effects in the case of surveys. For this reason, we provide supporting evidence from existing studies using a variety of methods. We also present new data from split-sample experiments embedded in two new surveys from Mexico in which registered voters were selected at random from seven precincts (2009, N=545) and four different precincts (2010, N=360) in the Federal District of Mexico City and the State of Mexico. In the Supporting Materials, we discuss site selection and sampling, and we show that our procedures effectively randomized the key treatments across respondents, thus automatically controlling for potential confounds in our analyses below.

Clientelist Exchanges Generate Obligation

If the provision of selective benefits failed to conjure up feelings of obligation, there would be little reason to think such feelings motivated clientelist exchange. Consistent with our argument, many ethnographic accounts of clientelism are drenched in the language of obligation (*inter alia*, Gosnell 1937; Weinstein et al. 1969; Powell 1970; Scott 1972; Lemarchand and Legg 1972; Lemarchand 1972; Eisenstadt and Lamarchand 1981; Eisenstadt and Roniger 1984; Erie 1988; Roniger 1990; Fukui and Fukai 1996; Gay 1998, 2006; Auyero 1999, 2000, 2001; Levitsky 2003). Clients regularly report feeling indebted to the politicians who provide them with benefits and that such obligation compels them to act accordingly (Gosnell 1937; Erie 1988; Auyero 2002; Gay 1998, 2006; Wang 2007).

One example of reciprocity comes from the so-called “new leaders” (*naya netas*) in
northern India. Although these village notables cannot monitor voters’ behavior, they can count on beneficiaries of government policy and private assistance to support them nonetheless. As one *naya neta* put it:

> It is a matter of keeping faith. People can obviously vote as they wish. But most people remember well who has helped them in times of need. And it is only a rare person who is faithless (Krishna 2007: 148).

Field reports on electoral politics in other countries, including Benin, Japan, northern Portugal, and the Philippines have uncovered the same dynamic (Schaffer and Schedler 2007: 21). In one clever study in heavily clientelist Paraguay, Finan and Schecter (2009: 17) show that individuals who exhibit greater reciprocity in experimental trust games *without any political content* were more likely to be involved in clientelist exchange than those who showed less reciprocity.

If the approach we propose is correct, benefits should not only generate obligations but variation in the value of benefits should also affect the degree of obligation. Data from existing surveys on Brazil and Mexico suggest that such a relationship does indeed exist. Respondents in the nationally representative Mexico 2006 Panel Study reported that providing important public services such as water, sewage, or electricity created more of an obligation than offering a bag of groceries, which in turn was worth more than holding a neighborhood party. Data on self-reported receipt of gifts from the same survey also support the notion that more valuable benefits produce greater obligation. The more recipients said that the gifts mattered to them, the greater the obligation they felt to support the party providing it (r = .51, p < .01, N = 79). In Brazil, respondents in the 2002 Brazilian Election Study, which polled over 2,500 adults nationwide, were asked whether parent should accept a gift and vote for the party that provided it. In the aggregate, respondents ordered items in a predictable way, evidencing the most obligation to support a party that provided medical care for a sick child (61%), then one that
arranged for a spot in school for their child (52%), followed groceries (46%), and a bicycle for their child (30%). (See Supporting Materials for details).

Our own surveys provide a more direct test of this hypothesis using a series of split-sample experiments. Interviewers read third-person vignettes of the following type, in which half the sample was prompted with the smaller sum and half with the larger sum: “Let’s imagine that a candidate for municipal president offers Gabriel/Gabriela [50/50] pesos in exchange for his/her vote and Gabriel/Gabriela accepts the money.\(^5\) In your opinion, how much obligation should Gabriel/Gabriela feel to vote for this candidate – a lot, some, a little, or none?” Similar vignettes were read where the benefit in question was a bicycle, several bags of cement, or medical treatment for a sick child.\(^6\)

The results presented in Table 2 show that respondents, in the aggregate, had a clear ordering of the degree of obligation that a citizen should feel when he or she accepts a benefit in exchange for political support. Small monetary payments induced the least amount of obligation to support a candidate, with approximately one quarter of the sample reporting some obligation. A gift of a bicycle induced obligation among more than one-third of respondents, and a few bags of cement (crucial to people living in poorly constructed homes) raised that proportion to almost two-fifths. As we would expect, free medical treatment for a sick child was the most powerful inducement, with nearly half of respondents saying that such an act should create a sense of obligation.

\(^5\) The exchange rate at the time was approximately 12 pesos per dollar.

\(^6\) We used hypothetical third-persons and matched the gender of the person in the vignette – Gabriel or Gabriela – to the respondent in order to enhance identification while avoiding social desirability bias in responses (King 2004). Eight versions of the survey were used to avoid having answers to one question affect answers to another.
Evidence from a variety of research methods and across several countries thus shows that clientelist benefits generate feelings of obligation among voters. But do feelings of obligation lead people to choose candidates on the basis of clientelist appeals? In our 2009 survey, we asked half the respondents whether they would vote for the party they sympathized with or the party that resolved an important issue for them in the past. Only 30.2% inclined toward the party with which they sympathized whereas 54.4% chose the party that gave them a benefit in the past. (Another 15.4% were uncertain which party to choose.) In other words, obligation stemming from past receipt of benefits weighed more heavily on voters than their partisan leaning.

As a final test of the relationship between obligation and voting, we constructed an Index of Political Obligation by adding responses from three questions that were asked of all respondents in our 2010 survey: how much obligation should Gabriel/a feel to vote for a party that gave him/her a) 500 pesos; b) a paid doctor’s visit for his/her sick child, and c) a rooftop water tank in exchange for his/her vote. A separate item on the survey asked respondents whether a voter who lives in an area that suffers from water shortages should choose a candidate who offers a week’s worth of water before the election in exchange for a vote or one who offers nothing before the election but promises to improve the water system in the area if he wins. Those who chose the party offering a pre-electoral payoff scored 37% of one standard deviation higher on the Political Obligation Index than those who opted for a future community benefit (p < .01). Similarly, the 10% of respondents who reported asking a politician for a favor evidenced 44% of one standard deviation more obligation than those who had never asked for a favor (p < .01) and the 6% of the sample that admitted willingness to exchange their vote for a payoff felt 31% of one standard deviation more obligation than those unwilling to enter into a clientelist exchange (p < .1).
Evidence from a range of sources thus supports the notion that the (1) the provision of selective benefits produces feelings of obligation, (2) subjectively more valuable benefits produce more obligation, and (3) feelings of obligation are associated with clientelist voting.

Civic Attitudes Discourage Clientelism

As noted above, feelings of obligation to support political machines may conflict with other obligations that could diminish the client’s willingness to follow through on the clientelist bargain, especially civic attitudes that prompt citizens to see clientelist exchanges as illegitimate. Variation should be observable across countries where the mean level of civic attitudes differs, across subnational units that are exposed to civic and anti-civic primes in experiments, and across individuals who have differentially imbibed civic attitudes.

In Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, respondents who expressed sympathy for machine politics tended to be less educated, less supportive of democracy as a system of government, less civic in their attitudes on other issues (e.g., whether it was acceptable to offer bribes to a government official), and more likely to identify with clientelist parties (the PRI in Mexico, the PJ in Argentina, and parties other than the PT in Brazil). (See the Supporting Materials for details.) The belief that vote buying constitutes an acceptable practice thus forms part of a larger pattern of “traditional politics” (Hagopian 1996), in which obligations based on the receipt of particularistic benefits outweigh those based on broader civic identities or commitments.

Differences in questionnaires across countries make it difficult to make cross-national comparisons in the level of civic-mindedness and proclivity to enter into the clientelist exchange. Nevertheless, crude comparisons across existing surveys in four countries yield suggestive
Voters in Argentina believed more strongly than those in Brazil, Dominican Republic, and Mexico that citizens should obey the law and pay their taxes (Latinobarometer 2007: 56, 58); they also showed the least sympathy for clientelism among the four countries (Ames et al. 2005; Brusco et al. 2004; Lawson et al. 2007; Seligson et al. 2004). (See Supporting Materials for details.)

Experimental data indicate that national identity and civic culture influence the effectiveness of clientelist appeals across sub-national units. Vicente (2008) demonstrates in a field experiment that exposure to anti-vote-buying literature in São Tomé e Príncipe increased perceptions that other people in the neighborhood were voting their conscience and reduced the extent of vote buying. In other words, experimentally raising the salience of civic values reduced the legitimacy of clientelist appeals and the success of vote-buying. In the same vein, Wantchekon (2003: fn 20) shows that Beninese villages that were randomly selected to receive nationally oriented, “programmatic” appeals were more critical of vote-buying than villages that received regionally-oriented, clientelist appeals; they also spent longer debating which candidate they should support.

Our 2009 survey employed an embedded experiment to test these hypotheses about civic attitudes directly. Half of the respondents were asked whether they believe that it is important to live in a democracy (the civic democracy prime) and the other half were asked whether they agree that people do not get ahead unless they take advantage of others (the anti-civic prime). All respondents were then asked whether it would be acceptable or unacceptable for a person to give his or her vote in exchange for a job for a relative, followed by the question the other half of the sample had received first. Despite the very subtle nature of the

These were the only surveys we could locate that included adequate questions on both clientelism and civic obligation.
experimental manipulation – a change in question ordering and a fairly weak civic prime – respondents who received the question on democracy first were 16% of one standard deviation more likely to reject the clientelist overture (p < .05).

As a further test, we constructed a Civic Attitudes Index by adding items that asked each respondent how disappointed s/he would be in a friend who did not pay the household electric bill, stole a soft drink from a store, did not pay bus fare, or earned money by selling marijuana. Those who expressed a preference to vote for a party offering a personal benefit before an election over one that promised a community benefit after an election scored 25% of one standard deviation lower on the Civic Attitudes Index (p < .05). Respondents with more civic attitudes were also 46% of one standard deviation less likely to admit willingness to sell their vote (p < .05) and 34% of one standard deviation less likely to ask a politician for a favor (p < .05). Finally, they thought that selling one’s vote was less legitimate for a variety of goods.  

Thus, whereas political obligation strongly predicts voters’ willingness to support a clientelist party, feelings of civic duty discourage voters from taking part in clientelist exchanges.

**Clientelism Persists Despite Ballot Secrecy**

As noted above, instrumental interpretations of clientelism have much more difficulty explaining clientelism in the absence of monitoring and sanctioning than do norms-based approaches. However, there is ample evidence from field research that clientelism persists without such policing. For instance, Van de Walle (2007: 64) points out that individualized monitoring is implausible in countries like Nigeria and Benin, which are not generally regarded

8 These relationships hold at the 90% significance level or better when the good in question is a bicycle, a refrigerator, or 500 pesos. However, the relationship does not hold when the good is very small (50 pesos) or very large (a paid doctor’s visit for a sick child).
as strangers to clientelism. Wang and Kurzman’s (2007: 233) detailed analysis of vote buying in a 1993 contest for county executive in Taiwan reaches the same conclusion: although the ballot was secret, operatives from the Kuomintang reported purchasing 14,090 votes by relying on networks of trust and obligation.

Even scholars in the “selective incentives” tradition occasionally acknowledge that “clientelist linkages” can involve strong feelings of affect and duty. Kitschelt and Wilkinson write:

Continued interaction and exchange between patrons and clients over time – for example, at local celebrations – may eventually make regular monitoring of voting unnecessary because…the interaction may be sufficient to induce cultural expectations of reciprocity inherent in any gift-giving situation (2007: 15).

However, instrumentalist scholars treat such instances as isolated exceptions or aberrations.

Nevertheless, nationally representative survey data also show that clientelism extends much further than monitoring. For instance, in São Tomé e Príncipe, 90% of subjects said that brokers attempted to buy their political support in parliamentary elections, yet only 14% reported any attempt at monitoring or sanctioning (Vicente 2008). In a similar vein, survey data from Brazil and the Dominican Republic show that voters believe it is acceptable to sell one’s vote, even when the questions asked do not imply any policing of voters’ behavior by the machine (see Supporting Materials). As Vicente concludes, such findings support “the idea that self-enforcement may be the main mechanism by which vote buying works” in settings where such behavior is pandemic (2008: 21).

Our survey data, again designed to test this argument explicitly, suggest the same conclusion. In our 2009 survey, 78% of respondents said that they consider the vote to be secret (“it is impossible for anyone to know how a person votes unless the voter reveals it”). The minority of voters who believed that their choices can be monitored by party operatives were no more likely to choose a clientelist party over the one with which they sympathized ($\chi^2 = .61$ for
Voters also perceived that the parties had a diminished capacity (or desire) to monitor votes: just 27.1% said that they saw party representatives inside polling places trying to determine who voters chose and only 12.1% reported seeing party representatives threaten to sanction voters. Nevertheless, 71.4% believed that parties regularly or sometimes try to buy votes in their neighborhood, and 69.3% think that people in their neighborhood sell their vote (50.4% say that it occurs with frequency and another 18.9% that it happens sometimes). Thus, far more clientelism occurs than the parties’ monitoring capabilities could support.

Before showing how our norms-of-reciprocity approach accommodates retrospective considerations, we briefly bring together the prior empirical sections with an accessible statistical model. The model not only helps summarize our findings, but it shows that the relationships between feelings on obligation and civic attitudes, on the one hand, and support for a clientelist party, on the other, are not artifacts of voters’ fear over monitoring, as the instrumentalist perspective might suggest.  

For this analysis, we use voters’ preferences for a pre-election personal benefit (a week’s worth of water in a water-deprived community) versus a post-election community benefit (a promise to improve the water delivery system in the area) as

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9 Data from the 2010 survey show that a whopping 41% of voters believe that their votes are not secret and here there is a statistically significant bivariate relationship between belief in the secret ballot and support for a clientelist party at the .1 level. However, as we show below, this relationship disappears in multivariate models that include reported feelings of political obligation. Also see the next note.

10 Also note that voters who fear monitoring do not over-report obligation. Those who do not believe in ballot secrecy report no more obligation for the items in Table 1 than do those who believe in ballot secrecy.
the dependent variable and estimate a logistic regression model. Our main predictors include
the Political Obligation Index presented above and a Civic Attitudes Index that is measured
additively with items that asked each respondent how disappointed s/he would be in a friend
who did not pay the household electric bill, stole a soft drink from a store, did not pay bus fare,
or earned money by selling marijuana.

As the models in Table 3 show, political obligation propels, and civic attitudes retard,
support for a clientelist party. The effects of these variables remain virtually unchanged when
we control for a host of other potential influences on clientelist voting. Whether or not
respondents believe that their vote is secret has no effect on willingness to enter into a
clientelist exchange, and fear that prying eyes can thwart ballot secrecy clearly does not
confound the relationship between feelings of obligation of support for a clientelist party.
Similarly, family wealth as measured by an inventory of common household items (Kitschelt and
Wilkinson 2007; Stokes 2005), education, feelings of political efficacy as measured by a
standard question about whether or not respondents think that politics is too complicated for
them to understand, and partisan identification, measured with feeling thermometers for the
main political parties, do not affect clientelist voting.

[Table 3 about here]

A simulation using this full model shows that an otherwise average individual who feels
the highest level of political obligation is 10.8% more likely to choose a clientelist party than one
who feels the lowest level of obligation. This change more than doubles the likelihood that an
individual would support the machine from 10.3% to 21.1%. A voter who is average in every
way but highly civically minded would be 16.7% less likely to cast her lot with a clientelist party,
cutting in half support for the machine. A voter who reports the highest levels of political
obligation to patrons and the lowest levels of civic obligation is more than 39.1% more likely to
support the machine than voters who are least civic-minded and evidence the lowest levels of
political obligation.\textsuperscript{11}

Returning Favors: Retrospective Voting in Clientelism

In instrumentalist models of clientelism, voters care about the future payoffs they will receive from a clientelist party. If voters consider past performance, it is only as an indicator of the likely future stream of clientelist goods that they may receive by supporting the machine (Cox and McCubbins 1986; Dixit and Londregan 1986; Lindbeck and Weibull 1986; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007b: 25, 342; Lyne 2007, Stokes 2005). In our norms-based approach, by contrast, voters may make their choices based on purely retrospective considerations because they may feel an obligation to support politicians who have done right by them in the past.

Providing favors or services for voters is commonplace in developed countries under the name “constituency service”. American congressmen devote enormous attention to this activity – between one quarter and one third of their time (Fenno 1978; Fiorina 1981, Yiannakis 1981, Cain et al. 1987, Fiorina and Rohde 1989). Such activities presumably generate considerable goodwill among constituents, and this sense of gratitude and loyalty appears to translate into votes. If it did not, politicians would not likely dedicate the time and resources to do it. The dividing line between constituency service and clientelism is not always so clear. For instance, Japanese politicians maintain massive personal support networks (koenkai) that dole out cash gifts at funerals and furnish constituents with material benefits in times of need (Fukui and Fukai 1996, Scheiner 2007). American political machines and service activities in Ireland (Komito 1984), Italy (Rossetti 1994, Golden 2003), and Mexico (Hilgers 2005) similarly blur the distinction between these activities, both of which are based on obligation.

A 2002 survey of voters in Argentina conducted by Brusco et al. (2004) shows that many

\textsuperscript{11} All first differences reported are statistically significant at the 95% level.
clients used purely retrospective criteria when deciding their votes, and indeed none reported using prospective criteria. Voters were asked whether they had received a gift from a local representative of a party or organization during the campaign and, if yes, whether the gift affected their vote. Just 29 respondents admitted to being influenced. In open-ended questions, four of these respondents said that they felt an obligation to vote for the party that gave them the gift; six said they changed their vote because the party “helped” them; five said they normally voted for parties who gave them things; and others reported vague positive sentiments based on retrospective considerations.

Our 2009 survey investigated this question head-on. Half of the sample was asked how much obligation a hypothetical person would feel if a party promised a particular good or service in the future. The other half of the sample received similar questions, in which the party reminded the voter that the good or service was provided in the past. If voters ignore or discount past benefits, then they would presumably feel much less obligation to vote for parties that did right by them previously than they would for parties that promise desirable benefits in the future. Yet the data show that this is not the case. Respondents reported no greater inclination to support a party that promised to build a medical clinic in the neighborhood if it won the election there than one that reminded them it had built such a clinic in the past. In addition, respondents felt less obligation to vote for a party that promised better medical services in the state than one that improved medical services in the area when in power, and this difference was statistically significant at the .05 level. We repeated these particular questions in the 2010 survey and found the same results, this time with statistical significance at the .01 level.

A different form of retrospective voting – much less discussed in the literature to date – is repayment of past insults and injuries. Voters who have been part of a clientelist network may feel cheated or ripped-off if former patrons fail to reward them. They may then turn against the machine, even if they are still more likely to receive a future payoff from that party than from an
opposing party.\textsuperscript{12} To test for the possibility that voters practice “altruistic punishment”, we compare responses to two separate items from our 2010 survey. The first asked whether a hypothetical voter should feel obligated to vote for a party from which she normally receives foodstuffs in exchange for support but which did not deliver anything this year. The second asked respondents whether they agreed with the statement “when someone takes advantage of me, I get them back”. Those who strongly agreed with that statement – thus evincing a willingness to practice altruistic punishment in general -- were much more likely to think that the spurned voter should choose another party rather than to abstain. ($\chi^2 = 4.12$ for three degrees of freedom, $p < .05$).

\textbf{Conclusion: Durable and Self-Enforcing Clientelism}

The role of coercion and instrumental calculation in clientelism is well established; monitoring and sanctioning may be important for ensuring the commitment of some voters in areas where clientelist parties have broad and deep organizations akin to descriptions of political machines in the United States that operated at the ward level. A range of evidence also suggests, however, that there is more to machine politics than strict reward and punishment. Clientelism persists in such a wide variety of contexts because gratitude and loyalty make machine politics self-enforcing.

These conclusions have broad implications for relationships between candidates and voters. If voters spontaneously comply based on norms of reciprocity, then clientelism may not ______________

\textsuperscript{12} Instrumentalist models that employ a standard punishment path strategy such as grim trigger (Stokes 2005) yield similar hypotheses; however, instrumentally motivated (and thus future-oriented) voters should not rationally turn against patrons who spurn them in any one election cycle. By contrast, such behavior can be explained by our norms-reciprocity approach.
require the highly organized and deeply rooted political machines that most analysts now argue is necessary for clientelism to persist (Kitschelt 2000; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007b; Stokes 2005; Gyrzmala-Busse 2005). Rather, personalist politicians who can access resources and distribute benefits to voters may be able to build clientelist relationships even when they lack the capacity to monitor individual voters. This fact helps explain the persistence (or even expansion) of clientelist politics in democracies around the globe during a period when economic austerity and media-centered campaigning has diminished party density (Mair and Van Biezen 2001), transformed mass parties into “electoral-professional” ones with far fewer activists (Panebianco 1988), and dismantled the political machines of the past in many countries (Levitsky 2003; Greene 2007; Weyland 1996).

Another intriguing implication of our findings is that the difference between clientelist exchange and constituency service may not be as large as previously thought. Both types of interactions between politicians and constituents create a sense of obligation to back the patrons that provide selective benefits. Indeed, it is the force of obligation that makes personal exchanges so attractive to politicians. Although they could potentially elicit the same sentiments by instituting redistributive policies, citizens often have a harder time assigning credit for them (Müller 2007). As a result, the investment-to-reward ratio for policy entrepreneurship is likely to be lower than for personal exchanges, making retail politics a durable element of all democracies.

Our conclusions have important implications for efforts to curb clientelist politics. One obvious prescription -- with which instrumentalist approaches to clientelism would presumably agree – regards the elimination of discretionary resources available to political parties and candidates. Not only will such restrictions prevent politicians from generating obligation, the withdrawal of resources may also lead voters deeply embedded in the machine to rebel against the party that suddenly fails to hold up its end of the traditional bargain between patrons and
clients.

But even where such resources remain available, our findings suggest that public policies designed to reinforce the secret ballot may not be sufficient. Rather, efforts to instill civic values may be needed. Where norms of obligation form a significant component of clientelism, machine politics faces a serious challenge whenever citizens view clientelist transactions as illegitimate, feel obligated to vote their conscience, or come to view their patrons’ largesse as a democratic right rather than an obligation that must be repaid with political loyalty (Rossetti 1994). These shifts in mindset constitute a key part of the “difficult transition from clientelism to citizenship” (Fox 1994, Gay 2006) – a transition that is difficult precisely because it requires not only institutional reform but also attitudinal change.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Reciprocity Predictions</th>
<th>Instrumentalist Predictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Attitudes about clientelism | • Greater benefits cause greater feelings of obligation  
                               • Civic values and respect for the law undermine clientelism | No prediction. Attitudes about clientelism do not affect the clientelist exchange.         |
| Monitoring vote choices     | Clientelism can exist despite ballot secrecy                                            | Surveillance/lack of ballot secrecy required for clientelism to persist                    |
| Retrospective voting in clientelism | • *Purely* retrospective voting based on previous provision of benefits  
                                           • Possible “altruistic” punishment for cessation of benefits | Retrospective considerations only matter as an indicator or future payoffs.                |
Table 2. Degree of Felt Obligation for Benefits Offered, Mexico 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit offered</th>
<th>Percent who felt a lot or some obligation</th>
<th>Mean obligation</th>
<th>Percent of respondents who thought it correct to accept the gift</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50 pesos</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 pesos</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cement</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical treatment</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The mean value is calculated on a scale of 0 to 3 where 0 is no obligation, 1 is little, 2 is some, and 3 is a lot. The differences between adjacent benefits in the table are not statistically significant except cement versus medical treatment for which $p<.01$. Differences between all other paired comparisons are statistically significant at the .01 level.
Table 3. Logistic Regression Models of Support for a Clientelist Party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coef</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td>Coef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Obligation Index</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Attitudes Index</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in secret ballot</td>
<td>-0.55</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political efficacy</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family SES</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN FT</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD FT</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI FT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.07</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>-1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>287</td>
<td></td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Dependent Variable is coded as 1 for voting for a clientelist party and 0 otherwise.  
* p<.1, ** p<.05, *** p<.01, two tailed test
References


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