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# The Path from Neopatrimonialism: Democracy and Clientelism in Africa Today

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# **The Path from Neopatrimonialism: Democracy and Clientelism in Africa Today**

by

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## **Abstract**

The paper explores the impact of recent democratization in Africa on political clientelism in Sub Saharan Africa. It argues that clientelism is a ubiquitous feature of modern politics and is unlikely to disappear soon, but it shows that the nature of clientelism varies according to the type of political regime. The neo-patrimonial clientelism that has dominated post-colonial Africa is deeply incompatible with democratic politics and the paper predicts that successful democratization will change its dynamics. The paper suggests that the main obstacles to this successful transition towards a more democratic clientelism are likely to be the region's economic stagnation and the deeply ingrained habits and expectations of politicians.

## **About the Author**

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## Introduction

The nature, extent and impact of the political and economic changes taking place in Sub Saharan Africa are the source of much contemporary debate. Not all agree on the nature and extent of recent political reforms, but clearly, at least at the level of formal institutions, significant changes are in the process of taking place. Since 1989, political reform has witnessed the systematic introduction of multi-party electoral politics in a region where single party and military rule had been the rule for most of the 1970s and 1980s (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997). In its wake, electoral competition has brought political democratization with the greater independence of the judicial and legislative branches of government, as well as the liberalization of the press and the emergence of a much more lively civil society, or at least of more numerous organizations not controlled by the state. Of course, the extent of these reforms vary enormously across the states in the region, but at least on the surface, authoritarian politics seems to be retreating.

The more significant debate concerns the impact of these reforms on the deeper underlying structures of African politics. The dominant paradigm for understanding African politics for most of the post-colonial era was some variation of the neo-patrimonial thesis with which Jean François Médard is so prominently associated (e.g. Médard, 1991). By this, I mean that most scholars agreed that African political dynamics were structured by a set of informal institutions they labeled as “big man politics”, “personal rule”, “politics of the belly” or neopatrimonialism, to use some of the favorite labels, and without getting into the internecine debates between the practitioners of this general line of analysis (Erdmann and Engel, 2007, for a recent review)<sup>1</sup>. Most observers have agreed on two theses: first, that neopatrimonialism was inherently anti-democratic. In other words, it was constituted by a set of mechanisms and norms that ensured the political stability of authoritarian regimes and undermined political participation and competition. Second, most analyst have agreed that neopatrimonialism played a central role in preventing capitalist accumulation in the region, and thus was a key explanatory factor in Africa’s longstanding economic crisis (Chabal and Daloz, 1999; van de Walle, 2001). As a result, the removal of neopatrimonialism has been widely seen as a prerequisite for sustained economic growth and structural transformation in the region.

This essay thus briefly addresses a central question posed by the recent political and economic evolution in the region: what effect will the introduction of multi-party electoral politics have on neopatrimonialism in Sub Saharan Africa? In addition, the answer to this first question can serve to shed some limited light on the region’s economic prospects. I argue that neopatrimonialism is largely incompatible with democracy, and will thus weaken as democracy in the region consolidates. Indeed, I believe that the medium-term survival of neopatrimonial tendencies in a country despite the regular convening of competitive multi-party elections provides a good sign that the regime is in fact an electoral autocracy (Schedler, 2007), rather than a consolidating democracy.

It is analytically useful to think of neopatrimonialism as having three constituent components. First, such regimes are characterized by presidentialism, in which both formal and

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<sup>1</sup> For the rest of this essay, I will use the general term neopatrimonialism as an all purpose label for this set of informal institutions.

informal rules place one man – usually the president – largely above the law and not subject to the checks and balances that democratic executives face in mature democracies. In such cases, one effect of democratization is necessarily the weakening of the president relative to the other branches of government. Second, such regimes rely on systematic clientelism by the president and his immediate followers to maintain the status quo and ensure political stability. Third, and unlike more traditional patrimonial regimes, neopatrimonial systems rely on the fiscal resources of a modern state to provide the resources that are distributed following a clientelist logic. The main focus of this essay, because I believe the comparative literature to be largely imprecise and even analytically confused on the issue, will be what happens to political clientelism following the democratization of neopatrimonial regimes.

This essay is avowedly comparative. It starts with some observations about the historical evolution of political clientelism and the nexus between capitalist growth, the evolution of the state, and democracy. The central argument of the essay is that political clientelism is a ubiquitous feature of modern politics, and will not disappear from Africa any more than it can be expected to disappear from the United States or Italy, but that its function and form will evolve in significant ways related to the nature of African political regimes and their economies. This is admittedly a ridiculously overambitious topic for a short paper, and the objective will be to use a handful of empirical and theoretical observations to set out some broad hypotheses to be investigated more fully at some later time. The essay starts with some observations about political clientelism. I distinguish between types of clientelism, which I link to the regime type and level of economic development. I then examine the likely effects of democratization on political clientelism. I argue that neopatrimonialism is incompatible with democracy, and that its manifestations will progressively become less important in countries of the region, provided, at least, that they do democratize, and not all will. The essay argues that there is no reason to believe that clientelism will disappear, since it appears to be a ubiquitous characteristic of the modern state, but it suggests that the specific nature of clientelism will change significantly because of democratization.

## **1. Political Clientelisms**

In the classic anthropological definition, political clientelism can be defined as an exchange relationship between unequals, which provides a political advantage to the more powerful agent and a material advantage to the less powerful agent (Schmidt et al, 1977; Eisenstadt and Lemarchand, 1981). Perhaps because of its roots in anthropology, journalistic discussions of clientelism in Africa, and indeed too many academic analyses as well, have tended to view clientelistic practices as an primordial atavism, left over from traditional political culture. This is surely wrong on two counts. First, the atavism view can not be right because clientelist dynamics exists in virtually all political systems, albeit in sometimes very different guises. Indeed, a new literature has reenergized theorizing about its manifestations in democracies in Europe and Latin America (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Piattoni, 2001; Helmke and Levitsky, 2006).

Secondly, clientelism seems likely to exist in all modern states, as long as political actors are able to use the preferential allocation of resources over which they have discretion for

political advantage. State structures with any degree of either fiscal or regulatory capacity will have discretionary resources at their disposal. Fiscal capacity will provide state agents with resources to redistribute, while the ability to regulate the provision of goods and services in the economy will provide them with discretion over the allocation of those goods and services.

Instead, it seems more useful to think of political clientelism as a modern phenomena that is inherent to the modern state, but that changes as a function of the type of state. Political clientelism exists in all modern states in one form or another, but just as clearly, its precise manifestations vary enormously. More specifically, this essay will argue that the form that political clientelism takes varies as a function of economic structure and the nature of the political regime.

Though they are often conflated in careless and ethnocentric analyses, three relatively distinct types of clientelism can be identified in the literature (see van de Walle, 2007 for a more complete discussion and citations).

First, *tribute* constitutes the traditional practice of gift exchange in peasant societies and traditional kingdoms, in which patron and client are engaged in bonds of reciprocity and trust. It is embedded in a communitarian ethos, even if economic anthropologists offer a perfectly rational explanation for its prevalence in terms of risk-sharing. African big men may sometimes adopt the rhetoric and cultural repertoires of traditional forms of tribute to legitimate the clientelist practices they want to pursue, but their clientelism is fundamentally different, and indeed the reference to specific tribute traditions are not necessarily accurate, but may be invented in the modern era. In other words, there is no reason to believe that the level of political clientelism in an African country today is related to tribute traditions that may or may not exist in that country's past.

Second, what can be called *elite clientelism* is limited to a narrow political elite. The characteristic form of this kind of clientelism is prebendalism, or the strategic political allocation of public offices to key elites, granting personal access over state resources. Significantly, it can be associated with authoritarian states of limited capacity in a resource poor environment. I will argue this has been the dominant form of political clientelism in the authoritarian countries of Sub Saharan Africa.

Third, it can be distinguished from *mass clientelism*, which relies on the practice of using state resources to provide jobs and services for mass political clienteles, and usually involves party organizations and electoral politics. Pervasive use of *patronage*, defined as the political instrumentalization of the distribution of public jobs and services, is designed to gain support for the more or less institutionalized political party that dispenses it. It should be associated with mass politics, including in the mature democracies of the West.

These three types of clientelism are often conflated in the literature, but it is important to realize the differences between them. The discussion that follows will focus mostly on the difference between mass and elite clientelism for ease of exposition and because tribute is much less relevant to politics in modern states. Most generally, it is important to distinguish between political systems that rely primarily on patronage from those that rely on prebendalism.

Prebends and patronage overlap, of course, but I wish to emphasize their fundamental difference. Hiring a member of one's ethnic group to a senior position in the customs office is an example of patronage. Allowing the customs officer to use the position for personal enrichment by manipulating import and export taxes is an example of a prebend. From this example can be deduced three fundamental differences between patronage driven politics and prebendalism.

First, they have very different fiscal implications. Prebendalism is a feature of most early states, invariably characterized by the absence of a professional civil service and weak extractive capacity (e.g. Ardant, 1975). Prebendalism constituted one of the basic fiscal institutions of the European feudal state, in which the king had little choice but to allow his barons to pocket a large proportion of the revenues they had control over. As a political mechanism, prebendalism is attractive to leaders who do not control either a high level of resources or much capacity within the state apparatus. Patronage, on the other hand, requires a reasonably healthy and growing state, since it is expensive. The poor, small states of Sub Saharan Africa have for the most part, and with minor subregional variations, not been in position to afford major patronage strategies. Observers have sometimes erroneously suggested that patronage was an important feature of African politics, but such a claim it seems to me constitutes a conflation of patronage and prebendalism. In fact, low income African states command few resources and a smaller share of national GDP than governments in richer countries. In the late 1990s, roughly one in three African states had government revenues under 15% of their national GDP (van de Walle, 2001, p. 74), a remarkably low number that compares to levels in the OECD that regularly attain half of much higher levels of national GDP. In sum, I am not denying that political patronage has existed in Africa, just that its political importance is easily exaggerated, and almost certainly less important to ensuring political stability than an elite clientelism, strictly circumscribed to the hundreds or maybe several thousand people who constitute the country's top political elite.

One direct result of this reality is that African state structures have tended to be comparatively small, with a considerably smaller number of state employees than states in other regions of the world (Goldsmith, 2000). The available statistics, presented in Table 1, thus suggest that the average African state's public workforce represents around 2 percent of the labor force, compared to 7.7% for the rich countries of the OECD. Put in simple terms, African presidents could not afford mass clientelism strategies. Indeed, the regimes that sought to build up large patronage states in the immediate independent period were all too soon facing fiscal crises and inviting the IMF to prescribe its stabilization medicine. By the late 1970s, any project to substantially expand the state apparatus had crashed and burned and the regime was committed to fiscal discipline under the attentive gaze of the donors.

In sum, I posit that the wealth of the economy and the resources available to the state condition the scope of clientelism, regardless of the nature of the political regime. In poor states that cannot afford mass patronage, clientelism is more likely to be limited to the distribution of elite offices. On the other hand, patronage is more likely in rich states overseeing substantial and diversified economies, which are more likely to be able to afford a large and expensive state.



**Table 1: Government Employment, Early 1990s**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Employees (as % of Pop)</b>	<b>% of which in Central Gov't</b>
<b><i>Africa (n=20)</i></b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>45</b>
Botswana	5.8	60
Senegal	0.8	50
<b><i>Asia (11)</i></b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>35</b>
Maldives	4.9	61
Bangladesh	0.6	67
<b><i>Eastern Europe and Former USSR (17)</i></b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>14</b>
Armenia	10.5	8
Turkey	2.6	38
<b><i>Latin America and Cari. (9)</i></b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>40</b>
Barbados	6.8	59
Chile	0.9	33
<b><i>Middle East and North Africa (8)</i></b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>36</b>
Egypt	6.2	29
Lebanon	1.4	14
<b><i>OECD (21)</i></b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>23</b>
Sweden	17.4	24
Greece	2.7	41
<b><i>Total (86)</i></b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>26</b>

Note: High and low countries given for each region; other categories are local government, teaching and health.

Source: Salvatore Schiavo-Campo, Giulio de Tommaso, and Amitabha Mukherjee, "An International Statistical survey of Government Employment and Wages" World Bank Working Paper no. 1806. (1997) Washington DC: the World Bank.

Second, and related to this first distinction concerns the impact of clientelism on state capacity. Whereas prebendal practices weaken the state or at least limit its capacity, patronage is quite compatible with an effective and responsive state apparatus. We know from a wide variety of regimes across time that patronage political machines can be responsive to citizen concerns and deliver services. Indeed, the so-called “political machines” of urban American and European politics in the early twentieth century were electoral machines that received support because they addressed constituent concerns. On the other hand, the prebendalism of elite clientelism can be associated with regimes that seek to limit participation and are not responsive to their citizens. Even as a small political aristocracy benefits liberally from its links to the state apparatus, the average citizen does not receive adequate social services or benefit from an adequate public infrastructure.

Third, the relationship to legality differs across types of clientelism. Patronage is often perfectly legal and many mature democracies have officially codified it and circumscribed its extent. Though the favoritism it implies is frowned upon and constitutes a “grey area” of acceptable practice; it remains present in the state structures of the most advanced economies of the world. Theobald cites the estimate of 4 million patronage positions in state and local government in the US during the early 1980s, for example (Theobald, 1990, p. 56). These positions are almost entirely controlled by the Republican and Democratic Parties, who thus provide steady employment to their rank and file, and use state resources to engage in significant amount of recruitment. At the Federal level, the spoils system explicitly allows the President to make several thousand political appointments in the federal government. Individuals hired as “political appointees” face a different set of administrative regulations than regularly appointed federal appointees, and are, for instance, expected to leave office when the president who appointed them leaves office.

Prebendalism, on the other hand, invariably entails practices in which important state agents unambiguously subvert the rule of law for personal gain. As a result, these practices are invariably illegal and illegitimate, even in countries in which they are quite common.

Finally, and a direct result from much of the previous discussion, the different types of clientelism have a specific causal relationship with the nature of the political regime. In particular, elite clientelism is not compatible with the participation and competition of democratic politics. The practice of prebendalism is compatible with closed political systems, in which elites are little accountable to the citizenry, and in which their illegal actions are not sanctioned. On the other hand, patronage politics meets the needs of politicians engaged in electoral competition, and is compatible with the high levels of participation of democratic politics. Put more generally, I argue that the amount of democracy in the system determines the nature of clientelism; the more democratic the system, the more clientelist practices will benefit mass publics; and the more they will be limited to legal and codified behaviors. The less democratic the system, the more the benefits of clientelism will favor elites, and the more clientelist practices will subvert the rule of law and undermine property rights.

A corollary of this last point is that the locus of elite clientelism is typically the executive branch of government, while the locus of mass clientelism is more likely to be political parties and the legislative branch. In the former, the objective of clientelism is to keep the president and

his cronies in power; analyzing the single and no-party regimes in Africa before the democratization of the 1990s, the subordinate status and marginality of political parties is striking. The president and his inner sanctum of followers dominated politics, in what were highly presidential regimes, both on the level of formal and informal institutions. The party may have been an instrument of presidential power, but between the end of the electoral competition of the immediate post-independence period and the democratization wave in the first half of the 1990s, parties progressively declined in political importance. Even in countries like Kenya or Ivory Coast where the regimes had built relatively strong government parties, over time the regime's clientelist practices bypassed the party apparatus, and came to be dominated by the state itself, notably the office of the presidency.

In mass clientelist systems, on the other hand, the objective is to win elections, and the key instrument of electoral competition is likely to be the political party. The centrality of party competition is the hallmark of electoral politics, and the reliance of patronage to buttress parties a fairly standard feature of a wide number of democracies. Indeed, the codification and circumscribing of clientelistic practices that took place in rich countries a century ago, was accompanied by a broader reformist campaign to professionalize and discipline the civil service, and in effect move the remaining clientelism outside of the state and to political parties.

Table 2 summarizes the discussion so far, distinguishing the different kinds of clientelisms.

**Table 2: Characteristics and Correlates of Different Kinds of Clientelism**

	<b>Key Mechanism</b>	<b>Resources involved</b>	<b>Dispensed by</b>	<b>Legality</b>	<b>Implications for Central State</b>	<b>Relationship to Democracy</b>	<b>Relationship to Economy</b>
<b>Traditional Clientelism</b>	Tribute	Patrons' own	Patron	Customary	Alternative legitimacy to state	Incompatible	Positive: Rational risk sharing mechanism
<b>Mass Clientelism</b>	Patronage	State	Political party	Grey area	Bias for larger state	Compatible	Depends on quality of state intervention
<b>Elite Clientelism</b>	Prebends	State	Presidential network	Illegal	Undermines state capacity, legitimacy	Incompatible	Negative: undermines property rights

## 2. Democratization and Clientelism in Theory

Of course, this distinction between mass clientelism and elite clientelism is idealized. Most regimes in the modern world exhibit both types, and in practice it is not always easy to distinguish between them. In addition, other factors shape the nature of political clientelism, from the prevailing electoral regime and other constitutional provisions that condition appeal of particularistic politics (Cox, 2001; Haggard and McCubbins, 2001), to the nature of party cleavages and party development (Shefter, 1994).

Nonetheless, and with these caveats in mind, it is useful to argue that the neopatrimonial states of Sub Saharan Africa were characterized by elite clientelism because of both their authoritarian nature and the economic structure of their economies. Despite claims often made in the literature, there was relatively little mass patronage in the region, largely because these countries were not rich enough to afford it, and because their authoritarian nature lessened the need to be responsive to their citizenry. Instead, politics was more often characterized by elite accommodation processes in which different ethnic groups were integrated into the political system through elite clientelism. The state brought in big men from different ethnic groups into the presidential majority, and the former were expected to bring with them the support of their ethnic group, as has been well described by a large Africanist literature (e.g. Bayart, 1989).

I am now in a position to offer an answer to the question this paper began with: what happens as these types of regimes move to electoral competition? In general, I argue that democratic consolidation in the region will result in the decline of neopatrimonialism and the evolution from elite to various forms of mass clientelism. What does this imply? First, I hypothesize that prebendal arrangements will progressively disappear; in their place will be the kind of patronage politics which we observe in mature democracies, usually focused around party politics. These practices may be more or less significant, in much the way that variation is observed between, say, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark in the locus and scope of party patronage, but on the whole they will fall far short of the egregious illegality that we observe in the current set of neopatrimonial political systems.

An important caveat to the argument relates to the resources available to these consolidating democracies to engage in redistribution. Fiscality constitutes the Achilles heel of poor democracies. As emphasized above, the advantage of elite clientelism is its cheapness, and the more ambitious expenditures of mass clientelism will bring with it huge economic risks, particularly in the absence of rapid economic growth. Indeed, the history of post World War II Latin America is in many respects a history of a failed transition from elite to mass clientelism, as the populist regimes that emerged as the electoral franchise was extended in the 1960s and 1970s established political economies that relied on a populism their economies could not ultimately sustain (Huntington and Nelson, 1976; Remmer, 1986), leading directly to the economic crises of the 1980s. In Africa, a successful transition will include the ability to shepherd limited resources into productive public expenditures, notably in social sector investments, that both promote productivity growth and economic development, and accommodate political coalition building. In sum, sustained economic growth is probably a requisite of the political regime transition I am hypothesizing can take place.

Second, the move to mass clientelism will bring about a greater degree of economic redistribution to countries that democratize, provided the economy allows it. Economists like Milanovic (2003) have shown in recent years that post-colonial Africa has undergone a rapid increase in inequality. This seems to me inevitable, as neopatrimonial institutions generate social and economic stratification. Again despite some careless scholarship the contrary, the elite clientelism of neopatrimonial states is not redistributive, but is rather directed to an exceedingly narrow elite, which accumulates a disproportionate wealth. There is, moreover, little economic redistribution in these regimes through taxation, social programs or public spending which is minimal and rarely progressive. By definition, democratic regimes are more responsive to their electorates. As the clientelist networks expand with an electoral logic, we can expect greater economic redistribution. Clientelist networks are more likely to work themselves down the social ladder, and democratic elections are more likely to result in greater spending on social service. In sum, the more democratic a country, the more redistributive its clientelism will be, even if the logic of clientelism will always be to give a relatively privileged minority access to public goods. The size of this minority increases with competitive politics. Moreover, whether they are clientelist or not, democracies almost certainly engender greater public expenditure, notably in the social sectors, than do authoritarian states.

Thirdly, the evolution from elite to mass clientelism in the new democracies will entail the growing importance of political parties in political exchange. Rather strikingly, in mature democracies, the biggest single cause of political corruption appears to be the insatiable appetite of political parties for funding in order to wage electoral campaigns. Politicians across a wide variety of OECD countries regularly get caught with illicit schemes to finance their parties in rapidly escalating electoral campaigns. Rarely is individual gain the major motivation in these scandals. To be sure, occasionally a civil servant is caught in an influence peddling exercise, but this is much more rare. For instance, in perhaps the biggest scandal in American politics in the last two decades, the Abramoff influence peddling scandal, involving a so called “K Street” lobbyist and his mostly Republican friends in Congress and the White House, virtually no career civil servants appear to have been involved. In sum, when African politicians go to jail on a regular basis for having steered illicit money to political parties in the months before elections, rather than to enrich themselves, we will know that Africa’s democratic transition is complete.

### **3. Democratization and Clientelism in Practice**

I hasten to add that these last several points do not constitute a prediction for Africa’s future. Instead, I am offering a hypothesis for what will happen if African countries successfully democratize. It is far from clear that democratic consolidation is taking place in more than a handful of states (see Lindberg, 2006 for recent comprehensive and fairly optimistic survey), even if Michael Bratton is correct to surmise, from Afrobarometer data, that multi-party competitive elections have become entrenched enough in popular attitudes that they can now be “regarded as an institutionalized norm of African politics” (Bratton, 2007, p. 8).

In a larger proportion of African states, however, neo-patrimonial rulers have adapted remarkably easily to the new rules of the game by instituting “façade democracies” (Joseph, 2003) or “electoral autocracies” (Schedler, 2007) that undermine neither their hold on power nor

the main instruments that buttress their rule. It may be useful to remind ourselves that much of Africa is not democratizing, since so many observers are now willing, somewhat perversely, to point to electoral autocracies to highlight the alleged flaws of democracy (e.g. Carrothers, 2002).

Even in countries that have undergone significant democratic progress, the resulting regimes are often best characterized as “hybrid” (Diamond, 2002) or “illiberal democracies” (Zakaria, 1997), as authoritarian dynamics subsists side by side with the new democratic dispensations. None of Africa’s new multi-party regimes have abandoned presidential constitutions, for instance, for parliamentary rule, which is in force in just a handful of Africa’s 48 political systems. Though democratization has often included concerted efforts to curtail presidential power and empower mechanisms of vertical and horizontal accountability, more often than not, presidential prerogatives remain significant. If Mainwaring (1999) and others are correct, presidentialism weakens political parties in low-income states, and makes good governance less likely. Certainly, given the logical connection between neopatrimonialism and presidentialism in Africa, the latter’s continuing stranglehold on African politics is a cause for pessimism regarding more profound democratization.

Moreover, the evolution away from neopatrimonialism is likely to be long and slow, for several other reasons. First, the national characteristics which facilitate neopatrimonialism and elite clientelism remain there in the short to medium term, even after formal political institutions have been altered. Economic stagnation and fiscal crisis will militate against attempts to move towards patronage strategies. Low state capacity had been endogenous to the old neopatrimonial ruler, that had no great incentives to promote an effective state apparatus; but the legacy of that rule will take years to overcome even if the new regime is entirely sincere about increasing state capacity and eliminating corruption.

If Przeworski et al (1996) are correct to suggest that democracies are unlikely to survive in low-income countries unless they are able to generate rapid economic growth, at least some of these weakly institutionalized democracies will not survive. For a long time, the biggest danger facing them will be their inability to promote economic growth, which could lead to an anti-democratic backlash. Rapid economic growth, on the other hand, can help finance the growth of the state apparatus and the services it provides, which fuels both the growth of patronage opportunities and legitimacy for the regime.

Second, the transition to democracy can occur virtually over night, but democratic culture takes a longer time to develop. In Jonathan Fox’s felicitous phrase (1994), it takes time and effort to transform clients into citizens: civic organizations, the press, and the expectations of the citizenry will not immediately adjust to the new dispensation, but need to be nurtured and encouraged. For their part, many politicians and their followers were socialized in the *ancient regime* and bring certain expectations to the new one. The old kind of clientelism will remain a convenient solution to day to day problems for these politicians, particularly as long as the instruments of the new kind of politics, political parties, are weak and poorly organized. Schattsneider (1942) may be right that democracy is not conceivable without parties, but the building of strong party organizations takes time and skill, and requires the passage of time, if for no other reason than that elections are discrete events that only occur every once in a while. In the meantime, resorting to the tried and true methods of African politics will be tempting.

Moreover, as Helmke and Levitsky (2007) remind us, in consolidated democracies, a panoply of well-established informal institutions buttress the democratic order, and shape both expectations and behaviors of political actors. These include norms and informal understandings regarding the relationship between political parties, mechanisms of accommodation and compromise between the branches of government, and broadly understood standards of not only what is legal, but also what constitutes acceptable behavior in the political game. Again, these rules do not immediately emerge in the aftermath of democratization, but require the passage of time, and the experience of repeated elections, budget cycles and legislative sessions. In the meantime, the old culture of neopatrimonialism will repeatedly be invoked by actors who find it useful to their ends, and it is far from clear that other actors will always be able to proscribe the resultant behavior.

Finally, the international relations of most African countries on balance serve to maintain the political status quo. To be sure, since the end of the Cold War, the West has advocated democracy in the developing world with slightly more consistency and sincerity. But the 20 billion dollars in annual foreign aid that is mostly directed to the region's governments both on balance probably serves to buttress their hold on power and may actually weaken the bureaucratic institutions needed to counterbalance neopatrimonialism (Moss et al, 2007). Indeed, some observers have suggested that the current modalities of aid distribution are easily and consistently instrumentalized in clientelistic fashion by African state elites (Olivier de Sardan, 1998; van de Walle, 2001).

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

A regular claim that is made today suggests that democratization has actually increased clientelism in sub Saharan Africa. It is argued that greater competition around elections fuels the buying and selling of votes, and that the end result may be greater clientelism than in the past. Other analysts have argued that democratization has increased ethnic identity and sharpened ethnic politics, through the lubricant of public resources and electoral competition.

I am skeptical about such claims. First, even if accurate, the increase in clientelism may result not from democracy, but from the recent democratization. In at least some cases, it does seem that the democratization of public life has enlivened ethnic competition and increased corruption. Regime transitions can be a Pandora's box, in which a number of old political resentments and conflicts that had been kept under wraps get new life, as new political actors emerge and heightened political competition takes place. The issue at stake is not necessarily the nature of democracy or of electoral competition, however, but rather the uncertainty and chaos of moving from one set of political rules to another.

Second, many of these accusations are made about electoral autocracies, and it seems slightly perverse to blame Democracy for the ills of what are essentially authoritarian regimes with only falsely competitive elections. One should rebut such criticism by arguing these deficiencies are often due to the non-democratic aspects of these regimes.



Thirdly, I would argue that the increased attention to political corruption often does not suggest an actual increase in its occurrence, but rather a freer press that is more able to report accusations of corruption than in the past, combined with a less cowed public that is more public about criticizing abuses of power than in the past. One of the paradoxes of democracy is precisely that its more open and participatory nature will generate a greater volume of sometimes delegitimizing criticism than is the case for authoritarian regimes.

In any event, this essay has posed the more pertinent question, not whether political corruption would increase or decline, but instead, whether its function and forms are likely to evolve. I have sought to show that in beginning to democratize its politics, Sub Saharan Africa has started the long road away from neopatrimonialism. Does that mean that politics will entirely escape various imperfections? Hardly. Entering the end of the second decade of democratization, nonetheless, a tone is creeping into the analyses of experts on the region that is quick to harp on the imperfections of multi-party elections in the region. It is important to avoid Panglossian optimism. Nonetheless, in suggesting that political clientelism is an essential and ubiquitous feature of all democracies, this essay has sought to inject greater optimism into the study of African democratic practices. Vote buying, jobs for the boys, schools being built in key constituencies in the weeks before elections, party finance scandals, corruption scandals in the press, influence peddling in the legislature – all these things should not be celebrated, sure, but they do mean that Africa is becoming less neopatrimonial and more democratic.

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