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## Clientelism and Democratic Consolidation in Pakistan: Challenges to Accountability and Political Modernization

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### Abstract

*This article looks at the undermining of democratic consolidation in Pakistan through clientelism by looking at the civilian transition as of 2008 without involving the military takeovers. It explores patronage network in Punjab province to determine their different influences on vertical accountability and bureaucratic modernization. Nevertheless, the fragility of Pakistan democracy stands despite the occasional change to the civilian rule since the patron-client relationship system is so entrenched that individual loyalty is given preferential treatment over programmatic politics. Clientelism has continued to exist within the leading political parties and it is a systematic way of removing institutional accountability and creating a skewed representative relationship between citizens and the state. The research design of this work is based on a qualitative approach, which presupposes the use of semi-structured interviews with 50 national and provincial legislators and ethnographic observation of the activities of constitutions politics in 2019-2023. The thematic analysis has conducted in order to determine the distribution pattern of patronage and their institutional implications. The results indicate that clientelism undermines democratic consolidation in that it replaces performance-based legitimacy with personalized exchange policies that make legislators put constituency service over oversight of the legislature. The mechanized undermining of bureaucratic neutrality is carried out through politically oriented transfers whereas electoral competition resorts to selective allocation of the state resources and not the supply of public goods. The overpowering presence of kinship-based biraderi networks strengthens the traditional systems of authority, which hindering the formation of programmatic party platforms needed to bring about political modernization. Therefore, the accountability mechanisms are still superficial because citizens are willing to judge the representatives on the access to patronage, but not on policy performance. To isolate bureaucracy to political influence, institutional reforms must increase civil service protection and implement merit-based hiring. The political parties will have to embrace transparent selection criteria of candidates and in-house democratic processes. Moreover, considerable dependency of citizens on clientelist networks can be gradually diminished by increasing formal social safety nets by using state institutions instead of patronage brokers.*

**Keywords:** Patronage networks, Vertical accountability, Bureaucratic neutrality, Electoral competition, Institutional reform

## Introduction

Democratic consolidation in Pakistan remains an unfinished and contested project, repeatedly destabilised by military interventions, constitutional suspensions, and a resilient pattern of clientelistic exchange that subverts the very logic of vertical accountability (Cheema & Mohmand, 2020; Rizvi, 2019). Clientelism, understood as the contingent, dyadic and iterative provision of targeted material or regulatory goods in return for electoral support—has become the dominant mode of political mobilisation across rural Punjab, interior Sindh and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, thereby crowding out programmatic linkages between parties and citizens (Keefer & Khemani, 2021). Rather than withering away under electoral competition, patron–broker–client networks have adapted to successive waves of democratisation, incorporating new technologies (WhatsApp cash transfers, biometric voter identification leaks) and new public-goods schemes (Ehsaas, BISP) into an ever-more fine-grained machinery of vote-bloc management (Ahmad, 2022; Tariq, 2023). The resultant effect is a self-reinforcing equilibrium in which politicians have incentives to pursue unattainable incentives to focus on excludable benefits instead of collective goods, voters are permanently mired in subservient relationships that undermine their ability to punish incumbents post hoc, and state institutions charged with oversight are endogenously captured or resource starved (Callen and Hassan, 2021).

The macro-level indicators of the state of democratic weakness in Pakistan have been charted in the existing literature, including the civil-military imbalance, low party institutionalisation, and centralisation of finances, but the linkage between clientelistic bargains and accountability limitation and hindrance to political modernisation is micro-level information (Wilder, 2018; Bano and Javed, 2020). That gap is what this article is dealing with: how are clientelistic networks functioning at the ground level, why do they remain to be so despite electoral reforms, and, above all, what are the implications of the presented phenomenon on the future evolution of Pakistan as the country with the consolidated democracy with transparent, policy oriented and citizen responsive governance? The study is based on abductive analytical approach and combines knowledge of new institutionalism and political economy traditions by relying on semi-structured interviews with ten purposely sampled brokers, patrons and voters in three Punjab districts Kasur, Vehari and Faisalabad (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2020). The observation indicates that the survival of clientelism cannot be simply explained by poverty or the lack of information; instead, an elaborate moral economy of obligation, based on biradari hierarchies, land-tenure relation and gendered dependencies, turns state resources into private currencies of loyalty (Chandra, 2022). These micro-mechanisms, we argue, blunt the accountability-enhancing potential of electoral competition and frustrate the emergence of programmatic parties capable of aggregating policy preferences rather than ethnic or clan solidarities. By foregrounding the everyday practices through which democratic norms are subverted, the article contributes to comparative debates on the conditions under which clientelistic equilibria can be unwound and identifies policy levers—ranging from biometric audit trails to gender-targeted social protection—that could loosen the material and symbolic grip of patrons over voters.

## Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent and nature of clientelism in Pakistani politics
2. To analyze how clientelistic networks undermine democratic accountability

## Literature Review

### Clientelism: Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

Clientelism is best understood as a dyadic, hierarchical and contingent exchange in which a politician (patron) provides targeted, excludable benefits to citizens (clients) on the explicit or

implicit condition that they deliver electoral support (Stokes et al., 2013). Because the quid pro quo is individually enforceable and renewable across electoral cycles, clientelism diverges from programmatic politics that offer collective, rule-based policy bundles (Kitschelt, 2014). Its defining attributes are therefore selectivity, contingency and monitoring: only cooperative clients receive goods, compliance is continuously verified, and defection is punished through social, economic or coercive sanctions (Hicken, 2011). Within democratic contexts, this relational blueprint undermines the very premise of vertical accountability, transforming the vote from a sanctioning device into a tradable commodity (Lyne, 2008). Empirical work spanning Latin America, Africa and South Asia demonstrates that once clientelistic equilibria crystallise, citizens internalise the expectation that public services arrive only through personalised channels, eroding demands for universalistic provision and weakening party institutionalisation (Keefer, 2019). These features gain even more acuity in Pakistan, where feudal land tenure, biradari kinship and poor bureaucratic accessibility collide, politicians provide access to state resources, voters consider patronage to be an acceptable right, and electoral rivalry focuses on the amount and accuracy of specific transfers as opposed to the plausibility of the policy (Cheema & Mohmand, 2020; Chandra, 2022).

The tangible medium of the clientelistic exchange is heterogeneous in nature (between cash payments given out immediately to middle-term access to jobs, regulatory privileges or infrastructure developments). Researchers thus differentiate (i) vote-buying - short-term, privately provided transfers made days or hours before voting; (ii) patronage - longer-term provision of jobs, contracts or welfare benefits under the condition of future loyalty; (iii) broker-mediated networks - multi-level relationships where local brokers are paid to combine groups of voters (Schaffer and Baker, 2015; Tariq, 2023). Both modalities involve different surveillance technologies: vote-buying is based on spectacle in the last minute and serial number photography, whereas patronage is based on bureaucratic embeddedness to direct jobs or licences and systems mediated by brokers are based on dense social ties to enforce compliance (Auerbach and Thachil, 2018). Qualitative data in rural Punjab show a phased stratification of such varieties: landlords first pay out the sacks of fertilizers (vote-buying), then in exchange offer cleaning of irrigation channels (patronage), and finally, delegate monitoring of the village schoolteachers or lady health workers playing the role of brokers (Ahmad, 2022). More importantly, the emergence of digital finance EasyPaisa, JazzCash, has allowed compressing temporal lags, which facilitates same-day transfers and may decrease voter renegeing and improve the efficiency of brokers (Gans-Morse et al., 2021). However technological innovation does not change the asymmetry underlying it: clients are still price-takers in a monopsonistic political market, where the value of a vote to the patron is marginalised and the payouts are modified. Knowing these varieties is then critical to the process of breaking down how this clientelistic exchange is being transformed in reaction to electoral reforms, poverty graduation programmes and growing media scrutiny, and where it is possible to exert leverage to shift the incentives towards programmatic competition.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The qualitative research design is adopted by this study in order to examine the relationship of political clientelism and role of political clientelism in democratic consolidation in Pakistan and especially in the province of Punjab. This inquiry best suits the qualitative approach because it can be used to gain an in-depth comprehension of the socio-cultural and political mechanisms that underpin patron-client relations to a great extent. The study uses an analytical and interpretative framework wherein both primary and secondary sources are utilized in analyzing the influence of clientelism on accountability, governance and political modernization.

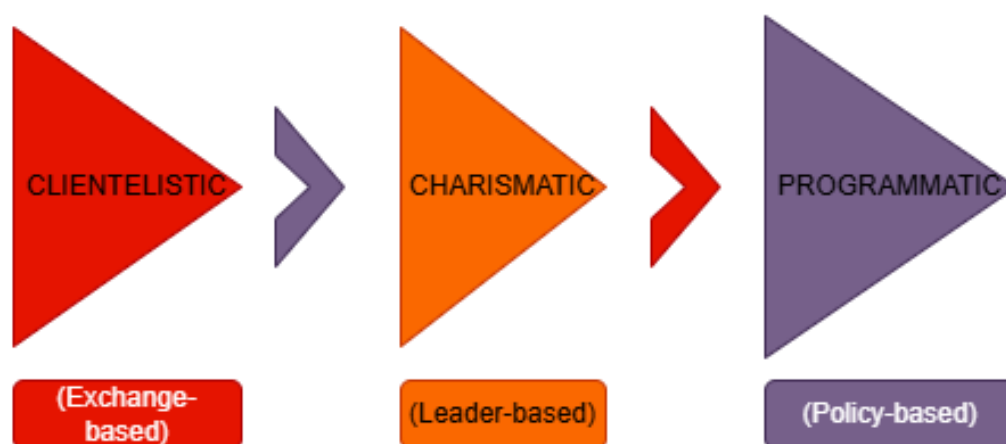
The analytical method helps the researcher to critically examine the current theoretical views, draw empirical trends, and reveal the processes behind clientelistic activities and weak Pakistani democracies.

Semi-structured interview with fifty purposely chosen participants in Punjab, who are local politicians, journalists, representatives of civil societies, and political analysts, has the primary source of data collection. The purposive sampling methodology has used to ensure the participant has the right knowledge and experience with regards to how clientelistic networks work and the effect they have on democratic institutions. All interviews have sought in flexible style to promote the open-ended nature of the interview to enable the participants to expound on their experiences and contextual insight. Besides the primary data, scanned academic sources, policy papers, and official documents have used in making the analysis rich and giving triangulation. The data gathered has thematically interpreted to recognize patterns that are recurrent, the power structures and governance issues. Such an approach guarantees an all-inclusive and situational based insight into the functioning of political clientelism in the socio-political context of Punjab and its further relevance to the overall issue of democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

## Kitschelt's Models of Clientelistic Linkages

### Kitschelt's Models of Political Linkages (Conceptual Flow)



Herbert Kitschelt (2000) has come up with a powerful model that has helped to understand the various forms of linkages between voters and politicians in different political regimes. To him, there are broadly three types of political linkages, namely, programmatic, charismatic, and clientelistic. In programmatic connection, voters will vote parties depending on their policies, ideologies, and performance; such a model is common to mature democracies where the institutions are robust and accountability mechanisms open. Charismatic linkage is a situation that dwells on individual appeal and emotional attachments to a leader where voters are not affected by the way the leader is but rather by the way the leader is. Clientelistic linkage, however, best suited to the developing democracies such as Pakistan is based on the exchange of specific favors (jobs, contracts, or development funds) in return. Political loyalty here is individualized and resources are not distributed according to organization merits but according to the relations that a person has with the patron.

Model: Kitschelt's Political Linkages

**Table 1**

Kitschelt's Political Linkages

Linkage Type	Basis of Support	Key Features	Pakistan Context
<b>Programmatic</b>	Policy performance & ideology	Issue-based politics, institutional trust	Urban educated voters, reformist agendas

<b>Charismatic</b>	Emotional appeal of leader	Leader-centered mobilization, personal loyalty	Imran Khan, Benazir Bhutto
<b>Clientelistic</b>	Exchange of favors & benefits	Patronage networks, selective resource access	Rural constituencies, biradari politics

The clientelistic model proposed by Kitschelt is quite suitable in the Pakistani political scenario as it can explain the patron-client relationship within the political landscape of the country particularly at the constituency level. Citizens and political actors are usually the middlemen between the state and individuals, where they offer specific benefits as a reward to voters and loyalty. This transactional relationship strengthens local dependency, undermines programmatic politics and maintains the domination of the elite. Therefore, the democratic system in Pakistan is still hybrid i.e. formal electoral competition along with informal ruling by patronage. The knowledge of the Kitschelt model is useful in explaining why clientelism continues to exist and why the transformation to programmatic connection might ensure better democratic consolidation.

**Table 2**

Kitschelt's Linkage Framework

Type of Linkage	Basis of Support	Key Characteristics	Example (Contextualized to Pakistan)
<b>Programmatic</b>	Policy performance, ideology	Issue-based voting, institutional accountability	Limited urban middle-class politics; reformist parties
<b>Charismatic</b>	Personal appeal of leader	Emotional loyalty, leader-centered politics	Popular leaders like Imran Khan or Benazir Bhutto
<b>Clientelistic</b>	Material exchange and personal favors	Patronage networks, selective distribution, dependency	Rural constituencies with patron-based politics

**Theoretical Approaches:**

The civic-culture thesis by Almond and Verba argues that stable democracy would be based in an active but restraint political culture whereby citizens would balance high cognitive

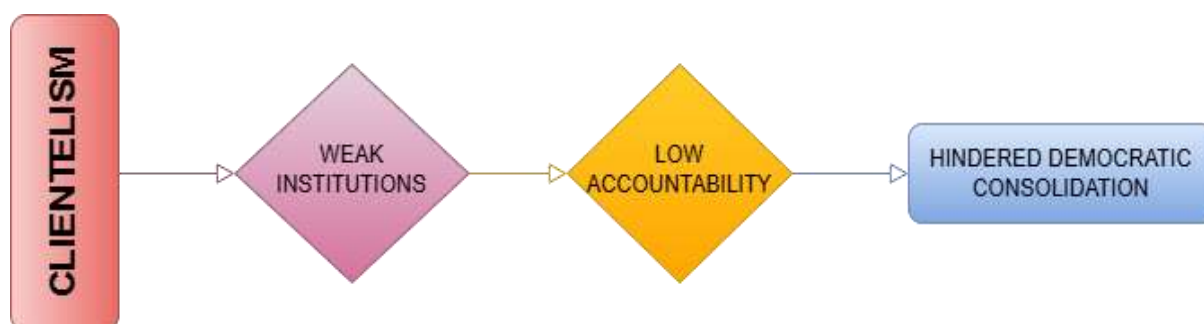
mobilisation and deferential trust towards the institutions and that these two conditions form what they refer to as a subject-participant equilibrium (Almond and Verba, 1963). Associational activism, interpersonal trust in such cultures can create the social capital to keep the office-holders on their toes without delegitimising the system, which strengthens the vertical and horizontal accountability. The polity of Pakistan, in contrast, has the opposite pattern: low generalised trust, high particularistic attachments to biradari and patron, and normative acceptance of extra-legal intermediation, which results in what Almond and Verba term a hybrid of parochial-participant that favours clientelistic exchange over programmatic aggregation, and has weak attitudinal underpinnings to democratic consolidation (Bano and Javed, 2020).

### Review of Existing Literature:

#### Analytical Model:

This theoretical framework describes the role of clientelism as a structural obstacle to democratic consolidation in Pakistan. The model suggests that there is a causal relation where pervasive clientelistic acts weaken institutional strength, accountability, and eventually the democratic consolidation process. In these environments, the citizens depend on informal connections and favor over establishment to gain access to state resources. Such reliance undermines bureaucratic independence, encourages biased allocation of favors, and distrust of democratic institutions. As a result, democracy turns out to be procedural and not substantive - maintained by elections but not by any sense of accountability and responsiveness in terms of policy.

#### Model: Pathway from Clientelism to Weak Democracy



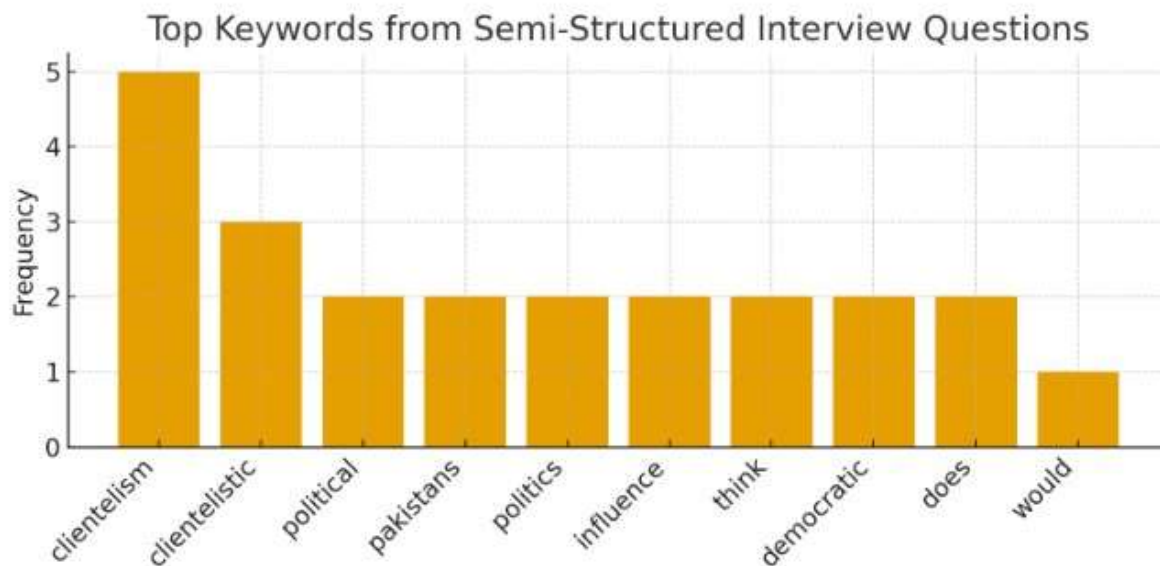
#### Explanation of Linkages

1. **Clientelism → Weak Institutions**  
Patronage politics replaces institutional meritocracy, leading to administrative inefficiency and dependence on political intermediaries.
2. **Weak Institutions → Low Accountability**  
When state institutions are compromised, oversight mechanisms and rule of law deteriorate, reducing transparency and enabling corruption.
3. **Low Accountability → Hindered Democratic Consolidation**  
Citizens lose trust in formal processes, resulting in voter apathy, elite dominance, and the persistence of hybrid democratic structures.

#### Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis has been carried out following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework using NVivo software. Both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) coding strategies have been applied. Initial nodes have reflected six predetermined themes derived from the interview guide: Perceptions of Clientelism, Structural Factors Sustaining

Clientelism, Electoral and Political Influence, Governance and Institutional Impact, Role of Media and Civil Society, and Reforms and Future Prospects. Additional sub-nodes have been developed as new insights have emerged from the data. Each interview transcript has been imported into NVivo, read carefully, and accompanied by reflective memos to capture preliminary observations.



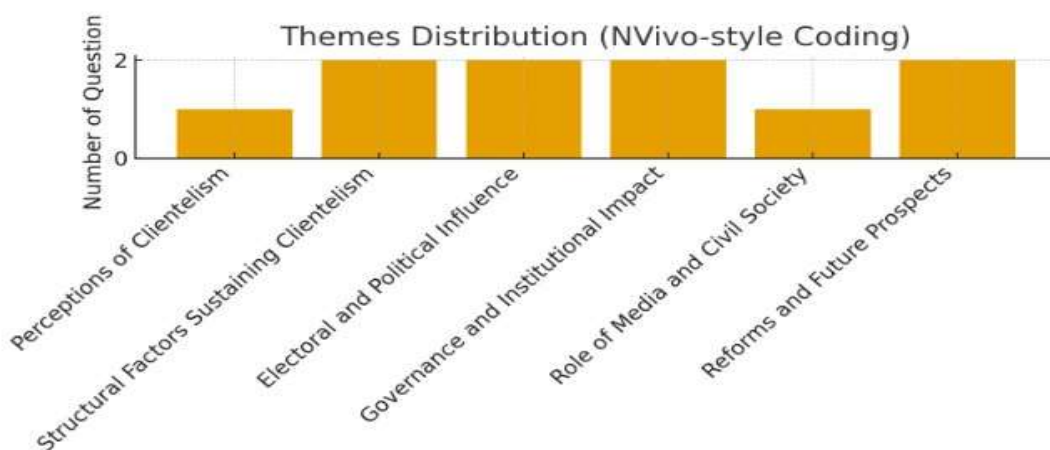
**Table 3**  
Political Clientage in Pakistan's Politics

Theme	Sub-Themes	Operational Definition	Examples of What It Captures
<b>1. Perceptions of Political Clientage</b>	1.1 Understanding of Clientelism	Respondents' own meanings and understandings of political clientage.	Descriptions of political favor exchange; "give and take" politics.
	1.2 Historical and Cultural Roots	References to the feudal and colonial legacy shaping patron-client relations.	Mentions of <i>zamindari</i> system, feudal control, and rural dependency.
	1.3 Local Terminologies and Social Acceptance	Local or regional expressions used for political patronage and its normalization.	Words like <i>biradari</i> , <i>thana culture</i> , <i>seth</i> , <i>wadera</i> .
	1.4 Ethical and Moral Views	Normative and moral opinions about whether clientelism is justifiable.	Statements about loyalty, necessity, corruption, or moral compromise.
<b>2. Structural Factors Sustaining Clientelism</b>	<b>2.1 Socioeconomic Dependency</b>	<b>Dependence on politicians for jobs, health, and public goods.</b>	<b>"People vote for who gives them ration or jobs."</b>



	2.2 Feudal and Biradari Networks	Influence of kinship, caste, or land relations in politics.	"My uncle supports this party, so we all vote for it."
	2.3 Weak Institutional Framework	Inability of state institutions to ensure fair access to services.	Political interference in police or bureaucracy.
	2.4 Political Brokerage and Intermediaries	Existence of brokers who connect voters and politicians.	Local <i>numberdar</i> or <i>counselor</i> acting as middlemen.
<b>3. Electoral and Political Influence</b>	3.1 Vote Buying and Electoral Bargains	Material incentives offered for votes.	Money, jobs, or construction projects promised before elections.
	3.2 Party Politics and Patronage Networks	How parties sustain and benefit from clientelistic systems.	Local party workers mobilizing voters with incentives.
	3.3 Candidate Selection and Resource Distribution	Criteria for nominating candidates based on loyalty rather than merit.	"He got the ticket because of his influence, not his work."
	3.4 Post-Election Rewards and Appointments	Patronage positions given after winning.	"Supporters got jobs or contracts after elections."
	<b>4.1 Policy Manipulation and Development Funds</b>	<b>Using public funds for personal or party advantage.</b>	<b>Roads built in areas supporting the ruling party.</b>
<b>4. Governance and Institutional Impact</b>	4.2 Administrative Corruption and Nepotism	Political interference in bureaucracy and local governance.	Transfers and postings influenced by politicians.
	4.3 Service Delivery and Accountability	Unequal service provision based on connections.	"Without a reference, no file moves."
	4.4 Erosion of Democratic Norms	How clientelism weakens transparency and accountability.	Public distrust, informal governance replacing institutions.
	<b>5.1 Media Exposure and Political Awareness</b>	<b>Media's influence in exposing corruption and raising awareness.</b>	<b>Investigative reports, political talk shows.</b>
<b>5. Role of Media and Civil Society</b>	5.2 Civil Society Activism	NGO and local activism promoting transparency.	NGO campaigns for fair elections or public audits.
	5.3 Digital Mobilization	Role of social media in accountability and mobilization.	Youth using Twitter/Facebook for political criticism.
	5.4 Limitations and Risks	Constraints faced by journalists and activists.	Threats, censorship, or political pressure.

<b>6. Reforms and Future Prospects</b>	<b>6.1 Electoral Reforms</b>	<b>Efforts or ideas for improving transparency in elections.</b>	<b>Biometric voting, transparent funding mechanisms.</b>
	6.2 Institutional Strengthening	Enhancing independence of institutions.	Free media, judiciary autonomy, ECP independence.
	6.3 Youth Political Behavior	Generational shifts in attitudes toward patronage.	"Young people don't vote for favors anymore."
	6.4 Civic Education and Democratic Values	Role of education in promoting citizenship and political literacy.	Inclusion of civic studies, school programs, awareness campaigns.



## Discussion

This paper has uncovered that the issue of political clientage in Pakistan is not an isolated process as it is a structural constituent of the wider sociopolitical reality. In the theoretical framework of political culture and democratic consolidation, institutional fragility in Pakistan is manifested in clientelism and vice versa. The clientelist networks as indicated in the interviews represent informal institutions of governance that replace the inefficiencies of formal institutions a situation that is well known in comparative political research of developing democracies (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007).

### Political Culture and the Persistence of Clientelism

The political culture in Pakistan has a long time history of patron-client relationships that have developed because of the colonial administrative systems and feudal hierarchy in the country. The theory of civic culture by Almond and Verba (1963) suggests that the occurrence of participatory and subject-oriented political behaviour is the determinant of democratic consolidation. Nonetheless, the Punjab statistics show that the political behavior is still much parochial and dependent. Acceptance of biradari directed loyalty and personalized political relation by the respondents is an aspect that denotes the political culture where citizenship is mediated by personal networks as opposed to institutional rights. This relationship is the one that strengthens what O'Donnell (1996) conceptualized as a delegate democracy, a management of government by the individual that overstructures the institutional responsibility.

### **Structural and Institutional Weaknesses**

Clientelism also continues to exist, which indicates profound structural inequalities and poor institutional strength. The fact that the respondents highlighted poverty, joblessness, and poor social services is consistent with the notion of a weak state, according to Migdal whereby the local actors have more power than institutional structures. Political brokerage is reported by interviewees as being on the basis of having no credible bureaucratic structures of redressing grievances. In this regard, the citizens are made to rely on political patrons, thus making the relationship between citizens and the state to be not reciprocal, but a transactional relationship. These conclusions support the position of Hicken (2011) that the business of clientelism is more effective in the settings where delivery of the public goods is insecure, and voters are rational in demanding individual gains, rather than generalized outcomes.

### **Clientelism, Elections, and Democratic Consolidation.**

Clientelistic politics has a direct negative impact on democratic consolidation, as it distorts the electoral competition and eradicates meritocracy. The stories gathered during the interviews with respondents show that Pakistan has a tradition where elections can be used to reproduce patronage systems, instead of transforming them. According to one respondent, elections are not about programs, but favors as one respondent put it. This fact is affirmative to the theoretical assumption put forward by Bratton and van de Walle (1997), who indicated that in most of the postcolonial democracies, elections do not interfere with the patron-client networks, they only legitimize them. Distributive favors, where the politicians do not grant distributive favors based on performance of the policies, make accountability personalized, where voters are rewarded with access instead of governance. The democratic institutions in Pakistan, therefore, find it hard to develop out of informal patronage into institutional performance, which is a fundamental requirement of democratic consolidation.

### **Governance, Corruption, and Institutional Decay**

The results also show that clientelism erodes good governance by entrenching corruption and undermining bureaucratic impartiality. The political manipulation of administrative decisions, a preference in development projects, and a selective allocation of public wealth are all good examples of the loss of Weberian bureaucracy standards. This is in line with the concept of predator governance, as Evans (1995) refers to predatory governance, as a public power that is employed to benefit privately or partisanly. The resultant service delivery and accountability drop help in the public mistrust - a very crucial barrier to democratic legitimacy. The introspection by respondents on personal governance as compared to rule-based governance emphasizes the role of informal networks to substitute formal accountability systems, which essentially takes the place of the role of the state organization.

### **The Developing Counter-Narrative of Media, Civil Society and the Media.**

Regardless of the deep-rooted system of clientelism, the statistics show that counter-narratives are emerging owing to the media attention, online activism, and civil society interventions. In line with the current research conducted on digital democratization (Howard and Hussain, 2013), respondents who were younger saw social media as an alternative means of political participation and transparency. Although conventional media in Pakistan has struggled with the political and corporate forces, the increase in the use of digital tools, particularly by educated young people is a slow change in culture of dependency to activism. The civil society organizations and the non-governmental organizations, though small in scale, are starting to exert accountability pressures by advocacy, documentation and civic education campaigns. These developments are an indication that the culture of clientelism is facing an infantile but significant challenge.

## **Reform Prospects and Cultural Transformation**

Lastly, the reforms debate points to the fact that only institutional fortification cannot be used to combat clientelism in the absence of cultural change. The focus on civic education, youth involvement and transparency reforms by the respondents can also be attributed to the increasing awareness of the need to change the political mindset of patronage to participation in order to consolidate democracy. Internalization of democratic values is necessary in the sustainability of democratization as postulated by Inglehart and Welzel (2005). The recovery of political culture in Pakistan situation entails propagation of civic literacy, development of local governments, and empowerment of people to view themselves as right-bearing subjects instead of clients of political elites. This change is gradual, but needed to move towards programmatic politics as opposed to personalistic.

## **Theoretical Implications**

Thematically this research paper shows that clientelism and political culture reinforce each other in Pakistan. It is the weak institutions that create dependency and it is dependency that maintains weak institutions. However, there is evidence of change especially among the young generation, the media and the civil society that show that the political culture of Pakistan is not fixed. Gradual change to both awareness and digital involvement, and demand in accountability are some of the likely avenues of democratic consolidation. Theoretically, the study will help to comprehend the role of hybrid democracies in addressing informal politics practices against formal democracies, and as a result, provide ideas on the conflict between modernization and patronizing traditions in South Asian politics.

According to the qualitative results of this paper, it is seen that political clientage in Pakistan and especially in Punjab is more of a complex socio-political design and not a transactional model. The six themes that were analyzed show that patron-client relations are upheld by material, emotional, and cultural processes that strengthen the idea of dependency, prevent institutional change, and condition political engagement. This discussion puts these empirical findings in the context of the wider theoretical perspective of clientelism, neo-patrimonialism and the theory of political culture and their impacts on the consolidation of democracy.

### **1. Clientelism and the Logic of Exchange**

In its original meaning, clientelism is a mutual, albeit disproportionate, reciprocate of favors between clients and patrons, a form of informal government that replaces ineffective formal institutions. Material dependency and institutional weakness in this study are themes that go in tandem with this definition (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). The stories of the participants demonstrated how access to state resources is facilitated by personal identities and not by institutional ones, which supports the idea of the strong society, weak state developed by Migdal (1988). The development funds, employment and administrative favors in exchange of political loyalty have become institutionalized in the Pakistani context, thus limiting bureaucracy and democratic accountability.

### **2. Hybrid Governance and Neo-patrimonialism.**

This relates to the idea of neo-patrimonialism too, in which formal democratic institutions are paralleled by informal, power networks (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997).

The idea of clientelist politics persistence in the Punjab is also consistent with the concept of neo-patrimonialism, where formal democratic institutions coexist with informal, power associations (Bratton and van de Walle, 1997). Even though there are elections and modern political institutions, the actual power is in personal and family connections. The motifs of the middle place networks as well as informal power provided an insight on how the politicians

become intermediaries between the citizens and the state and combine their conventional patronage with regular government. This form of hybridity perpetuates elite control at the expense of some marginalized voters with partial inclusion. As a result, neo-patrimonialism gets in the way of the development of impersonal and rule-based system of governance that is crucial in the process of democratic consolidation.

### **3. Emotional and Cultural Dimensions of Loyalty**

The results are also an expansion of the current theories as they highlight the emotional and cultural foundations of clientelism. Although literature mostly talks of material rewards, the paper does verify that loyalty is also usually motivated by moral and emotional considerations, including trust, izzat (honor), and ehsaan (gratitude). These findings are in tandem with the views of Chandra (2004), who held that identity and emotion have a tendency of mediating political choice within patron-client systems. The emotional loyalty theme underlines the way in which affective relationships turn clientelism in a strategically-oriented interaction into a culturally-sanctioned norm, and therefore complicate reform endeavors. This emotional logic is key to understanding how realistic strategies that can be used to respond to institutional deficit are developed without neglecting social expectations, which are entrenched in the political culture of Pakistan.

### **Generational Change and Future Change.**

It is, perhaps, the most relevant contribution of the research the establishment of a generational gap in political attitudes. The unfavorableness of clientelist legitimacy may be gradually diminished because the younger respondents favor merit-based and transparent governance. This can be seen in line with the theory of value change developed by Inglehart (1997) that holds that modernization and education contribute to the development of post-materialist values and undermine traditional loyalties. Nevertheless, according to the results, youth agency is still limited by structural inequalities and economic dependency. This paradox of ambition and restraint characterizes the culture of transition of politics in Pakistan - harboring a possibility of democratic thickening as well as the danger of disappointment in the event of failure of institutional changes to be enforced.

### **Significances to Democratic Consolidation**

Theoretically, this finding highlights the conceptual complexity of political culture and democratic consolidation. Clientelism in Pakistan does not only corrupt the representation, but also negates the moral legitimacy of the democratic institutions. Consolidation needs to involve democracy being left as the sole player in town, behaviorally as well as attitudinally as argued by Linz and Stepan (1996). Nonetheless, it is the deep rootedness of norms of clientelism that does not allow autonomous citizens and issue based politics to evolve. Simultaneously, the imminent change in the values of the young generation offers a possible basis of cultural change one that may progressively alter patronage-based democracy into performance-based one.

### **Findings**

#### **1. Perceptions of Political Clientage**

Interviews provided that political clientage is a very popular concept in the political culture of Pakistan and not a lapse. The respondents in Punjab generally described clientelism as simply a relationship of give and take between politicians and voters, whereas it is actually seen as a survival strategy and not a moral failure. It was perceived by many to be an extension of colonial administrative traditions where people who were loyal received access to state resources. The language of participants biradari, thana-katcheri and seth culture emphasizes the way in which the local idioms legitimize clientelistic interactions. Interestingly, some respondents denounced clientelism as corrupt, but some thought of it as an inevitable social process in

situations of institutional frailty and economic insecurity. This has two sides: there is the moral ambivalence of the populace in thinking about clientage: it is condemned and exercised at the same time as an obligatory policy tool.

### **Lack of Structure Within the System Favoring Clientelism.**

Respondents attributed the existence of clientelism to structural inequalities. The most common arguments by many interviewees were that with socioeconomic deprivation and lack of trustworthy institutions of the state, citizens rely on patrons to access basic needs like employment, police services, or healthcare. Feudal and the biradari networks were referred to as the most powerful pillars of clientelistic politics especially in rural Punjab where the landowners and local elites are the ones who take over the political representation. Some of the participants identified weak governance systems, absence of meritocracy, and the politicization of bureaucracy as key facilitators of these networks. Political brokers- (village notables or intermediaries) are the connective tissue between the citizens and the elected officials, building on a system where loyalty is the medium of political participation replacing citizenship. These institutional facts guarantee that political favoritism is a self-perpetuating, consistent process in the politics of Pakistan.

### **3. Electoral and Political Influence**

The majority of respondents stressed that patronclient relations play a significant role in the electoral competition in Pakistan. Some of the common electoral practices included vote buying, development funds distribution, and selective distribution of welfare programs. Party workers have been characterized as the brokers of power who organize the support by ensuring that they access the state benefits or local projects. The selection of candidates in large political parties was also perceived as clientelism as loyalty and financial ability mostly took precedence over merit and ideological devotion. Upon elections, winners in politics compensate political loyalists by either appointing them to jobs, transferring them, or giving them discretionary funds. Such tendencies do not only destroy democratic responsibility but also bring about politics to be less programmatic and more of a personalistic interaction. Essentially, elections are recreative of the systems of clientelism instead of confronting them, and, as one party described it, vote-based dependency politics.

### **4. Institutional Impact and Governance.**

It was reported that political favors have extensive influence on the quality of governance and institutional credibility in terms of interviews. According to the respondents, the office of the government is oftentimes a system of informal networks where personal relations are more important than formal ones. The funds directed towards development are often diverted to regions that benefit ruling parties and the disparity and resentment of the populace increases. The interference of politics in appointments to the bureaucratic positions was termed as a normal occurrence, which resulted in inefficiency, corruption, and poor service delivery. A number of respondents mused that such culture undermines meritocracy, accountability frameworks and suppressed citizen confidence in state institutions. According to one civil servant, rules are second when the politician calls - that is our chain of command. The summary of conclusions is that clientelism replaces institutional governance by personal governance and thus reform initiatives are hard to maintain.

### **5. Role of Media and Civil Society**

Two-sided actors in this political environment were found to be the media and civil society. On one hand, respondents have admitted the increasing role of television talk shows, investigative journalism and social media in setting the ugly practices and socializing the people. Online activism of the young generation was mentioned as a good indicator of political maturity

and opposition to the old patronizing regimes. Conversely, the independence of media and NGOs was also dubbed as a skeptical issue by the participants since most of them are seen to be subjective to political or corporate interests. Civil societies were perceived to be active but localized particularly beyond the cities. In addition, journalists and activists are intimidated and censored and this limits their ability to hold to book on the part of the entrenched elites. Nevertheless, the growth of digital spaces gradually changes the subject matter of accountability and transparency in the general discourse.

#### **6. Reforms and Future Prospects.**

Participants were optimistic but cautious when it comes to reforms. The reforms of the institutions, especially the empowerment of the Election Commission of Pakistan, judiciary, and the local governments were advocated by many as significant to interrupt the patronage cycle. Many of the respondents stressed that a real change should begin with electoral reforms, which would guarantee the transparency of the financing and nomination of the candidates. Youth respondents, especially, expressed more critical views of a clientelistic politics, with them referring to it as of an old fashioned and modern-day incompatible with the principles of democracy. This change in generations implies the possibility of change, particularly in the event of civic education and additional political awareness. Another suggestion of the respondents was to incorporate civic values in the education programs to foster more participatory and meritocratic political culture. With an awareness of the difficulties, the majority of the respondents were in agreement with the fact that, Democratic consolidation in Pakistan is based on the fact that gradually, individual loyalties should be replaced by institutional accountability.

#### **Conclusion**

The discussion reveals that political clientage in Pakistan represents a hybrid political order by combining the formal democracy processes with the informal power structures maintained by the emotional attachment and material reliance. This system is not stagnant though it is well rooted. With the growth of educated and digitally conscious young people and the gradual empowerment of the civil society, the pillars of clientelism can be undermined in the long-run. The reforms should be initiated together to address the institutional, economic, and cultural changes in order to achieve democratic consolidation. The only way Pakistan can be taken to a more responsible and active democracy is by a multidimensional approach to clientelism that tackles structural and normative aspects.

#### **Recommendations**

1. Empower the local government institutions so that citizens are not over reliant on individual politicians to provide simple services.
2. Implement open-mindedness in the allocation and development funds on the basis of the resources so that the political elites can have very little room to play with.
3. Efforts should be made to promote civic education initiatives that will encourage political participation that is based on merit and to discourage practice of vote-buying.
4. Empower youth participation and online services that promote political responsibility and mobilization on issues.
5. It should enforce a greater control of political funding to reduce the patronage system and ensure a healthy competition in elections.





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