

What impact does clientelism have on democratic performance and the realisation of social policy goals? The crux of the evaluative dilemma is that — however much clientelism diverges from the Weberian ideal of impartial, rule-based bureaucracy, or is associated with pathologies such as corruption — clientelistic practices can sometimes deliver material improvement to those in need, as well as providing a mechanism of elite-society accountability. The essays in *Clientelism, Social Policy, and the Quality of Democracy* provide a broad and varied set of responses to the question. This diversity is both a strength and a weakness.

The book is divided into two parts. The first six substantive chapters provide studies of clientelism in Latin American states, covering Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Peru. The second part broadens out from this regional focus to survey clientelism elsewhere, including India, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Eastern Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to geographical variety, the chapters display a range of methodologies, data sources, and policy areas, with some presenting original research and others providing literature reviews.

This review will pay particular attention to the chapter by Linda Cook on Eastern Europe. Cook begins by arguing that '[e]xperiences with political clientelism in Eastern Europe's post communist states differ from those of the other regions discussed in this volume' (204). Nevertheless, Cook argues that we can divide Eastern European post-communist states into three groups according to the prevalence of clientelistic practices: the 'poor, monoindustrial, rural and isolated' parts of the former Soviet Union and Southeastern Europe (high clientelism); 'consolidated East Central European democracies' (low clientelism); and 'post-Soviet electoral-authoritarian regimes' (non-clientelistic electoral manipulation) (204-205). Cook argues that these groupings are the result of 'the intersection of structural factors, primarily levels of socioeconomic development, and institutional factors, specifically levels of market transition, democratization, and political competition' (207). Overall, the chapter provides a compact overview from a respected scholar of a group of states that — despite sharing the post-communist label — display increasing diversity.

There are, however, a small number of weaker points in Cook's chapter. Firstly, although the narrative exposition of the argument is clear, its summary in table 9.2 (207) serves to confuse rather than clarify, given the use of inconsistent categories. Secondly, rather than survey all electoral authoritarian regimes, Cook suggests that 'the Russian Federation is the most important and will serve as a representative case of this type of political system' (216). Although the focus on a particular case is understandable given the constraints of a short review, the claim that the Russian experience is 'representative' is less sound. The variety of types and levels of electoral manipulation across the former Soviet Union should caution against thinking in terms of the modal case — a point hinted at by the spread of Freedom House scores cited by Cook in table 9.1 (206) for Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. Finally, there is a tension between the confidence with which Cook asserts that electoral manipulation is non-clientelistic in Russia and her acknowledgment of evidence to the contrary — evidence that chimes with recent findings, such as Frye, Reuter and Szakonyi's (2014: Abstract) conclusion that 'clientelist exchange can thrive in industrial settings and in the absence of deeply embedded political parties'.

One of the book's stated goals — and what would seem to set it apart from works such as Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson's 2007 edited volume, *Patrons, Clients, and Policies* — is to 'learn[] from successful experiences and develop[] a set of best practices for possible reform and change' (xi). In order to explore the comparative impact of clientelism, a basic starting point would seem to be a shared definition of what, in fact, constitutes clientelism. The authors do not, however, share such a common understanding. Although this definitional plurality is not a distinctive feature of the book — it reflects differences in the wider, burgeoning literature<sup>1</sup> — and although it allows for an interesting survey of different approaches, it severely complicates the task of meaningful cross-regional comparison. This could have been remedied somewhat by more explicit referencing between chapters to note the implications of using different definitions of clientelism. Alternatively, this synthesising work could have been included in a substantial concluding chapter. Instead, the

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<sup>1</sup>On the 'lack of conceptual clarity' in the literature, see Hicken (2011: 290).

final, very short chapter by Beatriz Magaloni largely steers clear of discussing the findings of earlier chapters.

In sum, the strength of *Clientelism, Social Policy, and the Quality of Democracy* lies in the sheer variety of responses to the opening question. The book's weakness lies in the lack of clarity regarding to what extent this diversity is a function of divergent experiences on the ground or simply differences in how we conceptualise clientelistic practices.

#### References:

Hicken, A. (2011) 'Clientelism', *Annual Review of Political Science* (14), 289-310.

Kitschelt, H., and Wilkinson, S. (eds) (2007) *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Frye, T., Reuter, O. J., and Szakonyi, D. (2014) 'Political Machines at Work: Voter Mobilization and Electoral Subversion in the Workplace', *World Politics* (66:2), 195-228.