

## I

## Introduction

Many politicians across the world deliver material benefits to citizens in direct exchange for political support. Recent news headlines provide a glimpse of this phenomenon. Nepal's former prime minister warned of politicians who pay citizens as if they are "goats and sheep," thereby "plundering the nation for five years by buying voters for one day."<sup>1</sup> The governing party of South Africa charged that a competitor stooped to "swine politics" by handing out piglets nearly a year before the 2014 elections.<sup>2</sup> Bulgaria's prime minister proclaimed vote buying to be "one of the ugliest phenomena in Bulgaria's recent history" as he spearheaded related investigations and arrests.<sup>3</sup> In Thailand, a Human Rights Watch observer claimed "everyone buys votes," and the *Bangkok Post* blamed vote-buying accusations for "fuelling" antigovernment protests.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Brazil ousted scores of politicians for distributing hand-outs during campaigns, reaching a staggering 1,000 removals in just over a decade.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps these reports are just isolated instances? On the contrary, recent surveys of 63,000 citizens across forty-four countries attest to the remarkable prevalence of such exchanges. The Latin American Public Opinion Project conducted surveys in twenty-six countries across the Americas and discovered that nearly 12 percent of citizens "sometimes" or "always" received offers

<sup>1</sup> "Madhav Nepal against Vote Buying," *Kantipur*, November 16, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> "Piglets Meant to Pay Off at Polls, Says ANC," *Business Day*, June 11, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Bulgaria Government Information Service, March 25, 2013. See also: "Bulgarian Prosecutors Investigating 43 Cases of Alleged Electoral Fraud," *Sofia Globe*, May 12, 2013; "Bulgarian Politician Arrested for Vote Buying in Varna," *Sofia News Agency*, July 6, 2013; and "2 Bulgarians Sentenced for Vote Buying," *Sofia News Agency*, May 19, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> "Snap Election Turns the Heat on Watchdogs," *Bangkok Post*, December 15, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Movimento de Combate à Corrupção Eleitoral (2012).

of benefits in exchange for their votes. This figure exceeded 16 percent in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Paraguay.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Afrobarometer uncovered that nearly 18 percent of citizens “sometimes” or “often” receive offers for their votes in the eighteen African countries it surveyed. Remarkably, figures surpassed 30 percent in Benin, Kenya, Madagascar, and Uganda.<sup>7</sup> And these findings are likely to be underestimates, because citizens tend to underreport such offers.<sup>8</sup>

This familiar pattern of exchanges – frequently called clientelism or machine politics – is the central focus of this book. Nearly all politicians promise some form of benefits to voters, so what distinguishes clientelism from “politics as usual?” A key distinction is *contingency*: citizens promise to vote for a politician in order to receive clientelist benefits.<sup>9</sup> In return for these promises, citizens may receive handouts during election campaigns or benefits that continue for years. This contingency contrasts sharply with the “programmatic” politics observed in some countries (especially in many but not all advanced democracies), in which citizens do not have to promise to vote for a politician in order to receive benefits.

Over the years, many scholars have been captivated by the question of how clientelism dies in some countries.<sup>10</sup> This book inverts the question and asks how clientelism survives. Fundamental challenges examined next might be expected to undercut machine politics, but the phenomenon remains remarkably resilient in many contexts. A cross-country survey of 1,400 experts by Herbert Kitschelt (2013) confirms that clientelism persists in more than 90 percent of nations, with “moderate” or “major” clientelist efforts in 74 percent of countries.<sup>11</sup> And far from abating, clientelism proves surprisingly durable. According to the study, over the past decade, politicians’ clientelist efforts remained constant in half of countries, and even *increased* in another quarter of nations.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 2010 Latin American Public Opinion Project. Several other countries reached comparable figures. See also Faughnan and Zechmeister (2011).

<sup>7</sup> Afrobarometer Round 3 Survey (fielded in 2005 and 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Addressing social desirability bias often yields far greater prevalence rates (e.g., Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012).

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the key role of contingency, see Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007, 10–11) and Hicken (2011, 291–292).

<sup>10</sup> Recent examples examining why clientelism declines (either partially or entirely) include Stokes et al. (2013), Hagopian (2014), Weitz-Shapiro (2012), Lyne (2008), Kuo (2013), Montero (2012), Lloyd (2012), and Pasotti (2010).

<sup>11</sup> Expert survey in 2008–2009 of eighty-eight countries (all democratic polities with populations of at least two million citizens). Question: “In general, how much effort do politicians and parties in this country make to induce voters with preferential benefits to cast their votes for them?” Coded as persisting if most of a country’s experts indicated “minor,” “moderate,” or “major” efforts.

<sup>12</sup> Calculated by author using data from Kitschelt (2013). Based on average responses of experts for each country.

## 1.1 *The Puzzle*

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### 1.1 THE PUZZLE

The persistence of clientelism throughout much of the world is striking, given the wide range of challenges that ostensibly threaten its existence. Scholars emphasize that four broad categories of challenges often threaten machine politics: structural changes, institutional reforms, legal enforcement, and partisan strategies. A brief, non-exhaustive overview of such challenges clarifies why the survival of clientelism is an intriguing puzzle.

Structural changes such as economic development may threaten machine politics. Observers long believed that direct exchanges of votes for benefits would wane as countries modernized (cf. Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007, 3; Hagopian, 2014). Although its persistence in some wealthy countries tempered such expectations, many contemporary studies contend that economic development undermines clientelism through poverty reduction. Clientelism is most prevalent in low-income countries, and within countries, politicians tend to distribute selective benefits disproportionately to poor citizens (Kitschelt, 2011; Stokes et al., 2013). Microeconomic theory points to one reason why: the diminishing marginal utility of income suggests poor citizens place relatively greater value on material benefits than on ideological preferences (Dixit and Londregan, 1996, 1114; Stokes, 2005, 315). Risk aversion and time preferences are other frequently cited reasons why poor citizens may be most prone to machine politics.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of why poverty and clientelism are linked, the plausible implication is that economic development should hinder machine politics so long as poverty declines. Yet clientelism has survived (and sometimes even thrived) amid a sharp increase in per capita income across the world over the last century (Maddison, 2001), as well as the halving of global poverty since 1990.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, machine politics endured in most of the world amid other structural changes posited to undermine the phenomenon. Examples include urbanization (which may inhibit clientelist monitoring) and population growth (which may raise the relative cost of clientelism).<sup>15</sup> Given economic development and other structural changes, how does clientelism remain so resilient?

Institutional reforms present another reason why the survival of machine politics is perplexing. Although various political and electoral institutions influence politicians' incentives to pursue clientelism (Carey and Shugart, 1995;

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion about the role of risk aversion, see Desposato (2007, 104) and Stokes et al. (2013, 163–164). For poor citizens' preference for immediate benefits, see Scott (1969, 1150) and Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007, 3).

<sup>14</sup> World Bank Poverty Overview. Accessed November 21, 2017 at [www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview](http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview). See also “World Bank Says U.N. Goal of Halving Poverty Met,” *Reuters*, February 29, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Increasing geographic mobility may render clientelist monitoring more difficult (Hicken, 2011, 299–300), while electorate growth may favor programmatic politics over clientelism due to economies of scale (Stokes et al., 2013, chap. 8).

Hicken, 2007),<sup>16</sup> the contemporary literature overwhelmingly identifies one institution as clientelism's biggest threat: the secret ballot. With the introduction of the secret ballot, what prevents citizens from accepting rewards and then voting as they wish? Ballot secrecy may undermine clientelism by making it difficult, if not impossible, to verify how citizens vote. Of course, it is widely known that many politicians violate ballot secrecy; for example, Filipinos distribute carbon paper to copy ballots and Italians lend mobile phones to photograph vote choices (Schaffer and Schedler, 2007, 30–31). Without denying the fallibility of ballot secrecy, most researchers concur that the institution hampers some forms of clientelism by increasing monitoring costs (e.g., Cox and Kousser, 1981; Rusk, 1974; Stokes, 2005). Compulsory voting is another important threat to clientelism because it undermines politicians' ability to use benefits to influence *whether* citizens vote. Beyond influencing vote choices, selective benefits often mobilize supporters and demobilize opposition voters (Cox, 2009; Cox and Kousser, 1981; Nichter, 2008). Abstention penalties hinder such strategies: they shrink the pool of nonvoting supporters who can be targeted and make it tougher to induce opposers to stay home on election day (Gans-Morse, Mazucca, and Nichter, 2014). Many countries have adopted such institutions that are supposedly inimical to machine politics: the secret ballot is one of the most ubiquitous electoral institutions in the world, and nearly thirty countries have compulsory voting (IDEA, 2009; Przeworski, 2012, 98). Given such institutional challenges, how does clientelism survive?

Heightened legal enforcement poses another key challenge for clientelism. In the case of historic Britain and the United States, Stokes et al. (2013, chap. 8) argue that legal reforms and their enforcement helped eradicate the phenomenon, as did economic development and ballot secrecy. Across the world today, nearly 90 percent of nations prohibit clientelism during campaigns (IDEA, 2012). Although enforcement is often weak, many countries are ratcheting up efforts to identify and punish transgressors, including Colombia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Thailand (Eaton and Chambers-Ju, 2014; Hicken, 2007; Schaffer, 2008). In tandem with such domestic efforts, international election monitoring dramatically increased over the last half-century: nearly 80 percent of national elections are currently monitored by foreign observers (Hyde, 2011, 356). Heightened legal enforcement may thwart clientelism if politicians are unwilling to stomach the increased risk of punishment. In addition, it may render clientelism costlier for at least two reasons: increased campaign expenditures to evade detection, and higher citizen compensation if receiving benefits is punishable by law. In contexts with heightened legal enforcement, how does clientelism endure?

In some circumstances, party strategies may also threaten the viability of clientelism. Whereas Martin Shefter's (1977) seminal work attributes

<sup>16</sup> For a brief overview, see also Kitschelt (2000, 859–862) and Hagopian (2014, 19–20).

## 1.2 The Argument

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parties' adoption of clientelist appeals to their formative years,<sup>17</sup> the dominant paradigm now views party strategies as relatively more adaptable to political incentives and circumstances (e.g., Kitschelt, 2000; Levitsky, 2003b). For example, Phil Keefer (2007) argues that politicians tend to rely on clientelism when they cannot credibly promise to enact policies once elected (see also Keefer and Vlaicu, 2008), implying that politicians may abandon the practice once they acquire such credibility. Moreover, Frances Hagopian (2014, 31) contends that neoliberal reforms motivated some parties to pivot away from clientelism and other distributive strategies – and others to shift toward them – depending on how reforms affected parties' relative competitiveness. A commonality of such studies is that they offer conditions under which parties choose to eschew clientelism. Where such conditions pertain, what explains the perpetuation of clientelism?

This discussion of potential threats to clientelism is not meant to be exhaustive. But a broader point emerges when considering this confluence of structural changes, institutional reforms, legal enforcement, and partisan strategies. As examined extensively in this study, many commonly observed factors might be expected to cripple machine politics. Yet the direct exchange of benefits for political support continues throughout much of the world. Amid so many ostensibly fatal challenges, what mechanisms sustain the patterns of clientelism observed in so many countries?

### 1.2 THE ARGUMENT

This book argues that citizens play a crucial yet underappreciated role in sustaining clientelism. Despite rising incomes, most of the world's population remains vulnerable to adverse shocks such as unemployment, illness, and droughts. When the state fails to provide an adequate social safety net, this vulnerability motivates many citizens to buttress the stability of “relational clientelism” – ongoing exchange relationships that extend beyond election campaigns. Although relational clientelism is often resilient to many of the challenges discussed earlier, it is especially prone to opportunistic defection, a crucial problem that citizens' actions help alleviate. More specifically, ongoing exchange relationships involve a dual credibility problem: (1) politicians are concerned about whether citizens' promises to deliver political support are credible, and (2) citizens are concerned about whether politicians' promises to deliver benefits are credible. Citizens who depend on these relationships frequently employ two mechanisms to help sustain relational clientelism: they *declare support* to signal their own credibility, and they *request benefits* to screen politician credibility. Citizens who promise to vote for a politician in exchange for material benefits are deemed more trustworthy when they publicly

<sup>17</sup> More specifically, Shefter (1977) suggests parties tend to employ patronage if they mobilized a popular base before bureaucratic professionalization, but could not do so otherwise.

declare support by displaying political paraphernalia on their homes, on their bodies, and at rallies. Likewise, politicians who promise assistance during adverse shocks in exchange for political support are deemed more trustworthy when they have a track record of fulfilling their clients' requests. Through both mechanisms, citizens often play an instrumental role in the survival of relational clientelism.

### 1.3 THE ROLE OF CITIZENS

Clientelism is typically depicted as a top-down phenomenon that is firmly controlled by elites. Citizens involved in exchanges are usually viewed as bit actors who do little more than accept offers and follow instructions from politicians and their representatives. Without denying the importance of elites, I reject the common assumption that citizens are relegated to a passive role in clientelism. Instead, this book argues that the purposive choices of citizens often play a fundamental role in the survival of clientelism.

In much of the world, increased voter autonomy enables citizens to make choices that help sustain clientelism. Traditional literature on the topic examined enduring exchange relationships that were highly asymmetric (e.g., Cornelius, 1977; Powell, 1970), and thus provided few options for citizens to engage in political actions of their volition. In contemporary societies, voters typically have far greater independence within exchange relationships than their historical counterparts, who were often locked into patron-client bonds due to land-tenure arrangements (e.g., Hall, 1974; Scott, 1972, 93). Moreover, many countries have shifted from monopolistic to competitive clientelism (Kitschelt, 2011, 16); when exchanges are no longer dominated by a single machine, the potential scope for citizen choice often increases as voters have alternative sources of handouts. Several analysts of clientelism document a decrease in elite control over citizens (e.g., Archer, 1990; Gay, 2006; Scott, 1972), and others discuss the increased power of voters (e.g., Hilgers, 2012; Piattoni, 2001; Taylor-Robinson, 2010). Nevertheless, the broader literature – including nearly all formal and quantitative research on the topic – tends to give short shrift to the implications of heightened voter autonomy. Studies of clientelism almost invariably focus on the strategies of politicians and their representatives, and generally offer few insights about how the choices of citizens might also influence exchanges. By contrast, the present book puts voter choice into stark relief, and argues that actions chosen by citizens frequently bolster the stability of ongoing exchange relationships.

Across the world, many voters have a powerful motivation for undertaking such actions – elites often help their clients cope with vulnerability. The concept of vulnerability employed in this book encompasses both poverty and risk, given that both low average income and high uncertainty can reduce a citizen's

#### 1.4 *Relational Clientelism*

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welfare (Ligon and Schechter, 2003).<sup>18</sup> Although poverty has declined in many countries in recent decades, many people remain susceptible to various sources of uncertainty, including unemployment, illness, and drought. Nearly a half-century ago, James Scott linked the survival of patron–client ties in Southeast Asia to a lack of institutionalized ways in which citizens could ensure their livelihood (1972, 101–102). While Scott did not focus on the role of citizen choices, his insights remain relevant. Citizens often strive to sustain relational clientelism if the state does not mitigate their vulnerability; for example, if social policy fails to provide income during bouts of unemployment, health care during illness, or water during droughts. Much of the world’s population remains underserved or excluded by social policy, as the welfare systems of both developed and developing countries have embarked on diverse trajectories (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1996; Haggard and Kaufman, 2008). Although legislation in many countries promises a wide range of social policy benefits, actual delivery to citizens often falls short due to various factors ranging from administrative constraints to political targeting (Mares and Carnes, 2009, 94). And contrary to the notion of a welfare state facilitated by an insulated modern bureaucracy (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 13), evidence from around the world demonstrates that anti-poverty benefits and even health care are frequently allocated on the basis of political criteria (e.g., Cammett, 2011; Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016). When citizens deem social policy to be inadequate or politicized, they are often motivated to sustain ongoing exchange relationships with politicians who mitigate their vulnerability.

#### 1.4 RELATIONAL CLIENTELISM

Although scholars rarely consider the role of voter choice in clientelism, substantial research emphasizes how some elites provide assistance through ongoing exchange relationships – a phenomenon I term “relational clientelism” (Nichter, 2010). A prominent study by Robert Merton, for instance, argued that political machines (i.e., clientelist parties) in the United States once played an important “social function” by dispensing “all manner of assistance to those in need” (1968, 128; see also Banfield and Wilson, 1963, 126). Drawing analogies between such patterns in the early United States and in developing countries, James Scott similarly explained that the machine’s handouts “symbolized its accessibility, helpfulness, and desire to work for the ‘little man’ ” (1969, 1144). Decades later, Judith Chubb emphasized that Italy’s Christian Democratic Party doled out clientelist favors as part of “a much more continuous relationship than that produced by the dispensation of benefits just prior to elections” (1982, 174). And along the same vein, Steven Levitsky explored how Argentina’s Peronist party frequently delivered assistance to constituents (including the

<sup>18</sup> For a more extensive definition and formal analyses of vulnerability, see Ligon and Schechter (2003). Vulnerability is examined thoroughly in Chapter 4.



clientelist disbursement of food and medicine) through an extensive network of “base units” (Levitsky, 2003b, 186–190; see also Auyero, 2001). The present book builds on this influential line of research and demonstrates how citizen actions help sustain such ongoing patterns of relational clientelism.

While my focus on relational clientelism thus rests on considerable precedent, it diverges substantially from the more recent literature’s depiction of exchange relations. The vast majority of studies published on the topic over the past decade fixate on “electoral clientelism” – a far more episodic phenomenon that exclusively provides benefits during election campaigns.<sup>19</sup> This strand of research depicts politicians and their representatives as providing campaign handouts to citizens who are unlikely to vote for them in an imminent election, in exchange for promising to act as instructed. A prominent example is Susan Stokes’s (2005) work on vote buying in Argentina, which contends that the Peronist party targets weakly opposed voters during campaigns and induces them to switch their votes. Another example is my work on turnout buying, which argues that politicians target nonvoting supporters and induce them to show up on Election Day (Nichter, 2008; see also Cox, 2009). Studies of electoral clientelism are silent about the role (or even existence) of clientelist handouts in the years between election campaigns. As with the overall literature, these studies also generally relegate citizens to a passive role. Citizens only receive clientelist benefits if targeted during campaigns, and their only choice tends to be whether to accept nonnegotiable handouts offered by elites. In sharp contrast to this recent wave of research, the present book considers patterns of clientelism during *and* after campaigns, and argues that citizens’ choices play a crucial role in sustaining ongoing exchange relationships.

In order to clarify the distinction between relational clientelism and electoral clientelism, Figure 1.1 describes their key defining attributes. As shown in the upper box, both forms of clientelism share the first attribute: the provision of material benefits is contingent on a citizen’s political support.<sup>20</sup> In exchange for benefits, a citizen promises that he or she will provide (or has provided) political support. Next, the lower box shows a second attribute regarding the timing of benefits. A fundamental distinction emerges: only with relational clientelism do these contingent benefits extend beyond election campaigns. By contrast, electoral clientelism distributes benefits *exclusively* during campaigns. With respect to this second attribute, two points deserve emphasis. First, relational clientelism need not suspend assistance to clients during campaigns. Thus, in order to determine whether a campaign handout constitutes electoral or

<sup>19</sup> Examples of studies exclusively focusing on electoral clientelism include: Aidt and Jensen (2016), Bratton (2008), Gans-Morse et al. (2014), Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2012), Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2014), Jensen and Justesen (2014), Larreguy et al. (2016), Morgan and Várdy (2012), Nichter (2008), Rueda (2016), Stokes (2005), and Vicente (2014).

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of contingency in clientelism, see also Kitschelt (2000, 849–850), Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007, 10–11, 22), Hicken (2011, 291–292), Robinson and Verdier (2013, 1), and Stokes et al. (2013, 7).



1.4 Relational Clientelism

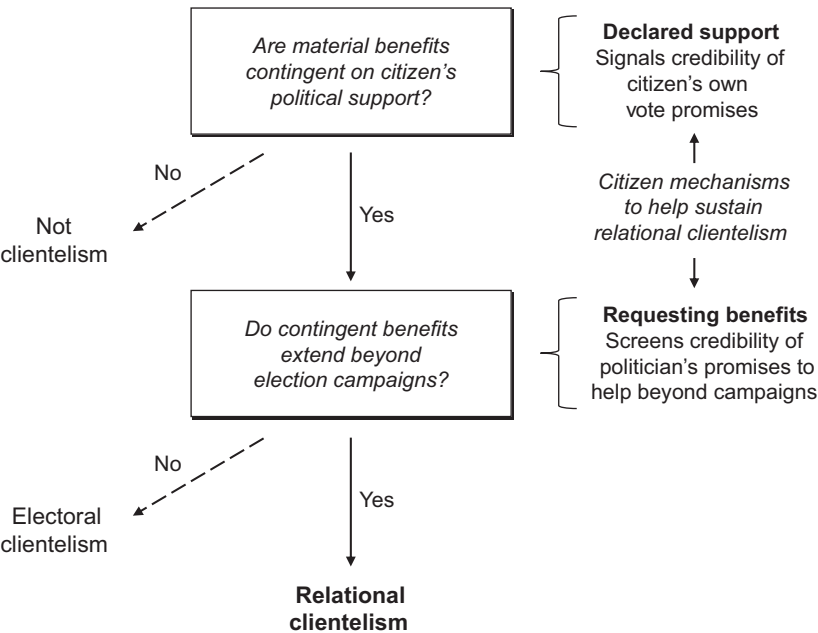


FIGURE 1.1 *Relational clientelism: Defining attributes and citizen mechanisms*

relational clientelism, it is necessary to ascertain whether a citizen's receipt of contingent benefits also extends beyond campaigns. Much of what scholars interpret as electoral clientelism is actually relational clientelism, because most studies fail to make this distinction. And second, relational clientelism does not necessarily provide a steady flow of benefits. As shown extensively in this book, much of relational clientelism involves periodic claims for assistance during adverse shocks, which can strike at any moment, including both election and non-election periods.

Most of the extant literature elides the crucial distinction between relational and electoral clientelism. On the other hand, much research emphasizes important differences between the broader concept of clientelism and other modalities of distributing benefits, such as programmatic politics, pork-barrel politics, and constituency service. Within Figure 1.1, these other forms of distributive politics are situated in the upper box's left branch, as each lacks the contingency that is a hallmark of clientelism. With programmatic politics, parties or candidates offer policy proposals to voters, and employ a codified approach when implementing policies (Kitschelt, 2000, 850). While these policies may favor broad swathes of citizens, benefits are distributed without regards to how or whether a potential recipient voted. With pork-barrel politics, elites target particular geographic districts with non-excludable benefits such as hospitals or roads (Golden, 2003, 200). This non-excludability of benefits inhibits contingent exchange;

residents in targeted districts cannot be precluded from receiving benefits based on their voting behavior. Two other forms of distributive politics similarly lack contingent exchange, and thus should also not be confused with any type of clientelism. With constituency service, politicians provide personalized assistance to residents of their districts, without using any political criteria to favor particular individuals (Fenno, 1978). Finally, with nonbinding favoritism, elites target recipients based on their political stripes, but without requiring votes in return; instead, benefits are distributed to generate goodwill during future elections. Unlike these various forms of distributive politics, citizens involved in relational and electoral clientelism promise political support in exchange for benefits.

The major challenges discussed earlier threaten both of these forms of clientelism – electoral clientelism (in which benefits are limited to campaigns) and relational clientelism (in which benefits extend beyond campaigns). But as explored in Chapter 3, relational clientelism is often more resilient to each category of challenges: structural changes, institutional reforms, legal enforcement, and partisan strategies. For example, even when economic development reduces poverty, continued vulnerability often leaves citizens reliant on ongoing exchange relationships with politicians during adverse shocks. Ballot secrecy fails to cripple relational clientelism because it does not rely on monitoring vote choices of opposing voters; citizens enmeshed in ongoing relationships prefer to vote for politicians who have a proven track record of providing them help. Likewise, relational clientelism is not scuttled by compulsory voting because it does not rely on mobilizing nonvoting supporters (or demobilizing opposition voters). Heightened enforcement of anti-clientelism laws typically focuses on election campaigns, yet much of relational clientelism occurs once the campaign season is over; moreover, benefits are channeled to supporters who are less likely to report their politicians' handouts to authorities. And as demonstrated in the context of Brazil, relational clientelism remained resilient even as some leading parties may have pivoted away from clientelism. Broadening the study of clientelism to consider such ongoing relationships – rather than just campaign handouts – is thus central to understanding how the phenomenon survives major challenges.

Although relational clientelism is more resilient than electoral clientelism to many challenges, it involves more complex – and potentially debilitating – issues pertaining to the trustworthiness of promises. This book argues that citizens buttress the stability of relational clientelism by undertaking actions that alleviate such credibility problems. These voter choices are fundamental to the survival of clientelism, because credibility underpins the viability of contingent exchanges. As discussed earlier, all forms of clientelism involve contingent exchange, in which citizens promise political support in exchange for benefits. Clientelism is effective to the extent that citizens fulfill such promises, so politicians are concerned about the threat of opportunistic defection. Thus, a common feature of both electoral and relational clientelism is