

## I

## Patronage and Political Machines in Southeast Asia

The day before the May 2016 elections in the Philippines, following a whirlwind week of interviews across the central and southern regions of the country, we found ourselves gathered in the front yard of a house owned by a campaign operative – we’ll call him Obet – in a small town in southeastern Luzon. Sitting under a mango tree at a table roughly hewn from bamboo slats, and taking a break from the final stages of his work coordinating a mayoral campaign, Obet was about to extend our education into the finer points of Philippine-style electioneering.<sup>1</sup>

The first lesson was about money. Obet explained that any serious candidate must amass a substantial campaign war chest ahead of the elections. Campaigns are expensive, and without substantial resources one cannot hope to get into the game. “When I entered politics,” he told us, “I soon realized that if you have no money, if you don’t resort to vote buying, then you will never win.” Over time, in fact, he began to think that perhaps the proper term should be “vote selling” rather than “vote buying.” This is because, when he was a newly elected councilor more than a decade earlier, Obet was regularly approached by voters keen to offer “their family’s support [i.e., votes] in exchange for some monetary compensation.”

Now, Obet instructed his team of local vote-brokers (termed “*liders*,” from the English word “leader”) to distribute money house to house, two to three days ahead of the election. The usual understanding – difficult to enforce – is that persons receiving the money will vote for Obet’s mayoral and councilor candidates. Occasionally, in an arrangement that is easier to be sure of, supporters of the opposing candidate will receive money in exchange for not voting

<sup>1</sup> All quotes from Obet come from our interview on May 8, 2016.

at all, a slight variation of which is to sponsor a day trip to a local resort – thus ensuring that such voters won't be able to reach the polling place.

The distribution of money, Obet explained, is “a signal to voters that you are a serious candidate.” This helps explain why the primary targets of money distribution are loyal, core supporters, with undecided voters a secondary concern. As other candidates and campaigners in the Philippines likewise told us, the standard game plan is to provide funds in the first round of distribution and then to gauge the opposing candidate's money-distribution strategy. Doing so serves the dual goals of estimating both the rival's remaining resources and his or her willingness to expend them: in Philippine parlance, both the depth of their pockets and the length of their arms. Whenever possible, the last distribution of funds to voters – particularly to those whose support is considered most shaky – should be made by one's own campaign. Obet's campaign had set aside 8–10 million Philippine pesos (roughly USD 165,000–207,000) for vote buying, with the goal of providing 10,000 voters with 1,000 Philippine pesos (around USD 21) each – roughly four times the daily minimum wage in this part of the Philippines – as an inducement to support the entire slate of mayor, vice-mayor, and town councilors.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, as Obet explained, electoral success also depends on a politician's prior involvement in the everyday life of the community. This may start in the church, where candidates strategically present themselves as “sponsors” or *compadre/comadre* (godfather/godmother)<sup>3</sup> at *kasal* (weddings) and *binyag* (baptisms) and as mourners at their constituents' *libing* (funerals and wakes) – a trio of activities that has come to be known as KBL.<sup>4</sup> Each activity generally involves financial contributions, whether to the newlyweds, new parents, or grieving relatives. Forging this bond of fictive kinship often leads to additional requests for assistance at later points, for everything from legal aid to help in coping with family emergencies. Obet was himself a cousin of the mayoral candidate and a godson of the congressperson, with whom his father – a businessman and politician – had long been a close friend.

To construct the campaign team, Obet relied primarily on a combination of his own relatives; the ties of fictive kinship forged in baptisms, weddings, and funerals; his father's political-business networks; and his own networks from a stint on the town council. As much as possible, the leaders he recruits at the community level should be loyal to the candidate. Even so, he explained, “you can't really avoid cases where some of your leaders will betray you. It's part of

<sup>2</sup> Every election season, the Philippines experiences a shortage of small bills as campaigns withdraw them in massive quantities. Conveniently for Obet, his wife worked at a local bank and was able to set aside stacks of pesos for the final push ahead of the elections.

<sup>3</sup> Fictive kinship, in a larger system known as *compadrazgo* or co-parenthood.

<sup>4</sup> The term “KBL” is meant to allude humorously – but with no direct connection – to the New Society Movement or Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL) ruling party of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, whose martial law regime extended from 1972 to 1986.

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the game.” Early in his political career, when he was “lenient” with his leaders, “some of them pocketed the money meant to buy votes.” This led him to take a tougher stance, showing them “who is the boss” by making threats, destroying their reputations, and even sometimes resorting to physical assaults.

The members of Obet’s local political machine worked closely together – including by sharing in the costs of and cooperating in the organization of leaders. Of decidedly secondary importance was the machine’s affiliation with a national political party. As the election approached, Obet’s team adopted the brand of the Liberal Party (LP) of then-president Benigno Aquino. This was also the party affiliation of the congressperson, who generously covered many expenses of the local machine. In the crunch of the campaign effort, however, the focus was solidly on the local race. Straight-party voting is rare, and Obet was frank in explaining the gist of the message he told his leaders to convey:

We tell the voters to focus on the mayor and the city councilors. If they still have the energy to go to the governor, please vote for the governor, if you still have the energy to vote for Congress, please vote for the congressman, then if you still have the energy to vote for the president, please do so. But focus first on the mayor and the councilors, that’s the marching order.

With national surveys ahead of the 2016 presidential election strongly predicting the victory of Rodrigo Duterte, Obet readily acknowledged that the local machine would shift its affiliation to Duterte’s party (PDP–LABAN) should the Davao mayor be elevated to the country’s top post – as in fact happened the very next day. Obet’s key concern was to maintain the vigor of his local machine, whatever its connections with tiers above.

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CORE QUESTIONS

Obet’s experience provides insight into a form of politics found around the world: the distribution of patronage. Patronage – which we define in brief as *a material resource distributed for particularistic benefit in order to advance political goals* – is central to political competition and mobilization in many countries. Cash payments to individuals – a major focus of Obet’s strategizing – often attract media and scholarly attention, but patronage can consist of a virtually endless variety of gifts, jobs, projects, favors, and other benefits distributed to both individuals and groups. Recipients can be voters, as in Obet’s scheme, but they can also be campaign workers, community leaders, lower-level politicians, and party cadres, or, in a more collective vein, women’s groups, local sports clubs, or religious organizations.

The practice of patronage politics poses formidable organizational and strategic challenges, many of them implicit in Obet’s description. How do patronage wielders identify recipients and distribute benefits in ways that increase the odds voters will repay their largesse with votes? Where do

candidates gain funds and other resources to distribute? How do they maximize the political benefits from patronage while minimizing leakage? How do they recruit and reward effective and loyal brokers? How can they convince voters their promises of largesse are credible? All politicians dispensing patronage confront these challenges, but they do so in widely differing social and political contexts, and with different institutional tools at hand. Accordingly, patronage politics itself varies widely.

Much existing literature simplifies the study of patronage politics by focusing only on certain forms of the phenomenon (e.g. pork-barrel spending, vote buying, or patronage jobs) or by merging varied practices under one catch-all category (most commonly, “clientelism”). We address instead the variation in the ways that politicians across Southeast Asia respond to the challenges of patronage politics, seeking to explain those differences. In Indonesia, many candidates we encountered – like Obet’s mayoral candidate in the Philippines – distributed cash gifts to large numbers of individual voters. To do so, they also recruited brokers and organized them into teams with similar structures to those used in the Philippines. Indonesian candidates also fretted about the “loyalty” of both the voters they provided with cash and the brokers they used to distribute it. And, like their counterparts in the Philippines, Indonesian candidates complemented their handouts to individuals with patronage targeted toward groups, for example, providing funds or materials to help local communities build or repair houses of worship, meeting halls, or roads and bridges. In other ways, however, the Indonesian pattern was distinctive. Unlike Obet’s mayoral candidate, Indonesian candidates relatively rarely collaborate closely with other candidates in designing campaign strategies, building brokerage networks, or distributing patronage. Relatively few of them rely to the same extent as Obet on long-term ties of dependence and reciprocity built up with voters between elections, instead constructing campaign teams premised on much more ephemeral and insecure ties with brokers.

In Malaysia, by contrast, politicians far less frequently distribute cash or other gifts to individual voters (though doing so is certainly not unknown, especially in some parts of the country). Relative to their counterparts in either Indonesia or the Philippines, they are also less likely to rely on their own personal funds to underwrite their patronage strategies. Patronage politics is still widespread; it is just that most of the benefits that tie voters to parties are government or party handouts rather than private or personal gifts. Moreover, in Malaysia, strong national parties, rather than individual politicians and their personal machines, are the key actors in patronage politics – however much individual candidates also rally personal support, with the help of trusted loyalists. Major discrepancies in the patronage resources available to politicians affiliated with government parties and those from the opposition also greatly affect their strategies.

In this book, we probe not just any one of these practices but instead focus on what explains the mix and proportion in which they appear across electoral

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settings. To make sense of such variety, we introduce the concept of *electoral mobilization regimes*, through which we seek to capture how networks and resources combine. Doing so allows us to integrate, recenter, critique, and widen insights in the literature on patronage politics.

The concept of electoral mobilization regimes is the product of our efforts to answer a set of five primary questions, conceived at the beginning of our project and refined over the course of our fieldwork in Southeast Asia. *First*, and most fundamentally: what distinguishes the forms of patronage that candidates, parties, and campaigners deliver to voters and other supporters across and within our country cases? *Second*, through what sort of political networks do they distribute that patronage? *Third*, to what extent do specific types of political networks tend to be associated with particular forms of patronage? *Fourth*, how do these distinctive patterns of patronage politics actually work; i.e. how, and to what extent, do they influence voters? These first four questions are broadly descriptive, as we identify general patterns and explain how they operate. This descriptive work is a major contribution of this book and necessary for the comparative analysis that we (and others) seek to undertake. Our *fifth* and final question focuses attention on analysis and causation: what *explains* the patterns we observe both across and within countries? In answering this question, we explore both why certain types of networks and patronage tend to align and why some forms of patronage politics and networks occur in some countries or regions but not in others.

We will later summarize our answers to each of these questions but first jump briefly to our fifth question. We argue that these patterns of networks and patronage – which, again, we refer to as electoral mobilization regimes – are largely shaped by historical-institutional factors, in particular the character of states, parties, and electoral systems. Long-term institutional development privileges certain types of networks, particularly the relative strength and penetration of national political parties or local machines, with differing levels of capacity and opportunity to capture and coordinate state resources. Each network structure, in turn, commonly aligns with a particular mix of patronage types. These patterns of networks and patronage tend to dominate electoral campaigning, subsuming other bases for mobilization. However, while we can identify national-level electoral mobilization regimes, subnational variation remains salient, as well. We offer a set of three electoral mobilization regimes, each characterizing one of our three core cases – Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines – and further investigate why certain regional pockets diverge from the national norm. These regimes are not unique to these states, nor is this set exhaustive. Rather, the approach and framework we model here will allow scholars of other polities to examine patronage politics through a new lens, building on the taxonomy we have started.

In order to begin answering our guiding questions more comprehensively, we next introduce the conceptual foundations of our study by elaborating upon our definition of patronage and by introducing a schema to understand its

variation. We draw upon that conceptual framework to sketch our core arguments, briefly explaining the broad patterns of patronage politics we encountered in Southeast Asia. We then situate our study within the context of previous work on patronage politics in the region, explain our case selection, elaborate on our methods, and survey the structure of the remainder of the book.

#### CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS: UNTANGLING PATRONAGE AND CLIENTELISM

We contend that the conceptual language scholars commonly utilize has unnecessarily straitjacketed previous attempts to understand how and why politicians use patronage strategies. In particular, over recent decades, the concept of *clientelism* has provided the dominant framework for comprehending such phenomena. The concept has its origins in studies of patron-client relations in traditional agrarian societies but has expanded in meaning to encompass vote buying and similar forms of targeted material distribution during elections. The key challenge is the lack of differentiation between two closely related but distinctive terms: “patronage” and “clientelism.” While some scholars treat the two terms as synonymous (e.g., Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007), here we use distinct definitions intended to overcome long-standing conceptual confusion (building on Hutchcroft 2014b).

To expand on the brief definition provided earlier, patronage is a *material resource, disbursed for particularistic benefit for political purposes and generally (but not always) derived from public sources*. Our definition refines previous attempts to conceptualize patronage, including Shefter’s (1994, 283) definition: “Patronage . . . involves the exchange of public benefits for political support or party advantage,” and politicians distribute it to “individual voters, campaign workers, or contributors.” Our modifications of this definition are three-fold and follow from our earlier discussion. First, patronage is usually but not always secured from public sources. It can also have private components, as when politicians dip into their own resources, tap into funds from illicit activities, or (most commonly) accept donations from businesspersons and companies to fund their largesse. Most obviously, when politicians distribute personal cash payments or other gifts to voters, they generally present these as private gifts, even if the ultimate source of such gifts is money corruptly attained from government office. Second, as we elaborate later, politicians and their machines or parties often distribute patronage not just to individuals but also to groups of various sorts. Third, we emphasize that patronage extends well beyond candidate–voter ties at election time. Patronage is commonly also dispensed across tiers of government (from national to subnational) and throughout the electoral cycle (that is, throughout the entire period from the conclusion of one election to the holding of the subsequent election).

Clientelism, on the other hand, describes a *personalistic relationship of power*. In its classic definition, persons of higher social status (patrons) are linked to those of lower social status (clients) in face-to-face and enduring ties of reciprocity that can vary in content, purpose, and direction across time. As James Scott (1972, 93) explains, “There is an imbalance in exchange between the two partners which expresses and reflects the disparity in their relative wealth, power, and status.” Clientelist relationships are thus typically hierarchical and involve ongoing, iterated personal interactions in which the behavior of each party is contingent on the behavior of the other (Hicken 2011).

Using these definitions, patronage, as an adjective, modifies resources and flows, and clientelistic, as an adjective, modifies relationships, linkages, and ties. Untangling the definitions of patronage and clientelism allows for greater analytical precision. Not all patronage involves clientelism, as some patronage flows are impersonal and others are personal. And not all clientelism involves patronage, as the exchange of goods and services (as Scott describes) may or may not involve the quest for “political support or party advantage” (per Shefter). Indeed, the classic clientelistic tie, between landlords and tenants, exists largely outside the state.

With patronage and clientelism thus disentangled, we can proceed to differentiate among three major types of patronage (again taking off from Hutchcroft 2014b). The first, *micro-particularism*, involves the disbursement of benefits to individuals and households. Examples include vote buying or the distribution of public-sector jobs for political advantage, including low-skilled positions that offer partisan benefits (Brierley 2021). At a higher level, micro-particularism can involve extra dollops of constituency development funds to individual legislators based on special ties they enjoy with party or government leaders. We can also refer to this type of particularism as personalistic patronage, as it often involves quite direct ties between those who dispense and those who receive.

Second, the beneficiaries of *meso-particularism* are larger collectivities, whether geographic (e.g., a village or congressional district), associational (e.g., a local religious group), or sectoral (e.g., a labor union or occupational organization). Examples of material benefits include everything from small- to medium-sized infrastructure projects to equipment for clubs or associations. Meso-particularism does not necessarily involve personalistic ties between donor and recipient. This category broadly corresponds to “club goods,” or “local public goods,” terms commonly used in the economics literature that we are happy to appropriate;<sup>5</sup> our alternative characterization, however, puts greater focus on the unit of aggregation and political rather than

<sup>5</sup> The conventional view understands club goods as being excludable (only a limited class of persons can access them) but non-rivalrous (one consumer’s use does not exhaust the good or prevent others from using it). As we elaborate in Chapter 5, more salient to us is that these are collective rather than individual goods rather than who, precisely, may use them.



market-oriented characteristics. Club goods are excludable to those outside the group's boundaries but not to those within those boundaries. Examples include local roads, improved schools, and other local infrastructure that target particular groups or communities but not others (Magaloni 2006; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016).<sup>6</sup>

The third major type is *macro-particularism*, involving national-level or regional-level programs that parties or politicians “hijack.” In these cases, the targeting of beneficiaries ostensibly follows programmatic and universalistic criteria – cash benefits to indigent families, pensions to persons over a particular age, scholarships to students who perform well in a university entrance exam, and so on – but politicians, in appearance or reality, intervene to direct the benefits to political supporters.

We further disaggregate macro-particularism across three sub-categories. *Credit-claiming* involves efforts to convince voters that parties or politicians are responsible for recipients' access to national or regional programs, even if these programs do not, in fact, involve the exercise of discretion outside the bureaucracy.<sup>7</sup> *Facilitation* refers to helping constituents access programs for which they are formally qualified. Facilitation is often an entirely above-board form of constituency service, as when a national legislator helps a local council lodge an application to a government agency (e.g., for a local transportation, health, or environmental initiative), but it can also involve bureaucratic string-pulling and calling in favors (as when a politician phones the head of a local hospital in order to help a constituent gain admittance as an inpatient). *Morselization* occurs when legislators cut a national or provincial program into discrete chunks and then use their discretion to disburse them for political or electoral benefit, as when a politician gets access to a quantity of health insurance cards or scholarships and hands them out to party workers, or when she intervenes in a budgetary process to direct a packet of school rehabilitation grants to her own electoral district. In effect, this can involve politicians turning pieces of national or regional programs into either micro- or meso-particularistic patronage. However, because their ultimate source is a broad program at least ostensibly allocated according to nonpolitical criteria – that is, because the policies or benefits in question *are* usually at root programmatic, with discretion, generally, only at the margins – we refer to all as macro-particularism.

<sup>6</sup> Club goods and local public goods contrast with public goods, which are fully non-excludable as well as non-rivalrous.

<sup>7</sup> An illustration from outside the region serves to clarify: the US Congress passed a series of COVID-19 relief measures in 2020. As president, Donald Trump exercised no discretion over distribution of these benefits. Yet he cultivated political advantage by signing his name to relief checks the Internal Revenue Service distributed to all taxpayers below a specified income ceiling. This step drew flak for exceeding the credit-claiming norm in the US (Costa and Rucker 2020).



We present these three overarching categories of particularism for their heuristic value; they serve as the foundation for our subsequent analysis. At the same time, we readily acknowledge that the boundaries among them can blur in practice. These types are best understood as existing on a continuum, running from fully particularistic (involving unfettered discretion) to fully programmatic (no discretion), with micro-, meso-, and macro- specifying the scale at which particularistic distribution occurs. This fuzzy demarcation is apparent, at the most basic level, in characterizing policies. As Gregory Noble (2010) explains in an analysis of particularism in Japanese politics, education can be viewed as a programmatic good, in that it is widely distributed and brings benefits both to school children and to society in general. It can, however, simultaneously involve an element of particularism based, for instance, on who obtains a contract to build a school. The same could be said for contracts to build a hospital, or decisions on the placement of a train line (on the latter, see Johnson 1986, 9). Public education, health care, and mass transit are programmatic goods, but their implementation can nonetheless yield lucrative particularistic benefits.

As we highlight in the subsequent chapters, this inherent blurriness, extending also to the scale of particularistic benefits (micro, meso, and macro), is all the more apparent in terms of electoral impact. A scholarship under a national education scheme that a politician gives in the middle of the electoral cycle to the child of a long-time supporter of her family's local machine is, in our categorization, macro-particularism. It is a national program that has been morselized and turned into a targeted benefit over which the politician has some discretion. However, in its micro-targeting, it could have similar political impact to a cash handout provided at election time or a town-hall job provided in the wake of an election (both of which we categorize as micro-particularism). Regardless of how it is categorized, ultimately, the desired political impact is to influence a particular voter (or household of voters) to provide electoral support. These examples are qualitatively different from what we would anticipate from meso-particularism, such as a small infrastructure project that a politician builds for the benefit of an entire village.

Of course, these strategies are not mutually exclusive: they can be, and typically are, mixed. But the mix of these strategies differs considerably among patronage-oriented polities. Such variation results not merely from differentiation in the *degree* of patronage vs. programmatic appeals – the primary focus of much preceding research – but also in terms of the *forms* of patronage dispensed. We find all three forms of particularism in each of the three cases that make up the core of this book, but they occur in different combinations.

Before we proceed, it is important to clarify one further dimension of variation in patronage politics: the level of government involved. Across the world, including in the countries we study here, election-related patronage tends to become progressively less intensive as one moves up from local-through provincial- to national-level politics. In part, this is because the smaller

scale of local-level politics facilitates face-to-face contact between dispensers and recipients of patronage, but it is also simply a matter of practicality: running a vote-buying operation in a national constituency with millions of voters poses much greater organizational challenges and is far more expensive than running one in a district constituency with a few thousand voters. It is generally more efficient to rely on programmatic, partisan, or charismatic appeals at greater scale, even if local political operatives associated with a national campaign still have incentives to hijack national programs for their own purposes. Thus, in both the Philippines and Indonesia, practitioners sometimes contrast the “ground wars” of local races, which involve extensive vote buying and gifting, with the “air wars” of presidential elections, which depend more on media campaigning and advertising.

#### SKETCHING OUT EMPIRICAL PATTERNS: ELECTORAL MOBILIZATION REGIMES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

We are now in a position to sketch our core arguments in response to the questions that guide our research. The first four questions invite us to identify and analyze the patterns of patronage and types of networks we observe across our three countries, combining to form what we term “electoral mobilization regimes”; the fifth digs deeper into the *why* behind those patterns. Recall that the *first* question concerns the mix of patronage strategies used. We find, of course, a wide range of types of appeals from one country to another – as well as across locales and levels of government within countries. Even so, distinctive patterns emerge. In the Philippines – as should be obvious from Obet’s story that opened our book – micro-particularism predominates, as well as substantial meso-particularism in the form of pork-barrel projects of many creative varieties (Holmes 2019), alongside ample opportunities to claim credit for, and morselize, national government programs. In contrast, in Malaysia patronage politics is characterized fundamentally by “hijacking” of macro-level public programs. For decades, the Barisan Nasional (National Front)-led government sustained itself in power by rolling out national programs that conferred various benefits, especially to its core Malay supporters, drilling into the recipients that they would continue to receive these benefits only if they supported the Barisan Nasional politically. While such credit-claiming and facilitation are not absent in Indonesia, the most prominent pattern there is a mixture of private micro- and meso-level patronage. In Indonesia, candidates for political office are especially likely to invest personal funds in distributing small-scale infrastructure projects and other benefits to villages, neighborhoods, and community groups, and in distributing gifts to individual voters.

We observe differences, too, in temporal patterns. Some Indonesian politicians – especially regional government heads and, to a lesser degree, incumbent legislators – are able to access state resources to support their patronage