

A Commentary on Patronage Democracy in the Philippines

Patronage Democracy in the Philippines: Clans, Clients, and Competition in Local Elections.
Julio C. Teehankee and Cleo Anne A. Calimbahin, editors. Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2022.

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The scholarly work *Patronage Democracy in the Philippines: Clans, Clients, and Competition in Local Elections* employs the concept of “patronage” as a lens in understanding the nature and dynamics of patronage politics in the Philippines and its impact on the country’s development. The editors, Julio C. Teehankee and Cleo Anne A. Calimbahin, are both distinguished academicians in the field of political science and are affiliated with the De La Salle University in Manila.

It is timely that it was published in 2022, the same year as the Philippines’ national and local elections. For the local and international observers who were disheartened, confused, or at least curious on the victory of numerous political dynasties in the recent elections, this book presents a context and an explanation. Readers are enlightened on the severity of inequality in the Philippine politics and the factors that inhibit the rise of a new generation of progressive Filipino leaders.

This book is a must-read for scholars who would like to study the Philippines’ political dynamics, particularly at the local level. It provides depth and breadth in the discussion of patronage democracy, which is the dominant character of our local politics.

In the first section, Teehankee comprehensively introduces the concept of patronage and its relevance to Philippine politics. He cites authors whose earlier works have defined, differentiated, and criticized patronage politics. Teehankee then expounds on factors that promotes the resilience of patron-client relationships in Philippine political spheres, highlighting the Filipino cultural value of “utang na loob” or indebtedness and the outgrowth of political machines and brokers. He explains how the state, as a major provider of resources for patrons, contributes to the political clans’ successful establishment of dynasties at the local level. He also presents alternative frameworks for analyzing Philippine politics such as bossism, good governance, moral

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politics, and populism. He asserts that though the defining characteristics of the patron-client relations have evolved over time, patronage remains a key construct in making sense of the local politics.

After laying the theoretical foundation of the book, the next chapters are case studies in which the construct of patronage is applied in analyzing the political dynamics in various localities in the Philippines.

One of the authors, Marvin H. Bernardo, focuses on the limitations and possibilities of reciprocity in Isabela Province. Investigating the dynamics of reciprocity that lasted for generations, he found out that patrons must be consistent in meeting the demands of their clients so as not to be at risk of being replaced by a different patron. Louie C. Montemar and Teehankee investigate the political brokerage in urban mayoral elections in Manila. They highlight former President Joseph Ejercito Estrada's mayoral victory in 2016 as well as his defeat in 2019 to Isko Moreno who supposedly replaced Estrada as an idol of the masses. Matthew David D. Ordoñez looks into the moral capital, patronage, and campaign narratives in Makati particularly on the Binay siblings' rivalry, which exemplifies the limited choice for voters due to dynasties. Aries A. Arugay and Kristoffer Daniel T. Li discuss the Caloocan politicians' national linkages, brokerage, and dynastic balancing. Another chapter focuses on Edgardo Erice and his hybrid type of politics. Mary Joyce Borromeo-Bulao's chapter deals with Camarines Sur's Villafuertes, especially their family feuds and political machines. Georgeline B. Jaca probes the durability of Cebu City's kinship networks. She discusses the defeat of Tomas "Tommy" Osmeña in 2019 and notes that being an incumbent does not ensure an electoral win. The chapter of Allan G. Quiñanola and Kevin Nielsen M. Agojo presents the study on Cebu Province's clients as brokers. They found that the extent of clientelism increases as brokers transact at levels that are more local. Mary Pauline L. Balmes talks about the linkage of national and local brokerage in the Iloilo Province. She considers Senator Franklin Drilon as the "Big Man" whose high-ranking post in

the legislative branch enables him to engage in political brokerage. Gladstone A. Cuarteros analyzes Bacolod City's machine politics and the influence of the religious group Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC). Cuarteros found out that the church's bloc voting is a significant factor amid highly competitive elections. The last case study is on Lanao Del Norte wherein Phyllis Marie S. Teanco examines the generational shifts in clan politics in the province with a focus on the Dimaporos.

The selection of case studies is commendable since the localities are spread across the country although there is only a single case from Mindanao. It is also noteworthy that the chosen cities and provinces are experiencing varying levels of development. The heterogeneity of the selected cases makes the book more interesting for scholars to compare and contrast the phenomenon of patronage in diverse social, economic, and cultural conditions.

Considering the lack of empirical research on the influence of Iglesia Ni Cristo in the Philippine politics, Cuarteros' chapter is worth reading for political scientists who investigate the implications of bloc voting, the connection between the state and churches, and the role of religious leaders in the patron-client relations.

My main criticism of the book is the use of "patronage" as the main frame for analysis. Aside from being a Western construct, it automatically paints a negative picture of the Philippines' democratic process. While I affirm the validity of this work, I hope that future research will attempt to apply an alternate lens, preferably from an indigenous perspective that may unearth new insights about local politics in the country.

Overall, I highly recommend the book for those who are actively involved in Philippine politics for them to gain a better understanding of the complex arena where they work in. I also strongly encourage those who are interested to start a career in politics, especially at the local level, to read this book so that they may be warned—as well as prepare and equip themselves—before they get hit by the frustrations brought by patronage politics.