

Causes and Consequences of Political Clientelism: Mexico's PRD in Comparative Perspective

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ABSTRACT

PRD politicians and officials widely use clientelism to structure their relationships with citizens. This is due not only to the entrenchment of clientelism in Mexican politics or to high rates of poverty and inequality, but also to the limited institutionalization of democratic rules inside the party. The last stems largely from the party's electoral strategy in its formative years, and has resulted in uncontrolled factional battles that play out through clientelism. The Brazilian PT faced external and internal conditions quite similar to those of the PRD, but its early focus on organization building and policy change allowed it to avoid clientelism to a greater degree. This analysis problematizes the trend of using minimalist definitions that assume clientelism to be nondemocratic because these approaches result in conceptual stretching and decreased explanatory power.

The Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) is Mexico's largest left-wing political party. It was established in 1989 in opposition to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), which had dominated the country's politics since its inception in 1929. In some ways, the PRD has been extraordinarily successful; in others, it has been a great disappointment. Candidates for the PRD and the electoral coalition that preceded it have twice come close to winning presidential elections, most recently in 2006, when its candidate came within 1 percent of his opponent. The party was instrumental to Mexico's democratic transition, and it has given hope for political and economic betterment to millions of people. At the same time, the PRD has been handicapped by factionalism, personalism, and clientelism, losing many supporters who became disillusioned by its practices. Why have PRD politicians come to use clientelism despite their efforts to avoid the methods of the PRI?

A series of external factors—poverty, the long history of clientelism in Mexican politics, the PRI's extensive use of this method to ensure political stability, and the PRD founders' proficiency in this method—are important in answering this question. These factors, however, did not guarantee that the new party would be marked by clientelism to the degree it has been. Instead, a succession of internal events, among which the party's strategy for bringing about a transition to democracy

stands out, have a more direct causal relationship with the outcome of clientelism.

The PRD was established from a wide range of left-wing parties, social movements, and individuals, with diverse ideological visions. Coordinating these currents under one organizational roof could have taken various forms, based on individual direct participation, ideological or programmatic groups, centralized or decentralized power, and so on. However, the emergence of one predominant leader, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, and the primacy of his political strategy set the party on a path of personalistic factions and centralized power, despite the best intentions not to replicate these characteristics of the PRI. As a result of Cárdenas's desire to oust the PRI from power, to do so in the electoral arena, and to do it as soon as possible, the PRD focused resources on elections. The resources, including time, that would have been necessary for institutionalizing party rules and regulations to ensure internal cohesion and democratic procedures were not available. As a result, leadership and alliances were personalized, and factions battled for power. When the PRD began to win local and state governments, these tendencies spilled into its administration and played out as clientelistic relationships with citizens.

Thus, "big events," such as the Mexican tradition of clientelism, are important in defining particular paths, but smaller events occurring at key moments may have an equally significant impact (see Pierson 2000). According to path dependence theory, history matters in a very particular way, because the outcomes in one setting can be quite different from those in another setting, according to the timing and sequence of events. The primacy of an electoral strategy so early in the life of the PRD was decisive for factionalism and, eventually, clientelism in the party.

A comparative case, the Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), shared quite a lot of the PRD's characteristics and external influencing factors at its formation in 1979, but originally chose an organization-building strategy, and began to focus on elections only in the 1990s. The PT has relied less on clientelism and more on community building. It began to encounter serious problems of patronage and corruption (mis-labeled as clientelism by a number of analysts) only much later in its life, once it focused on winning national elections.

Analyzing clientelism in the PRD and attempting to uncover instances of it in the PT lead to an interesting finding about clientelism as a concept. The study of this phenomenon has enjoyed a recent revival among researchers trying to understand why democratization has not always been as successful as the scholarly and political communities anticipated. Unfortunately, many of these researchers take for granted that clientelism, having been a key tool for maintaining economic and political stability under nondemocratic regimes, is necessar-

ily nondemocratic in itself. The earlier literature on clientelism was more ambiguous on this point; it included a vigorous debate on the value of clientelism for the client. The significance of this discussion continues to be vindicated by the experiences of those involved in clientelism.

Viewing clientelism *a priori* as a nondemocratic practice seems to have brought about a conflicting result, however. While the phenomenon has received a narrower interpretation with respect to democracy than is warranted empirically, it has also been subject to conceptual stretching, as a number of practices identified as nondemocratic have all come to be labeled as clientelism. An example of stretching can be seen in the growing reports of supposed clientelism in the PT, which more properly refer to patronage, vote buying, and corruption. The significance of clientelism's ambiguity in relation to democracy is apparent in an examination of PRD clients' experiences, which range from exploitation to participatory community building.

DEFINING CLIENTELISM

For the purposes of the analysis here, this article will rely on Roniger's 1990 discussion of clientelism as a guideline. Roniger provides a definition of clientelism that covers the aspects traditionally considered important. He sees clientelist relations as dyadic (two-person), voluntary, reciprocal, face-to-face links between individuals of unequal status who exchange noncomparable goods and services in a relationship that may involve affectivity, is based on norms of reciprocity and obligation, and plays out over time and across a broad series of interactions (Roniger 1990, 2–4). In this relationship, a person of social status (the patron) and a second person of low status (the client) agree to exchange goods and services (usually resources, such as housing, food, medical supplies, legal advice, and so on, for political support) to mutual benefit. The durability of the relationship depends on its benefits' outweighing its costs.

Discussing his definition, Roniger points to the contradiction between, on the one hand, the possibility, and often reality, of coercion and exploitation, and on the other hand, the language and ideology of voluntariness and mutual obligations (1990, 4). This is not a recent debate; much ink has been spilled over the tensions in clientelism in the past. For example, the resources controlled and exchanged by each party are sometimes labeled as unequal, and sometimes as noncomparable. Legg (1975) argues that inequality implies a value differential: the value of the resources controlled by the powerful patron outweighs that of the resources controlled by the low-status client; and the patron benefits more from the transaction because his higher-value resources give him a better negotiating position. However, Legg believed that value is subjective—it depends on the significance of the resources to the par-

ties involved—so that different resources should be described in terms of noncomparability rather than inequality. The resources exchanged do not have to be equivalent, but have to fulfill mutual expectations (Legg 1975, 4–8, 13–15).

Similarly, Gouldner (1977) contends that clientelism has too often been considered exploitative because one party is used unfairly by another. He argues that this is a mistake because the transactions are based on a “principle of reciprocity,” a moral code that creates the obligation to return good deeds. Someone who has given goods or services deserves to receive benefits in return (1977, 35). An important element, according to Gouldner, is that these reciprocal exchanges do not depend on social roles in which duties or rights are attached to particular status positions. They are obligations based on others’ past actions.

Flynn (1975), on the other hand, argues that all discussions of clientelism’s internal characteristics miss the big picture: that clientelism is a mechanism of elite control over the masses. Other commentators maintain that clientelist relations thwart the emergence of collective organization, limit the internal democracy of civil society, obstruct efficient production and resource allocation, and generally inhibit political freedom and participation while perpetuating economic inequality (Flynn 1975; Putnam 1993; Kurer 1993; see also Kitschelt 2000). Thus, despite the reciprocity and mutual benefit that have been defining aspects of clientelism in the past, the literature has generally given it a negative connotation. It tends to be seen as a relation of domination in which powerful patrons—politicians or landlords—benefit more than their poor clients (see, e.g., Singelmann 1981; Brusco et al. 2002). Because analysts, as Hellman (1994b) argues, have considered autonomous and ideologically motivated political participation as more important than the fulfillment of basic needs, they have tended to judge the effects of clientelism negatively. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, particularly in the ranks of sociologists and anthropologists (see, e.g., Fernández-Kelly and Shefner 2006).

Fox (1994) attempts to bring some clarity to the question of who benefits by dividing clientelism into two categories. He describes “authoritarian clientelism” as a relationship marked by asymmetrical power, in which the subordination of clients is maintained through coercion, either threatened or real (1994, 153). To this he counterposes “semiclientelism,” in which elites do not have the capacity to enforce subordination but attempt to ensure compliance by threatening benefit removal (1994, 157–58).

Most recent definitions come from perspectives driven by economic theory, and attempt to modernize the concept of clientelism by removing the elements their authors associate with traditional landlord-peasant links. They eliminate affectivity, face-to-face contact, long duration,

noncomparability, reciprocity, and dispersion of the relationship across a variety of exchanges, in order to do away with the personal and emotional attachments that, the authors claim, do not reflect modern political reality (Piattoni 2001, 9–11). Instead, these definitions pare clientelism down to a rational, interest-maximizing exchange of votes or other forms of political support for benefits (Piattoni 2001, 4, 11), in which participants gain confidence with repetition (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 7–9). They contrast this interpretation to situations in which political parties win votes based on the perceived merits of the universalistic policies and programs they enact and propose. That is, clientelism is placed on the nondemocratic end and programmatic platforms on the democratic end of a spectrum of vote-gathering methods.

The discussion on how best to describe clientelism is not advanced by removing all ambiguity regarding democratic practices from the definition. As we will see in the discussion of PRD clients' perspectives, removing these elements does not mean that they cease to exist in the experience of clientelism on the ground (see also Gay 1999; Hellman 1994b). The tension between positive and negative processes runs to the very heart of clientelism, so that recent definitions do not convey its full meaning. Because clientelism tends to involve voluntary participation and a series of exchanges that allow clients to hold patrons accountable, it can be quite a democratic process. In fact, it is often the only mechanism of political accountability available to marginalized sectors of the population, in nondemocratic as well as democratic systems (Gay 1999).

Describing clientelism as a simple exchange of support for benefits does not distinguish it from patronage, vote buying, or porkbarreling. Patronage is the distribution of public sector jobs to loyal supporters who help the candidate or party by collecting information on voters and generating votes, frequently through clientelism (Remmer 2007). The recipients of patronage are thus often the middlemen (or brokers) in clientelistic relationships. It has been said that such brokers are sometimes patrons and sometimes clients, depending on the people they are dealing with (see, e.g., Powell 1977); but this attempt conceptually to replicate the relationship that exists at the bottom of a hierarchical unit higher up in its ranks confuses the definition.

In vote buying, an individual citizen is given money, goods, or services shortly (hours or days) before an election in exchange for his or her vote. Unlike clientelism, this is a one-shot, direct exchange, in which the participants have no particular characteristics other than that the recipient is a voter (Schaffer 2007). Pork-barrel politics refers to electoralist policymaking, in which politicians promote distributive policies, the benefits of which are concentrated in their district but the cost of which is carried by the electorate at large (Ricci 2003). Porkbarreling is not a personal relationship and does not require the individual pressure to per-

form that is an integral element of clientelism. Although patronage, vote buying, and porkbarreling often occur in conjunction with clientelism, they describe a variety of activities and should remain conceptually differentiated. Such definitional rigor facilitates the accurate comparison of phenomena across cases, such as those of the PRD and the PT.

THE INITIAL CAUSES OF *PERREDISTA* CLIENTELISM

Clientelism had been used in Mexico since colonization as a mechanism of social organization and control, but it was a diffuse system until the PRI established the presidency as the central node in a network superimposed on the old relationships (Roniger 1990). Political interest groups (camarillas) organized networks in which actors endorsed successful figures all the way up to the president, and moved up through the ranks of public office with their mentors in an exchange of positions of influence for loyalty (Centeno 1997, 146). Rewards were also distributed through corporatist peasant, labor, and popular sectors in return for well-structured support from the rank and file (Singelmann 1981, 160). Social dissent was avoided through clientelist cooptation; those willing to play by the PRI's rules received preferential access to public resources (Hellman 1988).

This system functioned very well for the PRI while the state-led Mexican economy was in expansion in the post-World War II era. Economic modernization, however, created an educated middle class that grew restless under the PRI's heavy-handed regime. Subsequently, a series of economic crises restricted state resources, making it difficult for the PRI to feed its traditional clientelist networks (see Hellman 1994a; Collier and Collier 2002; Middlebrook 1995). From the late 1960s on, the PRI faced increasing public opposition. Inside the PRI and the government, some called for a response of economic liberalization (Teichman 2001), while others argued for a state-led, socially minded alternative. A subgroup of the latter, called the *Corriente Democrática* (Democratic Current, CD) and led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, left the PRI and formed the Frente Democrático Nacional (FDN) in support of Cárdenas's 1988 presidential campaign.

Cárdenas probably won the election, but the PRI's Carlos Salinas was pronounced victorious after an engineered computer crash delayed the publication of results. Salinas repressed *perredistas* (Castañeda 1993; Reding 1997; Bruhn 1997b, 1998) and revived clientelist deals with the lower classes, particularly through the new Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (PRONASOL). While many members of the lower classes had voted for Cárdenas, they could not afford to antagonize the new administration by continuing to support him and thereby risk losing access to government resources (Bruhn 1997a), if not their lives.

In this hostile environment, Cárdenas and his supporters decided to consolidate their miscellaneous front into a formal political party. Almost immediately, problems arose. The FDN lumped together a large variety of left-wing social and political groups, including communists, Trotskyists, Leninists, Maoists, left-wing nationalists, social democrats, clandestine revolutionaries, opposition politicians, parastatal politicians (from PRI-sponsored opposition parties), and longtime *prístas*, joined by the desire to rid Mexico of the PRI (Bruhn 1997b). These currents had been able to coexist effectively during the brief electoral campaign, but as soon as the short-term goal of winning the 1988 elections failed, they had difficulty reconciling their ideological and strategic differences (Sánchez 1999; Semo 2003).

The founding currents are generally presented in three clusters for conceptual clarification, but they were far from internally homogeneous. The institutional, independent left, represented by Heberto Castillo's Partido Mexicano Socialista (PMS), was not a unified organization (Prud'homme 1996, 226). It was a recent agglomeration of leftist parties that had had to compromise in order to create one large entity that would make the left electorally viable. This turned out to be a much more center-left project than those espoused by a number of its members (Carr 1996, 306–7). The social left, made up of civil society organizations and movements, did not fit easily with these institutional groups, and was also the least internally coherent. It comprised associations that organized mass mobilizations, armed guerrilla movements, intellectuals, and students. Many of the groups from the social left were informally organized, and employed tactics of confrontation with the government. These practices stood in opposition to the institutionalized processes and political moderation preferred by the old parliamentary left and most of the Democratic Current (see Martínez González 2003, 87–95).

Despite their common background, the *ex-prístas* under the banner of the Democratic Current were also not united in their opinions on and strategies for the PRD. Cárdenas argued for legal, institutional opposition to the PRI regime. His strategy was to continue organizing an electoral onslaught against the PRI at all levels: local, municipal, state, and national. This offensive was to be combined with “democratic intransigence,” a policy of nonnegotiation with, and nonrecognition of, the Salinas administration, in order to safeguard the democratic movement's principles. Cárdenas believed that the democratic transition was necessary immediately and that a radical change was the only way to bring it about (Galindo López 1990; Borjas Benavente 2003, 289–96).

Other members of the Democratic Current, however, thought that the momentum of the people's support in the 1988 election should be maintained and used to pressure the regime to remove Salinas and

install an interim government until new elections could be held. In addition, they argued that funding and human resources should be expended on creating a solid party organization that would function according to formally established rules. An institutionalized party could then form alliances with other opposition forces and negotiate democratic reforms with the government (Muñoz Ledo 2000, 217–49; Martínez González 2003, 87–95; Borjas Benavente 2003, 289–96; Sánchez 1999, 57–79; Prud'homme 1996, 242–3).

As the nationally recognized leader of the venture, Cárdenas had little difficulty gaining the upper hand in the party. He benefited from his name—he is the son of the adored ex-president Lázaro Cárdenas—along with the loyalty of the supporters he had amassed during his time as PRI governor of Michoacán, the allegiance of the various smaller leftist groups that had joined the PRD and were looking to its charismatic head for leadership, and his personal relationships with the members of the Democratic Current (Borjas Benavente 2003; Prud'homme 1996). To increase his chances of success, he built alliances with other leaders. In addition, Cárdenas allied with the social left because it recognized the validity of his position. The primacy of his vision was essentially legitimated by means of his unopposed election to the party presidency at the First National Congress in November 1990 (Prud'homme 1996, 232–36; Corona Armenta 2004, 90; Martínez González 2003, 87–91). The immediate result of embracing Cárdenas's strategy was that the party was placed squarely into the electoral fray, forcing it to maintain broad support while facing the hostile PRI. Not all members of Cárdenas's FDN joined the new party; some were unwilling to give up their independence (Valdés 1994, 61), and others believed that they could not afford to alienate the new PRI administration (Bruhn 1997a).

Attempting to maintain the loyalty of as many remaining supporters as possible, the PRD's founding statutes allowed for the existence of "currents, tendencies, or convergences" in a democratic context, so that the diverse groups could preserve their individual identities. Because it opposed the PRI and its methods, the PRD refused to use corporatist internal processes to organize its membership.¹ Permitting the existence of currents appeared to be the only option that would neither hinder the various groups' identities nor create corporatist sectors. Thus, according to the party statutes, all members had the right to form or join a current and, individually or as a current, to voice opinions, propose policies and programs, and nominate candidates for internal election, as well as precandidates for popular elections (PRD 1993, chap. 12, arts. 15, 16, 17). The statutes also set forth that democracy was the party's norm and that decisions regarding statutes, programs, representative and directive organs, and candidates for popular election would be made by affiliates in free and fair elections (PRD 1993, chap. 1, art. 2).

Formally detailed procedures for structuring the currents and ensuring democratic processes, however, were not elaborated. This lack of organization left groups that failed to win positions of power in the party to be included only by personal relations with members of the party executive, creating grounds for discretionary representation.² The executive itself was an empty shell, as Cárdenas directed the party from his personal offices with the help of an inner circle of trusted friends. Horizontal communication between currents or between the parliamentary bloc and the party did not exist (Prud'homme 1996, 233–4). Individual politicians developed personal relationships with Cárdenas, so that all information flowed through him (Corona Armenta 2004, 87; Sánchez 1999, 57–75, 2001, 23–42). Cárdenas was the charismatic leader around whom the party was structured and from whom it became inseparable (Panebianco 1988, 52).

As much as the PRD eschewed the PRI's corporatist methods, its currents began to resemble the PRI's *camarillas*, and with an important disadvantage. The PRI could maintain unity among its *camarillas* because its hold on the state meant that all *camarillas* had the chance to access power sooner or later. The PRD, on the other hand, had little power and few resources to distribute, intensifying the struggle for access to what it did have. Instead of drawing the PRD militants from different backgrounds together in a common project, the statutes, some commentators believe, granted formal permission for internal wars (Ortega 2004; Martínez González 2003, 85).

The founding PRD currents were principal factions endorsing various leftist ideologies, organizational forms, and policy orientations. By the early 1990s, however, they took on aspects of personalist interest factions that served a particular leader and sought power and spoils (see Sartori 1976, 77–80 for a discussion of faction types). These factions continued to espouse particular ideologies—social democratic in a professional electoral structure, socialist in a mass-based structure, and various combinations thereof—which differentiated them. Yet all were organized around a *caudillo* (strongman), who, in turn, looked to the party leader (the central *caudillo*). All maneuvered to access positions of power and redistribute the spoils of office to supporters. All entered conjunctural alliances with each other, negotiating for their own benefit.

Policy discussions, candidate selection processes, internal elections, and so on soon became hostage to negotiations among currents attempting to increase their representational quotas and to direct party strategy. By the late 1990s, the struggle among these factions had degenerated to the point that internal electoral processes became undeniably corrupt, including ballot box stuffing with fake votes, ballot box theft, vote buying, membership list inflation, and member deletion from the lists of those qualified to vote (Corona Armenta 2004).

The rise of a second central caudillo in the PRD, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, further fragmented the party. López Obrador was elected Federal District head of government in 2000, and used his position to advance the interests of the poor, whose plight had always been his primary concern. His social policies were so popular and his persona of a frugal man of the masses, unafraid to shake the establishment, was so different from those of other politicians that supporters in and outside the PRD began to look at him as a presidential hopeful for 2006. Thus, by 2004, Cárdenas was no longer the unquestioned central leader of the PRD, as a second pole had developed around López Obrador. The party was split between those loyal to Cárdenas and those who favored the rising star.

López Obrador pragmatically strengthened his and the party's national presence through alliances with a variety of external politicians and internal operators, but this further weakened party unity and loyalty to statutory principles of democracy. His electorally successful "franchise operation" (Meyenberg and Carrillo 1999, 66) allowed non-*perredistas* to run for election on the PRD ticket. Pacts were created between the PRD leadership and individuals with significant political capital whose careers in other parties had stalled. The politicians became PRD electoral candidates in return for joining the party and bringing their followers with them (Meyenberg and Carrillo 1999, 65).

Thus, in 1998, a number of *priísta* politicians only recently converted to the PRD won state gubernatorial races: Ricardo Monreal in Zacatecas, Alfonso Sánchez Anaya in Tlaxcala, and Leonel Cota Montaña in Baja California Sur. In 1999, the list was expanded with Antonio Echavarría in Nayarit, and in 2000 with Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia (a coalition candidate) in Chiapas. Not only *ex-priístas* have benefited from the PRD franchise: in 2005, Carlos Zeferino Torreblanca, a businessman whose political ideology was closer to that of the PAN than the PRD, won in the state of Guerrero, and Narciso Agundez Montaña, a former militant of the Mexican Workers' Party, succeeded Cota Montaña (who became party president) in Baja California Sur.

For former members of other left-wing parties to join the PRD is probably not inconsistent with the politicians' or the PRD's political programs. At times, however, the *perredista* desire to win elections has overshadowed principles, and candidates are courted purely on a calculation of who heads the best clientelist networks in a given state and is therefore the most likely to win elections. The 2004 gubernatorial candidacies of María del Carmen Ramírez García in Tlaxcala and José Guadarrama in Hidalgo were particularly divisive. Ramírez's husband was the outgoing governor, Sánchez Anaya; this presented questions of misuse of influence by the husband to promote the wife's campaign (the party statutes, moreover, prohibit immediate relatives of an incumbent from running for

the position) (Díaz 2004). Guadarrama was a longtime *priísta* charged with responsibility for the deaths of PRD militants, as well as years of repressive activities in local politics, making many *perredistas* question the integrity of a leadership that could welcome such a person into the party (Ibarz 2005). It is not surprising that the selection of franchisees fueled factional battles, as all sides tried to outdo each other by bringing in possible candidates and tarnishing the others' image. Thus, "Maricarmen" and Guadarrama were supported by some factions, while others did their best to publicly denounce the candidacies.

In discussions leading up to the 8th PRD National Congress in March 2004, party leaders concluded that the factions exacerbated clientelism and corruption in their organization, and set out to regulate their activities in the amended statutes eventually approved at the congress (Instituto de Formación Política del PRD 2004; PRD 2004). The attempt to regulate the activities of the currents was laudable, but its failure was predictable, given the process of increasing returns. It was not logical for any one faction or leader to adhere to the new statutes because it was unlikely that the others would do so. Given that all the factions were known to engage in clientelism, shady financing, and intrigue, a sure way for any one leader to be disqualified from the battle over positions in the party would be to introduce transparency to a faction's operations. Although compliance with the new statutes could be beneficial to all *perredistas* in the long run by creating trust and allowing them to work toward the same goal, the benefits of continuing on the established path in making immediate decisions appeared to them to outweigh long-term, uncertain gains. The longer these immediate benefits were chosen over long-term ones, the more difficult it became to deviate from the established path (see Pierson 2000, 252). For the PRD, moreover, the stakes were increased when the party began to win elections.

THE PRD IN GOVERNMENT

Once the PRD won elections at the local and state levels, it carried its factional disputes and power-seeking behavior into office. Now, power was related not only to influencing party strategies and gaining positions in the national congressional opposition but to the political and economic benefits of forming governments.

When the PRD won the first democratic elections in the Federal District in 1997, its bench in the Legislative Assembly was clearly inexperienced. Its members not only failed to secure consensus with PRI and PAN representatives, but they and their colleagues in the Federal District administration were often motivated by factional interests, a tendency that proved too obvious to conceal. In the municipalities, internal disputes occurred among administrators from different PRD currents, who

saw themselves as powerbrokers (Aguila Franco and Salgado 1999; Ward and Durden 2002). In addition, clientelistic deals, intended to strengthen individual factions, were struck between social organizations and politicians with access to public resources.

The Federal District is difficult to govern, given the size of this urban giant's population (close to 9 million) and its socioeconomic diversity. For example, demands from middle- and upper-class residents for enhanced public security conflict with demands from the lower classes for employment and shelter. The former desire clean streets free of vendors and *piratas* (pirates, unlicensed taxi drivers often noted as responsible for theft and kidnapping) and buildings or empty lots free of squatters. The latter cannot find employment in the formal sector and demand the right to make a living—even if this takes place in an unregulated manner in the streets—and access to shelter.

The PRD's official response to the dilemma has been to regulate street vending, take a tough stand against *piratas*, and evict squatters. Unofficially, however, party factions ally with vendor, taxi, and squatter organizations, using the groups' electoral strength to increase their own bargaining power in negotiations for positions and policy direction inside the party. In return, they provide preferential treatment to the organizations' members. Thus, squatters from the Frente Popular Francisco Villa (FPFV) have benefited from their leaders' alliance with one of the most powerful PRD factions in the Federal District by gaining comparatively better access to social housing credits than other citizens have (Grajeda 2005).

Citizens unable to make such clientelistic alliances are clearly at a disadvantage. Thus, one social housing claimant, affiliated with an association that was a rival of the FPFV, recounted that when one goes to the Federal District's *Instituto de Vivienda* (Housing Institute, INVI), one is immediately struck by the difference in treatment of individual citizens seeking credit and those represented by organizations such as her own and the FPFV. "When you get there, the first thing they ask you is whether you're represented," and if you are not, the authorities keep you waiting, she said (Isabel 2004).

The inequalities generated by the PRD's clientelism are also visible in less conspicuous daily governance activities. The faction in power in 2004 in the Federal District municipality of Iztapalapa, for instance, created a number of programs for senior citizens. At weekly meetings held in the community hall, seniors exercised, danced, chatted, and made crafts, but they also interacted with faction activists and were asked to participate in political events organized by politicians from the faction in power. Every month, the municipality provided baskets of basic food items to seniors. However, only those senior citizens whose signatures figured on each of that month's meeting attendance sheets or who could

excuse missed meetings by proving participation at political events were given the food baskets. Senior citizens who chose not to involve themselves in these politically tinged meetings, or those who simply did not know about the programs, went empty-handed.

This is not to say that the PRD has not had successes in government. Cárdenas's Federal District administration created programs to reorganize and improve the civil service, the criminal justice system, and the police force; to encourage citizens to denounce corruption; to alleviate unemployment; to improve health policy and continuing education; to prioritize gender equity; and to revitalize the city's historic center. Cárdenas managed to circumvent absolute domination by the federal government and to maintain confidence in the feasibility of a democratic Mexico City (Baena Paz and Saavedra Andrade 2004, 225–9; Ward and Durden 2002). Subsequently, López Obrador continued and expanded many of the Cárdenas administration's programs. Among other things, he subsidized senior citizens' nutrition, children's school supplies, and health care for vulnerable sectors of the population; created commissions and financing to improve access to subsidized housing; and formed alliances with business to rebuild the downtown financial district.

Yet the processes underlying these successes also hindered further advances; they were marked by the factionalism and clientelism already noted, as well as by a lack of institutional commitment. Thus López Obrador's devotion to the poor and aversion to traditional elites led him to work for and protect the interests of the former through sometimes unorthodox or even extra-institutional means. Commissions to ensure transparency in administrative spending or to evaluate the economic status of subsidy recipients were, in his eyes, an unnecessary waste of funds that should go directly to the poor (García Ochoa 2004; Juárez Vázquez 2004; Trelles and Zagal 2004). While this dedication was laudable, its long-term repercussions for democratic governance processes were questionable.

The party's unregulated dynamics also undercut the ambitious projects of other PRD administrations. In the municipality of Nezahualcóyotl ("Neza"), Mexico State, the PRD won the mayoralty in 1996, 2000, and 2003. Following decades of PRI administration, the PRD immediately set about creating more transparent government processes; for example, three-year development plans, annual mayoral reports, and Internet-based budgetary documents that provided citizens with previously unimaginable access to information (Selee 2006).

The mechanisms that allowed for autonomous citizen participation in political processes were short-lived, however, because they curtailed the ability of the local PRD factions to negotiate positions and policy. Open primaries for selecting PRD candidates for mayor and city coun-

cil were held only briefly, because the factions preferred bargaining among themselves to divide up the available positions. Local administrations considered the federally mandated community councils for participation in certain budgetary decisions too vocal and allowed them to become factional and partisan bodies. Other participatory councils quickly became little more than arenas in which social leaders and individual citizens negotiated urban services and personal favors with local politicians. Even city council meetings, intended to be weekly and public, were held infrequently and without prior notice, making it difficult for citizens to access information about the municipal government's actions before decisions were made (Selee 2006).

In sum, although more information about government actions and budgets was now available to Neza citizens, it was published after the fact. Since forums for public participation in governance were held hostage by partisan and factional elements, personal relationships and clientelism continued to be fundamental elements of citizen demand-making. In Michoacán, local PRD administrations did not even attempt to institute anything like popular councils for fear that the factions would just take them over anyway (Bruhn 1999).

The factionalism and clientelism apparent in its municipal and state governments are far from the participatory, democratic processes emphasized in the PRD's official discourse (see Harbers 2007), but they are relatively harmless in comparison to what has occurred in at least one other local PRD government. Citizens of Neza and the Federal District may freely choose to exit relationships with the PRD—albeit at the risk of losing the public services that have essentially been privatized through clientelism—but members of other organizations in Zinacantán, Chiapas, have faced repression by PRD authorities in a manner reminiscent of the PRI.³

In the Zinacantán area, political power is held by a number of violent local strongmen, many of them former *priistas* who crossed to the PRD when they were expelled from the party (Bellinghausen 2004b). In 2003 and 2004, Zinacantán's mayor and other PRD militants cut off potable water supplies and verbally harassed and physically threatened Zapatista activists unwilling to participate in local government activities. When other Zapatistas organized to bring water to their comrades, their convoy was attacked by government forces, an episode that left a number of Zapatistas injured, families fleeing their homes, and five people missing (Bellinghausen 2004c). In addition, the correspondent for the national newspaper *La Jornada* reported being under surveillance by local police informants as a result of his coverage of the events (Bellinghausen 2004a). Thus, in some instances, unwillingness to support a PRD administration leads to consequences more dire than the loss of clientelistic benefits.

To be sure, the impetus for clientelistic deals has not come from PRD politicians alone. Many of the social movements that joined the party in its formative years, and others that now seek advantages from an alliance with the PRD in power, have a long history of clientelist links with PRI politicians and officials. It is also common for such organizations to structure internal relationships with their membership according to clientelistic rules. These are not necessarily associations that aim simply to exploit their members but groups that have been highly successful in defending their adherents' interests with public officials (see Haber 2006; Hellman 1994a; Cross 1998). Their organizational experience and expectations for relationships between citizens and politicians affect the PRD in government nonetheless. As one founding member of the PRD with a long previous history in left-wing opposition politics said, "when you form a group that brings together existing leaderships, such as regional movements that have been fighting other movements for existence, you're going to be bringing in their clientelistic practices" (Guerra 2004).

For many members of social organizations and individual citizens, the *gestión* is at the heart of politics. Literally, *gestión* translates as process or negotiation. Practically, in the context of local politics, it describes the arrangements politicians and their operators make to fulfill citizens' needs for electricity, sewage control, gutters, legal advice, social events, health care, and so on. *Gestiones* are what draw the interest of the lower classes to politicians—they want to know what politicians will do for them—and politicians know, or learn, how to use this tool (see Tejera Gaona 2003).

The types of services typically provided through *gestiones* should be made available to all citizens by municipal governments, but these often do not have enough resources to cover all their constituents' needs. Approximately 48 percent of the Mexican population is considered poor by the World Bank (2006). The poor as a sector of the population have few chances of receiving aid from their resource-strapped governments, but as individuals they can help themselves by forming relationships with social and political leaders. The latter step in as brokers to organize individuals in need and represent them at various government agencies. The backing of people's membership, in turn, gives the leaders significant political capital. Citizens who succeed in gaining the resources they sought through these relationships tend to be grateful for the negotiating role played by the leaders who represented them. The norm of reciprocity (Gouldner 1977) translates into political support.

As the PRD became electorally successful—particularly through its 1997 victory in the Federal District—and gained access to public resources, growing numbers of individual and organized citizens looked to *perredista* politicians as possible patrons in clientelist bargains. The

desire of certain sectors of the public to engage in such alliances further reinforced trends toward clientelism in the PRD, as the factions readily used such pacts to surpass the size of each other's public following.

This additional pressure still does not negate the hypothesis that Cárdenas's charismatic leadership and the lack of party institutionalization resulting from his strategy are the keys to understanding the roots of clientelism in the PRD. The Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores faced constraints very similar to those encountered by the PRD, including a long tradition and continuing culture of clientelism, but made significant strides to overcome these through a commitment to participatory democratic regulations.

THE PARTIDO DOS TRABALHADORES

The PT was formed when the Brazilian military regime (1964–85) opened its artificial two-party system to the creation of real opposition parties in 1979. At about the same time, a series of important labor strikes shook the nation and garnered a great deal of media attention, but largely did not succeed in getting their material demands met. Labor leaders realized that they needed to engage in political action at the national level to create a more propitious context for workers to make their demands. Taking advantage of the new election law, they joined with progressive intellectuals and opposition politicians to create a workers' party (Keck 1992).

The sociopolitical environment in which the PT developed was similar in a number of ways to what the PRD faced in Mexico. Although the Brazilian regime was in a process of *abertura* (opening), the transition was slow and marked by violent repression of union activists, many of them PT members. Important social sectors had been linked to the regime through a corporatist structure intended to facilitate social control (Keck 1992). Social subjugation had also historically been ensured through clientelism, and the military joined with local and regional strongmen to guarantee the quiescence of their clients (Hagopian 1996). Indeed, much like politics in Mexico, Brazilian politics continues to be structured around clientelism (Avritzer 2000). Society, too, is marked by a general culture of clientelism, in which citizens evaluate the work of politicians according to their local engagements and direct impact on improving constituents' lives through public works, urban services, personal favors, and so on (Nylen 2003, 102). This situation is exacerbated by widespread poverty, at a level of about 38 percent, and high socioeconomic inequality (World Bank 2007).

In addition to these contextual factors, the PT as a political party shares several significant characteristics with the PRD. Much as the PRD's early existence hinged on Cárdenas's leadership, the PT

depended on the persona of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva. Furthermore, although the PT was formed as a workers' party, it has never been constituted by industrial workers only, but includes all manner of left-wing social and political groups, intellectuals, white-collar workers, Christian base communities, and new social movements. It did not take long for the more radical of these groups to start fighting with each other and with those having a more reformist orientation, creating a factionalized party (Keck 1992). Many of the social organizations that have sought alliances with the PT in government, moreover, are little more than local leaders interested in solidifying their political status by negotiating material benefits for their clients with the party (Nylen 2003; Baiocchi 2003). Even the labor unions that constituted the heart of the PT in its formative years had long previous histories of clientelistic relationships with the government (Keck 1992). The charismatic leadership, factionalism, and tradition of clientelism that characterized the PRD in Mexico thus were also important factors in the Brazilian PT.

At first glance, contemporary clientelism would appear to be another similarity between the PT and the PRD; yet a closer look reveals that moderation is necessary in this comparison. The difference stems from the problems associated with minimalist definitions of clientelism. According to a great number of sources, the PT is increasingly using clientelistic mechanisms for building political support. As the PT shifted from the left to the center-left of the political spectrum in the 1990s, its discourse moved from democratic socialism to a more catch-all, progressive approach (Hunter 2007). Coupled with its ascent to national power in 2000, this shift has led the PT to make alliances and advocate programs that pundits and critics term clientelistic. Such critiques seem to be based on something approaching the parsimonious economic understanding of clientelism—a simple trade of support for benefits—described above. In reality, vote buying and patronage have occurred at elite levels of the national PT administration, as well as policy that could be described as pork-barreling (but likely is not even that).

These activities, however, do not resemble the grassroots relationships that tie citizens to the PRD in a system in which two persons of unequal status engage in a face-to-face exchange of material benefits for political support over a period of months or years; that is, the real stuff of clientelism. As much as such relationships may exist in the PT (see Keck 1992, 212–14), the party has made significant strides toward using nonclientelistic community-building mechanisms. The “clientelism” for which the PT has been so heavily criticized in recent years—its corruption scandals and targeted social programs—is not really clientelism. Employing a minimalist definition, one begins to label a wide range of behavior clientelistic, diluting the explanatory power of the concept. Patronage, vote buying, and clientelism are similar in certain aspects

and often occur together, but they are not the same, and should remain conceptually differentiated.

The most widely noted supposed examples of clientelism in the PT are the *mensalão* (big monthly) and *caixa dois* (second fund) (see Avritzer 2006). The *mensalão* refers to an arrangement by which members of the National Congress from other parties have received monthly payments from the ruling PT in return for supporting PT policies. Although a long-term exchange is involved here, it is a matter of vote buying (by the PT) and of corruption (by recipients) among high-level elites with relatively equal positions of power, not a relationship between a powerful patron and a dependent client. The *caixa dois* is a slush fund that has been used to finance PT elections—again, a matter of corruption, not clientelism. The PT has also been using patronage. The Brazilian president has unequaled discretion in appointing thousands of administrative officials, a power Lula has used to reward loyal *petistas* instead of using merit-based criteria (see Wainwright 2005; de Oliveira 2006). One cannot deny that these activities occur, but it should be noted that they constitute patronage, not clientelism.

Critics charge that the PT uses social programs like the *Bolsa Família* (Family Grant) to convert the Brazilian masses into clients of the state (de Oliveira 2005; Hunter and Power 2007). The program provides a small monthly subsidy to poor families, who must send their children to school and have them vaccinated in order to qualify. Opponents argue that the Bolsa Família demobilizes citizens, transforming them into helpless dependents instead of teaching them to organize and make demands. Yet the program's implementation is decentralized, and some communities use participatory mechanisms to shape its outcomes, in a very empowering process (Aidar Prado et al. 2007). To be sure, in some communities the subsidies are simply handouts, and Lula has benefited electorally from the program. However, this is not even pork-barreling, let alone clientelism, since the program is aimed at an entire sector of the Brazilian population rather than at a territorially definable group, and forms part of a clear, long-term platform for easing poverty.

Still, even the careful analysis of Hunter and Power (2007) points to the Bolsa Família as a modern type of clientelism. The authors do indicate that the program is universally available to the targeted sector of the population and that no reciprocity is required; therefore, it is not clear how the program differs from the regular stuff of politics. What is clear is that the PT has indeed fought clientelism at the grassroots, more or less successfully instituting participatory democracy in both local government and party structures (Abers 1998; Baiocchi 2003).

Given the otherwise similar contexts and characteristics, why has clientelism become so much more central in the PRD than in the PT? The key differentiating factor appears to be each party's initial strategy.

In the PRD, Cárdenas's conviction that a transition to democracy required ousting the PRI as quickly as possible through institutional means caused the party to focus all resources on elections. Lula and other PT leaders, in contrast, thought that winning elections alone was not enough, since governments would remain clientelistic and exclusionary, limiting the amount of change possible from above. Convinced that democracy had to be brought about from the bottom up, *petistas* in local government began to use popular councils to generate participation. This not only matched their worldview but was considered the best available strategy for countering the entrenched culture of clientelism (Nylen 2003, 47–48). The PT's early concern with building its organization and seeking policy change significantly affected its development path (Hunter 2007, 456, 465–68).

Thus, *petistas* developed democratic rules and regulations to govern life in the party. The PT statutes call for participatory forums and elections at all levels, and the rules are strictly followed. Individuals who want to become party candidates for elected office are chosen carefully to ensure the compatibility of their political vision with that of the party; and this includes alliance or coalition candidates. Factions were regulated early on and forced, among other things, to undergo registration by the party. Today, a number of PT factions even have their own Internet sites, explaining their vision and activities.

Party unity is also strictly enforced. The Brazilian Congress is notorious for party representatives' voting as though they were independent, yet the PT makes sure that its representatives adhere to the party platform. According to Samuels (2004), the institutionalization of democracy in the PT has been so solid that it is actually responsible for the party's ideological shift to the center-left. Rules guaranteeing the weight of members' voices ensure that the growing political pragmatism among industrial workers and the increasingly important sector of white-collar workers with reformist views in the party were translated into a party leadership and candidacies for elected office with similar perspectives. While Hunter (2007) disagrees as to the causes for this shift, she concurs that the PT's solid democratic bases have kept it from becoming a catch-all party like all the others in the Brazilian electoral arena.

In government, the PT has developed a series of community councils to stimulate citizens' direct participation in political decisionmaking. These councils have made important strides toward forestalling clientelism and educating citizens about their rights and responsibilities (Abers 1998; Avritzer 2000; Baiocchi 2003; Nylen 2003). Some PT administrations, of course, have been less successful than others. In some cases, the PT has not been re-elected because of local dissatisfaction with the government's activities; in others, citizens reverted to clientelism as soon as the PT was voted out (Nylen 2003).

Corruption, vote buying, and patronage in the elite spheres of the PT are the results of inserting the party fully into electoral politics in the 1990s. The shift in strategy from seeking policy change to seeking power meant that the pressure of maximizing votes increased, making the party more vulnerable to the institutionalized patronage and corruption of Brazil's political system (Hunter 2007, 456, 465). It appears that lower-level PT politicians, officials, and activists were as stunned and disgusted by these events as the public and critics, and that the guilty parties did not use the various funds for personal enrichment or advancement but rather to help the cause of the PT (Wainwright 2005; Avritzer 2006). Although this does not mitigate the gravity of the corruption, it does lend further support to the evidence that the party's ideals of democratic participation have not been damaged by clientelism at the grassroots. Thus, the PT appears to have staved off clientelism to a greater degree than the PRD. As much as the PT's woes highlight the stretching that can result from minimalist definitions, the PRD's activities underline the continuing importance of discussions regarding the ambiguous relationship between clientelism and democracy.

THE CLIENTS' PERSPECTIVE

From the perspective of civilians involved as clients in relationships with PRD politicians, the impact of these links can be complex. The cases presented in this section illustrate that clientelism is not necessarily a nondemocratic exchange of support for benefits.⁴ The patron-client relationship is a complex interaction from which both parties always draw benefits. To be sure, a fine line divides exploitation from acceptable burdens, and short-term gains may be outweighed by long-term losses, but power and trust, individualism and community interact and confront each other. In certain instances, clientelism may be the best available mechanism for holding politicians and officials accountable, and in some cases it may even result in community building. Clientelism at the grassroots is replete with political tensions that are essential elements of the phenomenon.

In the first case study, Beatriz and her sister were young, single women when they decided to join the Frente Popular Francisco Villa because they could think of no other way to get enough capital and influence for access to subsidized housing. They were required to pay an initial deposit to a cooperative fund for their construction projects and weekly fees of 10 pesos to the leadership, to attend meetings every Sunday, to protest in front of prisons holding members of the organization, to demonstrate at the social housing offices, and to attend rallies commemorating events such as the 1968 student massacre. Once the PPFV allied itself with the PRD, demonstrating and protesting with the

party was also obligatory. Beatriz said that all the activities “really wore you down” (Beatriz 2004). She persevered and eventually received her apartment, but many other members either left the organization or devised tricks to avoid participating. Shirking participatory obligations could be expensive if not done right: at demonstrations,

people go, look for the person who writes down that you were there, and then leave. That’s what I did. But if you don’t go at all, you have to pay a fine [of] between 30 and 50 pesos. The idea is that you pay this so that they can pay someone else to go in your place, but they never end up giving that person the full amount. Those who collect the money keep some of it. But none of this matters, because as long as you don’t have a house, you do whatever they say to get it. And you say whatever it is they tell you to say: Down with the PRI, Down with the PAN. Once you already have a house, you stop going. The Frente enslaves people. It exploits them as much as it can. (Beatriz 2004)

Leaving the organization implied even heavier financial losses; Beatriz explained that it was very difficult to get one’s cooperative fund deposit returned. It seems that the leaders kept the funds, betting on the odds that former members did not have the resources to pursue the matter legally. Regardless, Beatriz claimed that some people were disgusted enough by the FPFV’s requirements to leave despite the financial repercussions. Though she persisted, she felt so manipulated that she came to regard the organization, the party, and the entire political left as corrupt. From the moment she got her apartment, she stopped participating in anything political.

Unlike Beatriz, some clients draw a lifetime of benefits from clientelistic relationships. Many settlers living in housing organization shantytowns while they save for down payments on subsidized apartments not only see their situation pragmatically but also feel relatively at home in their communities. When Luisa was interviewed, she was living in a shanty community run by the FPFV. Indeed, she had been living in such communities longer than the organization had existed: she was part of the massive 1988 expulsion from the squatter community of Lomas del Seminario, which was one of the sparks leading to the founding of the FPFV. When she was forced to leave El Seminario, she moved to Cabeza Juárez in Iztapalapa, one of the largest FPFV housing developments, and in 2001 to the community where she was interviewed. There, she inhabited a one-room dwelling with her daughter, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. Luisa liked the way the FPFV was organized; she supported being asked to take part in FPFV activities in return for the privilege of the leaders’ protection, and she was happy living in her community. “We feel at home here and in the organization” (Luisa 2004).

Luisa was unemployed, which made it unlikely that she would contribute enough to the FPFV cooperative fund to obtain an apartment in the organization's government-subsidized projects. She continued nevertheless—after more than 20 years—to live in shanties under FPFV protection from eviction by government authorities. That the PRD in government develops policies to aid people like Luisa while also attempting to control them is evidence of the difficulties inherent in governing the urban monstrosity of the Federal District, with its poor and wealthy divides.

Luisa is not alone in willingly spending much of her life in shantytowns run by social housing organizations. This is not an unusual phenomenon, and it points both to the dire situation in which many poor housing claimants find themselves in Mexico City and to how useful these organizations are for their members. Carlos, an FPFV leader, said,

Sometimes, I don't know who uses whom. The FPFV is criticized for using the poor, but the poor also use the organization to get what they want. In the end, they get their apartment, and in the meantime, they pay their 30 pesos per week in dues, and other than that they get to live for free. Twenty-five years ago, during the invasion of Belvedere [a plot of land], there was this 80-year-old woman, Doña Tachita, whom everyone was looking out for to make sure she wasn't too cold in her cardboard shack, that she didn't get hurt in the violence, and so on. But then, slowly, we came to realize that she had already been in other invasions; the Santo Domingo one, which was the biggest one in the Federal District, and later on, another one. This was how she lived. She invaded and then, when the land was hers, she'd sell it, making more money than she could have in a regular job, and then she'd go and invade somewhere else. She's not the only one who does this. So, who uses whom? (Carlos 2004)

Clearly, members pay a price in time, money, and the danger of being fleeced by leaders for the housing and protection they stand to receive from the FPFV. Because the FPFV organizes the poorest of the poor in Mexico City, its members have few resources and fewer alternatives, and are willing to incur relatively high costs to reach their goals (see Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). Some, such as Luisa, feel this to be a fair bargain, while others, such as Beatriz, become disenchanted with political action as a result of their clientelistic experiences.

Elena, a lifelong activist, expressed outrage at what she regarded as the exploitation of the poor in organizations such as the FPFV, but was just as concerned about the long-term effects of clientelism on the broader left-wing political project. She had been involved in the Movimiento Urbano Popular (MUP), which had protected and promoted the social housing rights of the urban poor under the PRI in the last

three decades of that party's rule. She and many of her friends supported Cárdenas in 1988, and in the early 1990s a great number of the MUP's leaders joined the PRD to continue their struggle in the political arena. Elena now felt, however, that the PRD's social policies were not structured properly.

López Obrador's social politics is individualist and personalist . . . they're removing people's organizations and individualizing things and tying them directly to the party and to López Obrador himself. Is this what it means to be leftist? The movements are paralyzed now because with the current government, it's like they've won, but things aren't getting done, yet it's hard for people to mobilize against their own government. (Elena 2004)

Elena admitted to being disillusioned because the PRD fell far short of her expectations: it conducted its politics using the same clientelistic methods as the PRI and thereby demobilized citizens.

The critiques leveled at clientelism by those who have experienced it firsthand, such as Beatriz and Elena, and by those who have studied the phenomenon (see, e.g., Flynn 1975; Singelmann 1981; Putnam 1993; Kurer 1993) are noteworthy. Although the interview stories show that clientelism could not function without some significant benefit to the client, the interaction involves more than performing a task in return for material gain. It entails elements of power and trust that have important personal and sociopolitical repercussions. Some clientelistic relationships lead to feelings of exploitation and reactions of political disengagement, while others result in feelings of belonging and security. Güneş-Ayata (1994) argues that modernization and democratization free individuals but also atomize them, rendering them powerless to obtain the resources they need in the free market. In this context, clientelism provides access both to market resources and to community, a sense of belonging to some larger unit.

According to the research for this study, in some cases the individual benefits derived from being part of a clientelistic group also have positive repercussions for the collectivity and for political participation. Some of the poor clients interviewed in Mexico City had initiated clientelist links with social organization leaders or political brokers in order to meet personal needs, but learned from these relationships that they could help their community and thus became socially or politically engaged citizens. These people came to see the importance of the activities that are a required aspect of the exchange bargain. Participation at association meetings, in research groups, at political rallies, in classes on the political process, and so on is compulsory in many social organizations that are linked to the PRD. Many clients do not put much thought into what goes on at such gatherings, and others consider them an

imposition, but some become more socially and politically active through their experiences with clientelism.

Another subject, Iginio, was interviewed after a meeting of his social housing organization, the *Asamblea de Barrios*. He said that his activities with the organization and the PRD had resulted in his family's ownership of a government-subsidized apartment. Although he had reached his initial goal, he considered it important to keep working for the organization and to convince others to do the same.

I have my house now. As I got ahead, I realized that others were getting the same thing I was. I realized that we were receiving something like a subsidy in terms of the help of the people in the organization. Now, I feel that I have to give something back. We have to keep the organization running for services and to help those who have even less than we. (Iginio 2004)

Iginio pointed out that the scarcity of social housing in Mexico City and the trend toward family disintegration cause social and economic difficulties for the poor. To combat these problems, his group attempted to integrate people into a social circle, teach them economic skills, and generally assist them. Thus, crafts made by a women's committee were sold to help the family economy; there were programs to keep youths out of trouble; and once a month, everyone contributed a little bit to a worthy cause, such as buying a wheelchair for a disabled member of the organization.

Isabel, a member of another housing organization, explained how the clientelist exchange functions.

They're giving you a kind of schooling, such as the habit of participating in something on a weekly basis. They are teaching us, and manage us with points for participating. We go to the meetings, and then you have to go to other events. Going to the meeting is worth one point, and events depend on what the leaders give. Those with the highest points get to choose their apartment first. (Isabel 2004)

Although Isabel said she was being "managed," she did not see her involvement in politics in a negative light, "I don't feel manipulated because I do like to participate. . . . I like to learn and to understand what's going on in politics. . . . I've learned a lot from [the patron]." She explained that she became more and more involved in politics because she wondered why people mobilize, and then realized that demonstrations are a type of pressure that forces the government to work and to respond to citizens' demands.

Iginio and Isabel became involved in their respective organizations for personal reasons—they were trying to improve their housing situation—but took from their experiences much more than satisfaction of

their initial goals. They learned about the responsibilities of citizenship and took these on as their own, using clientelism as a springboard for community building. Yet as we have seen, other clients do not necessarily share their experiences. Some feel isolated and exploited and become politically detached, while others simply continue to use the clientelistic community for their own benefit.

Power, dominance, exploitation, and individualism are significant elements of clientelism as much as community, trust, mutual benefit, and reciprocity. The tensions among these aspects generate positive and negative effects, both internal and external to the relationship itself. These tensions are fundamental aspects of clientelism, and should be reflected in definitions and discussions of the phenomenon.

CONCLUSIONS

The people who appear to continue participating actively in their communities and in politics as a result of their experiences with PRD clientelism are not the poorest of the poor and are not involved in highly exploitative relationships with their patrons. They are people who enjoy a relative level of economic stability: they are employed, they own property (often as a result of clientelistic bargains), and they mention having some education and an interest in continuing to learn. The patrons with whom they have had their most significant clientelistic relationship may be authoritarian but are relatively fair and truly concerned for the well-being of their clients.

Further research is required to establish a more definitive profile of these participants, but for the moment it is interesting to point out an apparent overlap with individuals identified by Nylen as likely to remain mobilized after participating in the PT's community councils (2003, chap. 6). The latter tend to have past histories of community involvement (before joining the PT councils) and, though poor, are relatively wealthier than the worst-off segments of the Brazilian population. It would be interesting to study the implications of this overlap (if it holds on further investigation into the characteristics of *perredista* clients). Is there a profile of "participators" who will mobilize even if the mechanisms are not ideal?

The problems resulting from recent definitions of clientelism—conceptual stretching and decreased explanatory power—also deserve further attention. Detailed definitions of clientelism are rooted in relationships observed by researchers in traditional agrarian communities. As these societies modernized, the definitions were transposed onto widening market and political networks. Researchers following these developments began to tinker with the definition of clientelism, minimizing its personal elements in favor of broader political exchanges. In the

post-third wave transitions era, clientelism has become synonymous with the remnants of nondemocratic regimes that continue to complicate democratic consolidation. Yet clientelistic relationships are often more democratic than this assumption reveals, and should be differentiated from phenomena such as vote buying and corruption, with which they are often equated. As a result, the often-noted causal link between clientelism and weakly institutionalized democracy may also need to be reexamined.

Despite its weak institutionalization, factionalism, and clientelism, the PRD continues to be an interesting alternative in the Mexican political arena to the conservative PAN and the chameleonlike PRI, and has enough electoral support to remain viable. Indeed, López Obrador's extremely popular Federal District social programs gave the party more votes (and a near-victory) in the 2006 presidential race than it had been able to garner since Cárdenas's fraudulent defeat in 1988. The PRD is not always easy to understand, given its informal rules and regulations, and for the same reason, less competitive in the electoral arena than it could be if all its members were working together. Its governance of Mexico City and its plans for the country continue nevertheless to give millions of Mexicans from across the socioeconomic spectrum hope for a different, more egalitarian future.

NOTES

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1. To be sure, societal or neocorporatism has been a prominent feature of a number of Western European social democracies. Here, business, labor, and the state engage in tripartite negotiations to determine policy orientations. *Perredistas* have, however, been more influenced by the PRI's state corporatism, in which the corporatist sectors are used to carry out the state's will. See Schmitter 1974.

2. For an analysis of the difficulties in relationships between social organizations and the PRD, see Bruhn 1997a, 2003.

3. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this case.

4. The cases are drawn from fieldwork conducted in Mexico City from August to December 2004. The real names of large, well-known organizations are used but those of smaller groups are omitted; names of all individual subjects have been changed to protect their identity.

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