

# INSTITUTIONAL DUALISM AND ITS IMPACT ON ELECTIONS: THE CASE OF PATRON-CLIENT NETWORKS IN BANGLADESH

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh began her transition to democracy in 1990 through a process of large-scale uprisings when political parties united to fight President Ershad's ten-year authoritarian rule. Since 1991 elections in Bangladesh have been held every five years (except between 2007-2008 during a two year state of emergency declared by the army-backed Neutral Caretaker Government), with an alternation of power each time, thereby meeting Huntington's two-turnover test and reaching Rustow's decision phase of democracy<sup>1</sup>. Bangladesh is a homogenous country with very few cleavages in terms of ethnicity, religion or caste. People have historically manifested strong democratic spirit and yet the country remains suspended in what Fareed Zakaria terms 'illiberal democracy' and oftentimes illustrates that liberal values of tolerance and pluralism represent distinct political traditions that may not accompany electoral democracy<sup>2</sup>. The democratic era in Bangladesh has been marred by a widespread consensus of a 'governance crisis', characterized by rampant corruption amongst politicians and public officials, including the judiciary and law enforcement agencies; escalating political violence and the use of 'muscle politics' through *mastaans* (political strongmen); marginal rule of law with access to justice being impaired by corruption and politicization of state agencies; regular disruptions to daily life through *hartals* (political strikes), curfews, and aggressive politics of the street; and the ensuing lack of civil rights, basic security and redress mechanisms from these jointly reinforcing illiberal phenomena. These elements are suggestive of deep-seated problems in Bangladesh's style of democracy, and have produced social tensions, a lack of equal access to natural justice, and abuses of human rights and shows that Bangladesh has not reached the habituation phase of democracy despite holding regular elections. In this paper I attempt to illustrate that after twenty years of democratic rule and elections Bangladesh remains an 'Illiberal Democracy' because of institutional dualism in the form of patron-client networks. The paper shows that formal institutions such as the electoral system are rendered ineffective because of the culture of patronage and its effect on voter and politician behavior.

The paper is divided into four parts, each with several sub-sections. Part II defines different types of democracies and describes Bangladesh as a 'patronage democracy'. Section c of Part II explains what democratic consolidation is for the purpose of this paper. Part III explores the concept of informal institutions and their impact on formal democratic institutions and then moves on to a specific discussion of the particular informal institution of 'patron-clientelism'. Finally, Part IV explores how patron-client networks manifest in the electoral arena in Bangladesh and what this manifestation means for accountability of Members of Parliament. The paper concludes that patron-client networks in Bangladesh change the nature of accountability in such a manner that politicians in such a patronage democracy are held accountable on the basis of individualized distribution of private resources and thus the nature of democracy in these societies is different from what is known as 'liberal democracy'. For the purpose of this research I will use the terms 'patron-client', 'clientelism' and 'patronage' interchangeably and as defined below.

This paper is the result of extensive desk review of academic literature, policy papers and practice-orientated research. Primary empirical research has been conducted in the form of semi-structured elite interviews. I have interviewed elected representatives of the Bangladesh Parliament (*Jatiyo Sangsad*) in order to identify

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<sup>1</sup> Rustow, Dankwart A., 'Transitions to Democracy: Towards a Dynamic Model', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Apr., 1970), Page 351.

<sup>2</sup> Zakaria, Fareed, 'The Rise of Illiberal Democracy', *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 76, No. 6, Page 24.

the role of MPs in Bangladesh and to evaluate to what extent they view themselves as patrons and act according to patron-client modes as opposed to formal duties of MPs and why – the why should help me understand more about the nature of accountability in the electoral arena in Bangladesh. Additionally, secondary empirical research through the examination of media reports has also been conducted.

## 2. DEFINING DEMOCRACY, DEMOCRATIZATION AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

Any research on the negative impact of institutional dualism on Bangladesh's road to democratic consolidation first requires a clarification of what is meant by democracy and what is to be consolidated for the purpose of the research. Originally the concept of 'consolidation' was meant to describe 'the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune against the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual "reverse waves"'<sup>3</sup>. However, since then the third wave democracies have faced such differing challenges that the problems of identifying democracy and how to reach democratic consolidation have 'expanded beyond all recognition'. Scholars studying democracy are divided between those who argue in favor of *degrees* of democracy and those who talk about *types* of democracy. *Degrees* of democracy usually measure levels of democracy using an index or scale. On the other hand, those who speak of *types* of democracy have named hundreds of (reportedly 550<sup>4</sup>) types of nominal and weakened subtypes of democracy. When speaking of democratic consolidation one has to identify what is to be consolidated – certainly with the *type* of democracy, consolidation may occur for any of these *types* of democracy be it liberal or defective. Similarly with the *degree* kind of democracy, it seems irrelevant to argue for the consolidation of various *degrees* of democracy – rather a state should already be considered a democracy before trying to understand the process of its democratic consolidation. According to Freedom House statistics Bangladesh is an *electoral democracy* but has also been categorized as only *Partly Free*. Thus, although Bangladesh is already an *electoral democracy* I will claim that it is currently a *patronage democracy* and is in the process of consolidating to into a *liberal democracy*.

### 2.1. 'Liberal' Democracy

With the observation of democratic development in the third wave democracies, theorists seem to be rejecting the notion that the extent of rights, rules and 'stability of a system differs from the nature of a system'<sup>5</sup> and have set higher standards for the definition of democracy which goes much beyond holding free, fair and participatory elections. Today the extent to which a country is a democracy is no longer simply a matter of regime classification. Now after almost four decades of empirical evidence from the third wave countries it appears that the reality of the process of democratization is a lot more complicated than the simple regime classification of the mid twentieth century. Despite becoming *electoral democracies*, many of the third wave countries seem to be struggling with the transition to become a *liberal democracy*. Thus, scholars have noted that the definition of democracy can no longer be seen 'just in the terms of public balloting, but much more capaciously, in terms of what John Rawls calls "the exercise of public reason"'<sup>6</sup>, in fact *electoral democracy* is said to be a 'minimalist' standard<sup>7</sup> and other 'thicker' concepts of democracy are defined as *liberal democracy*, *embedded democracy*, *constitutionalism*, *government by discussion*, *institutional democracy* and so on, which state's should aspire to in order to become a true democracy.

A *liberal democracy* is where free and fair elections go hand in hand with the rule of law and basic human rights. According to Merkel *liberal* or *embedded* democracy consists of five partial regimes, all of which need to be satisfied. These regimes can be divided into democratic electoral regime, political rights of participation, civil rights, horizontal accountability and where effective power to govern lies in the hands of elected representatives. Although Freedom House in 2011 has categorized 115 countries out of 194 as *electoral democracies*, only 87 have been defined as *free* – which would mean that the remaining countries, which include Bangladesh, are not yet *liberal* or *constitutional* democracies.

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<sup>3</sup> Schedler, Andreas, 'What is Democratic Consolidation?', Journal of Democracy, Vol 9., No. 2, Page 91.

<sup>4</sup> See Davis Collier and Steven Levitsky, 'Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research', World Politics, Vol.49, No.3, 1997, 430-451

<sup>5</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century, Page 3.

<sup>6</sup> Sen, Amartya, 'The Idea of Justice', Allen Lane, 2009, Page 324.

<sup>7</sup> Diamond, Larry, Thinking About Hybrid Regimes, Journal of Democracy, Volume 13, Number 2, April 2002, Page 22.

Proponents of *liberal democracy* demand a priority of liberal rights that even ‘demotes the democratic process to an inferior status’<sup>8</sup> because, according to Fareed Zakaria, democratically elected regimes around the world are routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power and thereby depriving citizens of their basic rights and freedoms. Zakaria notes that in today’s world ‘democracy is flourishing, constitutional liberalism is not’<sup>9</sup> and that half the democratizing countries in the world today are illiberal democracies. Diamond notes that it is ‘astonishing frequency with which contemporary authoritarian regimes manifest, at least superficially, a number of democratic features’<sup>10</sup>. In this paper I will attempt to establish that democracy in Bangladesh has not reached a point where Merkel’s five partial regimes of *embedded democracies* exist because the concept of democratic accountability is eschewed due to the existence of patron-client networks. Thus, I define Bangladesh as a *patronage democracy*.

## 2.2. ‘Patronage Democracy’

Chandra defines *patronage democracy* to mean a democracy where the state has relative monopoly over access to jobs and services, and in which elected officials have discretion in the implementation of laws allocating the jobs and services at the disposal of the state. Thus in a *patronage democracy*, the key aspect is the power of elected officials to distribute the resources controlled by the state to voters on an *individualized* basis, by exercising their discretion in the implementation of state policy. This individualized distribution of resources along with a dominant state makes *patronage democracies* a distinct type of democracy with distinct types of voter and elite behavior.<sup>11</sup>

In a *patronage democracy*, because elected officials have discretionary power over the distribution of benefits given by the state, they also have the incentive to market these benefits in order to receive private gain. Basic access to goods and services provided by the state – both due to scarcity and official control over them – become commodities which officials can use as a bargaining tool. In a democracy the most valuable form of payment for politicians are votes since they provide the opportunity for continued control of the state. Thus, Kanchan Chandra writes that, ‘wherever patronage-democracies exist, therefore, we should also see a black market for state resources, where the currency is votes and the clients are voters. Incumbent and aspiring candidates in such democracies should court voter support by sending surreptitious signals about whom they will favor in policy implementation if they win’<sup>12</sup>. For most voters in *patronage democracies* the need to secure some of the material benefits at the disposal of those who implement policy is very important. Such material benefits are greatly valued, limited, and, most importantly, private. They are also necessary for individuals (e.g., jobs, medical care, university admissions, housing loans, land grants) and to the micro-communities that they represent (e.g., roads, schools, electricity, water)<sup>13</sup>. Individual votes are not of value to patrons as they can’t influence the outcome of elections. So, clients or voters in *patronage democracies* have to form collective groups or factions in order to be eligible for the possibility of receiving benefits in exchange for their votes.

## 2.3. Democratic Consolidation

For the purpose of this paper I will consider democratic consolidation to mean the prevention of democratic breakdown and its erosion as defined by Schedler<sup>14</sup>, in a country where (more or less) free, fair and competitive elections are held. The different routes that democratic erosion or breakdown may take have been attributed to various reasons from economic trends to reassertion of military supremacy, lack of civil society to the type of authoritarian predecessor regime. In this paper I explore what happens to democracy when both vertical and horizontal accountability is diminished by informal institutions, or other, structurally

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<sup>8</sup> Habermas, Jurgen, ‘Reconciliation through the Public use of Reason’: Remarks on John Rawls’s Political Liberalism’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 92 (1995), Page 127.

<sup>9</sup> Zakaria, Fareed, ‘The Rise of Illiberal Democracy’, *Foreign Affairs*, Volume 76, No. 6, Nov-Dec 1997, Page 24

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* 14, Page 23.

<sup>11</sup> Chandra, Kanchan, ‘Why Ethnic Parties Succeed?: Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India’, *Theory and Research in Comparative Social Analysis*, UCLA, 2003, Page 7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Chandra, Kanchan, ‘Why Ethnic Parties Succeed?: Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India’, *Theory and Research in Comparative Social Analysis*, UCLA, 2003, Page 56.

<sup>13</sup> As Above, Page 61.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* 3.

induced patterns of behavior. In the context of Africa, Lindberg writes 'If voting behavior, holding elected officials accountable, and enforcement of administrative and political horizontal accountability are dependent on personal relationships of the patron-client kind, then liberal democracy may be corroded by the rust of personalized rule in democratic disguise so much as to threaten democracy's very legitimacy and survival'<sup>15</sup>. In the following section I explain the theory of patron-clientelism and then go on to explain its impact on voting and how it produces *patronage democracy* in Bangladesh.

### 3. PATRON-CLIENT THEORY

In theory, in a democracy elected officials hold political power through a system of legal procedures, transparency and accountability – if the public are not satisfied with the government, the leaders are held accountable and fail to gather/maintain enough support to win the next elections. However, the reality of government is not as simple as in theory - besides these formal institutions through which democracy functions, all societies have underlying informal institutions that contribute to the functioning of democracy. One of the reasons that scholars have attributed to the difficulty of political transition to democracy of third wave countries are these underlying informal structures<sup>16</sup>. The following is a general discussion about informal institutions and their impact on democracy. The paper then moves on to a particular discussion of the informal institution of political patron-clientelism and its manifestation in the electoral arena in Bangladesh.

#### 3.1. Informal Institutions and types of impact

Traditionally institutions have been understood as 'controlling, organized organs of state'<sup>17</sup> embodied in constitutions, commercial codes, administrative regulations and laws, civil service procedures, judicial structures. Their features are readily observable through written documents, physical structures (e.g. ministry buildings, legislatures, courthouses), and public events (e.g. elections, parliamentary hearings, city council meetings, legal proceedings). However, Neo-Institutionalist understanding of institutions goes beyond the traditional analysis. Rather institutions are understood as 'norm patterns which shape behavior, and which can expect reciprocal behavior from fellow citizens'<sup>18</sup>. Thus Douglas North defines institutions as 'game rules of a society or...the limitations of human action as conceived by people'<sup>19</sup> and Guillermo O'Donell notes that 'By.. institution I mean a regularized pattern of interaction that is known, practiced and accepted (if not necessarily approved) by actors who expect to continue interacting under the rules sanctioned and backed by that pattern'<sup>20</sup>. Informal institutions are based solely on the fact of their existence and their effectiveness. They are based on implicit and unwritten understandings. They reflect socio-cultural norms and routines, and underlying patterns of interactions among socioeconomic classes and ethnic groups.

The authority of these institutions is based on social acceptance, which lends them a measure of legitimacy. One of the main features of this acceptance is due to the purpose of informal institutions. The way in which informal institutions function continues to 'make interaction between individuals and groups easier, by creating known and accepted behavioral structures which cannot be changed by any individual. Even if an actor does not wish to accept them, he or she obeys them, in accordance with rational calculation; the costs involved in rejecting them can only be offset when real behavioral alternatives are available'<sup>21</sup>. Informal

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<sup>15</sup> Lindberg, Steffan I., 'It's our time to "Chop": Do Elections in Africa feed Neo-Patrimonialism rather than Counter-Act it?', *Democratization*, 10:2, Page 127.

<sup>16</sup> Brinkerhoff, Derick W. and Goldsmith, Arthur A., 'Clientelism, Patrimonialism and Democratic Governance: An Overview and Framework for Assessment and Programming', U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Democracy and Governance, December 2002. Page 1.

<sup>17</sup> Hans-Joachim, Lauth, 'Informal Institutions and Democracy', *Democratization*, 7:4, 2000, Page 23.

<sup>18</sup> Hans-Joachim, Lauth, 'Informal Institutions and Democracy', *Democratization*, 7:4, 2000, Page 23.

<sup>19</sup> North, Douglass C., 'Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance', Cambridge University Press, 1990, Page 3.

<sup>20</sup> O'Donell, Guillermo, 'Illusions and Consolidation', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol 7, No. 2, 1996, Page 34.

<sup>21</sup> Brinkerhoff, Derick W. and Goldsmith, Arthur A., 'Clientelism, Patrimonialism and Democratic Governance: An Overview and Framework for Assessment and Programming', U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Democracy and Governance, December 2002. Page 24.

institutions take a long time to change or dissolve as the participating actors have internalized the processes and these are reproduced by shaping future behavior and expectations.

In contrast to formal institutions, which receive their legitimacy through the state, informal institutions are based on auto-licensing (that is, self-enactment and subsequent self-assertion). While changes to formal institutions can be made by those with the authority to do so, this is not the case with informal institutions as these develop indigenously and there is no center to direct and co-ordinate their actions. Therefore, if the actual recognition of informal institutions ends, so does their existence. Lauth writes that ‘despite their unofficial nature, informal institutions can be precisely understood and described at the analytical level, as they manifest their own functioning logics and rules of identity, which distinguishes them from others.’<sup>22</sup>

These informal institutions can have several different types of impact on formal democratic institutions. Hans Joachim Lauth distinguishes three types of relationship – **complementary**, **substitutive** and **conflicting**. When informal institutions co-exist with and support formal institutions it is a complementary type of informal institution. When the informal institution is as effective as the formal institution and is functionally equivalent to the formal institution it is a substitutive type of informal institution. Finally, the third type of informal institution, which is the type that this paper is concerned with, is the conflicting type of informal institution. Conflict type informal institutions interfere with the functioning logic of formal institutions. These informal institutions are dependent on the existence of formal institutions, they perpetuate by exploiting formal institutions for their own purposes by partially occupying or penetrating them.

According to Weber the features of the modern bureaucratic state include ‘a formal, meritocratic bureaucratic structure that adheres to rules, is impersonal in its dealings with individual citizens, and represents a sharp separation of the private and public spheres’<sup>23</sup>. However, Professor Mushtaq Khan writes that developing countries function in a completely contradictory manner. He notes that the average developing country is organized on a basis of ‘personalized exchanges between rulers and their factions, bureaucratic rules are regularly broken, and private interests are deeply penetrated in the public sphere represented by the bureaucracy’<sup>24</sup>. According to Weber, when a state is based on patrimonial rule, where allegiance to a leader is based on personal loyalty and traditional legitimacy, it lacks rational bureaucratic structure and therefore gets in the way of capitalism. In the following passages I will review the existing literature on Clientelism and then go on to show how the existence of this informal institution impacts the behavior of voters and political elites in Bangladesh and how elections perpetuate these networks.

### 3.2. Clientelism

#### 3.2.1. Historical Development

Traditionally patron-client relations was a concept in anthropology, it was connected with the study of phenomena such as ritual kinship or friendship and anthropologists focused on the institutionalized types of personal patron-client relationship in tribal settings or small rural communities. Patron-client relations were seen as marginal in their respective societies and were studied in the framework of more traditional concepts and concerns. However, since the mid-1960s the study of patron-client relations has flourished and become of central importance. With the extension of the objects of these studies from dyadic, interpersonal, semi-institutionalized relationships between a single patron and client to a broader variety of social relations and organizations, the studies encompassing of a wide range of societies throughout the world and the realization that patron-client relationships would not disappear with the establishment of democracy, the study of patron-client relations became of importance to the social sciences<sup>25</sup>.

By the 1960s the study of patron-client relations became integral to the major theoretical developments and controversies in the social sciences. Patron-Client studies focused on phenomena such as groups and their

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<sup>22</sup> Hans-Joachim, Lauth, ‘Informal Institutions and Democracy’, *Democratization*, 7:4, 2000, Page 25.

<sup>23</sup> From Khan, Mushtaq H, ‘Markets, States and Democracy: Patron-Client Networks and the case for Democracy in Developing Countries’, *Special Issue of Democratization: On the State of Democracy*, Julio Faundez (ed.), Page 10.

<sup>24</sup> As above.

<sup>25</sup> Eisenstadt, S.N and Roniger, Louis, ‘Patron-Client Relations as a Model of Structuring Social Exchange’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan., 1980), Page 42, 43.

needs and boundary maintaining mechanisms focusing on personal and interpersonal relations, quasi-groups, networks and power relations<sup>26</sup>. It also observed the structuring of the flow of resources, exchange and power relations and their legitimation in society. It was recognized that clientelistic relations are not only peripheral aspects of more fully structured or organized social relations but are the primary aspect of the institutional patterns of some societies<sup>27</sup>. Those studying patron-client relations in developing countries began to note that pyramids of patron client networks exist from the top leader to the grassroots. Martz asserts that clientelism is 'an enduring mechanism of internal control in society...identifiable in all times and settings'<sup>28</sup>. Eisenstadt notes, 'while many organizational aspects of patron-client relations (such as the dyadic or triadic networks of brokers) can be found in many different societies, yet their full institutional implications and repercussions are seen only when they become a part or manifestation of the central mode of regulation of the flow of resources and processes of interpersonal and institutional exchange and interaction in a society or a sector thereof. They can best be understood therefore in relation to the broader, often macro-societal, setting in which they take place'<sup>29</sup>.

With the knowledge that patron-client relations should be understood in the broader, macro-societal setting that they take place in, scholars of patron-clientelism also observed that the nature of clientelism is not uniform in all societies but that it reflects the changing structure of the state and the society in which it take place. According to Eisenstadt and Roniger new types of clientelism appear as systems change and the stability of the new clientelism reflects the social setting. Lande notes that the variation of substructure to which patron-client relationships are attached will create a resultant type of clientelism. Brown similarly observed that change in the structure of the state is reflected through change in the structure of clientelistic power relations. Schmidt remarks that shifts in clientage occur with changes in the larger society. Devine, when observing Bangladesh, notes that clients shift to different patrons depending on who is the source of resource (the type of resource may also change), even when the patron becomes third sector actors such as NGOs. Peters takes the view that it is futile to attempt to identify a system as political clientelism because the characteristics change too much over time<sup>30</sup>. However, most observers do agree on a basic body of identifying characteristics, which I will attempt to set down in the following pages. The next section is a review of the literature on the nature of patron-clientelism, especially in the electoral arena, particularly in Bangladesh.

### 3.2.2. *The Nature of Clientelism*

Manfred G. Schmidt understands clientelism as a 'specialist term for forms of protective relationship of mutual benefit between a person or persons occupying a higher place in the social hierarchy (patron) and a following concerned with protection and the acquisition of certain advantages (clients)<sup>31</sup>. Clientelistic structures are based upon a relationship of exchange, thus they are often understood as forms of participation, even when the personal connections are asymmetrically structured. On the one side, there is the patron, who controls the relationship, and on the other there are the clients who accept the authority of the former. Roniger also notes that clientelism is about mutually advantageous relationships of power and exchange but he goes on to say that the relationship is unequal – 'It is a non-universalistic quid pro quo between individuals or groups of unequal standing'<sup>32</sup>. Through the process of clientelism access to resources and markets are facilitated and those who are not involved in the process are normally excluded from such access. This access is conditioned on 'subordination, compliance or dependence on the goodwill of others'<sup>33</sup> and

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<sup>26</sup> Eisenstadt, S.N and Roniger, Louis, 'Patron-Client Relations as a Model of Structuring Social Exchange', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan., 1980), Page 47.

<sup>27</sup> Lande, C.H, 'Introduction. The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism,' in Schmidt et al., *Friends, Followers, and Factions*

<sup>28</sup> Martz, John D. 'The Politics of Clientelism: Democracy and the State in Columbia', New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1996, Page 10.

<sup>29</sup> Eisenstadt, S.N and Roniger, Louis, 'Patron-Client Relations as a Model of Structuring Social Exchange', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan., 1980), Page 49.

<sup>30</sup> From Kettering, Sharon, 'The Historical Development of Political Clientelism', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter, 1988), page 419.

<sup>31</sup> Hans-Joachim, Lauth, 'Informal Institutions and Democracy', *Democratization*, 7:4, 2000, Page 27.

<sup>32</sup> Roniger, Luis, 'Political Clientelism, Democracy and Market Economy', *Comparative Politics*, Volume 36, No. 3, April 2004, Page 354.

<sup>33</sup> Roniger, Luis, 'Political Clientelism, Democracy and Market Economy', *Comparative Politics*, Volume 36, No. 3, April 2004, Page 354.

‘those in control – the so called patrons, sub-patrons and brokers – provide selective access to goods and opportunities and place themselves or their supporters in positions from which they can divert resources and services in their favor. Their partners – the so-called clients – are expected to return their benefactors’ help, politically and otherwise, by working for the patron at election times or boosting the patron’s prestige and reputation’.<sup>34</sup> Like Roniger, Jans- Joachim Lauth asserts that though clientelistic relationships are based on a relationship of trust it is a ‘particularist and not universal structure’. Lauth notes that ‘entry into a clientelistic structure is only in a limited way voluntary. Partially, it is determined by birth and, partially, it is based on the necessity to gain access to essential goods. The voluntary nature of a withdrawal from the relationship is also limited and often entails certain costs’<sup>35</sup>.

Eisenstadt and Roniger<sup>36</sup> define patron-client relations as a mode of regulating institutional order, such as the flow of resource exchange and power relations and their legitimation in society. They give nine characteristics to patron-client relations, which are:

1. Patron-client relations are usually particularistic and diffuse.
2. It is based on simultaneous exchange.
3. The resources are usually exchanged in a ‘package deal’.
4. There is usually an element of long range credit and obligations.
5. There may be an element of interpersonal loyalty and attachment between the patron and the client which is often related to conceptions of identity.
6. The relationship is not legal or contractual, and are often opposed to the official laws of the country.
7. Patron-Client relationships are entered voluntarily and can be abandoned voluntarily (usually).
8. Clientelism takes place between individuals or networks of individuals in a vertical fashion, and seems to undermine horizontal group organization.
9. These relationships are based on inequality and difference in power. Kettering observes that the patron has disproportionate power and thus enjoys wide latitude about how to distribute the assets under his control. In modern polities, most patrons are not independent actors, but are links within a larger grid of contacts, usually serving as middlemen who arrange exchanges between the local level and the national centre<sup>37</sup>.

Kaufman also states that the patron-client relationship occurs between actors of unequal power and status. However, according to Kaufman because patron-client relationships are based on the principle of reciprocity the relationship fails once the expected reward fails to materialize<sup>38</sup>. Clientelistic links are usually based on rational economic calculations rather than on blind or instinctive personal loyalty. Patron-client relations are a type of instrumental friendship—though not an equal friendship because patrons target who they want as clients and take advantage of their limited information and autonomy. Nonetheless, each participant in the exchange does get something which is of value and otherwise inaccessible to them. Kaufman’s view would seem to be justified, at least in the context of Bangladesh, where there has been an alternation of power between the two major political parties at each election – thus showing that clients have abandoned their patrons for another when the patron has failed to fulfill their promise.

Another view on clientelism, as held by scholars such as Ayşe Güneş-Ayata is that clientelism is a valuable method of obtaining transactional gains, in resource allocation and for providing local-regional-national mechanisms of delivery. While clientelism and patronage oppose universalistic standards, scholars following this perspective have claimed that it is nevertheless ‘sensitive to local sentiment, may solve existential

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<sup>34</sup> As Above.

<sup>35</sup> Hans-Joachim, Lauth, ‘Informal Institutions and Democracy’, *Democratization*, 7:4, 2000, Page 27.

<sup>36</sup> Eisenstadt, S.N and Roniger, Louis, ‘Patron-Client Relations as a Model of Structuring Social Exchange’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Jan., 1980), Page 49,50.

<sup>37</sup> From Kettering, Sharon, ‘The Historical Development of Political Clientelism’, *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter, 1988), page 425

<sup>38</sup> Kaufman, Robert R., ‘The Patron-Client Concept and Macro Politics: Prospects and Problems’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol 16, No. 3, 1975, Page 285.

problems, provide access for migrant populations, and serve political entrepreneurs<sup>39</sup>. Andreas Schedler in researching Mexican voters found that they receive cash, caps, tee-shirts, pencils, lighters, dictionaries, bags of basic foodstuffs, breakfast, cactuses, fruits, vegetables, beer, washing machines, bags of cement, cardboard, sand shovels, pickaxes and so on in return for electoral support and concludes that clientelistic relations are based on 'the idea of reciprocal justice'<sup>40</sup>. Thus scholars who prescribe to the idea of clientelism as a mutually beneficial structure have pointed out that clientelism and patronage practices (in the form of favors, jobs or selective development projects) may adjust to post-modern logics and civil society more than is usually expected. Professor Ayşe Güneş-Ayata pointed out 'Although in principle postmodern forms of participation are vastly different from their pre-modern counterparts, both stand in sharp contrast to modern institutional forms. Both search for flexible solutions oriented toward individual needs, taking private concerns into consideration and integrating everyday concerns as public issues'<sup>41</sup>.

#### **4. CLIENTELISM AND ELECTIONS IN BANGLADESH: FACTIONS, THE MONOPOLIZATION OF RESOURCES AND DIMINISHED ACCOUNTABILITY**

According to most experts Bangladesh is identified as a patron-client state. David Lewis writes that 'patron-client relations are a cornerstone of society in Bengal, combining political, economic and religious elements of social organization'<sup>42</sup>, while Kochanek notes that all households need to negotiate reciprocal exchanges 'in which people of higher rank are accorded the right to extract labor, services, and respect from people of lower rank'<sup>43</sup> which creates a hierarchical web of dyadic relationships and mutual obligations. Both Lewis and Kochanek further write about Bangladesh that the entire society is structured around a complex network of patron-client relationships, which have both economic (jobs, credit) and political (protection) aspects. Thus people are unable to build horizontal relationships whether based on politics, kinship or locality. It is observed that this has a very negative impact on public institutions and on collective action. Mushtaq Khan observes that class interest and patron client networks together creates a serious problem of instability in Bangladesh's political institutions and describes a pyramid structure forming a network of linkages and relationships. Political parties form the top of the pyramid while the base is formed by groups and classes created through a series of patron-client networks which penetrate all levels and sectors of society<sup>44</sup>.

Weber used the term 'neo-patrimonial state' to describe states where the public service is appointed by and answers to the top leader because of personalized rule and is organized through clientelistic networks of patronage, personal loyalty and coercion. Khan observes that 'the common features of this type of politics have been collectively described as patrimonialism, clientelism, patron-client politics, and factional politics'<sup>45</sup>. He goes on to note that 'the common features include the personalization of politics by faction leaders and the organization of politics as a competition between factions. The personalization of leadership is not based on traditional deference or the greater susceptibility of developing country societies to charisma, but is a rather 'modern' phenomenon in that faction leaders offer payoffs to those who support them. In turn,

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<sup>39</sup> Roniger, Luis, 'Political Clientelism, Democracy and Market Economy', *Comparative Politics*, Volume 36, No. 3, April 2004, Page 355.

<sup>40</sup> Schedler, Andreas, 'My Vote? Not for Sale: How Mexican Citizens view Electoral Clientelism', Paper prepared for presentation at the conference "The comparative politics of vote buying", MIT, Centre for International Studies, 26-27 September 2002, Page 13, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Ayşe Güneş-Ayata, 'Democracy, Clientelism and Civil Society', Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1994, Page 26.

<sup>42</sup> Lewis, David, "Bangladesh: Politics, Economy and Civil Society", Cambridge University Press, 2011. Page 99.

<sup>43</sup> Kochanek, Stanley, 'Patron-Client Politics and Business in Bangladesh', Sage, New Delhi, 1993. Page 44.

<sup>44</sup> Khan, Mushtaq H., 'Class, Clientelism and Communal Politics in Contemporary Bangladesh', *The Making of History: Essays presented to Irfan Habib*, e.d. K.N Pannikar, T.J. Byres and U. Patnaik, New Delhi, Tulika, 2000. Page 17-18.

<sup>45</sup> Khan, Mushtaq H, 'Markets, States and Democracy: Patron-Client Networks and the case for Democracy in Developing Countries', *Special Issue of Democratization: On the State of Democracy*, Julio Faundez (ed.),



they capture the resources for making these payoffs by mobilizing their supporters in factions<sup>46</sup>. He further writes that the grassroots, or the people at the bottom of the pyramid, are not interested in the ideology of the political parties but rather make rational calculations about material outcomes. According to Khan, one of the reasons for the enduring nature of clientelism is because in developing countries clients recognize that the small gains to be made from factional allegiance and patron loyalty (such as a retainer payment of physical protection) are still likely to outweigh those that might arise from class-based political action. About Bangladesh, he writes:

*These basic patron-client factions are ubiquitous and range from neighborhood groups led by petty mafia bosses known in Bangladesh as mastaans to village factions led by somewhat more respectable matabbars, dalals and upazila chairmen.... Bargaining power depends on the number of people who can be occasionally mobilized by the faction for elections... local level enforcement networks, organizing civil protests, demonstrations...and other forms of activity which aim to inflict costs on those who refused to make deals or offer payoffs to that faction<sup>47</sup>.*

According to Stefan I. Lindberg sustenance of these neo-patrimonial states take regular flows of resources from leaders to followers. To sustain themselves, leaders are compelled to extract resources from all sources including the state, kin and followers as loyalty from their clients is dependent on redistribution of such resource. The patron-client mode of politics tends to monopolize resources, as the nature of the institution makes fundamental that patrons are able to distribute such resources. The more resources the patron has access to the stronger will be his or her support base. This turns politics into a zero-sum struggle for control of the state, which becomes the key to economic advantage. In essence, this has been termed the 'privatization of the state'<sup>48</sup>. Clapham states this by writing 'when there is no money, there is no patronage and no loyalty in this kind of system'<sup>49</sup>.

According to Khan and Lewis coalitions in patronage systems are built on a broad factional base of clients, but once mobilized these inevitably disintegrate as it becomes clear that not all groups can be adequately rewarded. Similarly Sarah White identifies Bangladesh as a 'weak state' within a 'strong society'<sup>50</sup> – this means that society is made up of many groups organizing social control and the state is simply one set of institutions amongst others which seeks to exercise control in an environment of conflict. Thus, in Bangladesh, successive governments are unable to resist the strong claims made upon it by a wide range of social groups and interest groups tend to stop any challenge to the existing power structure.

The reason that capture of state resource becomes so important for neo-patrimonial systems is because they do have their own peculiar type of vertical accountability between the patron and the client. However, this type of accountability is very different from the way accountability is meant to function in liberal democracies. In liberal democracies, accountability should be based on public policies, political programs and prudent use of public resources. In the patron–client relationships found in neo-patrimonial systems, vertical accountability is a matter of ensuring personal favors and benefits, often at the expense of public concerns and resources. What is also particularly damaging about the clientelism that exists in Bangladesh is that institutions of accountability such as the media, the judiciary and parliamentary committees are weak. Hence, the consequences of clientelistic acts and behavior are more damaging to the consolidation of democracy.

MPs in democracies with a neo-patrimonial system have to find sources to finance election campaigns, especially where there is no funding available from the state and thus patronage businessmen, business

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<sup>46</sup> Khan, Mushtaq H, 'Markets, States and Democracy: Patron-Client Networks and the case for Democracy in Developing Countries', Special Issue of Democratization: On the State of Democracy, Julio Faundez (ed.), Page 8.

<sup>47</sup> Khan, Mushtaq H., 'Class, Clientelism and Communal Politics in Contemporary Bangladesh', The Making of History: Essays presented to Irfan Habib, e.d. K.N Pannikar, T.J. Byres and U. Patnaik, New Delhi, Tulika, 2000. Page 17

<sup>48</sup> Lindberg, Steffan I., 'It's our time to "Chop": Do Elections in Africa feed Neo-Patrimonialism rather than Counter-Act it?', Democratization, 10:2, Page 123.

<sup>49</sup> Clapham, Christopher, 'Democratization in Africa: Obstacles and Prospects', Third World Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1993, Page 427.

<sup>50</sup> White, Sarah, 'Ngos, Civil Society and the State in Bangladesh: The Politics of Representing the Poor', Development and Change, Volume 30 (1999), Page 319

houses, and traders have become an increasingly important source of electoral funds. These resources are then often used for private patronage which include attending to individuals' school fees, electricity and water bills, funeral and wedding expenses or even handing out small cash sums to constituents. In the context of Africa, particularly Ghana, Lindberg observes that voters view these private patronage distribution as their 'right' and if an elected representative fails to distribute these then voters are likely to shift support to another candidate. During an interview with the member of the Jatiyo Sangsad from Gopalganj 1<sup>51</sup>, I was told that what voters in Bangladesh demand from their MPs are, 'what has happened to "me"' :

*'dhoru ami akhon MP, peoples expectations from me is skyrocketing. Tara mone kore uni toh montri, amar chele chakri... ajke shokalao bole bhai amar chele ta porikkha dibe chakri ta diyeden.. toh amar jonno toh shokolor chakri deye shombhob na.. chakri dile bole faruk bhai amar chele ke chakri diyechhe take vote ta dibo.. ar chakri na pele.. ha uni chakri dai nai amake..'*

*'Say now I am an MP, people's expectations from me is sky rocketing. They think he is a Minister, my son's needs a job... even this morning I heard 'brother my son will give the exam, give him the job'... so it is not possible for me to give a job to everyone...if he gets the job they will say 'Faruk bhai gave my son the job I will vote for him'.. and if he doesn't get it...[they will say] he didn't give the job...'*

*'amar mane amar graame ki holo , amar barir pashe raasta ta holo kina, amar graame bidyut ta ashlo kina, kimba ami bidyut ta pelam ki na, shara Bangladesh bidyut peyeche bidyut er unnoti hoyeche by 40% not that interested, amar graame bidyut chilo na amar graame ashlo kina kimba amar baari te ashlo kina? kimba amar chele chakri pelo na ki.. nice to talk to think je desher unnoti koto tuku hoyeche, ba tumi bolba je GDP bere che.. kintu voter der toh shai ta na '*

*'"My" means what happened in my village? was the road next to my house built? did I get electricity? it doesn't matter that electricity generation has increased by 40%, they are not that interested, my village did not have electricity and now has electricity, or now my village has electricity but my house does not, or did my son get a job?.. nice to talk to think how much the country has developed or that GDP has increased but that does not matter much to most voters.'*

Thus, in order to meet voter expectations and get elected in patrimonial, patron-client societies, MPs need to gather resources for private distribution. As can be seen from the extracts above, private patronage includes what is known as 'pork barrel' spending as well. This distributes benefits somewhat more broadly than constituent service but nevertheless appropriates public funds for geographically targeted projects that do not serve the interests of any large portion of the country's citizenry, and that bypass usual funding procedures<sup>52</sup>. What we can see however is, as Lindberg points out, 'this is not simply a buying of votes. It is an institutionalized behavior signifying willingness to take care of 'your people', namely the constituents.'<sup>53</sup> It might also entail personal assistance in dealing with the authorities, whether police, courts, headmasters, local government officials or ministries. Such interventions mostly tend to entail the use of resources like time and authority rather than money. As mentioned above, this usage of votes as a bargaining tool with MPs also encourages the creation of groups or factions as individual votes do not have overall impact on election results – thus the society is also divided into factions that come together to package their capacity to gather votes as the strongest.

The purpose of this giving and taking is to create and reproduce unwritten and often unspoken agreements of mutual loyalty. Lindberg writes that 'The clients are (re-) assured that their MP will attend to their needs in times of hardship in exchange for political loyalty transferred into votes in democratic elections'<sup>54</sup>. Thus, the idea of democratic accountability is completely diminished and elected officials are not held accountable for their action, or inaction, with regard to public matters and their political agendas rely on the provision of socio-economic benefits in personalized networks. Horizontal accountability may also be indirectly affected - First, situations where constituents are in difficulty with parts of the state apparatus outside of their elected

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<sup>51</sup> Interview conducted on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2011. Transcript available with the author.

<sup>52</sup> Brinkerhoff, Derick W. and Goldsmith, Arthur A., 'Clientelism, Patrimonialism and Democratic Governance: An Overview and Framework for Assessment and Programming', U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Democracy and Governance, December 2002., Page 6.

<sup>53</sup> Lindberg, Steffan I., 'It's our time to "Chop": Do Elections in Africa feed Neo-Patrimonialism rather than Counter-Act it?', *Democratization*, 10:2, Page 124.

<sup>54</sup> Lindberg, Steffan I., 'It's our time to "Chop": Do Elections in Africa feed Neo-Patrimonialism rather than Counter-Act it?', *Democratization*, 10:2, Page 124.

representatives ambit may give rise to patterns of mutual favors between elected officials and/or between elected officials and administrative staff. Second, MPs or other elected officials spend hours every day attending to the time-consuming task of maintaining their personal clientelistic networks. It is common in Bangladesh to see queues of constituents outside MPs' homes each morning, and the MP spending the entire morning having tea with each constituent whilst attempting to solve their difficulties (this may be in the form of job or school recommendations, small amounts of cash, phone calls to different arms of the administrative service etc.).

Often MP's reside in Dhaka (Parliament being located in the capital) and constituents have travelled far from their villages and spent essential money on travel, thus depending on private help from their MP, in fact expecting it as their 'right'. MPs need to attend to their constituents who are the basis for their power. In effect, MPs are unable to allocate a sufficient amount of time and energy to attend parliament, think through rule making, or hold other elected officials accountable. On the other hand, local governments are also not being given responsibility or are being unable to function as the MP gets involved in what is meant to be the job of the chairman of the districts and sub-district. Thus, overall accountability within the society is weakened. During an interview with the Member of Parliament from Bhola 1 constituency, the author was told<sup>55</sup>:

*'jamon shob cheye boro kotha amra MP, amader dayitto parliament a boshe kaaj kora, to make law, to speak for you..kintu ora eguli care kore na. ora ekta chairmaner jai kaaj gula kora dorkar ora oi ta expect kore... je amra oikhane boshe biye dibo, nari nirjaton mamla korbo, kaar ki churi korlo, ora amake ghum theke uthe dekhte parbe, bichar acher korbo but excuse me I am not supposed to be there, I am supposed to be at the parliament making law.. so you know you can't change it..tumi ai ta change korte parba na...ai jonno local government fail kore jai. Amader constitution a kintu local govt khub strongly lekha..kintu local govt ki kore...jamon I hate my upazila chairman..it's not just me all the MPs do that..you know why? Because tumi local development er shob daiyitto Jodi upazila chairman er hate diye dao he becomes greedy.. kemon kore ami boli..mone koro o rasta banacche, o ghat banacche.. o aita korche o shaita korche.. he has the access to directly go to my constituent..one to one first hand..so o jokhon tomar haate chal diye dicche 20 kg, ba tomar vgf card dicche relief er jonno... tumi je ekta timid member of the society you don't care what super speech Partho made in the parliament..you are like he is the man..je amar bipod e amake vgf card dicche..so he becomes greedy je next election im going to run..so I have all the reason to be selfish to protect my seat..ain kore dik kalke upazila..je upazila chairman ra dosh bochor MP election korte parbe na he will be my buddy..because he takes half of my headache..tahole toh ami bolbo bhai rasta ghat thik korar dayitto toh upazila chairman er... one to one service dewar dayitto upazila chairman er..my duty is to make law and to see whether that has been implemented..but aita hocche na...'*

*'The biggest thing is that we are MPs, our responsibility is to sit in parliament, to make law, to speak for you... but they don't care about these things. They expect the job of a chairman.. that we will sit their and give people in marriage, file violence against women cases, who had what stolen, they want to see me as soon as they wake up, I will do dispute resolution, but excuse me I am not supposed to be there, I am supposed to be at the parliament making law.. so you know you can't change it.. you cannot change this.. this is why local government is failing. Our constitution strongly provides for local government.. but what does local government do? For example, I hate my Upazila chairman...it's not just me all the MPs do that... you know why? Because if you give responsibility for all local development to the Upazila chairman then he becomes greedy.. let me tell you how... say that he is making the road, the ghat.. he is doing this, he is doing that... he has the access to directly go to my constituent...one to one, first hand... so when he is handing you 20 kgs of rice, or handing you your relief card.. you are a timid member of society, you don't care what super speech Partho (the MP) made in the parliament... you are like he is the man.. the one who is handing me my relief card in my time of trouble... so he becomes greedy that at the next election I am going to run.. pass a law tomorrow that Upazila chairmen cannot run for national elections for ten years, he will be my buddy... because he takes half my headache... then I will say brother the job of fixing roads and ghats is the duty of the Upazila chairman...one to one service is the responsibility of the Upazila chairman... my duty is to make law and to see whether that has been implemented... but that's not happening...'*

Thus, we see that the infiltration of patronage in Bangladesh changes the nature of accountability of MPs from the public to the private and therefore affects overall accountability within the society. In the words of

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<sup>55</sup> Interview conducted by author on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2012. Transcript available with author. Translation: author's own.

Lindberg, 'If voting behavior, holding elected officials accountable, and enforcement of administrative and political horizontal accountability are dependent on personal relationships of the patron–client kind, then liberal democracy may be corroded by the rust of personalized rule in democratic disguise so much as to threaten democracy's very legitimacy and survival.'<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Lindberg, Steffan I., 'It's our time to "Chop": Do Elections in Africa feed Neo-Patrimonialism rather than Counter-Act it?', *Democratization*, 10:2, Page 127.