

Clientelism

Clientelism is a pattern of relationship established among individuals located in different positions of the social hierarchy, exchanging privileges for political loyalty. This modality of interest intermediation usually flourishes in societies where the access to public goods and benefits depends on one's political and/or economical situation.

Clientelism presumes the establishment of vertical connection among individuals from different social positions, instead of horizontal links that can generate ideological associations and collective actors. Through the patronage mechanism those in lower positions of society are able to insert their interests in the public arena. Public employment and social benefits are not expected as citizens' rights, but considered as favours due to the client's loyalty to the patron.

In these societies rational and universal exchange standards coexist with personal networks, linking individuals through a chain of recurrent trade of protection for fidelity.

The critical point of this relationship is the resource control by the patron, especially public resources. Nonetheless, it also embroils paradoxical features, such as the combination of an unequal relationship between individuals that share some mutual solidarity, and the existence of a mix of coercion with informal but imperative duties.

Reciprocity is essential in order to keep the mutual and continuous flow. Instead of horizontal links that can generate ideological associations where personal assistance is provided on one side and political support is demanded on the other. Although it may include institutions, like political parties and bureaucracy, clientelism main characteristic is the personal and non-transferable link between patron and client.

(250 words)

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