



**THE TRANSITION FROM TRADITIONAL TO  
BROKER CLIENTELISM IN COLOMBIA:  
POLITICAL STABILITY AND SOCIAL UNREST**

**Working Paper #140 - July 1990**

**Ronald P. Archer**

**Ronald P. Archer** received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of California at Berkeley in 1990 and is currently Assistant Professor of Political Science at Duke University, North Carolina. During the 1989-90 academic year he was a Residential Fellow at the Kellogg Institute.

The author would like to give special thanks to Scott Mainwaring, Timothy Scully, Roberto DaMatta, Julio Cotler, and Guillermo O'Donnell for their fruitful suggestions and comments on this paper.

## **ABSTRACT**

The principle argument of this paper is that the transition from traditional to broker styles of clientelism in Colombia has weakened the capacity of Colombian political elites to deal with increasingly serious problems of social conflict and political violence. The paper describes traditional clientelism as it operated in early twentieth-century Colombia and explains the transition from traditional to broker clientelism. The author also analyzes current broker clientele networks in Colombia and compares the features of the two types of clientelism. The paper concludes that the erosion of traditional sources of authority and legitimacy and their replacement by a broker clientelism based on personal influence led to political immobilism and placed severe constraints on the actions of potential reformers and institution builders.

## **RESUMEN**

El principal argumento de este trabajo es que la transición en el tipo de clientelismo en Colombia, de uno tradicional a uno de intermediarios, ha tenido un profundo impacto sobre la capacidad de las elites políticas colombianas para enfrentar problemas cada vez más serios de conflicto social y de violencia política. El trabajo describe el clientelismo tradicional según operaba al principio del siglo XX en Colombia, y explica la transición del clientelismo tradicional al de intermediarios. Proporciona también un análisis de los nexos actuales entre clientelas e intermediarios en Colombia, y compara las características de los dos tipos de clientelismo. El trabajo concluye que el desgaste de las fuentes tradicionales de autoridad y legitimidad y su substitución por un clientelismo de intermediarios basado en la influencia personal, han llevado a un inmovilismo político y han constreñido las acciones de quienes podrían hacer reformas y crear nuevas instituciones.

## I. Introduction

This paper is part of a larger research project<sup>1</sup> that seeks to explain the paradoxical fact of the co-existence of regime stability and growing social violence in Colombia. The stability of Colombia's regime is indicated by the continued electoral and institutional predominance, if not hegemony, of the country's two traditional parties, the Liberal and the Conservative, and the failure of either legal electoral or disloyal non-institutional opposition to provide serious threats to the regime.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in a country with a long history of social violence, including eight nineteenth-century civil wars and the bloody chaos of the undeclared and uncontrolled rural civil war given the generic name of *la Violencia* (1948-1957), the resurgence of civil violence in the 1980s has increasingly called into question the legitimacy of the state and of the political regime. My research project seeks to explain this outcome by utilizing a multi-level explanation that focuses on (1) the systemic level (the co-existence of regime stability with social violence); (2) the state level (the weakness of the state and its inability to deal effectively with rising social conflict and violence); (3) the level of state institutions (particularly, the institutional conflicts among executive, legislature, and parties with the consequent impact on state capacity for carrying out timely reforms); and (4) the level of regime support organization and maintenance (party clientele networks).

The primary assumption of the research project is that the most important mechanisms available to state and political elites for dealing with social violence are reforms that address the causes of social conflict. However, the weakness of the state and the dispersion of decision-making power means that neither the state nor the executive is capable of unilaterally enacting the

---

<sup>1</sup> See Ronald P. Archer, "Paralysis of Reform: Political Stability and Social Conflict in Colombia," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> By the former I refer to the various transitory legal parties of the left of which the Unión Patriótica is the current, and perhaps equally ephemeral, example. By "disloyal non-institutional opposition" I refer to various left-wing insurgent groups of which the most important are the pro-Cuban FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and the traditional-Maoist ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional). In arguing that these "subversive" groups do not provide a serious threat to the regime, I do not wish to imply that they are irrelevant. In fact, even though largely restricted to relatively inaccessible and rural areas of the country where the state's presence is weak, they have provided an important challenge to the state's claim to legitimacy by highlighting its inability to control national territory and the use of force, evidenced by the insurgents' ability to maintain operations over nearly 25 years. The role of the drug cartel's private armies and death squads is similar. While not yet a serious threat to the political regime and the hegemony of the traditional parties, the relative impunity with which they operate has provided a serious challenge to the state, a challenge that might, with time, so reduce the state's effectiveness as to call into question the usefulness of the current political regime. In fact, the growth of private coercive forces operating outside the state is the primary cause of the current level of social violence. Whether the state's inability to regain control over coercive forces will lead to regime breakdown is, however, open to question and thus highlights the need to separate these two levels of analysis.

necessary reforms. Executive attempts to enact reforms that would expand the representativeness of the Colombian political regime and increase the capacity and effectiveness of the state's developmental role have repeatedly failed.<sup>3</sup> The institutional conflict between a reformist executive and an obstructionist legislature is thus the most immediate explanation for the failure to reform and therefore of the inability of the state to deal with rising social violence. This institutional conflict, in turn, is caused not only by institutional factors but also by the differences in the constituencies of the executive and the Congress. The clientele networks that mobilize and organize support at the congressional level are predominantly rural and conservative. While the presidential hopefuls must have the support of these networks to be elected, they must also capture a sufficiently large proportion of the urban electorate. Given the fact that clientele networks have been incapable of successfully organizing and mobilizing most of the urban electorate, the presidential candidates must use programmatic and personal appeals to win sufficient votes to offset the rural machine support of their opponents. Thus, while the urban electorate is a minority it plays a crucial role in electing the president.<sup>4</sup> This minority status is

---

<sup>3</sup> In the last 20 years three significant reform initiatives by Colombian presidents have failed: those of Alfonso López Michelsen (1974-1978), Belisario Betancur (1982-1986), and Virgilio Barco (1986-1990). In all three cases, the executive sought to circumvent the parties and representational institutions (especially the Congress) but was forced to return to the legislature where virtually all of its proposals were defeated or ignored. In the case of López, his attempt to call a Constituent Assembly to reform the constitution was overturned by the judiciary. Betancur attempted to organize public opinion, through informal mechanisms including commissions and direct negotiations with leftist insurgents, in support of a significant reorientation of the political regime. His attempts were defeated by opposition from within the military and from major producer and political leaders. Finally, Barco sought to circumvent Congress through a direct plebiscite to the country's electorate which would have made important changes in the constitution. This patently unconstitutional mechanism (the constitution specifically states that only the Congress can amend the constitution by a 2/3 vote in two consecutive sessions) was also blocked by the judiciary. See Ronald P. Archer and Marc W. Chernick, "El Presidente frente a las instituciones nacionales" in Patricia Vásquez, ed., *La democracia en blanco y negro: Colombia en los años 80* (Bogotá: Editorial UniAndes, Departamento de Ciencia Política, y CEREC, 1989); and Ronald P. Archer, "State Inaction and Social Conflict: Colombia in the 1990s," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Association for Latin America and Caribbean Studies, October 5-7, 1989, pp. 20-21.

<sup>4</sup> While the urban electorate is a minority, it is a majority of the "potential" electorate. One of the consequences of the National Front (1958-1974) was the demobilization of the urban electorate. In part, this was an intended consequence due to elite fears of the type of radical populist mobilization carried out by Jorge Eliezer Gaitán in the 1940s. This can be seen in the decisions of traditional party leaders to avoid creating urban functional organizations and to de-emphasize their ties to already existing urban-based functional groups such as the major labor confederations. This also explains the high perception of threat felt by the elite with regard to ANAPO's attempt to remobilize the urban electorate in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, the demobilization of the urban electorate was also, in part, an unintended consequence of the National Front. One of the primary goals of the National Front was to reduce partisan conflict by eliminating party competition for sixteen years. While party clientele networks maintained party control over the rural sector, the lack of inter-party competition led to a significant decline in party identification in the urban sector and greatly reduced the perceived relevance of elections during this period. When the consociational agreement came to an end in 1974, the parties made no attempt to

evidenced by the fact that, through and including the 1988 elections, the only election in which the urban vote surpassed 50 percent (52.8) was the presidential election of 1986.<sup>5</sup> This and the lack of organization of the urban electorate make it a weak reed upon which to build reform coalitions. Thus, the struggle between reformist presidents and conservative, clientelist dominated legislatures has inevitably been won by the latter.

It is the more limited purpose of this paper to show that the primary explanation for the co-existence of regime stability with serious challenges to state authority lies in the ways in which the traditional parties have mobilized and organized support through mechanisms (patron-client networks) that have been, and continue to be, relatively impervious to social conflict. To do this I will begin by defining the concepts of "patron-client relations" and "clientele networks." The central part of the paper will focus on the evolution of patron-client ties since the 1930s and their articulation through the party system in Colombia and concludes with a description of the formation and operation of a contemporary rural clientele network, contrasting it with more rudimentary urban clientelism. Finally, I will draw on these descriptions of the transition from traditional to broker clientele systems and of their individual characteristics to discuss the consequences of such clientele networks for the representational capacity of the traditional political parties, the distributional and developmental roles of the state, and the authority and legitimacy of the state and the political regime.

---

reorganize or repoliticize urban voters with the result that rates of urban abstention have been significantly higher than in the countryside. The result has been the overrepresentation of rural voters and clientele networks in all elections since then, a result even more pronounced in congressional elections. See Gary Hoskin, "The Democratic Opening in Colombia: How Do Party and Electoral Behavior Relate to It?" paper presented at the 45th meeting of the International Congress of Americanists, Bogotá, Colombia, July 1-7, 1985; and Jonathan Hartlyn, *The Politics of Coalition Rule in Colombia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) pp. 146-167.

<sup>5</sup> There is no accepted measure of the urban vote in Colombia due to the fact that voting statistics are collected by *municipio* (county) and thus mix urban and rural votes in the same total. The method I used to calculate urban votes was the following: First, all *municipios* of greater than 20,000 population were placed in one category and their votes calculated. Then, the vote total was multiplied by the percent that lived in the urban center of the *municipio* (i.e., the *cabecera*). This calculation assumes, incorrectly, that rural and urban populations vote at the same rate when in fact what little evidence does exist indicates a higher turnout in rural areas. This measure, therefore, still tends to overestimate the percentage of the urban vote. Within this category of urban *municipios*, smaller towns and cities turn out a higher percentage than the larger cities. Thus, for example, in the 1986 presidential election Colombia's four major urban metropoli, (Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, and Barranquilla), accounted for 52 percent of the urban population but only 49 percent of the urban vote.

## II. The Concept of Clientelism

Despite the widespread belief that clientelism plays a central role in Colombian politics,<sup>6</sup> surprisingly little attention has been given to the existing body of literature that makes use of the concept by scholars studying Colombian politics and culture.<sup>7</sup> As Lemarchand and Legg state in an interesting article, “little systematic effort has been made to establish [clientelism’s] relevance to an understanding of the processes of change associated with the growth—and decline—of political institutions.”<sup>8</sup> The existence of political clientelism is often taken as a given and its relationship to overall state and systemic performance is often taken for granted.

---

<sup>6</sup> Just a few of the authors who have stressed the importance of political clientelism are Eduardo Santa, *Instituciones políticas de Colombia*, 2nd Edition (Bogotá: Editorial Temis, 1981); Orlando Fals Borda, *Peasant Society in the Colombian Andes* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1962) and *La Subversión en Colombia* (Bogotá: Editorial Tercer Mundo, 1967); Diego Montaña Cuellar, *Colombia: país formal y país real* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Platina, 1963); Hugo Escobar Sierra, “La organización interna de los partidos” in *Los partidos políticos* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 1968); John D. Martz, *Colombia: A Contemporary Political Survey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962); Robert H. Dix, *Colombia: The Political Dimensions of Change* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); James L. Payne, *Patterns of Conflict in Colombia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Paul Oquist, *Violence, Conflict and Politics in Colombia* (New York: Academic Press, 1980); Helen Delpar, *Red Against Blue: The Liberal Party in Colombian Politics, 1863-1899* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981); Jonathan Hartlyn, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Among the first to study political clientele networks in Colombia were Richard Weinert, “Political Modernization in Colombia,” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1967 and Steffen W Schmidt, “Political Clientelism in Colombia,” Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1972; “Bureaucrats as Modernizing Brokers? Clientelism in Colombia,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 6 (April, 1974); and “La Violencia Revisited: The Clientelist Bases of Political Violence in Colombia,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 6 (May, 1974). Another important work that focused on the role of clientelism in the Colombian rural sector was that of Katherine LeGrand, “Perspectives for the Historical Study of Rural Politics and the Colombian Case: An Overview,” *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 12:1 (1977). In recent years a number of scholars, mostly connected to the Jesuit-run CINEP (Centro de Investigación para la Educación Popular) or the Universidad Nacional de Colombia have begun to build upon the first systematic attempts to study clientelism in Colombia. One group has focused on the role of clientelism during the period of *la Violencia* (1948-1957) and their works include but are not limited to Jaime Arocha, *La Violencia en el Quindío: determinantes ecológicos y económicos del homicidio en un municipio cafecultor* (Bogotá: Editorial Tercer Mundo, 1979); Gonzalo Sánchez and Donny Meertens, *Bandoleros, gamonales y campesinos: el caso de la Violencia en Colombia*, 2nd Edition (Bogotá: El Ancora Editores, 1984); and James D. Henderson, *When Colombia Bled: A History of the Violencia in Tolima* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1985). A second group has tried to show the relationship between patron-client networks and different economic, political, and social structures. These include Nestor Miranda Ontaneda, *Clientelismo y Dominio de Clase* (Bogotá: Editorial CINEP, 1977); Alejandro Reyes Posada, *Latifundio y poder político* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1978); Eloisa Vasco Montoya, *Clientelismo y Minifundio* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1978); Jorge Valenzuela Ramírez, *Producción arrocera y clientelismo* (Bogotá: CINEP, 1978); Fernán González, *Clientelismo y Administración Pública* (Bogotá, 1980); and Eduardo Diaz Uribe, *El Clientelismo en Colombia: un estudio exploratorio* (Bogotá: El Ancora Editores, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> See René Lemarchand and Keith Legg, “Political Clientelism and Development: A Preliminary Analysis,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 4(2), 1972, p. 149. They note the exceptions of Sidney

In part this is due to a certain confusion about its effect on politics and more specifically on party and state performance. Those who write on Colombia tend to see clientelism and patron-client networks as an “evil” with subsequent, obvious, and often unexplored negative consequences for the political system. A second, although minority perspective, emphasizes certain “positive” aspects of *clientelismo*, arguing that it serves as a means to augment the poor distributive capacities of the state; as a means for social mobility; and as an overall stabilizing force within Colombian politics.<sup>9</sup> In fact, as John D. Powell has cogently argued, both of these perspectives have considerable merit. “One of the salient characteristics of governments based on peasant clientele systems has been their capacity to withstand challenges from groups on both extremes of the political spectrum.”<sup>10</sup> But, he goes on to note that “a second general limitation of clientelist politics is that it seems to be a transitional phenomenon—or, better put, appropriate and successful only under certain conditions, and then for a limited period of time.”<sup>11</sup> One of the most important reasons for this confusion lies in the fact that detailed studies simply have not been made of how patron-client ties operate in Colombia, how they are mobilized and channeled through clientele networks, and how these means of generating political support impact on political institutions.

### **Defining Clientelism**

There is also considerable confusion about how “clientelism” should be defined. The greatest uncertainty appears to lie in the connotation of the term: that is, what kinds of relationships can be properly classified as patron-client relations. In part, this is due to the fact that this concept was originally created for use by anthropologists and was later appropriated by political scientists as a useful description of types of behavior they were observing.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, anthropologists tended to restrict the denotation of the term to a traditional social

---

Tarrow's *Peasant Communism in Southern Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) and John Duncan Powell's "Peasant Society and Clientelist Politics," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 64 (June, 1970). Other important articles that begin to explore these issues are those of Alex Weingrod, "Patrons, Patronage, and Political Parties," *Comparative Studies in Society*, Vol. 10(4), 1968; Robert R. Kaufman, "The Patron-Client Concept and Macro-Politics: Prospects and Problems," *Comparative Studies in Society*, Vol. 16(3), 1974; and Luigi Graziano, "A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Clientelism," Western Societies Program Occasional Paper No. 2 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1975).

<sup>9</sup> An excellent review article that calls into question “the usual assessment of the Colombian party system and of the political order of which it is the keystone [that] ascribes to it corruption (it is in some sense wrong) and political bankruptcy (it is unable to solve the problems of the country, and indeed contributes to them)” was written by John A. Peeler, “Colombian Parties and Political Development: A Reassessment,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 18 (2), 1976, pp. 203-224.

<sup>10</sup> John Duncan Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

<sup>11</sup> Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 422.

<sup>12</sup> Alex Weingrod makes this point quite ably in *op. cit.*, pp. 377-381.

relationship not to be confused with more modern forms of political patronage systems. This limitation, however, was unnecessary. Powell, drawing on this literature isolated three basic connotations of the concept: the patron-client relationship was characterized by (1) “two parties unequal in status, wealth, and influence;” (2) “the formation and maintenance of the relationship depends on reciprocity in the exchange of [noncomparable] goods and services;” and (3) “the development and maintenance of a patron-client relationship rests heavily on face-to-face contact between the two parties.”<sup>13</sup> As Lemarchand and Legg argue, this basic definition can be easily extended to what most political scientists refer to as clientelism. “Political clientelism, in short, may be viewed as a more or less personalized, affective, and reciprocal relationship between actors, or sets of actors, commanding unequal resources and involving mutually beneficial transactions that have political ramifications beyond the immediate sphere of dyadic relationships.”<sup>14</sup> All three, in fact, argue that the denotation of the concept can be extended by adding a set of variable factors to the patron-client relation as defined above. These include (1) the scope or extensiveness of the relationship; (2) its durability or persistence over time; (3) its intensity or degree of affectiveness; and, closely related to the first, (4) the type of transactions attendant upon such a relationship which, I would argue, should include the nature of the resources utilized by the patron to cement the relationship.<sup>15</sup> By including these variables the result is, as Eric Wolf has argued, that “patron-client relations [will probably] operate in markedly different ways”<sup>16</sup> under different given social, economic, and political structures.<sup>17</sup>

A second source of confusion within the literature on clientelism lies in the difference between “traditional” patron-client relationships and those which are generally referred to as “broker” patron-client relationships.<sup>18</sup> Traditional patron-client ties, based on high affect/strong dependence on the part of the client and the overwhelming economic power of the patron, declined. A transformation “in the function of the traditional patrons (large landowners)” also occurred, together with the emergence of “other local people with ‘outside connections’ [who] also began to assume brokerage functions—bourgeois landowners, schoolteachers, physicians and pharmacists, priests, tax collectors and other local officials” of often intermediate social

---

<sup>13</sup> Powell, *op. cit.*, pp. 412-13

<sup>14</sup> Lemarchand and Legg, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-152.

<sup>15</sup> See Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 413 and Lemarchand and Legg, *op. cit.*, pp.151-153.

<sup>16</sup> Eric Wolf, “Kinship, Friendship and Patron-Client Relations” in Michael Banton, ed., *The Social Anthropology of Complex Societies* (New York, 1966) p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> For some examples of how differently patron-client relations can operate under different sets of constraints, see René Lemarchand, “Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa: Competing Solidarities in Nation-Building,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 66 (1972).

<sup>18</sup> Luigi Graziano refers to these types of patron-client ties as “clientelism of the notables” and “party-directed patronage.” *Op. cit.*, p. 32.



status.<sup>19</sup> Given the definition of the patron-client concept as used by some anthropologists, these developments were taken as a sign that the system of patron-client ties had disappeared and was being replaced by something completely different.<sup>20</sup> The confusion lies in the fact that while the “broker” patron-client relationship may be different in important respects from that of the “traditional” patron-client relationship, it meets the three basic components of the connotation of the concept “patron-client relation” with the differences lying within the four factors mentioned above. Thus, changes in the degree of asymmetry between patron and client, in the types of goods and services exchanged, in the scope of the relationship, in the affectiveness of the relationship, and in the durability of the relationship do not mean that the basic logic of the relationship ceases to be one of patron and client.

The emergence of new forms of patron-client ties in Colombia and elsewhere occurred congruently with important changes in the nature and scope of the state and in changes in the social and economic status of traditional landholders caused by severe social, political, and economic upheavals in the rural sector. As Powell and others have argued, the emergence of the “broker” was made possible by a strengthening of the linkages that existed between what had been a relatively isolated community ruled by one or more traditional landowners and the outside world. “Two underlying processes are largely responsible for the establishment of these linkages: state centralization and market expansion.”<sup>21</sup> In Colombia, these changes began in the 1920s and spread with considerable rapidity during the 1930s and 1940s. However, one additional factor present in Colombia made this transition from traditional to broker forms of patron-clientage much smoother: the existence of intense political partisanship which was itself a consequence, as we shall see below, of traditional patron-client relationships. As the state expanded and with it the resources available to Colombia’s traditional political parties, the fact that Colombia’s overwhelmingly rural population had already been socialized into one or another of the parties meant that the emerging broker-patrons were able to build personal loyalties on top of underlying

---

<sup>19</sup> Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

<sup>20</sup> Weingrod, *op. cit.*, pp. 380-381. Here Weingrod is calling into question the restrictive definition used by Sydel Silverman in “Patronage and Community-Nation Relationships in Central Italy,” *Ethnology*, Vol. 4(1965), pp. 183-184. As Weingrod goes on to argue, “Traditional relationships between ‘patrons’ and ‘clients’ (landlord and tenant) become less critical, while relations between political party leaders or agents and their supporters become more significant. Elected officials and party-linked administrators now play major roles, so that anthropologists studying at the village level will wish to rule some aspects of party politics and government agencies into their analysis” (p. 381). It should be noted that Weingrod is himself a highly thought of anthropologist.

<sup>21</sup> Powell, *op. cit.*, pp. 413-14.

party loyalties. Thus, the process of modernization created more complex and better articulated versions of traditional patron-client networks.<sup>22</sup>

However, this extension of the anthropological concept of the patron-client tie to more modern, broker-based patronage systems introduces the most fundamental problem associated with the concept of clientelism: the possibility of “conceptual stretching.”<sup>23</sup> For example, Kaufman, criticizing one attempt to extend the reach of the concept, argued that “the typology, in a word, is so broad as to exclude practically nothing... By not specifying precise definitional limits to the patron-client relationship, the authors have, by their own admission, stretched the concept well beyond the already ambiguous meanings usually ascribed to it.”<sup>24</sup> More specifically, Kaufman argues that the denotation of the term, that is its boundaries, where clientelism leaves off and something completely different begins, are unclear. “Some of the properties associated with ‘clientelist’ collectivities are not exclusive to those associations... The contours of patron-client models are generally blurred by inadequate theoretical and conceptual attention given to non-clientelist phenomena and modes of association.”<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the best attempt to deal with some of the problems that have emerged in the use of the concept of clientelism is that of Luigi Graziano in his excellent and insightful paper, “A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Clientelism.”<sup>26</sup> In this paper Graziano attempts, by drawing on the work of Mancur Olson and on the theory of social exchange elaborated by Peter Blau and George C. Homans,<sup>27</sup> to distinguish clientelist dyadic relationships and structures (clientele networks) from other kinds of groups or associations. By combining two conceptual pairs, direct v indirect exchange and intrinsic v extrinsic benefits, Graziano elaborated a taxonomic conceptual chart that allows one to distinguish clientelistic exchange from other forms of

---

<sup>22</sup> As Lemarchand and Legg, *op. cit.*, note, the new “broker-patrons” may in fact be the same people who filled “traditional-patron” roles. The economic and social changes that occurred may have reinforced their position, that is, “their clientele may change but their position *qua* patrons remains fundamentally unaltered” (158). On the other hand, the emergence of completely new brokers may also occur as the result of the development of “crucial linkages between the center and the periphery” with new types of resources available for the crafting of patron-client ties (*ibid.*). One strong distinction between the “traditional” patron and the “broker” patron, therefore, was that the former was heavily dependent on his own personal resources (usually extracted from his clients) while the latter could draw on new kinds of non-personal resources (source and type) as well as his ability to deal with state bureaucracies and functionaries.

<sup>23</sup> See Giovanni Sartori, “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 64 (December 1970).

<sup>24</sup> Kaufman, *op. cit.*, p. 290 criticizing Lemarchand and Legg, *op. cit.*

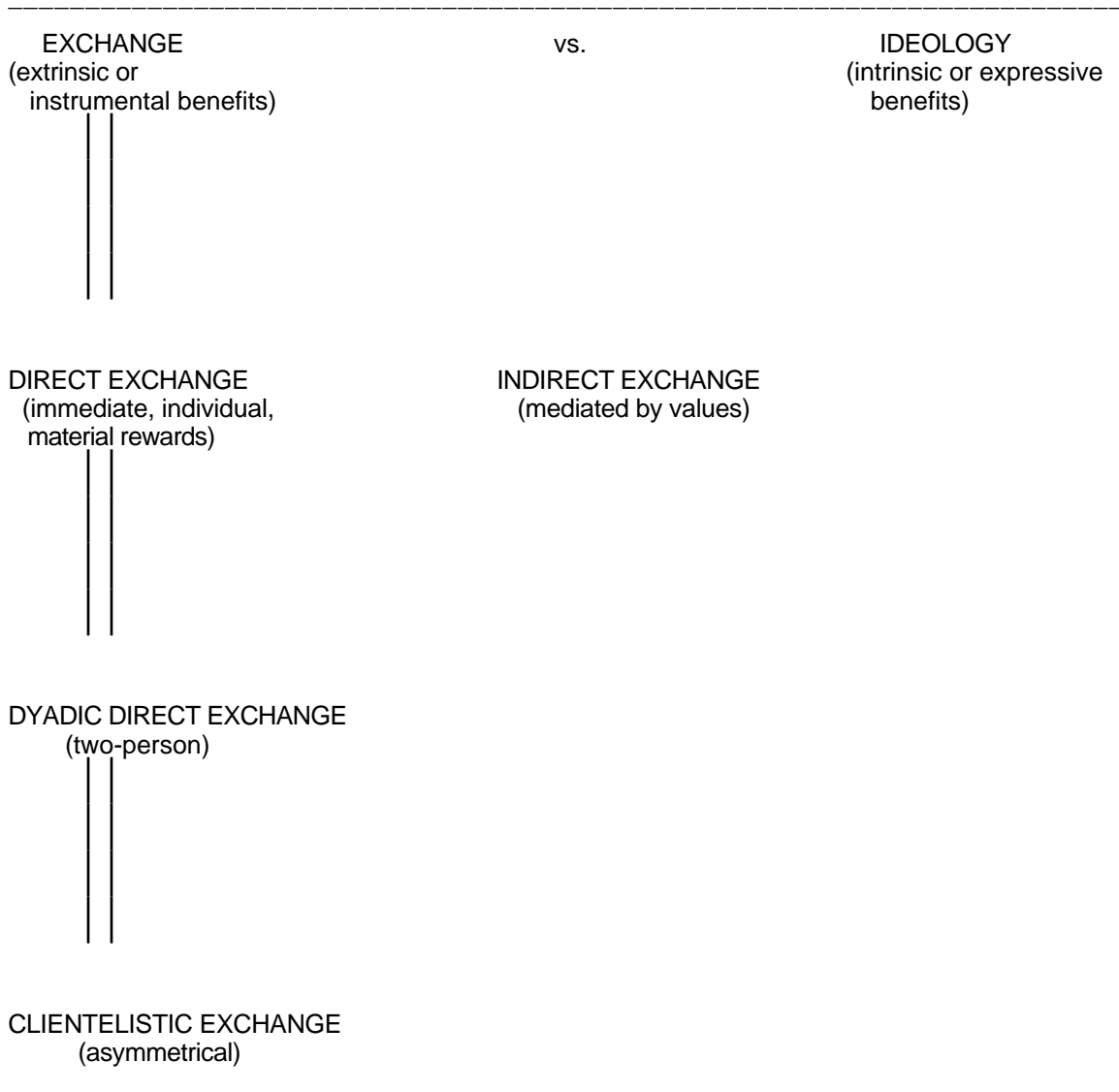
<sup>25</sup> Kaufman, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

<sup>26</sup> Graziano, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Graziano refers specifically to Olson’s *The Logic of Collective Action*, revised edition (New York: Schocken Books, 1971); Homans’ article “Social Behavior as Exchange” in *Sentiments and Activities* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962) pp. 43-46, and *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961); and Blau’s *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New York: Wiley, 1964).

exchange and that, by definition, includes both traditional and broker patron-client relationships, clusters, and networks. (See Table 1.)

**Table 1**  
**Conceptual Chart of Clientelism**



Source: Graziano, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

Therefore, clientelism, whether traditional or broker patron-client relationships, would be marked by the following characteristics: (1) a form of social exchange based on extrinsic or instrumental benefits as opposed to behavior dominated by intrinsic or expressive benefits; in which (2) the type of exchange is direct (based on immediate, individual, predominantly material rewards) as opposed to an indirect exchange mediated by values; (3) the exchange is limited to two individuals (dyadic direct exchange); and (4) the status of the two individuals as well as the benefits they exchange are asymmetrical. After describing the transition from traditional to broker patron-client politics in Colombia, I will return to this definition of clientelism in the conclusion, showing its usefulness in explaining the weakness of the Colombian state, and the incapacity of Colombia's elite to meet the problems of the 1980s with timely reforms.

### III. The Evolution of Clientelism in Colombia

In this next section of the paper I will describe and explain the transition from traditional to broker patron-client relationships and show some of the consequences this transition has had for how the traditional parties mobilize support for the regime. These changes, which involved the emergence of relatively small clientele networks, while serving as an important source of upward mobility for an emerging rural, and to a lesser extent urban, middle class, also reduced the power and significance of national elites, dispersing power downward towards regional and even local broker patrons. One consequence of this change was a severe reduction in the capacity of the state and the ruling elite to direct timely reforms to deal with growing social conflict and violence.

#### Traditional Patron-Client Relationships

According to Eduardo Santa, the figure of the *caudillo* "was born in the fight against Spanish domination."<sup>28</sup> Major national leaders won to their side important landowners and thus formed the armed groups that led the wars of independence and won the right to rule when the new Republic was formed. In describing these regional and national leaders, Santa writes that

These *montoneros* (rural landed elites) had only a limited concept of liberty, understanding it only as freedom from Spanish rule, and they fought against perceived abuse rather than to instill any preconceived political theory. They fought equally hard for centralism or for federalism, allying capriciously with whatever charismatic leader motivated them either by sympathy, admiration or subjection. To the landed elite, these great *caudillos* personified the ideal of liberty, whether draped in federalist or centralist trappings, and they went off to war with little thought or discussion on the convenience or inconvenience of these contrasting views. This elite was military, subject to the personalist authority and prestige of the *caudillos*. For them, whether Nariño, Torres or

---

<sup>28</sup> Eduardo Santa, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

Baraya, these *caudillos* personified liberty and if they said something was so, then so it should be.<sup>29</sup>

Beneath these *caudillos* and their *montonero* allies was the great majority of Colombia's population. In their majority, the rural masses were descendants of Indian villagers who had been pretty thoroughly assimilated even as early as the beginning of the 19th century. "Mestizo" rather than Indian, this population was tied through formal and informal agreements to the major landowners, descendants in part of the families who had arrived in Colombia in the 17th and 18th centuries with land grants from the Spanish crown.<sup>30</sup>

Usually tied to the land through peonage arrangements, the Colombian peasant was often dependent on his patron for protection from the outside world, whether civil strife or natural disaster. In describing the patron-client relationship in Tolima, Henderson describes three such leaders and their relationship to their followers in the following way:

Lozano, Echeverri, and Sandoval were all men of means, educated, and respected for the roles they had played in the recently concluded civil wars. They were destined to be followed, obeyed and respected; and the ordinary *campesino* would not have understood if told he was their equal, for in his estimation, and in theirs, he was not. Proximity between patron and client was close in the rural setting of early-twentieth century Tolima. General Echeverri drew his strength from the people of eastern Líbano, where he could be seen any day riding his horse along the trails that crisscrossed his hacienda or traveling the road into town on public or private business. Echeverri and the others were also members of countless *campesino* families, for they were godfathers to many of the children who were produced so frequently by *antioqueño* settlers of the northern cordillera.<sup>31</sup>

The closeness between patron and client under traditional clientelism was especially strong in Colombia in the early 20th century for three primary reasons: first, the state was small, weak, and virtually absent from large parts of the territory. This absence of the state, however, was only in part the consequence of low levels of economic development caused, to a considerable extent, by the murderous series of civil wars of the 19th century. Rather, problems of order were left to the patrons to handle and, as a result, the peasant had few if any alternatives to

---

<sup>29</sup> Santa, *ibid.* It should be noted that the term "montonero" is meant to convey the impression that this group of secondary landed elites were generally uneducated, lacking in culture, and probably unwashed.

<sup>30</sup> Of course, by the beginning of the 20th century many of the major rural landowners were relative social parvenus. Some bought their estates during the breakup of the Roman Catholic Church's land in the 1840s or from the dissolution of Indian *resguardos* during the same period. Others consolidated land during the various surges of colonization during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Regardless of their origin, major landholders entered into various formal and informal peonage arrangements with peasants who either worked their land or rented it from them. Perhaps one of the best descriptions of one such arrangement was that of Eduardo Caballero Calderón in his novel *Siervo sin tierra*. Calderón was a member of a wealthy *latifundista* family with holdings in the municipio of Tipacoque in the department of Boyacá.

<sup>31</sup> Henderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

dependence on the local landed gentry. The second reason was in the lack of market relations in the countryside outside of a few small, and often foreign-owned, enclaves. The *hacienda* economy, highly self-sufficient and with only weak relations to the market, limited the possible contacts peasants had with potential patrons or groups that might have in some way reduced their dependence on their patron. Thus, the patron controlled their economic livelihood as well as access to the market and they in turn were often left with little alternative but to continue within peonage systems that were often highly unjust.<sup>32</sup> While the relationship between patron and client was often exploitative and repressive, as Calderón's novels make clear, there were important benefits in the relationship for both sides. Again, in the words of Henderson:

The requirement of reciprocal benefit was fulfilled on many levels. The patron could always turn to his followers in time of stress, as the three leaders described here did throughout their careers, and in highly politicized Colombia the vote of even the most lowly peon was cherished. On the other hand, the *campesino* could find relief from a myriad of personal problems simply by laying his case before the *patrón*. But Colombian clientelism embraced many other aspects. As the Echeverri raid revealed [a minor skirmish during a partisan conflict in 1913], the first people to join him in his march on Líbano were workers on his own hacienda. As his employees, they were expected to help him fight his battles, but other factors entered the equation as well. Echeverri was the general, the *patrón*, the *compadre*, the friend—any and all reason enough to follow him. His defeat was theirs as well. In the isolated worlds of regional Colombia, the *patrón* was omnipresent, a sort of demigod whose influence touched every part of life.<sup>33</sup>

Henderson's reference to the patron as "the general" introduces a third reason for the closeness of traditional patron-client relations. The armed struggles over the Church-State and State-Periphery issues during the 19th century had been led in great part by these rural patrons. Their peasant clients, in turn, made up the bulk of the landed elite's unprofessional, fragmented, and often haphazard armies. Any member of the rural oligarchy who could throw together a fighting force of a 100 or more men could head off to war as a colonel or general to take part in one of the constant civil wars being fought. As a result of several generations of such wars, "the individual has a political affiliation from the very cradle... This phenomenon of political determinism, this hatred inculcated by the family against the adversary, the resentment produced by some ancestor's maltreatment by the other party, even, on some occasions, the pride of being related to some martyr of the cause to whom the family renders obeisance, all serve to insure that party

---

<sup>32</sup> There were important exceptions. By the beginning of the 20th century an important rural middle peasantry was emerging in the south of Antioquia and in the department of viejo Caldas as a consequence of the rapid expansion of coffee production. Nevertheless, even in these regions access to the market was often difficult and coffee buyers for major coffee exporting houses, owned mostly by Colombians, were among the first major broker patrons to emerge in Colombia. Also, in regions of primarily *minifundia* production and where large landholders did not exist, broker patrons emerged, again usually those who owned stores and thus were available to extend credit to local peasants. See Fals Borda, *Peasant Society*, *op. cit.* for a description of the latter relationship.

<sup>33</sup> Henderson, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

membership is acquired from a young age. To abandon the party of one's family has always been perceived as the most horrendous treason."<sup>34</sup> The formation of these "hereditary hatreds," often in the service of a patron, created powerful ties between patron and client and, incidentally, between the clients and the patron's political party.

The political system of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was organized in ways very similar to the organization of social and economic life. At the very top were a small group of national notables, often referred to as *líderes naturales* or "natural leaders." Descendants of renowned generals, intellectuals, or economic leaders, these "super-patrons" sought to create broad and inclusive coalitions among regional *caciques* so as to achieve the presidency. As Santa observed, "Each of the traditional parties has perhaps a dozen families closely linked to its history who produce natural leaders almost systematically... No one would dare question their natural authority...to occupy without resistance the most important positions and to hold the greatest responsibilities."<sup>35</sup>

Usually under but sometimes belonging to the category of "natural leaders" were the regional *caciques*, who, as Carlos Holguín described them in 1893, controlled their departments as if these were "like private property belonging to [them], whom aspirants to the presidency had to respect under solemn promises."<sup>36</sup> These regional bosses, in turn, brought together various clients of their own from the landed elite of their departments. Through these arrangements, local patrons funnelled the votes of their dependents up to the electoral lists of the regional bosses whom, in turn, placed them behind one or another of the *jefes naturales*. As Schmidt described this system, "not only are localities perceived as tied to 'outside' *caudillos*, but these *caudillos* in turn are seen as dominating the entire *departamento*, and they in turn serve as the basis of even larger complexes of people, namely presidential aspirants. Thus, the departmental *caudillo* is also a broker of sorts, and the presidential candidate who forms an alliance is a super-*gamonal* (clientelist patron)."<sup>37</sup>

The traditional parties, which have existed as identifiable parties since the late 1840s, were organized during this period, as could be expected, along highly personalistic, elitist, and exclusive lines. The "jefes naturales" dominated the national directorates although the decision as to which of them would serve on the directorates (usually composed of from three to seven individuals) was often in the hands of the departmental or regional *caciques*.<sup>38</sup> The national

---

<sup>34</sup> Eduardo Santa, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>35</sup> Santa, *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Cited in Helen V. Delpar, "The Liberal Party of Colombia, 1863-1903," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1967, p. 198.

<sup>37</sup> Steffen Schmidt, "Bureaucrats as Modernizing Brokers," *op. cit.*, pp. 431-432.

<sup>38</sup> To make it easier to follow this terminology, I will use the following terms as consistently as possible: (1) *jefes naturales* or "natural leaders" are terms that refer to elites with national

directorates would generally be charged with the functions of keeping the peace among the various departmental party bosses as well as elaborating the rules that would determine how candidates were chosen for various electoral lists and how representation at the various party conventions would be apportioned. This latter function was very important since conflicts over presidential nominations held the very real threat of party division and electoral disaster. Of course, until 1930 this was less of a problem owing to the facts that the Liberal Party abstained from all but one presidential election in the first three decades of the 20th century and that party succession during the 19th century was often determined by civil war.

The departmental directorates were made up of regional notables and mirrored the functions of the national directorate. The powerful egos and ambitions of the various local patrons made the function of peacekeeper a difficult one and the national directorate was often called upon to determine the legality of the process of selection or to mediate between the claims of rival "directorates" established by competing *caciques* and local bosses. These directorates were responsible for choosing party lists for elections to the Chamber of Representatives and the departmental assemblies, the latter crucial because until 1947 these bodies elected senators from lists provided by the departmental directorates. Finally, the nature of the local patron-client relationship often vitiated the usefulness of municipal directorates. Nevertheless, they too existed and were usually composed of middle-class or professional *hombres de confianza* (loyal clients) of the local patron. If their party won the national election, these were the men who would most likely be given the opportunity to serve either as local or departmental notary publics, judges, departmental assemblymen, municipal councilmen or mayors, and in some cases *suplentes* (substitutes) to, or as, representatives.<sup>39</sup>

It was this type of arrangement that existed in good part into the 1930s and even as late as the 1950s in some parts of the country. The strength and cohesiveness of these clientele

---

reputations and statures and who served at the highest level of the parties and the state (as presidents and ministers) almost as if by divine right; (2) *caciques* refer to regional or departmental leaders or party bosses who brought together in a clientele network most of the local bosses, through client-patron mechanisms; (3) *gamonales* or local landholding elites used highly personal and asymmetrical patron-client ties to mobilize political support which was then funnelled upward to departmental caciques. It should be noted that in contemporary Colombia, the term *gamonal* has a negative connotation and usually refers to small-town or rural broker patrons.

<sup>39</sup> One curious practice in Colombia is that of choosing *suplentes* or substitutes for all elected positions in multiple-member elected bodies. Until 1945, for example, each city councilman, departmental assemblyman, and congressman (Senate and Chamber of Representatives) had two *suplentes*. This was cut to one in 1945. In part, this practice was due to the fact that elected officials to multi-member bodies were allowed, by law, to withdraw from their positions for self-determined periods of time to pursue other interests, whether in the state bureaucracy, business, et cetera. The *suplentes* would then hold down the position until the principals decided they wished to return. A second reason for the practice is that it allowed party leaders to spread, across a relatively large group, the honor of being elected to office. The *suplente* practice, therefore, was and remains an artifact of the clientelistic origins of the parties.



networks can be seen in the fact that even with the division of the Liberal Party in the 1930s and again more sharply in the mid-1940s, departmental directorates maintained sharp control over the formation of electoral lists and dissident lists were almost totally unsuccessful during these years.<sup>40</sup> Thus, even during the period in which the large, extended clientele networks based on traditional patron-client ties were breaking down, control over access to the state was held with considerable success by the upper echelons of the parties and, thus, by the country's elite.

To conclude, and drawing on the definition of patron-client ties used above, the traditional patron-client relationship in Colombia was characterized by patron-client ties which (1) were prevalent throughout large sectors of the population (wide extension) and covered virtually every facet of the economic, social, and political life (all-inclusive in scope) of those involved in such relationships; (2) were very durable, often lasting generations; (3) were notable for the high levels of affect and *respeto mutuo* (mutual respect) of the participants; and (4) covered transactions that were almost overwhelmingly dealt with on a personal level and through the personal resources of the patron, as opposed to his ability to draw on state resources. Clientele networks were both few in number and had broad vertical extension, reaching from the lowest level of the political system (the primary patron-client tie), to the level of national elites. These networks were also quite durable, with generational transfer of control in some cases. Finally, given the relatively limited role of the state, these networks worked primarily for the immediate benefit of the patrons, with the vast bulk of the peasantry almost totally dependent materially and politically on their patron's personal largess. Political patronage (jobs and budgetary resources) was relatively scarce.

### **The Emergence of the Broker Patron and State Attempts to Form Functional Organizations**

Dating the transition from traditional to broker patron-client relationships is difficult. However, a number of changes that occurred within Colombian society during the period between 1925 and 1965 allow us to state that before this period virtually all patron-client relationships were traditional and that by the end of this period this type of relationship had

---

<sup>40</sup> Between 1933 and 1951 only three congressmen (all representatives) out of a total of 1128 representative and 238 senators elected belonged to third parties. Between 1958 and 1974 the terms of the National Front restricted access to third parties. From 1974 to 1990, of 452 senators elected only 16 belonged to third parties, and eight of these 16 were defectors from the traditional parties who were never re-elected. The figures are similar for the Chamber: 795 elected, 34 from third parties of whom more than half were defectors from the traditional parties. While good data for defector lists for the 1933 to 1951 elections are not available owing to the destruction of archives during the 1948 Bogotá insurrection (bogotazo), perusal of newspaper election accounts show virtually no successful dissident lists during the 1930s and early 1940s. However, with the division within the Liberal Party between "gaitanistas" and "directoristas" in the mid to late 1940s, there was a duplication in the number of liberal lists finally approved as official party lists by departmental directorates.

become clearly secondary to that of brokerage clientelism. By the 1980s, any existing remnants of traditional patron-client ties were almost all subsumed or articulated within broker patron-client networks.

Here I would like to touch only briefly on four significant changes occurring during this period that brought about the emergence and eventual dominance of the broker patron. First, the Liberal Party's victory in 1930 and the institution of the so-called Liberal Republic (1930-1946) brought with it an emerging consensus on the need to greatly expand the role and functions of the state, a process that was accelerated during the administration of Alfonso López Pumarejo (1934-1938) and has continued ever since. With the consequent growth of the state, new patronage resources became available to the parties and their leaders. Second, a rapid expansion of the internal market and its penetration into the rural sector was occasioned by what Vernon Fluharty has called the "dance of the millions" of the 1920s,<sup>41</sup> a period of rapidly escalating foreign investment in Colombia, of the first sustained industrialization, massive investments in transportation networks by the state paid for by foreign loans and U.S. payments in settlement of the Panama Canal issue, and a turn towards policies promoting Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) with the advent of the Great Depression and especially during the 1950s and 1960s. This rapid growth was to cause a number of changes in rural and urban social structures, affecting existing traditional clientelism. Third, the process of partisan conflict, which escalated very swiftly with the growth of the state during the 1930s and 1940s and the resulting "unofficial" civil war in which partisan strife escaped from the control of national and even regional and local elites, led to massive internal migrations, the partial breakdown of traditional land tenant relations, and what Joel Migdal refers to as patron withdrawal,<sup>42</sup> thus compounding the corrosive effect of

---

<sup>41</sup> See Vernon Lee Fluharty, *Dance of the Millions: Military Rule and the Social Revolution in Colombia, 1930-1956* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1957).

<sup>42</sup> See Joel S. Migdal, *Peasants, Politics, and Revolution: Pressures toward Political and Social Change in the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974) pp. 215-217. For other accounts of this general process of state and market expansion and the breakdown of traditional forms of social control, including the patron-client relationship, see Benno Galjart, "Class and Following in Rural Brazil," *América Latina*, Vol. 7 (Sept. 1964); Andrew Pearse, "Metropolis and Peasant: The Expansion of the Urban-Industrial Complex and the Changing Rural Structure" in Teodor Shanin, ed., *Peasants and Peasant Societies: Selected Readings* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971); and James C. Scott, "Corruption, Machine Politics, and Political Change," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 63 (Dec. 1969). State expansion during this period occurred primarily in three different areas and with somewhat different levels of success: (1) the area of social policy and state welfare functions; (2) the area of directing and channeling the development of the national economy; and (3) the area of public order. For information on these initiatives, which continued into the 1980s, see Parts II and III of Miguel Urrutia's *The Development of the Colombian Labor Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969) and the sections on Colombia in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, The Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming). For discussions of the relatively controversial land reform Law 200 of 1936 see Robert H. Dix, *op. cit.* and Chapters 1 and 2 of Catherine H. LeGrand, *Rural Colonization in Colombia, 1880-1930* (University of New

modernization on traditional patron-client ties. Finally, the political elite's reaction to the breakdown of the traditional patron-client ties and the means of control exercised through existing clientele networks, as evidenced during the years of *la Violencia*, was the formation of an extensive, tightly structured coalition under the National Front which was to last from 1958 to 1974. The primary goal of the Front was to reduce partisan tensions by dividing the state and its institutions evenly between the two traditional parties and to allow the state to pursue general developmental goals while, when possible, introducing elements of income and wealth redistribution. The structure of the National Front introduced a set of incentives that led to the further disintegration of existing extensive clientele networks and their replacement by fragmented, more limited networks. The cumulative effect of these changes was the rapid disintegration of traditional patron-client relationships and their replacement by broker patron-client ties.<sup>43</sup> In what follows, I explain why in greater detail.

Traditional patron-client relationships are predicated on the lack of alternative "linkages" between the local community and the larger system. In the absence of linkages to the state or the market that do not pass through the local patron, both peasants and patrons had little alternative to traditional patron-client ties. The expansion of the state, with its attendant functionaries, into the countryside as well as the penetration of market relations into the countryside have generally had negative consequences for these ties. First, the level of dependence of the client on the patron is reduced by the availability of important alternatives. Second, this, when combined with the destruction of peonage systems and the introduction of wage-labor, increases the incentives for traditional patrons to restructure their relationship with their clientele, seeking to change the relationship from an affective one to one based on rational market principles. Finally, the expansion of the market and, in a congruent and mutually related fashion, the expansion of the state provide significant new patronage resources for political parties and stimulate the formation

---

Mexico Press, 1988). These efforts were augmented by a more extensive land reform in the 1960s. See Albert O. Hirschman, "Land Use and Land Reform in Colombia" in Albert O. Hirschman, *Journeys Towards Progress: Studies of Economic Policy Making in Latin America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973). For an expansion of the state's economic role see Jonathan Hartlyn, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-131. For the expansion of technocratic influence within the state bureaucracy see Fernando Cepeda Ulloa and Christopher Mitchell, "The Trend Toward Technocracy" in Albert Berry, Ronald Hellman and Mauricio Solaún, eds., *Politics of Compromise: Coalition Government in Colombia* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1980). Also Robert H. Dix, *op. cit.*, John D. Martz, *op. cit.*, and Steffen Schmidt, "Modernizing Brokers," *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Another important factor in the emergence of the broker was the endemic land conflict between settlers (*colonos*) and "land entrepreneurs" in areas of new colonization. This conflict, although present from at least the middle of the 19th century, became especially important in the 1920s and 1930s. In her work on land conflict in Colombia, LeGrand notes the especially important role of "intermediaries in facilitating communications between the rural poor and authorities in Bogotá." LeGrand, *op. cit.*, p. 73. See also Chapter 6, *passim*. Given the fact of population concentration in relatively small areas of the country well into the 20th century, colonization movements represented great opportunities for the new rural middle classes to enter into politics by fashioning clienteles.

of new party activists who seek to utilize these resources as a means to enter into the political game from which they had largely been excluded.

Normally, the diffusion of state and market relations into the countryside is uneven and met by different degrees of opposition or support by existing rural elites. As a result, the evolution in patron-client ties is also spotty, and delayed. However, in the Colombian case the massive violence and strife of *la Violencia* served, to an important degree, as a goad to change, speeding the process significantly. The massive migration from the countryside to the city of peasants fleeing political persecution provided one serious blow to existing clientele structures. To this must be added the fact that this “client migration” was matched by an even more extensive and complete “patron migration.” Fearful of the violence, and given their status as traditional and highly visible party leaders, traditional patrons turned their estates over to managers and fled to the cities and even overseas. The combined result of peasant and patron migration left patronless those peasants who remained, at precisely the moment when new rural middle-sectors were emerging as a consequence of market and state expansion in the countryside. Given their relative newcomer status to the role of patron and their lack of personal resources, the new brokers created patron-client relationships that differed considerably from those dominated by traditional patron-client ties.

The period of the National Front was, therefore, one that saw both the rebuilding of patron-client ties along broker lines and the emergence of multiple groups, competing for state resources. At the same time, national elites sought to reduce the power of clientele groups by circumventing clientelist arrangements and creating direct state-citizen ties. The conflicts between emerging broker patrons and state bureaucrats became an important feature of the National Front and continued after the Front ended.<sup>44</sup> The end of partisan electoral competition and state attempts to create functional organizations retarded the full-blown emergence of broker clientele networks. First, the reduction in partisan conflict had a significant demobilizational impact, greatly reducing the relevance of elections and the incentive to participate. Second, National Front governments pursued policies that funnelled moneys directly through the state

---

<sup>44</sup> Steffen Schmidt, “Modernizing Brokers,” pp. 442-450. One state bureaucrat interviewed by Schmidt gave the following account of such conflict: “If a school for 300 pupils is needed in the *vereda* [village] of Pavas because there is a concentration of unserved students there, but the *gamonal* [broker patron] of the *vereda* of Mayacal has a lot of political influence, we still want to build in Pavas. You know the real point is that we’ve come so far that our own attitude is ‘Pavas or nothing’ and ‘to hell with the *gamonal*.’ The biggest problem is that up above us there are still politicians and they are tempted to build one in Mayacal or they are in political trouble. For the first years of the Frente we were protected from that because everybody got something. Now that it’s almost over the big men at the top are coming down again and trying to take over this thing. I think they will find a great deal of resistance” (p. 442). For Schmidt, with the end of the National Front, the “objective of the parties seems to be the repoliticization of the bureaucracy as both the spoils of winning political battles and as the incentive to followers—the payoff, as it were, in exchange for votes” (p. 448).

into rural areas that had suffered from political violence. Third, the coalitional nature of the Front and elite fears of both electoral and insurgent challenges to it increased the perceived importance of party unity and led to the formation of broad-based clientele networks around various “natural leaders.” Thus, the Conservative Party formed up behind two competing national “super patrons” and ex-presidents of the period of Conservative dominance (1946-1953), Laureano Gómez and Mariano Ospina. The Liberal Party was even more united, organizing around a coterie of pre-*Violencia* figures such as Alfonso López Pumarejo, Darío Echandía, Carlos Lleras Restrepo, Alberto Lleras Camargo, and other national leaders who came of age during the Liberal Republic. Occasional challenges, such as that of Alfonso López Michelsen, did occur but even López’ MRL (Movimiento Revolucionario Liberal) was co-opted back into the party.

As the National Front progressed, however, attempts to build functional organizations with direct ties to the state created enormous incentives for bureaucrats and politicians to capture these organizations. The state’s tendency to provide resources to these new groups through various discrete state bureaucracies and private sector institutions provided a large number of potential brokers with control over important resources and direct ties to rural peasant communities where traditional patron-client ties had lapsed thus providing a golden opportunity for the creation of clienteles. Their success in doing so provided an important impetus for the formation of new patron-client relations.

During the first decade of the National Front, under the impetus of developmentally-oriented national elites, several attempts were made to create direct state-peasant ties through the formation of functional organizations. The first and most important was the Community Action Program, although others that went through very similar stages of development were the Asociación Nacional de Usuarios Campesinos (ANUC), Acción Cívica Militar (ACM), and Integración Popular (IP). “The objectives of the AC program were to promote economic and social development in local communities through self-help projects and to create a sense of popular participation in local government.”<sup>45</sup> Created in 1958, by 1966 nearly 9,000 local *Juntas de Acción Comunal* (JACs) had been formed and by 1974 this number had ballooned to nearly 18,000. “By the end of the late 1960s roughly half the rural *veredas* in the country had formed a junta, although many subsequently remained inactive for years... The growth of the AC program was spectacular. By the mid-1960s, the juntas were managing a sizeable proportion of the nation’s local level infrastructural investments both in urban and rural areas.”<sup>46</sup> Funded by several ministries, decentralized agencies, congressional discretionary funds, as well as private

---

<sup>45</sup> Bruce Michael Bagley, *The State and the Peasantry in Contemporary Colombia* (Meadville, PA: Allegheny College and the University of Akron *Latin American Series*, No. 6, 1989) p. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Bagley, *op. cit.*, p. 11. A *vereda* is a small rural village that is a sub-unit of most municipalities. Often without legal status, these villages are heavily dependent on local patrons for access to state resources.

sector and international organizations, these groups brought quick benefits to the state. As Bagley notes, "The political benefits derived from the AC program were, however, even greater than the economic ones. In the rural areas especially, the *juntas* rapidly became focal points for community social activities...This 'renewal of community life' was an important aspect of the restoration of social stability in the violence-torn countryside."<sup>47</sup> However, as Bagley argues,

Access to these resources greatly strengthened the local political leverage of the AC leaders, for they could build patronage networks that translated into control over votes in their neighborhoods during elections. As a result, AC leaders were often local party leaders as well and at times even ran as party candidates for local political office... Inevitably, the dependence of the AC leaders and their neighborhood clientele groups on governmental largess tied them directly into the Frente's system of patronage politics... Given the weakness of grass roots party organizations in Colombia in the aftermath of the *Violencia*, the AC *juntas* rapidly became key vehicles of political-electoral mobilization for both parties during the early years of the Front.<sup>48</sup>

The dependence of the JACs on the state and increasingly on Frente clientelist structures created powerful incentives to gain autonomy from both. Thus, important efforts were made by JAC leaders to build autonomous sub-regional and departmental federations of JACs. In many cases these new, popular sector organizations began to promote radical changes in rural land tenure arrangements, oppose party and bureaucracy corruption, and to demand better services from the state. Thus, what began as an attempt to create functional organizations dependent upon the state led to a struggle, between local JAC leaders and political and state officials, for greater autonomy and finally to direct opposition, in some cases, against the political regime. The state reacted sharply and

[as] a result of the government's tactics of division and cooptation, the AC regional federations were effectively neutralized as a popular political force in Colombia by the late 1960s. Indeed, over the course of the early 1970s, the AC *juntas*, even in the few areas where effective regional federations had surfaced, essentially reverted to their previous roles as vehicles of patronage distribution and voter mobilization with no significant role in either local or national level policy-making. During the 1970s the AC *juntas* remained integral parts of local-level party politics despite repeated efforts by left-wing activists to radicalize them again.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time that the state was indirectly and almost unintentionally providing the means for the creation of new clientele networks, deference to national "natural leaders" began to erode as new broker patrons began to break into politics at the local and regional level. This breakdown in traditional attitudes towards national "natural leadership" was greatly compounded

---

<sup>47</sup> Bagley, *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Bagley, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Bagley, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-18. Cite on pp. 17-18. Bagley also relates the similar result of the formation of ANUC by the state, its radicalization, repression and cooptation, and capture by clientelist broker patrons. See *op. cit.*, pp. 19-48.

by the re-emergence of significant regional elites (especially from the Atlantic Coast region and from southern Colombia) dissatisfied with the dominance of Cundinamarca and Antioquia, the departments that contain Colombia's two principal cities, Bogotá and Medellín.<sup>50</sup> The last two presidential elections of the Front were marked by significant dissident presidential candidates reacting against what they perceived as the restrictive and exclusive role of the "natural leaders" of the two dominant parties. In 1970, these dissidencies almost led to the collapse of the National Front arrangement by nearly defeating the Front's official candidate.

With the end of the National Front, these tendencies came to full flower. By 1974 the fiction of "official" party lists drawn up by departmental directorates was abandoned.<sup>51</sup> By 1986 the 114 senatorial seats were won by an astonishing 104 lists, of which 2 won 3 seats, 6 won 2 seats, and the remaining 96 elected only the top person on the list. This process was also apparent at the level of the Chamber of Representatives in which 199 seats were filled by 170 lists of which 1 list elected 7 representatives, 3 won 4 seats, 1 won 3 seats, and 12 won 2. The remaining 153 lists won but one seat. Of the 17 lists which successfully elected more than one seat, 13 were located in Antioquia, Cundinamarca, and Valle, traditionally the politically most powerful departments. Only 4 2-seat lists were elected in the other 21 departments with all others being "nominal" lists. When the many losing lists are added to these totals, the level of fragmentation within the traditional parties becomes apparent.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, the role of national "natural leaders" had eroded to such an extent that it was difficult to determine just who such "leaders" might be within the Liberal Party and while this was less the case with the

---

<sup>50</sup> It is interesting to note that except for one exception, every Colombian president since the formation of the Liberal Republic in 1930 had an important electoral support base in either Cundinamarca or Antioquia and had been elected to Congress from one of these two departments.

<sup>51</sup> During the 1930s and 1940s lists were drawn up by local, departmental, and national party directorates. Although some dissident Liberal Party lists were presented during this period, especially in the mid to late 1940s by the *gaitanista* wing of the party, such lists were tolerated by the two parties owing to lack of control over the use of the party name. During the National Front competing party directorates emerged, particularly because of splits at the national level of the two traditional parties. Nevertheless, the business of making lists was still left, with some important and growing exceptions, in the hands of the directorates. By 1974, however, the making of lists passed increasingly under the control of individual politicians with party directorates becoming less and less important in the list-making process. For more detail, see Ronald P. Archer, "Clientelism and Political Parties in Colombia: A Party System in Transition?" paper presented at the Midwest Political Science Association, April 5-7, 1990, Chicago.

<sup>52</sup> However, it must be noted that these numbers tend to overstate slightly the degree of party fractionalization owing to the fact that some party leaders present more than one list so as to take advantage of the residuals system of proportional representation. This practice was prevalent in the Atlantic Coast departments even during the National Front and spread quickly to other departments once the mechanism was understood by other party bosses. In the following discussion of a broker clientele network, we will see that this technique was used by a senator and representative who entered into a coalition and presented two lists for the Chamber of representatives and five lists for the departmental assembly.

Conservative Party, it too was showing signs of growing restlessness under the tutelage of ex-president Misael Pastrana (1970-1974).

In conclusion, by the end of the 1980s the emergence of new broker patron-client relationships had solidified, completely replacing traditional patron-client ties. In the following section I will describe one such broker clientele network, illustrating the differences between traditional and broker patron-client relationships and clientele networks.

### **A Broker Clientele Network in Colombia**

My description of Colombian broker clientele networks and their component broker patron-client ties is drawn from a series of interviews carried out during two trips to three municipalities in a centrally located department in 1987 and 1988. For reasons of confidentiality, both the names of these municipalities and of the broker patrons involved will not be used. Besides these interviews, 22 in number, I also carried out several interviews with various political activists belonging to the clientele network I was investigating, who worked in the department capital, either in local municipal governments, the departmental assembly, the department bureaucracy, or in the Congress.

My belief that this clientele network is representative of other such networks in Colombia is based on three principle reasons: First, a total of 27 interviews made during trips taken in 1985, 1987, and 1988 to seven municipalities in three other departments of the country provided clear evidence that my case study was quite similar in its basic characteristics to clientele networks in other parts of the country. Second, over 150 interviews which were done with local political, social, and economic elites in ten municipalities by investigators working for the department of Political Science of the University of Los Andes as part of an ongoing study of municipal politics funded by the Ford Foundation, again corroborated the basic representativeness of my case study. Finally, the conclusions drawn from my interviews and case study indicated that if it were representative of other such clientele networks, certain specific patterns of electoral behavior should appear in election results during the period between 1960 and 1990. While this part of the investigation is as yet incomplete owing to the difficulty in finding the results of local city council elections, those electoral results that have been investigated fit the patterns expected with some exceptions. In describing this clientele network I have chosen the elections of 1986 as the focal point, moving backwards and forwards in time as seemed warranted.

Despite the evident complexity of broker clientele networks they can be broken down into three basic units. The basic unit of analysis of a clientele network is the single patron-client relationship. However, to be a patron various such units must be combined. In other words, while it may be theoretically possible, a patron with only one client simply does not exist. Thus, the small, compact patron-client cluster with relatively little scope, and strongly dependent on kinship



and localist ties, is the basic building block of a clientele network. Depending on the size of this “primary” patron-client cluster (roughly from 15 to 400 or 500 voting members) and the size of the municipality, these “primary” groups are either directly involved in putting up candidates for local office (larger networks, smaller municipalities) or they are combined with other “primary” groups forming local patron-client machines. The local patron-client “machine” is, in turn, aligned to a sub-regional or departmental machine in one of two ways: (1) either directly to the head of the clientele network owing to carefully cultivated personal patron-client relationships with the patron or patrons making up the local machine; or (2) to sub-regional brokers who have crafted coalitions among various local machines through patron-client ties with the head or heads of these machines and then entered into patron-client relations with departmental or national political leaders. The degree of complexity of broker clientele networks depends to a great extent, therefore, on how many such levels exist and how many broker patrons exist between the “primary” patron-client clusters and the head of the clientele network. (See Figure 1.)

To give a better picture of how this process operates I will describe one “strand” of my case study, tracing it from one local “primary” patron-client cluster and show how it is eventually combined with other “strands.” I will then conclude this description by making some comments about the overall structure of this particular clientele network.

Don Santiago is a broker patron who, as he put it, “fell into politics.” His family had moved to the *cabecera* (county seat of the municipio) from one of the larger *veredas* (villages) of the municipality in the late 1940s and had been successful in creating a rural middle-class niche for themselves as the county seat’s hoteliers and as owners of one of the municipio’s restaurants.

During *la Violencia* Don Santiago’s father and uncles left the county seat to join with other members of their political party in forming a village self-defense group in response to increasing armed incursions by the opposition party into the area. Through this involvement, Don Santiago’s father was to take a leadership role in what was eventually to become a local party guerrilla organization which sought to halt their opponent’s attempts to take over the lands of their village and force the local peasants off the land. As was the case for many of the current dwellers in the municipio, Don Santiago’s father and one of his uncles were killed and the guerrilla band was gradually forced into the mountain where it was joined by the families of many of the displaced peasants.

With the end of *la Violencia*, Don Santiago’s brothers returned to the cabecera where together with Don Santiago’s mother they took on the task of rebuilding their businesses which, by the 1970s had expanded to include a “fleet” of three trucks which ran produce to the regional market town and to the departmental capital, as well as a small coffee brokerage which bought the relatively small coffee harvests which never had recovered from the depredations of the violence.



Together with the hotel, (which had two levels, one that contained six “deluxe” rooms for dignitaries and relatively well-off guests, and the other about 20 small cubicles for peasants who came to town either bringing in their produce for the Sunday market or for one or another of the various holidays), the restaurant which also fed the hotel’s guests, and a small parcel of land with a few cows and fruit trees about an hour from the county seat, this was the extent of the family’s holdings. By the 1980s these various family businesses had been divided between Don Santiago (who kept the hotel, the restaurant, and the small farm) and the uncles (who kept the coffee brokerage and the “fleet” of trucks). While the family was certainly not rich, even by rural standards, it did make enough to see that its children finished high-school and received some college training in the departmental capital. Don Santiago’s family was, therefore, almost a prototype of the rural middle class that began to emerge in the 1930s and 1940s and was well established although still relatively small in the 1980s.

When I asked Don Santiago how he “fell into politics” his answer was “small things that added up little by little.” Over the years since the violence, peasants from his home village visiting the county seat (population about 1500; the total population of the municipality was about 15,000 in 1985) naturally gravitated to the hotel and restaurant of their former *paisano* and the son of one of their leaders in the mountains. Don Santiago and his mother extended small courtesies to these villagers over the years and they, in turn, would bring small gifts on their infrequent trips to town. These infrequent contacts began to solidify into patron-client ties as these peasants occasionally asked for help in filling out legal papers or in their dealings with county or departmental bureaucrats. As Don Santiago’s success in his broker function grew, so too did the extent of the “favours” he did for his patrons, including becoming a godfather to several children of village families and some residents in the county seat.

In the late seventies Don Santiago was not especially interested in transforming his role from “un hombre de respeto” (a man of respect) to “doing something in local politics” but with the increasing complexity of the problems faced by his clients, and as the need for better and higher connections also grew, he began to develop contacts with regional and departmental brokers. One in particular took a special interest in Don Santiago’s problems and began to extend small favours, visit the family restaurant, introduce Don Santiago to various departmental bureaucrats, and generally took the initiative in establishing a warm, friendly relationship with Don Santiago and his family. By the beginning of the 1980s this young broker began to speak of the great possibilities for the region if it could only be organized and thus attract greater resources from the department and the state.

While Don Santiago was hesitant, (“I wasn’t sure if the relationship would work. He was younger than I and from the same social class), he eventually began to ask his clients to vote for his new patron in local elections. As the relationship grew, and as his new patron began to scale

positions in the political hierarchy, the rewards also grew. By the end of the 1980s, Don Santiago had managed to place family members in the Departmental Office of the Comptroller, in the local Alcaldia (City Hall), had won a managerial position for a nephew in the Cattleman's Bank (Banco Cafetero), and had placed his 20 year-old son and a niece as Justices of the Peace (Inspectores de Policia). At the same time, his greater access to the departmental and state bureaucracy through his new patron allowed him to expand his patron-client relation to about 60 extended families with nearly 300 votes.

Don Santiago was one of seven "primary" brokers who together constituted the local machine for Don Pacho, a deputy in the departmental assembly who was elected for the first time in 1986 and again in 1988. Don Pacho is 36 years old and was born into a peasant family, a fact that he brings up constantly in his speeches. Pacho has been working towards a law degree on and off over the past five years, usually studying nights or when the assembly is not in session. He began his political career as a city councilman in the regional market town (a county seat of about 5,000; total population of the municipality was about 25,000 as of 1985) and moved rapidly to parlay his access to municipal and departmental funds into a growing patron-client network, primarily through ties with local village JACs. I was never able to draw Don Pacho out as to precisely how he made this initial step but a number of subordinates constantly mentioned his *astucia* (astuteness) in making a deal.

Unlike Don Santiago, Pacho knew that he wanted to be a politician and he worked constantly to build a following. After working for a number of years as a *teniente* (lieutenant) for an assembly deputy, while at the same time strengthening his personal position on the local city council (his machine elected four of nine councilmen), and constantly seeking contacts with potential and actual "primary brokers," Pacho got his big break in 1986 when his patron, a representative in the Chamber of Deputies, decided to split his list for the Chamber and run a subsidiary list based on an alliance with the assembly deputy for whom Pacho had been working. Pacho had, by this time, created an expanding regional party machine which had elected councilmen in five neighboring municipalities, including three of seven positions in Don Santiago's municipality, and could bring nearly 6,000 voters to the polls. (See Figure 2.) This kind of electoral strength, and the clear indication that Pacho was "going somewhere," led the representative to choose Pacho as the head of his new list for the assembly. With his victory in 1986, Pacho was able to move swiftly to expand his radius of action, owing to his access to a number of departmental jobs, including several in the department-owned distillery and in the Comptroller's office, and to the resources available to him through his patron in the Congress.

One aspect of Don Pacho's ascent to assembly deputy was unclear from the interviews. It would appear either that his relationship with the previous deputy and current head of the representative's second list for Congress never was a patron-client relationship, or that Don



Pacho was able to transfer his primary allegiance, with relative ease and with no apparent ill effects to his political career, from the former deputy to the representative who headed the clientele network. How this transfer of allegiance was accomplished was never explained by the people I interviewed and when asked point blank, the interviewee never quite answered the question. In the often Byzantine politics of clientele networks, such evasions usually indicate a possible source of embarrassment or simply involve the type of political calculations that Colombian politicians constantly deny ever making. One possibility is that Don Pacho simply bypassed his previous patron in favor of a direct, personal relationship with a man higher up the political ladder. A more positive interpretation is that it is simply accepted that when such a patron-client tie develops and strengthens over time, previous relationships lapse as the degree of asymmetry between the client and the displaced patron declines. George M. Foster makes the distinction between "colleague contracts" and "patron-client contracts," defining the former as contracts that are "phrased horizontally, and can be thought of as symmetrical, since each partner, in position and obligations, mirrors the other."<sup>53</sup> Thus, Pacho's promotion to head of the deputy list and his personal control over nearly 6,000 votes transformed what was probably a weak patron-client relationship into a colleague relationship between two important leaders in the representative's clientele network.

In discussing the final stage of this clientele network it is necessary to make one observation. The higher I moved up the network, the more difficult it was to get detailed information about the patron and how he was able to build his ties to his clients. In part this was due to the number of contacts and interviews which declined as I moved up. But perhaps more important was the growing aversion to being identified as clientelist patrons by the network notables. Don Jorge, who was first elected to the Chamber of Representatives in 1986, is one of that majority of Colombian congressmen who preach against clientelism and yet practice it assiduously. Thus, when I interviewed him, Don Jorge constantly referred to the fact that his program (which he considered populist despite the fact that he is generally regarded as one of the more conservative members of Congress) had struck a chord with the Colombian electorate and this was what explained his success in forming such a large clientele network despite his relative youth (early 40s) and relatively low position at the top level of the political hierarchy. Given our knowledge of how the network is built, Don Jorge's apparent anti-clientelism and emphasis on programmatic appeals (work for those who want to work; housing for the poor; credit for the peasant; harsh treatment of armed insurgents) ring false. This impression is strengthened by the fact that Don Jorge owes his rapid ascent in the hierarchy in part to the fact that he is the son of an ex-national "natural leader" of great stature, and thus has enormously developed contacts

---

<sup>53</sup> George M. Foster, "The Dyadic Contact in Tzintzuntzan, II: Patron-Client Relationship," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 65(6), 1963, p. 1281.

throughout the political party and the state which are simply not available to most other broker patrons.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the one unusual aspect of this particular clientele network, that the head is not a senator, can be explained by the special resources available to Don Jorge as one of those “chosen ones” referred to so disparagingly by Eduardo Santa. In fact, Don Jorge’s potential influence and his bright political future built on following in his father’s footsteps make him a “colleague” of most if not all of the country’s senators.

The overall structure of this network can now be laid out. (See Figure 1.) At the top is Don Jorge, a one-term congressman who in his first run for Congress won nearly 130,000 votes by bargaining for a reciprocal exchange of votes with an important senator of the department.<sup>55</sup> Alongside Don Jorge, but in a clearly subservient position, was the candidate who was elected as part of Don Jorge’s principal list (he won two seats), but who was a client of the senator and, in a more contractual relationship but still slightly subservient, was the winner of the subsidiary list created through bargaining between Don Jorge and the previous assembly deputy. At the assembly level Don Jorge’s forces presented four lists of which three won. The principal list won three seats while the other two lists, linked to the supplemental congressional list, won one seat each for a total of five assembly seats, two of which belonged to the senator. At the local level the movement won dozens of city council seats including those won by Don Jorge who was elected as a principal to several city councils as were his subsidiary congressmen and even Don Pacho, who was elected to city councils in three different municipalities.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Such politicians are often referred to by Colombians as *delfines*. Although several people I questioned could not explain the allusion to me, my guess is that it is a reference to the crown princes of Europe who were also referred to by this term or by one quite similar.

<sup>55</sup> Obviously this kind of bargaining and mixture of votes makes it very difficult for an outsider to untangle the two clientele networks involved. Nevertheless, the senator’s, the representative’s, and the deputy’s aides gave remarkably similar figures when asked to estimate how many votes were brought to the coalition by the various secondary patrons. This ability to measure the vote potential of various factional leaders and sub-leaders is referred to in common parlance in Colombia as *milimetría* denoting the preciseness of these kind of calculations. This also explains Don Jorge’s decision to launch a supplemental list. By counting their votes and estimating those of their opponents, network leaders can calculate very precisely how many votes they need to win a seat under the residuals system of proportional representation. This is even more remarkable given the fact that these estimates rarely account for more than one-half of the potential electorate. The first direct election of mayors in 1988 mobilized many previously non-participating voters and in many small cities and towns *milimetría* failed for the first time. In most of the large and intermediate cities, however, these calculations were even then quite successful. One of my research assistants correctly chose 19 of the 20 winners to the Bogotá city council.

<sup>56</sup> This is one unusual characteristic of the Colombian electoral laws and one of the remaining vestiges of the traditional patron-client networks. By law, candidates may run for as many city council, assembly, and Congressional positions as they wish as long as they belong to separate electoral districts. Thus, it is theoretically possible for one man to win 24 seats in the Senate, 24 seats in the House of Representatives, 1 seat in each of the 24 department assemblies and 1 seat in each of the 1009 Colombian municipalities. Obviously, should a politician win more than one seat in a legislative body or in several bodies, he chooses the highest office in the most strategically located department leaving the remaining seats to be filled by his *suplicantes*. This practice was very common in the 1930s and 1940s when national “natural leaders” headed

In concluding, I would like to begin by noting three other important aspects of Don Jorge's clientele network. First, each of the secondary patrons, whether Don Pacho or Don Jorge, had, like Don Santiago, "primary" clienteles. Don Santiago's clients were, for example, "secondary" clients of Don Pacho and of Don Jorge. But both deputy Pacho and congressman Jorge had their own "primary" clientele which had been with them from the beginning of their careers and whose members had close, long-lasting patron-client relationships with them. These different levels of clientele add to the complexity of unraveling clientele networks and it should be possible to introduce status distinctions among various clients dependent upon the type of relationship they have with their patron and how high up the clientele network he is.

Second, Don Jorge, like many Colombian politicians, made a strong effort to capture votes in the department capital. While the rural component of his clientele network is crucial in providing a solid and stable base for his movement, the large number of available votes in the capital require that Don Jorge and other network patrons extend as much of their patronage resources as possible to capturing some of these voters. This is usually done in one of two ways: first, the capital of this department, as of the others, is composed in large part of immigrants from the countryside, including many families with strong ties to their home municipality or village. Thus, patrons constantly strive to build links with these people through families who have remained in the countryside, hoping either to capture their votes in the city or to convince them to return to their rural home towns to vote for them there. Don Santiago estimated that he paid passage home for as many as 15 percent of his voters with another 5 to 10 percent voting in the capital city. Second, network patrons often seek to develop patron-client relationships with emerging leaders or local brokers in new city settlements, especially squatter or "invasion" barrios. While most of the patrons noted that such relationships were often transitory, they all expressed interest in developing such ties and spent a considerable amount of time attempting to do so. In this case, nearly one-half of the votes captured by Don Jorge and the senator came from the capital city although most of these belonged to the senator or voted for Don Jorge because of his conservative image or his status as a "natural leader."

This brings me to my final comment on Don Jorge's clientele network. While clientelism and "primary" and "secondary" patron-client relations account for the bulk of Don Jorge's followers, a large part of the electorate, perhaps as much as 25%, vote for entirely non-clientelistic

---

congressional lists in four or five departments. In the 1988 elections Senator Luis Carlos Galán, the leading presidential candidate killed by drug traffickers in August of 1989, headed his movement's list for city council in Bogotá. While looking through city council returns for the department of Cundinamarca, I found one senator who had been elected to 8 different city councils. The rationale is clearly one of lending the notables' name to local machines in the hope that the possibility of having such an important politician so publicly identified with the city council might attract unattached voters or "primary" broker patrons.



reasons.<sup>57</sup> These voters, often referred to as “voters of conscience” or “civic voters,” are drawn to various candidates either by personalist or programmatic appeals rather than by direct, indirect, or hoped-for ties to a patron-client network. With the combination of *milimetría* to count clientelist votes and modern survey techniques, network leaders can measure the draw of various national “natural leaders” or prominent civic or business leaders, and then try to convince them to lead various lists at the local or departmental level. In Don Jorge’s case, part of his appeal was the strong identification that many voters made between him and his father and this, when combined with Don Jorge’s powerful clientele network, probably convinced the senator to bargain with him to head his list for the Chamber of Representatives. While this description of a clientele network casts some light on how Colombia’s parties aggregate electoral support through clientele networks, the level of network leaders’ bargaining is still unclear and is deserving of more study for the light it might throw on how the parties function within representative institutions.

To conclude, and comparing the characteristics of broker patron-client relationships to those of traditional patron-client ties, the former are (1) considerably more restricted in scope, especially at the level of “primary” patron-client relationships; (2) much less durable, especially at the level of “secondary” relationships where levels of asymmetry seem considerably more reduced than was previously the case, in part a consequence of the proliferation of clientele networks; (3) similar in the high levels of affect and *respeto mutuo* (mutual respect) especially at the “primary” level but more calculated and pragmatic at the “secondary” level; and (4) characterized by transactions that are almost always related at the “secondary” level to the broker’s skills in dealing with the bureaucracy and to non-personal, state or party-financed resources, true to only a somewhat more limited extent at the level of “primary” patron-client relationships. (See Table 2.)

At the level of clientele networks, broker networks, when compared to traditional networks, tend to be much more numerous, and with relatively shorter vertical extensions, rarely reaching beyond the level of the departmental *cacique*, who is but one of many competing at that level. As a consequence of the high level of competition, these networks are much less stable

---

<sup>57</sup> According to a survey taken by the Universidad de Los Andes nearly 25 percent of those who expected to vote in 1988 gave primarily “civic” reasons for why they would vote. These respondents stated that they would vote because (1) their candidate had the best solutions to the locality’s problems or (2) voting was necessary to maintain democracy. See Ronald P. Archer, “Análisis descriptivo y explicativo de la Primera Encuesta sobre la elección popular de alcaldes (Proyecto: La elección popular de alcaldes: Seguimiento de un gran proceso).” Research document, Departamento de Ciencia Política, Universidad de Los Andes, Bogotá, 1989.

**Table 2**  
**Differences between Traditional and Broker Clientelism**

<b>Characteristics of the Clientelist Relationship</b>					
	<b>Scope</b>	<b>Durability</b>	<b>Intensity</b>	<b>Transactions Type</b>	<b>Resources</b>
<b>Traditional</b>	Extensive (all inclusive)	Very High (generational transfer)	Very High	All Kinds	Personal
<b>Broker</b>	Restricted (mostly electoral)	Low (one or more elections)	Low to High	Votes for Favors	State Patronage

Source: Archer, "Transition...", *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30, 53-54.

and durable than was the case before,<sup>58</sup> although the evidence does seem to indicate that without the mobilization of new clientele the current level of fractionalization has already come very close to the point of maximum saturation. Finally, and sharply different from the case of traditional networks, the functions of the broker clientele network are geared less to the personal necessities of the patrons and more towards the distribution of political patronage (knowledge and access, jobs and budgetary resources) which, with the growth of the state, has become much more plentiful.<sup>59</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

In this final section of the paper I return to the underlying purpose of my broader research, explaining the apparent incongruity of high regime stability and growing social violence and conflict. Part of the explanation for this situation lies, I argue, in the way in which the country's two traditional parties organize and channel support through the electoral system and into state institutions. In the case of Colombia, the primary mechanisms of regime support mobilization are a

---

<sup>58</sup> When a network patron begins to lose votes and influence, usually by losing an election to a new or expanding clientele network, Colombians tend to say that the politician "se quemó," which is probably best translated as "he burned out."

<sup>59</sup> According to Jonathan Hartlyn, public sector employment in Colombia has grown from about 260 thousand in 1966 to over 900 thousand in 1985. Of these, only about 10 percent are covered by civil service rules. Hartlyn, *op. cit.*, Table 6-8, p. 178.

large number of relatively limited and poorly aggregated broker clientele networks which mobilize support through the downward distribution of state and party resources.

Clientele networks have some positive aspects, such as their capacity to augment the poor distributive capacities of a weak state; to serve as a means for social mobility; and as an overall stabilizing force within the Colombian polity. Nevertheless, these benefits are rapidly being balanced by the negative consequences that such clientele networks have had on the party's representational capacity and for the effective functioning of the state. Moreover, even the extent of many of these positive effects is being reduced. With the rapid proliferation of broker clientele networks to take the place of disintegrating traditional patron-client relationships, not only has the state's capacity to support a further expansion of such clientele networks been exhausted, but these networks have also had negative consequences for the state's capacity to direct its distributive efforts in rational, efficient, and cumulative developmental ways.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the transition from traditional to broker clientelism has had a significant and negative impact on the authority and legitimacy of Colombia's political elite and thus on the state's capacity to build effective institutions to pursue goals of political, economic, and social development.

The exhaustion of the potential for expansion of clientelist structures and patronage distribution has put a brake on the capacity of such networks to continue providing a mechanism for upward mobility. Rather, like an illegal "pyramid game," those who entered clientele networks early on and positioned themselves well are reaping the benefits while the great majority of Colombians, who arrived late or not at all to a patron-client relationship, are being shut out from the distribution of state resources and in many cases from the state itself.

These consequences of the proliferation of broker clientele networks also call into question the capacity of this system of regime support generation to continue to guarantee and maintain the long-term stability of the political regime. The limits of broker clientelism have greatly reduced the representational function of the traditional political parties. This is true for at least three reasons. First, such systems are highly particularistic and create a highly atomized citizenry whose relation to the state is based on a personal relationship with a patron rather than any interests they might have as members of a social class, a functional group, or even as members of their own party. Second, the highly competitive nature of the brokered clientelist system means that those political parties without access to state patronage face almost insurmountable obstacles to entry into the political system despite its high degree of formal openness. This is due in part to

---

<sup>60</sup> One classic example is the archaic and outmoded bureaucracy which has been maintained for clientelist reasons. For example, virtually every transaction, public or private, must be notarized. Thus millions of documents are funnelled through the notary publics for *pro forma* notarization, consuming hundreds of thousands of man hours to maintain a few thousand patronage positions. Attempts by the state to streamline the process of document authentication have been consistently stymied by network patrons.

the voter's belief that such parties do not represent realistic challenges to the traditional parties, thus reducing their incentive to vote for alternative parties, even if their leadership faithfully represents their interests. Also, as one third party politician argued, "if you want to win in politics you have to have jobs and some favors to give away because people are very selfish and that's all that keeps them in line."<sup>61</sup>

The traditional parties' dependence on clientelism to mobilize support and their failure to build alternative means of representing societal and sectoral interests, especially within the urban sector, means that the majority of the population, excluded from the clientelist network of distribution, must turn elsewhere to make their demands upon the state. The emergence of the search for alternative means of entry to the state and access to its resources is one of the most important reasons for the current level of social violence. On the one hand, there has been an impressive increase in the number of civic strikes and peasant marches demanding the extension of social services (electricity, schools, sewage systems, aqueducts, health care) and changes in policy in such areas as justice, employment, land tenure, civil rights, taxation, and many more. When revolutionary insurgencies, mobilization of new functional groups by left-wing and anti-clientelist activists, and demands for social, economic, and political access by the new drug elites are added to an increasingly violent, defensive reaction of rural and urban elites, the capacity of the state and the traditional political class and its clientelist system to continue to successfully contain and deal with these pressures is clearly open to question.

The transition from traditional to broker clientelism had an important impact on the authority of the political elite. Together with other changes in the rapidly modernizing society, it called into question the legitimacy of the state.<sup>62</sup> As shown above, the authority of Colombia's traditional patrons was based on two fundamental claims: first, their great status as "men of wealth and culture" in a primarily rural, poor, and uneducated country and, second, their role as party leaders. Colombia's "natural leaders" had played fundamental roles in the evolution of the two traditional parties, whether as ideologues or as military *caudillos* who had led partisan forces during the various civil wars of the 19th century. By the 1930s a new generation of party leaders who had never fought in their party's colors had emerged at the forefront. The decline of their authority became especially evident in the late 1940s and 1950s when partisan conflict (*la Violencia*) spiralled out of their control. With the decision to form the National Front and to remove from political discourse the potent political symbols of partisan identity, the authority of the political elite

---

<sup>61</sup> Schmidt, "Bureaucrats as Modernizing Brokers," *op. cit.*, p. 447.

<sup>62</sup> As Graziano argues, "the transition to party-directed patronage has important effects, both on the cost of the incentives which must be distributed in order to induce people to participate in politics and on the authority of the new political leaders, who enjoy neither the traditional legitimacy of the notables nor the 'modern' legitimacy which an 'ideological' leader may derive from his 'project' for social transformation." See Graziano, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

came to rest on their capacity to provide services through the rapidly expanding broker clientele networks, often led by men of relatively low social status and with no history of heroic efforts on behalf of the party. The consequence, returning to Graziano's conceptual chart, was a substitution of personal influence for authority.

"Personal influence is based on a *direct exchange* between leader and subordinates, authority is enforced through *indirect processes of exchange*."<sup>63</sup> As Blau argued,

Authority can arise only in social structures. The power or personal influence exercised in pair relations can never develop into legitimate authority. For only the common norms of a collectivity of subordinates can legitimate the controlling influence of a superior and effect willing compliance with his directives in the specific sense of making such compliance, since it is enforced by the subordinates themselves, independent of any inducements or enforcement actions of the superior himself... The social norms and values of subordinates that legitimate the power of influence of a superior transform it into authority. Simultaneously, indirect processes of social exchange become substituted for the direct exchange transactions between the superior and individual subordinates.<sup>64</sup>

Without the transition from direct means of exchange, typical of clientele-based political systems, to indirect means of exchange, a leader's ability to call on his followers to pursue objectives that do not lead to immediate rewards but rather point to future gains becomes nearly impossible. As Graziano points out, "the individual incentives typical of direct exchange make collective mobilization for long-term objectives infinitely more difficult."<sup>65</sup>

The erosion of traditional sources of authority and legitimacy and their replacement by a broker clientelism based on personal influence leads to political immobilism and places severe constraints on the actions of potential reformers and institution builders. The inability to restore authority and legitimacy "would account for the 'immobilism' which often characterizes societies [in transition]. Due to the tendency of opposition groups to become confused with those in power, these societies are incapable of both achieving the stable social and political organization which only legitimate leaders can provide and, at the same time, reorganizing themselves."<sup>66</sup>

Legitimate authority, created through the political parties and funnelled into state institutions, negates the need for clientelism since it "results in more capital for a society, in the specific sense of allowing its leaders to engage in long term, generally costly innovations, political or otherwise. Institutionalized authority is authority supported by enough social credit to permit officials to carry out temporarily unpopular initiatives of the kind frequently necessary in

---

<sup>63</sup> Graziano, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>64</sup> Blau, *Exchange and Power*, pp. 209,211 as quoted by Graziano, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>65</sup> Graziano, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>66</sup> Graziano, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

modernizing countries.”<sup>67</sup> Where this capital does not exist, then political leaders must either seek to create it through new means of mobilization or fall into the trap of direct exchange.

Without traditional bases of authority and legitimation, Colombia’s current political elite has increasingly come to depend on the personal use of power characteristic of clientelism. Attempts to find alternative means to mobilize support have been transitory and largely unsuccessful. Alfonso López Michelsen’s MRL, Rojas Pinilla’s ANAPO, Belisario Betancur’s Movimiento Nacional, the various guerrilla insurgencies and electoral coalitions of the left, have all been unable or unwilling to challenge an increasingly unwieldy political regime based on personal influence. More importantly, the failure of both elite, popular, and state-directed attempts to circumvent clientele structures, together with the growing evidence of the exhaustion of the capacity to extend clientelism to new groups, clearly calls into question the continued ability of the state to deal with the pressures created by growing social unrest and instability and to fulfill its distributional and developmental roles. As Luigi Graziano argues,

Clientelism, implying as it does a strictly personal use of power, prevents the disassociation between authority roles and their occupants which is the first characteristic of institutionalized authority. Being based on the anti-bureaucratic principle of “regard for the individual,” that is, on the discriminatory application of norms, it undermines faith in the “rules of the game” and in the political institutions which are supposed to enforce such rules... What is more, by nourishing expectations of immediate and individual reward, they make it impossible for society to carry out social investments which are as essential for political development as accumulation of material resources is for economic development.<sup>68</sup>

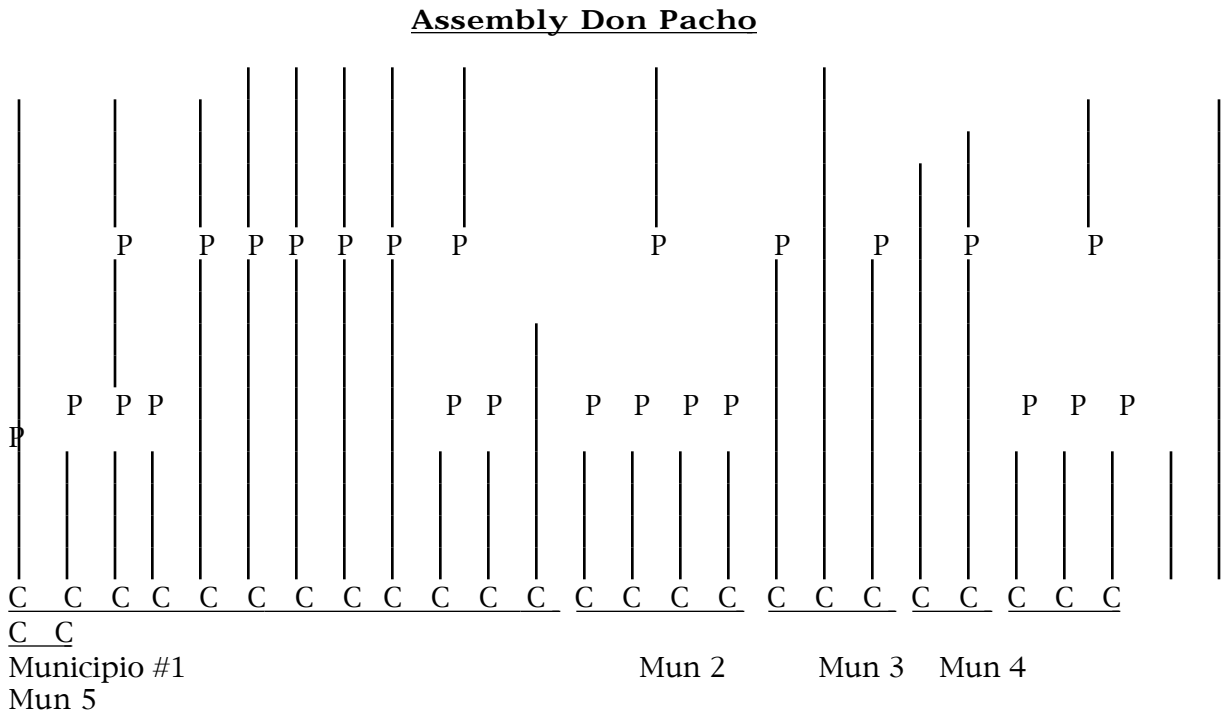
In conclusion, the traditional parties’ ability to channel support through clientelist structures, while providing an impressive degree of *regime* stability, at the same time undermined the authority and legitimacy of the political elite and of the state and made the state’s task of providing for the social, political, and economic development of the Colombian people nearly impossible in the long term. The Colombian people, disarticulated and disaggregated through the mechanism of broker clientelism, have been unable to create functional organizations that might better represent their interests and needs before the state. Not only has the state’s legitimacy suffered as a result but so too has its capacity to provide those services that the Colombian people have increasingly come to perceive as rights rather than bargaining chips for votes. As a consequence, the authority of the state, the traditional parties, and the political elite has crumbled while no new means of building the social capital necessary to restore authority and legitimacy has emerged. Thus, the escalation of social conflict and the “immobilism” of a political regime which once appeared monolithic but with every passing year appears more tattered and in disrepair.

---

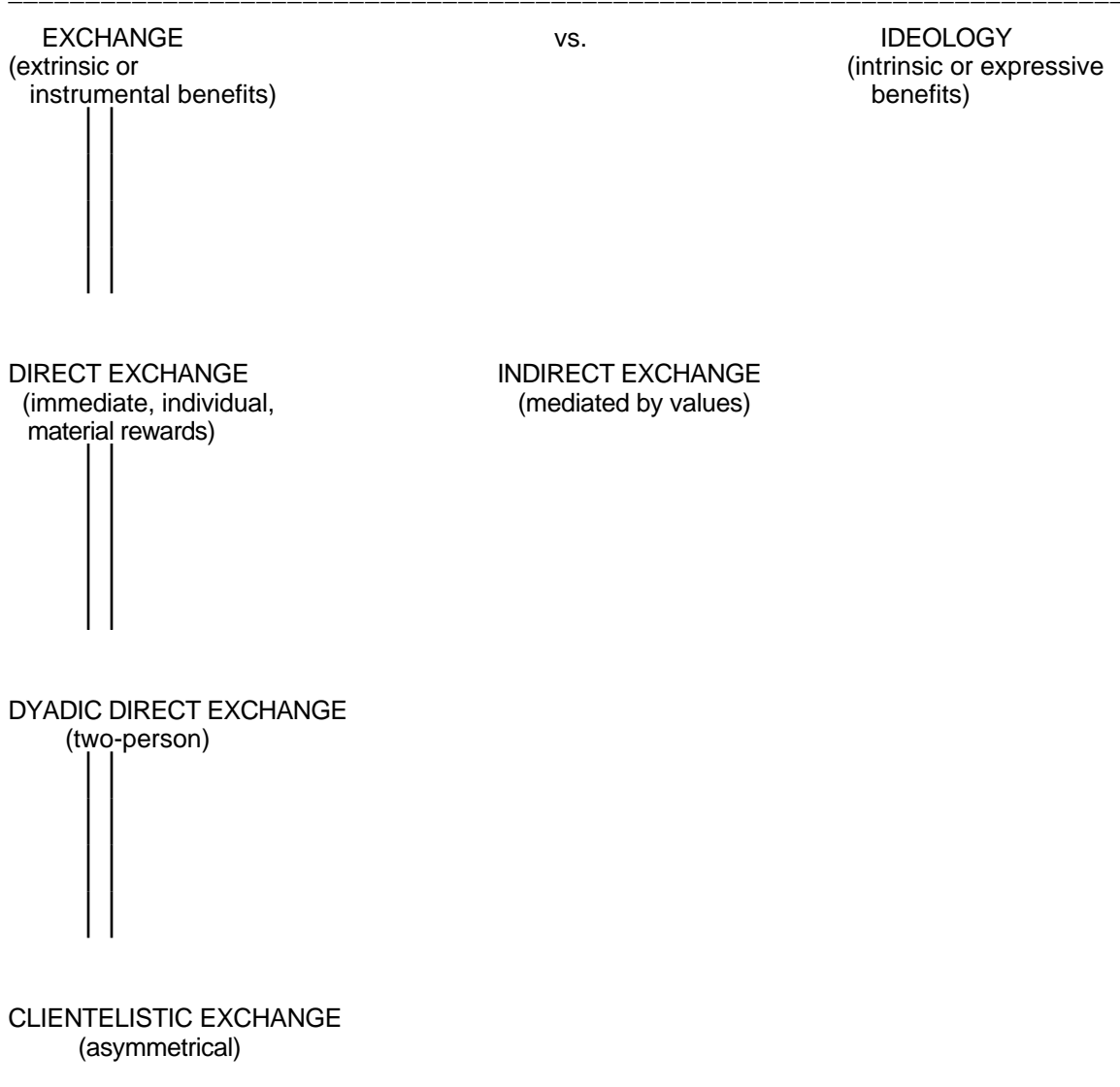
<sup>67</sup> Graziano, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>68</sup> Graziano, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

**Figure 2. An Assemblyman's Clientele Network**



**Table 1**  
**Conceptual Chart of Clientelism**



Source: Graziano, *op. cit.*, p. 19.



**Table 2**

**Differences between Traditional and Broker Clientelism**

---

**Characteristics of the Clientelist Relationship**

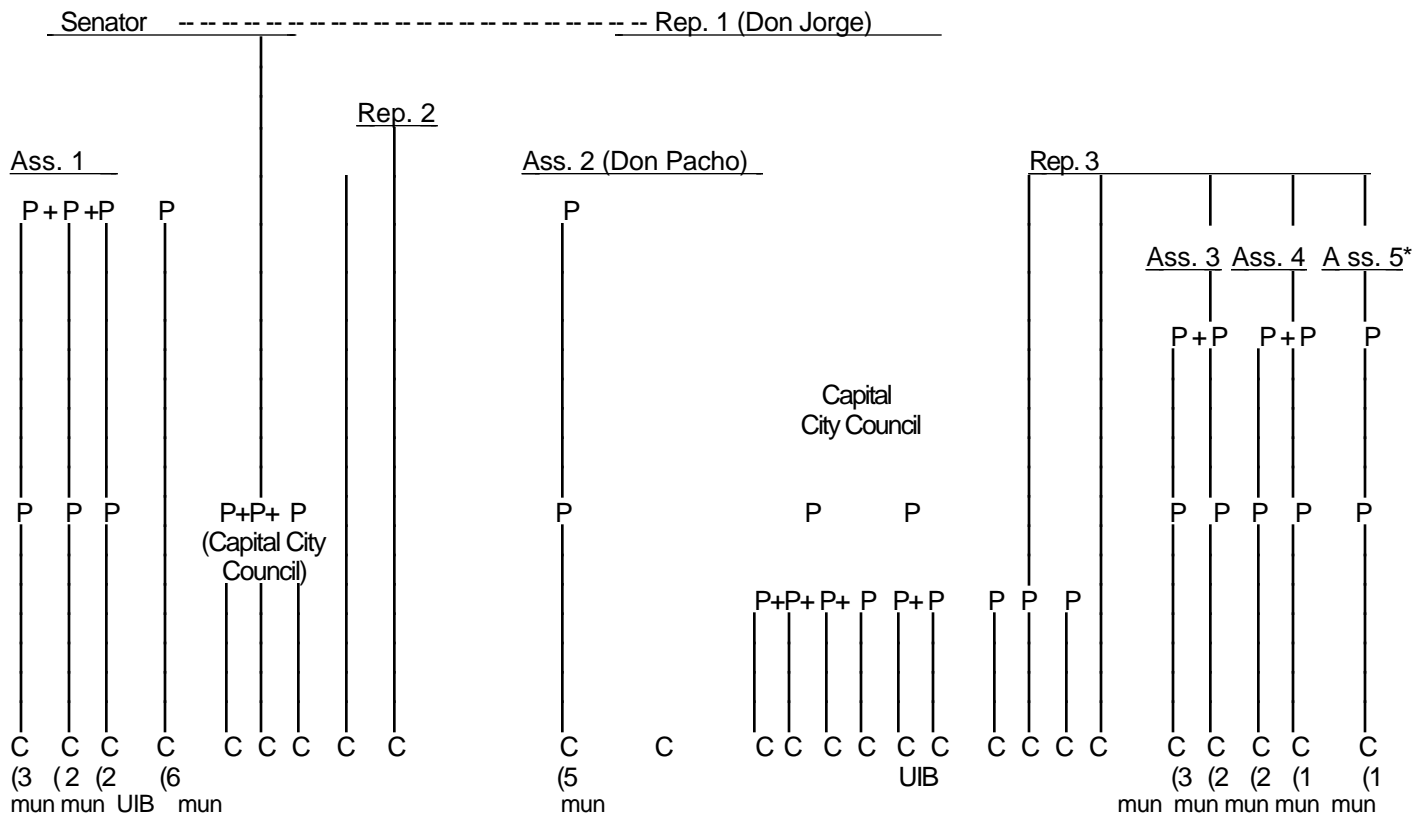
---

	<b>Scope</b>	<b>Durability</b>	<b>Intensity</b>	<b>Transactions Type Resources</b>	
<b>Traditional</b>	Extensive (all inclusive)	Very High (generational transfer)	Very High	All Kinds	Personal
<b>Broker</b>	Restricted (mostly electoral)	Low (one or more elections)	Low to High	Votes for Favors	State Patronage

---

Source: Archer, "Transition...", *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30, 53-54.

Figure 1. A Two-Network Electoral Coalition (Colombia: 1986)



UIB = Urban Invasion Barrio  
 mun = municipality  
 \* = not elected