Political Clientelism in Mexico: Bridging the Gap Between Citizens and the State

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ABSTRACT

This article explores practices of political clientelism in a native village in Mexico City during recent elections (2006, 2012), aiming to create more conceptual clarity and to demonstrate the usefulness of ethnographic approaches. Seen from the clients' and the brokers' perspective, political clientelism and vote buying are two different practices, carried out in different ways, with different degrees of legitimacy. The problem-solving network studied here bridges the gap between the citizen and the state, while the political operators hope to be rewarded with public employment. In this case, one candidate-patron changed parties a few months before the 2012 elections, and the electoral statistics provide indications of the numerical effectiveness of his clientelist network. Multiparty competition, instead of undermining clientelist practices, appears to "democratize" them.

The return of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) to presidential power in 2012, apparently aided by television campaigns and possibly massive vote buying (for example, with debit cards for a supermarket chain), feeds into the debate about vote buying and political clientelism in Mexico. The former is illegal and, in Acopilco, the community studied in this article, mostly seen as illegitimate. The latter, however, is considered legitimate, at least among those who constitute the demand side of the bargain. In this community, the candidate for delegation chief in 2012 won his position clearly because of his long-term clientelist engagement.

The candidate, Adrián, had been involved for several years with the PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática); however, when the PRD leaders appointed another candidate a few months before the 2012 election, Adrián approached the PRI/Verde coalition and was appointed its candidate. The PRI coalition had received only 16 percent of the votes in Acopilco in the previous local elections (2009), but Adrián garnered 46 percent for the PRI in 2012; the PRI presidential candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, obtained 37 percent in Acopilco. Adrián won the Delegation of Cuajimalpa for the PRI, as the only one out of 16 delegations in the Federal District in 2012.[1]

It is important to point out that these votes were not the result of coercion, threats, or fear, as is often argued in the literature about political clientelism. The

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intermediaries (brokers or operators) who initially supported Adrián split into two groups, and it seems that the voters mostly followed the choice of their broker. Fellow partisans who did not follow Adrián called him a traitor, whereas many others (clients or brokers) felt that he had every reason to switch parties, since he had worked for years to establish his electoral base but had not been allowed to cash in on his efforts. In addition, the intermediaries who had been working with Adrián had little chance for reciprocation from him if they did not follow him over to the PRI.

The broker who was my informant—let us call him Juan—expected some sort of job in the delegation, which he would have been unlikely to obtain if he had stayed with his party and supported the PRD candidate who replaced Adrián. Besides, how could he have argued that "his" voters had to vote for a new, unknown candidate when Adrián was the one who had helped them? Also, fellow partisans who were not engaged in clientelist networks in Acopilco either as clients or as brokers told me that they had voted for Adrián although they had always supported the PRD over the last decade. The strength of personal relations must also be taken into account. Although PRD factionalism (see Hilgers 2008) may have caused the change of candidate, the villagers saw it more as an example of arrogance among the party leadership downtown.[2]

Research Problem and Aim of the Article

This article offers a concrete description of how a particular problem-solving clientelist network is formed and functions, based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the community under study. This approach makes the distinction between political clientelism and vote buying stand out very clearly, since these are understood by the clients to be two different practices. One is known by the term *vote buying*, which is illegitimate and shameful; therefore nobody admits to doing it, and in its monetary form, it is done privately, secretly, and is therefore unobservable. The other is political clientelism, which among the clients and brokers does not have a term, but is included in the rich flora of communitarian networks that constitute the community. People see it as a legitimate way to solve everyday problems; they carry it out openly, and nobody in the community criticizes it.

A fairly common definition of political clientelism is an asymmetrical relationship that is voluntary, reciprocal, personal, and affective; it plays out over time, involving exchange of goods and services for political support, to mutual benefit (Roniger 1990, 2–4, cited in Hilgers 2008, 125). The process takes place in networks of informal relationships, which cut across social class (González Alcantud 1997, 75; Adler-Lomnitz et al. 2004, 26–29).

I stick to this common definition and I take it seriously, in the sense that when a practice does not fulfill these criteria, I do not apply the term *political clientelism* to it. Both political clientelism and vote buying concern the exchange of goods and services for political support, but vote buying, obviously, does not fulfill requirements such as operating in networks, long duration, creating personal relationships, and affectivity.

Table 1. Characteristics of Political Clientelism and Vote Buying

Element	Political Clientelism	Vote Buying	
		Nonmonetary (building materials)	Monetary
My source	Observation Conversation	Observation Conversation	Rumor Conversation
Duration	Long-term (1 year 4 months)	Few weeks	One-time occurrence
Timing relative to election	More than 1 year before	Few weeks before	Few days before
Network	Problem-solving Subsumed in communitarian practices	No	No
Social activities, parties	Yes	No	No
Locals use a special term for the practice	No	Yes	Yes
Affective	Yes	No	No
Collective/individual	Collective	Individual	Individual
Open/hidden	Open	Semi-open Visible	Hidden Denied
Personal/impersonal	Personal	Semipersonal	Impersonal
Asymmetrical	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**
Degree of legitimacy	High	Low	Nil
Type of obligation	Moral	Market	Market
Monitoring form	Taco party	Unknown	Unknown

These are the distinctive traits that make the clients perceive political clientelism as a legitimate practice and as quite different from vote buying. The aim of this study is to describe and understand political clientelism from the perspective of the clients and the broker. In the process, however, it points out how clientelism differs from vote buying, both in degree of legitimacy and in the ways it is carried out (see table 1).

My contention is that ethnography is particularly useful in the study of the issue at hand, because it allows the researcher to gain access to the perspective of the clients, what they say but also what they do and what they do not talk about, their silences and moral evaluations, and the relationships among them. Surveys alone, and even interviews, cannot produce this information, and when a practice suffers from lack of legitimacy, answers to survey questions cannot be reliable. This problem is enlarged when researchers conflate political clientelism and vote buying (Schedler 2004; Stokes 2005). Studies that do not consider these elements risk seri-

ous methodological flaws, regardless of flawless methods of calculus, since the quality and meaning of the information being processed is unreliable.

Networks of political clientelism require three types of actors: the clients, the broker, and the patron. What we are able to discover in a study will largely depend on where we position ourselves in the process; in other words, the perspective the researcher adopts. It is also paramount to explicate this position in the text; in my case, I have carried out the research among the clients and the broker, which constitutes my perspective. I also tried to explore the view of the patron; however, he did not grant me an interview.

In addition, there is the issue of the relationship between the state, democracy, and political clientelism. This study demonstrates that clientelism is perfectly possible without access to public funds; instead, it may bridge the gap between the citizens and the state, granting the citizens access to public benefits to which they were entitled but which they had not obtained. Thus, in contrast with machine politics, which is strictly for governing parties (Scott 1969, 1143), political clientelism is available for all parties and candidates. Used in combination with political alternation, which is now the case in Mexico, the practice is not entirely antidemocratic. Furthermore, it is notable that due to its legitimacy, political clientelism does not necessarily depend on force and coercion.

The Acopilco Study: Cooperation and Reciprocation

During my long and repeated periods of fieldwork in Acopilco, I observed a strong emphasis on reciprocation as a central value among the inhabitants. The natives participated widely in communitarian practices of a socioreligious nature and in family celebrations in which reciprocity was fundamental, everybody taking their turn some point (Hagene 2007).[3] They participate as *fiscales* in maintaining and running the church and the nine chapels, the celebration of two annual fiestas—plus one for the Virgin of Guadalupe and one for each chapel—each with their novenas, and in the weekly collection of contributions to pay for mass and all the festive arrangements. Acopilco upholds relationships of reciprocal ritual exchange (*mandas*) with nine other communities; the principal fiesta of each community is the occasion when these *mandas* are realized, bringing busloads of visitors, ritual meals, and gifts.

Huge numbers of natives participate, not only in the celebrations but also in their organizing, financing, and realization. Most of these *cargos* (responsibilities) rotate every year, instituting experiences of reciprocity among the natives, who reproduce a sense of communality and social belonging through these practices.

Family celebrations rely on similar reciprocal practices among blood and fictive kin, friends, and neighbors; the same applies to the institution of *faena*, which is the local term for the community members' unpaid work to improve community infrastructure, such as water systems, roads, and schools. Reciprocity stands out as a basic communitarian value, as the literature on communities also testifies (see, e.g., Hernández-Díaz and Juan Martínez 2007; Medina 2009; Romero Tovar 2009).

These practices of collective reciprocity operate in networks of long-term relationships. The obligation to reciprocate in these relationships contrasts with the one-time exchanges of market transactions, which do not generate relationships or moral obligations but build on a juridical precept: an "exchange" without payment would be considered theft. The habit of creating and using networks to carry out collective tasks forms part of the communitarian life-world, a habit which is also adaptable to clientelist practices (Hagene and González-Fuente forthcoming).

Context of the Study

San Lorenzo Acopilco is one of approximately two hundred native villages (*pueblos originarios*) within the boundaries of Mexico's Federal District (Correa 2010); their names are composed of that of a Catholic saint prefixed to the original Nahuatl name. These villages uphold a number of social, religious, political, and cultural practices that distinguish them from the rest of the city. Acopilco is among the communities that still own communal land (*bienes comunales*), some 1,608 hectares, mostly forest with several water springs. It is situated in the Delegation of Cuajimalpa along the road to Toluca, bordering on the State of Mexico, at 3,000 meters above sea level, with a population of 24,000 (INEGI 2010).

Well over half the population uses the term *natives* (*nativos*) about themselves; of these, only 2,345 persons are *comuneros* (natives with official agrarian rights). The lesser group, called *avecindados* (nonnatives), covers a wide socioeconomic and ethnic range whose common trait is personal origin outside the community. The communitarian practices mentioned above concern mostly the native population.

In 2000, only some one hundred persons in Acopilco earned a living by cultivating the land or any other primary activities. The majority of the working population had employment outside the community, mostly in the city. Less than one-third were employed in construction and manufacture, and more than two-thirds worked in commerce, transport, education, various professional and government services, domestic service, and restaurants (INEGI 2000). More than half of the income-earning population earned less than two minimum salaries.[4] Only 3 percent had an income of more than ten minimum salaries (INEGI 2000). The village could thus be characterized as semiurban and low income.

Traditionally, Acopilco appointed a local *juez de paz* (traditional judge) from among the leaders of the *companías*, which oversaw local law and security issues (Martínez archive). In 1929, however, the municipalities in the Federal District were suppressed, and all local elections discontinued (Serrano Salazar 2001); the traditional authority was renamed *subdelegado* (subdelegate; see Contreras Esquivel 1995, 81), and finally, toward the end of the 1970s, absorbed into the delegation authorities in Cuajimalpa, leaving Acopilco with no local authority in place (Hagene 2007, 4). Up to 1997, the president appointed a regent for the Federal District, who then designated delegates in each of the delegations.

During this period, Acopilco was primarily a rural community, relying largely on forest and agricultural activities, while local leaders collaborated closely with the

peasant organization that formed part of the corporatist PRI regime, the CNC (Confederación Nacional Campesina). They perceived that communities supporting or participating in the PRI received more government support than other communities (Nava 2003; Martínez 2006). Eckstein's 1998 study of downtown Mexico City from the 1960s to 1980s certainly supports this interpretation. In the presidential election of 1994, the last before the political reform of the 1990s reinstated local elections in the Federal District, the PRI was still the hegemonic party in Acopilco, as almost everywhere else in Mexico, garnering 47 percent of the votes. This percentage, however, dropped to 31 in 2000 and 12 in 2006 (based on data from IFE; Hagene 2007, 195).

Since 1997, every three years, the citizens of the Federal District have elected a government chief and a Legislative Assembly, and since 2000, 16 delegation chiefs. The PRD has been the governing party in the Federal District since 1997 and has initiated a series of social programs. In the Delegation of Cuajimalpa, however, it was only in the period 2003–9 that the PRD was in power. In 2000–3 the PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional)/Verde governed, in 2009–12 the PAN alone, and in 2012 the PRI/Verde won the election. The delegation structure is in charge of implementing most of the social programs; however, the inhabitants often lack information about them and the procedures to obtain them.

The community of Acopilco has always appointed religious and agrarian authorities, and the natives have managed ritual practices autonomously. Since 1992, agrarian issues have been directed by a Commissariat of 12 members elected for a period of three years.[5] In addition to the communitarian networks, the Commissariat has been an important mediator between political candidates at the delegation level and the *comuneros*, even if it is not itself elected according to party affiliation.[6]

Literature, Concepts, and Methodology

Numerous studies from several disciplines and methodological orientations have addressed the issue of political clientelism, vote buying, and different forms of electoral alchemy in Mexico. A few newer studies, none of which apply ethnographic approaches, argue that political clientelism is about to disappear in Mexico (Magaloni et al. 2007; Díaz-Cayeros et al. 2009), or at least lose its legitimacy (Schedler 2004). Most recent studies, however, indicate widespread existence of clientelist practices (e.g., Cornelius 2004; González de la Fuente 2007; Tosoni 2007; Hilgers 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012; Fox and Haight 2009; González Hernández and González Hernández 2011; Hicken 2011; Abente Brun 2014). I shall discuss some of the relevant literature with a view toward clarifying the concept of political clientelism and how it differs from that of vote buying. I will also account for my methodological approach, highlighting some advantages of participant observation and ethnography in general.

Political Clientelism in the Literature

Literature on this phenomenon in the 1960s and 1970s perceived it as "typical of underdeveloped political systems, usually at early phases of institutionalization" (Magaloni et al. 2007, 182). This developmental approach can be traced back to Scott's 1969 writings on machine politics, a concept he used to explore politics in the new nations (Asia and Africa). He found resemblances between the new nations in the 1950s and 1960s and the United States around the turn of the twentieth century, making reference to the social context: massive immigration or urbanization, leading to a shift in loyalty patterns in the population from traditional patron-client relations to the need for cash or other inducements (Scott 1969, 1146). The mechanisms he describes are linked to a certain stage of social development. As to the machine, he specified a strict definition: the machine is always a political party in power, a nonideological organization, securing office for its leaders and distributing income to those who work for it (1144). Another defining trait is that political leaders are selected by means of elections, while other necessary ingredients are mass adult suffrage and electoral competition (1143); elections thus provided even the most humble citizen with a resource.

The term *vote buying* is barely mentioned in Scott's text on machine politics, and *political clientelism* not at all; yet in Stokes (2005), which features Scott (1969) as an introduction, machine politics, clientelism, and vote buying are used interchangeably. Stokes focuses on the monitoring and enforcement aspect and maintains that perverse accountability is what keeps the machine operating, a mechanism that makes use of tentaclelike organizations to make sure that clients pay with their vote. The conflation of concepts in her text makes her "miss an opportunity for using her evidence to illustrate the difference among them" (Hilgers 2011, 581). In later texts, Stokes defines the terms *political clientelism*, *vote buying*, and *patronage*, explicitly seeing the latter two as subcategories of the former (Stokes 2009, 604–7; Stokes et al. 2013, 13–14).

The conflation of clientelism and vote buying, furthermore, is quite widespread (see, e.g., Schedler 2004, 6; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, 2; Magaloni et al. 2007, 182; Auyero et al. 2009, 3; González-Ocantos et al. 2012, 202; Lawson and Greene 2012, 2). This type of conflation also occurs in Díaz-Cayeros et al. 2009, which uses the UNDP report (PNUD 2007, 5) as a source on political clientelism when in fact it addresses vote buying and coercion.

Some of the literature on political clientelism in Latin America focusing on the enforcement aspect tends to depict clients as "captive," involved in relationships of force (e.g., Fox 1994; Schefner 2001; Magaloni et al. 2007; Díaz-Cayeros et al. 2009; Szwarcberg 2011), likewise in agrarian settings in the Mediterranean world (Scott 1977). The discourse is permeated with terms like *force*, *coercion*, *pressure*, *threat*, and *fear* (see also discussion in Alvarez-Rivadulla 2012). Tosoni (2007, 51) emphasizes that legitimacy is what distinguishes clientelist domination from the domination enforced by physical threats and violence. When the participants in an exchange consider it legitimate, there is no need for force and threats. Her study is

qualitative and based on long-term involvement with the informants; this is also the case with the present study, which renders the same result concerning legitimacy.

The problems of conflating vote buying and political clientelism become obvious in texts like Schedler's (2004, 83), which argues that political clientelism is losing legitimacy even in destitute rural areas, while it makes no distinction between vote buying and political clientelism. The material Schedler uses consists of 15 interviews, but the questions asked, which are not cited, probably reflected this lack of distinction between what is ruled by the laws of reciprocation (political clientelism) and by the economic rationality of the market (vote buying). What was illegitimate might have been vote buying, not clientelism. But as Hilgers notes (2011, 578), a study of vote buying cannot test a hypothesis of clientelism; thus, the conflation in Schedler's study leads to an obvious risk of underrepresenting political clientelism, which is probably also present in many studies.

Hilgers and Combes adopt opposite approaches to the problem of conflation. Combes (2011, 29) suggests that we substitute the term *clientelism* with *intercambio en política* (exchange in politics), which indicates that she does not find it necessary to differentiate between the two practices. Hilgers, on the other hand, militates for differentiating the two (2011, 567), as does Magaloni (2014, 254). The present study shows that it is important to distinguish one practice from the other, partly because the clients do so, partly because the practices actually differ in most ways (see table 1).

In Mexico, the PRI ruled for 71 years, on the basis of a combination of authoritarian rule, genuine political support, political clientelism, and electoral fraud. After a probable electoral loss in 1988, when the PRI continued in power with the help of what has gone down in history as a gigantic electoral fraud, the party funded a massive welfare program, PRONASOL; this combined personal transfers, suitable for creating clientelist relationships, with allocation of public goods.[7] This program has inspired some fine studies of clientelism (see, e.g., Braig 1997). Political reforms were also carried out, and even if these were more about regulating local communities than providing them with representation, resources, and power (Eckstein 1998), fraud became less accessible for the PRI, and a tendency to shift from fraud to political clientelism ensued.

Some authors (Magaloni et al. 2007, 203; Combes 2011, 28) have argued that economic development and political competition probably will put an end to political clientelism. This developmental approach does not seem to hold the answer, although poverty and inequality appear to be decisive elements. Political competition, however, does not undermine political clientelism; Scott (1969, 1143) saw it instead as a prerequisite for machine politics, and Tosoni (2007, 49) and Schedler (2004, 61) report cases in which political clientelism has flourished with the advent of competitive elections, both in Mexico and elsewhere. Hilgers (2012, 12) cautions that clientelism is more than a remainder of authoritarian regimes.

Political clientelism, then, appears to be adaptable to a large variety of contexts. Even if some scholars find that clientelism undermines solidarity among peers (Foweraker 1990, 16; Schefner 2001, 596; Montambeault 2011, 95), others, for example

Auyero et al. (2009, 1), contemplate the possibility that it might lie at the root of collective action, and Lazar (2004, 228) sees it as a part of citizenship practice. Fox (2012, 208) concludes that the question is not "whether clientelism persists, but rather to what degree it interferes with citizens' exercise of their democratic rights," which is also the fundamental preoccupation for Magaloni (2014, 259). Gay (2006, 212) further submits that clientelism forms part of the clients' practical logic, and reports cases that he takes to represent the democratization of clientelism.

Díaz-Cayeros et al. (2009) convey the impression that political clientelism requires access to public funds. Certainly such practices exist, but as this study will show, political clientelism is perfectly possible without controling public funds. My own explorations of clientelist practices in Mexico have been directed toward the social practices that are woven around any kind of beneficial program, regardless of which party is in power. These practices bridge the bureaucratic gap between the potential beneficiaries and the resources (see Auyero 2000, 60). This point is well taken in the UNDP report, which recommends that publicly accessible information on the programs would be an important improvement (PNUD 2007, 37–38).

Magaloni (2014) and Stokes et al. (2013) share the underlying assumption of a political machine in control of public funds as the instigator of clientelism. Stokes et al. present a model (2013, 7) in which programmatic and nonprogrammatic politics are the basic sorting criteria before their truth table sorts survey data concerning nonprogrammatic benefits into categories like clientelism, patronage, vote buying, and the like. The model, however, fails when confronted with material like that in this study, which concerns programmatic politics in the Federal District, where welfare programs are used by brokers and candidates to operate clientelist problem-solving networks. This material would not even enter into the sorting mechanism, which is therefore bound to underrepresent political clientelism. If programmatic politics with objective criteria should put an end to clientelism, additional requirements would be, at least, successful information, professional bureaucrats, and zero patronage.

Conceptual Clarification

I here address the concepts of political clientelism, and vote buying as a monetary practice and a nonmonetary practice. I do this because below, in addition to the main case of a clientelist network, I also present a case of nonmonetary vote buying. The latter resembles in most ways, but not all, the monetary practice of vote buying (see table 1).

The three practices entail exchange of votes for material benefits, but I agree with Hilgers (2011, 572) that an indiscriminate use of the term *clientelism* for both vote buying and clientelism tends to void the concept of descriptive power. The practices differ regarding how they are carried out and their degree of legitimacy; they may even differ as to how effective they are, but I have no material to illuminate this particular aspect. Table 1 gives an overview of the similarities and differences between the practices. Nonmonetary vote buying features some elements that are

ambiguous, but the practice still lacks the most important defining traits of clientelism: operating in networks, long duration, creating personal relationships, and affectivity. The only element that is identical to the three practices is asymmetry.

The practice of political clientelism described in this study was carried out in a problem-solving network of neighbors over a period of one year and four months, though repeated from one election to the next. The broker was from the same community, living among the clients; their activities were collective and open, and comprised parties and social enjoyment where the candidate might also participate, even if he did not live in the village or share its communitarian life-world.

Vote buying, on the other hand, especially if it was a strict monetary transaction, went on secretly, illegally, individually, in a one-time, momentary transaction a few weeks or days before the elections. It did not build any personal relationships between the parties involved or webs of obligations among them. When material goods other than money were involved, like construction material, this could not be hidden, but people would maintain that they still voted as they liked.

Here I want to make reference to Auyero's expression "the double life of clientelism" (2002). Clientelism is not only about the instrumental (economic and political) resources, but also the expressive ones (promises of loyalty and solidarity) (Auyero 2014, 116–18). Vote buying concerns the instrumental exchange but lacks the affective, expressive aspects present in clientelism. The case of vote buying described in this study indicates that the practice worked; but as the discourse revealed, it was considered illegitimate. People did not experience the affectivity that produces legitimacy. Their reciprocation may have rested on an actual sensation of obligation to repay, or also on a suspicion of monitoring. Even if this monitoring would be very difficult without a network to support it, people might still believe that it took place (see Kapferer 2004, 40; Fox 2012, 195).

Political clientelism in this study operates within the morality of a communitarian life-world. The term *clientelism*, however, is not a word in common use; instead, clients speak of "helping each other" and brokers about "social work," incorporating the practice into the universe of communitarian social networks undergirded by norms of reciprocity also noted by Hilgers (2012, 11). Auyero's study (2002) was conducted in a different social context; his terms *negación colectiva* (collective denial) and collective self-deception (2002, 46) refer to the ways people highlighted the affectivity of the relationship while playing down the asymmetry. In this study, rather than speaking of collective denial, I would point out that the practice of clientelism "goes without saying"; it is subsumed in the multitude of communitarian networks and is part of people's habitual practical logic (Bourdieu 1998, 103) or life-world (Luckmann 1990, 9–13).

I therefore submit, along with Hilgers (2011, 572–73, 578) and Magaloni (2014, 254), that political clientelism and vote buying should be seen as two separate analytical concepts. I also add the distinction suggested by Nichter (2008) between vote buying and turnout buying. Although the secret ballot has made monitoring of people's choice of party very difficult, there may still be reason to buy turnout, targeting only supporters to make them actually assist at the polling station (Nichter 2008, 19).

Methodology

My research in Acopilco has aimed to explore practices and notions of democracy and participation in the community. I carried out ethnographic fieldwork amounting to 15 months during the period 2003–12. Participant observation, which entails "the extended involvement of the researcher in the social life of those he or she studies" (Bryman 2004, 291), constituted the backbone of my methodological approach. This implies emphasizing "speaking and listening" as an embodied and coeval practice (Conquergood 1991, 183), always accompanied by informal conversations and interviews.

The repeated stays made it possible to piece together otherwise fragmented information from various visits and to gain insight into some of the unspoken, implicit, taken-for-granted knowledge, which is not accessible through "the superficiality of surveys" (Auyero 2011, 107). I thus endeavored to access the experiences of the subjects under study—and the meanings they imputed to those experiences—inspired by the life-world phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1962). Participant observation, furthermore, makes it possible to study not only the actors but also the relationships between them (Auyero 2011, 109). The aim is to construct knowledge that draws on the experience of many subjects (intersubjectivity), avoiding the "objective … discourse … of science" (Jackson 1996, 9).

This would constitute what we could term political ethnography, producing knowledge from the "inside out," in combination with other methods (Bayard de Volo and Schatz 2004, 268, 270). An outstanding example of the combination of extensive ethnographic research followed by surveys built on the insights from such ethnographies is Krishna's 2007 study of change in the type of persons who operate as clientelist brokers in 69 North Indian villages. My study is by far more modest; I did, however, examine several archives, collect electoral data, carry out 20 qualitative interviews before the 2006 elections and a small sounding about turnout immediately after, and conduct 15 qualitative interviews around the 2012 elections.

Political Clientelism in Recent Electoral Processes

On Election Day 2006, July 2, I visited a series of polling stations in Acopilco. Outside one of them I struck up a conversation with Juan, an informant who was ticking off people on a list. He told me that he had mobilized 130 votes, so he wanted to see if they actually turned up to vote. While we were talking, an elderly woman came out of the polling station; she spoke with him, he ticked her off and asked how she had voted, and she told him, "*Todo amarillo*!" (All yellow), yellow being the color of the PRD. He did not seem in the least embarrassed to be "caught red-handed" monitoring people's votes. He volunteered that nobody had offered him a job in return for his electoral work, implying that this would have been normal. There was no need, he said, since he did this "out of passion." He told me that he helped people with paperwork and dealings with the authorities, and instead of

asking for money, he asked them to vote for the PRD. I also observed people from other parties ticking off names on their lists; this kind of mobilization apparently is seen as legitimate, and does not require concealment or pretense.

Problem-solving Networks

During a field visit in Acopilco in February and March 2011, I had the opportunity to observe how this vote mobilizing may be initiated. Juan had put a handmade poster on his door, inviting his neighbors to meet in the *Comité de la Esperanza* (Committee of Hope). Some 25 persons turned up, and in his welcome speech he reminded them of what they had achieved in earlier years, suggesting that they invite Adrián (the upcoming PRD candidate for delegation chief) to the next meeting to get a complete picture of the existing welfare programs and enlisting his help to obtain the benefits they might need. This apparently was the first in a series of meetings, which would lead to his neighbors' getting microcredits, food assistance, cheaper milk, housing credits, health insurance, unemployment insurance, and so on, well in advance of the next elections for delegation chief in July 2012. The welfare programs were mostly managed by different offices at the delegation headquarters, but Juan pointed out that people would meet with difficulties in the offices if they approached them on their own. So he volunteered to mediate, finding out what documents were needed, receiving them, and passing them on to the PRD candidate, Adrián. "Adrián will support us, and we will support him," Juan explained.

Furthermore, he outlined plans for parties on upcoming important dates; for instance, Mother's Day in May, when they would ask the candidate to help out with some tacos. He also suggested other possibilities for financing parties. In this way they would revive and expand previous problem-solving and social networks in which enjoyment was part of the social glue (see, e.g., De Vries 2002, 912). Adrián, the candidate, would help them obtain their benefits and have a good time together, and in return they would support him in the 2012 elections.

Three weeks after this meeting I talked with one of the people who had been there and learned that the candidate had indeed arrived, informed them of the possibilities, and told them what documents they needed for each benefit. Later, Juan received the documentation and passed it on to the candidate, who would be interested in speeding up the handling process and securing a positive outcome.

Díaz-Cayeros et al. (2009, 230) argue that the federal welfare programs under the PAN up to the 2006 elections could not be used to create clientelist relationships because the program documents required that benefits be distributed according to objective poverty criteria. In my example, all criteria might very well have been objective, yet people experienced the need to rely on help from politicians to obtain the benefits.

Given that prospective beneficiaries often have difficulties finding out which programs do exist, where to apply for the benefits, whom to approach, what documents are needed, and furthermore, being taken seriously when they present their claims, it stands to reason that support in this process is welcome. The "interface

between state and citizens" (Fox 2012, 190) here leaves an open space, ready to be filled with clientelistic practices.

Votes in Exchange for Jobs

The difficulties involved in obtaining these benefits are accentuated by the lack of professional preparation of the many public servants who have acquired their jobs more through connections than merit. The community's commissioner, who had organized parties for the *comuneros* with the candidate from the PRD in 2006, giving him a chance to win votes, explained that now the community would demand more in return; he was referring to jobs in the delegation. When I was back in the village in November 2006, several of the PRD members and organizers there were employed in the delegation, presumably for their contributions to mobilizing votes, an exchange that Hilgers (2008, 127; 2011, 575) terms "patronage."

It is one thing that people in prestigious positions with the chance to mobilize many votes are rewarded with high-ranking jobs—such as advisers—in the delegation. These positions would be filled with persons of political merit in any case. Another matter altogether is that to a considerable degree, all sorts of jobs in the delegation seem to be filled with personnel recruited for reasons other than merit. An outline of the structure of employment in the delegation illustrates this.

Of a total of 3,100 employees in 2008, 415 held political positions (personal assistants included), all of them appointed on political merit.[8] The permanent staff amounted to 2,160 persons with a salary of, at a maximum, half of the lowest paid political position, or equivalent to the lower-paid assistants of the political appointees. The permanent staff is unionized, which means that, political connections apart, people who are offered these positions must be accepted by the union leaders; in many cases they are blood or fictitious relations or friends of union leaders or their supporters. Furthermore, there is a layer at the bottom of this pyramid: 520 persons on this particular roster, the *eventuales* (temporary workers) or *peones* (laborers), who earn the lowest wages. These jobs may be handed out by high-ranking members of the politically recruited hierarchy or by the union leaders. In addition, a number of jobs in the delegation are hereditary, apparently a common practice in Mexican public service.[9]

As suggested by Medina and Stokes (2007, 83), the question is not "whether, but how often public sector jobs are given as rewards for party loyalty" rather than merit. The processes described here are not unique to Acopilco. For example, Roniger, building on studies from a series of European and Latin American countries, argues that "clientelism … leads to overemployment and underqualified personnel in public administration" (2004, 354).

Bridging the State-Citizen Gap

We could therefore argue that the principal qualifications of many public servants in charge of the welfare programs are capacity to mobilize voters, to show party loyalty, and to form family, *compadrazgo* (fictive kinship), or union connections.[10] This form of patronage enlarges the gap between citizens and the state, a gap that is partly bridged by the problem-solving networks that brokers organize. The broker calls in a candidate with the desired knowledge and connections; the clients acquire the relevant information from their next-door neighbors, hand in their papers to this broker, and often get a positive result. All that is required is that they reciprocate with their votes on Election Day.

Client-initiated Networks

Let me add that the forms of clientelist relationships that I have described here only represent some of those in operation. Furthermore, many are not necessarily initiated by a patron or a broker. Tosoni (2007, 55–57) offers a case in point, from the neighboring State of Mexico, the municipality of Nezahualcóyotl. She relates the story of irregular settlers who organized as clients in order to obtain municipal services and legalization of their plots. They gave political support to a specific candidate, mobilized for his rallies, participated as audiences, and finally voted for him, but failed to receive the expected reciprocation. Tosoni points out that people often seek the client position as a means to put pressure on politicians, to create an obligation to reciprocate their support. She demonstrates the deep-rooted belief in the rules of reciprocation and the way many clients voluntarily enter into or initiate these relationships.

The story told by Gay (1999), on the other hand, shows how a particularly resourceful president of a neighborhood association in one of Rio's favelas managed to obtain substantial public works over the years by negotiating with different parties and choosing the highest bidder, for whom he subsequently asked the neighbors to vote. This certainly could be termed perverse accountability (Stokes 2005), making voters responsible to their representatives, but it seems a more cunning approach than hoping to hold the politician accountable after voting for him or her in the election.

Another example of client-initiated relationships concerns groups of dwellers in "irregular" settlements around Montevideo. They distributed political parties among themselves and successfully managed to "reach the state," obtaining different services through these connections (Alvarez-Rivadulla 2012, 14–20). Thus, as Medina and Stokes (2007, 69) remark, clients are often better off under a patron, although clientelism as such is not necessarily a system to their advantage. However, based on his long-term research in the Rio favelas, Gay submits that "attempts to do away with clientelism may prove not only unsuccessful but also ill-advised" (1999, 65). He suggests that clientelism should be seen as one of the ways to introduce an element of accountability into the shifting relationship between the least privileged

Table 2. Votes in Acopilco, 2006, 2009, 2012

	President			Delegation Chief		
	PAN	PRI	PRD	PAN	PRI	PRD
2006	2,261 (24%)	**1,078** (12%)	**5,351** (57%)	1,806 (19%)	**2,172** (23%)	**4,015** (43%)
2009	— —	— —	— —	2,575 (33%)	1,206 (16%)	3,295 (42%)
2012	1,591 (14%)	**4,216** (37%)	**4,945** (44%)	1,628 (15%)	**5,159** (46%)	**4,034** (36%)

Source: Author's elaboration, based on IEDF 2012a, b; IFE 2012.

in Brazil and the state (1999, 65), and proposes the term *democratization of clientelism* (2006, 212).

Political Clientelism in Acopilco, 2012

Ten days before the 2012 elections I returned to do fieldwork in Acopilco and found election posters hanging densely from the electric poles. I noticed the well-known face of Adrián on one of them; but wait, the name of the party on the poster was not PRD but PRI-Verde! Why was he a PRI candidate, when he used to be a PRD candidate? I localized Juan, the intermediary, and got an interview with him; also another man, who represented the local PRI cell, was present (Juan and Carlos 2012).

Juan explained that he had worked with Adrián over several years within the PRD structure, but some months before the elections, the PRD leaders downtown had appointed another candidate for delegation chief. Adrián would still be a candidate, but now for the Partido Verde, in coalition with the PRI, in return for supporting the PRI candidates for president, government chief, and local deputy. Juan further explained that the people Adrián had helped had the understanding that they were to vote for him, so from March on the intermediaries were explaining that this now meant that they were to vote for the PRI, not the PRD.

Juan, of course, was in direct communication with the clients, and his impression was that the majority would vote for Adrián. There was, however, the dilemma between party loyalty (for some), principles, and invested clientelist work, which might yield fruit in the form of jobs, assuming that they followed Juan and Adrián won. The electoral statistics in table 2 give some indication of what eventually happened, but meanwhile Juan rejoiced that Adrián was on top in the polls. This was very important, since "*la gente se va con el que está arriba*" (people go with the one who is on top).[11]

On Election Day, July 1, in the morning, I observed people queuing up to vote. About 2:30 P.M. I entered Juan's patio; Juan had invited me for carnitas (chopped pork meat, coriander, onion, lemon, and chili-sauce, rolled into a tortilla to make

up a taco, with soda), the most accessible form of ritual food in Acopilco. One large table on the patio and two large ones indoors accommodated the visitors, many of them in family groups, leaving after they finished their tacos.

Afterward Juan told me that 664 adults from different parts of Acopilco came to have a taco on his patio; this was a considerably greater number than those who participated in his problem-solving network. He pointed out that two PRI militants and himself, all of them drawing on contributions from their local people, covered the costs, about 24,000 pesos. He explained that earlier he and his group had divided the list of people in his area among them, making house-to-house visits (canvassing), asking people for whom they planned to vote. He thought this had contributed to reminding the members of the network actually to turn up and vote, so that they could show the voter ink on their fingers when they joined the carnitas party. This constitutes an example of turnout buying as discussed in Nichter (2008, 19). Juan also pointed out the affective aspect of the relationship, speaking about *el afecto, el carisma que uno tiene con ellos* (being affectionate and charismatic with them).

When the electoral results were ready, Juan reported that Adrián had won the delegation for the PRI, as the party's only delegation chief in the Federal District. The PRD, however, won the office of government chief, as well as that of local deputy.

Electoral Results

Table 2 presents the number of voters in Acopilco who probably followed Adrián from the PRD to the PRI in 2012; they voted PRI for delegation chief but not for president (943), or PRD for president but not for delegation chief (911).

The delegation chief, however, is elected by the citizens of the entire delegation, not only Acopilco. At delegation level, a total of 91,500 votes were cast (IEDF 2012b), compared to 11,143 in Acopilco (IEDF 2012a). In the delegation, Adrián's advantage over the PRD candidate was 1,145 votes, out of which 1,125 were cast in Acopilco. Even if the "Peña Nieto effect" may have garnered good electoral results in Acopilco, Adrián won 943 votes more than Peña Nieto did in this locality. By the end of the year, the broker, Juan, was employed in the delegation under the new delegation chief. Why did the PRI-Verde coalition accept Adrián as its candidate? As the PRI militant told me, "The PRI wants to recover the delegation, so we need Adrián, because he comes with a certain *estructura* [structure, organization] from the PRD" (Juan and Carlos 2012). And he was right.

Vote Buying in Acopilco

The electoral results from Acopilco 2012 indicate that people felt reciprocation to be an appropriate response to their clientelist involvement. I do, however, have similar indications concerning practices of the nonmonetary form of vote buying in the electoral results from 2006, on this occasion carried out by an original PRI candidate. He did not succeed in winning the position of delegation chief, but seems to have successfully bought more than one thousand votes.

During my daily walks in the village before the 2006 elections, I discovered heaps of construction materials—gravel and sometimes cement—lying on the sidewalk outside many houses. I inquired of a neighbor about this, and he told me that these were gifts from the PRI candidate. On demand he gave away gravel and other construction materials; that is, one had to go to his office and apply for them, filling in a form with one's name and address. My neighbor, however, assured me that they could vote as they pleased: "Nobody will ever know," he said, referring to the secret ballot. The popular saying went, "Take all the benefits you can get, and then vote as you like." This phrase was often used to play down the possible or actual vote selling, which was spoken of in very pejorative terms by everyone in the village; nobody ever admitted to doing it. Instead, they talked about "the others" who were reported to engage in this practice. The concealment indicates a lack of legitimacy, which is not the same as saying that votes were not sold.

This candidate obtained 2,172 votes, which is 1,558 more than the 614 votes his predecessor got in 2003. Furthermore, if we compare the votes obtained by the PRI in Acopilco in the election for delegation chief in 2006 (2,172) to the number of votes for its presidential candidate the same year (1,078), we find 1,094 more votes for delegation chief (see table 2). I cannot ascertain whether the distribution of construction materials actually bought over 1,000 votes for the PRI alliance, but the results are compatible with an allegation of this type.

Of course, there were different candidates for the PRI in 2003 and 2006, so this might be an issue of candidate popularity, although it seems likely that this candidate's popularity rested on his generous gifts. Successful vote buying, however, did not imply winning the election. The 2,172 votes that he obtained represented only 23 percent of the votes, as opposed to the 43 percent of the winning PRD.

It appears, then, that many people in the village feel obliged to reciprocate with their vote for a gift, at least when it is substantial, even when it is a one-time transaction that is not carried out within the warmth of a problem-solving network. However, they will not admit to it, and if there is no remedy (after all, the construction materials were dumped at their doorsteps), they could always take recourse to the argument of the secrecy of the vote. Still, not everybody was totally convinced about this secrecy; for instance, one woman told me, "I don't know how, but I think they can find out."[12] For some, it might be the fear of monitoring, for others the sense of obligation, but my figures seem to indicate that many actually did reciprocate.

Vote buying is talked about a lot, normally to explain why a competing candidate has won; as one PRD militant told me after Adrián/PRI won the election in 2012: "He paid 1,000 pesos per vote and gave away a lot of water tanks just days before the elections. How cheaply the dignity of people is sold!"[13] There was plenty of evidence that Adrián was involved in clientelist practices, but she did not mention this; instead she invoked the standard accusation of vote buying.

Following Bourdieu (1998), it is particularly the introduction of money into the exchange that is seen as illegitimate. The monetary transactions with votes, somewhat similar to those with sex, are considered shameful, since they blur the boundaries between two distinct moral universes, the market and that which oper-

ates by the rules of reciprocal affectivity. Participant observation provides insights into the mysteries of clientelism difficult to obtain by other methods, while it also presents us with the messiness of everyday life. I suggest, however, that the slight ambiguity of nonmonetary vote buying is not enough to demonstrate that the practices of vote buying and political clientelism are the same. Vote buying in any form still lacks the four defining elements that produce legitimacy: networks, long duration, personal relationships, and affectivity (see table 1). My contention is that research on political clientelism and vote buying is best served by keeping the two concepts separate.

Concluding Remarks

My ethnographies demonstrate the need to differentiate between political clientelism and vote buying. The practices are carried out in different ways (see table 1); one is seen as legitimate, the other not; and one is spoken of massively in pejorative terms, the other not; in fact, it has no specific term. When some operators, militants, and clients of the PRD explained the electoral results to me, nobody complained about clientelist networks; they criticized Adrián not for clientelism but for "buying votes." In Acopilco, to do clientelist work was instead called "help," "social work," or "support," and nothing to be accused of. But if somebody wanted to discredit an opponent, they would accuse him of vote buying.

Conflating the two concepts presents some problems. One is in the researcher's own studies; for instance, Schedler 2004: his failure to distinguish between the two practices may have produced answers concerning vote buying while he took them to concern clientelism, a serious flaw (see Hilgers 2011, 578). Two, in this way the study is likely to underrepresent the magnitude of political clientelism. Three, such conflation may lead to researchers' referring to studies on vote buying, like the UNDP (2007), as studies on political clientelism. This kind of conflation, or conceptual stretching (Hilgers 2011), constitutes a serious methodological flaw and an obstacle to understanding the phenomenon.

The importance of accounting for the perspective we as researchers adopt in the study of political clientelism should be underscored. It is common in many studies to implicitly adopt the "godlike perspective of science," presenting the findings as objectively "true." When we study a process that includes three different actor positions—the client, the broker, and the patron—it should be obvious that it makes a difference where we speak from. And I stress this not because of any commitment to "give a voice to the voiceless" but simply because it is methodologically congruent. To be conscious about one's perspective offers the researcher better insight into the phenomenon under study.

A similar problem concerns an implicit assumption that the clients act exclusively according to economic rationality. Obviously, the clients enter the bargain out of self-interest, but the workings of reciprocation in personal relationships allow for much more than just money. The affective aspect of a relationship plays a decisive role in legitimating the exchange.

The issues of force and coercion, according to many studies, form integral parts of political clientelism. However, in my study, the clients take these transactions to be legitimate, so there is no need to exercise force and threats. Therefore, I support a definition of political clientelism that does not necessarily include force and threat, although these elements may apply in other settings.

The failure of the state to reach out to the citizens (see also Auyero 2000, 69; PNUD 2007, 37–38) provides a space where political clientelism thrives. My study contributes an important insight into the ways this mechanism bridges the gap between the citizens and the state. Brokers of clientelist networks may operate without public funds, as in Acopilco, whereas the network provides access to a share of public funds for clients, to which they might be entitled. This mechanism has caused some scholars to speak about the "democratization of clientelism."

There is also a tendency to assume that clientelist practices require control of public spending and are carried out only by parties in power. This would tend to conflate clientelism and machine politics, representing yet another form of conceptual stretching and a risk of underrepresenting political clientelism.

Another important element to underscore is the choice of methodology in studies of political clientelism. Most of my findings rely heavily on the use of ethnographic approaches, principally participant observation, though always in combination with other methods. Let me spell out some obvious benefits of this methodology: detecting networks of political clientelism, unraveling how they function and how participants perceive them, and tracing questions of moral universes, forms of rationality, and the meanings of the various practices. The "taken-for-grantedness" of that which "goes without saying" can hardly be discovered by any other method.

It is therefore surprising that political science literature on political clientelism features so few references to ethnographically oriented studies. Ethnographies can improve our understanding of what should count as political clientelism, how it works, and its similarities and differences relative to other mechanisms, all of which would be useful for those who make models and measure the prevalence of the practice. A few quotes from scattered interviews cannot be expected to do this job.

Notes

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1. A delegation is the lower state level in the Federal District, similar to a municipality in the rest of Mexico. Electoral statistics from various years will substantiate the claim that Adrián brought at least 1,000 extra votes with him from the PRD to the PRI in 2012, out of about 11,000 votes submitted in Acopilco.

2. Ex-commissioner and PRD militant, one PRI militant, and several villagers over the years, personal communications. In the 2000 elections something similar occurred, though the former PRD candidate migrated to the PAN on that occasion.

3. The term *native* (*nativo*) or *original* (*originario*) is what they use about themselves.

4. A minimum salary in 2000 equaled 38 pesos per day (US$3.80), while the figure for 2013 was 63 pesos (US$4.90) (CONSAM). In comparison, the international standard for extreme poverty equaled US$1.25 a day in 2010 (World Bank 2010).

5. In 1992 the agrarian community of Acopilco finally received the Presidential Resolution, which documents its legal claim to the territory, the *bienes comunales*, as laid out in the 1917 Constitution.

6. Ex-commissioner, personal communication.

7. PRONASOL was the precursor to PROGRESA, which in 2002 again was changed to OPORTUNIDADES.

8. The total 3,100 is according to the roster of employees in the delegation, February 2008.

9. Personal communication by a night watchman in the delegation. He inherited his job from his father and expects one of his sons to follow him.

10. Personal secretary in the delegation, personal communication, February 20, 2008.

11. Lazar (2004, 231) made a similar observation in Bolivia.

12. Nonnative woman (44), personal communication, July 18, 2012.

13. Female PRD militant, personal communication, July 4, 2012.

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