

PATRONS AND CLIENTS IN THE BUREAUCRACY: CAREER NETWORKS IN MEXICO*

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As you know, we have an institution called the *sexenio* when everything changes.¹ And we're here now for six years. You know how we all come in and get thrown out at the *sexenio*.

If someone has a chief who is capable and has the prospects for a good future, then that person will probably think, "Perhaps I can go with him at the *sexenio*"; and it happens in reverse, too, if someone has a chief who is not particularly capable but who has influential friends, some will want to follow him. There are a lot of changes and it affects our program, especially when people stop working to pursue their futures.

Political time in Mexico is measured by the six year incumbencies of successive presidents. The bureaucrats who made the statements above were recognizing an inescapable fact of political life in that country: Each change of administration is marked by a massive turnover of personnel within the government at the national and state levels, echoed at the municipal level every three years. The turnover is complete among occupants of elective positions who, like the president, cannot succeed themselves. Party officials also abandon their previous responsibilities, some to be appointed to bureaucratic positions and others to assume elected posts, while many take up other functions in the party. Middle- and high-level bureaucrats in turn are initiated into new appointive or elective offices. Cabinet members and heads of government agencies, commissions, trusts, and industries are selected by the incumbent presi-

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dent: they are permitted a free hand in choosing their own subordinate nonunionized employees, subject only to certain political suggestions of the president and the party.

Not surprisingly, therefore, public careers in Mexico are shaped by the *sexenio*, the six year term of administration.² Bureaucratic positions that become available at middle and high levels depend upon personal appointments, usually made by top administrators in each ministry or agency. Similarly, elective positions are carefully doled out by appointment as official candidates in the dominant party, the PRI. As a result, individual careers become dependent upon the cultivation and maintenance of personal and political alliances that are mobilized to acquire jobs. Fundamentally oriented toward the goal of career advancement, these alliances are based upon informal norms of reciprocity and loyalty and are conceptually similar to a specific type of interpersonal exchange alliance which has been termed a patron-client relationship.

This study will describe patterns and consequences of career management in Mexico and demonstrate their relevance to theoretical discussions of patron-clientelism. In the following section, data from a bureaucratic case study are presented to illustrate how public careers are initiated and maintained in Mexico as well as how a personal relationship between superior and subordinate can be manipulated to achieve effective performance as defined by the bureaucratic leadership, to mobilize political support for an organization and to promote the political ambitions of its top managers. In the concluding section, the literature dealing with the patron-client concept is reviewed and suggestions are offered about the contribution of the case study to the theoretical understanding of patron-clientelism. In the Mexican case, the formation of exchange alliances and networks is shown to be a rational response to structural conditions and to be based upon clearly perceived principles of career management appropriate to the political environment.

The data to be reported are based on open-ended interviews conducted in Mexico in 1974 and 1975. The respondents were middle- and high-level bureaucrats in CONASUPO, a federal agency responsible for administering the government's agricultural price support program and for regulating the staple goods market at both the wholesale and retail levels.³ Under the Echeverría administration (1970–76), CONASUPO was a rapidly expanding organization which was implicated in attempts to solve some of the country's most difficult social and economic problems. It was also a politically important agency which distributed benefits to large sectors of the low-income population. As a consequence of these functions, CONASUPO attracted a corps of highly qualified and politically mobile individuals (see Grindle 1977).

When the administration of Lu s Echeverr a took over command of the government in December 1970, a new director was appointed to head CONASUPO. In the following few months, he selected twenty high-level subordinates. These recently installed division directors, subsidiary company heads, and department managers then personally appointed their immediate subordinates, office chiefs who generally had discretion to assemble their own corps of underlings. That they used this discretion liberally is attested by the fact that of seventy-eight middle- and high-level bureaucrats interviewed, only twelve worked in CONASUPO immediately prior to December 1970 and none of these occupied the same position before and after the inauguration of the new administration.⁴ As is evident in the following section, significant patterns of career dependency existed among these officials that were based on widely shared understandings of how career mobility can be achieved most effectively within the political system.

BUILDING CAREERS AND MANAGING ORGANIZATIONS IN MEXICO

The Mexican system offers great opportunities for individual advancement, mobility. Anyone can advance himself through this system. I began by selling newspapers in the streets and worked my way up to be a manager in three government companies. Then I lost out and was reduced to being a mere department chief. . . . then a submanager and now I have risen to being a manager again. There is what you might call a great deal of capillary action in Mexico.

What if the general director should get "sick" and have to leave CONASUPO? I have to think of that eventuality and be prepared for it.

The change of administration every six years provides the would-be politician or bureaucrat with an impressive structure of personal risk and opportunity in the government. Every middle- and upper-level bureaucrat knows that chances are very good that he will not continue in his present position after the next national election; politicians are certain of their impending unemployment.⁵ The ambitious and the insecure in both politics and bureaucracy therefore seek to make contacts and friendships with those perceived to be more influential than themselves, for it is on individuals—not policy, ideology, or party loyalty—that their futures depend (see Brandenburg 1964, ch. 6; Camp 1974; Fagen and Tuohy 1972, ch. 2; Greenberg 1970, ch. 7; Hansen 1971, ch. 7). The individual's career may depend not upon "cashing in" on the friendship of a single influential person, but on the ability to call upon a wide range of contacts and alliances, "on having a variety of contingency plans should the sponsors fall from favor" (Fagen and Tuohy 1972, p. 25). The possibility of losing must be accepted also. Because of the uncertainty of future appointments in the government or the party, many middle- and high-level officials in

CONASUPO maintained interests in private businesses that provided them with extra income and a fall-back position should they find themselves out of a job in the public sector. Others expected to be able to assume administrative or teaching positions at the national university in the event of failure to secure official employment. By and large, however, future career aspirations in CONASUPO were clearly directed toward filling ever more important jobs in the bureaucracy each sexenio.

Indeed, in Mexico much of the sexenio turnover in public office occurs through interpositional change, as when a senator takes up a bureaucratic position or when an administrator moves from a federal agency to a regular ministry of state. In this respect, the six year procession often resembles a national game of musical chairs in which the same actors may reappear in different positions; new players are freely admitted, however, and the number of chairs is frequently enlarged to accommodate some of them. Statistical analysis of the career patterns of high-level officials in Mexico led one scholar to conclude: "In general, the possession of one office does very little to determine what the next office will be. . . . From almost any location in the political system, one could reasonably hope to move to almost any other location" (Smith 1974, pp. 18, 23).

To understand the consequences of this turnover for individuals and for organizations such as CONASUPO, it is important to consider the concepts of *confianza* (trust), the *palanca* (lever), the *equipo* (team), and the *camarilla* (clique), which serve as building blocks for upward mobility in the political system. As described in detail below, *confianza* is the trust and loyalty based on personal acquaintance which ideally exists between superiors and subordinates within an organization. Given the importance of personal ties of *confianza* to career advancement in Mexico, of particular significance to the organization and its leadership are patterns by which individuals are recruited into an agency through use of the *palanca*. Using this mechanism of recruitment, a personally loyal corps of subordinates can be created. This is an *equipo*, an informal group of officials that potentially can be mobilized by organization leaders to achieve effective and innovative performance. Finally, bureaucratic chiefs may be integrated into loose coalitions or factions with other members of the political and economic elite. These *camarillas* attempt to shape the outcome of political events in Mexico and not inconsequentially, they affect the status and operation of many public agencies.

Confianza and Sexennial Reorganizations

In contrast to the distribution of public office under the spoils system in the United States, in Mexico the principal criterion for an official position is not one's ability to "get out the vote" (see Hoogenboom 1961). Rather, within this dominant party regime, the promise of personal loyalty is the most impressive qualification an individual can present to a potential employer. As demonstrated by the classification of many bureaucratic positions as "confidence" jobs, the ability to trust one's subordinates is extremely important. Frequent turnover of high- and middle-level personnel means that officials are often placed in charge of organizations and programs they know little about. They may have no professional or experiential background to aid them in administering programs. Unprepared for their responsibilities, they are nevertheless expected to take charge quickly, to plan new activities for the unit under their command, to revise operating procedures, and to implement rapidly the directives of their superiors. These conditions place a premium on the availability of trustworthy subordinates.

Furthermore, knowledge of their short term of office makes all high-level and most middle-level officials in the organization aware that the results they seek must be achieved rapidly. The leadership of CONASUPO during the Echeverría administration, for example, was determined to bring about fundamental changes in the agency's objectives and transform the previously lax and inadequate organization into an effective and efficient one. Middle- and high-level officials were aware that they were being evaluated on the basis of their capacity to carry out adequately, diligently, discretely, and promptly the tasks they had been assigned. The overriding concern expressed by program, department, and office heads in CONASUPO was to get a program going before they moved on to other posts. One administrator, for example, explained, "we want to do away with programs which are subject to the *sexenio*," and another was determined to "set this program in motion before the next *sexenio* so that it will really be carried out."

Other characteristics of the system that make *confianza* important are the inadequacies of the administrative, control, and information systems for overseeing the activities of subordinates. For example, although operating and procedure manuals abound in CONASUPO and its subsidiary companies, officials were not highly knowledgeable of their contents. The manuals themselves frequently outlined extensive and complicated steps for requesting, submitting, or storing information, generally involving multiple copies, signatures, and archival depositories. In reality, most internal affairs of the agency were conducted over the telephone or in personal encounters; the paperwork often followed upon

the transcurrence of business rather than being instrumental to it. Generally, this handling of affairs facilitated and encouraged prompt action on official matters. It also made control tenuous as officials at any one moment might have only a vague idea of what subordinates were doing. This problem was particularly acute in CONASUPO because its personnel was dispersed over the entire country and field offices were responsible for vital aspects of the company's activities.

Officials in CONASUPO were also aware that mistakes made by them or their subordinates could be extremely detrimental to their careers. Frequently dependent upon superiors for future career advancement and employed by an agency that stressed performance and productivity, administrators were sensitive to the risks involved in making the wrong decision at the wrong moment. Moreover, many handled large amounts of money or were responsible for the transferral, storage, or sale of huge quantities of grain, foodstuffs, and other products. Careless or indiscreet management of these could bring scandal or disgrace to both the individual immediately responsible and to his superiors, seriously damaging the career chances of all. Many officials interviewed alluded to predecessors or officials they knew who had been quietly but suddenly removed from their positions for unspecified misconduct and "problems." Mistakes made in the fulfillment of one's responsibilities have serious personal ramifications and are not contemplated lightly.

Finally, for officials at all levels, competition for advancement is often intense. "It's a blood-filled battle, a constant fight of one against the other," commented one official. At the same time, because of the emphasis on performance, decisions must be made and action must be taken, regardless of the risk involved and in spite of an information system that is frequently inadequate for making sound decisions. To one administrator, the two most important rules to follow if one wishes to get ahead are, "Do things fast," and "Don't make mistakes," axioms that underscore the risk and pressure on middle- and high-level bureaucrats.

All of these characteristics make it imperative to surround oneself with subordinates one can trust, in whom one has *confianza*. From the point of view of the individual administrator, this is the most efficient way to ensure that orders are executed, that mistakes are avoided or covered up discreetly if made, and that subordinates fulfill their responsibilities, even when not directly supervised. The fundamental importance of *confianza* was summed up by an official engaged in personnel administration:

The administration of personnel here in Mexico is almost necessarily more subjective than in other countries. There are two reasons for this. First, it's often

necessary, for “public relations” reasons, to hire certain people who come recommended by influential people. Public relations, in terms of political support and image, is very important to CONASUPO. The second reason is that because of the *sexenio* change, because individuals are called to positions they often have no training or experience for, because they must often build programs practically overnight, and because if they make mistakes it can have grave consequences, it’s extremely important for people to have under them those they trust, confidence employees. The word *confianza* is a perfect term for it; it means someone I trust personally.

The most effective way to surround oneself with this type of subordinate is to recruit and hire individuals one knows personally or who come recommended by people one knows and trusts. The *palanca* is therefore a mechanism useful for ensuring that *confianza* exists between superior and subordinate.

The Palanca and Recruitment in Conasupo

How did I come to CONASUPO? Well, you see, I’m from the same state as the director and we’ve been friends since childhood and when he became director he asked me to take charge of this. . . . No, I’m not nervous about the *sexenio*. I have some business that the family is taking care of for me. I don’t know what will happen to the director in the future, whether he will go on to other government business or will leave. If he stays in government, I’ll probably follow him.

I’m here because one belongs to certain political groups, you know, and when “X” asked me to come here, even though it was for much less money than I was making and even though it meant working in an office which I don’t like to do—when one is asked, one more or less has to do it for political reasons. I have known “X” for years.

Don Roberto and I are *compadres*. We have been friends ever since preparatory school days—we really got to know each other at the university. We worked together in the PRI and then Don Roberto asked me to collaborate with him here.

How did I get here? Through an ad in the newspapers, just like everyone else!

All but eight of the seventy-eight individuals interviewed in CONASUPO mobilized personal ties to get jobs in the agency, including all of those who formed part of the highly qualified technical corps of the agency. A position was frequently acquired through the use of a personal introduction, often referred to as a *palanca* or lever. In CONASUPO, the source of the *palanca* used to obtain a job was most frequently other officials in the agency, generally mobilized on the basis of ties formed during university days or in previous governmental positions. Officials in CONASUPO served as *palancas* for over half the individuals interviewed. Elected officials recommended about 15 per-

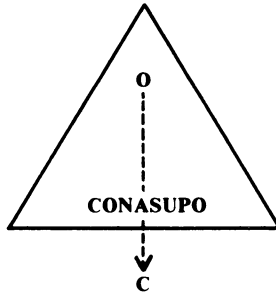
cent of the interviewees, while party officials were palancas for another 8 percent, and 12 percent were recommended by officials of other government agencies. These palancas tended to be based on long acquaintance with the job seekers or with their families or on kinship ties. When a recommendation came from the agency director, any of his immediate subordinates, or any of the subsidiary company managers, hiring by the personnel department was automatic; in other cases, the political or bureaucratic status of the recommender was evaluated carefully. If a recommendation came from someone outside the agency and if this individual were of importance, the recommendation was sent to the director for decision. He was therefore in a position to do a personal favor for the recommender, a favor that could be exchanged for support of the agency or himself at a later time.

Three significant recruitment patterns using different kinds of palanca were observed in CONASUPO: recruitment through direct ties to individuals in the agency; recruitment mediated by another individual in the agency; and externally mediated recruitment. In the first two cases, the loyalty and performance that are offered in return for a job serve to strengthen the organization internally and to reinforce hierarchical command structures. In the third case, organization leaders have the opportunity to mobilize external support for the agency; at the same time, however, loyalties and obligations are dispersed to actors outside the organization.

The simplest type of recruitment to CONASUPO occurred when an official in the agency directly appointed his own underlings. This was the case, for example, when the agency director appointed many of his immediate subordinates at the beginning of the sexenio. Direct recruitment is initiated either by the chief looking for loyal subordinates or by the person in search of a job. This direct means of obtaining a position is illustrated in figure 1. Interestingly, in CONASUPO, this pattern was most evident in cases in which an individual was appointed to a relatively high level position and was able to bring a number of his subordinates from his previous post to work for him in his new capacity. In this case, the recruitment pattern is similar to figure 2 and the hierarchical ties of loyalty and obligation tend to reinforce the official command structure of the agency.

A second frequently encountered pattern is one that is mediated internally by an official of the agency, acting as a broker. In this case, the official does not directly control the provision of a job but he can introduce the job seeker to some higher-level administrator who does. Two variations of this pattern were observed; one utilizes vertical relationships between superior and subordinate exclusively, while the other pattern

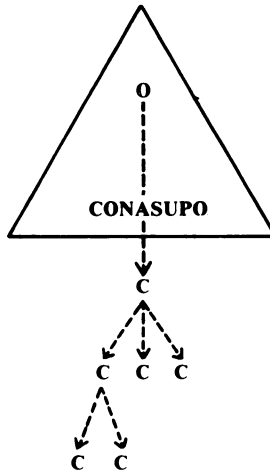
FIGURE 1
DIRECT RECRUITMENT
PATTERN



O = Official
C = Candidate for a job
⋮ = Provision of a job
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*Note: In this and other diagrams to follow, an attempt has been made to indicate the vertical or horizontal status positions of the actors and to suggest the hierarchical position of the officials within the agency's pyramidal structure.

FIGURE 2
DIRECT RECRUITMENT
PATTERN
EXTENDED VERTICALLY



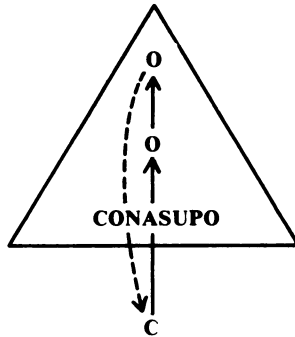
mobilizes a peer or horizontal alliance also. In the first, an actor wishing a job is either approached by or seeks out a previous acquaintance who is his status superior and who is already employed by the agency; the official then approaches his superior to recommend the job hunter. The higher-level official may then provide the job directly to the supplicant. This pattern is diagrammed in figure 3.

In the second variation of internally mediated recruitment, a job seeker may contact an official within the agency who is his status equal—a peer from school, for example—and attempt to arrange an introduction to his superior. The job is provided directly by the superior. In CONASUPO, this kind of recruitment tended to strengthen the formal hierarchical organization and to contribute to overall agency performance and success. Occasionally, however, it meant that loyalty and performance obligations would skip a hierarchical level, the new recruit owing more to his chief's chief than to his direct superior.

A third pattern is more complicated as it involves figures such as party leaders, governors, and state senators. In externally mediated recruitment, high-level officials, especially the agency director, used the provision of a job as a means to gain support for the agency or themselves at a later time; in effect, the director could “cash in” on the obligations incurred through job patronage. Thus, for example, an individual wishing a job would contact an influential person outside the agency with whom he had a special relationship such as long family acquaintance, kinship, or personal loyalty. This person might then communicate with his high-level friends in the agency, or use his political prestige to inquire whether a position existed for the job seeker. The CONASUPO official might provide the job directly, or he might offer it to the political figure who then would dispense it to his supporter, as indicated in figure 5. This form of recruitment may mean that part of an agency may pursue goals not condoned by its leaders or may not conform to current policies because the person responsible for “providing” the job is not a member of the organization.

In terms of the hierarchical position of the respondents, all three channels were used for obtaining a job in CONASUPO. However, direct recruitment would seem to be more frequent among high-level officials. In addition, all of the high-level administrators were recruited with personal introductions. It is important to emphasize that the *palanca* was employed regardless of the training or experience of the person seeking a job. All but one of the fifty-nine CONASUPO officials interviewed who had specialized technical training were recruited on the basis of prior friendship or school ties. The *palanca*, then, can be con-

FIGURE 3
INTERNALLY MEDIATED RECRUITMENT
PATTERN
VERTICAL ALLIANCE ONLY



↑ = Request for a job

FIGURE 4
INTERNALLY MEDIATED RECRUITMENT
PATTERN
HORIZONTAL ALLIANCE

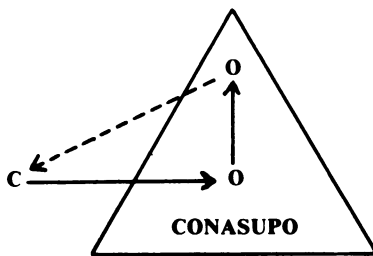
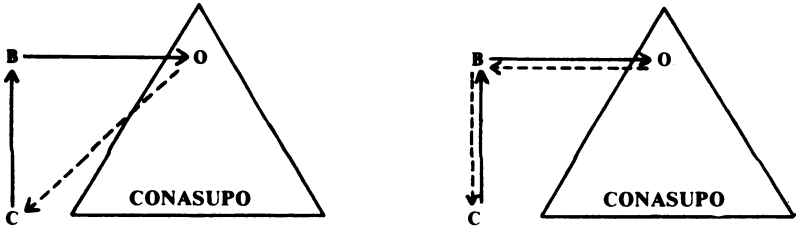


FIGURE 5
EXTERNALLY MEDIATED RECRUITMENT
PATTERN



B = External broker

FIGURE 6
THE PATRON-CLIENT PYRAMID

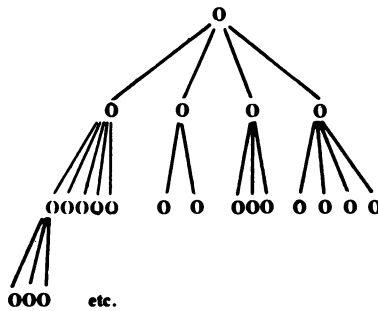


TABLE 1 *Recruitment Patterns of High- and Middle-Level Officials*

	<i>High-Level</i> N = 37	<i>Middle-Level</i> N = 41
Direct	40.6%	26.8%
Internally mediated	24.3	24.4
Externally mediated	35.1	29.3
Open recruitment	0.0	19.5
	100.0	100.0

sidered a highly institutionalized means of securing public employment in Mexico. When it results in a high level of *confianza* between superior and subordinate, it can be the foundation of an effective and loyal *equipo*.

The Formation of an Equipo

Now this team which has come in with this administration is special in that we all are very good friends and we almost all knew each other before we came here—some from as far back as ten years ago.

In any given department, division, or office, an *equipo*, or team, is made up of the confidence employees who are tied to the highest ranking official in that part of the agency and who rely upon him for future career advancement. Program directors, office chiefs, and managers in CONASUPO were aware of the importance of employing competent and trustworthy subordinates for their work and for their careers. A high-level official in one of the subsidiary companies commented, for example: "When I took charge of this position, I found that although I had many friends, there were few I trusted enough to invite them to help me. There are three people I brought here whom I trust blindly. . . . I trust them with my prestige, with my signature and with my honor. . . . This is my *equipo*." The means used to recruit such a loyal *equipo* is demonstrated by the field coordination program in CONASUPO.

This program was designed to help coordinate the extensive activities of the agency at the grass-roots level by stimulating community involvement in the agency's programs. Outside the capital city, communication, chains of command, and personal loyalties often meant that the various divisions and subsidiary companies of the agency pursued conflicting goals and hindered the successful and rapid solution of local-level problems. The field coordination program required a group of employees who would be actively and personally involved in achieving overall coordination while at the same time minimizing tensions and

jealousies among local-level officials and encouraging them to accept and pursue new work habits. It was imperative that they not be available for cooptation by local interests and that they deal effectively but discreetly with the problems arising at this level, avoiding the antagonism of officials over whom they had no functional authority. In short, the program manager required an equipo of individuals whose behaviors and motives he could trust and who would continue to perform their tasks diligently when they were not being directly supervised.

He used a number of methods to put together this special equipo. Before he assumed the leadership of the program, the administrator had served as the manager of CONASUPO's planning department. While in this position he had recruited a number of young university graduates to work for him in designing and planning an integrated set of agency programs to serve rural communities. He had met many of these individuals through the university courses he taught, through positions he had previously held in government, and through his participation in government study groups. When he became field coordination manager, some of his subordinates followed him to form the basis of a new team. These were the individuals in whom he had most confianza in terms of ability, preparation, and dedication. Then, as coordination manager, he recruited a number of new subordinates, frequently making use of the peer alliances of his underlings. The result of the recruitment of this equipo was a group of individuals actively engaged in achieving the goals of the coordination program and who were deeply convinced of the correctness of the manager's approach to local-level problem solving.

At the agency level, the general director attempted to build an effective and dedicated equipo in the same fashion. He needed a team that would be committed to achieving the overall policy goals of the agency and that would support him in conflicts with other government agencies and in the mobilization of support for his policies. In fact, a number of his appointments achieved just this result. Many individuals were recruited because of preexisting personal ties to the director. Others, however, were appointed by him as payment for past political obligations or in an attempt to tie the agency to the party elite or to the president. He therefore sacrificed some of his control over agency activity and saw some of its economic resources utilized in questionable or nonproductive activities.

In many cases, high-level officials attempted to use their authority and prestige to extend their equipos throughout the organization under their command. They did this by influencing the appointment of individuals to key posts, seeking to ensure that the people in these positions were personally loyal to them rather than to their immediate superiors.

This was the way one subsidiary, for example, sought to ensure honest and responsible performance in its field operations. A high-level official in the subsidiary explained how the process worked:

Effectively, I have complete power to select the regional sales managers. The subsidiary head has given me a free hand in that matter. What usually happens is that he calls me up and asks me to suggest someone and I take a few days to think of it and hopefully can give him the name of someone honest and good for the position. Then he calls up the regional manager and very politely suggests this person and says he's sending him up. This is a political management of the control problem we have.

It was expected that a team put together in this fashion could be relied upon for effective performance.

Camarillas and Elite Networks

If you would look at my professional *curriculum vitae* you would find little reason for me to be here. But if you were to look at my political *curriculum* you would see much more clearly why I occupy this position. What kind of politics? Well, party politics doesn't really matter all that much since it's effectively a one-party system. What counts is group politics and the politics of personal relations.

As may be clear by now, recruitment to official positions in Mexico serves two interrelated functions. Selecting a suitable cadre of subordinates is extremely important to the bureaucratic chief who wishes to direct an effective and efficient organization. Performance goals may be influential criteria for recruitment for reasons such as ideological or professional goals but also because career advancement opportunities may be more abundant if an official is known to be capable of directing a well run agency or program. Making a name for oneself as an efficient administrator is therefore important in present-day Mexico. The second function is more overtly political. Recruitment can be used as a means to enhance a political career by strengthening ties to important political actors. This is particularly true at high levels of the organization where officials are generally members of political factions, or *camarillas*.⁶

The *camarilla* is formed of actors who have established politically significant followings. The followings may originate in bureaucratic equipos, in political and professional organizations, in economic enterprises, or in a combination of these. The power and influence of various followings may be pooled to achieve the goals of all members of the *camarilla*. Implicit understandings of mutual advantage bind the members together and therefore, when anyone is unable to continue supplying valuable resources to the other members, he may be excluded. Moreover, *camarillas* are built through the mobilization of both vertical and horizontal exchange alliances. The horizontal alliances frequently

place actors in a near equal bargaining relationship. This makes these political cliques more fluid and shifting than the smaller-scale *equipos* in which personal loyalty and dependence are stronger (see Boissevain 1974, ch. 7; Johnson 1971, ch. 3).

Through a number of high-level appointments, the director of CONASUPO made friends among the leadership of the peasant and middle-class sectors of the party, obligated a number of state governors, developed a following among university students, and established friendships with officials in key government agencies. The extent of the political support he accumulated in this manner made him a valuable member of a political faction whose importance increased as it attempted to influence the selection of the presidential candidate for 1976. If successful in this maneuver, the director could expect to become a close collaborator of the new president. His subordinates were aware of the advantages of "winning" for their own careers. "If he becomes a minister," commented one respondent, "then his entire *equipito* will follow him and we'll all have positions in the Ministry."

Camarillas not only advance the careers of their members, they may also expedite official business. The director under Echeverría, for example, was able to deal effectively with the heads of other government agencies because of the understanding of mutual benefit that existed among them. This in turn had an important effect on his ability to gain access to the president and influence him in supporting CONASUPO's claims to a greater role in market regulation and agricultural policy development (see especially Grindle 1977).

For several directors and administrators, CONASUPO served as a stepping stone toward other public positions. Several former directors of the agency moved on to other high-level posts, two to become ministers of agriculture, one to become the governor of the state of Mexico, one to become governor of the state of Chiapas, and another to be secretary to the president. A director of an important commission of CONASUPO became minister of health and welfare and then governor of the state of Mexico, while another was minister of industry and commerce before becoming governor of the state of Michoacán. These career trajectories have all been determined by the *palancas*, the *equipos*, and the *camarillas* formed by the administrators or mobilized on their behalf. The use of personal networks enabled them to establish their careers, to expand the extent of their influence, and to increase the importance of the activities of CONASUPO for the government.

These individuals, then, have successfully manipulated the career mobility system in Mexico, a system fundamentally built upon individual patronage alliances that pyramid into extensive networks within

the elite politico-administrative apparatus. These linkages among members of the bureaucracy can be referred to as patron-client relationships and networks. It now remains to review the patron-client relationship as it has been described in the past, indicate how the linkages observed in the Mexican bureaucracy differ from previous accounts, and consider how the case study illuminates the causes of the development and persistence of the patron-client mechanism.

THE PATRON-CLIENT MODEL

The patron-client relationship, as it has been conceptualized by anthropologists and political scientists, is an enduring dyadic bond based upon informally arranged personal exchanges of resources between actors of unequal status.⁷ The objective of each actor is to achieve certain goals by offering the resources he controls or has access to in exchange for resources he does not control. The identifying characteristics of the patron-client linkage are thus that it is (1) an informal or nonlegally binding and (2) personal or face-to-face relationship (3) involving an exchange of valued resources (4) between actors of unequal status that (5) persists through time. Individual alliances become pyramidal as patrons in turn become clients to more powerful individuals in order to gain access to resources they do not directly control.

The concept of the patron-client linkage was developed in anthropological field research in small, traditional, often isolated and closed communities. The prototypical example of local-level patron-client ties is that often encountered between the peasant and his landlord in remote communities. In this context, the primary goal of the relationship, at least for the subordinate, is a minimal level of social and physical security. Due to the vicissitudes of nature, the predatoriness of neighbors, the lack of communication ties to the larger society, and the often unbridled power of local elites, the peasant may be dependent upon the local landlord for land, credit, subsistence, and protection. At the same time, the landlord wishes to obtain obedience, loyalty, information, superior service, gratitude, and deference from some of his peasants (see Boissevain 1966; Cotler 1970, pp. 536–38; Foster 1967a; Hollnsteiner 1967; Wolf 1959, ch. 10). A means of acquiring these goods and services on a relatively stable basis is to establish a dependency relationship that was labelled a patron-client dyad.

The general parameters of the concept were well established in early anthropological research. A conceptual advance was made, however, when it was observed that in the local community, village authorities were often sought out as patrons because they had achieved and

maintained extralocal ties. In the 1950s and 1960s, anthropologists contributed to an expanding literature that identified the role of the local authority as a personal intermediary or broker (Bailey 1963, ch. 6; Betley 1971; Boissevain 1974, ch. 6; Geertz 1960; Kenny 1961; Silverman 1967; Wolf 1965). A broker does not directly command the resources relevant to an exchange but instead maintains a personal relationship both with an actor who does control the needed goods and services and with an actor who desires to acquire them.

The broker is of significant interest because of his role in linking the local community to the nation (see Wolf 1965, pp. 97–98). The patron landlord then becomes valuable to his clients to the degree to which he has contacts and patrons in the bureaucracy, political party, or military. He serves his clients as “a short cut through the maze of authority” in their dealings with regional or national officials (Kenny 1960, p. 19). Similar triadic dependency interactions have been observed in low-income urban neighborhoods where a local-level boss mediates between community dwellers and urban or national authorities (Cornelius 1975, ch. 6; Lomnitz 1974; Ray 1969). At this level of analysis, the individual patron-client bond is necessarily extended to the concept of a network of such relationships that has been labelled clientage or clientelism (Powell 1970). The conventional schematization of such networks is in the form of a pyramid (see figure 6).

A more recent advance in the application of the clientele concept has been the demonstration that various kinds of political organizations, even those that are nominally “democratic,” may be pervaded by patron-client networks. Political parties, labor unions, and peasant syndicates may demonstrate factionalism, personalism, and a lack of ideological commitment, all of which are indicators of the existence of patron-client networks within the organization.⁸ The political consequences of this kind of clientelism have almost universally been described as factionalism, competition between peers, vertical alliances maintained at the expense of horizontal ones, lack of ideological or programmatic commitment, intense personalism, incomplete integration, and the fragmentation of demands on government for action.⁹ The political “pay-offs” or exchanges that encourage participation or mobilization in such a system are likely to be small scale, individualized, and material.

These linkages existing within organizations have been of special interest to political scientists as they imply that participation, mobilization, and competition are channeled through and managed by individual ties of status superior and subordinate. In contrast, class and interest group models of political participation do not explain why, in many polities, class-based parties have not developed, nor why, in some

environments, organizations which claim to represent the interests of a specific class fail to aggregate and mobilize these interests in a politically meaningful way. Where such organizations do function in an expected fashion, there may coexist with them other associations that claim members' loyalty in essentially vertical rather than horizontal patterns. Patron-client networks present an alternative to organizational alliances built on the shared recognition of class, ethnicity, religion, common interests, or commitment to ideology (see especially Landé 1973; Sandbrook 1972; Scott 1972; Zuckerman 1971).

On a more general level, when patron-client relationships pervade most political organizations in a country, the entire political system may be described as a clientele system. Japan has been called a "patron-client democracy" (Ike 1972), and Venezuelan decision-making processes are described as being permeated by patron-clientelism (Blank 1973). In Brazil, politicians acted as brokers between the entire governmental apparatus and mass followings of clients, making demands upon the bureaucratic system for accommodations of general policy through individual allocative decisions (Leff 1968). Jaquette (1972) considers social and political relations in Peru to derive from clientelist patterns. A significant body of literature on corporatism also employs the patron-client model to explain political phenomena on a system-wide basis (see especially Pike and Stritch 1974; Roett 1972; Wiarda 1974).

The Model and the Case Study

The networks and alliances that exist within Mexican bureaucratic institutions clearly conform to the definition of patron-client linkages. They are informal relationships entered into by status superiors and subordinates for the purpose of exchanging valued resources and they tend to persist through time. However, these relationships in the bureaucracy also differ in several ways from those described in most previous literature. First, and perhaps most interestingly, the clientele bonds described in the Mexican case study are intralite relationships. In the anthropological and political science investigations that have provided the conceptual framework of patron-client ties, the linkage itself is considered a mechanism that relates nonelites at the village level or that links nonelites in traditional or transitional environments to more modernized elites. When viewed as nonelite/elite linkages they are generally described as relationships that are consciously used by modernized or modernizing groups to manipulate, mobilize, or control their less modern clients (see Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales 1975; Leff 1968; Pollock 1974; Powell 1970; Roett 1972; Scott 1972).

In the Mexican bureaucracy, however, vertical alliance networks are composed of individuals from the most educated and urbanized sectors of the society. The informal alliances bind together public officials from various institutions for the pursuit of policy goals; they serve to connect individuals within one agency for defense against the functional encroachments of another; they tie the bureaucratic elite to the political elite and make possible intragovernmental problem solving; and they may link regional elites to the bureaucratic center. Thus, these patron-client linkages are not alliances among individuals in traditional low-status social groupings, but networks within a highly sophisticated, urbanized, and educated sector of the population that is directly responsible for governmental policy making and implementation in Mexico.

A second and equally important difference between the clientele linkages in the public bureaucracy in Mexico and those described by investigators in local communities is that bureaucratic networks are fundamentally organized around the achievement or protection of a particular goal, career advancement. This is the goal of both the superior and the subordinate in the relationship. In anthropological work, in contrast, the principal goals pursued by actors are generally security and subsistence. Where assurance as to the source of tomorrow's meal is in short supply, where the law threatens overwhelmingly, where health care is precarious, or where land tenure is uncertain, the peasant, traditional villager, and destitute city-dweller are preoccupied with establishing and maintaining protective relationships. In much political science research, the chief goal of clientele networks is considered to be political power, achieved through the exchange of votes for material goods and services. For middle- and high-level bureaucrats, however, building a career is a long-term investment that encourages superiors to offer resources such as access, authority, and budgetary support in exchange for performance, information, problem-solving, discretion, and loyalty from subordinates (see Greenfield 1972; Leeds 1965).

Another way in which the clientele networks in Mexican public bureaucracy differ from those observed in other sociopolitical contexts is that they frequently coincide with and reinforce formal-legal hierarchical levels. In the village studies cited earlier, very little formal-legal structure intervenes in the formation and maintenance of clientele bonds, social structure being by far more determinative of rights, duties, and resources to be exchanged. Similarities to the bureaucratic case, however, are found in examples of local-level authorities who are sought out as potential patrons because of their office-related control over resources. Indeed, in the more extended form of clientelism discussed by political scientists, it has been demonstrated that loss of formal-legal status may

mean a consequent loss of patrons and clients because of the withdrawal of office-related resources to exchange (Scott 1972, p. 98).

The bureaucracy is an extreme example of a situation in which formal-legal structures delimit, often in detail, the resources that the patron or client has to offer. It is important to note, however, that while formal-legal structures allocate institutional resources to certain positions, they often do not regulate their subsequent distribution. Thus, for example, a department chief may be granted the formal authority to hire and fire subordinates, but how he exercises this authority is not regulated and he is therefore provided with a resource that is useful to him to exchange for other resources he may not completely control, such as loyalty, the provision of information, or on-the-job performance.

A related and final distinction that may be made is that alliance networks within the bureaucracy tend to concentrate power in the hands of a relatively few individuals at the top of the formal bureaucratic hierarchy. In anthropological studies, in contrast, the number of varied clientele networks in the local communities is limited only by the status differential of available actors and the control and "reach" of the resources to be distributed. Likewise, political scientists have tended to identify multiple and independent networks within the systems they have studied, such as political parties or the networks that link national and regional elites to local-level political and economic leadership. In a bureaucratic organization, however, the pyramidal structure of control over certain resources is formalized and preexisting; moreover, the formal-legal organization of the entity means that authority is exercised from the top, channeled down through hierarchical levels of command. Competing alliances and networks within the bureaucratic unit can in fact be demonstrated to exist; however, they tend to be constrained by official chains of command and responsibility.

Explanations of Patron-Client Networks

The distinct characteristics of patron-client linkages as they operate within bureaucratic institutions are relevant in seeking to explain why patron-client relationships develop and persist.¹⁰ Some scholars have cited cultural phenomena as the primary impetus to the emergence of patron-client linkages within a society. In brief, culturally determined values or behavioral expectations, often linked to religious belief, personalism, or paternalism, lead to the formation and continued vitality of patron-client linkages (see Boissevain 1966, p. 23; 1974; Campbell 1964, p. 221; Kenny 1961, pp. 135–36). However, an exclusive reliance on culture to explain clientelism has proved inadequate for many scholars

(see especially Kaufman 1974). Forms of clientele bonds, it has been pointed out, are found in nearly all societies, in widely different cultural milieux, from those in Southeast Asia and the Middle East to modern university settings in the United States.

A general cultural explanation, moreover, does not easily explain instances within the same society in which the linkages are not operative. A more specific political culture explanation would deal with variation among different sectors of the society by categorizing individuals as parochials, subjects, and participants, suggesting that patron-client ties are more often encountered among parochials and subjects than among participants or are manipulated by participants in the control of other subcultures (see Scott 1974). Unfortunately, this does not explain why these relationships permeate elite levels of the political system in Mexico, linking "participant" to "participant."

Other scholars have used a developmental perspective related to tradition, transition, and modernity, as a point of departure for understanding the conditions giving rise to patron-client linkages (see especially Lemarchand and Legg 1972, p. 154; Powell 1970; Scott 1972; Silverman 1967, p. 289; Stuart 1972, pp. 39–40; Tarrow 1967, p. 74). Stressed in this explanation is the gradual emergence through historical phases or stages of national integration of formal impersonal mechanisms that ensure individual and kin security.¹¹ Central to this explanation is the expectation of the eventual disappearance of clientelism as societies become increasingly modern.

As is evident, however, this perspective is particularly inadequate to explain exchange relationships in the Mexican bureaucracy. The bureaucrats in question are all part of a modern elite group. They are university educated and generally from urban and industrial areas of the country. They are often widely traveled and have been exposed to a variety of experiences and opportunities. The organizations they belong to may be formally constructed according to rational, hierarchical principles. Moreover, the principal purpose of the networks in which bureaucrats participate is not to mobilize or manipulate more traditional or transitional social classes. Nor is it apparent that these alliance structures are gradually disappearing in Mexican public life; they continue to be actively sought out in the accomplishment of a wide variety of tasks in highly modern contexts. As indicated, patron-client linkages in the bureaucracy may reiterate and reinforce rational formal-legal structures. The developmental perspective, then, is not useful for explaining the Mexican case.

A third perspective is that patron-client linkages are brought into existence by a basic environmental condition of resource scarcity. This

explanation differs from a cultural one in that it does not rely on the previous existence of values or expectations as to proper social relationships. And it is distinctly different from a developmental perspective as the enabling structural conditions may be observed in a modern university environment or in a transitional or traditional village or urban squatter settlement.

This is perhaps the explanation most often favored by anthropologists who have been impressed by the precarious nature of existence in many peasant communities.¹² Foster, for example, explains patronage linkages as a means to ensure a minimal amount of resource availability in an environment in which nature is capricious and human relationships are treacherous. The "image of the limited good" is based upon the perception that goods and services are in limited quantity; equal distribution of them would leave all with insufficient amounts. As all individuals are equally in need of the limited resources, this "zero-sum" or "constant pie" perception of the world means that anything gained by another necessarily diminishes one's own share (Foster 1967b; Powell 1970, p. 411; Scott 1972, p. 102). Patron-client linkages provide a relatively efficient means for acquiring access to the limited goods necessary for survival. It follows from the zero-sum nature of social, political, and economic resource distribution that each individual will attempt to protect the resources he does have and not openly engage in competition beyond that required to achieve a minimally sufficient quantity of desired goods and services. A static and fiercely protective overall distribution of resources results in which risk is actively avoided (Foster 1967b; see Strickon and Greenfield 1972, pp. 9–10).

This environmental explanation, especially as it stresses structural conditions, is perhaps most appropriate in the Mexican case. Insecurity is, in fact, an objective condition of life within the bureaucracy. The actors involved in the linkages are often subject to great risk in the pursuit of their careers and their job related functions; the wrong move might easily mean at least temporary loss of influence, prestige, and economic reward. In contrast to low-status groups, however, middle- and upper-level bureaucrats are very aware of their elite status and of the education and social background characteristics that open up a wide range of alternatives for them should their positions in the bureaucracy be threatened. Therefore, bureaucrats may be more likely to take risks than individuals whose very survival may be endangered by a change in the status quo. Moreover, the involvement in vertical exchange alliances does not rest fundamentally upon a perception of a zero-sum environment. Rather, goods and services are required for the active pursuit of a goal that has little to do with maximizing a static sense of security.

In the Mexican bureaucracy, it is suggested, informal exchange networks develop because they are perceived to be, and are in fact, an efficient and effective means of goal attainment. They are sought out, in short, as a calculated and rational response to a structural environment that severely limits access to career mobility by other means. The turnover of public officeholders each sexenio means that impersonal systems of merit and seniority are irrelevant for middle- and upper-level officials. In their place, personal appointments through the use of the *palanca* determine each individual's future employment. In addition, bureaucratic managers have found that reliance on ties of *confianza* and the conscious recruitment of a personally loyal *equipo* is the most effective means of carrying out assigned responsibilities with minimal internal dissent and noncompliance. The individual manager, manipulating his control over the job futures of his subordinates, is provided with an extremely valuable incentive to ensure diligent and discreet performance. He uses it because he has found that it works.

The officials in CONASUPO who sought to formulate and implement policies to achieve the goals of the agency freely embraced such mechanisms as kinship relationships, political influence, personal loyalty, and career dependency. In the Mexican system, these instruments are recognized as highly efficacious and legitimate means to obtain program and policy results, as was evident in a statement made by one respondent: "It has been a great help in our program that the chief is the brother of the wife of the president. It has opened many doors for us. He worked for many years in the National Peasants Confederation and he was a deputy and so he has great knowledge of the countryside and its organizations. I find that in many cases, just mentioning his name has been a boon to a program. It gets results!"

Structural conditions, therefore, may encourage or discourage the formation of patron-client relationships based on perceptions of utility in the achievement of desired goals. In addition to the case study examined here, other examples of the effect of structural conditions on exchange relationships may be cited. For example, a recent paper contrasting government-business relationships between the United States and Mexico points out that the Mexican government has preferred to regulate business through direct and disaggregated methods such as individually assigned quotas and licenses. This encourages the businessman to develop an informal exchange relationship with a government bureaucrat in order to achieve his individual needs such as an import quota, a license, or a tax exemption. Such a strategy is a rational means for him to pursue his interests. In contrast, the United States businessman participates in a legal and policy framework that more

impersonally regulates resource distribution through tariffs, taxes, and the availability of money and credit and encourages the development of interest associations to pressure government (Purcell and Purcell 1976). In this context, then, the businessman has no long-term need to seek out special personal relationships with bureaucratic officials.

Similarly, where governments fail to establish or pursue explicit policies or plans for the allocation of resources, citizen demands on the bureaucratic apparatus for goods and services may be pursued through personal exchange relationships. These may enable individuals to achieve solution to their problems more rapidly and effectively than if they were to press their claims through class or interest-group activity (Cornelius 1974; 1975). Similarly, in an organization in which salaries are strictly regulated through formal procedures of seniority and union bargaining, informal alliances are less likely to be encouraged than where personal relationships significantly influence raises, promotions, and hiring practices (see Crozier 1964, pp. 40–50; 70–71).

The Mexican case study suggests that in order to understand and explain patron-client relationships, it is important to consider the *context* in which such relationships are formed. When this is done, it becomes apparent that seeking out patrons and clients may be a rational and useful strategy to achieve one's goals in certain environments. Far from being a mechanism useful only to peasants or other low-status actors in their search for subsistence and security, it can also be valuable to administrators and managers who seek to ensure their own career mobility or the effective performance of the organizations they command. Thus, when contextual variables are taken into account, behaviors and attitudes that may often have been labelled anachronistic or traditional may be revealed to be based on highly rational perceptions of available alternative courses of action.

NOTES

1. All extracts and quotations without specific citations come from interviews conducted by the author in Mexico.
2. Party positions, while not officially recognized as public employment, can be considered so for the purpose of career analysis because the dominant party, the PRI, is supported largely by public funds and a number of public officials such as the president, the governors, municipal presidents, congressional figures, and cabinet chiefs largely determine the selection of party office holders.
3. CONASUPO is an acronym for the National Popular Subsistence Corporation. The interviews were with officials who had important decision-making roles within the agency in the formulation and implementation of public policy. The agency is organized into a parent company, sixteen semi-independent subsidiary companies and a commission to administer a trust fund. In 1975, the entire CONASUPO system employed more than 8,300 people and managed an annual budget of more than eight-

teen billion pesos, almost four times the size of its appropriation in 1971, the first full year of the administration of Luís Echeverría. For an analysis of CONASUPO's role in Mexican agricultural development policy, see Grindle (1977).

4. Seventy-three percent of the total number of employees in the parent company had less than five years experience in an organization whose roots can be traced back to 1937. In CONASUPO, personnel turnover was highest among middle- and upper-level "confidence" workers. In the agency, 30.5 percent of the 1,283 individuals employed in the parent organization were officially recognized as confidence workers and another 10.5 percent were free professionals who, contracted by the day, week, or month, could be considered to share the same employment status. This proportion was smaller in the subsidiary companies responsible for the physical operations of the system. For example, in one of the subsidiaries, only 14.5 percent were confidence workers, while 85.5 percent were "base" employees.
5. Within the administrative apparatus, it is the "confidence" or white collar workers who are the most subject to appointment and dismissal at the time each new administration takes office. Lower-level bureaucrats generally have job security that is protected by union contracts and law, largely insulating them from dismissal when the administration changes hands. Many of the positions that become available at the sexenio, particularly low-level elective offices and the appointive jobs found in the party, are poorly remunerated; frequently they are only part-time posts. These and other positions, however, are widely aspired to and actively sought in Mexico, in part because of limited employment possibilities in the private sector. Jobs within the public administration are particularly attractive because salaries are generally good and often competitive with the private sector. Moreover, as a government employee, the bureaucrat enjoys innumerable official fringe benefits such as access to low-income housing; free medical care and drugs; subsidized food, vacations, and clothing; periodic pay bonuses that fluctuate between 4 ½ and 5 ½ months pay annually; free child care; and a forty-hour work week.
6. Camarillas in Mexico are similar to the *panelas* or *panelinhas* described by Leeds in Brazil (see 1965, pp. 392–93 Cf. Camp 1974; Johnson 1971, pp. 67–73).
7. Foster (1967a; 1967b), Landé (1973), Powell (1970) and Scott (1972) all present useful treatments of the patron-client concept. Two general anthologies of studies on patron-client relationships are Schmidt, Scott, Guasti, and Landé (1975) and Strickon and Greenfield (1972). The first presents studies by political scientists, the second works by anthropologists.
8. Powell (1970; 1971), for example, has described the rural organization structure of the Acción Democrática party in Venezuela in terms of clientele linkages. Schmidt (1974) demonstrates that the liberal and conservative parties in Colombia have persisted virtually unchallenged until recently because they are built upon such networks. In Italy, the institutionalized factionalism of the Christian Democratic party has been traced to similar mechanisms (Zuckerman 1971), while in China, ideological shifts of the regime have been described as resulting from clientele relationships in the Communist party (Nathan 1973). Similarly, parties in Paraguay are shown to have been formed and to have persisted on the basis of patron-client networks (Hicks 1971; see also Bailey 1963; Landé 1973; Valenzuela 1976, pp. 9–14).
9. See Campbell 1964, pp. 260–61; Graziano 1972; Landé 1973; Leff 1968; Lemarchand and Legg 1972; Nathan 1973, pp. 26–28; Powell 1970, pp. 412, 422; Tarrow 1967, pp. 74–78; Valenzuela 1976, pp. 9–14; Zuckerman 1971. It is important to note that each client is linked individually and vertically to the patron; most often he is not linked in any way with the other clients of the same patron. In fact, the clients may actually be competing with each other for access to the resources controlled by the patron. Competition in vertical networks, except at the very top and very bottom, is two-directional for peers tend to compete with each other for the allegiance of clients while at the same time vying for the attention of those in directly superior positions.
10. One aspect of the development or evolution of patron-client relationships that has been documented is that as national penetration or integration has proceeded and as

- central organizations have become more complex, single all-purpose patron-client pyramids are increasingly replaced by multiple and specialized networks (Heath 1972, p. 132; Powell 1970, p. 414).
11. Various perspectives in the literature as to why patron-client relationships develop, persist, and change are not mutually exclusive and, indeed, some commentators rely upon the convergence of multiple causal factors to explain the relationships (see, for example, Boissevain 1966, pp. 30–31; 1974, ch. 4).
 12. Wolf identifies patron-client linkages as a viable coping mechanism in environments in which “the formal institutional structure of society is weak and unable to deliver a sufficiently steady supply of goods and services, especially to the terminal levels of the social order” (1966, pp. 17–18; see also Boissevain 1966, p. 30; Kaufman 1974).

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