RELIGIOUS CLIENTELISM AND DEMOCRATIC CHOICE

Clients of God

Aiysha Varraich

Introduction

One man, one vote is a central tenet of democracy. This, however, is regularly displaced in the context of developing democracies where various forms of inequalities permeate. The Indian Subcontinent is no exception. There are a number of power structures present in the region including but not limited to feudalism and clientelism. The former remains the perennial power structure undergirding much of the analyses of the democratic consolidation, or lack thereof, of Pakistan (Wilder 1997, Mohmand 2019). The latter, clientelism, is the main explanation that directly displaces the one man, one vote tenet and, as such, has the potential to not only hinder the democratic consolidation of developing countries, but also to contribute to democratic backsliding, that is, the autocratization of young democracies.

Much of the political science literature that examines vote choice in South Asia forwards the contemporary understanding of clientelism as a central explanation of voting behaviour, where clients sell their votes in exchange for a material good to the highest bidder (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007, Chandra 2007, Mohmand 2019). Effectively, citizens of the region are viewed through a marketized lens, where a cost–benefit analysis dominates as an explanation for their vote choice. What remains largely absent from the contemporary political science scholarship is a theory of clientelism that can explain why client-voters may be swayed by non-material incentives in casting their vote – that is, an understanding that goes beyond the economic lens of the material exchange, where instead what is witnessed is clientelism as politics, or a “total exchange” that is “at once economic, political, ritual and moral” (Piliavsky 2014: 11). This absence risks overlooking the role played by context and social identities that go beyond a quid pro quo understanding of the voter.

One such ‘total exchange’ is the power structure that permeates much of the rural expanse of Pakistan – the *pir-murid* relationship. Pir is the local term for living saints – the same term is used across the local languages. Murid is the term used for disciples/followers of pirs. Here the exchange takes place between voters and politicians both of whom play dual roles: patrons are both politician and living saint (*pir*) and clients are both voters and followers (*murids*) of these *pirs*. The exchange centres on non-material incentives, where voters cast their votes

for their saint-politicians in exchange for salvation. Unlike the marketized model of clientelism, *religious clientelism* allows the inclusion of context and social identities of the citizens as part of their calculus in casting their vote. This allows for a more holistic understanding of the *murid*-voter. It is important to note that material goods are also included in this calculus, but a *preference* and prioritization is given to non-material, religious goods, such as blessings, spiritual guidance and the ultimate – salvation. *Pir*-politicians have long formed part of the Pakistani political elite, with much attention devoted to their role as brokers able to deliver the vote (Talbot 2005, Wilder 1999, Gilmartin 1979, Malik and Malik 2017). Today, 16% of Pakistan's National Assembly are *pir*-politicians, with similar numbers, if not more, in the Provincial Assemblies. Despite this constant and growing presence of *pir*-politicians over the past seven decades, there remains a dearth of research on the actors that vote for them, specifically what drives the *murid*-client, and the role that this spiritual relationship plays in their political behaviour.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First it seeks to present a subtype of clientelism that takes into account *non-material* exchanges between patrons and clients, activated through the inclusion of the actors' social identity provided by religion. This can help further our understanding of how clientelism operates on the ground, and to provide a more nuanced and holistic analysis of the client-voter. Second, to examine how some functional aspects of this relationship, at the individual level, appear to hinder the self-determination of *murid*-voters when casting their votes. Because this effectively displaces the one man, one vote concept undergirding a core tenet of electoral democracy. This results in moving developing countries away from democratic consolidation and closer to authoritarianism.

I argue that in religious clientelism, religion as a social identity operates at two levels simultaneously – collective and individual. At the collective level, religion provides a social group identity to clients through which they relate to others in their spiritual community as well as their overall social life. As such the individual belongs to a community of likeminded people, all bound by the spiritual connection to a common leader and congregation – where the connection to the spiritual leader remains centre stage. At the individual level religion serves as belief system. By this I mean a private sphere through which the individual situates himself in relation to society, and makes sense of the world, but also relates to the supernatural, addressing questions pertaining to life after death, the meanings associated with different aspects of life and the like. It is this dual function of religion as both social identity and belief system in one that enables *non-material* goods to be part of the reciprocal exchange between client and patron. At the collective level it delivers the vote. At the individual level it allows for *individualized*, personal, private, non-material religious goods of salvation, spiritual guidance and blessings. I then explore how key aspects of this relationship may stymie the self-determination of *murid*-voters when casting their votes.

I draw on data that I have gathered through extensive fieldwork across Pakistan's Sindh and Punjab provinces (September–December 2015, and April–May 2019). This includes in-depth interviews with thirty-seven *murids*, twelve *pir*-politicians, and participant observation. I further draw on a database I created of *pir*-politicians across time in both national and provincial assemblies as well as secondary sources. The overarching contribution of the chapter is that it provides insights from the client-side of the relationship. Specifically, on a theoretical level, the chapter uses clientelism as a framework to analyze a religio-political bond, highlighting the importance of non-material aspects of the clientelistic relationship that can undermine how citizens vote. It is firmly grounded in original empirical data, reflective of how clientelism works on the ground, resulting in a theory derived through an inductive process accounting for the interplay of both social and political identities simultaneously in the analysis of citizens' voting behaviour.

At the empirical level, although *pir*-politicians and the power they wield has been the subject of much investigation (Ansari 1992, Talbot 2005, Wilder 1997, Malik and Mirza 2015), to my knowledge this is the first study to provide fine-grained, micro data on the *murid*-voter's preferences and how this relationship affects their voting decisions.

The remainder of the chapter is as follows: I first define clientelism, followed by a sketch of the five core elements of religious clientelism. I detail the actors, their resource base, affective ties of the relationship, its iterative nature and the presence of trust. The second part presents an analysis of key aspects of the relationship that can undermine a client-voter's self-determination. The chapter concludes with a discussion focused on whether this type of face-to-face clientelism is yet another factor contributing to the autocratization of Pakistan, or if it can help its democratic consolidation.

Delineating religious clientelism

Before sketching out religious clientelism, it is necessary to define the term. Clientelism is founded on the reciprocal relations between patrons and clients. By clientelism I mean a form of *personal, dyadic* exchange relationship often rooted in obligation between two parties of *unequal power* (whether this power be social, political, economic or religious), where the interchange is often of *non-comparable* goods and services. I have adapted James Scott's comparative framework to sketch out the five core characteristics of religious clientelism – (1) a dyadic relationship centred chiefly on a non-material exchange; (2) the resource base of the actors is personal; (3) the relationship is highly affective; (4) it is iterative; (5) the basis of religion fosters both trust and loyalty and finally the relationship is not purely of a *quid pro quo* nature (1972: 106).

First, religious clientelism is a dyadic relationship centred on two primary actors – the *pir*-politician (patron) and *murid*-voter (client). The *murid* swears allegiance to the *pir*-politician from whom he seeks spiritual enlightenment, and the ultimate, salvation – initiating a lifelong bond. This pledge reinforces the asymmetric character of the relationship, with the client in an inferior spiritual position to the *pir*-politician. The relationship centres on the iterative, and reciprocal, face-to-face interaction – cementing the personalized bond between the two actors. Typically, within larger clientelistic set-ups there may be a third actor involved, a broker, such as the *khalifa*, who acts as a representative of the *pir*-politician, found in the rural settings of Pakistan. Usually, a broker can play the role of patron too; however, I do not treat him as a patron in his own right because the *khalifa* normally has sworn allegiance to the *pir*-politician. More importantly he does not have access to either religious or political power. Effectively, the *khalifa* maintains no access to the goods that form part of the exchange relationship.

The patron is a *pir* (living saint) and a politician; he has both religious and socio-economic power. In the context of Pakistan, society is highly stratified, where people who exercise political power tend to belong to a higher socio-economic stratum, in terms of access and assets. Echoing this, most *pir*-politicians are also landlords in their own right – giving them immense social standing and large embedded networks (Ansari 1992). One apt example is the current Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Querishi. He is considered a living saint because of his position as the spiritual head of the shrine of Baha'uddin Zakariya. He is also, according to the electoral register, a landlord in his own right. Another example is former Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Reza Gilani. He is the head of the shrine of Musa Pak, and has large landholdings, while serving as an active politician within the Pakistan People's Party. In effect, both are landlords, spiritual leaders and politicians.

The client in religious clientelism, *murid*, is a follower of a *pir*-politician and can be from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds; ranging from landlord (with access and ownership to land, contact networks, etc.), senior civil servant, middle-class banker, to the poor farmer that needs to work every day to put food on the table. Different permutations of these characteristics of the *murid* dictate the function that the clientelistic bond of *pir-murid* plays for them. For the poorer *murid*, the relationship functions as a coping mechanism – socially he or she may depend on his patron for access to the state machinery, including arbitration in land matters. On the religious plane the bond may help make sense of the material world, with the knowledge that this relationship provides access to salvation. For the *murid* who is a landlord, with hundreds of acres of land, the bond of *pir-murid* acts as an added layer of insurance. One example being mediation in cases of land squatting. This relationship creates expectations because both actors operate in an environment that reacts to the other.

Second, both actors' resource base is personal. This resource base ties in directly with the actions available to each actor. The *pir*-politician has a number of goods to offer their clients, which form part of his *ruhani* (spiritual) and *dunyawi* (worldly) duties towards the clients; both non-material and material goods. The religious non-material inducements that the *pir*-politician offers the *murid* are tied in with his personhood. Only someone descending from a lineage of *pirs* dating back to the original saint, is able to offer this. This legitimization factor functions as a barrier to entry for other politicians. The non-material religious inducements include but are not limited to spiritual guidance, making religion accessible and the promise of salvation. These are done by delivering sermons that highlight the access he provides to the other worldly – in the form of providing a condensed, easy access to day-to-day religion – such as reminders of what is sufficient as part of being a good believer. Other non-material goods include social wellbeing (including social standing, social identity as well as belonging), access (government office or to business/personal networks) and foremost impartial arbitration (in matters of land squatting, stealing of property, marriage breakdown, to name a few). The patron offers these through constant communication with his congregation via various nodes available to him. These include annual *urs* (death anniversary of the original saint), annual visits the *pir*-politician pays to his followers and on a regular basis through the extensive network of *khalifas*. This provision reinforces the *pir*-politician's social power (social standing as impartial arbitrator) and political power (through the *murid*'s political activity including votes). The material goods, normally provided as part of the *pir*'s worldly duties towards his *murids*, include building of schools, roads and getting jobs for the clients (whether in government or otherwise).

The *murid*'s resource base is also largely personal. The *murid* has a number of goods to offer the patron, including but not limited to allegiance, loyalty (religious, political and social), offerings (ranging from tithes, to land deeds, monetary donations), investment of time, and political support (this can range from showing up at political rallies, to casting their vote). The *murid* avails these non-material goods offered by the *pir*-politician through his position as a client, that is, through membership of the congregation. It is not an *active* good that is being exchanged, but one that requires investment of time and constant communication with the entirety of the informal institution associated with the *pir*-politician (the shrine, congregation, *khalifa* network). Importantly a client's access to non-material goods can only be removed if the client were to leave the relationship. Furthermore, the actors relate to each other on two levels, both religious and political, where both have duties towards each other, creating expectations, where there is a complex overlap of religious and social identities. It is crucial to point out that only if one's patron is running for office or has categorically expressed a political leaning

towards a candidate, is the vote perceived as part of one's sworn spiritual allegiance, with the expectation of the *murid* is voting for their saint.

Third, the relationship is highly affective. Scott's framework is helpful here, which assesses the strength of a clientelistic bond in relation to how many linkages patron and client share. Many link reinforce the bond, resulting in a stronger bond, whereas fewer links between the actors are associated with a weaker bond (1972). In case of the *pir-murid*, the actors share multiple links, all in different spheres of life – social, political and religious. Each link reinforces the other. Some scholars argue the possibility of differentiating between these linkages being limited to the analytical level, where differentiation in practice is of little importance. One example is Jeremy Boissevain's study of Sicily, where patronage, friendship and kinship reinforce each other and exist as an amalgamation (1966: 29). I agree to a certain extent, where the linkages in practice indeed do exist as an amalgamation. However, I argue for a practical differentiation between the bonds of the *pir-murid*, because the religious bond appears to be driving the social and political linkages, and as such constitutes a differentiation both empirically and theoretically.

Fourth, the relationship is iterative. There is regular interaction between the actors. On a daily basis there is social interaction between *murids* of the same congregation, the *khalifa* of the *pir*-politician, and at least once-a-year interaction with the *pir* himself during the annual *urs* (death anniversary) at the *pir's* associated shrine. These face-to-face interactions with the entire system of religious clientelism are in stark contrast to today's vote-buying literature where interaction is limited to only election time (Mohmand 2011, Hicken 2011, Stokes et. al 2013).

Finally, in conjunction with these four attributes outlined above, religion as the basis of clientelism reinforces aspects of trust (Hosking 2014: 46) and loyalty. This is exercised at different levels and degrees. At the interpersonal level, the *murid* shares strong thick trust between himself and the *pir*-politician, where *murids* have committed valued resources (such as the oath of allegiance, tithes, investment of time and their vote) (Granovetter 1973). At the individual level, the *pir* serves as an authoritative figure, to whom *murids* look up as spiritual guide and intercessor, and in general, trust them more than ordinary human beings (Hosking 2014: 38). At the collective level, the myths associated with the *pir*-politician provide a narrative framework for trust. This trust, between patron and client, is reinforced by the iterative and reciprocal exchanges between both actors. Finally, at the institutional level the *murid* has trust in the shrine and the congregation – that is, generalized trust. This is a strong thin trust based not on knowing someone personally but is “based on first-hand knowledge of how society generally works”. One example is the knowledge of what streets are safe to walk at night in the city one resides in, or what Bronislaw Malinowski calls ‘auto-pilot’ trust which is based on one's cumulative experiences with said institution (Newton 2007).

Hindering self-determination?

Now that we have outlined and described the core characteristics of religious clientelism, we home in on the functional aspects of religious clientelism relationship which have the potential to subvert the political self-determination of the *murid*-voter's vote choice. For analytical purposes we divide these into three separate categories: (a) voting as a religious duty, (b) inability to change *pir*, and relatedly, (c) social sanctioning. It is important to note that in practice these three aspects are not entirely separable. In fact, they overlap considerably and operate in symbiosis in the process of the *murid* selecting how to cast their ballot.

Voting as a religious duty

The first functional aspect of the relationship that poses a potential threat to the self-determination of the *murid*-voter is when voting is understood as a religious duty. Most voters cast their vote for the *pir* as part of the expectations that exist between the actors. In this case what the *murids* believe is expected of them. As one disciple of the late politician and spiritual leader Amin Fahim puts it, “*Voting for Sain Sahib is not only our duty but it is also an expression of our love for him*” (interview, Karachi, November 2015). Although the act of voting is understood as a religious duty, this is not necessarily an active order from the *pir* – instead it appears to form part of the overall expectations held by both actors. The below quote highlights this expectation versus direct orders from the *pir*, where an explicit order would seal their choice in favour of the *pir*.

Yes, I vote for him...He never tells us to, but if he were to tell us his opinions then we would be bound to do so...That is what a *murid* is, we are his disciples.

(Interview, Hala, November 2015)

There is a mixed picture about whether or not direct orders coming from the *pir*-politician is the main *modus operandi*, indicated by a large majority pointing out “*We vote for whatever political party that the Sain [his Honour] tells us*”, there seems to be a communication network at work, where “lists” are provided to the congregation through the *pir*’s substantial *khalifa* network. That voting is viewed as a religious duty is further reinforced by *murids* voting across party lines when their *pir*-politician switches party – across the political ideological left–right spectrum. One such example is the current Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Querishi, who previously was with the left of centre Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), and currently is part of the right of centre Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI). One *murid* puts it bluntly, detailing *where* their political allegiance stems from and why they vote in a certain way.

Our relationship is with Sain [His Honour], not with the party and not with anyone else. Listen, what is more important – this politics business or our faith? Imaan [faith] will be useful here and ‘there’ (pointing up to the sky, indicating heaven and afterlife).

(Interview, Multan, November 2015)

The quote also highlights the religio-clientelistic relationship as the driving force behind the political choices of these voters, where the personal bond supersedes the one with the institution of the party. Another aspect of voting that could limit the *murid* from voting for their *pir* is a practical one. Whether or not one can cast a vote for a candidate depends on where one is registered to vote. Simply put, If one is registered in the same constituency from which the *pir*-politician is contesting office. In effect, this duty could practically be limited to the bounds of a constituency. How do *murid*-voters support their spiritual leaders through their vote if they cannot cast a direct vote for them? One *murid* explains the process in detail.

We vote for whatever political party that the Sain tells us, but **normally** we just vote for the person that is part of the **list**. Take my example, I can’t technically vote for Sain because I belong to Sindh [his *pir* was running from Punjab]. In this situation I just vote for the candidate who belongs to Sain’s party in our area.

(Interview, Multan, November 2015)

This strategy, to vote for candidates via a list provided, or in the absence of such a list, for the political party that the *pir*-politician belongs to, appears to be a general trend among *murids* across the congregations, whether they belong to the congregations of Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, Makhdoom Shah Mehmood Querishi or the followers of Makhdoom Jamil-uz-Zaman. Voting is understood by *murid*-voters to be a religious duty, and is accommodated and adjusted according to the knowledge at hand – specific (lists) or general (voting for the political party).

No exit?

The second, and perhaps more important aspect that may hinder *murids*' exercise of choice is that one cannot change their *pir*. As elaborated earlier, when entering this religio-clientelistic bond, the *murid* takes an oath of allegiance – this entails exclusive submission to one spiritual leader (Ewing 1983). Furthermore, many times, the choice of *pir* is a matter of tradition, that is, swearing allegiance to the same *pir* that one's fathers and forefathers did. This aspect of tradition in combination with the oath of allegiance can make the idea of changing a *pir* seem implausible. When asked if one can change their *pir*, one *murid* was dumbstruck, and responded

...this is a very strange question, it's like asking if I can change my religious sect – becoming Shia from Sunni, or vice versa. We cannot change our sect, can we? So, in the same way, no you cannot change your *pir*. This is a matter of one's beliefs.

(Interview, Multan, October 2015)

This highlights a loyalty that exists between both actors. It prevents them from choosing a patron in accordance with the best offer. This is in contrast to the contemporary understanding of the client, where clients are assumed to be able to go 'patron shopping', where the vote is used as a bargaining chip by clients with potential patrons, which the patron needs in order to gain political office. Effectively clients exchange their vote for the best material inducement offered, or in the words of Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson, a situation in which clients are "willing to surrender their vote for the right price" (2007: 2). This is not the case for the *murid*-voter.

Furthermore, because the religious linkage supersedes the political one, for *murids* the vote does not translate to a bargaining chip when dealing with their *pirs*. In fact, for the *murid* to switch patrons comes with extreme social costs because of the sworn allegiance to the *pir* as spiritual leader. To borrow Anna Grzymala-Busse's phrase, religion as an identity is not fungible, you cannot leave without incurring a disproportionate social cost and the psychological burden of damnation (2012). The fear of damnation is best illustrated through the interview extract, where a *murid* confronted his *pir* and challenged his ability to provide spiritual advice because he himself was not following the advice he gave his followers.

CLIENT: "Why should I listen to you? You yourself are not doing those things that you tell us to do. In fact, you are indulging in things that you yourself say are not permitted for us [the *pir*-politician is widely known to be an alcoholic]. How can you then be a spiritual advisor?"

PATRON: "Let us light a fire here." [They light a small bonfire. The *pir* tells the *murid* to bring some water, and as there is no fresh water around, he tells him to fetch some from the nearby open sewer and throw it on the fire. The client did as he was told; he threw

the pail of sewage onto the fire, and the fire went out.] The *pir* turned to the client and said “You see what just happened here? No matter how dirty I am, at the end of the day, I am still the one that will save you from the fires of hell and provide you salvation in the afterlife.”

(Interview, Karachi, November 2015)

The underlying role of this relationship as an inherent part of the *murid*'s social identity also begins to surface and provides better insight into why an exit from the relationship is more complicated than just opting out. The oath of allegiance, and tradition together with “this is part of who we are” (interview, Hala, November, 2015), makes for a layered relationship that serves not only one's religious inclinations but also social ones. It helps us understand how social sanctioning is part of the active considerations the client operates with.

Social sanctioning

The third aspect of the relationship that may potentially stymie the *murid*'s self-determination via the vote, is social sanctioning. As the above sections show the relationship itself is inherently a socio-religious identity that forms part of the *murid*'s day-to-day existence. The clients have a choice to vote or not to vote for the patron. If they vote – they are guaranteed to receive the non-material goods (the promise of salvation, religious guidance, social wellbeing). If they choose not to vote for the patron there is a high social cost to pay; they lose insurance of salvation, religious guidance but more so, their social wellbeing/reputation is affected in an adverse manner. Because of religious clientelism operating at the collective and individual levels at once, not to cast a vote in favour of one's *pir* can be viewed as betraying the entire congregation. In a conservative society like Pakistan, reputation and “face/honour” can be the highest thing an individual possesses; therefore, this plays an imperative role in how other members of society perceive and react to one. Social standing not only affects the day-to-day quality of life but also is a major aspect of how one operates in various aspects of society. Therefore, social sanctioning in the form of social ostracism can result in isolation of not only the individual but also the individual's family, revoking an imperative part of social identity and belonging. As such, the client is not only reacting to the goods provided to him by the patron but also reacting to the fellow *murids* of the congregation that are to be found in his surroundings.

The far-reaching effects of social sanctioning are best underscored by the example of exclusion of a well-to-do *murid*. He is a local landlord who belongs to the elite of the country, both asset- and access-rich (he obtained his post-graduate degree in the USA, and currently manages 5,000 acres of land of his own) but also has his own vast contact network across the country, with family members active politicians at the national level. His family was excluded from their congregation for displeasing the *pir* and had their “hands tied”. In effect, he was ousted from the congregation and the status of *murid* revoked through public announcement. Within the community word quickly spread of a social boycott against not only the offending individual but also the members of their immediate family. Members of the community stopped communicating with them, refused to intervene to provide any form of help, and also removed themselves from any public association with the former *murid*. This resulted in a social boycott and ostracization, where any work the client tried to perform in this context was limited to their own devices. In close-knit communities, social boycotts can spell doom for an individual actor, where even the well-off client will be subjected to the same demands and expectations as any other client – that is, both implicit and explicit expectations between client and patron. As such, revoking this relationship, or going against one's *pir*, may come with extreme social costs,

where at the collective level it functions as a collective identity that provides social standing, protection of the patron and an added layer of insurance – especially in the case of conflict (such as land squatting issues). As one former superintendent of police (SP) of Sindh detailed “this is especially so in areas in which the state is lacking in the provision of the public good of law enforcement, and where even the local superintendent police officer has been appointed through the consent of the local *pir*, whether or not they are active politicians” (interview, Karachi, April 2019).

Discussion and conclusion

The empirical analysis above clarifies two important points. First, it highlights the important role of non-material considerations in a *murid*-voter’s decision-making process of casting a vote. These considerations are overwhelmingly tied in with social aspects of the relationship, where voting is not viewed as a bargaining chip in their exchanges with their *pir*-patron. Instead one’s vote is part of the expectations between the two actors, where the vote is perceived as “it’s just a vote” relative to other expectations from the relationship. The social embeddedness is underscored by the sanctioning that takes place by not only the patron, but also by community members.

The second point clarified is the need to make our models more reflective of how clientelism operates on the ground. So far, the literature has attempted to forward a parsimonious model of how voters operate, where the focus has heavily been on seeing and understanding clients through an economic lens, where the clients opt for the best material inducement. This reduces the lived reality of voters to simplistic models that are not reflective of the real world these citizens operate in. The above analysis, however, clarifies that we have to make space for non-economic considerations when attempting to further our understanding of clientelism in general, but client-voters specifically. Specifically, we must pay attention to the client’s various identities and the social contexts they find themselves in, thus going beyond the quid pro quo of material goods. Put simply, the inclusion of long-term bonds into our analysis shows us how the *murid*-voter’s political behaviour is not just a result of the material exchange relationship between himself and the *pir*-politician, instead it is a more complex and nuanced approach that accounts for the clientelistic bond as a whole, where non-material supernatural goods also feature.

Furthermore, it underscores how clients themselves monitor their own behaviour, and thus stop themselves from taking certain actions. This specific finding addresses the overall monitoring debate of clientelism, where a general assumption held is that patrons monitor clients’ actions and sanction them if they renege on their end of the bargain, despite scant evidence in support of this assumption (Hicken and Nathan 2020). In this case, self-monitoring as portrayed by my empirical findings can help address this evidentiary gap.

Finally, the importance of this type of clientelism and its effect on a country’s democratic trajectory is highlighted in developing contexts such as Pakistan, where political parties do not operate as programmatic ones; instead politics is personalized, where voters relate to politicians through personalized linkages provided by the myriad of power relationships that they find themselves in. The importance of these linkages, especially religio-political ones, is reinforced in how these can affect the democratization or autocratization of a nation. This type of clientelism has the potential to operate in either direction – towards democratic consolidation or autocratization. In the absence of programmatic parties, one way to use this relationship towards democratic consolidation of developing democracies is to follow examples of countries such as Ghana, where tribal chiefs are legally barred from running for office. In this case if the *pir*-politician were to refrain from participation in the political arena, and actively encourage

his disciples not only to participate in elections but ensure that they go to cast their vote, then the relationship could be a step in the right direction, to reinforce democratization efforts. Nevertheless, this does not negate the potential risk posed by *pirs* acting as brokers between political parties and the voters, where their lack of direct participation can be geared towards indirect influence instead. For the success of such an initiative the *pir*-politician would have to remove themselves from the political process altogether, by not encouraging any affiliations or endorsements, but only to ensure their followers partake in the electoral process by casting their vote for whomever they please. If the relationship is used in the above manner, it would help reinforce democratic consolidation.

However, if this relationship operates and hinders the choice of *murid*-voters due to the above reasons discussed, not only will the presence of such a relationship continue to stagnate the one man, one vote concept, but such ties will continue to contribute to the autocratization of nations like Pakistan. This is especially in an environment where the voters' choice of candidate is not driven by their own understanding of the political sphere; instead their decision-making is driven by loyalty factors. That said, if *murids* vote for these *pir*-politicians because they believe them to be the most suitable actors able to represent their interests in the political arena, where a blend of material and non-material exchanges continue to be swapped, then at its core it will be an exercise in choice. For that to take place though, other factors available to citizens in democratic settings must also be present – such as freedom to express oneself without repercussions, insurance of one's personal safety in day-to-day life and access to hold one's politicians accountable. Until these other factors in Pakistani politics are assured, the *pir*-*murid* relationship will continue to be perceived by analysts at large as one that pulls Pakistan towards autocratization.

Bibliography

- Ansari, S. (1992). *Sufi Saints and State Power: The Pirs of Sind, 1843–1947* (Cambridge South Asian Studies). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511563201
- Boissevain, J. (1966). Patronage in Sicily. *Man*, 1(1), new series, 18–33. doi: 10.2307/2795898
- Chandra, K. (2007). Counting heads: A theory of voter and elite behavior in patronage democracies. In H. Kitschelt & S. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition* (pp. 84–109). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511585869.004
- Ewing, K. (1983). The Politics of Sufism: Redefining the Saints of Pakistan. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 42(2): 251–268. doi: 10.2307/2055113
- Gilmartin, D. (1979). Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab. *Modern Asian Studies*, 13(3): 485–517. doi: 10.1017/S0026749X00007228
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 79, Number 6, May 1973.
- Grzymala-Busse, A. (2012). Why Comparative Politics Should Take Religion (More) Seriously. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 15: 421–442. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/10.1146/annurev-polisci-033110-130442>
- Hicken, A. (2011). Clientelism. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 14: 289–310. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/10.1146/annurev.polisci.031908.220508>
- Hicken, A. and Nathan, N. L. (2020). Clientelism's Red Herrings: Dead Ends and New Directions in the Study of Nonprogrammatic Politics. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23(1): 277–294.
- Hosking, G. (2014). *Trust: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Khan Mohmand, S. (2011). *Patrons, Brothers and Landlords: Competing for the Vote in Rural Pakistan*. Doctoral dissertation. Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
- Khan Mohmand, S. (2019). *Crafty Oligarchs, Savvy Voters: Democracy under Inequality in Rural Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (South Asia in the Social Sciences). doi: 10.1017/9781108694247

- Kitschelt, H. and Wilkinson, S. I. (eds) (2007). *Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511585869
- Malik, A. and Rinchan, Mirza. (2015). Religion, Land and Politics: Shrines and Literacy in Punjab. The Pakistan Strategy Support Programme (PSSP) Working Paper no. 030.
- Malik, A. and Malik, Tahir. (2017). Pirs and Politics in Punjab, 1937–2013, *Modern Asian Studies*, 51(6): 1818–1861. doi: 10.1017/S0026749X16000949
- Newton, K. (2007). Social and Political Trust. In R. J. Dalton and H. D. Klingemann (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behaviour*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270125.003.0018
- Piliavsky, A. (Ed.) (2014). *Patronage as Politics in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scott, J. C. (1972). Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia. *American Political Science Review*, 66(1): 91–113. doi: 10.2307/1959280
- Stokes, S. C., Dunning, T., Nazareno, M. and Brusco, V. (2013). *Brokers, Voters, and Clientelism: The Puzzle of Distributive Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics). doi: 10.1017/CBO9781107324909
- Talbot, I. (2010). *Pakistan: A Modern History*. Second Edition, London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Wilder, A. (1997). *The Pakistani Voter, Electoral Politics and Voting Behaviour in the Punjab*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.