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"Bolivia in Miniature:" Clientelism in University Politics and Implications for Democracy in Bolivia

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"Bolivia in Miniature:" Clientelism in University Politics and Implications for Democracy in Bolivia

Disciplines
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"BOLIVIA IN MINIATURE:" CLIENTELISM IN UNIVERSITY POLITICS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY IN BOLIVIA

By

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ABSTRACT

The Bolivian university is administered through a system of co-government, which gives students and professors the right to 50% of the vote in elections of authorities as well as 50% representation on governing and advisory boards. In the elections of the decano (dean) and director académico (academic director) of a particular Facultad (School) within the university, professor-candidates and student-voters develop clientelistic relationships: the candidates, acting as patrons, attract the electoral support of students, the clients, with displays of generosity such as parties and raffles. Furthermore, as data from 16 ethnographic interviews with students reveals, those who participate more extensively in the campaign of a certain candidate often do so because of the implicit promise of future academic, economic or political favors. This experience with clientelism in university politics may have negative effects on democracy in Bolivia because 1) students learn to rely on manipulation of personal relationships rather than institutional rules in order to advance and 2) many students equate university political practices with corruption, which reinforces the widespread belief that politics in Bolivia is inherently corrupt and degrades faith in democratic procedures and institutions in their society.
# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
Methodology ................................................................................................................... 4
Ethical Considerations .................................................................................................. 5
Theoretical background: democracy and clientelism in a new context ....................... 6
Setting the scene: the Bolivian university .................................................................... 11
Ethnographic data ....................................................................................................... 15
Causes and consequences: Why Bolivia? .................................................................... 23
Causes and consequences: effects of perceptions of corruption on democracy ......... 25
Clientelism and corruption in other Bolivian educational settings ............................ 28
Conclusions .................................................................................................................. 30
References Cited .......................................................................................................... 32
Appendix: Interview Questions ..................................................................................... 35
Figure 1: Cover of campaign pamphlet ...................................................................... 37
Figure 2: Cover of campaign pamphlet ...................................................................... 38
Figure 3: Photograph of campaign banners on university buildings ........................ 39
Figure 4: Photograph of campaign banners on university buildings ........................ 40
Figure 5: Photograph of campaign banners on university buildings ........................ 41
Introduction

At the Universidad Mayor de San Simón in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the campus is abuzz with normal activity on a bright July morning. The buzz intensifies, however, as I approach the Facultad (School) of Science and Technology. I suddenly encounter swarms of students, many swathed in red or blue tunics with the acronym V.I.D.A. (life) hand painted in white letters. They are eagerly filling my hand, outstretched or not, with fliers and pennants, slapping a sticker on my shirt or even draping me with a V.I.D.A. sash (Figures 1 and 2). From the fliers I learn that the letters in V.I.D.A. stand for “Vanguardia Independiente Democrática y Autonomista” (Independent, Democratic and Autonomist Vanguard). The buildings are plastered with brightly colored banners, mostly V.I.D.A.’s red and blue, but also a few white sheets with a graceful blue stick figure with raised arms next to the word DIGNIDAD (dignity) (Figures 3, 4 and 5).

Is this preparation for some big soccer match? No, I have stumbled upon the long-heralded elections of the decano (dean) and director académico (academic director) of the School of Science and Technology. As a North American university student, I am puzzled by the very notion of electing school authorities. When I admit this to my enthusiastic San Simón counterparts, they proudly proclaim, “In our universities, we have democracy.” They use the term as if an obviously fundamental part of the higher educational experience. As one student said, “We have the right to elect our authorities; as students we can best judge their qualifications.” Indeed, cogobierno (co-government) is a hallmark of Bolivian higher education, and since the 1950s, has guaranteed students the right to 50% of the vote in elections of authorities as well as 50% representation on governing and advisory boards. This tradition began in Argentina with the Cordoba
Reform in 1918 and has since become an integral part of many Latin American universities.

The philosophy and function of co-government has been widely discussed in official literature and scholarly critiques. While publications produced by the university proclaim the need to defend university autonomy and co-government from the threat of neo-liberalism (Ramos 1991, 1997), Brunner (1993) and Rodríguez Ostria (2000) criticize the system’s inefficiency. Less attention, however, has been paid to how this experience shapes the political views of Bolivia’s future professionals: the students themselves. Because the students have relatively great influence in the decisions that affect them (especially compared with the university system in the United States), the system of co-government might appear to be the epitome of democratic tradition, played out on a micro level. Are not the ideals of representation and participation reinforced by giving each student a vote? So affirms the University’s Estatuto Orgánico, or constitution, the “eminently democratic context” of the Bolivian university; so affirm the students in their aforementioned discourses on their democratic rights. Indeed, scholars who have studied Bolivia’s political culture, such as Jorge Lazarte, find that democracy is often equated with participation in the form of voting. The Bolivian case is consistent, he asserts, with Alain Touraine’s observation that in Latin America, “politics is defined more in terms of participation than representation,” (Lazarte 2000:95) and that it is valued over all other sources of legitimization of authority (ibid:96).

Universal participation, however, is not the only ingredient for a democracy. Closer investigation of the system of university elections shows that it may be reinforcing the principles of clientelism instead of those fundamental to a truly democratic political
culture. Lazarte defines political culture as “a system of values, norms and orientations towards all things political, which function as a code of interpretation and action” (ibid:29). Luigi Graziano (1976) classifies clientelism as the political version of patronage. Anthropologist Alex Weingrod explains that the study of patronage is “the analysis of how persons of unequal authority, yet linked through ties of interest and friendship, manipulate their relationships to attain their ends;” clientelism is “largely the study of how political party leaders seek to turn public institutions and public resources to their own ends, and how favors of various kinds are exchanged for votes” (Graziano 1976:150). The thesis of this paper is that the power of the deans to distribute funds, favors, and affect academic and occupational futures, with little accountability to their “constituents” once elected, positions students as obsequious clients in relation to their professor-patrons, the electoral candidates. This experience with clientelism in the university is antithetical to the strength of democracy in Bolivia for two principal reasons. First, it teaches students to rely on manipulation of personal relationships rather than institutional rules in order to advance. Second, many students equate university political practices with corruption, which reinforces the widespread belief that politics in Bolivia is inherently corrupt and degrades faith in democratic procedures and institutions in their society.

After describing my methodology and ethical considerations, I discuss the concepts of democracy and clientelism, proposing the latter as a framework for interpreting relations between student-voters and professor-candidates during an election. I then give a description of the Bolivian university as exemplified by the Universidad Mayor de San Simón (UMSS) and distinguish my unit of analysis - the election of the Dean 3
dean and academic director - from the many other components of co-government. Next, I interpret the ethnographic data from interviews of students within the framework of clientelism and discuss the aforementioned twofold implications for democracy in Bolivia.

**Methodology**

After having spent spring semester of 2001 on study-abroad in Cochabamba, the idea for this project struck me in conversation with a neighbor of my host family. A student of civil engineering, he eagerly told me about the next day’s elections in the university’s School of Science of Technology. He had worked very hard helping the campaign effort of one of the candidates. The way he spoke about democracy intrigued me, and I wondered how this experience contributed to his and other students’ understanding of the concept. I decided upon the ethnographic interview as the best way to obtain this information, and so designed two sets of open-ended questions; one for students highly involved in the campaigns and another for those whose participation was minimal (Appendix). My neighbor helped in introducing me to other students, who were generally eager to participate. I chose primarily students from the School of Science and Technology, which held elections for the dean and academic director on July 13, 2001. However, I also interviewed two students from the School of Law; because their elections were just a few weeks earlier, I figured the experience was still fresh enough in their minds to be able to comment on their participation in the event. In total, I interviewed sixteen students - nine men and seven women - between July 13 and August 3, 2001. I was careful to include in my sample students who were older and younger, male and female, minimally and greatly involved in the campaigns. Bolivians do not necessarily
fit within the 18-22-year-old range North Americans usually evoke when thinking of university students. While the youngest student I interviewed was 17, the oldest was 30. Some students start their studies when they are older, some work full time and take less than a full course load every semester, while still others decide to pursue another degree after having completed a first one. This is possible because the cost of attending is only a low matriculation fee, 70-80 bolivianos (roughly 12 USD) per semester for the School of Science and Technology. In addition, young people generally live with their parents throughout university and even afterwards, perhaps until marriage. Thus, the cost of housing is not a problem for students who wish to continue or prolong their studies. However, Bolivian university students are almost exclusively urban dwellers; lack of sufficient pre-secondary education and the cost of relocation make higher education unattainable for most rural people.

In addition to the interviews, I collected primary source documents such as the Estatuto Orgánico (the university constitution), campaign pamphlets from the day of the election, and official publications about the history of university autonomy and co-government. My literature search was greatly aided by Bolivian scholars who had been my teachers during my academic semester.

**Ethical Considerations**

The most difficult ethical challenge I have encountered is that of holding in check my own cultural standards when evaluating Bolivian higher education. Those who do research in poor countries often identify with its problems all too readily; at the outset, the assumption of many studies is that something must be wrong with the system that contributes to the country’s economic malaise. Such discourse only reinforces the belief
that reigns in the subconscious of those in the U.S. and Latin America alike: the former is rich because it does things “the right way” and the latter is poor for failure to follow the example of its northern neighbors. I am not immune to such assumptions and stereotypes. When I first heard of this system of student-professor elections, my personal reaction was one of disapproval. Politics, I thought, simply should not be a part of the academic experience. I have made a conscientious effort not to let this negative first impression color my analysis.

**Theoretical background: democracy and clientelism in a new context**

In order to see how clientelism is practiced in the university and its implications for democracy, we must clearly define both terms. We cannot discuss clientelism without identifying its essential logic: that of exchange. The underlying principle is the same that Mauss identified in his famous study of exchange in traditional communities, *The Gift*. Favors exchanged in patron-client relationships are “presentations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested. The form usually taken is that of the gift generously offered; but the accompanying behavior is formal pretence and social deception, while the transaction itself is based on obligation and economic self-interest” (1967:1).

The concept of patronage was originally used by anthropologists in their studies of rural communities to describe relationships between landowners and peasants. According to Weingrod, political scientists later adopted it in application to “the ways in which party politicians distribute public jobs or special favors in exchange for electoral support” (1968:379) and coined the term clientelism. (While the terms “clientelism” and “patronage” are often used interchangeably, I will stick to Graziano’s aforementioned...
definition of clientelism as the political version of patronage.) Weingrod continues, “Patronage for anthropologists is an enduring relationship, while in the political science sense patronage is most clearly enunciated during election campaigns” (ibid:380).

Political parties, voters, and the states are the actors in question. The scopes of analysis range from the local to the international; contemporary authors even use the term “international clientelism” to describe the relationship between rich and poor nations (Pawelka 2000, Afoaku 2000).

How are the principles of clientelism in conflict with those of a democratic political culture? As discussed above, Bolivian students adhere to the importance of at least one element of democracy: participation in the form of voting. However, Larry Diamond (1996) warns us of the “minimalist” tendency of “privileging electoral contestation over other dimensions of democracy.” He continues, “As Collier and Levitsky note, minimalist definitions of democracy have been refined in recent years to exclude regimes with substantial ‘reserved domains’ of military (or bureaucratic, or oligarchic) power that are not accountable to elected officials.” Beginning in earnest in the late 1960s and continuing today, clientelism is widely discussed in political science literature as a hindrance to democracy, if not its very antithesis. For example, Marsh writes, “Politics in Smolensk, as in most of Russia, more closely resemble clientelism than effective democracy” (2000:447). Luis Roniger writes, “the logic of civil society and democracy run counter to the logic of clientelism” because the latter is “shown to neutralize the system of representation, as ‘friends’ are placed in the strategic synapses of power and mechanisms of control” (1994:9). Although identified as “an attribute possessed in different degrees by all national political systems” (Kaufman 1974:288), it is
most often seen as problematic in poor and/or newly democratic countries. In his study of clientelism in poor Buenos Aires neighborhoods, Auyero writes, “Political clientelism is recurrently associated with the limitations of Latin America’s unceasingly fragile democracies. It is seen as one of the pillars of oligarchic domination that reinforce and perpetuate the role of traditional political elites” (1999:297). Accordingly, the discussion of clientelism is frequently linked to that of corruption, for as Gupta notes, “the discussion of corruption lends itself easily to barely concealed stereotypes of the Third World” (1995:378). Rather than merely perpetuate such stereotypes, it is my wish to emulate Auyero’s effort to understand how the clients — in my case, university students — “think and feel about [clientelistic] exchanges, and how they evaluate...politics in general” (1999:309). Because these thoughts, feelings and evaluations comprise Bolivia’s political culture, the importance of investigating them cannot be overstated.

The discussion of clientelism in Bolivia is not new. In his aforementioned study on Bolivian political culture, Lazarte concludes that while Bolivians support democracy above all other forms of government, they also accept behaviors that undermine democracy. Like Diamond, he decries the merely “procedural” definition that denotes “a group of rules by which the population freely chooses the holders of power” (2000:23). True democracy, he asserts, excludes the phenomena associated with clientelism. He associates clientelism with a lack of respect for authority and disbelief in the rule of law. He writes, “One of the major weaknesses of Bolivia’s democratic culture is that people do not associate democracy with the observance of rules nor with respect for authority” (ibid:104). He links clientelism with the culture of authoritarianism and \textit{la cultura patrimonial} (patrimonial culture) rather than that of democracy. A fundamental
component of democracy is a public space or sphere distinct from the private one, in which all rules apply equally to all players. In Bolivia, however, “people confuse the two, resulting in the private sphere overlaying the public one; this confusion is the base, among other effects, of generalized corruption.” (ibid:73). This confusion results in a “culture of clientelism,” in which “politics is converted into a personal exchange of services between patron and client.” When survey respondents were asked, “Are you in favor that politicians, in their campaigns, give gifts such as cement, chalkboards, soccer balls or money?” the majority answered in the affirmative (ibid:74). Thus, he argues, the majority of Bolivians accept clientelism as a normal part of politics. Breaking the answers down by demographics, he finds that the following groups are the most predisposed to clientelistic behavior: those in the lowest socioeconomic levels, those with the least formal education, and young people under 18 years of age. In other words, the most vulnerable sectors of society – the poorest, youngest, and least educated – are more accepting of clientelism. Relative to Bolivia’s professional population, most university students fall into one, if not all, of these categories.

Lazarte treats prebendalism, which refers to people in positions of authority granting jobs or favors to friends or family members, in its own category. The term appears often in Bolivia, both in casual conversation and in the press. While the overwhelming majority of survey respondents answered that they would expect nothing from a relative in public office, Lazarte believes this result to be misrepresentative of the actual practice of prebendalism. Asserting his authority as a member of the society in question (Lazarte is Bolivian), he concludes that “Judging by what one hears every day, the perception of this phenomenon must certainly be more extensive” (ibid:76). I will
include prebendalism within the category of clientelism because the underlying principle—of exploitation of personal relationships for political or economic gain—is central to both. As the ethnographic data of my study reveal, this adherence to the principles of clientelism that Lazarte finds at a national level is reflected and perpetuated in the university.

While the concept of clientelism has been used to analyze political relationships from the local to the international level, to my knowledge it has never been applied to academic authority structures. Roniger identifies, however, that “patronage cannot be confined to politics in the narrow sense; it proliferates as well in the arts, academia, the church, the media, and even business—whenever we are dealing with the power of appointment and the granting of access to benefits, goods, services, influence, and honors” (1994:15). He insists,

The study of the continuity and discontinuity of clientelism and patronage in societies that have adopted democracy or are in the process of democratization is highly important...it is important to identify the factors that condition the emergence or decline of clientelism in different segments and subcultures of complex societies. Such studies may shed light on the interplay of interests, commitments, values and perceptions, as well as on the potentialities and limitations of public life and bureaucratic universalism in democratic societies. Moreover, they may reveal the flexible nature of patronage in accommodating change and trace its persistent yet variable impact on modern politics and its interplay with other trends of civil society throughout contemporary and past transformations of the public sphere. [ibid:5]

Bolivia is precisely the type of society to which Roniger refers—its adoption of democracy dates back less than two decades—and the university “subculture” is ripe for analysis.

The most obvious difficulty with my application of the concept to Bolivian higher education is that the university is an institution within a society, not a society in itself.
However, it is set up (quite intentionally, as official literature reflects) as a mock democratic society, and while we cannot draw a neat analogy between the university and the state nor students and citizens, it does have the elements that make it eligible for analysis using the conceptual categories of political science: voters, candidates, parties, and elections. The officials that Bolivian students elect have very real power to affect the academic and economic realities of their lives. Thus, the clientelistic relationships between actors are consequential and demanding of serious analysis. The system’s effects on the university’s functioning as a place of learning is important enough to warrant investigation, but its implications do not end there. Bourdieu alerts us that, in addition to the “essential function of inculcation” (1996:194), educational institutions have the “social function of reproducing class relations, by ensuring the hereditary transmission of cultural capital” and the “ideological function of concealing that social function by accrediting the illusion of its absolute autonomy” (ibid:199). The university is an institution of social reproduction that plays a major role in shaping the civic identities of Bolivia’s future professionals. Thus, we must analyze its “ideological function” and consider that a system of university authority that reinforces the principles of clientelism must have critical consequences for Bolivia’s political culture.

Setting the scene: The Bolivian university

To understand how relations between students and professor-candidates tend towards clientelism, a brief overview of the Bolivian university is in order. The modern institution and its structure of authority have roots extending well into the last century. It contrasts greatly with the North American “bureaucratic model” defined by Cox and Courard (Rodríguez Ostria 2000:121), which gives decision-making power to
administrators and a board of trustees. These bureaucratic professionals are supposedly objective and not influenced by the power networks within the academic community. The decision makers in the Bolivian university, on the other hand, are themselves members of the academic community. As stated in Title III, Article 18 of the UMSS Estatuto Orgánico, “Professors and students exercise the power of decision and government through the following organs: the Congreso Universitario (University Council) and the Consejo Universitario (University Congress). The Consejo Universitario is the “maximum organ of government and decision” (ibid:6) of the university. It generates the policies of the university and can modify the constitution. It is comprised of 50% students and 50% professors who are elected by mandatory, universal vote. However, The Congreso only meets every two years; in the interim, the Consejo reserves greatest decision making power. The Consejo is comprised of the Rector, the Vice Rector, the decanos (deans) and academic directors of each school, two student delegates from each school, and representatives of the teacher’s unions. The collective votes of students and professors each contribute 50% apiece to the final results.

School administrative authorities are elected just as representatives of the Consejos. The university is divided into Facultades, or Schools, which are comprised of several carreras or majors. The dean and academic director of each School are elected for a 3-year term. The powers of the deans are many. They convene the Consejos Directivos de Facultad (the Councils of the Schools), comprised of elected student representatives and directores de carrera (head professor of a major). They propose modifications to the program of study, preside over graduation exams and the defense of theses, and recommend the hiring of professors and administrators within the School.
They may impose disciplinary sanctions upon professors, students and administrators. They also determine which research is to be published and secure contracts and agreements for projects to be carried out within their Schools. These projects are often financed by foreign, non-governmental organizations and the dean usually receives a cut of these funds as a sort of commission.

In an election year, the candidates for dean and academic director run as part of the same front, similar to presidential and vice-presidential candidates. The two generally belong to the same carrera (major). In the July 2001 elections, one set of candidates was from civil engineering, while the other was from biology, both of which are majors within the School of Science and Technology. Political parties are created specifically for an election, and do not usually last once an election is over. The candidates are personally responsible for financing their own campaigns. As in national elections, voting is mandatory. Those students and professors who do not go to the polls face a fine. As in all university elections, the collective student vote make up one-half of the final vote, and that of the professors makes up the other half.

From where did such strong student participation, in the form of cogobierno universitario, come? Gustavo Rodríguez Ostría’s book, De La Revolución a la Evaluación Universitaria (2000), traces the evolution of the organizational culture of the Bolivian university between the 1930s and the 1990s, and discusses how the discourse related to autonomy and co-governance was influenced by historical events. The term cogobierno is almost always used with autonomía (autonomy), which refers to the freedom of the university to plan its budget and set programs of study without state interference. Most Bolivian universities were founded in the early 19th century, but were
not autonomous until 1931. That year, following the lead of 1918 Cordoba Reform of Argentine universities, the Law of University Reform was made part of the Bolivian national constitution. Henceforth, the university was recognized as independent of the state in all its academic activities, but still dependent on it for financing. At this point, there was still no demand for student partisan participation. Students comprised only a “symbolic” one third of the Consejos Universitarios and the Consejos Directivos de Facultad.

1952 saw Bolivia’s National Revolution and a demand for popular participation across the boards. The new Law of University Reform, passed in 1955, added the principle of co-governance (50/50 vote and representation) to the definition of autonomy. Now autonomy not only referred to a way of relating to the state, but a way of internal operation that included students to an unprecedented degree. “The university must understand itself from then on as an independent polis, and its government as that of the demos” (Rodríguez-Ostria 2000:54). This style of reference to the university as a miniature society is still prevalent, as reflected in the current Estatuto Orgánico. In the 1960s, greatly due to the influence of Che Guevarra and the Cuban revolution, Bolivian university discourse became revolutionary. These leftist ideologies manifested in a maximum level of student participation in the co-government. Social distinction between student and professor disappeared, and all members of the university committee were considered compañeros universitarios (university comrades) (ibid:72). When the military dictatorship of Hugo Banzer began in 1971, the University was prohibited from taking positions against the state and all revolutionary discourse was repressed. After democracy was reestablished 1982, the defense of autonomy returned to center stage, and
leftist ideologies gained prominence. In the 1990s, the fall of the Soviet Union meant a
deterioration of the leftist groups on campus. That, and the international focus on
modernization, was reflected in a discourse that turned from promoting egalitarianism to
promoting excellence and efficiency. According to Rodríguez Ostrria, the elections of
authorities became “de-politicized”, and expensive propaganda replaced ideology as the
most important part of a candidate’s campaign. (ibid:82).

Ethnographic data

Now that we have seen how students and professors become political actors in the
context of university democracy, we are in a position to see how clientelism can be used
to explain their interactions. As we analyze the ethnographic data, it is helpful keep in
mind Scott’s criteria, as quoted by Graziano (1976:152), as a basis for comparison. Four
of the criteria of clientelistic relationships that distinguish them from other dyadic
relationships are as follows:

(1) “Direct Reciprocity: as such, this relationship differs from those of pure
coeordination or formal authority.” The reciprocity expected between students and professors
is direct in the sense that campaign parties and food are given with the implication that
the students will return the favor with a vote. The students also expect a fairly direct
return for the work they have done for a campaign. The element of coercion is still
present, however, in that the deans have the power to negatively affect student futures
and may use this fact to intimate students, if subtly, into supporting their campaigns.

(2) “Unequal reciprocity: due to the disparity in relative wealth, power and status
between the patron and client.” The inequality of the reciprocity is evident (and
arguably inevitable) in that the professor-candidate is in a position of much greater
relative power than the student.

(3) “Face to face’ quality of the relationship.” Students see the candidates every
day in classes, and work very closely with them on their campaigns.

(4) “Diffuseness: the patron-client tie is a poly-functional bond and not a
functionally specific relation as a contractual relation.” While the candidate gives favors
to the student with the specific expectation of his or her vote, their bond is certainly poly-
functional from the student’s perspective. The candidate can in turn support them in a
number of ways, be it academic, economic or political.

We find examples of each of Scott’s characteristics in student testimony. The
interview questions sought to reveal student motivations for level of involvement in
university politics and their perceptions of the system in general. Most students cited the
same reason for the extent of their involvement, be it great or small: the fact that
participation is usually a front for favor seeking. In this way, students acknowledged (if
informally) the dominance of clientelism. While those who were active in campaigns
readily stated they were taking advantage of these benefits, others viewed the whole
system with disdain and chose not to take part on principle. Besides the more trivial,
immediate pleasures of raffles and parties, favors sought by students supporting
candidates fall in three categories: political, academic, and economic. Miguel, a man of
28 who had earned one degree in civil engineering and is now pursuing another in Law,
gave many examples of all three. He had been very involved in university democracy and
held several student posts. He says that for students running for political positions
themselves within the university, the support of the deans is essential:
A student gives support to a candidate on one hand because of his affinity for the person who is running, and on the other hand, for self-interest. If the candidate that you are supporting wins, then you already have some favors, as much academic as economic. If you are a student politico, say, if you want to participate in the Centro de Estudiantes or the Consejo of your major, to make your campaign you need to make propaganda and things like that. And as you are just a student, you don’t have much money. So you support a party and this party wins, well, the deans get a good deal of money, and as you have supported them, it is only ethical on the part of the winner to repay with something economic.

This particular statement reveals that the candidate-student relationship is one of “direct reciprocity,” that is, one favor demands another in return. Thus, a student may be fairly certain to receive favorable treatment if he or she supports the campaign of the one who ends up the winner. The other side of this coin, which we shall see in later student testimony, is that those who do not support the winning dean may also be fairly certain of being excluded from such favorable treatment.

Along the same vein of economic favors is the influence of the deans to affect the distribution of scholarship monies. Scholarships, often for study at foreign university and funded by a foreign government or non-governmental organization, are granted to students with the strongest application. A letter of recommendation from the dean can greatly aid a student’s chances of winning the prize. Miguel continues: “They send scholarship money to the office of the dean before that of the major. The dean’s office distributes the scholarships to the majors. The people who have helped and are closest to [the dean], well...they gain a lot. A scholarship lasts two, four years, everything paid.”

This power of the dean can be labeled as what Scott calls the “brokerage” function of a patron in relation to his clients. A patron is responsible for “wresting resources from the outside” (1977:23) for distribution among his or her clients.”
an example of the *de facto*, if not legal, power that promotes clientelistic relations between students and professor-candidates.

Another example of unofficial but almost universally known power of the deans is their ability to interfere in a student's academic affairs. Non-monetary academic favors may include authorizing a student to take a test on another day if he is not prepared, as Miguel relates: "If you didn't take an exam because you weren't prepared, you just tell the dean, you know what, I would like for you to write me a letter that authorizes me to take it another day. They are small favors that help a student very much."

I heard a similar tale from the professor's side. Amado teaches in the School of Science and Technology; at the same time, he is finishing up his own, second degree in the same School. He observed that, because they have access to all three locations where grades are recorded, the deans and academic directors are virtually the only ones capable of changing grades. He once had a student that, despite having failed the course, managed to have his grade changed to passing by petitioning the dean and academic director of the School. Amado's protests were futile.

This type of favor represents a weakness in the bureaucratic structure that "undermines faith in the 'rules of the game'" as Graziano, as does Lazarte (quoted above), says clientelism is prone to do (1976:171). According to Graziano, such "patrimonial use of office (personal, discriminatory, 'dilettante')...violates two fundamental principles of bureaucratic office: the distinction between the "private" and the "official" spheres and the abstract, impartial application of administrative rules" (ibid:164).
My interviews revealed that students were well aware that deans can and do bend the rules with regards to grades. Several recognized the importance of “staying on the good side” of the winning candidate; even those who were younger and less experienced. 18-year-old Carlos, for example, had been fairly active in the winner’s campaign by helping to organize social events and distribute campaign materials. An student in his first semester, he echoes Miguel’s assessment of student campaign participation:

By supporting (the party), more than anything I am putting myself in a good position with the one who is going to win. I mostly want to go to the team that is going to win. With that, I can get in good (puedo congraciarme) with the dean. If I have some problem or complaint I will be able to approach him more easily, he’s more accessible. Mostly for that reason…most students affiliate with the parties for convenience…so that a professor won’t have anything against them.

Maria, a 23-year-old student, lists the same reasons for student involvement:

“Those who are closest to the professors, the dean and the academic director, they always enjoy some privileges because they support them with their elections. The winning front always gives more privileges to those people, such as postponing an exam, or perhaps help in a certain subject.” She then went on to speak of the economic rewards implicit in supporting a candidate’s campaign, as did Miguel above: “Some even can give them a scholarship, sometimes from a political party. Or a vacation, all paid, what more could they ask for? It is for these things that some students enter politics.”

The promises of favors (or threats) can be very explicit, as Miguel relates:

*Miguel:* [A candidate said], if I don’t win, think of how is it going to be for you the next semester…or, you have to vote for me, and you will receive favors, it is very clear.

*Author:* He actually said that?
M: Yes, it's that way. I didn't believe it either, that a person can be so direct, but when I took classes with him, and one of his friends was running he said, "You guys have to support this person, because if not..."

A: Where did he say this?

M: In the very classroom where we take classes. For example, in these elections. As the professors need to be in favor with the engineer (who is running)...they say, "you know what kids, your exams are bad. And Engineer XYZ is running for the election. Well, you will all have 30 extra points if XYZ wins...This doesn't always happen, but when they are Engineers of this type, those who pisa fuerte (step strong, i.e., wield much influence over university affairs), nobody can reclaim anything.

Carlos reports that he had heard of, but not directly experienced, such phenomena:

A disadvantage [of the system] would be that the professors manipulate the students a little so that they vote for them. They can say, if at least 300 people in this major don't vote for so-and-so, your grades will go down. This hasn't happened to me but...that is, I haven't been a long time in the faculty but, according to what my friends tell me, I realize that this occurs. In some classrooms, I heard my friends say, "Y jolé, this guy loses and we're in trouble."

Although this statement reflects mere hearsay and is not evidence of the phenomenon, it does indicate the student's perception that threats would be a normal occurrence in the context of elections.

Another student, Amado (described above as simultaneously teaching and studying in the School), related a tale of intimidation by this professor who later became the dean. Like Miguel, Amado was older- 27 years old - and working on his second degree, in mathematics, after having completed one in civil engineering. He recalls the problem that arose when he and a fellow student, who had attended the same high school, received almost equal marks on the entrance exam (the following excerpt is paraphrased and not a direct quotation):
When I took the entrance exam, there was another boy from my graduating class, and since we were from the same high school, we wrote almost the exact same answers on our test. And “El Pata” (the nickname for the professor who later became dean) thought that we had copied each other. I was completely self-assured (soberbio), I told him “We haven’t copied, if you wish, give us another exam right now.” And only for my forwardness...my forwardness bothered him, and he told me, “Do you know whom you’re talking to? You’d better be careful with me, I can affect everything around here; I can make life very hard for you if you don’t watch your step.”

Again, while Amado had not himself experienced nor heard of candidates threatening students during elections, this particular encounter with the dean lead him to believe that such things would be “probable.”

Although technically belonging to the category of coercion – which Scott identified above as separate from the mechanisms of clientelism - each of these statements about threats and intimidation reveal another aspect of the university elections that is more characteristic of clientelism than of democracy: the great personal influence of the patron, which extends beyond his official, legitimate authority. In this case, the dean had already acquired substantial influence in the university, by which mechanisms we can only speculate. Whatever the mechanism, his reputation as a university strong man was well known. I once asked a group of students why he was nicknamed “El Pata,” which can either mean legs, paws, or hooves. One student suggested he was so called for his long legs. Another said, “No, es porque pisa fuerte en la universidad” [He “steps strong” in the university.] This is the same language Miguel used, quoted above. The other students burst into laughter but quickly shushed themselves, looking around nervously at the teachers seated in the café around them. It was clear that the candidate was respected and even feared.
Even those students who don’t participate much in the campaigns still enjoy the social events they sponsor. One 19-year-old woman spoke with enthusiasm about the bicycle raffle with which she assisted and rattled off a list of other fun events: a futbolín ("foosball") championship, a party in the park complete with musical groups, a mariachi concert, and plenty of offers of free food like api (a hot breakfast drink) and chicharron (fried meat, usually pork). Such displays of generosity, together with the costs of posters, banners, fliers and other forms of propaganda amount to a significant expenditure on the part of the candidate.

Bourdieu aptly expresses the function of such expenditure in *The Logic of Practice*. While he does not use the terms patron and client, we could easily insert them into his discussion. Symbolic capital, he writes, is acquired by gift giving, which is used to wield symbolic violence (violence meaning the subjugation of one person to another person’s will). This “gentle” violence is fundamental to the acquisition and maintenance of power. Bourdieu refers to Malinowski’s prototype of the “tribal banker” who accumulates resources only to lavish them on others and create a debt of obligation that will be repaid in the form of homage, respect, loyalty, and when the occasion arises, work and service (1990:125). In this way, giving is an act of symbolic violence that allows the giver power. In other words, “A man possesses in order to give. But he also possesses by giving. A gift that is not returned can become a debt, a lasting obligation; and the only recognized power – recognition, personal loyalty or prestige – is the one that is obtained by giving” (ibid:126). Exercising this symbolic, instead of overt violence, exacts a heavy price: “It always presupposes a form of labor and a visible (if not necessarily conspicuous) expenditure of time, money and energy” (ibid:128). This cycle of giving
and debt is the only way to acquire personal power until that position of power is institutionalized, after which point the person’s power is accepted without “demonstrative expenditures” (ibid:131).

The relationship between patrons and clients may be expressed in the same way. As seen above, the candidates (patrons) lavish students (clients) with parties and small gifts throughout the campaign, an example of “demonstrative expenditure.” Students then feel, at least subconsciously, the obligation to repay the most generous candidate with their vote. After the election, that is to say, once their power is institutionalized, the gifts and smiles and handshakes disappear. As 28-year-old Amalia laments, “Only when there is campaign or only when they need a student, there is where the approach a student, and not during the semester or during the time that you are a student, they don’t give you that support that you could need.” This is consistent with Weingrod’s classification of clientelism as “most clearly enunciated during election campaigns” (1968:380). However, other student testimonies — such as that of Carlos and Miguel — show that the benefits can extend past election day if a student is visibly involved in a candidate’s campaign.

Causes and consequences: Why Bolivia?

We have seen that those students who are highly involved in the political campaigns, like Carlos and Miguel, are seeking to acquire symbolic capital that they can later use to their advantage. As they said, they can count on the professors’ support if they actively contribute to their campaign. Later, when they are in the job market, that support and recognition becomes more important still. While connections are helpful in any context, they are essential in an economy such as Bolivia’s where jobs are scarce.
30-year-old Pati notes that many students participate in the deans’ campaigns so they will be able to get a job later: “Many people get involved in politics in order to have access to other things...for example, jobs. They have more access, and these people are the ones who are mobilizing the student vote in these elections.” When asked if she will become more involved in politics once she leaves the university, 28-year-old Amalia responds with a regretful yes: “Lamentably, because of the economic situation here, wherever there is the opportunity to work and move ahead, a person gets in however he can. Whatever (shrugging her shoulders); that’s the life we live, especially in this situation.” 21-year-old Manola says essentially the same thing: “I believe [that I will participate in politics after graduation], because in the end I believe that to secure a job in Bolivia, you have to be involved in politics. If you aren’t a politician, I don’t think you will get a good job. You are nothing.”

Amalia and Manola express cynical resignation with regards to the system in which making personal connections are more important to success than following the rules. It may be argued, as Waterbury has done, that clientelism is more pronounced in such situations of economic crisis. He observed in the late 1970s, “In Egypt the ration is probably even more adverse than in Tunisia between the supply of educated personnel and that of jobs commensurate with their abilities. In a climate of such scarcity virtually everyone needs as many patrons as possible” (1977:261). The same could easily be said of Bolivia at the dawn of the 21st century. Signs of the current economic crisis, which is popularly dated to the 1985 implementation of neo liberal economic policies, are evident in the burgeoning “informal” economy (street vendors) and the high number of unemployed professionals; the online CIA World Factbook (2002) reports that the
employment rate in Bolivia is 11.4% (in 1997), but adds that there is “widespread underemployment” and an estimated 70% of the population lives below the poverty line. Roniger writes, “Promotion of liberalization, reduction of state intervention in favor of market mechanisms, privatization of state-owned and state-supported services, and curtailment of union power, among other processes, further fragment society and heighten the need for support networks. Patronage, when available, remains as important as ever” (1994:14). This is precisely the process that has occurred in Bolivia in the 1980s and 1990s. Given the economic context, it is not surprising to find clientelism dominating politics at various levels in Bolivian society.

**Causes and consequences: effects of perceptions of corruption on democracy**

While Amalia acknowledges the importance of political connections, she believes that “wherever there is politics, there is corruption.” She also says that national politics is “the same thing, the same story” as university politics. Nonetheless, she believes she may have to participate in order to get ahead. Her attitude is one of fatalism; this is the way the world is and there is no use trying to change it. Thus, the phenomena pertaining to clientelism students observe in the university, which they commonly label “corruption,” are regarded as a regrettable but unavoidable part of the political system. Pati’s generalization about corruption was particularly negative:

> For the most part, it is corrupt here, corruption is the first thing one does here in the university. The first thing an authority gets involved with is to acquire some kind of benefit for himself. They may a few things related to their post, but the greater part is for themselves, for their own benefit. Here, there is not a single person who is not corrupt.

When asked about the similarities between politics at the university and the national level, 24-year-old Celia responds:
The similarity is that both are characterized by being very corrupt governments. It is a harsh word but it is also a reality. Everybody knows this, that Bolivia is a country with a good percentage of corruption. The majority of the countries know that Bolivia has a percentage of corruption...medium, not high. They (polities at both university and national level) are also similar because the people involved are motivated by money. There are personal interests. Many times the government does not think about the people, and many times the government of the university does not concern itself the way it should with the students.

Although Celia doesn’t see the level of corruption in her country as “high” relative to other countries, she still categorizes government as “very corrupt.” Perhaps this indicates that she views corruption as a normal part of government in any context.

Sandra, a 22-year-old student, voted en blanco (did not vote for either candidate) at the polls because neither option appealed to her. She stated at the beginning of the interview that she did not like to get involved in university politics because of its corrupt nature. When I asked for examples of such corruption, she first mentions the following: “More than anything...if there is a type of project, some type of study, there is always some kind of corruption with respect to the money involved. A certain amount goes to certain people and a little for the rest, you understand?” Sandra is referring to the projects that a dean secures for the School, and for which he or she often receives a hefty commission. Amado had also mentioned that he believed this was the main incentive for most professors to seek the position of dean.

Sandra continues by saying, “in order to get a job within the university, you have to be a relative or friend or something.” When asked to compare university and national politics, she said:

I think they are very similar. They work the same way...the people that follow a candidate also expect something in exchange. It is not only the candidate, or the rector who are corrupt, but also those who follow them, the very students that participate in all that. I think it is the same here as in other countries. I don’t believe there is any difference.
Like Celia, Sandra seems to believe that corruption in government is as normal “here (in Bolivia) as in other countries.

    Tales such as these related here are oft heard; out of sixteen interviews, ten students used the word corruption in describing university politics. Each of the phenomena they discussed is characteristic of clientelism. The first is the purely personal gain sought by candidates and supporters: people who get involved do so por conveniencia (for convenience) or por su propio bien/beneficio (for their own good/benefit). The second is the existence of prebendalism, or authorities securing jobs or favors for their friends and relatives. Two other students spoke of these same phenomena but did not use the word corruption. Many students, like Celia and Sandra, mentioned these deplorable practices as a quality shared by both national with university politics. Thus, we see that students definitely draw connections between the natures of university and national politics. Even those students who did not speak of corruption as a common element of the two systems of democracy readily identified other parallels between them. As 22-year-old Ernesto said, “la universidad es Bolivia en pequeño” [the university is Bolivia in miniature]. Clearly, the attitudes and behaviors learned in the experience of university extend to life in civil society. For this reason, clientelism and its association with corruption in university politics is doubtless corrosive to democracy in the society at large. As Lazarte identifies, “the sensation in public opinion of a growing corruption” is one of the most serious problems that “damages democracy” (2000:20).
Clientelism and corruption in other Bolivian educational settings

The perception of corruption, as a label applied to clientelistic phenomena, is not limited to the public university. Anthropologist Aurolyn Luykx also identified it in the rural normal school (teacher’s college). Her discussion of how students perceive and manipulate power structures within the normal school is analogous to the situation at the Universidad Mayor de San Simón, even though the former does not have the latter’s system of co-government. She characterizes the normal school in Marxist terms, as a place where academic commodities are exchanged (schoolwork for grades) and schoolwork is a form of alienated labor. In addition to the official exchange of schoolwork for grades, there exists a “black market” in which both students and teachers seek favors. She defines corruption as a form of resistance in which “practices (that) evade institutional control and circumvent the legal limits of the institutional economy, but simultaneously fortify the principles on which the economy is based” (1999:241-242). Prebendalism is one such value enforced: “Kin ties serve as cultural capital. Several students had kin or fictive kin among the faculty…the influence of kin ties on grades can thus be considered part of the normal school economy” (ibid:245). These principles that are fortified- the importance of kin ties and personal influence – are those of clientelism.

While phenomena that reinforce the values of clientelism are harmful to democracy in any context, Luykx reminds us why they are particularly problematic in educational settings. She emphasizes that socialization does not end upon completing childhood. Rather, “secondary socialization” continues throughout young adult, and entails

Dean 28
mastery of new communicative competencies, exploration of various ideologies, and experimentation with various social personae...The renegotiation of identity that accompanies the emergence from childhood involves increasing awareness of, and identification with, the various subject positions available in the adult world. [ibid:124-5]

Luykx also stresses how important schools are to the “nationalist project” of the state, invoking the language of Bourdieu: “It is the school’s task to construct a bond between students and the nation, to embrace students within a network of meanings and practices that define them as “Bolivians” and make this relationship an enduring part of their ideological repertoire” (ibid:128). As discussed above, co-government was originally implemented in the 1950s as part of a university student’s civic training, to inculcate the importance of democratic participation. I believe the system still has this effect today, and can therefore be seen as, in some ways, contributing to the strength of Bolivia’s democratic culture. Students see democracy as an inalienable right as well as a hallowed tradition. In addition, although student politics was not the focus of this paper, the few student politicos I spoke to expressed that, for all its faults, the political system is still the best way to affect positive change (instead of revolution, for instance).

Unfortunately, these lofty ideals are not the only principles with which students come away. Just as influential as official rhetoric (or perhaps more so) in shaping their ideas of civic behavior are the clientelistic practices that dominate university elections. Luykx writes, “the illicit economy students discovered in the normal school was part of their professional training preparing them for situations they would encounter after graduation” (ibid:252). The same occurs at the public university. Through the elections of the deans, students at the public university learn that good relations with certain professors are a form of symbolic capital essential to advancement not only within
the university, but also in the job market. Professor-candidates are aware that they possess the valuable “commodity” of power and influence and use it to attract student support of their electoral campaigns. As clients, the students see manipulation of political influence and “fictive kin” ties are essential to survival in a depressed economy such as Bolivia’s. As one of the normal school students said, “like the big shot politicians, they give you a car, you know, or a house maybe. What do I do? Lose out on a house? So, I’d have no choice but to just become another crook” (ibid:262). This pessimistic attitude echoes that of Amalia and Manola, who expressed that even though they deprecate politics, they may be forced to participate to get a job after graduation.

Conclusions

The system of authority in the university, and the elections in particular, promote a norm of clientelism and teaches students to maneuver within such a system. They learn that institutional rules are invalid and that personal influence can be applied to get around them. Awareness of clientelistic practices further enforces the belief that Bolivia is somehow intrinsically corrupt and erodes faith in the democratic institutions of the country. Whitehead summarizes the effect of what he calls partidocracia, or a system that benefits only a few key political actors, on the viability of democracy in Bolivia: “Electoral competition may be presented as ‘the only game in town,’ but if it is seen as protecting the undeserved privileges of a partidocracia, large sections of the population may see no reason to play the game or may even be attracted to ‘anti-system’ challengers” (2001:9). We see such disillusionment in the testimonies of students such as Pati, Celia and Sandra who recoil from involvement in politics because of the corruption. Although they are required to go to the polls on Election Day, Pati and Sandra vote en
blanco (do not check the box for any candidate). This is also a common response when I ask people in casual conversation for whom they will vote in the 2002 presidential elections. We may interpret this refusal to vote as a form of resistance against what they see as the futility of a supposedly democratic process; such a trend should therefore be taken as a warning signal of popular dissatisfaction. Thus, it is not only the experience itself of clientelism in the university, but also its negative effect on public opinion of democratic processes and institutions that weaken democracy in Bolivia.
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Appendix: Interview Questions

**Preguntas para estudiantes que participan en la política** (Questions for students who participate in politics):

1. ¿En qué año estás? (In what year in school are you?)

2. ¿De dónde eres? (Where are you from?)

3. ¿Cuándo y cómo empezaste a participar en la política de la universidad? ¿Puedes describir tu experiencia? ¿Cómo participaste en las elecciones? (When and how did you begin to participate in university politics? Can you describe your experience? How did you participate in these elections?)

4. ¿Cómo decidiste apoyar este partido y sus candidatos? ¿Qué son las diferencias entre los partidos? (How did you decide to support this party and its candidates? What are the differences between the parties?)

5. ¿Qué es tu opinión del sistema de elegir a los decanos y directores en San Simón? ¿Qué son las ventajas y desventajas? (What is your opinion of the system of electing the deans and academic directors in San Simón? What are the advantages and disadvantages?)

6. ¿Sabes si existe la corrupción? (Do you know if there is corruption?)

7. ¿Qué son semejanzas y diferencias entre el sistema de la política dentro de la universidad y el sistema nacional? (What are some similarities and differences between politics within the university and that in the national system?)

8. ¿Para ti, por qué es importante participar en la política? ¿Participas también en la política nacional? ¿Crees que vas a participar en ella después de salir de la universidad? ¿Cómo? (For you, why is it important to participate in politics? Do you also participate in national politics? Do you think you will once you leave the university? How?)

9. ¿Están tus padres interesadas en la política? (Are your parents interested in politics?)

**Preguntas para estudiantes que no participan en la política** (Questions for students who do not participate in politics):

1. ¿En qué año estás? (In what year in school are you?)

2. ¿De dónde eres? (Where are you from?)

3. ¿Qué es tu opinión del sistema de elegir a los decanos y directores académicos? ¿Qué son las ventajas y desventajas? (What is your opinion of the system of electing the deans and academic directors in San Simón? What are the advantages and disadvantages?)

4. ¿Votaste? ¿Cómo decidiste apoyar este partido y sus candidatos? ¿Qué son las diferencias entre los partidos? (Did you vote? How did you decide to support this party and its candidates? What are the differences between the parties?)
Appendix: Interview Questions

5. ¿Sabes si existe la corrupción? (Do you know if there is any corruption?)

6. ¿Por qué no participas en la política de la San Simón? (Why don’t you participate in San Simón politics?)

7. ¿Qué son semejanzas y diferencias entre el sistema de la política dentro de la universidad y el sistema nacional? (What are some similarities and differences between politics within the university and in the national system?)

8. ¿Crees que vas a participar en la política nacional después de salir de la universidad? ¿Cómo? (Do you think you will participate in national politics once you leave the university? How?)

9. ¿Están tus padres interesadas en la política? (Are your parents interested in politics?)
"Un buen candidato sin un programa coherente y claro se desenvuelve en la penumbra, es un candidato fuerte; y un buen programa sin un candidato apropiado que lo ejecute, es letra muerta".
Figure 2: Cover of campaign pamphlet (names obscured).
Figure 3: Photograph of campaign banners on university buildings.
Figure 4: Photograph of campaign banners on university buildings (names obscured).
Figure 5: Photograph of campaign banners on university buildings (names obscured).