

# How does clientelism foster electoral dominance? Evidence from Turkey

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## Abstract

This article reveals how the AKP's use of clientelism contributes to its electoral dominance. It does so by examining the features and actors as well as the structure of the clientelist network. The arguments are based on fieldwork in one of the poorest and most densely populated districts of Bağcılar, where in the 2015 legislative elections the AKP achieved more votes than in any other district in Istanbul.

## Keywords

AKP, clientelism, dominance, monitoring, urban poor

## Introduction

The impact of clientelism – the distribution of material benefits in return for political support – on the Justice and Development Party's (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) continued hold on power in Turkey is undeniable.<sup>1</sup> Despite a large volume of literature on different aspects of patron–client relationships in Turkey (see Aytaç, 2014; Çarkoğlu and Aytaç, 2015; Marschall et al., 2016; Sayarı, 2014),<sup>2</sup> the micro-mechanisms of the AKP's clientelism and its effect on electoral dominance remain unexplored.

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## MPiFG Journal Article

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This study aims to fill this gap. It examines the features, the actors (on both the demand and supply sides), and the structure (i.e. the content and the deterring mechanism) of the AKP's clientelism. It is based on six months of fieldwork in one of the most densely populated districts of Bağcılar, where in the 2015 legislative elections the AKP received more votes than in any other district in Istanbul.

Our main contentions are as follows. First, clientelism mainly targets the devout bourgeoisie and the urban poor. Second, there is a division of labor among patrons in the clientelist exchange. Third, clientelism is a leader rather than broker mediated. Fourth, clientelism is a problem-solving strategy. Fifth, clientelism is shaped by neoliberalism. Sixth, Islam constitutes the non-material aspect of clientelism. Finally, clientelism is hinged on sectarianism rather than ethnic exclusion.

Our analysis reveals a complex division of labor among patrons, which involves each actor targeting distinct groups with distinct benefits. On the demand side, the persistence of poverty is crucial in buying the loyalty of the clients. With regard to the structure, we show how patrons have established an efficient monitoring mechanism to deter exit from the clientelist network, and that they usually do not refrain from using the punishment card against clients if necessary. In addition, on the content of the clientelist exchange, we argue that the AKP's clientelism typically entails the distribution of goods and services in return for votes; it rarely involves cash payments.

The article begins by introducing the concept of clientelism. It then illustrates the properties of the AKP's clientelism. Next, it highlights the actors and the structure of the clientelist exchange. The last section concludes.

## **Concept of clientelism**

Clientelism is an interdisciplinary concept that can be analyzed through the lenses of different disciplines. For instance, taking it as a type of "social relationship," anthropologists elaborate on the daily working mechanisms of clientelism, while political scientists, taking it as a "feature of government," investigate the effects of clientelism on voting behavior and democratization (Weingrod, 1968: 380).<sup>3</sup> Among myriad definitions,<sup>4</sup> we take clientelism to be "a transaction, the direct exchange of a citizen's vote in return for direct payments or continuing access to employment, goods, and services" (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007: 2).

Clientelism is the scapegoat of modern politics. It is blamed for inhibiting horizontal solidarity (Eisenstadt and Roniger, 1984); corroding ideal citizenship (Trantidis, 2013); reinforcing oligarchic tendencies (Kaufman, 1974); reversing accountability (Stokes, 2005); directly or indirectly causing violence (Wantchekon, 2003; Wilkinson, 2007); hindering institutional development (Graziano, 1973); blurring public and private sphere distinctions (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002); and leading to economic inefficiency, systematic corruption and populist backlash (Müller, 2006; Singer, 2009).

Nevertheless, clientelism is a persistent feature of modern politics. It is used by political parties to appeal to voters and tilt the political field in their favor. According to Greene (2007), parties in power may benefit from clientelist resources in several ways. In the first place, they may transfer money to clients from the budgets of state-owned enterprises or through secret line items. Such transfers are difficult to trace and usually closed to public scrutiny. Second, incumbent parties may take advantage of patronage resources, depending on the size of the public sector. Third, governing parties may use public resources to exchange kickbacks and receive illicit (if not illegal) campaign contributions from business circles. Last but not least, the parties might use the administrative resources of the state, such as public vehicles and phones, as part of their electoral strategy to reach

and mobilize voters (Greene, 2007: 40–41). With these advantages in hand, the parties in power attract better candidates and communicate more easily with the electorate.

Although it is widely documented that the AKP government exploits the resources outlined above in order to maintain its rule, this study restricts its scope to analyzing the distribution of patronage jobs, the exchange of kickbacks with loyal businesses, and the use of administrative resources, excluding instances involving state-owned enterprises and secret line items.

## Method and case selection

The fieldwork was carried out in Istanbul's Bağcılar district from November 2017 to April 2018. Bağcılar was chosen because it is the district in which the AKP achieved the highest number of votes among the districts of Istanbul in the November 2015 elections.

The data was derived from semi-structured interviews conducted in a group format (see Appendices I and II). The interviewees include partisans, brokers, party officials, mukhtars, and municipal employees residing in Bağcılar. In the context of the state of emergency that was in force at the time of the fieldwork, snowball sampling was used to reach the targeted clients. Quotations from interviews are standardized.

The next section underlines the features of the AKP's clientelism.

## Features of the AKP's clientelism

As far as we can discern, the AKP's clientelism has the following properties. First, clientelism mainly focuses on the devout bourgeoisie and the urban poor.<sup>5</sup> The latter are targeted because they outnumber other groups (Brusco et al., 2004; Calvo and Murillo, 2004; Dixit and Londregan, 1996; Szwarcberg, 2013), they are more risk-averse (Stokes et al., 2013; Wantchekon, 2003), and they are less costly (Hicken, 2011: 299–300). Accordingly, it is not surprising that clientelist parties have regularly been observed in poor societies characterized by high inequality (Robinson and Verdier, 2013: 264; Singer and Kitschelt, 2011: 17). Turkey, with its high income disparities and entrenched poverty, thus offers favorable conditions for clientelism to thrive.

The AKP government seeks to attract the votes of the poor with the money of the rich. In fact, the AKP's alliance with loyal business is not surprising if one considers that dominant parties typically have organic links to strong social groups, such as rich businesspeople (as in Japan, for example), the church (as in Italy), or trade unions (as in Sweden) (Dunleavy, 2010: 12). In this framework, AKP governments have frequently exchanged kickbacks with businesses, particularly in the construction sector (Karatepe, 2016). They have also encouraged loyal businesses to buy non-partisan media companies.<sup>6</sup>

The second feature of the AKP's clientelism is a division of labor among patrons, including the party, the leader, the municipality, mukhtars, charity organizations, religious communities, and loyal businesses. The division of labor has two main functions. First, it hinders the monopolization of clientelist resources. Second, it improves the efficiency of monitoring voters.

Third, and unlike Latin American cases, clientelism is leader- rather than broker-mediated. As far as we observed, the party brokers organize meetings, make home visits, inform the party about developments in their area of responsibility, and take care of the people assigned to them, be it the elderly or the disabled. In this way, brokers keep the party organization alive and make things happen. Despite their crucial role, however, party brokers are not allowed to develop autonomous

influence. Nor are they indispensable to the party leadership. The absence of strong brokers helps maintain the unity of the party under a strong leader.

Fourth, clientelism is a problem-solver for diverse groups (Auyero, 2001, 2012). In the case of the urban poor, clientelism serves to meet basic needs, which in theory are supposed to be fulfilled by the welfare state. In addition, clientelism promises upward social mobility and safeguards access to urban services and state jobs through its informal promotion and reward mechanisms (Auyero, 2012: 98).

Fifth, unlike similar Islamic-rooted parties in the Middle East, AKP's clientelism is shaped by neoliberalism. By implementing neoliberal policies, such as privatization<sup>7</sup> and deregulation, the AKP has nurtured its Islamic bourgeoisie, which funds the clientelist network. Similarly, by perpetuating poverty, neoliberalism keeps clients dependent on the government to sustain their lives. In this sense, clientelism and neoliberalism are mutually reinforcing in Turkey.<sup>8</sup>

Sixth, Islam constitutes a non-material aspect of clientelism. To build an efficient clientelist network, the flow of material benefits must be complemented by non-material instruments, such as Islamism. Islamism as an ideology fulfills two crucial roles for clientelist exchange. First, it serves as a cement that keeps normally antagonistic classes under the same party flag (Gülalp, 2001). Second, it deters exit from the clientelist network through neighborhood pressure.

Finally, clientelism hinges on sectarian rather than ethnic exclusion. Voters with an Alevi background are excluded from the clientelist network because they have long been aligned with the social democrats. By contrast, because Kurds predominantly vote for the AKP – at least in Bağcılar – ethnic exclusion is not evident. Highlighting the features of the AKP's clientelism, the next section details the actors on both the demand and the supply side.

## The actors

### *Demand side: The poor*

Among the various socio-economic groups, the poor in particular depend on clientelism to survive or to solve their problems. Even in pursuing their most basic rights, the poor need the help or, to put it more bluntly, the “mercy” of the political authorities.

Although the interviews show that poverty is a widely recognized phenomenon in Bağcılar, the views of patrons and clients diverge substantially with regard to its dynamics. Broadly speaking, while the party and the municipality administration emphasize the AKP government's successful efforts to reduce poverty, the clients underline how the government has failed to improve their well-being.

Municipal officials typically referred to high levels of informal employment as a source of poverty. One (49) explained this as follows:

Poverty is considered high in Bağcılar because of high informal employment. In every family, there is at least one person who is informally employed. These people are underpaid in return for earning higher wages in cash. Accordingly, they are counted as poor in the official statistics.

Although officials consider high levels of informality to be the main source of apparent poverty, the government is reluctant to take any measures to reduce it. For instance, according to the *DİSK* (2018) report, between September 2016 and September 2017 total employment rose by 1,233,000, whereas informal employment rose by 491,000. This provides an informality rate of around 40 percent. The informality rate is likely to be even higher (at least in the short run) in the wake of the

arrival of more refugees from Muslim countries (for example, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq), who have gradually started to replace the present workforce in the district. This trend, if it persists, also has the potential to make Bağcılar the second Zeytinburnu district of Istanbul, in terms of hosting a considerable proportion of the migrant population.

In addition, officials commonly claim that the number of the poor has declined due to the AKP's remarkable economic performance. Clients, however, offer different insights into poverty in the district:

I work in a textile atelier and earn slightly above the minimum wage. I have two children. My wife is not working. Although I live in a very small flat, half of my salary goes to rent. With the remaining money, I do not know how I can make ends meet. Without assistance, I cannot survive. (19)

I migrated to Istanbul in 2004. Although I receive aid from the municipality, life has become much more expensive for me. I even have difficulties sending my child to high school. I have to pay for transportation and food. I am seriously thinking about going back to my village. In my village, at least I will not pay rent. (39)

These testimonies demonstrate that the AKP has reinforced poverty rather than curing it. Broadly speaking, it does so in two ways. The first is dispossession, which has been increasing with the urban transformation projects that have caused house prices in the district to skyrocket.<sup>9</sup> The second is to make people dependent on the state (or rather the government) to maintain their living standards and solve their problems.

We are well aware that the examples above do not represent the entire economic picture in the district. That is to say that there are some people whose economic conditions have improved such that they have come to own a car or a flat under the AKP. However, before attributing that "success" to the government, we need to underline its dynamics. None put this better than the mukhtar (60):

Yes, the economic situation of some people improved. But how has this happened? For many years, there were only two postmen in our neighborhood. Now there are four. They mostly bring legal documents. This means that the government enabled people to own a car or a flat through borrowing.

### *Supply side: The party*

Among the actors mentioned above, political parties require special treatment because they increasingly orchestrate clientelism in the modern world. To perform this efficiently, parties need strong organizational power and charismatic leadership. The AKP apparently fulfills both conditions.

The party has multiple functions within the clientelist network. First, the party organization makes it possible to reach a larger audience. It does so by establishing daily and face-to-face contact with the voters. This essentially requires committed party workers to sacrifice their time and money for the party. One party official (59) illustrates this:

We start our business on the morning of election day. There is no difference in our strategy before or after the election term. We do as much as we can. For instance, I work in the transport sector. I do my job from morning to 3 o'clock [pm]. Then, I come here and stay until night. There are always officials in this building. You can find our officials here from morning to 11 o'clock at night.

Second, the party organization directs clients to the relevant institutions or the authorities that may help them to solve their problems. For instance, party workers may establish contact between the district governorship and an elderly person who needs medicine but cannot afford to buy it. Third, the party mobilizes voters for rallies or at the polls with its strong organization. However, apart from election times, the party organization is not much visible in the street. To illustrate, one partisan (32) pointed out that:

The party does not have regular contact with me in normal times. However, on the eve of the elections, the party frequently sends messages and calls by phone. The workers on the phone just kindly thank me if I say I can't join the event.

The lack of party activism during normal times seems to be for two main reasons. The first is the embodiment of clientelism in the cult of personality. This keeps clients as loyal voters even if the party organization is not particularly active at the grassroots level or even if it is not well liked. The second reason is to avoid "excessive" politicization of the masses. The logic is that if politicization becomes an essential part of clients' daily routine and heightens their sense of expectation, it may rebound on the clientelist machine itself.

Last but not least, the AKP monitors clients before and after the elections. This feature distinguishes the AKP from previous incumbents (for example, the Motherland Party [Anavatan Partisi, ANAP]), which was unable to transform the party system into a predominant one because it failed to establish effective monitoring and relied solely on its charismatic leader to underwrite clientelist exchange. The AKP, though, monitors clients through a sophisticated organization that has adequate and up-to-date information on clients because of its daily close contact with them.

### *Supply side: The leader*

The AKP leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, plays multiple roles in clientelist exchange. First, he is the guarantor of clientelist exchange. This is above all due to the intense media propaganda that praises him for this.<sup>10</sup> The widespread view among clients that "if Erdoğan goes, so do the benefits" is the product of such propaganda. Here, there is also a pragmatic concern that must be emphasized. The clientelist network is so crucial to the AKP that its destiny cannot be left in the hands of the fragmented party leadership and/or brokers. If it was, then the fate of the AKP would not be much different from other dominant parties (for example, the KMT in Taiwan).

Despite our findings that loyalty to the AKP goes hand in hand with loyalty to Erdoğan, there is a notable difference between them, which has become more evident in recent years. Although the electorate is increasingly holding the party organization responsible for political errors and the declining electoral performance of the AKP, it has so far considered the leader above criticism.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, a leader who previously was equated with the party has slowly acquired a new position beyond and above the party. This strengthens his appeal by allowing him to attract non-partisans as well. As a result of this tendency, Erdoğan could easily get votes from the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) in the 2018 presidential elections.

Erdoğan's appeal is borne out by the way in which both partisans and the party leadership praised him during my interviews. For instance, one partisan (23) noted that:

I don't have party membership and have never joined any party activities except big meetings in Istanbul. I follow Erdoğan on the TV and he feels close to me. If I have to describe him with one word, it would be "sincere."

The party organization (59) shares the same view: "People believe in Erdoğan. We think that if the headman [*reis*] says something, he definitely knows it. If there is no Erdoğan, there is no party." Erdoğan's role is even more crucial when it comes to local elections. One partisan (27) pointed out that:

I vote for Erdoğan. Although I do not like the work of the mayor in Bağcılar, I still vote for him because I feel that I would be betraying Erdoğan [if I didn't]. Erdoğan is sincere and has so far stood up to pressure successfully.

Although the embodiment of the clientelist network in the personality of Erdoğan creates a strong partisan attachment at the grassroots level, it also poses a risk for the future. The ANAP case illustrates that a clientelist network cannot survive if it hinges on the charisma of the party's leader. It is likely that the AKP will confront the same scenario in the post-Erdoğan period.

In addition to being a guarantor, Erdoğan keeps the clientelist network alive. As already emphasized, the lack of party activism during non-electoral periods is balanced by the strong party leader who communicates daily via the partisan media. In any case, this is an efficient strategy because it enables the party leader to reach a larger audience with far fewer resources than the party organization would need to carry out the same function.

Third, Erdoğan keeps normally antagonistic classes united under the same party flag. This is more crucial in the absence of a precise ideology and growing income inequality. Nevertheless, we contend that even Erdoğan's charisma may not suffice to unite these classes if the economic crisis that began in the summer of 2018 deepens further. Last but not least, Erdoğan bypasses any judicial supervision that might put the maintenance of the clientelist exchange in jeopardy. As Scheiner (2006), in the context of Japan, and Wang and Kurzman (2007), in the context of Taiwan, demonstrate, the institutional protection of clientelist actors is essential to building an efficient clientelist machine. Such protection therefore explains the persistence of the clientelist network in Turkey.

### *Supply side: Religious groups, vaqfs, and loyal businesses*

Religious groups – which are organized around mosques, Quranic courses, and bookstores<sup>12</sup> – are historically dominant in Bağcılar. Although they insist that their main aim is to save souls, religious groups have in recent times sought also to pursue the interests of their members. Prominent examples include Gülenists and Menzilcıs, who are organized in the public bureaucracy to the extent that they constitute a "parallel state."<sup>13</sup>

The tasks of the religious groups within the clientelist machine are twofold. First, they attract new clients and deter exit by establishing daily face-to-face contact with their members. Second, because the relationship between the religious leader (imam) and their followers is hierarchical in itself, religious groups facilitate the integration of members into the clientelist network.

The *vaqfs* constitute another crucial actor. They include Türgev<sup>14</sup> and Ensar,<sup>15</sup> which seemingly operate as the civil-society wing of the AKP government.<sup>16</sup> Like religious groups, the *vaqfs*, especially the religious ones, target clients with a discourse of "brotherhood, solidarity, and



goodness” (Zencirci, 2014), and establish personal and constant relationships through religious gatherings, excursions, and sporting activities. The feeling of reciprocity emanating from such linkages makes it easier to buy the loyalty of *vaqf* members.

Loyal businesses are also pivotal actors in the clientelist machine. It is widely reported that they exchange kickbacks with the government (e.g. Çeviker-Gürakar, 2016; Esen and Gümüşçü, 2018). In addition, loyal businesses contribute to public resources by paying taxes. Construction companies such as Ağaoğlu and Torunlar merit special attention.<sup>17</sup> In return for being awarded large-scale urban transformation projects or having completed intended changes in construction plans, loyal construction companies employ partisans in their businesses. They also monitor the voting behavior of their employees. In the interviews, workers widely complained that the construction companies compel them to take photos of the ballot paper when they vote. Even worse, the workers claimed that they are threatened with dismissal if they cannot prove that they voted for the AKP.

The potential of construction companies to sabotage the AKP’s electoral performance must also be emphasized. During my fieldwork, partisans, especially the poor, widely complained about growing corrupt links between construction companies and local politicians and their destructive impact on the district. This tendency was very much crystallized in the March 2019 local elections, which witnessed a sharp drop in the AKP’s vote share.

Having identified the actors, the next section reveals the structure of the clientelist network.

## The structure

### *The content of the clientelist exchange*

As noted, clientelism involves the exchange of goods and services for political support. The goods and services vary, based on the setting. In the case of Turkey, coal seems to be the favorite clientelist good overall, followed by flour, tea, sugar, rice, and clothing (Sayarı, 2014). This general observation, however, does not strictly hold for Bağcılar. For instance, because most houses use natural gas for heating, distributing coal would not be the best strategy. Nevertheless, we heard of extreme cases in which clients receive coal and then sell it on. Similarly, cash payments are not common (Arslantaş, 2019).

It is evident in the field that different actors target clients with distinct benefits. In this framework, at least in theory, it is reasonable to assume that the AKP itself is not one of these actors, because the party finance system restricts the spending of treasury money for the sole purpose of party activities (for example, paying rent on buildings, workers’ salaries, and campaign spending). But we must acknowledge that theory and practice do not overlap much here. During the interviews, many clients admitted that they received symbolic gifts, such as Turkish delight and Turkish coffee, from the party at regular meetings. Although it is very difficult to identify the financial sources of these gifts, it is likely that small favors of this kind put the AKP ahead of other parties because opposition parties lack the resources to follow suit.

In addition to delivering material benefits, the clientelist actors also provide jobs and services to clients.<sup>18</sup> This matters most when it comes to mobilizing clients at the ballot box. For instance, an old man pleaded with an AKP official: “I have back pain so I cannot work. I do not have any money to buy my medicine. For God sake, help me.” Another example was a woman in her early 20s. Talking to party officials, she said: “Hello, I am looking for a job. I came here with a reference from Mr. Kaya. He said that if I gave you my CV, you would help me get a job.”



As we have seen, clientelist actors offer wide-ranging benefits to secure clients' votes. The aim is to maximize the party's appeal while minimizing the cost. The persistence of poverty clearly serves this aim.

### *Detering exit: Monitoring and punishment*

To maintain dominance, clientelist parties must deter exit.<sup>19</sup> If they are unable to do so, clients may receive benefits with one hand and vote with another (Szwarcberg, 2015). Parties use several instruments to deter exit. The most common method is to build an efficient monitoring mechanism (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007).<sup>20</sup> In densely populated districts, this requires sharing monitoring tasks among multiple actors. For instance, while religious groups monitor their committed followers, parties monitor through their neighborhood organizations.

In addition to establishing efficient monitoring, clientelist parties deter exit by playing the punishment card. This entails the withdrawal of clientelist benefits from those who fail to give their support.<sup>21</sup> One partisan (33) working in the construction sector illustrated this: "My boss said that I have to take a photo of my vote and send it to him. If I did not do it, he threatened to fire me."

Reflecting this approach, both the party and the municipal officials interviewed refrained from situating distributed benefits within the welfare state framework. If benefits are associated with the welfare state, this would imply that they are permanent, not temporary and conditional. This would give clients less incentive to show loyalty to the government.

## **Conclusion**

The role of clientelism in the AKP's continued dominance has been under-explored, despite the extent of the literature on other related elements, such as social cleavages and populist leadership. This article has shown how clientelism fosters the AKP's electoral dominance, by uncovering the features, the actors, and the structure of the clientelist network.

We first highlighted that clientelism primarily targets the urban poor and the devout bourgeoisie. While the latter replaced the nationalist-secular bourgeoisie as patrons, the former have been added to village dwellers as clients. Second, clientelism is leader rather than broker mediated. This expresses the absence of strong brokers who command their own resources and thereby enjoy autonomy from the party. We observe that clientelist exchange is guaranteed by the charismatic leader, whose image is constructed and propagated by the partisan media. Third, there is a division of labor among the patrons that take part in clientelist exchange. Fourth, in stark contrast to other Islamic countries in which the Islamic-rooted parties were unable to adapt themselves to neoliberal programs (for example, Egypt and Tunisia), clientelism has been nurtured in line with the neoliberal transformation in Turkey. Fifth, clientelism is a problem-solving strategy for distinct classes (Auyero, 2001). To illustrate, while clientelism secures food for the poor, for construction companies it is an instrument for doing business. Sixth, Islam constitutes a non-material aspect of clientelism in Turkey; that is to say, Islam is the cement that assembles different classes within the clientelist machine. Similarly, it deters exit from the clientelist network. Finally, clientelism hinges on sectarian rather than ethnic exclusion. This implies that, while the clientelist network includes the overwhelming majority of Kurds, because they predominantly vote for the AKP – at least in the case of the urban poor – it excludes Alevites because of their historical alliance with the social democrats.

In addition, this article highlights the roles of partisans, the party, the leader, religious groups, and loyal businesses in the clientelist network. Our analysis shows that there is a complex division of labor among supply-side actors, which entails each actor targeting distinct groups with distinct benefits. On the demand side, the persistence of poverty is crucial to keeping clients as loyal supporters of the government. Furthermore, we demonstrate how monitoring and punishment deter exit from the clientelist network. Finally, on the content of the clientelist exchange, we argue that the AKP's clientelism frequently involves the distribution of goods and services and rarely involves cash payments.

Finally, the impact of economic crisis on the future of AKP rule needs to be discussed. The current economic crisis, if it deepens, may have severe repercussions for the clientelist machine. First, it would weaken the ties between private business and the party leadership, which is politically responsible, reducing clientelist resources obtained in the form of bribes and taxes. Second, as the problem-solving capacity of the social state diminishes, due to shrinking public resources, clientelism will become more important in fulfilling this role. Third, as public and private resources become scarcer, clientelism will reach fewer people and thus become more exclusive. In this case, the first group to be sacrificed will be the swing voters, who have a decisive influence in local elections, especially in metropolitan areas. Finally, as material resources shrink, the non-material component of clientelism, Islamic ideology, will slowly turn into a substitute for material benefits rather than being complementary to them. Increasing investment in Imam Hatip schools and Quran courses is the clearest indication of this trend.


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### **Notes**

1. For fresh discussions on the emergence of the predominant party system in Turkey, see Arslantaş and Arslantaş (2020); Arslantaş et al. (2020).
2. Recent studies underline the clientelistic nature of Turkish party politics, as well as the clientelistic mobilization strategies of the AKP. For instance, Ocaklı (2016) shows how civil society organizations nurture clientelist ties; while Gürcan and Mete (2017) demonstrate the same for trade unions. Ark-Yıldırım (2017), on the other hand, elaborates on the differences between the AKP's (transforming social welfare into clientelist resources) and the opposition parties' (broker-based vote-buying) strategies of clientelism. The most recent studies include Yıldırım (2020), which discusses the role of the monopolistic control over public resources in keeping the AKP dominant; and Bulut (2020), which contends that clientelist parties are not always unresponsive to the demands of party platforms and public priorities.
3. Recently, the number of political science studies on clientelism has exceeded that of anthropological ones. This political turn, while providing precision and calibration to the understanding of clientelism, has also introduced problems. First, clientelism is increasingly taken as a political strategy that is

restricted to election time. Second, clientelism is conceived as a vote-buying or turnout-buying strategy (Auyero and Benzecry, 2017: 181).

4. The literature offers a wide array of definitions of clientelism. For example, Stokes (2007: 605) defines it as “the proffering of material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion of distribution that the patron uses is simply: did you (will you) support me?” According to Roniger (2004: 353), on the other hand, “clientelism involves asymmetric but mutually beneficial relationships of power and exchange, a nonuniversalistic quid pro quo between individuals or groups of unequal standing.”
5. Ayata (1990: 159) argues that a cross-class alliance is needed for the smooth operation of clientelism. In the case of the AKP, this is formed between the urban poor and the devout bourgeoisie (see, for instance, Marschall et al., 2016).
6. The making of the partisan press under the AKP government is a dramatic example of a patron–client relationship. In 2004, Star TV and the *Star* newspaper, owned by Genç Party leader Cem Uzan, were handed over to the prime minister-controlled Saving Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF). Three years later, the popular newspapers *Sabah* and *Takvim* and a popular TV channel, ATV, were also taken over by TMSF. They were then sold to loyal businesses through procurements. With the sale of the Doğan group-owned *Vatan* and *Milliyet* to the pro-AKP Demirören family in 2011, loyal business control over newspaper circulation rose by 30 percent in seven years (Çarkoğlu et al., 2014: 300–301).
7. While privatization revenues were merely US\$8.2 billion between 1986 and 2003, they peaked at US\$58 billion from 2004 to 2015 (Bloomberg, 2016).
8. This stands in stark contrast to Mexico, where the clientelist machine weakened after the PRI’s neoliberal turn during the 1980s.
9. Dispossession has the potential to undermine AKP rule in the short run by fostering dealignment.
10. The *Konda* (2017) survey demonstrates that AKP supporters closely follow the partisan media: ATV (26 percent), A Haber (17 percent), and the state-owned TRT (19 percent).
11. In line with that, the *Konda* (2017) survey found that while 46 percent of AKP voters’ support is because of Erdoğan, only 22 percent is due to the AKP’s political appeal.
12. According to the district office of the Mufti, Bağcılar has 69 mosques, 19 small mosques (*mescit*), and 13 boarding and 36 non-boarding Quran courses.
13. It is widely reported that members of Menzil tariqat (an Adıyaman province-centered Naqshbandi group led by Abdulkaki Erol) have started to fill open positions in the Ministry of Health, after the dismissal of the Gülenists (*Cumhuriyet*, 2016a).
14. Türgev was founded in 1996 under the guidance of Erdoğan when he was mayor of Istanbul. Currently, his son, Bilal Erdoğan, has an administrative position in it. The *vaqf* aims to build dorms for students, whose numbers exceed 10,000. Türgev has frequently been accused of having corrupt relations with AKP-administrated municipalities (*Cumhuriyet*, 2016b).
15. Ensar Vaqf was established in 1979, and is typically associated with the National Outlook Tradition. It has recently been targeted by the opposition because of child abuse scandals (*Birgün*, 2016).
16. A recent report shows how the AKP-administered Istanbul metropolitan municipality supports loyal *vaqfs* through the transfer of public resources. To illustrate, by 2018, the municipality had transferred TL51 million to Türgev (amounting to nearly US\$8 million at current exchange rates) and TL28 million to Ensar (Toker, 2019).
17. During the period of AKP rule, the Ağaoğlu and Torunlar groups have come to prominence by undertaking large-scale construction projects alone or in collaboration with Emlak Konut (Housing Development Administration of Turkey’s (TOKI) subsidiary). For instance, Ağaoğlu and Emlak Konut collaborated on the “Maslak 1453 Istanbul” project, located in the middle of the forest in Sarıyer. The Torunlar group, meanwhile, constructed huge residential and office blocks where Galatasaray football club’s stadium used to be (Ali Sami Yen). It has also built popular shopping malls, such as the Mall of Istanbul and Torium.

18. What makes the AKP unique is that it managed to associate itself with “service.” Within party literature, this illustrates how service as a “policy issue” is attributed to “party image.” Sartori (2005 [1976]: 293) notes that “parties communicate with mass electorates via party images and much of their electoral strategy is concerned with building up the appropriate image for the public from which they expect votes.” Nevertheless, it must be noted that diverse groups that support the same party do not necessarily share the same image of it (Sartori, 2005 [1976]: 293–294). For the catch-all AKP, this is even more evident. For instance, interviewees also widely emphasized conservatism/Islamism as a defining characteristic of the AKP.
19. Although monitoring and punishment are essential for clientelist parties to minimize turnover, two factors substantially reduce the need for them, at least in the context of Bağcılar. The first is the status of Bağcılar as a stronghold of Islamic/conservative parties. The second is weak inter-party competition on the right of the political spectrum.
20. The successful institutionalization of monitoring leads to what Stokes (2005) calls “perverse accountability,” which holds voters accountable to politicians rather than vice versa.
21. This rests on the “discretionary nature of particularistic transfers” and illustrates what Magaloni et al. (2007: 184–185) call the “threat of exclusion.”

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### Appendix I. Interview guide.

Introduction	How long have you been living in Bağcılar?
AKP	How many times have you voted for the AKP? Have you ever voted for another party? Which party and why?
Form of integration in clientelistic networks	Are you aware of the material benefits distributed by the government and the pro-AKP actors? Have you received any benefits so far? If yes, what, when, and how much? Is there any mediator that secures your access to goods? When deciding on which party to vote for, how important is the distribution of material benefits for you?
Partisan identification	What is your type of relationship to the AKP (voter, member, or partisan)? How has it changed in recent years? How regularly do you take part in party activities? How close do you feel to the AKP (weak, moderate, or strong)? Are you a sympathizer/member of any other religious or social group? If the AKP's interest clashed with that of your mentioned group (religious group, regional-communal organization, or civil society group), which side would you take? Why?
Ideology	How do you define yourself politically (e.g. left, right, conservative, or nationalist)? Have you observed any change in your political position during the AKP period? If yes, on which issues?



**Appendix II.** List of interviews.

Number	Gender	Date
Voters		
1	M	17.11.2017
2	M	19.11.2017
3	M	21.11.2017
4	M	23.11.2017
5	F	28.11.2017
6	F	28.11.2017
7	F	1.12.2017
8	F	1.12.2017
9	F	5.12.2017
10	F	5.12.2017
11	M	9.12.2017
12	M	9.12.2017
13	M	9.12.2017
14	M	14.12.2017
15	M	14.12.2017
16	F	19.12.2017
17	F	19.12.2017
18	F	19.12.2017
19	M	3.01.2018
20	M	3.01.2018
21	M	3.01.2018
22	M	9.01.2018
23	M	9.01.2018
24	M	11.01.2018
25	M	11.01.2018
26	M	11.01.2018
27	M	16.01.2018
28	F	16.01.2018
29	F	20.01.2018
30	F	20.01.2018
31	F	20.01.2018
32	M	24.01.2018
33	M	24.01.2018
34	M	27.01.2018
35	M	27.01.2018
36	F	14.03.2018
37	F	14.03.2018
38	F	14.03.2018
39	M	20.03.2018
40	F	20.03.2018
41	F	20.03.2018
42	F	20.03.2018
43	M	3.04.2018
44	M	3.04.2018
45	M	3.04.2018

*(continued)*

**Appendix II.** (continued)

Number	Gender	Date
Municipality		
46	F	17.11.2017
47	F	17.11.2017
48	M	17.11.2017
49	M	17.11.2017
50	M	17.11.2017
51	M	17.11.2017
52	M	17.11.2017
53	M	17.11.2017
54	M	17.11.2017
Party		
55	M	6.03.2018
56	M	6.03.2018
57	M	10.03.2018
58	M	10.03.2018
59	M	10.03.2018
Mukhtar		
60	M	20.11.2017