

Patronage, Service Delivery, and Social Justice in Indonesia

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Introduction

Abstract

This article examines how patronage networks operate in subnational governments in Indonesia paying particular attention to how they have affected human resource management (HRM) practices in education and health services. Corrupt practices were found in varying degrees in all the provincial public services studied. They were associated with patronage systems and involved illegal payments for entrance exam results, recruitment and selection, placement, promotion and transfer. These practices had an adverse effect on the quantity and quality of service delivery and represented a challenge to social justice.

Keywords Patronage, Human resource management, Corruption, Indonesia

From the early years of development assistance in the 1960s there has been a strong and understandable belief among development workers that lack of capacity provides a major part of the explanation as to why many developing countries have experienced slow or slower than expected progress in improving the welfare of their populations. As a consequence, capacity building has been and remains a huge industry funded both by donors and developing country governments. The basic premise of this industry is that the pace of development can be accelerated if there are enough people with the appropriate skills and knowledge in the right organizations, in the right geographical locations deploying their skills and knowledge for the public good. Education and training needs to be supplemented by good organization design and sufficient investment in infrastructure, such as schools and clinics, and equipment to enable the skilled human resources to provide effective services in an efficient and timely manner. According to this logic, building human, institutional, organizational and physical capacity should lead to sustainable human development and rapid improvement in the indicators used to measure that development.

This ideology has retained its attraction over the decades partly because it has great appeal to commonsense, but also because it is a safe perspective that offers non-threatening solutions to big problems faced by politicians, bureaucratic leaders, government staff and donors. It is something that everyone can agree with and that possesses a simple and beguiling logic. For instance, if access to and quality of education are lacking, then education policy should be reviewed and more teachers should be trained and, in turn, their trainers should have enhanced skills to raise the quality of the teacher graduates. Furthermore the teachers need the buildings and equipment to enable them to practice what they have been taught. Once these conditions are in place then we can expect effective and efficient education service delivery will follow.

While not denying that capacity building is needed for national development, we argue that it is not a sufficient condition for it, and that it may not always be as major a constraint to development as many take it to be. This would help to explain why, in different settings over many years, the investment of so much effort and so many resources in various forms of capacity building has produced relatively disappointing results. But what is the explanation? Our contention is that where patronage networks are systemic and embedded, within government and linking government and society, they distort or prevent the utilization of capacity and hence have serious adverse effects on the production and delivery of services. We shall show that, in government in Indonesia, one of the main currencies of patronage is the corruption of human resource management (HRM) practices which is manifested in the purchase of jobs, promotions, exam results, transfers and placement, and in favouritism to family, friends and the highest bidders. Human resource management malpractice thereby becomes integral to patronage. As Blunt *et al.* (2012) say 'HRM practices in government [in Indonesia] are crucial ingredients of patronage and are largely of its design, under its control, and subject to its protection'. The result is a state of 'patronage democracy' in which HRM is not directed towards organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Chandra, 2004). In such circumstances, people are routinely appointed without the requisite skills or qualifications, transferred when there is no vacancy, placed in the wrong positions, and given assignments that they cannot fulfill. Staff are demotivated in organizations, or motivated to do the wrong things where what matters is who you know, what and who you pay, and to whom you pledge loyalty, and where initiative, excellence and results matter little. The achievement of developmental goals is constrained and citizens, especially the poor and marginalized, are unable to secure the services in the amounts and of the quality that they are entitled to expect.

This article examines how such patronage networks operate in Indonesia paying particular attention to how they have affected education and health services. The article draws on interviews conducted between March and May 2011 in three provinces and their component districts where despite their geographical, economic and cultural diversity, similar patronage systems were found to prevail. Because of the sensitive nature of the data collected and the consequent need to protect the identity of interviewees, we have deliberately omitted details of where interviews took place and who were the respondents. The data were obtained through a qualitative approach involving a combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and written accounts of patronage and corruption in action relating to HRM. There were 211 participants in our study comprising doctors, dentists, nurses, midwives head teachers, teachers, and local government administrators.

Patronage in Theory and Practice

Classic development theory, whether of the Marxist, Weberian or modernization varieties, predicted that the institutions associated with 'traditional' societies would be overwhelmed by the forces of progress (Lerner, 1958; Marx, 1967; Marx and Engels, 1969; Moore, 1963). Capitalism and democracy or revolution would dispatch these institutions to historical memory and usher in new institutional and organizational forms in both economy and society. But this has not been the case. While there have been profound changes in developing countries, some 'traditional' institutions have demonstrated remarkable tenacity and adaptability to dramatically altered circumstances. Prominent among these is patronage, which, while currently very different from its original agrarian forms, has successfully managed to accommodate to new economic, social and political arrangements in many developing countries (Khan, 2005). Its adaptive capacities are such that it has been able to penetrate a variety of environments including centralized and decentralized political systems, market and planned economies, democratic and authoritarian regimes, and political systems with only a few consolidated parties as well as those with highly fragmented parties (Blunt *et al.* 2012).

Patronage and its various guises (eg clientelism, patrimonialism, neo-patrimonialism) is fundamentally 'a distinct mode of regulating crucial aspects of institutional order: the structuring of the flow of resources, exchange and power relations and their legitimation in society' (Eisenstadt and Roninger, 1980, p. 49). Its structure is always based on vertical dyadic ties between patrons and clients and along which exchanges are made between the individuals concerned. However, the dyadic ties are always asymmetrical in terms of power with the patron exercising dominance through control of the most desired resources. In traditional agrarian societies land was the most valuable of the resources possessed by the patron while loyalty and labour were the contributions of the clients (Scott, 1972a). But with modernization, 'a transformation occurs which provides the age-old institution with a new function more in accordance with contemporary economic benefits' (Wertheim 1974, p. 243). Traditional legitimacy is discarded and modern forms of exchange take over.

Government in developing countries has been a fertile ground for patronage. Its practitioners have transferred basic principles and practices from earlier times and moulded them to suit their particularistic interests in state institutions and organizations that are supposedly guided by Weberian rationalism. As Khan (2005, p. 714) points out, the core element of the new patronage is the 'personalization of power', a traditional legacy, but the novel element is that 'the state is treated as an extension of the property of the leader, and the leader rules with the help of clients who get a pay-off for their support'. The patron, occupying a strategic location in the state, is able to develop multiple links with clients within and outside of the state to form pyramidal structures of informal contractual relations that facilitate the acquisition, maintenance and extension of power 'over a country, a government, an organization, a party or a faction' (Grindle, 2010, p. 3).

The practices of patronage have been observed in many developing countries. For example, McCourt (2006) has identified the contemporary prevalence of patronage in civil service staffing in Swaziland, its dominant role in political parties in Mauritius, and its hold over HRM in Sri Lanka. Grindle (2010) has charted patronage's longevity and sway in Latin America and identified the often successful tactics used by its proponents to overcome attempts to remove it. For Africa, Berman (2004, p. 45) writes of 'pervasive patron-client relations' as one of a group of factors that encourage particularism and personal ties to undermine universalistic institutions and contribute to 'a ruthlessly competitive and materialistic politics devoid of ideology or principle'.

Patronage systems in modern government are not benign. They have undesirable consequences, notably that they result in citizens receiving lower amounts and quality of services than they are entitled to and should expect. This occurs because patronage subverts the potential contributions to human welfare of civil services ostensibly built on the application of regularized rules and merit principles. Patronage systems are 'capricious, subject to the whims and ends of those who manage them' (Grindle, 2010, p. 22). The presence of formal rules governing bureaucratic behaviour becomes a façade concealing the opportunistic behavior of patrons and their clients. Patronage also facilitates the appointment of the incompetent and mediocre and leads to a severe case of goal displacement (Merton, 1940). Instead of pursuing excellence and improvement in service delivery or even abiding by the rules, patronage systems divert their participants' energies into extracting resources, fostering personal loyalty and relegating achievement and innovation to subsidiary concerns. Inefficiency and ineffectiveness are tolerated while motivation to pursue the formal goals of the organization is dampened or extinguished. Citizens in general bear the brunt of such goal displacement through its principal outcome, that is, the inadequate production of services. To make matters worse it is the poor and disadvantaged who feel these deprivations most severely as they are the most vulnerable (World Bank, 1997).

Patronage in Indonesia

The institution of patronage has a long history in many parts of Southeast Asia where it 'represent[s] an important structural principle....of politics' (Scott, 1972a, p. 92). Agrarian patronage systems were evident in countries as diverse and widespread as the Philippines (Doronila, 1985; Kerkvliet, 1977), Thailand (Keyes, 1976; Piker, 1968; Wilson, 1962), Vietnam (Scott, 1979) and Cambodia (Roberts 2009) and have moved on to colonize the contemporary politics and the organizations of the state. Indonesia is no exception where the history of patronage stretches back into pre-colonial Javanese empires (Crouch, 1979). In the 1950s, in post-colonial Indonesia, patronage emerged in new forms but anchored 'in a feudal past' and leading to 'conflicting loyalties between duties towards the government and duties towards

one's family' (Wertheim, 1959, p. 87). The initial post-colonial regime of President Sukarno failed in part as a result of a 'patrimonial structure resting on non-patrimonial foundations' (Crouch, 1979, p. 575). However, his successor, President Suharto was more successful, embedding the patron-client ties at the core of his centralized authoritarian regime.

When financial crisis precipitated democratization in 1998 and was followed by political decentralization in 2001, it seemed as though the death knell of patronage had been sounded. According to the prevailing logic, the introduction of democratic governance should have progressively removed the conditions under which patronage had previously thrived. Officials should have become accountable to the citizens they were supposed to serve, and not only to high-ranking officials as under authoritarian rule, while transparency should have placed official actions under close and constant scrutiny (Turner and Podger, 2003). In decentralization theory, such conditions are supposed to be particularly favourable at the local level where elected and appointed officials are much closer to the people they serve and therefore can be more easily brought to task (Smith, 1985).

This idealized state has not eventuated. There have been impressive gains in terms of regular and orderly elections, a free and critical press, the arrest and prosecution of senior officials for corruption, and the growth of a vibrant civil society. However, patronage has been able to jump regime from centralized authoritarian to decentralized democratic. It has mutated and set up residence in subnational governments. Various analysts have detected this unfortunate reformation of 'predatory control over public institutions and resources, and the replication of old relationships more strongly at the local level' (Hadiz and Robison, 2005, p. 232). One area in which patronage has been able to embed itself at the local level is in the field of HRM, with political and bureaucratic patrons using control over recruitment, placement, transfer and promotion as the means to gain private benefit from public resources. In the next section we detail how this local level patronage operates to make it more difficult to achieve the formal developmental goals of the state.

How Patronage works in Education and Health in Indonesia

To enter the civil service in Indonesia it is necessary to pass a common entrance exam. Recruitment then depends on the mark received as there are no interviews or assessments of technical skills. It is a seemingly simple and fairly rational bureaucratic mechanism that would appear to pose difficulties for the forces of patronage to overcome. However, interviewees from the health sector often claimed knowledge of recruits who had paid fees or provided 'gifts' to pass the test. It can cost 'tens of millions' of Rupiah to pass the test said one interviewee, an allegation corroborated by many others. In one province the sum of Rp100

million was mentioned several times as the fee to ensure success in the test¹. Another person said it could go up to Rp120 million. In a neighbouring district the cost of passing the exam was estimated to range from Rp35 to 70 million. Elsewhere, a nurse reported giving Rp60 million to pass the entry test and get her job.

'Intermediaries' can play the role of brokers between those wishing to secure a pass grade and high-ranking officials occupying dominant nodes in the patronage network. They represent those wishing to purchase a pass in the test to those with the ability to make it happen, and the brokers draw a fee for their services. In some instances family connections may suffice, or at least lower the price. Thus, several people remarked how applicants who were close or related to high-ranking officials were 'guaranteed' to pass the test. While these candidates might have obtained their preferential treatment at low or no cost, money was most frequently identified as the commodity that flowed along patronage networks. But in all areas surveyed, market forces were reported to be affecting the networks and driving up prices because of too much demand for entry into the civil service and too little supply. For example, one respondent observed that a friend had paid Rp70 million for her child to pass the civil service exam but that another aspirant had outbid her with Rp100 million - hence 'my friend's child failed the test'. A similar picture was painted for another area where one interviewee stated that 'if there are applicants who can pay higher, then the highest paying applicant gets accepted'. More specificity was given by another respondent: 'for bachelor degree holders it [payment for test results] ranges from 40, 50 million, and even up to 75 million...whoever can pay the highest is accepted'. This was corroborated by another interviewee who stated that 'last year it cost diploma graduates Rp50 million... and Rp72 million for bachelor degree holders'.

Interviewees from the education sector also noted the same practices, but perhaps less widespread, of making payments to ensure exam success. In one province it was alleged that Rp70 million was the going price for purchasing the desired test score. Furthermore, it was proposed that several actors could be involved in the network facilitating the required test score. One informant thought the fee given to 'independent' education institutions that held the recruitment test was perhaps too small thus leading persons there to be amenable to receiving bribes. Another respondent was more forceful, alleging that local government officials and personnel in 'independent' educational institutions conspired 'to conduct KKN' [*Kolusi, korupsi dan nepotisme* – collusion, corruption and nepotism). Another said the personnel agency of the local government (BKD – *Badan Kepegawaian Daerah* – Local Government Personnel Agency) could also muscle in to manipulate test scores in their role as the responsible authority for the test. Several people mentioned the *bupati* (regent) and *walikota*

¹ During the time of our research (March-June 2011) Indonesian Rupiah (Rp) 1,000,000 was worth approximately US\$116.

(mayor) as key decision-makers in determining success and failure in the test while another cited the local elected councilors as asking for a 'cut' in the recruitment process, that is a certain number of positions reserved. Some respondents simply gave general descriptions of what they considered to be the usual situation in which one would contact those responsible for the recruitment test to 'lobby and secure passing of the test', 'lobby' being a term that can be a euphemism for 'bribe'.

The widespread abuses in civil service recruitment were complemented by similar patronage practices in other aspects of human resource management including staff placement, promotion and transfer that bore close resemblance to those set out above for recruitment. Regarding the placement of individuals in posts in particular organizations, several interviewees from different areas and professions referred to a package deal whereby payment for passing the exam also incorporated the bonus of posting to a favourable job and organization or, as one person put it, not to be placed in difficult areas. For example, one case was related of a person paying between Rp100 and 150 million for passing the entry test and the assurance of placement in a 'comfortable' area, and this despite not yet completing the required professional education. For one region, a respondent reported a scale of placement fees whereby midwives paid Rp15 million and nurses Rp10 million to be placed in 'good areas'. There was regular mention of the relatives, friends and even the electoral campaign stalwarts of high-ranking officials being placed in favourable locations and organizations once recruitment had been fixed. In one case, it was observed that to get into one organization one had to be a relative of a particular high-level official. Some respondents made more general observations about the arbitrary allocation of staff both in terms of number and the appropriateness of their technical skills. The 'system', it was said, was poor at placing the right person in the right position.

Respondents appeared to be well aware of the major consequences of the patronage-driven placement of recruits. Firstly, they acknowledged that it could lead to staff who were not technically competent to carry out their tasks. For example, one person referred to recent personal experience of newly appointed midwives being unable to handle birth procedures and nurses who could not perform injections or correctly insert intravenous tubes. Secondly, even when recruits did have the basic competencies for effective job performance, their placement in favoured locations led to distortions in the distribution of staff. This was especially so in the health sector where the major urban centres and particular health units were seen as highly desirable and were judged to have disproportionately large numbers of staff. Staff concentration in these places, it was said, led to inequity in the availability of health services.

Transferring staff both within subnational governments and between them was seen by respondents as another aspect of HRM which the tentacles of patronage had grasped. A

general sentiment in one of the regions visited was that transfers had become increasingly abused to reward friends that were not qualified for the positions they were moved to. It was politely put to us that transfers were not necessarily based on measurable needs and organizational justification. Some respondents noted that demonstrated loyalty to bosses facilitated transfer to 'wet' areas while perceived lack of loyalty could entail transfer to 'dry' areas, the higher the level of moisture the greater the potential for earning extra income. The theme of loyalty to those occupying powerful locations in patronage networks was repeated across all the areas surveyed. Family, co-ethnics, friends and political supporters were seen to qualify for favourable treatment because of their loyalty. It was also a way of acquiring more political supporters according to one respondent who was asked to provide such support in order to facilitate his/her transfer request. In all these instances, performance was judged by respondents to be a secondary matter or even to be of no significance where transfers were concerned. Sometimes money was said to have changed hands. For example, in the health sector of one area it was alleged that unless payment accompanied a transfer request to the BKD, the request would not be processed. Others spoke of cash going to high-ranking officials to secure the desired transfer.

According to our respondents, promotions were similarly influenced by patronage and its associated corrupt behaviour. 'Relationships with superiors matter more compared to actual performance' said one respondent. Others across all regions corroborated this statement. Typical responses included 'promotion is still coloured with bribery'; 'nowadays, it is more common that people have to pay to be promoted'; and 'to be promoted you have to lobby...you have to have a link with the head of region too'. There were allegations that even unqualified people could be recruited and promoted, that it was becoming increasingly common for the selection of headmasters to be characterized by 'unethical practices', and that heads of region put 'their men' in prominent positions whether or not they had relevant experience or knowledge. In one case where it was perceived that promotion had a strong correlation with kinship, it was reported that promotion ceremonies were jokingly described as 'family reunions'. Interviewees occasionally mentioned sums of money involved in promotion. For example, it was alleged that one head of department paid Rp200 million for his/her position while in another area it was said by several persons that educational personnel were promoted from functional positions (those theoretically based on technical skills such as nurses, doctors and teachers) to structural (management) positions, where income-earning possibilities were much better, by making payments of between Rp30 and 150 million to high-ranking officials.

As can be seen from the data presented, the corruption of basic HRM functions and processes by patronage networks was widespread. While there were variations in incidence, type and price between areas and sectors, respondents everywhere confirmed the prevalence of patronage. In one region the associated practices were neatly summed up in the acronym '3 D'

factors – *Dekat, Dulur, Duit* (Closeness, family relations, money) while in another the alleged motto of current personnel management was UUD (*Ujung-Ujungnya Duit* – in the end it's the money that matters). The major casualty of this deep penetration of HRM functions and processes by patronage networks was service delivery. It suffered because recruitment did not select the persons who were best qualified. Instead, it was the incompetent, the inexperienced and the partially equipped who were recruited. Placement of staff was not necessarily based on needs and demands. This led to a distorted distribution of civil servants in general and those with specific skills in particular. The main victims of this inequality were citizens who received differential access to services. Transfer of staff could exacerbate this process with decisions being based on payment, punishment and kinship rather than trying to achieve an appropriate spread of skills and knowledge to best serve public interest. Promotion practices likewise detracted from enhancing civil service performance by elevating the loyal and trusted, rather than those who had produced good results or demonstrated innovation. There was, perhaps, the public servants' predilection, reported in another study, to resign themselves to 'RMPS' (*Rajin Malas Pendapatan Sama* – the hard-working and the lazy receive exactly the same salary) (Turner *et al*, 2009). HRM practices combined to demotivate and misdirect energy rather than to propel civil servants towards goal achievement, a results-orientation and performance excellence. To cap it all, those who obtained their positions through payments could, once recruited, direct their primary attention to recovering the money they had expended in the first place rather than performing well in service provision.

Patronage, Freedom and Social Justice

The data presented in this article clearly demonstrate how patronage has been able to adapt to new circumstances in Indonesia and move from a centralized authoritarian state to a democratic and decentralized one. From our interviews with public servants in three Indonesian provinces we have established how HRM has been absorbed and reconstituted by patronage networks and their accompanying corrupt practices. This form of patronage has long abandoned the moral economy that characterized patron-client relations in the earlier agrarian societies of Southeast Asia (Kerkvliet, 1977; Scott, 1979). In its contemporary manifestation in HRM in Indonesian subnational governments, we find everything is potentially up for sale: exam results, placements, positions, promotions and transfers. While the incidence of these practices varied between subnational governments, the evidence did indicate that they enjoyed a wide geographical spread.

From an economic perspective, the HRM patronage we have described in education and health services leads to the sacrifice of efficiency and effectiveness to the service of self-interest. The wrong people are recruited, placed, promoted and transferred for the wrong reasons—not always and not everybody but in enough cases to have a deleterious effect on the operating

processes, cultures and outputs of organizations. The formal goals and merit principles that attach to all government organizations in Indonesia are not in fact those that determine organizational behaviour. The asymmetrical dyadic ties of patronage make personalism, loyalty and illegal monetary flows the dominant characteristics and influences.

Looked at from the point of view of freedom and justice, the patterns of patronage that we have delineated impinge on the attainment of what Sen (1999, p. 36) describes as instrumental freedoms, those freedoms that enable people to achieve development. Sen (1999, p. 38) sets out five instrumental freedoms that are complementary and 'tend to contribute to the general capability of a person to live more freely'. Three of these are adversely affected by the patronage practices in health and education in the Indonesian subnational governments we investigated. Political freedoms are affected in that patronage makes criticism and freedom of expression difficult if not impossible for public servants. They must conform to the rules set down by patrons. The denial of social opportunities is perhaps the worst affected instrumental freedom in that patronage has a negative effect on 'the arrangements that society makes for education, health care, and so on' (Sen, 1999, p. 39). Citizens do not get their full entitlements for leading better lives and their participation in economic and political activities. Finally, patronage finds the freedom of transparency guarantees an anathema as it promises openness and dealing with each other under assurances of disclosure and lucidity. Obviously, the types of patron-client transactions in HRM that we have described in this article represent precisely the corruption and 'under-hand dealings' that the instrumental freedom of *transparency guarantees* aims to stop.

Taking the argument about social justice a step further, we can clearly see that the conditions of patronage that we have delineated in health and education in subnational governments in Indonesia are enemies of what Rawls (1985, p. 227) sees as liberal society—'a system of fair cooperation for mutual advantage'—and as such deny the possibility of social justice for citizens. Patronage denies citizens Rawls's (1985, p. 227) second principle of social justice concerning the distribution of public goods and social and economic inequalities where he asserts that the latter can be attached to offices and positions only so long as these 'are open to all under conditions of fair equality and opportunity'; and so long as they allocate 'the greatest benefit to the least advantaged members of society'. Plainly, the distortions and inequities inflicted by patronage systems in education and health in Indonesia fail to satisfy Rawls's second principle. Rather they lead to social injustice.

Conclusion

While we have elaborated the ways in which HRM has been taken over and utilized for the corrupt purposes of patronage in Indonesia and established that such practices are affronts to freedom and social justice, there remains the 'wicked problem' of how the scourge of patronage can be addressed. We have seen that capacity building is a second order matter and that one could, in theory, keep building individual and organizational capacities without

seriously threatening patronage regimes especially given their remarkable adaptive capacity. The answer could lie in the political realm. Rosser *et al* (2011) in their study of public services in four Indonesian districts argue that the key determinant in providing free services is leadership. Specifically, leaders who are political entrepreneurs and mobilize the poor for their own political purposes, and reward them with access to 'free' services, are preferable to those leaders that are beholden to business elites or local 'gangsters' and manage the local economy primarily with their joint nefarious interests in mind. This point is arguable, however, as leaders may be able to switch between or simultaneously display both behaviours. Also, picking winners in the form of entrepreneurs promises to be easier said than done.

Whatever the case may be, Rosser et al. (2011) acknowledge that democratization on its own is inadequate, because it can be too easily reconstituted and corrupted by ruling elites, a conclusion also evident in our work (Blunt *et al.* 2012). Indeed, this has allowed other more predatory leaders to thrive in subnational governments. While political means for realizing social justice, such as those outlined by Rosser et al (2011), deserve consideration and could provide one prong of a multi-pronged strategy for combating the corrupt practices of patronage in service delivery agencies, they would be by no means adequate on their own. Neoinstitutionalist approaches to governance reform dictate that different categories of strategies are required to work together (Pope, 1999). These include prevention strategies that reduce the opportunity for corrupt patron-client behaviour; enforcement strategies focusing on detection and punishment; public awareness measures that promote intolerance of corruption; and building institutions that can and do effectively address corruption. The strategies represent a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, the former having a poor track record so far in Indonesia and in many other countries where they have been tried. It is thus the latter—bottom-up approaches—that could have greater potential, especially when the popular aggregation of preferences against patronage and corruption is realized and pressure can be exerted on politicians and bureaucrats to promote development as freedom and social justice. Whether this can be politically engineered is open to question. It may require more spontaneous expressions of public anger and intolerance of corruption as the catalyst to exert substantial and sustained pressure for the dismantling of patron client relations and their corrupt practices in Indonesia.

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