

## CLIENTELISM AND THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RULE OF LAW AND PUBLIC GOODS PROVISION IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA

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**ABSTRACT.** Clientelism remains common in Southeast Asian politics even though electoral democracy has expanded. This study examines how different forms of clientelism associate with democratic quality, focusing on the rule of law and public goods provision in Indonesia and Malaysia. Building on the theories of clientelism, understood as the exchange of material benefits for political support. Such practices can weaken the fair enforcement of laws and shift public spending toward targeted groups instead of universal welfare programs. This study uses panel data from the Varieties of Democracy Institute and applies a comparative approach to analyze Indonesia and Malaysia across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A bivariate linear regression model is used to examine whether higher levels of clientelism are associated with weaker rule of law and lower levels of universal public-goods provision. The results show that higher levels of clientelism are linked to weaker rules of law and lower public-goods provision in both countries. However, the results appear in different ways. In Indonesia, fragmented and candidate-centered clientelism organized through temporary broker networks is more strongly connected to the erosion of legal enforcement. In Malaysia, centralized and party-based clientelism under the United Malays National Organisation–Barisan Nasional system mainly associated with the fairness and universality of welfare distribution.

**Keywords:** Clientelism; Indonesia; Malaysia; Rule of Law; Public Goods; V-dem.

### INTRODUCTION

This study examines how different institutional configurations of clientelism shape governance outcomes in Indonesia and Malaysia, with particular emphasis on the rule of law and the provision of public goods. The analysis draws on panel data from the Varieties of Democracy Institute and is informed by theoretical perspectives developed by Staffan I. Lindberg and colleagues (2022) as well as Maria Lo Bue and co-authors (2021). By situating the comparison within broader debates on clientelism and democratic governance, the study explores how variations in political organization, patronage networks, and institutional structures influence patterns of rule enforcement and public resource distribution in both countries.

Previous research has discussed how clientelism affects the rule of law and how well public services are provided. However, some studies show that the effect of clientelism can be different depending on the type of clientelism. This study is based on the work of Aspinall and others in 2022, who have shown that there are different types of clientelism. This study suggests that the type of clientelism in Indonesia and Malaysia may have a different result.

Despite the formal expansion of electoral democracy across Southeast Asia, political clientelism continues to shape governance outcomes in enduring ways. Clientelism—defined as the contingent exchange of material resources for political

support—remains deeply embedded in the electoral and administrative practices of the region (Aspinall et al., 2022, pp. 10–13; Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019, p. 151). However, its manifestations differ sharply across countries, raising important questions about how distinct clientelist regimes influence democratic quality. For example, In Indonesia, politicians generally build temporary campaign organizations (*tim sukses*) for each electoral contest, depending heavily on privately financed micro- and meso-level patronage and typically distributed during campaign periods (Aspinall et al., 2022, pp. 10–11). By contrast, in Malaysia, political mobilization is sustained through centralized and hierarchical party networks, most notably the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which exercises control over macro-level patronage by selectively channeling or appropriating national development programs to reward loyal constituencies (Aspinall et al., 2022, pp. 10–11).

Existing scholarship often treats clientelism as a uniform pathology that undermines democracy by distorting accountability, eroding legality, and biasing welfare toward particular constituencies (Hicken, 2011, p. 291; Stokes et al., 2013, p. 183). Nonetheless, recent works suggest that clientelism operates through different mechanisms depending on its organizational form. Lindberg et al. (2022, pp. 157–158) highlight *forbearance*—the selective leniency or uneven enforcement of law—as a key channel through which clientelism weakens the rule

of law, while Lo Bue et al. (2021, pp. 2–3) emphasize how clientelist systems divert public spending from universal welfare to targeted, partisan redistribution.

In this context, variations in the form and institutional structure of clientelism across countries may produce different impacts on the democratic rule of law and public-goods provision. Hence, this paper asks: How do different forms of clientelism—personalized and centralized and party-institutionalized in Malaysia—affect the quality of the rule of law and the inclusiveness of public-goods provision?

This paper proceeds in four parts. It first develops a conceptual framework and theoretical expectations on how different forms of clientelism—personalized and privately funded in Indonesia versus centralized and party-institutionalized in Malaysia—shape the democratic rule of law and public-goods provision. It then outlines the research design and data sources, drawing on the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset and relevant secondary literature. The third section presents the comparative findings on how institutional variations in clientelist practices affect governance outcomes. Lastly, this paper concludes by summarizing the key insights and discussing their broader implications for understanding democracy and accountability in Southeast Asia.

Extensive theoretical and empirical scholarship has explored how clientelism affects democracy, such as the rule of law and the provision of public goods (Hicken, 2011; Lindberg et al., 2022; Lo Bue et al., 2021; Stokes et al., 2013). Thus, in this section, we draw my frameworks to explain how clientelism undermines democracy in a way that erodes the rule of law and also weakens the universality of public goods provision.

Following Stokes (2013, p. 605), We define clientelism as the informal and particularistic distribution of public resources by political leaders in exchange for political support. In this sense, clientelism is not merely a single act of corruption or favoritism, but a recurrent and reciprocal pattern of material exchanges between patrons and clients. These exchanges typically occur throughout the electoral cycle and can take the form of clientelism, such as job appointments or targeted benefits, all designed to secure loyalty and electoral advantage.

Furthermore, O'Donnell (2004, p. 33) argues that the rule of law as a law that exists, is written down and publicly promulgated by an appropriate authority before the events meant to be regulated by it, and is fairly applied by relevant state institutions, including the judiciary. In other words, the rule of law implies that laws are publicly known, general, and stable, and

that no one is above the law. He also suggests one of the dimensions of the democratic rule of law requires that all branches and agencies of the state—not only the judiciary—treat every individual with fairness, respect, and due consideration. (O'Donnell, 2004, p. 44) However, Lindberg et al. (2022) introduce the concept of “forbearance” as the key mechanism to explain how political clientelism undermines the rule of law. As defined by Holland (cited in Lindberg et al., 2022, pp. 2–3) forbearance refers to intentional and revocable government leniency toward violations of the law. In clientelist political systems, leaders often employ forbearance strategically by tolerating or selectively enforcing laws to reward loyal constituencies or secure electoral support. Because this leniency can be granted or withdrawn at will, it becomes a flexible tool to maintain contingent political exchanges. Such practices address credibility problems inherent in clientelistic relationships but at the cost of eroding legal equality and institutional impartiality. Hence, “the practice of forbearance in relational clientelism tends to weaken the rule of law, leading to a deterioration in the quality of governance over time” (Lindberg et al. 2022, p. 3)

In understanding the relationship between clientelism and public goods provision, I rely on Lo Bue et al.'s (2021) work. Lo Bue et al. (2021, p. 8) define public goods provision as the state's capacity to design and implement universal social policies and to deliver collective benefits that reach all members of society. This dimension captures the extent to which governments provide essential welfare programs (e.g., free education, healthcare, and retirement or unemployment benefits) in a universal and impartial manner rather than targeting particular constituencies.

Lo Bue et al. (2021, p. 3) demonstrate that political clientelism tends to weaken this universalistic capacity because it transforms public spending into a tool for targeted redistribution. Clientelism, which is characterized by an asymmetric and recurrent exchange between patrons and clients, leads politicians to direct limited resources toward selective or conditional benefits that secure electoral support. Such exchanges prioritize particularistic gains over programmatic welfare expansion (Stokes, 2013, pp. 604–606). Logically, clientelist systems exhibit a structural bias toward private or “club” goods at the expense of universal public goods, thereby constraining the state's ability to promote impartial and equitable governance.

Building on the conceptual discussion above, this study advances two testable hypotheses regarding the governance implications of political

clientelism. Specifically, it examines whether higher levels of clientelism are associated with weaker rule of law and lower levels of public-goods provision. Before presenting the empirical results, the following section outlines the research design, including the two selected case studies, the data sources and variables employed, the methodological approach adopted, and, importantly, the key limitations of this study.

### METHOD

This study used data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Dataset, which provides annual measures of democratic quality and governance for over 180 countries between 1900 and 2024 (Coppedge et al., 2025). The V-Dem dataset offers a valuable and historically rich panel to examine long-term trends in political clientelism, rule of law, and public-goods provision across regions. For comparative purposes, this study selects Indonesia and Malaysia as illustrative cases. Nevertheless, the two countries diverge sharply in the structure of clientelism: Indonesia’s clientelism is fragmented, competitive, and election-driven, while Malaysia’s is centralized and institutionalized through dominant party machines with continuous access to state resources (Aspinall et al., 2022, pp. 12–13). These contrasting configurations provide a valuable lens for examining how different forms of clientelist exchange influence the rule of law and the universality of public-goods provision.

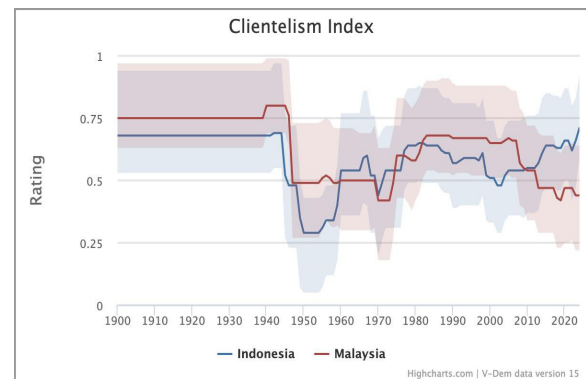
To examine these relationships, this research run a multiple linear regression model to test whether higher levels of clientelism are associated with weaker rule of law and lower levels of public-goods provision. This approach adapts the global framework developed by (Lindberg et al., 2022, pp. 2–8; Lo Bue et al., 2021, pp. 4–10) to a small-N comparative design focused on Indonesia and Malaysia.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged. Due to data constraints, control

variables such as, GDP, trade openness, education, and rural inequality are not included, which may limit the explanatory precision of the finding (see full of models in: Lindberg et al., 2022, p. 9; Lo Bue et al., 2021, p. 13). Furthermore, because this study relies on observational panel data, it identifies associations rather than definitive causal relationships. Despite these constraints, the analysis offers valuable empirical insight into how contrasting modes of clientelism operate within Indonesia and Malaysia.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This analysis section begin by tracing the historical trajectories of clientelism in Indonesia and Malaysia based on V-Dem’s longitudinal data, identifying major shifts and turning points in each country’s pattern of political clientelism across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.



Source: [https://v-dem.net/data\\_analysis/VariableGraph/](https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/)  
**Figure 1. Historical trends in Clientelism in Indonesia and Malaysia**

Figure 1 shows that the levels of political clientelism in Indonesia and Malaysia have changed considerably over the past century, following distinct trajectories. Between the late 1940s and early 1960s, both lines show a visible decline, which is particularly steep for Indonesia, whose clientelism level dropped from around 0.7 to below 0.4. During this period,

**Table 1: Variables, V-Dem Indicators, and Conceptual Definitions**

Variables	V-Dem Data Set	Explanation
<b>Clientelism</b>	Clientelism Index (D) (v2xnp_client)	Clientelism measures the informal and particularistic exchange of public resources between political leaders and citizens in return for political support. It combines three indicators from the V-Dem dataset: vote buying, the emphasis on particularistic versus public goods, and whether party–voter linkages are programmatic or clientelistic.
<b>Rule of Law</b>	Rule of law index (D) (v2x_rule)	The Rule of Law Index measures how consistently and fairly laws are applied within a country and whether government officials act in accordance with those laws. Higher scores indicate that laws are transparent, impartial, predictable, and equally enforced.
<b>Public Good</b>	Means-tested v. universalistic policy (C) (v2dlunivl)	Public Goods Provision measures a proxy for the state’s ability to design and implement social policies that benefit all members of society. It captures how effectively a government delivers universal welfare programs, It also assesses whether existing welfare policies are means-tested (targeted to specific groups) or universal in coverage.

Source: the V-Dem Dataset (Coppedge et al., 2025), with conceptual adjustments inspired by Lindberg et al. (2022) and Lo Bue et al. (2021).

Malaysia's index also declined slightly but remained comparatively higher, around 0.6 to 0.7. From the mid-1960s to the late 1990s, Indonesia's level of clientelism stayed relatively low but showed gradual increases after the 1980s, while Malaysia's values remained largely stable around 0.7.

Interestingly, after 2004, Indonesia's clientelism index began to rise gradually, reaching approximately 0.6 by 2010, before increasing more sharply during the mid-2010s, peaking close to 0.7 in recent years. This upward movement suggests a steady return to higher levels of clientelistic politics after a period of relative decline in the late twentieth century. Meanwhile, Malaysia's trend follows a somewhat different pattern. The index remains stable and high around 0.7 until the mid-2000s, after which it shows a significant decline beginning around 2007, falling from roughly 0.7 to about 0.4 by the early 2020s. This drop represents the most substantial downward shift observed in Malaysia's series, indicating a reduction in the intensity of clientelistic practices during the most recent decade. Overall, while both countries experienced fluctuations over time, Indonesia's pattern is characterized by a renewed increase since the early 2000s, whereas Malaysia's trajectory points toward a gradual but notable decline in clientelism after the late 2000s.

Moving from describing the historical trend in Indonesia and Malaysia, in this part, I run regression analysis to examine whether higher levels of clientelism are associated with weaker rule of law and lower levels of universal welfare provision in Indonesia and Malaysia.

**Table 2. Comparative Regression Results: The Correlation of Clientelism on Rule of Law in Indonesia and Malaysia**

Dependent Variable	Country	B	S.E.	R <sup>2</sup>	Sig.
Rule of Law	Indonesia	-0.221***	0.050	0.139	< .001
	Malaysia	-0.216**	0.089	0.045	.017
Public-Goods Provision	Indonesia	-0.016**	0.006	0.056	.008
	Malaysia	-0.059***	0.009	0.277	< .001

Note: B = unstandardized coefficient; S.E. = standard error; \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001.

Table 2 demonstrates how clientelism correlates governance outcomes in Indonesia and Malaysia. In both countries, we can see higher levels of clientelism are linked to weaker rule of law and lower public-goods provision (see column B). Interestingly, the strength and nature of these

relationships differ. In Indonesia, the connection between clientelism and the rule of law is particularly strong, while in Malaysia, the relationship between clientelism and the rule of law is weaker than Indonesia but still evident. Additionally, when examining the association of clientelism on public-goods provision, the divergence becomes clearer. In Indonesia, clientelism has only a modest relation in curbing universal welfare programs, explaining only 5.6% of the variation in clientelism. In contrast, Malaysia shows a much stronger relation pattern and highly significant, explaining nearly 28% of the variance in clientelism—five times the explanatory power observed in Indonesia. This indicates that the expansion of more inclusive, rule-based welfare programs in Malaysia has a pronounced constraining linkage on clientelist practices. By taking these together, this result shows us that the political clientelism in Indonesia and Malaysia shapes its correspondence on democratic rule of law and public goods provision as Lindberg et al.'s (2022, p. 2) and Lobue et al.'s (2021, pp. 2–4) frameworks.

The analysis builds on previous findings and clearly shows that clientelism is linked to the rule of law in Indonesia. In Malaysia, its damaging impact is more evident in the area of public goods provision. We will now set out several arguments that explain the variation in outcomes between Indonesia and Malaysia regarding clientelism and its undermining association on the rule of law and the provision of public goods.

### Indonesia's Clientelism Form

In Indonesia is dominated by ad-hoc campaign teams (*tim sukses*), the temporary broker networks assembled by individual candidates during each election cycle rather than through durable party organizations (Aspinall et al., 2022, p. 11). Given their limited access to public resources, which remain largely under bureaucratic control, and the weak institutionalization of political parties, candidates depend heavily on personally financed micro and meso-level patronage, such as vote buying and localized project distribution. Indonesian brokers are usually paid, transactional actors rather than long-term party militants, and success teams focusing almost exclusively on dispensing electoral patronage rather than ongoing constituency service (Aspinall et al. 2022, p. 89).

Because of clientelist practices in Indonesia tend to be highly personalized and rely predominantly on private funding, this incentivizes candidates—who are largely independent from political parties—to engage in selective law enforcement (forbearance) as

a means to secure electoral support. Especially, with the high costs of election campaigns and candidates relying on private-sector backing rather than centralized party machines or state resources. Within this scheme, political actors wielding authority exploit their power to allocate public resources and licenses—such as mining or forestry permits—based on personal ties rather than legal or meritocratic criteria (Berenschot, 2018, p. 1570; Martini, 2012, pp. 3–5). The decisions, then, are guided by loyalty and reciprocity instead of accountability, resulting in uneven law enforcement and widespread impunity. However, it is worth noting that this mechanism has been serving as a tangible indicator of rule-of-law erosion from the Suharto era to the present (Barter, 1969, pp. 5–10). Thus, the enduring tolerance of such activities demonstrates how Indonesia’s fragmented and personalized clientelism corrodes regulatory enforcement, institutional impartiality, and ultimately, the foundations of the democratic rule of law.

The forbearance practices are deeply with Indonesia’s clientelism patterns that intertwined with Indonesia’s direct electoral system, which strongly incentivizes personalized political competition. In both national and local elections, candidates must secure personal votes and often compete even against co-partisans, weakening party institutionalization and encouraging candidates to build individualized broker networks (Allen, 2015; Aspinall et al., 2017; Berenschot, 2018). As a result, electoral campaigns frequently rely on distributing cash, goods, and pork-barrel projects to voters, turning elections into intense “ground wars” in which vote buying becomes a central campaign strategy in many districts. Because these clientelist practices are highly personalized and depend predominantly on private funding, candidates who are often relatively independent from party structures, face strong incentives to secure financial backing from private actors.

Financial backing from private actors is needed to address high financial needs to join the election competition. In a study involving candidates for the House of Representatives (DPR-RI) from various political parties competing in the 2024 general election, the research sought to understand the different types of campaign expenditures, the factors driving the high costs, and the implications of these expensive political costs for democracy in Indonesia. The study found that legislative candidates indeed have to spend enormous sums in order to participate in legislative elections (Pileg). On average, candidates spend around IDR 5 billion, with the lowest reported expenditure reaching approximately IDR 200 million (Prihatini & Ramadhani, 2025). These political costs

are incurred progressively across four stages of the electoral process: nomination, campaigning, voting, and the post-election period.

**Table 3. Comparison of Stage of The Electoral Process**

Stage	Tangible Costs	Intangible Costs
Nomination	Political dowries paid to political parties, electability surveys, registration fees, and preparation of campaign teams	Developing social capital, lobbying party elites, and mobilizing local support
Campaign	Campaign materials, community meetings, political consultants, salaries for campaign teams, and office space	Direct engagement with voters, building and maintaining relationships with key local stakeholders, and spending long periods away from family.
Voting (Election Day)	Paying polling station witnesses, distributing gifts in the form of cash or goods, salaries for campaign teams, office space, and legal costs (if necessary).	Time and effort to secure voters, monitor the vote-counting process, and maintain close coordination with election officials.
Post-Election	Maintaining campaign infrastructure in the electoral district, regular constituency visits, securing assistance programs and budget allocations for projects in the district, and party contributions.	Time and effort to regularly engage with constituents, promote and support the party’s agenda in parliament, and strengthen the party’s promotion and development in the constituency.

Source: (Prihatini & Ramadhani, 2025).

Candidates also negotiate with community organisations by promising club goods such as village roads, fishing boats, hand tractors or women’s micro-enterprise equipment, frequently combining these with cash payments to reduce free-riding (Aspinall et al. 2022, pp. 68–69, 108). Besides, local executives then seek to personalise public resources between elections, plastering their image across billboards and projects so that voters associate new programmes with a particular politician rather than with a party.

### Malaysia Clientelism Form

By contrast, the variant form of clientelism in Malaysia is organized through a centralized and institutionalized party coalition, like the National Front (*Barisan Nasional*), which maintains stable and privileged access to public resources (Aspinall et al., 2022, p. 12). This configuration sustains a dominant strategy of macro-particularism, whereby national development programs are continuously delivered throughout the electoral cycle using state funding, which is particularly directed toward the coalition’s core Malaysian constituencies.

Moreover Malaysia’s form of clientelism has historically been centralized and party-institutionalized,

which helps explain why its impact on the rule of law has been less severe than in Indonesia. For instance, during the *Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia* (BR1M) program, “eligible citizens could collect their checks from BN party offices—in many cases from Members of Parliament themselves” (Aspinall et al., 2022, p. 81). This demonstrates how state welfare programs were openly politicized, strengthening party loyalty by using government-financed benefits for political support. Moreover, since 1970, a service center (*pusat khidmat*) that is usually established at the local UMNO branch level has taken on broader social welfare functions and become a key access point for citizens seeking state assistance. Crucially, they are run by salaried party staff and financed mainly through constituency development funds distributed by the ruling coalition to government-aligned Members of Parliament (Aspinall et al., 2022, pp. 79–80). This mechanism illustrates how party-institutionalized clientelism might reduce candidates’ dependence on external funding sources, which in other contexts — such as Indonesia — often leads politicians to engage in selective law enforcement as a political trade-off.

Despite the fact that Malaysia’s variant of clientelism may lessen its impact on the rule of law, I contend that this form of clientelism nevertheless also plays a highly significant role in undermining universalistic public-goods provision, as the distribution of welfare and development benefits remains conditional on political and partisan affiliation. As Weiss (2020, p. 106) demonstrates, even ostensibly programmatic initiatives in Malaysia are filtered through partisan networks that transform state welfare into political currency. She observes that public goods are routinely distributed “through a clientelistic filter,” with both Barisan Nasional (BN) and opposition (PKR) politicians staging ceremonial events and citizens would be documented in wearing party t-shirts to present state-funded programs as party achievements (Weiss, 2020, p. 107). These practices render access to development assistance contingent not on citizenship but on one’s embeddedness within partisan networks, thereby hollowing out the universalistic character of welfare provision. Consequently, while Malaysia’s bureaucratically organized clientelism constrains arbitrary elite behavior, it simultaneously reproduces inequality by personalizing and politicizing the delivery of public goods.

Malaysia’s public goods distribution pattern lies on the historical governance inherited by the British Colonialism. In Malaysia, British colonialism left behind a relatively cohesive civil service, first consolidated in the Federated Malay States and then

expanded across “British Malaya,” with the Malayan Civil Service forming the core of the post-colonial state (Aspinall et al. 2022, pp. 36–37). Malays were gradually incorporated through a Malay Administrative Service that fed into this bureaucracy, while Chinese and Indians were largely excluded until the 1950s (Aspinall et al. 2022, pp. 36–37). On top of that, Aspinall et al. (2022, pp. 37–38) highlight that UMNO emerged before independence as the leading party negotiating decolonisation, rooted in rural Malay society and claiming a mission to defend Malay political and socio-economic interests. After 1957, UMNO fused party and state, expanding an already large civil service and, especially after the New Economic Policy of 1971, using affirmative action and redistributive schemes to cultivate Malay bureaucrats, businessmen and professionals as core clients (Aspinall et al. 2022, pp. 59–60). Therefore, Clientelism here is channelled through a long-standing ethnic party that sits atop a relatively disciplined.

Nevertheless, Indonesia represents a large-scale social programs such as *Kartu Indonesia Sehat* (national health insurance) and the *Kartu Indonesia Pintar* (education subsidy) were designed to provide welfare on a universalistic basis rather than through partisan networks. Prominently, these schemes are formally administered through national bureaucracies and standardized eligibility criteria, meaning that access to benefits is less mediated by party or patronage structures (Tempo, 2018, 2023). The contrast reveals that institutional design alone cannot ensure universalism when enforcement and accountability are embedded within clientelist networks.

The universalism of Indonesia’s public goods distribution pattern also lies on its historical governance system inherited by the Dutch. Dutch colonial rule produced an increasingly centralised *beamtenstaat*, but that administrative state effectively collapsed in the turmoil of Japanese occupation and the independence struggle; by 1950, the civil bureaucracy was “in tatters,” facing competition from militias, parties and other organisations (Aspinall et al. 2022, pp. 36–37, 44). No single party comparable to UMNO monopolised the nationalist struggle, and post-independence politics quickly fragmented among several major parties (Aspinall et al. 2022, p. 44).

## CONCLUSION

Using V-Dem panel data and drawing on the theoretical insights of Lindberg et al. (2022) and Lo Bue et al. (2021), the analysis shows that although clientelism has correlation to compromise

democratic quality in both countries, its mechanisms and intensity differ significantly. In Indonesia, fragmented and candidate-centered clientelism, financed largely through private networks of brokers known as “tim sukses”, has generated severe erosion of the rule of law through selective enforcement and the politicization of regulatory authority. In contrast, Malaysia’s centralized and party-based clientelism under the UMNO–Barisan Nasional coalition has sustained bureaucratic stability and legal continuity but entrenched partisan inequality by distributing welfare and development benefits through political channels.

These findings highlight that the degree of institutionalization related with how clientelism affects democracy. Institutionalized clientelism may coexist with stronger legal institutions, yet it converts social policy into an instrument of political loyalty, reducing the universality of welfare provision. Fragmented clientelism, on the other hand, weakens legality more directly by fostering selective enforcement and impunity. Overall, this comparison demonstrates that clientelism is not a uniform defect but a spectrum of organizational practices with distinct implications for governance and accountability.

This research also encourage for future research to address the limitations of this study’s small-N design by conducting large-N analyses across more countries and contexts. It should also consider the influence of unobserved variables such as GDP, trade openness, education, rural inequality, and state capacity, as well as subgroup perceptions across class, region, and ethnicity to enhance the generalizability of these findings.

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