Turkey, and China (pp. 235–36). Here the arguments become exceedingly vague, and the concept of monarchy is stretched such that it loses analytical value.

**Conditionality and Coercion: Electoral Clientelism in Eastern Europe.** By Isabela Mares and Lauren E. Young. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. 352p. $90.00 cloth, $35.00 paper.
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The central question of Isabela Mares and Lauren E. Young’s probing and meticulously researched book is, How does electoral clientelism work? Tackling it entails a host of related questions. What are the different forms that clientelism can take? What governs politicians’ choice among these different forms? How do voters respond—both those voters directly targeted by clientelism as recipients and those indirectly targeted as onlookers?

Mares and Young begin by carefully conceptualizing what clientelism is and is not. They first distinguish clientelism from patronage: the former is targeted at voters, whereas the latter is targeted at party activists (p. 48). Most earlier studies of party competition and party building in postcommunist Europe focused on patronage and analyzed the first decade of democratisation. Mares and Young’s study, which focuses on Hungary and Romania during the 2010s, is a useful update to this research: first, because clientelism is arguably even more difficult to measure than patronage, and second, because the massive upheaval of state administrations during the first decade of postcommunism offered parties opportunities to access state resources that are unlikely to occur again soon. Should we, then, expect party competition to become more grounded in programmatic appeals to voters as these other avenues close off? Not necessarily, according to Mares and Young; clientelism does not require much in the way of state resources, because denying (or threatening to deny) voters’ access to such resources can be as effective as granting access to them.

The authors’ close attention to conceptualizing clientelism facilitates the formulation of precise and empirically testable hypotheses that break down the complex calculations of both politicians and voters governing its use. They disaggregate clientelism into four types: policy favors, policy coercion, economic coercion, and vote buying. Policy favors and policy coercion rely on politicians’ access to state resources to reward or punish voters. In Hungary and Romania, these resources tend to be workfare programs and other antipoverty policies. Herein is one particularly disagreeable feature of such clientelism: it pits poor voters against other poor voters. Economic coercion—in which politicians collaborate with such local brokers as money lenders—does not involve state resources, but it is equally venal. A politician’s choice to use clientelism, and in what form, is not as simple as incentivizing the votes of those directly affected by favors or coercion. The book’s major theoretical insight is to consider how clientelism may serve as a form of information about the broader policy positions of the politicians using it.

Consider the following scenario involving a village with high unemployment, a significant population of economically marginalized ethnic Roma who depend on state services, and another sizable group of retirees living on state pensions—in short, the typical site of “poor against poor” politics in provincial Hungary and Romania. The local mayor is known to withhold state benefits from Roma voters unless they vote for him. Even if most voters dislike clientelism in principle, some may be willing to overlook this flaw and vote for the mayor anyway because they dislike social spending, especially on Roma. In short, clientelism sends a programmatic message to the mayor’s voter base that he is tough on welfare. (Let’s not forget, of course, the votes of the Roma threatened with the loss of benefits.) There are multiple factors at play in this scenario, two of which are the degree of control the mayor has over state resources in the first place (the “supply” of clientelism) and the relative size of constituencies supporting or opposing welfare policies (the “demand” side). Sorting out these dynamics is the book’s central theoretical contribution. It also structures the authors’ formidable empirical research.

Not only do the authors put together the most comprehensive and fine-grained data collection effort that I have seen on this topic but they also analyze it using methods both qualitative and quantitative. The research sites are small towns in Romania and Hungary in the 2010s in which sizable chunks of the electorate depend on state benefits, on the one hand, and loan sharking by local economic kingpins, on the other. Each empirical chapter covers one of the four types of electoral clientelism and follows a similar structure. First, each presents the results of extensive ethnographic interviewing by a team of locally based researchers. These interviews describe the “how?” of electoral clientelism: we read stories of welfare entitlements illegally withheld and all sorts of pressure applied. Then, each chapter switches from the qualitative to quantitative mode, employing a range of sophisticated survey-based experiments to measure the incidence of clientelism across research sites; testing how voters update their evaluations of politicians who use clientelism depending on such factors as economic ideology; and gauging the extent to which the use of clientelist strategies depends on the degree of political control that a local mayor has.

There is a wealth of fascinating findings too numerous to detail here. One important and reassuring finding from the surveys is that voters do not like clientelism. Of course, although clientelism is costly as such, these costs may be offset by the signals it sends about politicians’ programmatic positions regarding social spending and other policy
issues. Does this information effect outweigh the reputational costs of practicing dirty politics? Unfortunately, the evidence seems too mixed to say, at least for this reader. A second important, and rather surprising, finding is that there is little connection between the strength of a mayor’s political position—such as long-term incumbency or co-partisanship with the national party—and her decision to employ clientelist strategies. This finding will certainly interest scholars of democratic backsliding. Finally, scholars of clientelism in other regions like Africa and Latin America will surely pay close attention to the chapter on vote buying; although this is the most-studied aspect of clientelism in the comparative literature, Mares and Young find no evidence that it is effective.

One persistent question is whether the powerful can monitor how their clients actually vote. The authors are certainly aware of it, and their ethnographic research mentions a variety of methods, some of them very colorful, that power holders use to address monitoring. For example, several interviewees describe how local kingpins require clients to swear on the Bible that they will vote as instructed (p. 127); one loan shark reports that having a client swear on the Bible while holding her baby gets even better results (p. 160). Should we interpret such vignettes as showing the resourcefulness of the powerful in monitoring compliance, or do they indicate the futility of monitoring compliance in the first place? In terms of the “informational” aspect of clientelism, compliance is unimportant; however, because it is unclear whether the information revealed about a politician’s program by, say, policy favors can overcome the hit to his reputation, the overall calculus underlying the choice to use it remains elusive. Perhaps this choice is not so calculated after all but is motivated just by anti-Roma prejudice? This is not meant as a critique: social-science methods can take us only so far into such a complex decision as voting, and Mares and Young’s book takes us far deeper and more surefootedly than most. Moreover, this is research propelled by passion and conscience. Doing research in Eastern Europe’s hinterlands is unusual and to be commended; shining a light on such hair-raising examples of political malpractice as their ethnographic fieldwork uncovers deserves to be loudly applauded.


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Spreading massively in recent decades, precarious work has become a lasting feature of contemporary labor markets. Strong Governments, Precarious Workers tackles the important question of the social protection of precarious workers (or outsiders), who are often excluded from the rights associated with standard forms of employment. The book focuses on labor market policies and tracks policy changes in three small European countries with important similarities (corporatist legacies, strong union movement, and Social Democratic parties): Austria, Denmark, and Sweden. Addressing major debates in the welfare state and comparative political economy literatures, the book examines the remaining influence of trade unions on policy trajectories from the mid-1980s onward. Situating the growth of precarious work in the context of the expansion of market mechanisms and the deregulation of job security, Philip Rathgeb contends that some European welfare states have been better able to enhance the protection of outsiders than others.

In the first chapter, Rathgeb advances an original argument to explain the determinants of trade union influence in the era of liberalization. The motivation is that the two major theoretical approaches to studying cross-national variation in risk protection—producer group theory and partisanship theory—fail to explain the observed differences across the countries. In the author’s view, these approaches generally underestimate the shift in the balance of power between labor and capital that has weakened trade unions and made governments generally more responsive to the demands of employers. Instead of focusing either on the role of parties or producer groups, the study conceives the interaction and distribution of power between unions and governments as crucial for policy outcomes. It is only when trade unions face a weak government that they are able to extract concessions for outsiders. Government weakness is defined as “a low level of capacity for autonomous reform, which makes governments unable to formulate or pass a unilateral reform strategy that excludes unions” (p. 16). This weakness often results from divisions between parties in a coalition government or the absence of support in parliament for minority governments.

The second chapter presents an overview of the cross-national variation in changes in labor market policy. Rathgeb examines three dimensions: employment protection, unemployment protection, and active labor market policy. Using various indicators, he identifies a common trend toward a liberalization of labor market policy since the 1980s. However, his main message is to emphasize the distinct varieties of liberalization, in line with Kathleen Thelen (Varieties of Liberalization: The New Politics of Social Solidarity, 2014). Important and puzzling results emerge from this chapter. Austria did not follow the path of pronounced dualization typical of other Conservative–Continental welfare states, but rather improved the social protection of outsiders. The contrast with Sweden is striking, where the use of temporary forms of employment was made easier for employers, the inclusiveness and

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