

# Neopatrimonialism

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**Neopatrimonialism** is a term used for patrons using state resources in order to secure the loyalty of clients in the general population, and is indicative of informal patron-client relationships that can reach from very high up in state structures down to individuals in say, small villages.

Neopatrimonialism may underlay or supplant the bureaucratic structure of the state in that only those with connections have the real power, not those who hold higher positions. Further criticisms include that it undermines political institutions and the rule of law, and is a corrupt (but not always illegal) practice. Neopatrimonialism also has its benefits, however.

Neopatrimonialism can extend the reach of the state into the geographical and social peripheries of the country, it can provide short term stability, and can facilitate communal integration.

Neo-patrimonialism, as defined by author Christopher Clapham of *The Nature of the Third World State*, is a "form of organisation in which relationships of a broadly patrimonial type pervade a political and administrative system which is formally constructed on rational-legal lines." It is a system in which an office of power is used for personal uses and gains, as opposed to a strict division of the private and public spheres.

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## Origin and definition of the term

"Neopatrimonialism" as a distinct term is generally held to have originated with Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, in his 1973 book *Traditional Patrimonialism and Modern Neopatrimonialism*<sup>[1]</sup>, deriving it from Max Weber's term, 'patrimonialism', who used the latter term to describe a system of rule based on administrative and military personnel, who were responsible only to the ruler. Neo-Patrimonialism, which is a modern form of the traditional Patrimonial form of rule, is a mixed system. Here elements of patrimonial and rational-bureaucratic rule co-exist and are sometimes interwoven.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Application and criticism

Neopatrimonialism is a label often used to describe African states, sometimes as a way of explaining why they have "failed" to effect neoliberal market reforms.<sup>[2]</sup> This focus is controversial, with some complaining that the term is vague, and others that its use has failed to take into account the politics of non-African states. For example, in 1998 Thandika Mkandawire said,

Another problem is that "neo-patrimonial" states in and outside Africa have pursued a wide range of policies including some that are squarely developmental. In other words, other than indicating the style of governance, neo-patrimonialism does not tell us much about what policies a state will pursue and with what success. In the African case "neo-patrimonialism" has been used to explain import substitution, export orientation, parastatals, privatization, the informal sector development, etc. The result is that, in seeking to explain everything, it explains nothing except perhaps that capitalist relations in their idealized form are not pervasive in Africa.<sup>[3]</sup>

Others have argued that the concept is valid and needs refinement. For example, a paper in 2004 identified political difficulties in Bangladesh as having their origins in the neopatrimonial system that had evolved there.<sup>[4]</sup>

## See also

Prebendalism

## References

- ↑ Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. (1973). *Traditional Patrimonialism and Modern Neopatrimonialism*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. ISBN 0803903715. OCLC 866195.
- ↑ <sup>*a*</sup> <sup>*b*</sup> Erdmann, Gero; Engel, Ulf (February 2006). "Neopatrimonialism Revisited – Beyond a Catch-All Concept" (PDF). Hoffmann, Bert *GIGA Working Papers*, German Institute of Global and Area Studies. No. 16. Retrieved on 2008-02-03.
- ↑ Thandika Mkandawire (16 October 1998). "Thinking About Developmental States in Africa" in *African Development in the 21st Century*. *African Economic Research Consortium*, United Nations University.
- ↑ Islam, S. Aminul (January 2004). "Is the Candle Still Burning? Weber and the Crisis of Democratic Transition in Bangladesh" (PDF). *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology* **1** (1). Retrieved on 2008-02-03.

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