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WHEN CLIENTELISM IS IN CRISIS: BROKERS OF JDP DURING 2014 AND 2019 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN TÜRKIYE

ABSTRACT
Clientelism is an exchange relationship that includes sources of patrons and services of clients. In the political dimension, this relationship's basic characteristic involves political support from citizens and the redistribution of resources, mostly public resources, by party elites. Hypothetically, control of public resources is subject to state regulation within an institutional framework. In some countries, like Türkiye, the state and government, state elites, and party elites are intertwined. This structure has its own roots in the peculiarities of Turkish political history. These peculiarities make clientelistic relations embedded in daily life. These conditions and peculiarities make brokers, who bridge state elites and resources with citizens, significant actors in Turkish political history. In this study, I analyze the effect of brokers in politics at a local scale by examining their agency during the 2014 and 2019 local elections in Artvin, a province of Türkiye. The question posed is whether the efficiency of brokers influences local election outcomes.

KEYWORDS
Brokerage, Clientelism, Local Politics, Türkiye.

Introduction

The clientelist relationship and clientelist policies can be likened to a customs relationship between two countries with unequal resources and power. One country plays the role of the patron, the other that of the client. Each has its own needs and can fulfill some of them through the other. Reciprocity is present, yet asymmetrical. The existence and continuity of the relationship depend on mutual consent, the benefits each derives, the predictability of these benefits, and the repetition of the exchange. Within this customs metaphor, the most critical figures are the customs officers—those who regulate and authorize transactions across the border. In clientelist politics, these officers are analogous to brokers.

Brokers gain prominence precisely because of the gap between the two sides of the clientelist relationship. In the metaphor, this gap may represent

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linguistic or cultural differences; in the political context, it refers to the divide between the center and the periphery. Brokers bridge this divide by ensuring the continuity, observability, and effectiveness of the exchange. They are the relational glue that allows clientelist networks to function over time and space.

In the political history of Türkiye, clientelist relations developed within the land and tax systems of the Ottoman period, were transferred to the Republic, and have continued to exist until today. As will be explained in the text, it would be more accurate to describe these early relations as patronage. Clientelist relations, on the other hand, emerge especially with the experience of democratization, since this experience brings to the agenda the 'hypothetical political participation' and the deficiencies that give rise to the need for brokers, the center-periphery gap, which is argued in this study to be filled by brokers, and the bureaucratic structure that does not function properly, which becomes visible through clientelist relations.

This study will analyze the effects of "brokers" in local politics. I will focus on the 2014 and 2019 local elections in the districts of Artvin, a province in Türkiye's Black Sea region. In the 2014 local elections, JDP (Ak Parti or AKP in Turkish) won 7 out of 8 districts of Artvin. This success was unprecedented for any party in Artvin until then. The districts of Artvin were shared by several parties in the past local elections. Therefore, the JDP's victory was a real fairy tale. In 2017, the JDP made a routine change in some districts' local branches and district presidents. In the local elections held two years later, in 2019, the JDP lost 5 of the 7 districts it had previously won. The first thing the JDP did after the defeat was to dismiss the presidents of the districts where it had lost. Therefore, the JDP blamed the district presidents for the defeat. The reason why I think of this change as a change related to clientelist politics rather than an ordinary internal party affair is that district presidents are the most prominent and effective brokers in Türkiye's political culture. In Türkiye's social and political structure, the political elite is positioned against appointed bureaucrats and on the side of citizens. The citizen, who is an element of the "periphery," seeks the patronage of party figures such as the district presidents in the face of state elites who represent the "center".

What happened between and after the 2014-2019 elections should also be considered in the context of clientelism due to the structural features of Turkish politics. In particular, in the current political structure of Türkiye, which I call the "presidents' regime," mostly after the regulation of the Constitution in 2017, district/province presidents of JDP's local branches are the most powerful brokers of provinces. Therefore, a study on the brokers who took office in 2017 and lost elections in 2019 will allow us to understand the impact of clientelistic relations and brokers in local politics.

To guide this inquiry, the study poses the following research questions: How do brokers mediate relationships between political parties and voters in Türkiye's local political context? In what ways does the perceived effectiveness of brokers influence the local election outcomes? What factors contribute to a

broker's success or failure in securing electoral support in clientelist systems? How does the central appointment of brokers, rather than local legitimacy, shape their ability to function within clientelist networks? These questions are situated within the broader framework of clientelism, particularly drawing on the distinction between electoral clientelism, which involves short-term vote targeting during campaigns, and relational clientelism, which depends on long-term, embedded interactions between brokers and constituents.

Based on this framework and the field observations in Artvin, the study proposes several hypotheses: that brokers who engage in sustained, face-to-face relationships are more likely to generate electoral support; that voters rely on retrospective evaluations of a broker's past performance rather than one-time campaign appeals; and that when brokers prioritize upward loyalty to party elites over their embeddedness in local networks, their effectiveness diminishes. Finally, the study hypothesizes that centrally appointed brokers—particularly in party-centered patronage systems—may lack the local legitimacy required to fulfill their roles in relational clientelist networks. These propositions frame the analysis of the Justice and Development Party's broker strategies and their electoral consequences in Artvin between 2014 and 2019.

Political Dimension of Clientelism and Brokers

Clientelism refers to a form of political exchange in which material resources are distributed in return for political support. This exchange is inherently asymmetrical and hierarchical, involving patrons (those who control access to resources) and clients (those who seek those resources). Classic scholarship by Scott (1972) and Wolf (1966) emphasized the dyadic, personalized nature of such relationships, often characterized as "beneficial friendships" between unequals. Landé (1977) described clientelism as a "vertical dyadic alliance," stressing that although such ties are often reciprocal, they are rarely balanced. Kettering (1986) further emphasized the personalized, non-bureaucratic logic of these relationships, contrasting them with an impersonal, rules-based public administration.

Yet these early frameworks, while foundational, often treated clientelism as static or pre-modern. More recent work has refined these concepts by distinguishing between electoral and relational clientelism (Nichter, 2008, 2018). Electoral clientelism refers to short-term transactions that occur during campaign periods, such as vote-buying or turnout mobilization. In this model, parties use brokers primarily to categorize voters—loyalists, swing voters, opposition—and to allocate scarce resources strategically. Relational clientelism, in contrast, is about long-term embedded relationships. Brokers maintain ongoing ties with constituents, solving problems, mediating access to state institutions, and maintaining trust and loyalty between elections. In this model, voters are not passive recipients but actors who evaluate brokers based on retrospective performance, responsiveness, and accessibility—elements crucial to democratic accountability (Krishna, 2007).

Within this framework, brokers emerge as indispensable actors, especially in hybrid political systems like Türkiye, where formal democratic institutions coexist with centralized party control. As Auyero (2001) argues in his analysis of Argentine politics, brokers are gatekeepers within "problem-solving networks"—individuals who provide goods, resolve issues, and mobilize constituents. They are often embedded within the same neighborhoods or social groups as their clients, which gives them social capital and informal authority. Similarly, Ghergina and Nemčok (2021) argue that in contemporary democracies, accountability through clientelistic networks depends heavily on broker behavior and proximity.

Recent comparative studies have further theorized the complexity of brokerage roles. Brierley and Nathan (2021) emphasize brokers' dual accountability: upward to political elites and downward to constituents. Brokers who prioritize their party over their community may alienate voters, while those who lack party support often lack resources. Higashijima and Washida (2023) extend this insight in the context of electoral autoritarian regimes, arguing that brokers play a central role in navigating the gray zone between formal institutions and informal control. Their effectiveness is shaped not just by charisma or embeddedness, but by their ability to perform within institutional constraints while managing expectations from both ends of the chain.

This study draws from these multi-layered perspectives to analyze the role of brokers in Türkiye, where centralized party control intersects with long-standing traditions of face-to-face politics. In the Turkish case, brokers are not merely vote-counters or logistical agents; they are relational actors who must maintain visibility, credibility, and utility in their communities. As Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes (2014) note, one of the key functions of brokers is to reduce information asymmetry between political centers and the peripheries. When this function fails—when brokers misrepresent voter preferences or lose local legitimacy—the entire clientelist structure is weakened.

In summary, understanding clientelism today requires moving beyond simplistic vote-buying models. Instead, we must analyze the relational infrastructures that sustain political loyalty over time. Brokers are not just intermediaries—they are social agents who translate party resources into community benefits and community needs into political leverage. Their success or failure shapes not only individual careers but broader patterns of political representation and democratic performance.

Brokers

In political clientelism, parties aim to benefit individuals and try to keep their votes calculable. Therefore, parties have to pay attention to which voters and families have what kind of needs. This is where monitoring, one of the most important features of clientelism, comes into play. Vote tracking requires parties to collect concrete information about individuals' behavior outside the center. This need for "local information" leads political parties to hire "armies of

brokers". These brokers are people from the "neighborhood" and therefore can easily obtain insider information such as "whose child is sick, who went to vote in the last elections and who did not, whether a voter turned his back on the party, who voted for the rival party despite benefiting from party favors" (Stokes, et al., 2013: 19). Javier Auyero likens brokers in the "Peronist problem-solving relationship" to gatekeepers who control the flow of goods and services from local powers and administrators and support and votes from "clients" (1999: 303). Ersin Kalaycıoğlu makes a similar analogy to watchmen. According to him, brokers function "as a political hinge, providing political communication and connections between the masses and elites" (Kalaycıoğlu, 1998: 818).

The literature on clientelism takes brokers as a given when analyzing relationships and policies, but studies on brokers are limited (see Gay, 1999; 1976; Auerbach, 2016; Dawson, 2014). These studies focus on the activities of brokers and their effectiveness. Brokers bring together "people and opportunities". They enable the circulation of resources and communication. According to Kettering (1986), brokers are often already important people with resources and personal reputations and therefore become brokers. Serving as a broker requires influence within the community and in the social and political structure. Through their relationships, which are the source of their power and legitimacy, brokers "fill the gaps in the connection between individuals, groups, structures, and even cultures" (Boissevain, 1969: 380).

To understand the distinct position of brokers in clientelist networks, it is useful to distinguish them from patrons and clients. The broker differs from the patron in that he usually brings resources into the exchange that he does not own. The broker differs from the client in that he also possesses resources that distinguish him and enable him to participate in the system. The main problem is how one achieves such a unique position. It has already been mentioned that brokers can, in some cases, be patrons of the past. In such cases, it is important that the broker has resources that can be called 'family' and are usually acquired through his lineage and surname. This positioning may involve emphases from the past that can be seen as particularly favorable, but may also include the legacy of forms of relationship that may not have a positive connotation, but which can provide support where necessary. For example, people with surnames who have been settled in the same neighborhood for the last few centuries and who have held various statuses such as land ownership, banditry, merchant, moneylender, collector, bureaucrat, etc. during this period are likely to inherit this heritage and act as brokers.

Another possibility in determining the broker is that individuals become brokers through appointment by the Center. In this case, it can be stated that a person who has been settled in a place for a long time through different levels of civil servant positions acts as a broker between the Center and the Periphery, especially in matters related to the area in which he is in charge. A third possibility is that especially the 'party-oriented broker" is selected from among the members of the organization who have successfully served in their own party at various levels for many years.

A key debate in the literature is whether brokers derive their role from their position in networks or vice versa. According to Nico Ravanilla et al., 'the value of the broker derives, in part, from his or her position in social networks', but whether someone earns their position by virtue of being a broker or is a broker because of their position in the network is debatable (Ravanilla et al., 2022: 4). Brokers bring together 'people and opportunities'. They make the circulation of resources and communication possible. According to Kettering (1986), brokers are usually already important people with resources and personal reputations and therefore become brokers. Acting as a broker requires influence within the community and in the social and political structure. This influence can be derived from 'personal reputation, office, position and family name, wealth, civil service, clients and patrones' (Kettering, 1986: 43).

The importance of brokers increases when the periphery is untraceable from the point of view of the center and the need for the authority of the clientelist relationship entered into through the transfer of resources. With their functions of 'information accumulation and resource control', brokers form a 'problem-solving network' (Auyero, 1999: 16). Patrons (central authorities and/or political parties) need armies of brokers to gather the information needed for the correct and efficient distribution of benefits. According to Stokes et al., 'brokers are local mediators who solve the problems of their followers/constituents and provide them with certain benefits in exchange for their active participation in election campaigns and votes' (2013: 75). Due to this role - and this is also the factor that leads them to be considered brokers - they are in a frequent and continuous relationship with voters, and while observing their behavior, they also obtain information about their needs, political tendencies, and preferences.

Brokers keep predictability and observability in the clientelist relationship in constant operation. Since the network of brokers consists of local figures who know the clients (voters) who are parties to the relationship well, they are useful in understanding their demands and delivering 'the right goods and services to the right people' by predicting their voting behavior (Komsuoğlu, 2009: 27). The indispensable role of brokers in clientelism as a reciprocal exchange relationship stems from being 'embedded' in social relations. They take part in social relations and provide local information essential for distribution policies that will determine voter preferences (Stokes, 2005).

The importance of clientelist relations and brokers becomes most evident in multi-party democratic political systems within the modern state structure. This is because the race to win in multi-party political systems reveals the importance of political participation. The importance of brokers in the transition from traditional to modern society has already been mentioned. The modern state structure differs from the traditional social structure in that 'the scope for people to participate in politics and to be influenced by politics in large-scale political units has expanded' (Huntington, 1973: 36). In the traditional structure, whether we are talking about a small-scale or a large-scale society, political participation is limited to a small group. As the structure modernizes,

political participation limited to small groups turns into broad and grassroots political participation due to the existence of political parties.

Political participation can be considered in two ways. Firstly, there is a form of political participation that can be analyzed as the participation of the citizen in the macro-scale decision-making processes within the modern state and democratic system, which can be thought of as the citizen's relations with public institutions and political parties. Verba et al. (1971), when referring to this type of political participation, emphasize the activities of citizens to influence the government and its decisions on a national scale.

A second form of political participation requires a microscale analysis. This means that the political participation of the citizen does not only consist of sending deputies to the Parliament. Especially at the village, neighborhood, and district levels, the actors and conditions of political participation differ from the macroscale. The main difference at the microscale is the specificity of power relations at the local level. Weiner provides a detailed description of the scale of political participation at the local level as follows: 'any voluntary action at the local or national level to determine public policy, organize public affairs, or elect political leaders' (Weiner, 1971: 164).

Analyzing political participation activities from the national to the local level is necessary to evaluate political participation at the district level, such as in this study. It is possible to say that as the scale of political participation decreases, the influence of the periphery on the center increases. While the influence of the periphery in the center increases, it is important to note that the periphery is not identical to the center in terms of structure and actors. The periphery tends to maintain its own horizontal and vertical relations. The functioning of the existing structure in local and national political participation is made possible by the provincial organizations of political parties and the clientelist relations and brokers that link the provincial organizations with the citizens and the citizens with central politics.

It has already been mentioned that the two main elements of political participation are political parties and voters. The role and importance of clientelism and brokers for these two elements should be mentioned separately. The reason for this necessity is that clientelism and brokers should become more decisive during election periods for political parties and in the inter-election period for voters. In making this distinction, we will use the distinction between electoral clientelism, which becomes more pronounced during campaign periods, and relational clientelism, which persists in the inter-electoral period.

Studies on electoral clientelism (Stokes, 2005; Nichter, 2008; Gans-Morse et al., 2014; Rueda, 2015) emphasize a picture of voters as passive subjects with certain needs, waiting for campaign contributions from political parties or community leaders. In this picture, explicit clientelist politics, such as vote-buying and turnout-buying, are practiced. Relationships outside campaign periods therefore become irrelevant, suggesting that electoral clientelism is more important for political parties than for voters. The role of brokers in electoral

clientelism is to enable political parties to categorize voters (e.g. loyalists, opponents, swing voters) in order to make the most effective resource allocation.

In relational clientelism, clientelist relationships outside of election periods are decisive (Nichter, 2018). Voters are not only remembered when they are going to vote, but even their personal daily problems are on the agenda of political party organizations. The most prominent example of this form of clientelist politics in the literature is the structure of the Peronist Party organized down to the neighborhood scale (Auyero, 2001). Relational clientelism, which can be considered as a form of inclusion of the periphery in the center, is more important for voters than for political parties. The importance of brokers in relational clientelism is that they ensure the transfer of problems and demands, that is, they 'bridge' the periphery to the center.

Brokers for Citizens

In theory, democracy means that 'informed voters freely choose their own leaders and that these leaders run for re-election at set intervals', thus enabling citizens to choose the leader or party that best represents them while at the same time evaluating their term in power in the next elections (Lau and Redlawsk, 2006: 3). Therefore, casting the right vote and making the right assessment is crucial for the electoral component of a well-functioning democracy.

The main problem with the democratic assumption is that there are many variables affecting a voter's choice of vote. It is possible to categorize the variables under two headings: reasons for voters' decision-making and affinity with political parties. The reasons for voters' decision-making may vary according to their knowledge about public policies and political parties' programs, and their motivation to care about their own short-term or long-term interests. Depending on their closeness to their political parties, voters can be identified with positions such as core voters, swing voters, opposition voters, and it is assumed that they will vote in a way that fulfills the requirements of these positions.

In clientelist systems, these dynamics intersect with specific mechanisms that shape voter-broker relations. Five such mechanisms include a problem-solving network in the inter-election period, contact with the center, involvement in public policies, closeness to party politics, and similarity between their own voting preference and party policy. The determinacy of the inter-election period in the voting preference of the voter means that he/she will show a retrospective voting preference, where past utility is decisive. The effectiveness of the brokers, who are the transmitters and followers of the benefit, is decisive in this preference.

The periphery voters' contact with the center and public policies is also influenced by the clientelist relations, which we have emphasized as a form of political participation, and the brokers bridging the periphery to the center. The influence of brokers on the ties that voters establish with party politics or the parties they vote for can be labeled as perverse monitoring. Through local

organizations and representatives, voters have the opportunity to continuously test the policies and promises of political parties.

As stated above, the role of brokers in clientelist systems is central to understanding the enduring exchange between political elites and voters. Acting as both gatekeepers of problem-solving mechanism (Auyero, 1999, 2001) and "hinges" between masses and elites in political communication (Kalaycıoğlu, 1998), brokers enable a continuous flow of resources and influence. This reciprocal relationship, as further elaborated by Stokes (2005), is sustained through a long-term process of problem-solving, where voters respond with loyalty and participation in return for access and support.

One of the most important points in the situation of brokers in terms of voters is that brokers are also electable by voters. Güneş-Ayata (1984) states that voters are aware that the brokers do not have their own resources, and therefore they have the motivation to choose the best and most appropriate broker for themselves. Therefore, the voter takes into account the possible benefits that the candidate he/she will vote for will provide to him/her, in other words, how his/her vote will affect his/her life.

Clientelism and Brokers in Türkiye

Based on what has been discussed up to this point, it can be summarized that brokers are obliged to fill a gap. In Türkiye's political life, this gap is between the nuclear center of power and resources and the periphery where characterized lack of resources and caducity of political participation. This gap is fundamentally a gap between the state and citizens. Brokers are mechanisms that function as a prevention against the "lack of contact" between state and society, party and citizen, province and Ankara.

The most decisive element in defining Türkiye's clientelistic structure is the influence of parties over the bureaucracy and public resources. As Berenschott and Aspinall (2020) note in their analysis, relational clientelism is prevalent in "countries where political parties have strong control over state resources" such as Türkiye, Ghana, and Malaysia. Parties in power hold resources and distribute them through local party networks. Based on these considerations, Berenschott and Aspinall distinguish between "party-centered" and "community-centered" patronage democracies. Historically, party-centered patronage democracy has been observed in India, Malaysia, and Türkiye, where bureaucracies have come under the control of parties.

In Türkiye, where the control of public resources and bureaucracy in the hands of political parties has become a tradition, the most prominent role of the broker characters we have tried to identify is the role of "bridging", which we can think of as bridging the "distance between citizens and bureaucracy". Since the distance between the citizen and the bureaucracy is filled by political parties and structures that control public resources, it becomes inevitable for brokers to be directly associated with a current or past ruling party.

To fully understand the historical depth of brokerage in Türkiye, we must revisit its Ottoman roots. In Türkiye's political history, brokers have shown different characteristics due to the economic and social conditions that existed at the time. In the patrimonial conditions of the Ottoman Empire where power was concentrated in Sultan, *"â'yan"*s were origins of brokers. Since the 13th and 14th centuries, the â'yans had an important place in the provinces, but with the tax and land regulations of the late 16th century, they became semi-feudal lords whose main duty was to collect taxes. In the 18th century, as a result of the recognition of property and inheritance rights, the â'yan, "whose power derives from their economic and social control over the population," emerged as prominent figures in the countryside (İnalcık, 2003; Rodrik, 1982; Kettering, 1986).

From the late 19th century onwards, the brokers in control of public life, especially in the provinces, had a power that they would carry over into the Republican era (Meeker, 2005). The broker figure that emerges from the patronage networks handed down to the Republic is the eşraf. The notables, who were effective "in terms of rallying the social spirit" and "shared the same values with the peasants during the War of Independence", played an important role in "organizing the masses" for the war. Although the eşraf creates a patronage relationship because they make their own resources the subject of distribution, they are also suitable to be defined as patron-brokers because they are "a point of intersection between the state and the peasantry" (Komsuoğlu, 2009; Rodrik, 1982).

With the transition to multi-party life (after 1946), the â'yan, eşraf and agha would be replaced by party-linked brokers in line with the rise of party patronage. During the single party period, the role of brokers was assumed by a "growing new elite circle" such as large landowners, sheikhs, local merchants, artisans, doctors and teachers due to their close ties with the bureaucracy. With the transition to multi-party life, this "clientalism of notables" was replaced by "party-directed patronage" and "notables" were transformed into "party-directed brokers" (Sayarı, 1977; Komsuoğlu, 2009).

The urbanization (especially after 1960s) that emerged with the migration from villages to cities created a unique type of people. A new type of bureaucrat and urban broker emerged who carried the conservatism of his/her place of origin to the place of migration, who was knowledgeable about the problems of the center and the provinces, and who could establish good relations with those who remained in the provinces. The bureaucrat and urban broker type is characterized by the attempt to solve many of the problems created by irregular migration to the cities for their compatriots in the city and the problems of those in the provinces for their compatriots back home.

With the economic transformations Türkiye experienced in the 1980s, the 'merchant broker' type re-emerged on the scene. Being a merchant is a very important status, especially in provincial units with limited livelihoods. Merchants, who link producers and consumers to the national market, can establish many powerful relationships at both local and national levels. In order to use

these relationships for political mobilization when necessary, they distribute their resources according to their own criteria, buying a sense of indebtedness and gratitude that they can use in the future. It is not unusual for families enriched by trade to occasionally try to be decisive in local politics. However, in the 1980s, it is observed that they significantly influenced the distribution of resources and local politics.

The concept that figures or surnames who have become wealthy and have consolidated their power locally are selected by political parties and citizens to act as brokers continued in the early years of the AK Party's rule. As will be detailed in the findings section, while establishing its local organizations, the AK Party tried to attract those who had influence in the relevant provinces/districts to its side. However, in the following years, when it consolidated its party-centered patronage democracy, i.e. its control over both state resources and the bureaucracy, it prioritized the criterion of 'position within the party' in the selection of brokers. In particular, the Presidential System of Government, which was passed with the amendment in 2017, has created a new situation, which we call the 'presidents' regime' in the context of intermediation.

In this new situation, political party district presidents or provincial presidents, who we have always seen as strong brokers as a requirement of party-centered patronage democracy, have reached their most powerful and decisive positions, and unlike in the past, they are now mostly determined not by local conditions, but by their position within the party. In the presidents' regime, where the incumbent political party's elite has become the sole and continuous determinant of clientelist conditions, the importance of being strong at the local level has decreased and the importance of being strong in the party has increased.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, combining ethnographic fieldwork, participatory observation, and document analysis to examine the role of brokers in local Turkish politics. Since clientelist relations and brokerage practices are socially embedded and expressed through everyday interactions, they resist quantification. Qualitative research, with its emphasis on observing, interviewing, and analyzing contextual materials, is more suitable for identifying how brokers are constructed, evaluated, and function within local political networks (İslamoğlu & Alnıaçık, 2019). The objective was to reveal the underlying patterns within singular cases, making it possible to theorize how broker behavior impacts electoral outcomes.

Artvin was selected as the field site due to its unique political trajectory and socio-demographic profile. The province witnessed a remarkable reversal between the 2014 and 2019 local elections: the Justice and Development Party (JDP) won 7 of 8 districts in 2014, only to lose 5 of them five years later. This sharp fluctuation occurred without any major economic or demographic transformation in the region, allowing for a more isolated analysis of political

intermediaries. Artvin's small scale, non-metropolitan status, and mix of urban and rural areas made it an ideal site to observe face-to-face political relationships and informal mechanisms like clientelism and brokerage. It offers the opportunity to examine how localized political actors function in both geographically dispersed and socially dense environments.

Fieldwork was conducted over a six-month period in 2024, immediately following the latest local elections. The research proceeded in three phases, combining participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. In the first phase, I used ethnographic methods to explore how district-level brokers—specifically JDP district presidents who took office in 2017—were perceived by voters in their neighborhoods. Drawing on the logic of embedded ethnography, I spent time in political and social venues such as district party organizations, coffeehouses, mukhtars' offices, local administrative meetings, barbershops, and cooperative assemblies. These spaces allowed me to observe informal interactions and political discourses as they unfolded in everyday life.

The second phase consisted of interviews with JDP party members who served at the district level between 2014 and 2019. These conversations helped triangulate the perspectives gained from voters, offering a party-centric view of how broker performance was understood within the organization. In the third and final phase, I interviewed the district presidents themselves—individuals who had been appointed in 2017 and dismissed by 2019. The goal was to capture their personal narratives and interpretations of their roles. However, a major limitation emerged in this phase: none of the brokers acknowledged that they had any real influence on the election results. They framed their work as purely procedural, claiming loyalty to the central party and often describing themselves as "the shadow under President Erdoğan." Given the unanimity of their self-effacing discourse and the risk of strategic self-censorship, their accounts were excluded from the primary analysis. Instead, I centered the evaluations of voters and party members, who consistently emphasized broker effectiveness as a key determinant of electoral success or failure.

In total, the study engaged 64 individuals across all districts of Artvin: 8 district presidents (one from each district), 16 party members (two per district), and 40 voters (five per district). Participants were recruited using a "double snowball sampling" method that combined traditional ethnographic snowballing with independent outreach through existing local contacts. This approach was designed to avoid the risk of sampling homogeneity that arises when relying solely on one chain of referrals. In parallel with fieldwork, I also conducted document analysis using local newspaper archives and internal JDP party documents, with particular attention to organizational restructuring around 2017. These materials helped validate field insights, while also pointing to key actors and events worth observing. Taken together, the methodological design enabled a nuanced, triangulated understanding of how brokers operate within the overlapping spaces of party loyalty, local community ties, and clientelist expectations.

Findings and Conclusion

The first finding of this field study on the impact of brokers' effectiveness on local elections is the determinant role of face-to-face interaction between brokers and people. The most common phrase in the interviews was "everyone knows everyone here". In a place where everyone knows everyone, the daily life of the brokers is also known by everyone. A broker who is found to be indifferent to the people living in the district and their problems is seen as unsuccessful and incompetent by voters. A shopkeeper (Participant 1), who identified himself as a JDP voter, summarized his criticism of the broker figure (Broker 1), who served as the JDP's district president between 2017-2019, as "he failed to establish contact with the people during his term as district president". Broker 1 did not visit shopkeepers, did not contact people on the street and acted "arrogant". Participant 1 claimed that at least 30 other people like him did not vote for the JDP "because of this man". In districts where the results of local elections can be determined by 50-100 votes, the fact that even a shopkeeper was able to detect the swing votes of 30 voters is striking in terms of revealing the consequences of the incompetence of the district chairperson.

A second finding about the incompetence of the brokers is the problems with their own party's local branch and its members. As mentioned before, having served in various units of the party's provincial organization has become one of the determining conditions for becoming a district president in the last decade. However, this has also led to an increase in intra-party rivalry, as certain prominent figures within a small-scale organizational structure hold similar positions respectively. Therefore, the determination of who has more power within the party than the other was not determined by local dynamics but by central decision-making bodies.

An official (Participant 4), who has held important positions in the party for many years, stated that Broker 3 was "unpopular within the party" but was elected to this position "because of his good relations with those at the center" and this caused a reaction among party members. The result of this situation in terms of clientelist relations was manifested in the distribution of resources controlled by the broker. Broker 3 prevented party members other than those in his own circle from benefiting from resource distribution. Moreover, he did not act in accordance with the recommendations of the district organization regarding the employment of party members in various institutions. These two situations made Broker 3 seen as "ineffective" by his own party members and "corrupt" by others, leading to a loss of votes for his party and making it impossible for him to convince others.

The role of the brokers as a bridge between the state and the citizen and between the political party and the electorate has already been mentioned. This role is twofold: it connects the citizen to the bureaucracy and at the same time connects the political party to the electorate. There are therefore several different conditions under which a broker can fail. As presented in the examples above, a broker may fail because of problems in communication with citizens,

but also because of problems in communication with his/her own party. The influence of the broker on the relationships he or she has to control is also decisive. For example, if the importance of the broker for a political party is to prevent problems caused by information asymmetry, it can also lead to electoral defeat when the broker fails to provide its own party with accurate information about voter behavior.

Broker 5 provides an example of this situation. In the interviews, it was claimed both by members of the party organization and voters that Broker 5, who was found to have good relations with people, led to electoral defeat because he failed to correctly identify the voter group to be targeted during the campaign period. A party interviewee (Participant 5) described the process as follows:

> "After the start of the elections, Broker 5 targeted a certain group of voters, but it was clear that they would not vote for us. We warned him, he didn't listen. Those in the center also listened to Broker 5, not us. Broker 5 was so interested in this opposition group that our main voters felt abandoned. 'We guess,' they said, 'if they are elected, they will not give us a job in the municipality. They made promises to the opposition, but no one talked to us'. As such, we lost the votes of people who were already on our side or who we could have convinced with a few good promises, and we couldn't convince the opposition anyway, we couldn't."

It was found that voters take a retrospective approach to their voting preferences, and that the past benefits of the broker are important factors in its success. Participants at all levels stated that when they had a problem that needed to be solved by the broker, they took into account the broker's previous achievements. Political parties and people look for the "right man for the right job" criterion in the selection of brokers. As in the case of Broker 2, some brokers do not have the skills of a "problem solver" and therefore left behind unresolved problems and broken promises. While describing the activities of Broker 2, one participant said:

> "He would probably write your problem on a cigarette paper and then throw it away. A few days later, you would go to him and ask, 'President, what happened to our business?' and he answered: "I tried, but it didn't work." When these examples multiply, you realize that he is not at all interested in your problem. If he was a good man, he would immediately pick up the phone and tell whatever he needed to say. This President is such a man. He calls the director of the relevant institution, turns on the speaker on his phone and you know that even if your problem is not solved, the President tried but still could not solve it. Then you trust the man. The man of that time was not like this. He offended many people."

The findings of this study strongly align with Javier Auyero's (2001) concept of brokers as everyday actors within "problem-solving networks." In Artvin, brokers were judged not by their ideology or titles, but by their capacity

to resolve constituents' day-to-day issues — a core feature of relational clientelism. Voters described credible brokers as those who "called the director immediately" and "turned on the speaker," signaling genuine access and urgency. In contrast, those who made empty promises or delayed action were accused of indifference, and they lost political capital. This dynamic supports Krishna's (2007) argument that voters engage in retrospective voting, evaluating candidates and intermediaries based on past utility. Brokers who failed to deliver, regardless of party affiliation, were punished electorally — highlighting how micro-performance shapes macro outcomes.

These findings illustrate the relational logic of clientelism at the local level. Brokers who failed to engage in consistent face-to-face interaction or who selectively distributed resources were perceived not just as ineffective, but as violating the informal contract embedded in relational clientelism. In contrast to top-down narratives that emphasize ideological loyalty, local voters evaluated brokers through the lens of accessibility, empathy, and effectiveness. These expectations align with Nichter's (2018) argument that in relational clientelism, trust and personal rapport are more politically valuable than one-time benefits. They also reflect findings by Auerbach and Thachil (2018), who demonstrate that in urban slums of India, clients actively select brokers not based on party status but on everyday embeddedness, responsiveness, and localized credibility. Similarly, in Artvin, brokers were not judged by their formal party affiliation, but by their ability to deliver tangible support and remain visible within the community. These dynamics underscore the political agency of clients and the centrality of micro-level evaluations in shaping broader electoral outcomes.

Further, this study confirms Brierley and Nathan's (2021) observation that brokers navigate complex dual accountabilities: upward to party elites, and downward to local constituents. Several brokers in Artvin lost credibility precisely because they were seen as "favored by the center" but disconnected from the local party base or community. These vertical ties to the central party often came at the expense of horizontal relationships with local voters and cadres, creating organizational fragmentation. This also reflects Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes' (2014) model of information asymmetry, where brokers serve as transmitters of local voter preferences and behavior. In one notable case, a broker misinformed party headquarters about targetable voter groups, leading to misallocated campaign resources and alienation of the party's loyal base. Such breakdowns in communication underscore the critical — and fragile — role of brokers as intermediaries in distributive politics.

These findings also gesture toward more recent distinctions in the brokerage literature, particularly Camp Szwarcberg's (2015) concept of "liquid pocket" brokers and Zarazaga's (2015) contrast between "smoke merchants" and "plugged-in" brokers. In Artvin, voters made clear distinctions between brokers who could act swiftly and those who only pretend to have access. While some brokers were seen as "men of action," others were regarded as symbolic figures, lacking the embeddedness or resources to produce tangible outcomes. This suggests that not all brokers are equal in their efficacy or status, and that

access to institutional leverage — not merely party affiliation — determines a broker's legitimacy.

Together, these interpretations reposition brokers as central, active agents in relational clientelist systems, not passive instruments of party machinery. Their capacity to maintain everyday contact, translate needs into action, and mediate between organizational tiers makes them both vulnerable and powerful. The Artvin case confirms that brokerage is not simply about vote delivery but about navigating expectations, managing impressions, and fulfilling embedded social obligations within tightly woven local communities.

These findings, observed about the brokers working in the period in question and supported by some participant interviews, show that an unsuccessful broker affects voter behavior. This effect is one of the important components of losing elections in this sample. This sample provides a clear result regarding the effects of clientelistic relations and brokers in local elections. Future studies have the opportunity to fill an important gap in the political science literature by examining in depth the problematic put on the agenda in this study, through field studies to be carried out at different district levels.

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Kad je klijentelizam u krizi: Brokeri AKP-a tokom lokalnih izbora 2014. i 2019. u Turskoj

Apstrakt

Klijentelizam je odnos razmene koji obuhvata resurse patrona i usluge klijenata. U političkom smislu, osnovna karakteristika ovog odnosa jeste politička podrška građana u zamenu za redistribuciju resursa, najčešće javnih, od strane partijskih elita. Teoretski, kontrola nad javnim resursima bi trebalo da bude predmet državne regulative u okviru institucionalnog sistema. Međutim, u nekim zemljama, poput Turske, država i vlada, državni i partijski činovnici, duboko su isprepleteni. Ova struktura ima svoje korene u specifičnostima političke istorije Turske, koje čine klijentelističke odnose svakodnevnim i duboko ukorenjenim. U takvim uslovima, brokeri – posrednici između državnih elita i građana – postaju ključni akteri političkog života.

U ovom radu analiziram ulogu brokera u lokalnoj politici kroz ispitivanje njihove aktivnosti tokom lokalnih izbora 2014. i 2019. godine u provinciji Artvin u Turskoj. Ključno istraživačko pitanje glasi: da li efikasnost brokera utiče na ishod lokalnih izbora?

Ključne reči: brokeri, klijentelizam, lokalna politika, Turska