

Clientelism and informality in Albania

Islam JUSUFI*

Abstract

Albania made revolutionary progress in its post-communist transition. Nevertheless, there have been setbacks, including the emergence and failure in the fight against organized crime. In this fight, the attitude of governments and of the public has often been political and clientelistic. In Albania, regional, cultural and political polarization has constantly existed. This polarization has also played a role in governments' responses to organized crime, which in turn has been important for the economic survival of communities and this has come to survive in informal forms. In this context, organized crime has come to be tolerated by people. This article analyses the fight against organized crime in Albania and how phenomena such as clientelism have affected this fight. Clientelism has emerged as the reason for the general absence of active opposition against criminality among the population in Albania. The article finds that people's own clientelistic and political views affect their decisions and attitudes towards organized crime.

Keywords: informality, clientelism, criminality, organized crime, Albania

Introduction

In the second decade of 2000s, Albania continued its long transition that started in 1990s. Since 1991, when the communist dictatorship collapsed, revolutionary progress has occurred in the country. Nevertheless, there have been setbacks, including the emergence of lucrative organized crime networks in trafficking of people and arms and in the production and trafficking of drugs, particularly cannabis (UNODC, 2016; Politi, 2001; Strazzari, 2007). In the fight against organized crime, the attitude of Albania's population and governments, as argued in this article, has often had characteristics of being informal or clientelistic. In Albania regional (north vs. south), cultural (Gheg vs. Tosk) and political (right/democrat vs. left/socialist) polarization has constantly existed. This polarization has also played a role in governments' responses to organized crime. There has been a high level of politicization in many issues in Albania, with sharp differences between Democratic and Socialist voters. Although clientelism is in

*Islam JUSUFI is lecturer at the Epoka University, Tirana, Albania; e-mail: ijusufi@epoka.edu.al.

retreat, a number of political and economic clientelistic structures remain and stand to play a path-dependent role in the country's fight against organized crime.

An important body of research raises the possibility that peoples' political and/or clientelistic views may influence their practice. People with different political views have been found to provide different responses on important issues. Research has revealed substantial variation in the treatment of issues by people with particular political views (Hersh and Goldenberg, 2016; Pierce *et al.*, 2016; Gerber and Huber, 2009; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015).

The transition literature on Albania has focused overwhelmingly on the formal level rather than on the informal one. Exceptions apply (Triantis and Vatavali, 2016; Elbasani, 2017). The existing transition literature on Albania pays attention largely to nondemocratic trajectories - transitions to autocracies (Levitsky and Way, 2002), but fails to pay attention to the informal practices. But scholarship on other transition places (Davies and Polese, 2015; Russo, 2016) sheds light on the question of informality in contemporary Albania. Although there are studies carried out on organized crime in Albania (Hignett, 2017; Schwandner-Sievers, 2008; Strazzari, 2007; Glenny, 2004; Politi, 2001), very little is analyzed on how fight against organized crime has progressed considering informality and clientelism within political establishment and tolerance shown towards organized crime activities. In this context, this article provides Albania as a case study example for studying the social morality of crime. The role of informality in certain aspects of people's lives in Albania has remained largely unexplored. Thus, this article focuses on the practice of cannabis cultivation landscapes around Albania, symbolized in the word "Lazarat", which is a village in south Albania that became a symbol of cannabis cultivation in the country and revealing, at the same time, the ways informality has persisted in Albania. Lazarat in Albania and beyond has been famous for its cannabis production. The belief is that, by looking specifically at how political views impact on tackling with organized crime, this article will provide lessons for better understanding the processes of the fight against organized crime.

In Albania, people with different ideological orientations will provide different responses to politicized issues. This has led the author to investigate how people of different clientelistic and/or political worldviews engage on the politically sensitive issue of organized crime or criminality. The author hypothesizes that Albania's Socialist and Democratic voters' evaluations of the seriousness of the issue and choices of responses will differ in ways consistent with political bias. The assumption is that Albania's democratic and socialist voters treat criminality differently as political views affect their decisions on these issues. The author expected to see differences in the evaluation and treatment of organized crime. Because people in Albania regularly interact with others on politically sensitive issues and because the social and economic life is increasingly politicized, it is necessary to understand how people's own political worldviews may impact their actions. Because the issue of drug and cannabis cultivation is increasingly

politicized, it is necessary to understand how people's own political worldviews may impact their actions as a response to criminality.

Choosing cannabis production to interpret informality in Albania is important as it stands as a guide to understanding contemporary Albania. Cannabis production has been visible and with an impact in Albania (UNODC, 2016; Politi, 2001; Strazzari, 2007). As cannabis cultivation became massive, it became an important source of the country's grey economy (Feilcke-Tiemann, 2006). Cannabis cultivation has acted as a constraint on Albania. But with the cannabis cultivation that has not stopped in Albania, this article is believed to be a timely addition for better understanding contemporary Albania and what cannabis cultivation reveals about the recent Albanian socio-political landscape. The article does so by considering the political views and clientelism in explaining the treatment of criminality in Albania.

The assumption is that there is a general absence of active opposition against criminality among the population in Albania as an impact of the fact that organized crime has been important for the economic survival of communities and, as a result, for the influence of clientelistic networks. In this context, organized crime groups have come to be tolerated by both the people and the governments.

In researching the relationship between political views and treatment of organized crime, the article based its information and analyses on several primary and secondary sources. Under the primary data, this article employed the method of elite interviewing to learn about the relationship between political views and informality. As a result, the article employed qualitative research with aspects of discourse analysis as a methodological strategy for data analysis. The article also builds on previous research on informality and other processes in Albania.

The article is organized in four different and sequencing parts. The first part constructs a baseline of informality that guides the rest of the article. After setting the context for existence of informality in Albania, the section discusses its roots. The second part of the article describes the specific informal practice of cannabis cultivation. The following section provides an overview of the relationship between political affiliation and treatment of criminality. The last and concluding parts are dedicated to propositions and evidence for informality.

1. Informal practices in contemporary Albania

Albania's political spectrum is mainly made up of democrats and socialists. There has been a high degree of political bipolarization in Albania, where the electorate has been divided into two antagonistic camps: the Socialists, represented by the Socialist Party on the left, and the Democrats, represented by the Democratic Party on the right. This division of the society into two rivalry camps has also been reflected in the effective number of legislative parties in the post-communist transition years where the Albanian political scene has been dominated by an average

of 2.33 parties (Kajsiu, 2016). The bipolarity of the Albanian political scene mainly began in 1990, but elements of it have existed in the society for many years since the country's independence in 1912. Zogists (Legalists) vs. Nolists (Anti-Monarchists) during the inter-war years of 1920s-1930s, Partisans vs. the so-called collaborators of Italian occupiers during the World War II, and orthodox communists vs. reformist communists (both within the then communist Party of Labour of Albania) in the communist period of 1945-1991 were all bipolar political divisions of the Albanian society starting from its independence. This historical bipolar division later, in the post-communist years, would be transformed into a society divided between Democrats and Socialists. The latest phase of this division was also fed by the different interpretation of the post-communist years. While the Democrats were highly critical of the communist regime and called for deep and rapid political and economic transformations, the Socialists called for gradual transformations and held a less critical view of the communist past. The democrats ruled the country in the 1992–1997 and 2005–2013 periods, while the socialists were in power in the periods of 1997-2005, and 2013-present. Only these two major political parties have come to and left power in the post-communist years of Albania. During their ruling and oppositional periods, the two parties have relied on clientelistic networks in order to continue dominating the Albanian political scene. They have constructed extensive clientelistic networks through which they have sustained the loyalty of their followers and have provided particular benefits to their supporters (Kajsiu, 2016). This clientelistic competition between the two major political blocks has also had implications on the fight against crime and drug trafficking (Feilcke-Tiemann, 2006).

Belonging to or sympathizing with one political side bears a substantial impact on Albanian people's views on many important issues, including on organized crime and criminality. The Albanians in the media and other platforms often discuss criminality (Feilcke-Tiemann, 2006) and for this they are often inspired in their political views. Criminality is among the many politicized issues in Albania and has been one of the issues that have come to shape the country's domestic and foreign policy priorities. When the political parties of Albania conduct campaigns or other party operations they often engage people in conversations that touch upon a range of sensitive issues that relate to criminality and organized crime. Because this issue has impacted directly on the country's transformation record, it is inextricably tied to the political views of the population.

The informal practices and processes have been recurrent characteristics in post-communist Albania and formal and informal practices and institutions have co-existed just like elsewhere in the post-communist world (Russo, 2016; Aliyev, 2017). Informality has dominated the political and economic sectors of Albania. This Albanian order has been characterized by the resilience of informal and customary non-state institutions of governance and traditional societal structures and authorities.

There have been some attempts to study the impact of informal institutions on different aspects of domestic political order (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). In this direction, by informal practices, we mean patterns of socially meaningful actions (Adler and Pouliot, 2011) that affect the Albanian political governance. By informal practices, we also mean illegal practices (Russo, 2016) as well as other forms of legal non-formal practices.

The study of informal practices in the post-communist world has focused on informal trade, employment and entrepreneurship (Ledeneva, 1998). There have also been attempts to study the informal practices of post-communist world in the field of security and organized crime (Russo, 2016). Informal economic practices did not suddenly emerge after the collapse of the formal structures of the socialist order (Russo, 2016). The informal practices related to the post-communist world predate to communism and to the pre-communist period (Polese and Rodgers, 2011; Strazzari and Kamphuis, 2012), including in Albania. Informality in Albania is not only an expression of particular economic activities but is also embedded in social and political spheres and is connected to the continuity of everyday life tactics (Morris and Polese, 2013). The communist legacy has given way to the entrenchment and persistence of informality in all spheres of life (Aliyev, 2015; 2017) in post-communist Albania. Thus, informal practices have been common in the Albanian context at different times and still display constitutive effects impacting on the national governance system.

The study of the role of informality in Albania requires relating it to broader social processes in the country, including to clientelism. Clientelism is commonly talked about throughout Albania, and the politics of clientelism is an informal social institution that has pervaded the social fabric of much of Albania. It has been widely discussed in recent decades, especially in the literature on transition of Albania and wider (Gërxxhani and Schram, 2000; Jusufi, 2017). Clientelism plays a central role in both the economic and political spheres of Albania. The informal realm has been the venue where the most interesting and critical elements of politics in Albania take place. Clientelism is one of the traditional social institutions that vie for power to set rules and affect social conflict or order in many developing societies (Migdal, 2001; Seffer, 2015), including in Albania. Gërxxhani and Schram (2000) have argued on the negative effect of clientelism, together with other informal institutions, on the Albanian democracy. Clientelism remains a current problem in Albania after communism and has proved to be persistent despite its overall decline.

It was communism collapse in 1991 that thrust Albania into uncertainty. As the communist system collapsed, a number of informal institutions and practices emerged as a tendency in Albania's politics, including informal institutions and practices such as *kanuni*, blood feud, clientelism and others. The 1991 change gave the new Albanian elite a brief window of opportunity to rise and to establish informal clientelism networks that would bring them to and keep them in power and to further use their newly acquired positions to push through a transition of their own design.

In the early 1990s, the democrat politician Sali Berisha initiated the rapid democratization and shock therapy in the economy. In this period, the initial steps towards the establishment of clientelistic networks were taken. Later, new Albanian leaders such as Fatos Nano, Paskal Milo, Pandeli Majko and, lately, Edi Rama did the same and with little success in ending the clientelistic politics. The recent backlash as regards the judicial reforms in the country is a sign of the fight among the clientelistic clichés of the country.

Clientelism politics in Albania has penetrated every level of the state and the society. Thus, democratization and its limited form in Albania have often been particularly vulnerable. The key dimensions of Albania's fledgling electoral democracy have been undermined by clientelistic politics. Clientelist networks inhibit key elements of democracy consolidation, including state autonomy in policy-making vis-à-vis private interests. A vicious cycle of clientelistic politics has developed and has posed serious challenges to the state of democracy in Albania. In contemporary Albanian spaces, beneath the shadows of the signs of marketization, the informal economy remains visible. Market forces have penetrated only in few spheres of modern Albanian society. Current social structures of Albania often rely on informality. Informal practices are affecting the way politics is managed and governed in Albania. In Albania, the transition from communism has reinvigorated informal practices. A persistent and complete system in which informality is there to stay in various forms, including in that of clientelism still exists. These forms have established an informal governance system that in turn generates, allocates and allows the sharing of rights and responsibilities (Davies and Polese, 2015).

Clientelism, often used interchangeably with "patron-client relations", in the case of Albania is an informal institution and informal identity network based on regional or political affiliation and an informal institution involving the exchange of goods/services between patron and client (Collins, 2006). It is explicitly tied to a political/economic inequality that trades political support for public goods (Pattioni, 2001). Clientelism in Albania is the primary source of political and economic power (Gërzhani and Schram, 2000; Jusufi, 2017). As an informal network, clientelism pervades the regime and its institutions. Informal institutions shape actors' incentives and structure social interaction through informal sanctioning and selective incentives. Elites need the support of their network to maintain their status, protect their group, and make gains within an overarching political or economic system. Non-elites need clientelism patrons to assist them in finding jobs, accessing public services and goods in an economy of shortages. In significant ways, the contemporary Albanian economy is an economy of shortages, characterized by shortages and transaction problems. Although elites and non-elites do not benefit equally from clientelistic politics, both have incentives to maintain their bonds. Even if non-elites wanted to exit the network, they would have a difficulty in surviving outside clientelism and in joining another clientelism group to which they have no identity bond (Collins, 2006).

Understanding the informal politics of clientelism is critical to explaining the Albanian political trajectory. A close comparative-historical examination of Albanian politics, from the early 1990s to the present, demonstrates the dynamic relationship between clientelism and the political system under varying conditions. In Albania, clientelism was established and defined by the state and socially generated groups. Conglomerations of clientelistic networks compose the current Albanian nation. Since most traditional tribes in Albania broke down with communist collectivization, the existing clientelistic networks are a continuation of earlier Albanian tribes and clans. Although efforts have been made to modernize the country and thus eliminate clientelism, Albania has been pervaded by clientelistic networks. The trajectories evident since the 1990s demonstrate the existence of an informal regime of clientelistic politics. The democracy has endured in the country, but unstable. The clientelistic politics of Albania, a politics of competition between socialists and democrats in pursuit of clientelistic interests has had profound effects on Albania's post-communist political trajectory. Inter-clientelistic competition fostered the regime breakdown in Albania in 1997, leading to one of the destructive episodes of Albania's post-communist transition. This strongly suggests that clientelism should be taken seriously in explaining the treatment of criminality in Albania. During the civil unrest of 1997, when the state collapsed in Albania, local salvation committees in south Albania provided civil assistance and compensated for the police's absence and incapacity to provide public order and security. During the 1997 clashes, some of these national salvation committees reportedly played an important role in preventing violence in a number of cities in the southern provinces of the country. Then, the state authorities decided to rely on informal practices to improve internal security, particularly in south Albania. Finally, informal practices might surface from dysfunctional state institutions, especially in situations where relations between the centre and the peripheries often rest on personal exchanges, patronage networks and clientelistic mechanisms (Russo, 2016).

2. Cannabis cultivation as an informal practice in contemporary Albania

There have been increasing allegations with regard to the growing organized crime practices in many parts of Albania, particularly the practice of cultivating various drug substances including cannabis and marijuana. Increasing news coverage of growing cultivation of cannabis and their trade to Western Europe has become an important issue of discussion in politics and among the population. It is believed that drug cultivation has increased the amount of black money in the market, that in turn some of that money may have been channelled to political practices, including election campaigns. Drug cultivation has been widespread in Albania for many years and it is believed that a significant number of Albanians is involved in its cultivation and sale to West European countries. Contraband trade in the central and southern provinces of Albania often constitutes the only means of

economic subsistence for the poorest sectors of Albanian population. The economic crisis in the country has pushed many Albanian households to be involved in drug cultivation. In turn, due to its impact on alleviating economic crisis, the informal practice of involvement in cannabis cultivation has been increasingly tolerated by the state and by the population alike. But, this informal practice has not escaped from being politicized with it being one of the most debated political issues in the country. Despite the promise of fight by the government, many growers remain in the shadows, casting doubt on the potential of success in the fight against drug cultivation. Crime associated with illegal cannabis production remains entrenched in the country despite the actions by the law enforcement authorities. Police have gone after people who cultivate drugs or who grow them on private and public lands. They have raided series of sites and eradicated some plantations. Illegal plots are first identified by regularly flying aircrafts and then destroyed by the police. However, there are a lot of growers who do not give up. Repression has not had an impact and many growers do not feel deterred. The county's efforts to shut down illegal marijuana farms have not produced any success. It is going to take some time for strong enforcement. Albania, which by some estimates supplies a fraction of the needs of the west European legal and illegal cannabis markets will probably continue to be a major illegal exporter to other states. In part, that is because of the huge incentive to stay in the business: demand for Albanian cannabis on the west coast of Adriatic is still high. There are very few areas you can go in the county and not find marijuana; it is everywhere. "Lazarat is everywhere", as many interviewed Albanians would say now. Albanian cannabis growers have been operating for many decades including in communist times. Small-scale growers have planted marijuana for decades. In recent years, Albania has seen the entry of new "drug entrepreneurs" with a large profit motive. Starting in the early 2000s, a new 'informal economy' that related to cannabis cultivation emerged in Albania. But the market is estimated to be significantly smaller than thought.

Albania has criminalized cannabis production and it has largely unregulated the medical cannabis system. Possession of small or big amounts of marijuana and growing it is strictly prohibited by law. Normally growers are charged with felony for growing or possessing cannabis or marijuana. In practice, growers have been able to escape; if caught, they faced lighter punishments. The surge in the cannabis cultivation has also triggered violent crime around the country, which does not appear to fade away anytime soon. The related cases have included violent crime, robbery, aggravated assault, murder and kidnapping. There are people who were robbed, kidnapped and, in some cases, murdered and cannabis cultivation occurred in relation to these. Its cultivation is also a concern for environmentalists, who say that illegally grown cannabis damages the environment by using water resources and by affecting forests; consequently, the land is degraded. In environmentally unconscious Albania, there has been no conviction for pollution or damage to the land as a result of cannabis cultivation. Environmental crimes do not make people

angry here in Albania. Albanians have a romantic attitude towards marijuana; they think it is a harmless herb. Growing cannabis is so well entrenched in Albania that the government's effort to fight against it is considerably increased. There has also been a generational legacy in cannabis cultivation. Grandparents, parents and grandchildren have grown cannabis on the same piece of property.

Cultivating cannabis is believed to have had a corruptive impact in the society due to the cash available to buy everything in the country. Thus, it has become a threat to the country's democratization and Europeanization (Feilcke-Tiemann, 2006). However, there is currently a lack of comprehensive and accurate analysis of the scale of cannabis cultivation in Albania. Many of available information are based on journalistic reports. No institution in the country or beyond has complete and accurate information about the scale, intensity, production volume, people involved and routes of transfer of the cannabis produced. Government offices give conflicting accounts. Representatives of NGOs, the expert community and opposed political forces have different accounts and perspectives. Their narrative of the problem implies that the state is an accomplice in the business of cannabis cultivation. Albania is a relatively poor economy and it lacks any developed industrial base, which has given rise to the lucrative drug trade among the population.

This also explains why the cannabis trade has had a political impact in Albania. It has become open to this trade due to the connections between certain clientelistic networks and cannabis traders, its geographic location being close to Western Europe; moreover, Albania is a weak state. Almost all of the production is likely to be transported to Italy via Adriatic Sea while a substantial part of it is destined for western European markets with only small portions staying in Albania to meet the demands of the local and regional market. Cannabis cultivators, as they have been able to cash in for their production, have been become increasingly sophisticated and have penetrated many economy sectors of the country including tourism and trade. Furthermore, with their influence in Albanian politics they ultimately had an impact on its criminalisation. Individuals linked to cannabis trade could be found among Albanian parliamentarians. The criminalisation of the state became so apparent that later the country decided to launch the process of decriminalization where mayors and parliamentarians with links to organized crime would be stripped from their positions. Cannabis money corrupted politics by becoming one of the key sources of corruption and allegedly played an important role in elections campaigns. Most cannabis traders are believed to be part of clientelistic groups. Due to the overall lack of formal economy, cannabis cultivation emerged as one of the key income-generating activities in the country. In Albania, there is little if any chance of success against cannabis cultivation. Radical action is undermined by the fragmentation of political power among clientelistic networks. Various interest groups with links to politics have had connections with cannabis cultivation, undermining chances for success in tackling the illicit drug trade. In other words, there is a vested interest in keeping the status-quo (Kupatadze, 2014).

The informal practice of drug cultivation in contemporary Albania can be linked to the systemic corruption that affects the country's political governance. Also, trans-national and trans-regional criminal networks enhance the density of criminality in Albania. Cannabis cultivation and its sale across the Adriatic Sea represent a sector of cooperation between local cultivators and neighbouring criminal groups. Similarly, local cultivators, criminal groups and law enforcement bodies cooperate in the functioning of smuggling networks, regardless of their political orientation.

The informal practice of drug cultivation in Albania has also resulted in establishment of enclaves that have challenged formal institutions and actors. One such enclave in the case of Albania has been Lazarat, a village in south Albania, informally known as the cannabis capital of Europe. Lazarat has recently gained popularity in Albania and beyond following the anti-drug operation of the government in June 2014 that crashed the locally armed drug cultivating groups. Until then, Lazarat was a no-go area for the law enforcement bodies. The Lazarat case has multiple interpretations, some of which are contested, and impacts that stretch both within and beyond Albania. To some, Lazarat has come to embody the level of criminality in Albania. It shows how the Albanian state has been imploded and the way that Lazarat has become a microcosm of recent Albanian everyday life. To countless people, Lazarat remains an ongoing issue for Albania. Its consequences extend beyond its immediate neighbourhood, and well past the confines of its geographic space, penetrating many social, psychological and economic facets of Albanian everyday life. Wider Albanian geography has become a well-documented arena of drug mafia. Lazarat has been a representative element of this tendency. Thus, the case of Lazarat was used as a basis for discussion with interviewees for the purposes of this article.

For this purpose, the author used interviews to evaluate the views of Albanians on drug cultivation, organized crime and criminality. The interviewing consisted of two main parts: identifying the people with political views and conducting interviews with these people. The author drew a list of people and identified their political affiliation. There are several reasons why people were linked to political affiliation before conducting interviews. This enabled us to focus the study on Democrats and Socialists. Political independents were not surveyed for the sake of efficiency.

Questions were the central feature of the interviews. They covered issues which were especially aligned with political partisanship and which were suspected to be more politically salient in Albania, including cannabis production. This question was particularly political because there is a sharp partisan divide on this issue in Albania. In February 2017, the author contacted the interviewees and conducted interviews with semi-structured questions. All 16 interviews were held face to face in Tirana. Given the sensitivity of the material, the identities of all participants are not provided.

The dependent variable was the respondent's assessment of the seriousness of the issue of drug cultivation and the respondent's assessment of her/his likelihood of choosing a specific policy for fighting organized crime. The key independent variable was a binary indicator that distinguished Socialists from Democrats.

3. Albania's Democrats and Socialists treat criminality differently

This study demonstrates the connection between political orientation and treatment of criminality. There was strong and consistent support for the hypotheses. The relationship between partisanship and criminality treatment persists in Albania. As expected, Democrats and Socialists in Albania differed substantially in their expressed concern and their recommended policy for fight against organized crime.

Political beliefs predict the decisions. The evidence gathered suggests that political beliefs predict the decisions of people. On politicized issues, like marijuana and cannabis production in Lazarat, Albania, peoples' partisan identity is highly related to their decisions. Interviewed Albanians defined the events surrounding the cannabis cultivation in the area around Lazarat as "the peak of iceberg" and suggested that the issue is much wider and deeper than thought.

Interviewees offered various assessments for the politicized issue of drug cultivation. Democrats assessed questions on cannabis production substantially differently than Socialists. Democrats, as of writing this paper being in opposition, are more likely to discuss the risks and accuse the government for involvement. Socialists, as of writing this paper being in the government, are also likely to discuss risks, and urge the government to crack down, but would not provide a direct link between the government and cannabis cultivation; they would instead provide for a longer perspective on the existence of cannabis cultivation in the country. Although Democratic and Socialists did not differ on the judgment of seriousness of the issue, Democrats are more likely to discuss risks and the impact on security and political situation. The direction of the differences is consistent with expected political leanings. But they agreed that drug cultivation has become a necessity due to economic uncertainties and as a means of alleviating the lack of employment. They all also seem to be committed to the deployment of policies of counter-crime measures.

Political polarization and clientelistic policies have produced different understandings of criminality among Albanians. These unofficial crime perceptions have become a shared conception, tolerating practices that go beyond the laws and actually against them. The act of cannabis grown in the soil around Lazarat relies on the collective Albanian consciousness that reinforces and reciprocates informal understandings of crime and ways of alleviating the lack of employment. The existence of informality in Albania is mostly seen as depending on structure as the Albanian state has been unable to protect its citizens against social risks, a number of which are pushed into informal practices. They considered that informal activity

is largely involuntary with people just falling into it for the sake of survival (Glenny, 2004). Informality has been perceived as essential to the survival of most of the ones involved.

For many, despite a belief that it has caused widespread concern, the risk arising from criminality is considered less of a threat than the tangible reality of the ability to get enriched. From a state perspective, the role that criminality plays in alleviating economic crises makes it not worth containing or preventing it.

These results suggest that we need to be aware of political worldviews of people, especially if we expect tackling politically sensitive issues. Given the politicization of certain issues, it is imperative to consider how political views may impact policy judgments.

4. Propositions and evidence for informality in Albania

Despite being a relatively limited case study, it is possible to take the above data to draw some lessons that can be applied more widely within contemporary Albania and beyond. This section elaborates on some propositions related to informal practices in Albania and provides evidence for explaining the political dynamics of informality in Albania.

Proposition no. 1: Informality persists: In the Albanian case, the power of the society and thus of informality has been underestimated. The situation in Albania has demonstrated the persistence of informal institutions. The Albanian case proves the “state in society” literature that argues for the limited power of the state to shape society and that society affects the state more than states affect societies (Migdal *et al.*, 1994). The Albanian elite have been transformed to a limited extent and, in turn, it has not been able to transform society. State ineptitude is particularly acute when it attempts to control societies organized informally (Collins, 2006), including in Albania. The clientelistic state has not been able to effectively govern Albania’s dispersed population. Clearly, Albanian society, as argued for other cases (Scott, 1998), has resisted a strong and powerful state, causing the failure of the modernization scheme in the Albanian society. The assumption that modernization would break down traditional society, thereby fostering nation-stateness and democracy and that modernizing state policy would shift loyalties from family, village, and tribe to nation (Huntington, 2006) has not been seen in Albania; the outcomes have been different in Albania.

Clientelism is a social informal institution that interacts with the state and emerges in response to it. Clientelism as informal practice is likely to persist as it is inextricably linked to the development of Albania as a state. Both modernity and state have failed to be consolidated in Albania and cultural and normative institutions such as clientelism have not disappeared. There are compelling reasons for the salience of informality in contemporary Albania, particularly in the context of the weak Albanian state. Late state formation or state building is still an undergoing

process in Albania and has allowed informality to survive into the 21st century. When the state did emerge during post-communism, it came in the form of a weak one. Even during communism, as a state, Albania was not strong. There has been continuous lack of authority of the central state and its ability to deliver essential public goods and services.

Clientelism persists within weak states as it allows access to institutional channels of survival. Albania is still in a situation between anarchy and autocracy¹. And recently, when successor governments have attempted in the words of Prime Minister Edi Rama of Albania, “to establish the state”, they have often encountered challenges from deeply embedded informal institutions. Where formal institutions are fluctuating, unpredictable, or lacking in social trust, the role of clientelism as an informal identity becomes more important. Where bureaucracies cannot adequately provide basic social services, an “economy of shortages” prevails. Informality such as clientelism fills the gap as a network for social, economic and political exchange. Credible commitments, critical to political and economic deal making, are easier to obtain within or through clientelism than outside. Continuous instability in Albania has provided the background conditions for informal networks to persist. One of the strong informal networks in Albania has been the children and grandchildren of older communists who continue to dominate the country’s political and economic spectrum (EBRD, 2016). Thus, there has been general resistance to the emergence of a strong and functional state in Albania.

Proposition no. 2: Informality resists the emergence of a powerful state: The informal practices and clientelism have enabled the clientelistic networks in the country to resist and prevent the emergence of a strong and functional state. Clientelistic identity is a base of resistance. Also, state’s own institutions allow clientelism access to resources that enable its survival. Clientelism becomes increasingly important politically within weak states and when the state’s power is weakened as a consequence of declining economies and incipient institutions. Clientelism does not make democratization more likely. After more than twenty-five years of transition, the Albanian state has stagnated internally. The state has sought to ignore and sometimes to foster clientelism-based patronage. There has been no serious attempt to monitor and document extensive corruption departure from European standards. The norm of Albanian policy has been letting clientelistic networks rule the country’s politics and economy as long as they have not been openly challenging the state. There is strong resistance among clientelistic networks which now consider the state to be a direct threat to their identity and economic interests. As the state remains weak, clientelistic networks have reasserted themselves, regaining power from the state and stabilizing their positions. They hold hegemonic control.

¹ Qosya, R. (2017), Interview, Albeu.

The state, in both an imperial and a modern form, came late to Albania or never came. Before the 20th century, clans and larger tribes were the predominant mode of social and political organization in Albania. Although the dictatorial communist regime attempted to crash on regional differences, it also ruled under clientelistic rules, and thus instead of altering, it fostered the social structure of the country. The communists often struck feudal-like bargains with regional clientelistic networks. Although repressive, communism was not able to instil a modern state bureaucracy. The events of transition, including the regime breakup in 1991-1992 and civil unrest of 1997 destroyed what was left of the Albanian state system. Only with the turn of the 21st century, when the EU and NATO started to incorporate Albania into the European integration process, an attempt to establish a modern state has been made. The system in place in Albania is in fight against clientelistic networks which continue to maintain the balance of power in the country. This system has not yet attempted to eradicate the clientelistic system existing in the country. The resistance against the state is strong, since the new state seeks to impose both economic and social modernization via EU norms and standards. The state is deterred from waging an attack on clientelistic networks. The system has not been able to break down interest networks and to end traditional informal patterns. There has been informal and sometimes open resistance. There are institutions that clientelistic networks use to persist.

Proposition no. 3: clientelism and informality foster durability of a government: Clientelism establishes relations within a group through the arrangement of a pattern of governance over resources - outside the formal institutions of government. This pattern is especially important when there is no state mechanism to tax and objectively allocate resources. Clientelism fosters durability, which preserves the interests of clientelism members. It gives members informal access to power and resources and makes them key players in politics. The privatization of public enterprises and the politicization of the whole state governance provided a source of patronage for clientelistic elites, who used the state authority to further their clientelistic interests. Instead of destroying clientelism networks, the major political parties kept clientelism network units intact. The cross border crime, an enormous source of economic power in post-communist Albania, fostered clientelistic growth. By then, the state was in retreat, ignoring the "clientelism problem." The successive governments turned a blind eye to practices such as informal patronage of one's network. The clientelistic networks could rehabilitate and promote themselves with little fear of repercussion from the state. Once a clientelistic network member given a position within the local or national government apparatus or economic system, he brought in his friends and relatives through patronage. Whether by using their position to steal resources from the state to support the members of a clientelistic network or by penetrating the hugely profitable sectors, elites redirected massive amounts of state assets to their networks. By having clientelistic relations in positions of power, the two mainstream political

ideologies of Albania, both socialist and democrat, were able to survive economic and political hardships. In sum, the transition period has seen clientelistic networks to informally resist, rely upon their identity network, and exploit state institutions for their advantage. Clientelism turns to the state as a source of patronage and resources, with negative effects on the regime. Clientelism members with access to state institutions patronize their kin by doling out jobs based on clientelism ties, not merit. Clientelism elites steal state assets and direct them to their network. Building a circle of clientelism supporters provides clientelistic elite with security. Under good economic conditions or a strong state, this practice may just weaken state institutions (for example, depleting the tax agency) and create resentment against clientelism with access on the part of those without it. Under negative economic circumstances and transitional or weak states, the pressure for clientelism elites to feed their network increases. Clientelism begins to strip assets at a faster rate, with more serious consequences for state capacity. In both democratizing and autocratic regimes, if clientelism networks informally pervade the state bureaucracy, the regime will lose legitimacy as clientelism networks steal state resources and lose power as clientelism networks informally decentralize control. Clientelism networks use the assets to fortify their group, effectively bankrupting state coffers, decentralizing state power, and creating competing wealth/power centres where they govern through an informal regime of clientelism bargaining. These conditions persist in Albania, this time with cannabis production, and thus clientelism has been an informal basis of durable regimes.

Proposition no. 4: clientelism fosters durability of informality: Clientelism networks engage in “crowding out”, a process by which they participate politically through their network and effectively crowd out non-clientelistic forms of association or participation. Clientelism networks use this mechanism (inclusion of members/exclusion of non-members) as a means of low-cost mobilization and political participation and competition. Clientelism network elites use clientelism networks to mobilize social support for their agenda and thereby avoid the costs of managing their political parties or unions. In democratizing regimes, clientelism-based representation detracts from open competition. The politics of clientelism is insular, exclusionary, and non-transparent. While the extensive networks involved in clientelism politics suggest that this informal governance may be more participatory than some forms of authoritarianism - for example, military juntas, despotism, or totalitarianism - clientelism politics is not democratic. Even if civil and political liberties exist, clientelism politics establishes informal political and economic rules that are not pluralist, equally and fully participatory and representative, or transparently contested. Clientelism as informal politics therefore undermines formal civil and political liberties. By pervading formal regime institutions, clientelism politics inhibits the agenda of democratic regimes and prevents their consolidation. Finally, clientelism politics becomes self-reinforcing; it is a vicious cycle difficult to end without some intervening variable (such as

dramatic growth or an external patron). As clientelism networks strip assets faster, and the regime and state become weaker, such conditions lead to state failure (Rotberg, 2004). Declining state coffers will likely lead the state into a situation where clientelism networks can no longer afford to patronize their clientele through state apparatus and rely on informal mechanisms.

Conclusions

Clientelistic politics has emerged as an informal regime under the uncertain political and economic conditions of contemporary Albania. The Albanian case exhibits the existence of informality politics. The case suggests the need to be aware of political worldviews of people, especially if we expect tackling politically sensitive issues.

The analysis of the attitude towards drug cultivation and trafficking demonstrates the important role of informality in Albania. This research has shown that in Albania, cannabis cultivation has become an important informal practice and an important source of revenue for households. Due to economic reasons and to the differences in the political and clientelistic views of the public, drug cultivation has come to be tolerated by the society and strong opposition against it has been absent.

The case of cannabis cultivation shows that informality has increased in Albania and has become an important part of political discussions in the country. In Albania, people with different political views provide different responses to the practice of cannabis cultivation. Their evaluations of the seriousness of the issue and the choices of responses differ in ways consistent with political bias. Albania's democratic and socialist voters treat criminality differently as political and clientelistic views affect their decisions on these issues. As a result, organized crime groups have come to be tolerated by both people and governments.

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