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**RECRUITMENT OF AUTHORITARIAN INDIVIDUALS INTO
CLIENTELIST NETWORKS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF THE WESTERN BALKANS**

Understanding how brokers choose clients for vote-buying exchange is one of the key issues in explaining the success of these illicit practices. Norm-based theories seek an answer to this question based on individuals' values and beliefs, which would make them suitable candidates for vote-buying. A recent addition to this literature suggests that there might be a distinct authoritarian feature among the targeted voters. Building on the findings of this study, this paper examines the relationship between authoritarian tendencies and the offer of clientelist exchange in six Western Balkan countries. Overall findings vary significantly across countries: in Montenegro, Serbia, and Albania some associations were found, albeit not all in the theoretically predicted direction. In Bosnia and Hercegovina, Kosovo, and North Macedonia authoritarian tendencies were not related to an offer of clientelist exchange. The results point to a highly contextualized importance of authoritarian tendencies for the success of clientelist exchanges.

Key words: *Authoritarianism. – Clientelism. – Targeting. – Values. – Western Balkans.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the 2023 local elections in Serbia, investigative journalists from the Centre for Investigative Journalism of Serbia (CINS) detailed the structure of the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) call center, where (allegedly) initial employment was contingent on electoral support and which offered direct payments to employees on election day in exchange for proof of voting for the SNS (Milosavljević, Ćurčić, Kostić 2023). Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case, but a model of patronage politics that extends across the Western Balkans region and has taken root in almost every aspect of social life (see Drishti, Kopliku, Imami 2023; Gjuzelov 2020; Stanojević 2020; Marković, Marović 2020). The strategy of clientelism or patronage politics refers to a relationship between individuals, typically known as patrons and clients, where a quid-pro-quo exchange occurs – specifically, electoral behavior by clients (voting or abstention) in exchange for personalized, one-time or continued access to certain benefits (money, favors, jobs, etc.) (see Kitschelt, Wilkinson 2007). An important question that therefore arises is: who are the individuals or potential clients who are offered clientelist exchanges?

The scholarship on clientelism offers various answers to this question, ranging from the ideological affiliation of voters (Stokes 2005), their economic conditions (Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno 2013), or particular value sets they hold (Lawson, Greene 2014). This paper builds on a recent study (Stankov 2024) that argued that voters exhibiting authoritarian tendencies are more likely to be targeted for clientelist exchanges, as they are more likely to comply with brokers' demands. Particularly, the submissive tendency of authoritarian individuals should facilitate targeting through two different channels. First, authoritarian individuals hold a personality structure that is "based on their submission to [...] established authorities" (Altemeyer 1998, 52) which should prompt voluntary compliance with authorities' requests even if they are illegal; and second, voluntary compliance should provide for a scenario or clientelist resource distribution in which brokers do not have to establish complex systems to monitor compliance with the political demand. This proposition was tested in six Western Balkan countries, using the INFORM dataset for logistic regression modeling, and revealed a highly diverse mechanism of clientelism recruitment. The proposed mechanism of positive authoritarian association with clientelist targeting was clearly identified only in Montenegro, while in Serbia and Albania it was actually detrimental. Finally, no significant association was identified in North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Kosovo.

Pursuing the answer to this question is important for at least two reasons. First, clientelism and patronage are based on the distribution of finite resources, meaning that brokers and patrons must decide who the eligible clients are. Apart from a study by Bliznakovski (2020), to the best knowledge of the author, no other systematic examination of the client profile in the Western Balkans region has been conducted. Second, widespread clientelist strategies distort the functioning of democratic institutions and severely hinder voter ability to hold elected representatives accountable and responsive (Ruth-Lovell, Spirova 2019). When patronage politics is widespread, “rather than voters holding parties and politicians accountable for their performance, it is parties and politicians that hold voters accountable for their vote” (Hicken 2011, 292). In this regard, it is crucial to understand which types of voters are susceptible to being held accountable for their electoral behavior and in which political contexts this strategy prevails.

2. CLIENTELIST TARGETING

As with many concepts in social science, clientelism can be understood in a variety of ways, often conflated with general corruption practices. The key feature that distinguishes clientelist exchanges from overall corruption is the focus on electoral support. When a dyadic relationship between brokers and clients is established (Hicken 2011), some form of offer in exchange for a vote is presented (Kitschelt, Wilkinson 2007). These offers can be one-time exchanges, typically in the form of vote-buying, or long-term, such as patronage. The type of exchange is largely conditioned by the resource’s brokers are able to provide (Yildirim, Kitschelt 2020).

Research on the demand side of clientelism, i.e. the brokers’ decisions on whom to target, can typically be organized into three different approaches. An implicit assumption in all these approaches is the brokers’ tendency to minimize the “effectiveness gap” – the discrepancy between the scale of offers and the commitment to a clientelist exchange (Kitschelt, Altamirano 2015). The first approach argues that socio-economic conditions are key in deciding whom to target. Poor voters are more frequently targeted because the utility of clientelist exchanges is higher for them than for wealthier voters (see Calvo, Murillo 2004; Stokes 2005), and the practice itself is less stigmatized (Gonzalez-Ocantos *et al.* 2012).

The second approach suggests that the ideological affiliation (or party allegiance) of voters is crucial when considering whom to target. The literature on this issue is mixed; some argue that swing and unaffiliated

voters are more cost-effective to target (Stokes 2005), while others contend that the embeddedness of core voters in party infrastructure makes them easier to target and their behavior easier to monitor (Calvo, Murillo 2004).

Lastly, the third approach proposes that brokers use in-depth knowledge of the voters and their social preferences when deciding whom to target. When surveillance and enforcement structures are absent (be it for the reasons of ballot secrecy or poor surveillance structures), clientelism can succeed when voters comply voluntarily (Kitschelt, Wilkinson 2007). Here, authors emphasize the importance of norms of reciprocity, indebtedness, and gratitude (Lawson, Greene 2014). This approach assumes that brokers possess detailed knowledge of clients (see, Finan, Schester 2012 on how well brokers in Peru know their constituencies). This aspect of norm-based targeting is particularly relevant in the Western Balkans context. Bliznakovski (2020) demonstrated that voters with networking resources are typically targeted in the Western Balkans, suggesting that such situations provide brokers ample opportunities to gather in-depth knowledge about the potential client's social tendencies.

However, the norm-based approach is not without its drawbacks. Carlin, Moseley (2015; 2022) demonstrated that individuals who hold democratic values are poor targets for clientelism, as they tend to hold accountable the parties that employ such strategies. For this reason, Stankov (2024) argued that if individuals hold authoritarian tendencies and submit “to the perceived established authorities in society” (Altemeyer 1998), this should outweigh their commitment to democratic governance. The paper follows this conceptualization of authoritarianism, viewing it as a personality structure mainly based in submissive tendencies towards established authorities, which is more likely a consequence of social learning where individuals submit to the social norms endorsed by the authorities (Altemeyer 1998, 48). On a slightly different note, Lavrič, Tomanović, Jusić (2019) demonstrated that commitment to democracy is not exclusionary of authoritarian tendency. Young individuals in Southeast Europe are at the same time inclined to support democracy and a strong authoritarian leader that will address societal problems and issues. This may be the consequence of the perception of institutional efficiency and general satisfaction with how democracy works within a particular country. For example, Ghergina, Saikkonen, Bankov (2022) showed that those who are dissatisfied with democracy are more likely to turn to illicit practices and accept clientelist offers. Lastly, Markowski (2019, 125) recently argued that the support for political clientelism in Poland is based in values, fueled by those individuals “raised in nationalist/authoritarian/Catholic tradition.” From

this perspective, the norm-based approach can still help us understand why voters voluntarily comply, but it shifts away from the dominant explanations based in values of reciprocity, indebtedness, and gratitude.

This paper builds on this line of work, examining whether authoritarian tendencies are associated with the offer of clientelist exchanges in the Western Balkans context. To reiterate the main point of Stankov (2024), the submissive tendencies of authoritarians should facilitate voluntary compliance with brokers' demands, as the request comes from a person in a position of authority. This line of argumentation assumes that brokers are knowledgeable of individuals preferences and that they are basing on those preferences their decision whom to target. Albeit it is a very strong assumption, previous research suggests such knowledge might be available to brokers. For example, in Peru brokers were able to correctly predict client's level of altruism (Finan, Schester 2012) and they are an integral part of vast social networks through which they can access client's tendency towards reciprocity (Ravanilla, Haim, Hicken 2022). Lastly, Bliznakovski (2020) showed that network resources, particularly familiarity with individuals in positions of power, are an important predictor of clientelist engagement in the Western Balkans. To reiterate, this literature suggests that through their engagement in social networks, brokers are able to collect information on potential clients, possibly including their authoritarian tendencies, albeit probably in a form of their proclivity to be cooperative and honor the clientelist exchange.

In reference to the nature of the demand, the criminal (illicit) nature should not be a deterrent, as authoritarian tendencies likely provide a mechanism for legitimizing illegal practices. For example, authoritarian individuals hold more positive attitudes toward torture (Benjamin 2016) and are more likely to support antidemocratic policies targeting outgroups (Dunwoody, Plane 2019). In this sense, authoritarian individuals do not adhere to preconceived social norms but instead adopt and submit to the norms that the "authorities endorse" (Altemeyer 1998).

In conjecture, this voter profile should be appealing to brokers, as it allows them to distribute finite resources more efficiently, without the need to establish a large and costly network for compliance monitoring.

H1: Authoritarian individuals are more likely to be targeted for clientelist exchanges.

3. WESTERN BALKANS CONTEXT AND CASE SELECTION

It is almost an accepted fact of life that all the Western Balkan countries have extensive patronage and clientelist networks, supported by Bliznakovski's finding (2020, 108) that almost 14% of individuals have been offered vote-buying exchange and an additional 9.3% of individuals across the region initiated clientelist transactions themselves, or in other words, engage in "clientelist benefit-seeking". However, this is not a phenomenon unique to the region. Szanyi (2022) argued that patronage and rent-seeking behavior are key features of the regimes in Poland and Hungary, where they aim to co-opt and monopolize the economy. What makes the Western Balkans particularly interesting is that patronage networks tend to be especially effective when the state is a major employer (Chandra 2007), a characteristic applicable to most countries in the region.¹

Furthermore, patronage networks are not goals in themselves but are instrumental in the process of state capture. According to Keil (2018), these networks have been utilized in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Additionally, Chandra (2007) argues that when ethnicity is a major organizing principle of political life, it also becomes a channel for resource allocation through patronage linkages. The dismantling of such linkages would result in the loss of power and privileges. In this context, there are numerous accounts that demonstrate the viability of ethnically charged politics in each of the Western Balkan countries.

On a different note, Lavrič, Bieber (2021) demonstrated a longitudinal shift toward authoritarianism in public opinion in the Western Balkans, while also revealing that support for a strong leader is, in the eyes of surveyed individuals, compatible with democracy. In other words, these individuals accept the norm that strong leaders are both necessary and important for the functioning of democracy. Lavrič, Bieber (2021, 24) proposes that this may be a characteristic of a competitive authoritarian regime, where media and political elites actively shape public perception by normalizing the idea of a strong leader.

Taken together, the brief overview of the Western Balkans provided above supports the argument that the case selection is well-suited for the theory proposed in the previous section. The conditions enabling the development

¹ According to the World Bank report from 2018, 40% of the workforce in Montenegro was employed in the public sector (World Bank 2018). Additionally, data from the International Labor Organization shows that in 2021 the workforce percentages employed in the public sector were 23.3% in Serbia, 25.4% in Bosnia and Hercegovina, and 25.4% in North Macedonia (World Population Review 2024).

of clientelist networks are present and deeply entrenched in nearly every aspect of social life. On the demand side, authoritarian tendencies have been on the rise in recent years, which should allow for a robust empirical validation of the relationship between authoritarianism and clientelist targeting.

4. INDIVIDUAL CASES

In the case of **Serbia**, Cvejić (2016) has argued that clientelist networks permeate every level of society, including the electorate, fostering a practice of dependence that intensifies as one moves down the hierarchical pyramid from top clients to the smaller ones. According to Radeljić, Đorđević (2020), these networks function as a mechanism of state capture and are crucial for understanding the process of power maximization and preservation. Political parties are key actors in this system, with directed party employment serving as the main mechanism for resource distribution (Stanojević, Babović, Gundogan 2016). To illustrate the potential extent of this issue, it can be pointed out that Čakar, Čular (2023, 68) estimated that party membership in Serbia reaches up to 19.37%.

However, patronage alone does not capture the full picture. For instance, “clientelism and informal networks [are used] to pressure institutions and media outlets, altogether aimed at manipulating the public opinion” (Radeljić, Đorđević 2020, 603). Additionally, the private security sector operates in a seriously distorted market and is largely based on clientelist practices (Pešić, Milošević 2021). Once established, the system perpetuates its own survival. Along those lines Vuković, Spajić (2022, 535) argue that corruption and informal practices related to clientelism ultimately create a parallel normative system that regulates the behavior of clientelist actors. Their behavior, governed by informal social norms, is predictable and consistent, often running contrary to legally regulated norms. When informal norms are violated, a peculiar process occurs: formal state institutions are used to sanction the defectors.

Research on clientelism in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** has identified two key features that perpetuate the practice. First, the general ethnicization of politics has fostered the development of informal networks between ethnic parties and their ethnic electorates. These linkages are effective in securing electoral support but also act as a limiting factor for economic opportunity (Piacentini 2019). For this reason, Kapidžić (2019) argued that state-owned companies are crucial for maintaining what is termed ethnic oligopoly. Additionally, Obradović, Filić (2019) argued that beyond state-

owned companies, the welfare state system is entirely instrumentalized for clientelist purposes. Contrary to its intended goal, Obradović, Filić (2019) claim that the welfare system perpetuates inequalities to preserve clientelist networks. This occurs mainly through arbitrary assessment procedures and access to social transfers, and ultimately through the ability to threaten individuals with the withdrawal of benefits (for more on negative clientelist strategies, see Mares, Young 2019).

Second, political competition is not based on ideological differences but on the ability of parties to establish and maintain effective patronage and clientelist systems (Hulsey, Keil 2020). Therefore, it is essential for mobilizing and maintaining the electoral base. Similarly, new parties do not emerge with the aim of filling gaps in the ideological market, but due to party splits over internal disputes regarding the distribution of benefits (Hulsey 2015).

Like most Western Balkan countries, **Kosovo** features a competitive authoritarian regime that derives its political power from a network of clientelist dependencies (Beha, Hajrullahu 2020). Similar to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, electoral competition in Kosovo is largely disconnected from ideological differences and policy-oriented programs, and is mainly confined to the arena of clientelist promises (Beha, Selaci 2018). Economic uncertainty, combined with the fact that the state is the largest employer in Kosovo, contributes to the entrenchment of these practices.

This is effectively illustrated by the Beha, Selaci (2018) report, which shows that Kosovo scored 0.928 (0 to 1 index) on a standardized index of patronage developed by Kopecky, Scherlis, Spirova (2012), based on expert interviews. Additionally, approximately 77% of the general public believes that employment is conditioned on clientelist relationships. Jackson (2018) notes that the problem is further exacerbated by the lack of credibility of formal institutions, especially due to their low capacity to deliver public goods. According to Jackson (2018), clientelist exchanges serve as a visible demonstration of capability because they involve tangible transfers that clients can immediately benefit from (e.g., jobs, money). In turn, this reliance on clientelist exchanges further undermines capacity development, creating a circular problem.

Montenegrin politics was dominated by the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) for more than 30 years, until the parliamentary election in August 2020. Keil (2018) argues that this period was marked by a significant degree of state capture, while Laštro, Bieber, Marović (2023) claim that clientelism was a primary mechanism ensuring the political dominance of DPS. Pursuing an explanation to how this system was maintained, some have argued that a mechanism of state-sponsored populism was employed to support and justify the clientelist state system (Džankić, Keil 2017).

Similar to the practices observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Laštro, Bieber, Marović (2023, 227) show that “[t]here is also a noticeable increase in expenditures for social benefits, in particular one-time assistance payments, in election years.” Direct money transfers were also common. For instance, in a videotape of the “envelope affair”, Duško Knežević recorded handing over an envelope containing 97,500€ to the Mayor of Podgorica, Slavoljub Stijepović, ahead of the 2016 parliamentary election (Radević 2024). Although the legal proceedings were halted due to a lack of evidence, it is a reasonable assumption that at least a portion of this money was used for direct money transfer through vote-buying.

The practice of one-time payments was widespread. Using a survey-embedded list experiment, Batrićević, Komar (2021) estimated that approximately 24% of Montenegrin voters were offered money in exchange for their votes, with gender playing a significant role in determining whom to target. Specifically, women were 18% less likely to be targeted than men. Regarding patronage, an illustrative example is a leaked audio recording published by the *DAN* daily newspaper in 2012 (Kosović 2013), in which high-ranking public officials can be heard discussing a strategy of employing one person to recruit four votes through family voting.

In **North Macedonia** clientelism is manifested across various aspects of society. The high rate of unemployment fosters an environment where political clientelism thrives, particularly within the informal economy, as individuals seek employment, especially in the public sector (Gjurovska, Kandžija, Miljanić 2018). State capture exacerbates the problem by deactivating controls and using patronage to purge non-loyalists from key positions. This includes practices such as packing anti-corruption agencies with party loyalists by the VMRO-DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) or exploiting the cash-cows conditioned on patronage appointments in key positions that control public resource distribution (Auerbach, Kartner 2022).

Similar to the situation in Kosovo, Lyon (2015) highlights how decentralization facilitates the penetration of clientelist networks in North Macedonia. Clientelist promises are easier to fulfill at the local level compared to the national level. Lyon (2015) argues that, in such a system, challenger parties cannot establish credibility based on programmatic appeals; therefore, clientelism acts as a solidifying mechanism for the rule and power of existing parties. The widespread perception of clientelism and corruption is further evidenced by personal involvement, with 7.44% of surveyed individuals reporting being offered money for their vote (Markovikj, Gocevski 2018). In addition to vote-buying offers, Gadzovska, Spasovska

(2013) report that some villagers were blackmailed into providing electoral support by being denied access to state subsidies, while the VMRO-DPMNE party loyalists were granted up to 300 hectares of land.

Furthermore, in terms of specific aspects of social life, a 2015 whistleblower recording released by the opposition Social Democrats (SDSM) revealed a vast network of surveilled journalists – more than 100 individuals – and exposed transactions and quid-pro-quo relationships among editors with individuals across various branches of government, including the intelligence and security sectors (Micevski, Trpevska 2015).

Regarding the state of democracy in **Albania**, some authors argue that clientelism is the primary source of political and economic power in the system (Jusufi 2017). Kera, Hysa (2021) present an intriguing argument based on qualitative research focusing on the 2017 parliamentary elections, suggesting that there is a circular nature to clientelist relations in Albania. In the first step, clientelism is used to extract private funding for electoral campaigns, which is then used in the campaign to reinforces the clientelist networks themselves. A key enabling condition for this practice is the claim that clientelism is deeply embedded in Albania’s culture of informality (Luli 2021, Jusufi 2018), where social norms act as a substitute for legal rules (Luli 2021, 254). Luli (2021) further elaborates along those lines that clientelist and informal practices fueled by culture and social norms can be observed across various sectors, including the electoral system, judiciary, public administration, economy, and media. On a different note, Gërzhani, Schram (2009) demonstrate that clientelism is associated with asymmetrical assessments of government policies and vote choice, reflecting broader polarization in Albania (north vs. south). An illustrative example of clientelist favors exchanged for votes, which is not exclusive to Albania, is the distribution of legalization certificates and permits for illegally constructed dwellings in the four months leading up to the 2021 parliamentary election (Sqapi, Mile 2022).

5. DATA AND MODELING

This study utilizes survey data from the INFORM project, collected in face-to-face interviews across six Western Balkan countries in May 2017. The dataset includes various batteries of questions related to informal politics, including clientelism, and provides information that allows for the control of competing theoretical explanations. Relevant questions are recoded to fit the modeling requirements for binomial logistic regression.

Each model is fitted to separate country datasets, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of specific dynamics within each country, rather than relying on a general fixed-effects model with country-clustered standard errors. Models are also weighted by region, type of settlement, age, education, and gender.

For the *dependent variable*, I use a question that asked whether respondents were offered money or a favor in exchange for votes, which reflects one-time clientelist offers recoded into a dichotomous format. For the main *independent variable*, I use the respondents' value judgment on whether having a strong leader, who does not need to concern themselves with parliament and elections, would be best for the country. Response categories were recorded on a scale from one to five, with higher numbers indicating greater agreement with the statement.

To account for competing explanations mentioned in the review section of the paper, I include two variables related to the party allegiance of voters. First, a dummy variable indicates whether the respondent is or was a member of a political party. Second, I consider whether the respondent voted for the large parties that formed the government in the previous election. For norm-based explanations, particularly reciprocity, I include an item indicating the level of agreement with the statement that if one receives a favor from a political party, they are obliged to vote for that party. For socio-economic explanations, I use a question about monthly household income. Finally, a series of control variables are added, including whether the respondent is employed in the public sector (dummy variable), gender (dummy), level of education, age, type of settlement, and nationality, where contextually applicable.

6. RESULTS

The following section presents the results of estimating similarly defined models across each country in the Western Balkans which led to the estimation of 6 models. The overall finding indicates that support for a strong leader does not show any association with clientelist targeting in **North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina**, when relevant controls are included in the analysis. However, notable findings emerge in the remaining three countries.

Serbia: Contrary to the theoretical expectations of this paper, support for a strong leader is associated with lower odds of being offered money or a favor in exchange for a vote, with a unit increase in support for a strong

leader being associated with a 18.9% decrease in targeting likelihood (Table 1, Model 1). The strongest predictor is party membership, indicating that clientelist exchanges in Serbia are primarily conducted through the party infrastructure, with a well-established network for monitoring and sanctioning dissent. The result would imply that that brokers in Serbia do not rely on voters’ intentions for ensuring successful clientelist exchange.

Montenegro: The results from Model 2 (Table 1) show that support for a strong leader is positively associated with receiving money or a favor in exchange for a vote. A unit increase in authoritarian attitudes corresponds to a 20.5% increase in the odds of being offered money. Among the six Western Balkan countries examined, Montenegro is the only case where the theoretical expectation is validated, providing some evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

Albania: The findings in Albania follow a similar pattern as in the case of Serbia when it comes to the expected relationship between authoritarianism and clientelist targeting. A more puzzling finding is that apart from household income and age, none of the expected predictors of clientelist offers are statistically significant.

In short, these findings highlight varying dynamics in clientelist targeting across the Western Balkan countries, with Serbia and Albania on the one end, and Montenegro on the other, showing distinct patterns of recruitment relative to theoretical expectations.

Table 1: Regression estimates of clientelist offers in the Western Balkans.

	Vote-buying offer					
	SRB	MNE	ALB	BIH	NM	KOS
Authoritarianism	-0.209* (0.105)	0.187* (0.086)	-0.158* (0.075)	-0.089 (0.089)	-0.002 (0.085)	0.060 (0.080)
Reciprocity	0.042 (0.103)	0.168* (0.076)	0.132 (0.083)	0.034 (0.078)	0.159 (0.087)	-0.271*** (0.083)
Income	-0.171 (0.090)	0.097 (0.061)	0.253*** (0.055)	0.025 (0.058)	-0.121 (0.079)	0.131* (0.063)
Party Membership	1.099*** (0.319)	0.404 (0.278)	-0.427 (0.375)	0.733*** (0.251)	0.574 (0.301)	0.340 (0.339)

Recruitment of Authoritarian Individuals into Clientelist Networks

Rural	1.048 ^{***}	-0.528 [*]	-0.096	0.093	-0.330	-0.577 [*]
	(0.326)	(0.233)	(0.196)	(0.228)	(0.296)	(0.249)
Public Sector	0.049	-0.481	-0.551	0.390	-1.008	0.165
	(0.405)	(0.336)	(0.433)	(0.346)	(0.571)	(0.382)
Education	0.172 ^{**}	-0.115 [*]	-0.088	-0.043	0.020	0.021
	(0.064)	(0.056)	(0.047)	(0.057)	(0.062)	(0.068)
Age	-0.038 ^{***}	-0.023 ^{***}	-0.014 [*]	-0.026 ^{***}	-0.014	-0.012
	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Male	0.312	0.204	0.136	0.454 [*]	0.322	0.069
	(0.305)	(0.216)	(0.192)	(0.221)	(0.278)	(0.258)
Nationality: MNE		-0.143				
		(0.304)				
Nationality: BOS				0.447		
				(0.436)		
Nationality: SRB	-0.628	0.340		0.966 [*]		
	(0.424)	(0.340)		(0.455)		
Incumbent vote	-0.098	-0.075	-0.205	-0.063	0.201	0.156
	(0.332)	(0.243)	(0.199)	(0.268)	(0.302)	(0.276)
Constant	-0.491	-1.396 [*]	-1.074	-1.203	-2.040 ^{***}	-1.175
	(0.946)	(0.709)	(0.601)	(0.806)	(0.735)	(0.672)
N	620	550	693	657	750	579
McFadden Pseudo R ²	0.15	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.06
Log Likelihood	-172.150	-295.537	-370.050	-284.802	-213.778	-206.379

* p <.5; ** p <.01; *** p <.001

Source: author.

7. DISCUSSION

In exploring the relationship between support for a strong leader (authoritarianism) and the offer of clientelist exchange in the Western Balkans, it becomes evident that while clientelism is widespread across the region, the mechanisms of its implementation vary significantly. Although the modeling strategy employed captures certain patterns, it fails to fully encompass the nuanced contextual dynamics of each country. One possible issue may arise from the simple way in which authoritarianism was measured, with a single item that possibly fails to capture the complexity of authoritarian personality structure. Additionally, as the item focuses on the perception of country leader and their authority to conduct politics without parliament or elections, it may be conflated with the support for a specific strong leader currently in power. For this reason, the models were estimated with a control for incumbency vote in the previous election.

With regards to more substantive differences that arose in the analysis, e.g., in Serbia, clientelism may be deeply entrenched within the political system, with patronage networks extending from the ruling elite to local authorities. Contrary to expectations, individuals with strong support for a strong leader were less likely to receive offers of money or favors. This counterintuitive result suggests that clientelist exchanges in Serbia may be deeply embedded within existing party structures. The high estimate for party membership indicates that the party infrastructure itself plays a critical role in facilitating clientelism, potentially reducing the need for brokers to rely on voter compliance alone.

Conversely, in Albania, clientelism may manifest differently, possibly tied more closely to familial or regional affiliations rather than hierarchical political structures. Additionally, the political environment in Albania, characterized by frequent power shifts between left and right parties, may influence clientelist practices as neither party membership nor support for the incumbent parties were significant predictors of vote-buying offers.

In the three cases where authoritarianism failed to account for any association with vote-buying offers, the results are also quite mixed. In Bosnia and Hercegovina, party membership is a strong predictor as it is in Serbia, but the strongest predictor was Serbian ethnic identity, suggesting that ethnic-based resource distribution plays a significant role within the country. In Kosovo the only significant predictors are reciprocity and place of residence, where those who do not feel they owe it to the political party to return the favor are more frequently targeted, as are those who live in urban areas as opposed to rural. Lastly, the estimated model did not yield any significant predictors in North Macedonia.

In other words, while support for authoritarian leaders and clientelism may exhibit correlations, the specific mechanisms and contextual nuances within each country require deeper exploration. By acknowledging these differences, future research can offer more accurate insights into the complex interplay between authoritarianism, clientelism, and political behavior in the Western Balkans.

8. CONCLUSION

Clientelism, with its characteristic quid-pro-quo exchanges between patrons and clients, profoundly influences various facets of social and political life, including electoral behavior. This paper advances the understanding of clientelist dynamics by specifically examining the targeting of individuals for clientelist exchanges, focusing on those with authoritarian tendencies. Previous scholarship has offered various explanations for clientelism, ranging from socio-economic conditions to party allegiance and norms of reciprocity. This study contributes to this body of work by exploring the relationship between authoritarianism and clientelist targeting across six Western Balkan countries.

The findings reveal significant variation in clientelist recruitment mechanisms across the region. In particular, clear evidence supporting the proposed direction of the relationship between authoritarianism and clientelist targeting was found only in Montenegro, while it was actually in the opposite direction in Serbia and Albania. This result underscores a critical question: why does this relationship manifest distinctly in Montenegro, while other countries exhibit different patterns? The observed diverse mechanisms of clientelist targeting suggest that contextual factors, including political culture, party organization, ethnic relations, and alternation of power, play a crucial role in shaping clientelist practices.

Overall, while support for authoritarian leaders and clientelism exhibit correlations, the specific mechanisms and contextual nuances within each country require more detailed exploration. Future research should delve deeper into these differences in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between authoritarianism, clientelism, and political behavior in the Western Balkans. Such an approach would enable the more precise identification of vulnerable voter groups and contribute to the development of strategies aimed at enhancing accountability and fostering responsive governance in the region.

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