Clientelism: The alternative dimension to Kosovo’s governance
Foreword

This is a study by David Jackson as part of his broader research into the subject of clientelism and is part of a set of publications that the Kosovo Local Government Institute is issuing with the aim of strengthening democracy and local government in the Republic of Kosovo. This research was undertaken throughout the year of 2012-2013 and represents a valuable contribution to the public debate related to good governance and establishment of a sustainable system of local government in Kosovo. The research on this topic is the first of its type in Kosovo, and we, as Kosovo Local Government Institute, hope that with this publication we are encouraging other publications on the issue of clientelism in Kosovo.

The conceptual part of this publication is very well based on definitions and interpretations of contemporary literature about clientelism and the consequences of this phenomenon for democratic governance and society. Based on findings from detailed field research, the publication deals with the practices and forces enabling clientelism in the Republic of Kosovo.

For some, the strongly decentralised system of local governance is considered as a tool for political stability as it brings decision-making as close as possible to citizens and yet there are others who believe this system creates room for the abuse of power, nepotism as well as for enabling and encouraging clientelism. This publication explains the link between clientelism and other negative phenomena through concrete examples and illustrations.

Even though in recent years in Kosovo the political debate about similar negative phenomena has become enriched, partially because of numerous analyses, researches and reports showing that the abuse of power, political pressures, or corruption is a serious challenge for our country and society, this publication goes one step forward through its specific findings, articulating how the clientelism is being shaped and its association with other negative phenomena, such as corruption and nepotism. Actually, with great certainty it can be claimed that clientelism is a ‘bottleneck’ against democratic consolidation of Kosovo and is also damaging the possibility for good governance, including consequences related to discriminatory institutional practices as well as negative practices by institutional representatives in their relations with citizens. Overall, this is reducing the room for freedom guaranteed by constitution and laws.

No doubt, as this publication makes clear, clientelism has turned out to be of great concern for citizens’ access to institutions, services, employment, and even their access to decision-making and democratic influence.

This research and its findings call for immediate and multi-faceted action. In particular it calls for the attention of policy and opinion makers in Kosovo and makes the argument clientelism is eroding society’s foundations and thus it should be addressed without any further delay. The echo of this publication explains that wasting time without combating this phenomenon – clientelism – will be a barrier or burden for next generations in Kosovo, thus hampering their future European freedom.

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# Content

**Foreword** .......................................................................................................................... 2  
**Executive Summary** .......................................................................................................... 4  
**Introduction** ....................................................................................................................... 5  
**Section I: An anatomy of clientelism** ................................................................................. 6  
  - Defining clientelism ........................................................................................................... 6  
  - The location of clientelism in Kosovo ................................................................................. 7  
  - The main protagonists ....................................................................................................... 8  
**Section II: Measuring clientelism in Kosovo** .................................................................... 9  
  - Perception based survey ................................................................................................... 10  
**Section III: the extent of clientelism in Kosovo** ............................................................... 11  
  - Voting ................................................................................................................................ 11  
  - Participation ..................................................................................................................... 13  
  - Distribution of resources ................................................................................................. 14  
  - Universalism or particularism .......................................................................................... 16  
**Section IV: Why does clientelism persist?** ......................................................................... 17  
  - The supply side of clientelism: the political machine ...................................................... 18  
  - The absence of ideology ................................................................................................... 18  
  - Party hierarchy ................................................................................................................ 19  
  - Breaking free: Hani i Elezit ............................................................................................. 20  
  - The demand side of clientelism ....................................................................................... 21  
  - Economic structure .......................................................................................................... 21  
  - Low moral costs .............................................................................................................. 22  
**Section V: Clientelism and the longer-term prognosis.** ..................................................... 23  
  - ‘Society capture’ .............................................................................................................. 24  
  - Irrational governance ....................................................................................................... 25  
  - On the wrong track to Europe ........................................................................................ 26  
**Section VI: Recommendations** ...................................................................................... 27
Executive Summary

This report investigates clientelism at the municipal level in Kosovo. Clientelism is a relationship between a patron (often the mayor) and a client (a citizen) that involves a series of exchanges in which the person of greater status (the patron) gains power through elements such as the vote, favour owed or loyalty and the person of lesser status (the client) gains—or is promised—special treatment or resources that are not readily available to everyone in the same, or similar, positions. No systematic research on clientelism in Kosovo exists. Though it is widely known that it takes place, as of yet it cannot be convincingly argued that clientelism matters in Kosovo. Based on a year-long research process beginning in November 2012, the research has aimed to generate empirically robust and accurate evidence on the extent to which clientelism structures state-society relations in Kosovo. The report then goes on to explain why clientelism persists and evaluates its long term impact.

The main findings are: Behind and within the formal construct of liberal democracy exists an alternative dimension to Kosovo’s governance: clientelism. A survey of over a thousand citizens across Kosovo reveals that there is a strong perception that clientelism dominates the relationship between ordinary citizens and political leaders. Clientelism’s presence is evident across all the different dimensions of state-society interaction in Kosovo: voting, participating and accessing resources. While some people’s needs are satisfied via clientelism, this research demonstrates that the infiltration of clientelism in the relationship between society and the state tends to undermine democratic practice.

The research shows that there are two sides to the critical question of why clientelism continues to persist in Kosovo: the first relates to why political leaders, candidates and officials continue to supply clientelism as a political product. The report argues that the reason why political leaders at the local level practice clientelism has less to do with their own agency or their own individual qualities and much more to do with the fact that they are invariably part of a clientelism-inducing structure called the political party. In Kosovo, political parties tend to induce clientelism due to two striking qualities: the non-ideological glue that binds them and the hierarchical nature of their organisation. The flipside of the puzzle refers to why the citizens of Kosovo continue to enter into these clientelist relationships with politicians. This has little to do with traditional culture and much more to do with widespread economic insecurity that drives people into these personalised forms of exchanges. Attitudes also matter: the infusion of informal self-help networks into formal structures means that clientelist practice is often tolerated.

Lastly, the report argues that the effects of clientelism are not just a concern for those interested in the process of democracy. The reason why clientelism is so hazardous is that it subtly—but fundamentally—reduces the capacity of Kosovar society to solve its problems. Though clientelism in Kosovo may be a short term solution for some, if it is not contained it will become a long term problem for all. This is because it tends embeds a structural domination of politicians over society generating a sense of powerlessness amongst citizens. Clientelism also instils an irrational and inefficient style of governance that can harm the

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1 This research project was led and the report written by David Jackson, a doctoral researcher at the Berlin Graduate School of Transnational Studies/ Social Science Centre Berlin. David can be contacted at jackson@transnationalstudies.eu. The report was researched by David Jackson, Donjeta Murati and Shengjyl Osmani. Donjeta Murati is a sociology graduate and has previously worked as a researcher at the Kosova Women’s Network and currently works at Stacion-Center for Contemporary Art Prishtina. Shengjyl Osmani has worked at BIRN and the World Bank in Kosovo and is currently a Fulbright Scholar at Boston University.
delivery of basic services. Finally, clientelism encourages a factionalisation of the state which reduces the state’s autonomy to act, a trend that will act as a brake on Kosovo’s entry into the European Union.

**Introduction**

A snapshot of daily life across Kosovo’s municipalities: a hard working student achieves the highest marks in her school exams but misses out on a municipal scholarship for university; a village is left without a steady supply of water; a poverty-stricken family is turned away at the municipality; a teacher is sent away to teach at a remote village for opposing the mayor; a poorly performing business wins another municipal contract. These situations do not happen because of accident or neglect, nor do they occur principally because of the absence of the rule of law, a lack of training or because the Kosovar state has simply ‘not had the time to sort itself out’; these primarily occur because of the presence of a countervailing pattern of political behaviour called clientelism.

This research provides a full treatment of clientelism in Kosovo but before we get into the detail, let us zoom out a little bit: after thirteen years of an expansive and expensive state-building process, this research speaks to the broader question of what is the relative influence of formal and informal institutions in determining political behaviour and outcomes in Kosovo? In short, institution means ‘rule of the game.’ Formal institutions are embodied in the official state: in constitutions, administrative regulations and laws, civil service procedures and judicial structures. They are explicit and easily observable through written documents (e.g. laws), physical structures (government buildings) and public events (e.g. municipal assembly meetings). The extensive creation and reform of political institutions that comprise the post-1999 state-building process has concentrated on formal institutions, with the aim of developing a liberal democratic structure underpinned by norms such as accountability, transparency and other characteristics of good governance.

Despite such a focus, it is quite clear that behind the construct of the formal state alternative, informal structures and logics operate to determine politics in Kosovo. This is not surprising as all nations have both formal and informal governance systems: no human society is so ‘advanced’ that it relies exclusively on formal institutions to run its common affairs. Informal institutions are not embodied in the formal state but “are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels.” Informal institutions are unseen and implicit but this does not mean they may be any less significant. In fact, informal institutions matter because they represent an alternative and separate source of political behaviour. Whilst the nature of formal institutions can be shaped and changed by actors with rule-making authority (i.e. elected politicians), this is not the case with informal institutions which are authorised and enforced by more diffuse social processes. This independent source of enforcement grants informal institutions a kind of autonomy: strengthening formal institutions may encourage the demise of informal institutions, but it would not necessarily suppress them.

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3 ibid.
There are many different types of informal institutions in Kosovo: corruption is one, but so is nepotism, cultural conventions, traditional laws or informal bureaucratic procedures. Even though informal institutions are mostly autonomous from formal systems, the crucial point is that formal and informal systems in Kosovo are not separate but co-exist and interact. Informal institutions often operate within and through the formal state. Many analyses of developments in Kosovan politics focus on the formal institutions. While, the institutions of the formal state provide a map of what it is hoped Kosovo will become, the existence of informal institutions suggest that a focus on formal institutions sheds a dim light on the overall logic of how politics functions.

This research aims to explain how reality is rather than how it should be and to do this takes into account the informal institutions of politics. In doing so, this research will focus on the informal institution which perhaps exerts the most systematic influence: clientelism. The research involved a perception based survey as well as in-depth research into four municipalities (Peja, Skenderaj, Hani I Elezit and Kamenica) and aimed to assess the extent of clientelism in Kosovo, explain why it persists and evaluate its long-term impact. It starts with a definition.

Section I: An anatomy of clientelism
After defining clientelism, this section will describe the anatomy of clientelism in Kosovo. It will demonstrate that the main location of clientelism in Kosovo is state-society relations at the municipal level and will outline the main protagonists that are found within clientelist relationships.

Defining clientelism
At the heart of any definition of clientelism is the idea that it involves *an interest maximising exchange of resources* (*public or private*). This distinguishes clientelism from related concepts such as nepotism or patronage, which do not necessarily involve an exchange. To the core essence, clientelism as a relationship is defined by further characteristics: (I) it exhibits longevity or diffusiveness, meaning clientelism involves not one transaction but a series of interactions that play out over time; (II) it is based on face to face, personal relations; (III) it hinges on status inequality, meaning the relationship is not egalitarian but occurs on a continuum of power disparity between oppressive and relatively mutual.

From these additions, one arrives at a core definition of clientelism, that it is *a lasting personal relationship between individuals of unequal socio-political status that seeks to maximise individuals’ interests*. Clientelism involves a series of exchanges in which the person of greater status (the patron) gains power through elements such as the vote, favour owed or loyalty and the person of lesser status (the client) gains—or is promised—special treatment or resources that are not readily available to everyone in the same, or similar, positions.

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6 Hilgers, T. “Clientelism and conceptual stretching: differentiating among concepts and among analytical levels.” *Theor Soc*, 2011: 567-588. Hicken points out that the element every definition of clientelism has in common is the contingent or reciprocal nature of the patron-client exchange. Hence: ‘the delivery of a good or service on part of both the patron and the client is in direct response to a delivery of a reciprocal benefit by the other party, or the credible promise of such a benefit.’ Hicken, A. (2011). Clientelism. Annual Review of Political Science, 289-310

7 These attributes distinguish clientelism from concepts that may share a resemblance and a similar analytical space but actually possess different functional logics. For instance, nepotism or patronage, in which personal considerations undermine recruitment in merit based bureaucracies, may also accompany clientelism but they are independent from it as they do not necessarily involve an exchange logic that is central to clientelism.
**The location of clientelism in Kosovo**

Though it can be claimed that clientelist relationships exist within the upper echelons of central government (although these are more likely to be patronage-based relations), clientelism finds its fullest expression in the way it infiltrates the relationship between state and society. This relationship can be more concretely understood as the relationship between political office-holders and ordinary citizens, within which there are essentially three avenues of interaction: (I) citizens vote to hold politicians to account; (ii) citizens participate in decision making; and (iii) citizens access resources. These three dimensions encapsulate how state and society interact in Kosovo.

The quality of the relationship between society and the state is absolutely crucial in determining the sustainability of Kosovo’s democracy. The OECD DAC Task Force on Fragile and Conflict-Affected States has affirmed that the “central challenge for donors” was identified as the need to replace their focus on the state with an understanding that state fragility is a relationship between state and society, one in which the primary cause of stability and resilience is legitimacy, and vice versa.

Clearly, there are different points where state and society interact in Kosovo, yet none is more important than at the municipal level, an arena of day to day experience where citizens’ interactions with the state are most intense. Such intensity flows from the basic fact of geographical proximity—the municipal level is where citizens experience the state most frequently. Moreover, its qualitative importance as a political arena is rooted in the political architecture of Kosovo’s de-centralised state.

The Ahtisaari proposal—essentially a peace-building plan upon which Kosovo’s constitution was subsequently based—instituted a far-reaching de-centralisation of administrative competence to the municipal level, including over primary and secondary education, health care, economic development and urban or rural planning. *Society is mostly likely to bond or break with the state at the municipal level* as core facets of people’s live are administered, dealt with and delivered here. At the same time, society’s relationship with the central state is rather distant, compounded by the lack of direct representation of citizens in the national parliament where members are elected by a nation-wide list system rather than representing a particular constituency. There are also very few political organisations that mediate between the individual and the central state.

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Compared to other informal institutions, a focus on clientelism makes sense because it grasps more systematic dynamics than other informal institutions, revealing more of the underlying qualities of state-society relations. Entailing a mutuality and longevity, it is not a one-off phenomenon but represents a governance mode: a repeated form of practice that structures the flow of resources, exchange and power relations and their legitimisation in society. In areas where clientelist logic predominates over democratic practice, then one could more convincingly argue that the democratic system is more defective than if one focused on corruption, for example, which may just represent an island of anti-democratic practice in an otherwise stable system. See (Hilgers, 2011, p. 568)


10 Law Nr. 03/L-040 on Local Self Government Kosovo, article 17
The main protagonists

At the heart of clientelism is a relationship between a political office-holder (the patron) and the client in which certain things are exchanged, normally the vote and continued support for resources. This relationship lasts beyond elections and structures the way the client may participate and access resources. At the municipal level, the ‘patrons’ are most likely—but not exclusively—to be mayors, who are directly elected, have significant executive powers and access to the widest array of goods. Still, mayors are rarely in a position to monopolise state-society relations. Though the most dominant patrons are mayors, leaders of alternative political parties can compete with them and may preside over clientelist relations based on a promised exchange once in power, especially in more competitive environments where there is a higher turnover of political leadership.  

Clients are ordinary members of society, who become clients by agreeing to an exchange. The core relationship between patron and client is not often sporadic but is held over a longer period. Patron and clients in general know each other, or know of each other, due to family ties, general social interaction or knowledge (including gossip) circulating the public domain. Some clients may have little or no direct contact with their patron, but instead are connected via ‘brokers’, people who have organizational and leadership skills but lack access to distributable resources and therefore use their abilities to act as middlemen between clients and higher levels of power.  

In Kosovo, this role could be played by village elders, municipal assembly members or the most educated members of the neighbourhood. Even if individuals are not the direct beneficiary of the good, they may be connected via family to someone who is. In these cases, these citizens are often implored to support a patron if they will not directly receive anything. Citizens therefore become ‘clients by association’; in which case the clientelist web is cast further than the direct exchange between patron and client.

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11 Directors of state-run companies operating in municipalities can represent important behind the scenes patrons, exchanging positions of employment for special favours. In one municipality, a person who held a position within on the Trepça Mining Corporation was deemed more influential than the Mayor. Author interview, Mitrovica, Project Manager, Civil Society Organisation, 2013

Section II: Measuring clientelism in Kosovo

After thirteen years of internationally led state-building, does clientelism matter in Kosovo—and to what extent? No systematic data on clientelism in Kosovo exists. This is partly because clientelism is an informal institution, meaning it is unwritten, unofficial and difficult to observe and measure. When evidence of clientelism is cited in political discussions it is often based on anecdotes or confused with related practices such as cronyism or nepotism. Even though it is widely known that it takes place, as of yet it cannot be convincingly argued that clientelism matters at all. This research has aimed to generate empirically robust and accurate evidence on the extent to which clientelism structures state-society relations in Kosovo.

The starting point for turning the abstract concept of clientelism into something that is measurable is to understand what kind of practices should define state-society relations as stated in the constitution, laws and formal rules. In Kosovo, the practices that should underpin state-society interaction are explicitly democratic: voting is structured by the practice of people voting freely, with their conscience and secretly; participation is predicated on the formal participatory and accountability mechanisms; and access to resources is based upon equitable access and rules that are applied neutrally. These practices are pervaded by the norm of universalism, meaning the goal of government is public welfare and equal treatment applies to everyone regardless of the group to which one belongs.

From this, one can assert that the citizen-representative (formal democratic) relationship is transformed into a patron-client (informal clientelist) relationship via specific practices that deviate from those expected by the rules articulated by the formal state. These clientelist practices—observable implications of clientelism’s presence—can be understood as follows: voting is practised according to a system of exchange in which one has been personally promised something in return; participation is not determined by institutional structures but by informal mechanisms and depends on the strength of connections; access to resources is not determined by rights and rule-based entitlements but by the level of support given to the patron. All this practice is based on the norm of particularism: the stronger the relationship the client has to the patron, the better treatment received.

Democratic and clientelist practice compared:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Voting</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Access to resources</th>
<th>Principal/norm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Because of conscience</td>
<td>Via institutionalised mechanisms</td>
<td>Predictable and equitable</td>
<td>Universalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clientelist</td>
<td>Instrumentalised via an exchange</td>
<td>Informal, connection based</td>
<td>Unpredictable and inequitable</td>
<td>Particularism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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14 (Hicken, 2011)
16 Ibid.
Perception based survey

How do we know these practices are present within the different dimensions of state-society relations? It is sensible to ask the people of Kosovo. A perception based survey makes sense because it is directly central to people’s experience: all citizens interact frequently with the state and are therefore in a good position to judge to what extent clientelism may structure that interaction. The aim of the survey was to measure the extent of clientelism across the state-society interface (i.e voting, participation and accessing goods) to provide a barometer that assesses the climate of clientelism in Kosovo (see Annex for full survey).

Perceptions of clientelism were measured by reading a statement that affirms clientelist practice and asking respondents to configure their response according to a 5-point ordinal (Lickert) scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Answers of agree or strongly agree confirm the perception of a clientelist logic to state-society relations; disagree or strongly disagree would affirm a democratic logic.

For voting, the clientelist rule is quite simple: clientelism is observable if voting has been instrumentalised according to an exchange, in other words if there is a clear perception that people vote because they have been personally promised something in return (voting). For participation and accessing goods, it becomes a little trickier. For each, respondents were asked if ‘strong connections with political leaders at the local level’ are required to have their ‘voice heard’ (participation), ‘to be employed’ (resources: private good) and ‘to have improvements made to roads’ (resources: local club good). During February and April 2013, one thousand and seventy nine citizens in Kosovo across every region of Kosovo took part in the survey. Each respondent were surveyed personally within their homes based on a random-route technique.

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17 Strong connections’ was chosen over rival terms such as ‘supporters’ and ‘strong relationship’ because ‘supporters’ does not necessarily imply an exchange, nor does it support fully grasp the essence of clientelism, that is an enduring relationship, while ‘strong relationship’ may imply a connection too acute, thus not able to grasp the freedom of entry that a clientelist relationship involves. The statements referred to the non-specific ‘political leaders’ rather than ‘Mayor’ in order to avoid the problem of specific grievances biasing answers; also clientelism is extrinsic to the agents who practice it so it makes sense not to link the practice to a particular person or point in time. In order to avoid social desirability bias—respondents wanting to portray themselves in a favourable light—the statements were phrased impersonally. Linguists were consulted over lanaguage, the survey was pre-tested in Pristina. The first two questions were ‘dummy’ questions to avoid asking difficult questions straight off and making the respondent feel uncomfortable.

18 The population were all those eligible to engage with the state, that is all adults over eighteen. To ensure the sample was representative of Kosovo as a whole and the individual municipalities, the sample was stratified according to three strata: gender, age and ethnicity.
Section III: the extent of clientelism in Kosovo

The central finding of the survey is that across Kosovo people believe that the relationship between ordinary citizens and political leaders is dominated by a clientelist logic. This doesn’t necessarily mean that most people are clients but rather that the ‘rules of the game’ are perceived to be clientelist. This section will present the results in more detail and use qualitative interviews to understand how this clientelist logic works across the different avenues of interaction, as well as evaluating the distortions it introduces into the democratic process.

Figure 1

Voting

A democratic logic of voting is based on the practice of people voting freely, with their conscience and secretly, practices that are guaranteed in the basic provisions of the Law on Local Elections, for instance. It is expected that political candidates present themselves as custodians of the public good. The survey reveals that this form of political practice is barely relevant to how people vote or how politicians campaign. Rather voting in Kosovo is based overwhelmingly on the clientelist logic: what a political candidate may personally offer voters.

Clientelism is not a one-off exchange but a relationship, meaning it exists over time and throughout the different dimensions of the state-society relationship. The practice of exchanging a vote for a promised resource can be an entry point into a clientelist relationship; indeed, a client’s main form of exchange is votes. This currency is not only ‘taken’ at elections times as, given clientelism’s diffuseness, the promise of future votes is also a form of exchange often accompanied by a demand from the patron to join a particular party as a sign of credible commitment. Patrons meanwhile can offer a wider range of goods in

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19 The margin of error for the general sample (N1079) is +/-3 at a confidence level of 95%.
20 Law No. 03/L-072 on Local Elections in the Republic of Kosovo, 2008 p3
exchange and while the patron-client relationship may remain stable, the nature of the goods can evolve over time, depending on what patrons can claim authority over. Employment is the most sought after good and is seemingly resistant to drops in value.\footnote{The Mayor of Hani I Elezit has said that 90\% of all requests from citizens relate to employment. Author interview, Mayor of Hani I Elezit, 24.03.13}

Field research across Kosovo confirms a style of electioneering dominated by personalised promises. ‘Too much politics, too many promises!’ was a complaint frequently aired by voters. But often voters actively seek to become clients. Interviews with political candidates revealed that many people approach them seeking a ‘deal’, that is an exchange of a resource, normally a job, for a block of votes derived from a family network. One political candidate from Hani I Elezit explained:

‘One day \{during the 2013 local election campaign\} a citizen came to me and said I have some votes from my home, but I won’t give them to you without ‘compensation’. I told him, he should go to the market if he wants to sell something. I think buying and selling votes is corrupt government. I don’t know where it happens but it does generally happen around Kosovo. It is quite challenging for one individual to fight it.\footnote{Author interview, political candidate, 22.10.13}’

The deal struck between patron and client during elections depends on the patron being able to be sure that the client will vote for him/her, something that may be difficult under the ‘secret ballot.’ In Kosovo it is the intimacy of social relations at the local level that enables the effective monitoring of the exchange commitments made between patron and client.\footnote{Smart phones have become an important accomplice of clientelism, enabling instant proof of a way of voting. Apparently, a former Mayor of a municipality in the east of Kosovo had an actual ‘black book’ in which he monitored the favours he has given to people. Author interview, resident, Kamenica 11.02.2013.} Asked how in the context of a secret ballot political leaders know who voted for whom, the Mayor of Decan explained: ‘I have mechanisms...I have many friends and the way the party is organised I can understand the situation in every community.’

Clearly, in all countries the reason why people vote may often be determined by self-interest. Voting because you have been personally promised something is merely one rationale for casting a vote—it takes place across many democracies. Yet, the problem is if it becomes the dominant mode of electioneering. The survey results suggest it has become precisely that, creating an unfortunate cycle whereby employment and other core aspects of life are inextricably tied to the outcome of elections. Voting then is less of an opportunity for political debate and expression and more of scenario where the citizen-representative is transformed into a patron-client one. A student from Skenderaj suggests: ‘There are tons of these situations \{offering jobs in exchange for votes\}, but I know for sure the road to EU isn’t paved that way.\footnote{Author interview, resident, Skenderaj 24.09.13}’
Participation

The way people in Kosovo participate in decision making should be based on a democratic logic. The preamble of the Law on Local Self Government recognises ‘the need to bring the decision making closer to the citizens to promote sustainable governance and living conditions’ and the law itself has accorded significant weight to accountability procedures, as well as transparent and participatory structures in decision making.\(^{25}\) Having your voice heard should depend on fair and predictable institutionalised mechanisms, such as petitions, citizen committees or representation by assembly members. All citizens should be able to have a say; all political leaders should aim towards responsive government.

The survey reveals that this democratic logic is hardly relevant in Kosovo. Over ninety percent of people believe that it is only people with strong connections with political leaders who have their voice heard. In some cases, this prevailing logic can be functional: having direct access to political leaders via connections can provide an important link with the state that formal procedures would otherwise not provide. Not everyone in society can participate in public meetings or even know how to articulate complaints through formal procedures. Rural communities in Kosovo may rely upon such connections to express their needs and raise grievances.

The concern is not with individual clientelist relations but when a tipping point is passed and a general rule emerges that the closer one is to the political leaders, the more likely to have one’s voice heard. This survey has revealed that this mode is predominant and the effects of this have been observed during field research. One is that due to the need to pay more attention to clients, patrons often make decisions in informal, non-institutionalised settings. Restaurants and cafes remain the location for a great deal of political decision making. In one municipality, it was suggested that most of the political decision making takes place in the main restaurant in town where the Mayor can easily ‘go from table to table’ to hear the views of those lucky enough to afford to dine out.\(^{26}\)

It is not just private, alternative mechanisms of political decision-making that emerge under clientelism; the formal democratic mechanisms are equally distorted by the logic. Though many assembly members work hard to represent the interests of ordinary citizens, concern over the effectiveness of municipal assemblies to hold mayors to account is widespread in Kosovo.\(^{27}\) The argument made here is that the ineffectiveness of municipal assemblies has very little to do with the absence of a few missing ingredients—resources, training or capacity—and much more to do with a clientelist mode of politics that fundamentally hollows out these formal democratic structures.

Like in other areas, this clientelist mode can work two ways: assembly members can gain a privileged position in the distribution of resources if they support the patron or they are threatened with the withdrawal of a particular resource if they do not. As one resident who keeps a close eye on developments in Kamenica explains:

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\(^{25}\) Law Nr. 03/L-040 on Local Self Government, 2008

\(^{26}\) Author interview, business owner, Kamenica 19.02.03

The Mayor has neutralised the municipal assembly. If the Mayor faces opponents, the Mayor will get ‘revenge’ because he controls the education and health sectors. So if the wife of the opponent works in education, next year she will be re-allocated into another village. Then once the opponent falls back into line in the assembly, the wife is placed back into her original position. Everyone knows what is going on but people do not want to clash with the Mayor.\textsuperscript{28}

Channelling itself through accountability structures, clientelism makes effective and honest participation very difficult. One assembly delegate explains:

‘We have the right to criticise but no right to change anything (in the assembly). People are dependent on the Mayor and are submissive because of jobs. Even though I can disagree with the Mayor in the public assembly, no one openly backs me up. But then I get home and all the assembly members phone me up and say ‘you are right’\textsuperscript{29}

Distribution of resources

A democratic logic based upon equitable access and rules that are applied neutrally is firmly embedded in Kosovo’s constitutional ‘preamble’, which proclaims Kosovo to be a ‘state of free citizens that will guarantee the rights of every citizen, civil freedoms and equality of all citizens before the law....’ The survey reveals that clientelist logic dominates how the state relates to ordinary people of Kosovo; in fact the survey reveals that the reality of how politicians often distribute resources defies the Kosovar constitution.

Not all decisions about where resources are distributed are based on the clientelist logic. Research has shown that connections may not matter for administrative documents, for example. The pot of resources that a mayor has discretion over is also somewhat circumscribed, especially as in some municipalities nearly 80% of the municipality budget is fixed by the central level and this money is earmarked for specific budget lines in core areas such as education and health.

Even so, patrons can determine who is employed as teachers, administrators and hospital workers.\textsuperscript{30} Access to employment positions are invariably not based on the formal universal rules of entry but on the particularist rules of clientelism: ‘if you do not have a connection, you can forget about a job’ was a phrase commonly heard during field work. The survey revealed that only thirteen percent of people believe that employment in the municipality is not based on strong connections with political leaders. The Mayor of Decan freely admitted that there are many criteria beyond formal ones that he takes into consideration when deciding upon whom to give a job in the municipality, the main criterion being the rather vague ‘contribution to society.’\textsuperscript{31}

Patrons can have discretion over other resources, such as work on short-term infrastructure projects, business permits, or university scholarships. Material goods can also be offered, including phone cards or cash (around 10 euros per vote is the going rate) for votes or even basic foodstuff such as flour.\textsuperscript{32} Donor investment programmes can also provide

\textsuperscript{28} Author interview, resident, Kamenica 19.02.03
\textsuperscript{29} Author interview, business owner, Kamenica 19.02.03
\textsuperscript{30} It has been speculated that all 27 principals of schools in Peja used to belong to the former Mayor’s party, either because they are ‘political allies’ or they were forced to as an informal condition of their contract. Author interview Secretary of Political Party, 25.04. 2013.
\textsuperscript{31} Author interview, Mayor of Decan 17.07.13
\textsuperscript{32} Author interview, resident Kamenica 20.02.13
a helpful source of exchangeable goods, creating short term work opportunities that are then subsumed under clientelist relations. Non-material goods, such as special awards or influence, can also be traded in which clients support patrons in return for informal influence within decision making or to be put in a special position to receive a certain good. These are by definition private goods, but it is common for neighbourhoods or villages to club together to enter into a collective bargain with a patron over roads or infrastructure investment.

Even bigger resource distribution distortions are at hand, especially when it comes to investments. It has been speculated that the former Mayor of Peja, for example, had managed to assume control over a quarter of the municipality’s investment budget through the creation of an investment fund, which channelled money only into those neighbourhoods and organisations that had supported him politically—or were willing to do so in the future.

Clientelism is not just about favouritism; it is also about discrimination, denying someone a good that they are entitled to. Research by the National Democratic Institute in Mitrovica has revealed that despite the formal condition that scholarships should be awarded based on the highest grades; the scholarships in Mitrovica have been awarded according to the criteria of closeness to the patrons within political parties. It also involves the threat of withdrawing a particular good: it is said to be an ‘open secret’ in Mitrovica that some people face the sack if they do not bring in enough votes during elections. Patrons can often be quite ruthless in their attempts to obtain resources which then can be distributed to their clients. A caretaker of a school in a village outside Peja explains the suffering inflicted by clientelism:

I have worked all my life and they tried to fire me – the principal, and the education director- because they wanted to bring their person in. I was being forced from my job. My house needs so many repairs it can barely survive the winter. They said that I wasn’t turning up. They were hiding the attendance list. However a lawyer from Prishtina helped me. Everything is unjust. Everything goes by connections.

33 Workers implementing the European Commission investment programme ‘Beautiful Kosova’ were apparently pressured to join a particular party before they could take up their positions. Author Interview. Project Officer at Political Monitoring Body Kamenica, 19.02. 2012
34 Author interview, Civil Society worker, Mitrovica 18.03.2013
35 Author interview, Secretary of political party branch Peja, 25.04.2013
36 Author interview, Mitrovica, Project Manager, Civil Society/ NGO, 18.03.13.
37 Author interview, Mitrovica Civil Society worker 18.03.13
38 Author interview, caretaker, village 5km outside of Peja 30.10.13
**Universalism or particularism**

In theory, clientelism can still result in relatively egalitarian treatment; connections may still matter, but goods are allocated quite widely to maintain those connections or the patron seeks to looks after ‘the people’ as broadly as possible.

Conversely, it can result in a small clique of winners, where in those who are most closely associated with the patrons gain a lot, while the rest suffer from inequitable treatment. It is important therefore to try to test what degree of unequal treatment clientelism produces in Kosovo. To explore this further, a fifth question that aimed to assess whether universalist (democratic) or particularist (clientelist) logic structured state-society relations was asked more positively: ‘In general, people are treated equally by the political leaders of the municipality.’

**Figure 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% response: 'in general people are treated equally by the political leaders of the municipality'</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>-13%</td>
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Only twenty-two percent of Kosovar voters agreed that in general people are treated equally by political leaders. There is therefore a long way to go before Kosovo’s constitutional preamble bares any resemblance to reality. In fact, clientelism seems to generate a political system based on particularism which means the stronger the connection with the political office-holder, the better treatment you can expect from the state.

The survey also revealed that just under half (forty-five percent) of those who affirmed that unequal treatment is the norm in Kosovo believe that the situation has not changed from 5 years ago—thirty percent believe it has become worse. The lack of clear change in treatment reveals a few important qualities about clientelism. Firstly, it doesn’t go away with time, which suggests there is nothing inevitable about Kosovo’s political transition. The second is the changing of rules, for example by making mayors directly elected to hold them more accountable, does not really affect the extent of clientelism.
Moreover, the survey finds no real relationship between the size or ethnic composition of municipalities and the level of clientelism. There are no specific strongholds of clientelism, nearly all municipalities have a high score, with one exception being Hani I Elezit.

Section IV: Why does clientelism persist?
The same survey taken in every other country in the world would reveal that clientelism exists everywhere, but most other countries would not record such high results. The extent of clientelism in Kosovo is perhaps puzzling given that the last thirteen years have witnessed such a heavy-weight effort to produce liberal democracy.

Hence, the origins of clientelism in Kosovo are not the pressing puzzle; rather why clientelism continues to persist as the mode of governance in Kosovo is the critical question. There are two sides to this: the first relates to why political leaders, candidates and officials continue to supply clientelism as a political product. But it takes two to tango and without people taking up clientelist offers, the political practice would die out: the flipside of the puzzle refers to why people enter into these clientelist relationships with politicians.
The supply side of clientelism: the political machine

The reason why mayors practice clientelism has less to do with their own agency or even their own individual qualities, such as education, and much more to do with the fact that thirty five out of the thirty six mayors are part of a clientelism-inducing structure called the political party. To understand why politicians and municipality officials continue to exchange resources for political support through mechanisms such as the vote, the structure and behaviour of the political parties in Kosovo need to be investigated.

Of course, not all political parties are exactly the same. Nor do all members of the same political parties behave in the same way; in some parties there are genuine reformist elements that aim to reshape the party in a more democratic, forward looking organisation. Generally, however, the political parties who prior to 2013 have held office at the municipal level have two clientelism-inducing features.

The absence of ideology

The first clientelism-inducing quality refers to the nature of the binding force that internally binds political parties. In most European countries, parties have ideologies which provide a cohesive force for party members. In Kosovo, political ideologies offer little guidance of how parties behave, a finding that has been discussed elsewhere. For example, a 2012 KIPRED policy report suggests:

‘There is nothing new to be said if we repeat that political parties in Kosovo do not have their own political ideology, no real programs, and not even a clear membership...The best indicator of the lack of ideology and affiliation and identification of members with the ideology of a party is frequent transfer of members of one political party to another.’

Yet, it is not just the absence of ideology that explains clientelism but the nature of the glue. As has been noted, ‘financial and material benefit seems to be the greatest cohesive force within the political party...this keeps members inside the party and encourages and motivates them to engage and work.’ Contemporary political parties in Kosovo, therefore, tend to resemble political parties in 19th century urban America, from where political sociologists have drawn the idea of a political machine to describe political organisation: ‘a non-ideological organisation interested less in political principle than in securing and holding office for its leaders and distributing income to those who run it and work for it.’ Interests and not ideology are central: ‘a party machine relies on what it accomplishes in a concrete way for its supporters, not on what it stands for.’

Even though not all characteristics of political parties in Kosovo may be machine-like, field work across Kosovo confirms there is a general conformity to the style of the machine. Keen observers of the political scene in Prizren, for instance, suggested the leaders of the former incumbent party, ‘do not even like each other, it is common interests that keep them together. There is no ideology, just interests. The political party in Pristina decides what is happening in Prizren.’ The reason why this characteristic of political parties encourages clientelism is because in the absence of a centrally defined ideology that could appeal to a wide group of people, local political candidates can only induce support by offering material incentives—there is no other political product they can offer.

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39 KIPRED: Strengthening the statehood of Kosovo through the democratization of political parties, 2012. p5
40 KIPRED 2012 p11
41 Scott., 1969, p1143
42 Ibid
43 Author interview, Civil Society Prizren, 13.03.13
Party hierarchy

Another clientelism-inducing feature of political parties in Kosovo is their strongly hierarchical nature. One development expert summed up the organisational structure of parties in Kosovo:

“You are either the big man at the top or you take orders, there is no middle management. It takes strong personalities to break the mould and those who do try to do so are normally sidelined.”

Compounding the acute hierarchy is the absence of internal democratic mechanisms that could challenge the orders of the leader at the top. In fact, in the absence of democracy, there is a system of command and control that induces clientelism. The leaders of political parties can be understood as ‘super patrons’: the undisputed leader of the machine who sits at the apex of the organisation, charting its course and ultimately managing the internal flow of resources. Patrons at the local level are dependent on these super patrons for additional resources of exchange to manage clientelist networks or funds for election campaigns. Without support from the super patron, local patrons would find it difficult to survive politically. This acute hierarchy has created a situation of reverse accountability: rather than being accountable to the people, local politicians must be more accountable to the internal hierarchy of the party they represent.

Within this dynamic of reverse accountability, a local patron must be able to bring the super patron votes during national and local elections. Clientelism thus becomes such an important strategy for local politicians, because by locking voters into these relationships, it can ensure a predictable and steady flow of support for the super patrons during national elections. In return, the local patron will be able to receive additional resources to maintain power. Opting out of this system is too risky for patrons as competing candidates may acquire their clients. The system is also self-reinforcing as the more votes the local patron can guarantee for the party, the higher standing in the machine and the more likely he is able to receive the additional resources to maintain power.

Author interview, International Development Expert, Pristina 27.03.13
Breaking free: Hani i Elezit

The argument presented has been that clientelism is induced by the nature of the organisation of parties in Kosovo, which ‘crowds out’ the more noble intentions of individual mayors. A neat experiment has presented itself in Kosovo. In all but one of the municipalities, mayors are part of these machines. According to the explanation presented above, one would expect that the results of the survey in the municipality of the mayor who is not part of the clientelism-inducing structure would show less clientelism. The municipality in which the mayor is independent from these structures is Hani I Elezit and the results from the survey suggest clientelism is much lower than in other municipalities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Hani i Elezit</th>
<th>Average Kosovo</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clientelism-agree</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal treatment-agree</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens have power-agree</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This has little to do with the size of Hani I Elezit as the results of similar-sized municipalities compare unfavourably with Hani I Elezit. The Mayor, Rufki Suma, also had admitted that his style of governing is not due to intensive schooling in the ways of modern democracy. Since taking office in 2009, he has reshaped municipal governance from one dominated by clientelist style politics to one that is closer to the democratic logic precisely because he is free from the clientelism-inducing structure of the political party. Free from the need to provide resources for party supporters, the Mayor has been able to provide for citizens according to need. For example, the Mayor has recounted how a village, which had actively worked against him during one election campaign, were surprised to find out the day after the election that the Mayor had instructed improvements to their road to be made.45

Autonomous from any pressure to support the interests of the party leadership, the Mayor has also been able to form a close relationship with the citizens of Hani I Elezit. Every day, between six and eight in the morning the Mayor holds visiting hours in which any citizen is able to approach him. A member of an opposition party said they had declared their support for Mayor during the 2013 local elections because of the close relationship the Mayor had forged between the municipality and the community: ‘he is very close to the citizens.’

The main way he is close is because he identifies problems together with the citizens and implements those solutions together.46 Released from any accountability to a party hierarchy, the Mayor has been able to make decisions that are implemented rather than promises that can only be fulfilled if it serves the needs of the machine. ‘I lead because of my actions...Because of my actions, people believe me and trust me. People know work will get done, that I will build the roads in the villages, because I don’t make promises. There are eight jobs in the municipality, I cannot promise any.’47

45 Author interview, Mayor of Hani I Elezit 21.03.13
46 Author interview, Vetvendo’s head (LVV) of Hani I Elezit branch, 21.10.13
47 Author interview, Mayor of Hani I Elezit, 24.10.13
The demand side of clientelism

Clientelism is not thrust upon the people of Kosovo. There is a choice and a critical question remains: why have the citizens of Kosovo become clients? If the voters of Kosovo were to reject clientelism then the practice would rapidly disappear as politicians could simply not maintain power offering this strategy. There are two inter-related reasons why Kosovars become clients, each reinforcing the other.

Economic structure

One possible explanation often cited is that of culture and social structure, that somehow clientelist networks are a product of fixed qualities within the Kosovar mentality. One policy report, for example, has suggested that politics is shaped by a patriarchal culture in which an ‘individual submits to the will of the head of the family.’

Whilst this may have been the case prior to 1999, there is little evidence to suggest that it is still true. Family units remain the central units of Kosovar society but individuals within families are free to vote how they like. A small survey conducted indicates this. Asked whether the family has an influence on how people vote, only seventeen percent confirmed it did. Sometimes it may be in the interest of families to vote in the same way, but this is not determined by a ‘patriarchal culture.’

Rather than the traditional social structure, it is the economic structure of society that explains clientelism. The link between economic insecurity and clientelism is a strong one. Economic insecurity compels people to focus on the immediate consumption and to forsake longer term and more abstract gains. If you are poor, you first priority is material needs, not public policies that will only deliver payoffs in the future. Without a developed welfare system in place, people in Kosovo know that getting close to politicians may increase their chances of receiving much needed resources, such as health care, scholarships or if they are lucky, a job. Clientelism is thus a functional strategy to overcome weaknesses in the state provision of goods as it provides people with a predictable flow of resources—a way of providing for people’s needs which the formal system cannot. Once you have entered into these relationships, it is very difficult to opt out as you cannot be sure that the alternative candidate or even the state will be able to provide for you.

In the absence of a sustainable welfare state, the economic situation drives people into the arms of clientelist networks that have access to state resources. Clientelism is then a coping strategy: the reason why clientelism persists is due to the sheer degree of economic insecurity that exists in Kosovo, one of the poorest countries in Europe. More than a third of the countries citizens live below the poverty line of EUR1.55 per day and the unemployment rate stands at 40%. The current economic structure of society cannot provide for people’s needs. A 35 year old male resident of Peja underlined the extent to which economic insecurity affects peoples’ lives: ‘halfway through the month, the town turns grey...people realise they are running out of money.’

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48 KIPRED: Strengthening the statehood of Kosovo through the democratization of political parties, 2012, p10.
49 The sample was 60 people
50 (Scott, 1969)
53 Author interview, resident Peja 29.10.13
Economic insecurity can often displace an individual’s commitment to democracy. During interviews, respondents were placed in a hypothetical scenario whereby a political candidate offers to an imaginary citizen a job for a family member in exchange for their vote. While many respondents suggested that they would reject the offer, when asked the same question again with the additional information that the imaginary citizen is poor, many respondents changed their mind. A mother of three grown up children in Kamenica, who has worked hard all her life and believes in democracy, explained the reason why she would accept the offer:

'I understand wholeheartedly it is not right. It’s like selling your vote. However this scenario in reality dominates. The difficult economic situation forces people to take such actions. The economic crisis is everywhere.'

A 38 year-old in Skenderaj summed up the dilemma: ‘This is a tough question. I know that it’s wrong but it’s not as if I wouldn’t do it. I think everyone would accept in order for their family to benefit.’ The mass of Kosovar citizens are somehow dependent on clientelist networks and only very few have the privilege of not depending on politics. A 35 year-old citizen from Peja, who is lucky enough to have two jobs, explains ‘I have a job […] by day and work on a farm the rest of the time. It’s good, because it means I do not have to be part of politics. I don’t depend on politics.’

**Low moral costs**

A second explanation for the persistence of clientelism is the low moral costs of practising it. Clientelism involves the making of different ethical decisions: a citizen must agree to offer his/her vote in exchange for something; a municipal assembly has to agree to give out a scholarship to a particular party member; and a mayor has to agree that a teacher should be sent away to a different school for being politically disobedient. While many of the activities involved in clientelism are just about legal, these activities have a moral dimension.

Social scientists have recognised that ‘the prevalence of clientelism as an informal institution in a given society depends to a great extent upon the degree of tolerance of these practices in society (low moral costs) and the people’s predisposition to enter those exchanges.’ If clientelist relationships conflict with the prevailing morality of the community, then the perpetrator can expect a political backlash and a loss of support. Added to this is that the intimacy of social relations at the municipal level makes these actions difficult to hide. As one interview remarked about Peja, Kosovo’s second biggest city: ‘everyone knows everyone else’s business here.’

The higher the moral costs, the less likely that clientelist practice will be tolerated. Moral evaluations of clientelism vary across Kosovo. For some, actions such as exchanging a vote for a special favour are intrinsically corrupt, yet there is no generalised distaste for clientelism; for many, it is just normal practice, ‘how things are done.’ The reason for the relatively low moral costs of clientelism is not really due to some ‘moral crisis’ but because the morality of self-help networks, that sustained much of Kosovo during the 90s and before, has become embedded within politics. These self-help networks were naturally based upon

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54 Author interview, resident Kamenica 20.09.2013  
55 Author interview, resident, Skenderaj  
56 Author interview, resident, Peja 28.10.13  
57 de Souza, 2008  
58 Author interview, resident, Peja 28.10.13
putting family first, mutual assistance, favours and connections. This pattern of organisation that dominated life when there was no state has become the prevailing norm within a state. Unfortunately, politicians have not made the distinction between this style of distributing resources and the style demanded by a modern democratic state based on equal treatment.

In fact, what has happened is that informal family networks have become infused in formal political networks, which further encourages the tolerance of such practices. Field research data confirms this intermingling: asked what is the best way to establish strong connections with political leaders, the first ranked response from citizens was ‘join a political party’ (38%), followed by ‘be a family member’ (33%), with ‘have a business’ ranked third (13%). Neither educational background, being a good person nor religious authority was shown to be important for political connections.

Family connections at the local level matter, but entry into the political arena is mediated and ultimately configured by the political party, meaning there is an infusion of pre-state self-help networks and post-war political networks. A woman who is the mother of three small children in Peja describes the importance of these networks:

‘Before the war there was only Rugova, now you have to position yourself with someone or a political party because otherwise you get left unemployed. Sometimes maybe you don’t want to go into some connections, but you do. For example to get my son into a pre-school I had to do it by connections.’ 59

Section V: Clientelism and the longer-term prognosis...

The logic of clientelism does not explain every political outcome in Kosovo, nor could we expect it to. This research, however, has shown that it matters and to a considerable degree. It has also suggested that entering into clientelist relationships may be an understandable response to the economic and social environment of Kosovo. While some people’s needs are satisfied via clientelism, this research has also shown that clientelism tends to pollute the relationship between society and the state. However, the effects of clientelism are not just a concern for those interested in the process of democracy.

Here, the argument is taken one step further: the reason why clientelism is so hazardous is that it subtly—but fundamentally—reduces the capacity of Kosovar society to solve its problems. Crucially, as the balance tips towards clientelism becoming the mode of governance, which the data generated during the research suggests, structural process tend to embed themselves in society and the state. Clientelism in Kosovo may be a short term solution for some but if it is not contained it will become a long term problem for all as will result in ‘society capture’, irrational governance and will delay Kosovo’s entry into the EU.

59 Author interview, resident, Peja 28.10.13
‘Society capture’

The people of Kosovo live with difficult social circumstances: poverty, poor health care and a lack of opportunities, which restrict people’s ability to live their life to its full potential. Citizens are ‘problem holders.’ Like in many countries, citizens look towards politicians to help solve the problem.

Politicians are thus the ‘problem solvers.’\(^{60}\) In a healthy democracy in which there is clear information about who has the resources and where these are spent, the ‘problem solvers’ have an incentive to come to the aid of as many ‘problem holders’ as possible, as this will keep them in power. In a democracy dominated by clientelism and with poor levels of accountability, the ‘problem solvers’’ overriding objective is to manage their clientelist networks as efficiently as possible. To do this, the aim is to monopolise problem solving power to make the patron more attractive for potential clients. The patron does not have to solve the problems of the ‘problem holders’, but just has to establish a position in which it is perceived that patron is indispensable to solve the problems.

To do this, political office holders seek to hoard information and resources. Information hoarding means that you make government processes as removed from public scrutiny as possible. Many reports have concluded that mayors fail to engage the public in an open way and when they do dispense information it is more an exercise in public relations than transparent government. Interviews with development experts also suggest that scant information is shared in municipalities and when it is, it is done horizontally, amongst those in a position of power rather than top-down.\(^{61}\)

Hoarding resources has occurred in Kosovo via mayors excluding as many people as possible from the decision making process about where resources are distributed. Mayors have also sought additional resources by cutting deals with local businessman or the central government in Pristina.

Hording information and resources, ‘creates a structural domination because in accumulating these, they constrain the ‘problem holders’ own individual power to act.’\(^{62}\) Clientelism thus results in ‘society capture’, that is the structural domination of society by political office-holders. In order for people to get their problems solved, problem holders become increasingly ‘ensnared within the web’ of clientelism in Kosovo.\(^{63}\) With this reduction of the individual power of citizens to improve their own lives, clientelism creates a situation in which individuals feel powerless in relation to the institutions of the state and a general disillusionment towards politics is fostered. A poverty-stricken 35 year old man, also a father, from Peja explains:

*They promised me they would find me a job as a guard, after the last elections – it never happened. I have sent a request for a year now just for the materials to build my house, nothing has happened. Every Tuesday, I used to go the municipality but the Mayor only sees the people who have connections. Security guards started to block my way into the municipality, sometimes they even shouted at me. Now I go to the mosque, they provide me food and flour.*


\(^{61}\) Author interview, director of municipal project, international development agency, Pristina 16.11.12

\(^{62}\) Auyero, 2000

\(^{63}\) Auyero, 2000
In the survey, people were asked whether they agreed that ‘the political leaders in the municipality have generally much more power than citizens.’ Fifty percent agreed, while thirty five percent strongly agreed with the statement, which confirms that power increasingly is flowing away from the people and towards those who hold office. This has produced a fundamental accountability dilemma within state-society relations: how can you throw out a leader, however bad, if you are dependent on her/him, or may be dependent on them in the future?  

Given all this, it is not so difficult to understand why politicians confuse being in a position of power with being in a position of responsibility. Due to this domination, many people have given up on democracy in Kosovo. In March 2013, for example, an anti-government protest of around 60 people in Peja was met with laughter from some of the hundreds of coffee drinkers passively observing from the surrounding cafes, not because they thought it was a hapless cause but because they found the protestors’ belief that they could change politics faintly amusing.

**Irrational governance**

The second reason why clientelism reduces the capacity of Kosovar society to solve its problem is because it encourages poor governance. Inefficiencies become embedded in the state because those employed to work in public institutions often find themselves in the position by virtue of their relationship with the patron.

Turnovers of staff in municipalities are common during election time, but they also occur during the term of a mayor. Indeed, a great deal of energy is spent on kicking people out and placing supporters in municipal employment, energy that could be more effectively expended elsewhere. This is also highly disruptive: if a school principal, for example, is constantly changed after elections, a huge amount of organisational memory is lost. More generally, as clientelism reduces the ability of citizens to change things, trying to improve efficiency through reform becomes difficult. As one expert has noted ‘clientelism is incompatible with technology and modern forms of administration...which demand ever-higher levels of empowerment and participation by citizens in the realms of institutions.’

Sometimes the irrational style of governance wrought by clientelism becomes rather desperate. Consider the case of basic infrastructure development in a village a few kilometres outside of Kamenica. In this village, a large modern water well that would have provided water for the whole village remains disconnected to the villagers’ homes, meaning the few hundred residents still have to depend on their own often unreliable personal wells.

The new well was built by a previous Mayor, whom the village had overwhelmingly supported. This Mayor was subsequently voted out of office, and according to the villagers, the reason that the new well lies redundant is because it has not received the additional investment from the subsequent Mayor to connect it to a system of pipes that would distribute the water into homes. The villagers said that this investment was not forthcoming because the village mainly voted for a previous, unsuccessful Mayor. Backing the wrong man, they

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64 Stokes refers to this as “perverse accountability” in which voters become responsible to their representatives. (2005)
65 Author observation. Peje. 25.03.2013
66 Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002
explained, means that they cannot receive anything from the municipality. According to the then incumbent Mayor, the reason why there are no connectors is because the previous Mayor, who built the well, had promised the village that the municipality would pay for the connectors as a reward for the village voting for him. The then incumbent Mayor claims he was not taking revenge as the municipality had not paid for these connectors in any other village. Regardless of the who is to blame for this infrastructure going to waste, the case illustrates that basic services such as water provision are held hostage to the logic of clientelism.

**On the wrong track to Europe**

The third reason why clientelism reduces the capacity of Kosovar society to solve its problems is because this style of politics encourages a factionalisation of the state. This research has suggested that clientelism is the dominant mode of governing at the municipal level and that clientelist relations at this level combine to form networks that extend to the central state. The result is that state policy becomes geared towards factional interests. Complaints are rife from all political parties that successive governments have directed resources in accordance to where its supporters are rather than the public needs.

As Kosovar politics has factionalised, and as these factions have been so effective at looking after the interests of their supporters, there is a sense amongst the electorate that the only way of receiving resources is to continue to support the faction. One economics student from Skenderaj suggested: ‘You are somehow forced [not literally] to vote for PDK because that’s the only party that invests in Skenderaj.’ Another citizen from the same municipality explained: ‘I vote for PDK, just to keep LDK away from us. They will never do anything for us.’

Although there are islands of modern stateness in Kosovo, these are small compared to the great swell of factionalism that surrounds them. This will have a huge delaying effect on Kosovo’s entry into the European Union (EU). The EU accession process for Kosovo will be much tougher than it was for countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria. A perception that governance ‘rolled back’ after these countries joined the EU is one of the reasons for the greater demands from the EU. The EU has concluded that this regression in governance was because whilst laws were changed in these countries, the underlying logic of politics, especially clientelism, did not. Hence, the EU is very mindful of avoiding ‘shallow Europeanisation: the adoption of laws of the *acquis communautaire* without a requisite change in underlying political behaviour.

The EU will therefore be monitoring very closely the essential qualities of the Kosovar state. A key condition is that Kosovo must prove that it actually has a modern state, that is ‘one with sufficient autonomy or authority from political parties to be able to organise itself at least at a medium level of authority as a modern policy making agent.’ The more clientelism continues to dominate, and factionalism explains state policy, the less likely it is that Kosovo will enter the EU in the near future.

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68 Author interview, village residents, Kamenica 20.02.13
69 Author interview, (since Nov 2013, now former) Mayor of Kamenica 18.07.13
70 Member of parliament Naser Osmani in a recent debate over 2014 budget complained of unequal distribution of budget in municipalities led by PDK to the detriment of those led by LDK: ‘LDK cannot support this budget which makes no proportional distribution of capital investments’ said Osmani. From Lajmi.net
71 Author interviews, residents, Skenderaj 24.09.13
72 Mungiu-Pippidi, A Case Study in Political Clientelism: Romania's Policy-Making Mayhem, 2010
Section VI: Recommendations

There are no ‘silver bullets’ and no all-purpose formula to treat clientelism. The dynamics of clientelism operate differently in each country and ‘it is a gross and frequent error to think that the same solution might apply everywhere.’73 These recommendations represent possible routes forward; the precise nature, cost and expected outcomes of these proposals require further research. Many other initiatives may also be appropriate. As a basic principal, these proposals are grounded in the realities of clientelism as revealed by the research and the solutions will aim to target those causes that explain clientelism’s persistence. In doing so, it will avoid the temptation to ‘copy and paste’ institutions from other countries or to throw rules at the problem.

Adopting western-style institutions will have very little on clientelism is not maintained by faulty rules but by underlying social trends and structures. Moreover, it will avoid recommendations which begin with the words, ‘the government/parliament should monitor, implement, check etc.’ The government and the parliament cannot effectively guard against clientelism because neither state institution is autonomous from it. Lessons from the political development western European countries suggest that clientelism doesn’t just go away with modernisation, and while the European Union and international donors can play an important role in monitoring, establishing and encouraging anti-clientelist initiatives, it requires domestic agency to force its demise.

Recommendation I: civil society innovation

The larger the mass of people who reject clientelism, the less likely it is that politicians can continue the practice and remain in power. In Kosovo, there are many people who reject clientelism but are unorganised and isolated from each other. Increased civil society autonomy from clientelist networks is crucial. This autonomy should focus on material autonomy, that is self-funding organisations, and psychological autonomy, that is a sense that grass roots organisations can self-confidently challenge those in power. One constituency that could kick-start progress is the teacher community. The creation of an ‘Independent Teachers Association’ could provide an independent political voice for teachers, whom as state employers, are vulnerable to be pressured into clientelist networks. Most teachers would have a greater incentive to join an association that upholds professional standards and protects employment than join a political party. It could serve as a model for other professional associations.

Reforms should also focus on civil society innovation at the local level. In fact, civil society is generally weak at the municipal level, where political parties tend to have all the organisational power. The aim of an innovation in civil society at the local level would be to organise citizens in a way that ensures these organisations are autonomous from political parties and not dependent on state structures. The guiding idea of this innovation will be alter the underlying power relations that fuel clientelism. This requires not more of the same but a fundamental change in methodology: grass-roots organisations that challenge power.

73 Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006 p.9
Recommendation II: increase the policy-development capacity of political parties.
It is perhaps wishful thinking to induce reform in political parties by appealing to their better nature. Political parties exist to win power and if a hierarchical and non-ideological form of organisation has been successful so far, regardless of criticisms of their non-democratic nature, they should have no incentive to reform. Somewhat fortunately, the operation of clientelism in Kosovo has thrown up an incentive in Kosovo for political parties to reform. Credibility is key for political parties as they can only gain power if people believe they will deliver on the promises delivered during election campaigns. The credibility of the established political parties to solve people’s problems is on the wane in Kosovo with many voters simply not believing that politicians will deliver on their promises. Increasingly disillusioned, many voters are looking for an alternative to established parties.

Established parties need a new source of credibility. This can come from moving away from clientelist style politics towards appeals based on the public good that are backed up by an practical plan clearly showing how people’s lives will be improved. Central to the reform process within political parties then is for them to develop their internal policy-capacity, which at the moment is rather low. Those parties who move first in search of a new source of credibility have a first-mover advantage as they can attract the disaffected. Most of the public policy capacity resides in the numerous policy and research institutes in Pristina. International donors could invest in ‘link-ups’ between political parties and these research institutes, conditioned on political parties demonstrating a commitment to internal democratisation. These could also be funded by the fund for the ‘Democratization of Political Parties’ which is distributed from Kosovo's national budget.

Recommendation III: anti-clientelism education campaign
Increasing the moral costs of clientelism requires an attitudinal change across Kosovo. International donors and NGOs should engage in an anti-clientelism civic education and information campaign. The themes of such outreach campaigns should focus on the long term costs of clientelism, especially those incurred by the economy and democracy. The aim would be to introduce new perspectives, values and beliefs into a society that challenge entrenched forms of political behaviour and encourage a demand for policy and administrative reforms. A specific campaign could target municipal workers in order to instil the professional norms that would counter clientelist practices. A standardised ‘procedures and operations’ booklet for municipal workers that is accessible to everyone could clarify good practice and the rights and responsibilities of citizens and municipal officials.

Recommendation IV: economic development as the number one priority
Clientelism is fuelled by the economic insecurity of Kosovo’s citizens that results from the weak state of the economy. Increased employment opportunities will not materialise over night but there could be a clear strategic focus of the central government on job creation and insecurity mitigation. Economic development should be the number one priority for the government. As part of this, the dependence of citizens on the state for employment should be addressed and gradually reduced by having fewer employees on the public payroll. A strategic aim for the government should be to reduce unemployment by at least 10% over the next five years.

74 Field interviews confirm that individuals rarely hold promises from politicians as credible, even if they come from government ministers.
75 see for example, Vetvendojse’s victory in the 2013 Pristina mayoral race.
**Recommendation VII: limit mayoral mandates to two terms**

The longer patrons stay in power, the more possibilities they have to manage clientelist networks. Limiting the possibility of patrons to remain in office for more than two consecutive mandates can provide ‘windows of opportunity’ to break the clientelist stranglehold. The statutes of political parties should have similar provisions applicable to their internal election of candidates.

**Annex: survey on clientelism**

The survey statements were read out and respondents had to configure their response according to a 5 point ordinal scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A ‘strongly agree’ answer represents a strong affirmation of clientelism and ‘strongly disagree’ represents a strong dismissal of its presence. The survey took place across every region of Kosovo at surveying points in 11 different municipalities. The population we are interested in is all those eligible to engage with the state, that is all adults over 18. To ensure the sample is representative of Kosovo as a whole and the individual municipalities, the sample was stratified according to three strata: gender, geography and ethnicity within each municipality.

Method of interviewing was personal and within households based on a random route technique. The margin of error for the general sample (N1000) is +/-3 at a confidence level of 95%. The sample size was chosen in each municipality as to keep the margin of error below +/- 10.

1. In your opinion, people of X are optimistic about the future (dummy question)
2. In your opinion, people of X take an interest in what happens in the municipality (dummy question)
3. In your opinion, the political leaders in X municipality have generally much more power than citizens.
4. In your opinion, the political leaders in X municipality rarely follow the proper rules and procedures.
5. In your opinion, connections with political leaders generally require that you are able to give something back to them in exchange.
6. In your opinion, people of X vote for candidates during elections because they have been personally promised something (a job, money).
7. In your opinion, it is generally people who have strong connections with the political leaders in the municipality who have their voice heard when decisions are made.
8. In your opinion, it is generally people who have strong connections with the political leaders in the municipality who have a chance of being employed.
9. In your opinion, it is generally people who have strong connections with the political leaders in the municipality who have a chance of having better roads in their neighbourhood.
10. a: In general, people are treated equally by the political leaders of the municipality.
   b) If strongly agree/agree: are people treated more equally by the political leaders now compared to five years ago?
   Yes/no/ stayed the same.
   c) If strongly disagree/disagree: are people treated more unequally now than five years ago?
   Yes/no/ stayed the same.