

When Incumbent Vote Penalty and Weak Party Affiliation Catalyzes Vote-Buying. A quantitative analysis of party affiliation influence in vote-buying.

Case study from Albania

By

Alida Karakushi

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## **Abstract**

*Corruption has important implications for the proper implementation and success of public policies. A vast literature in the social sciences has highlighted important national attributes that propagate corruption within the public sector. Despite these vast literatures, less attention has focused on individual characteristics, outside of more basic cost/benefit analysis, that dictate whether individuals engage in corruption. In this capstone project, I examine how individual characteristics, particularly people's identity and affiliation with mainstream political parties, influences the likelihood that an individual will sell their vote in a national election. I examine this issue with a new database provided by the Eunacal Institute from Albania, where corruption is particularly acute and has severely impacted government effectiveness. This survey contains information on individuals' experience in selling votes in exchange for assurances of public sector employment, factoring their political affiliations and identities, their economic and educational backgrounds. Using logistic regression, I identified that, Socialist affiliated voters, were less likely to sell their vote compared to the Democratic affiliated voters and the Socialist movement for integration affiliated voters. I also found, socialist voters were less likely to sell their vote than the DP ones regardless their party affiliation due to weak party affiliation and the incumbent vote penalty. My findings have the potential to expand upon cost-benefit analysis, which focuses mostly on economic incentives, and highlight important social and political factors that influence one's tolerance toward engaging in corruption in the public sector.*

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## 1. Introduction

Vote buying<sup>1</sup> as practice, besides playing a role in the stagnation of the democratization process, has a direct impact in policy making. It does so as power concentrates in the hands of those able to buy votes, and also removes voters' belief in their right to party accountability. As a result, vote-buying erodes electoral representation, decreases the accountability process, increases the level of social distrust, and creates extractive political institutions where a significant proportion of the voting-aged population are unable to participate in political processes central to policy-making.

Over the last fifteen years, vote-buying has gained increasing attention, as many of the states engaging in the “third wave” of democratization continue to face challenges in building democratic institutions as well as implementing fair and free elections. After the 1990s, many communist states in Eastern Europe shifted toward democracy by implementing shock therapy type of political and economic transition, (many of those countries had hopes of joining the EU, which required accession countries to have stable institutions guaranteeing democracy and democratic values, have functioning free-market economic systems, and the ability to take on and implement effectively the obligations of membership.)<sup>2</sup> Regarding the first requirement, building democratic institutions, free and fair elections, represent a key indicator of democratic progress. In many former communist countries, however, elections have been mired by irregularities and outright election fraud, among which is vote-buying. Few studies have researched vote-buying in

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, vote-buying is defined as the process of transferring public goods, money, services, or promises of public employment from parties in exchange for the vote of a targeted electorate.

<sup>2</sup> For more information [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/conditions-membership/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/conditions-membership/index_en.htm)

post-communist countries of Eastern Europe. New democracies seem to be prone to this phenomenon, a conclusion we can derive from knowing that vote-buying was present also in the earlier histories of now well-consolidated democracies such as those of Germany (Zimblat,2009), United Kingdom (Seymour, 1970) and the United States (Reynolds, 1988). Studies on the current status of vote-buying confirm the presence of this phenomenon in Latin America (Stokes 2005 and 2007, Brusco et al, 2004 and Gonzales et al, 2012), as well as in Africa (Wantchekon, 2003) and Asia (Callahan, 2005 and Molina & Lehoucq, 1999). However, there are gaps in the geography covered thus far, as conditions favoring vote-buying may vary from country to country based on their previous history of governance, culture and geopolitical situation. For example the perspective of EU membership for Eastern European countries can be motivational. Therefore geography is important, but it may also have side effects such as the lack of ideology within a given political class where EU as the EU integration agenda can serve as a substitute of political discourse ideologically framed. Here the party debate strives only towards broad topics such as governance performance and EU integration (Barbullushi, 2013, p 89)<sup>3</sup> making the difference among parties less visible for the electorate and facilitating vote-buying.

Moreover, the unique experience of transitioning from a one-party communist state, where agencies capture among the elite may produce unique conditions (to Eastern Europe) which facilitate vote buying. Additionally, this case is important to understand other countries that have gone or will go through similar transition. My case study of Albania

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on EU integration and party politics in the Balkans see [http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub\\_4716\\_eu\\_integration\\_and\\_party\\_politics\\_in\\_the\\_balkans.pdf](http://www.epc.eu/documents/uploads/pub_4716_eu_integration_and_party_politics_in_the_balkans.pdf)

will provide an account of vote-buying from the experience of a democratizing post-communist country.

Most scholarship explains vote selling from a cost-benefit analysis taking into account individual characteristics of those selling their vote in new democracies (i.e. do the economic benefits exceed the costs of vote selling?). Taking Albania's last general elections as a case study, this paper builds on the current literature by seeking to identify the political individual characteristics (namely party affiliation) of vote selling. The central focus of this paper is to answer the question: What is the connection between fraudulent voting and party affiliation in Albania? I answer this question from the angle of political affiliation, focusing on vote-selling among affiliates of Albania's three largest parties: the Democratic Party (DP), the Socialists (PS), and the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI). While in this survey we discover that the majority of Albanians voted in a strategic way to "punish" the Democratic Party, a significant percentage of people declared that they sold their vote in exchange for jobs in public administration, for money, or for an airline ticket (as in the case with students). Moreover, when the job was not payment because the voter did work already in public administration the threat of losing that job was enough to induce vote-selling. Using logistic regression of a 2013 voting survey from the Eunacal Institute in Tirana I found that for those of Socialist Party (SP) affiliated voters are less likely to sell their vote than the same category of individuals affiliated with DP or SMI. Considering the weak party affiliation and the incumbent vote penalty, socialist voters were less likely to sell their vote than the DP ones

## 2. Literature review

State and individual level determinants of vote-buying, such as socio-economic conditions, political class and the structure of the electoral system, have been studied extensively and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Taking all this information into account, the literature review has been structured in the following sections: Section 2.1 analyzes the degree into which vote-buying is impacted by social structures and social programs, while section 2.2 expands into the electoral systems and the power dynamics of the candidates (incumbent vs. opposition). Section 2.3 focuses on psychological factors: perverse accountability, reciprocity and desirability bias. The secrecy of the ballot and monitored votes are discussed on section 2.4. The collective action problem of vote buying is discussed in section 2.5. Finally, section 2.6 discusses the theory of incumbent vote penalty, *personalism* and weak party affiliation.

### 2.1 Social Structures and Social Programs

One of the ways political parties “buy” the votes of the poor is by counting on these voters’ dependency on small rewards. Such small rewards can involve delaying implementation of social programs until and during the election campaign. In Mexico, the incumbent planned and applied social programs with the overarching objective of sustaining its electoral domination (Diaz-Cayeros et al, 2012). As Diaz-Cayeros et al. argue, these anti-poverty funds reached the poor only close to the election time even though the money was previously set aside (2012). The PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) targeted specific benefits (e.g., cash, food, medicines, construction materials, land



titles, credit, washing machines, fertilizers etc.) to entice its core voters to the voting booths and keep them reliant on the government until the next elections (Diaz-Cayeros et al, 2012). Similarly, Stokes et al (2013) argue that parties very often use the implementation of policies by favoring districts that are loyal toward the party so to secure votes and high turnout. In the case of Albania, often times it is physically apparent that a large part of public funds are invested at the end of the mandate of the party in power to use these funds as tools to buy votes (“Bashkia e Tiranës, 190 mln lekë karburant në fund të mandatit”, 2015).

Electoral fraud is also impacted by social structure. A study conducted by analyzing an original dataset from the German parliament’s record of election disputes of every parliamentary election from 1871 -1912, found that electoral fraud incidence is significantly related to a society’s level of inequality in landholding (Ziblatt, 2009). The main argument from this study claims that elections are introduced into settings framed by the representatives of the elite land-owners, despite the presence of uniform rules of universal male suffrage. These elites captured the support of crucial local institutions using coercive and material tools to convince their local citizens to vote a certain way. Further, the author argues that socioeconomic inequality, by making elections endogenous to antecedent social domination, can be a major and underappreciated obstacle to the long-term course of democratization even after the "choice" of officially democratic rules (Ziblatt, 2009). While there is a lack of data on the distribution of wealth in Albania, as well as a substantial informal economy and tax evasion, many reports indicate high levels of inequality (Davalos and Cancho, 2015), and therefore greater likelihood of vote buying, especially among the poor.

## 2.2 Electoral Systems, Incumbent candidates vs. Opposition candidates

Other studies have analyzed the relationship between electoral systems and corruption in a large sample of contemporary democratic nations. Chang and Golden (2006) argue that unlike open –list<sup>4</sup> proportional representation (PR) systems, closed –list PR systems are linked to higher levels of corruption as candidates are less likely to be accountable and concerned with the reputation from the electorate. Instead political advancement depends upon party loyalty, which in turn increases loyalty to the party's clientelist groups (Argentina, Bolivia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, Mexico, Taiwan, Korea, Morocco, Albania etc).

This theory, however, fails once the district size increases to include certain number of candidates. The authors argue that only at small districts, below fifteen candidates, is closed–list candidacy associated with higher levels of political corruption. In an open-list candidate setting, candidates of the same party are easily identified. When they are fewer in numbers they gain name recognition but as the numbers increases so increases the necessity to find financial support and resources, as decreases the chance of being identified (recognized) by the voters. In the open-lists with very small districts, parties name candidates that enjoy more popular support, and since there is an intraparty competition in the list, these candidates will have to find their funds independently through marketing and solicitation of gifts. Moreover, this makes candidates engage with important lobbyists who will seek a privileged status through government public works if these candidates win their mandate (Chang and Golden, 2006). The findings of Chang and Golden were confirmed also in the study of Nyblade and Reed (2008), who argue that

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<sup>4</sup> In closed systems voters can only choose between parties, not candidates as opposed to open list system in which voter can choose one or more candidates.

intraparty competition does not curb vote buying, but rather increases it (Nyblade and Reed 2008). In Albania there is a uniform practice of closed-lists candidacies PR, where, according to the study above, higher levels of (party loyalty-based) corruption should be more prominent compared to an open-list system.

Wantchekon (2003), who studies vote buying in Benin, showed that clientelism and vote-buying is particularly effective for regional incumbent candidates, whose proximity to voters is quite high. Examining the first round results of the 2001 presidential elections in Benin, Wantchekon (2003) outlines that one reason why local incumbents are so successful at vote-buying is because they have the tools to deliver the promised goods before the election takes place. This finding has been supported by studies done in Mexico (Diaz-Cayeros et al, 2012), and Turkey (Çarkolu and Aytaç, 2014). In the case of Albania, being incumbent is particularly favorable for local elections.<sup>5</sup> Lack of term limits has made incumbent candidates be able to impose themselves into party lists so parties secure victory in those districts, additionally it also exacerbates the potential for vote-buying.

Callahan (2005) analyzes vote buying through the lens of social theory. He takes as example Thailand's turbulent history of the passage from vote buying into building apolitical (non partisan/ technical) institutions that met an initial level of success, but that in turn resulted in another form of corruption where the main party increased its membership through payments and won the elections (Callahan, 2005). Further, the author stresses that many of the social capital successes such as the decrease of vote-buying in Thailand are seen as political problems as they are rooted "in the wrong social

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<sup>5</sup> In Albania there are mayors competing for their 7th mandate in the row in the upcoming local elections of June 21<sup>st</sup> 2015 (Top Channel, 2015).

context”. According to Callahan, what was really needed in Thailand was a high measure of connection to social capital in the shape of the political transformation movement so to equilibrate the impact of excesses of bonding in social capital in certain areas meaning the practice of buying voters to be members for the party (Callahan, 2005). Callahan concluded that an exclusive focus on vote-buying as a legal violation of good governance leads to other political problems (“legalistic delusion, elite technocracy, a neo colonial exploitation of rural areas and a new system of anti politics”) some of which are class based (2005, p 504). In the Albanian case, it is certain that a focus on vote-buying without analyzing the context can be misleading; however, there is also a critical point where if vote-buying is a continuous practice, it creates a social vacuum between parties and the electorate.

### **2.3 Psychological factors: Perverse accountability, Reciprocity and desirability bias.**

Reciprocity plays a crucial value when it comes to those targeted to sell their vote. As argued by Finan and Schechter (2012), vote buying is supported by an internalized norm of reciprocity. Further, in their empirical findings they argue that politicians targeted specific individuals who would vote reciprocally, highlighting the importance of social preferences in shaping political behavior (Finan and Schechter, 2012). Parties give citizens material benefits, and citizens see the need to reward those parties. This stream of literature can also tie into cost-benefit analyses of vote buying, where greater rewards incentivize people to sell their votes.

The magnitude of vote buying practice can be skewed because of the social desirability bias (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al, 2012). A list experiment study done in

Nicaragua found that 24% of registered voters were offered a gift in exchange for their vote, whereas only 2% reported this behavior when asked directly (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al, 2012). As the authors of this study argue, in this case social desirability bias is nonrandom and examinations built on outdated conspicuous measures of vote buying are unreliable (2012). In Albania Voters were sure that the parties could monitor their vote. The pressure on public sector employees for political aims, including voter turnout and decision, has been done almost in each election by both the position and opposition. In fact many of the public administration employees during last elections were intimidated and guided not just to vote the incumbent candidates but also to provide proof of voting such as photographing their ballots.

#### **2.4 Secret ballot vs. illegal monitoring of the vote**

Vote-buying as a practice is seen as an efficient approach to activate electoral support in low income electorates, especially when parties are able to see the way they voted (Stokes et al., 2004). Moreover, as Stokes et al. argue (2004), voters who defect from the implied clientelist arrangement can be punished if parties have the capacity to monitor them.

Why can voters not renege in front of secret ballots (where an individual's ballot for a candidate is concealed) when clientelist parties offer specific benefits to them in exchange for their votes? Parties make use of their networks into a voter's social environment so as to address problems with monitoring of secret ballots. For example in India party operatives control the way one voted by emptying the ballot box frequently, in this way they record the results and can easily guess who voted for whom (Chandra,

2004). Certain party structures can vary in the way votes are monitored. In certain instances a party has its own militant supporters, which in remote areas can be someone's neighbor. In this case they may know about voters because of proximity, and are able to monitor their public statements (2005). Another way to monitor whether somebody voted in the expected way is to monitor whether they used the party's bus to access the voting center or participated in a rally (Brusco et al, 2004). In this way parties menacingly punish voters if they did not vote for them, and create, what Stokes calls *perverse accountability* (2005). In her empirical findings Stokes brought evidence that the more precise party machines are able to monitor the way individuals vote the more likely they are to be efficient in their practice of vote buying. They do this either via a tentacle-like party structure or through voting technologies that reduce the anonymity of the vote. (2005). In the Argentinean case Stokes found that parties do not target their most loyal voters; they center their rewards on voters in the middle of the distribution of partisanship (2005). In addition Stokes found that even when parties are not able to monitor the votes of the targeted individuals, one reason that might push them to engage in this phenomenon is voter turnout, where weak opponents get paid so not to vote<sup>6</sup>.

Similarly, Nichter found a connection between vote buying and turnout buying (2008). Parties may pay voters to refrain from voting if they cannot monitor the way voted. They do this with the intention to deactivate potentially non-supportive constituencies (Nichter, 2008). As Nichter argues, what is seen as vote buying can actually refer to turnout buying (2008). Conversely, the secret ballot may also influence negative vote buying as voters can be paid not to vote. Even though negative vote buying is possible under the open ballot, it is not the most efficient one when compared with a

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<sup>6</sup> This strategy is often called "negative vote buying" in the literature.

combination of positive and negative vote buying under the secret ballot (Morgan and Várdy, 2012). Parties can pay those voters who they suspect will vote against them, as well as paying voters whom the party is more certain would vote in their favor so the latter will show up at the polls. In this way, as the authors argue, the obligation of the secret ballot may augment the quantity of vote buying. In addition, Morgan and Várdy (2012) find that the secret ballot can decrease the costs of buying votes. Media reports have shown that many people were paid not to vote during 2013 elections in Albania (“Two DP directors identified in Durres giving money in exchange of the ID card so people do not vote”, 2013)

## **2.5 When vote buying goes wrong**

Vote-buying can create a collective action problem when all parties are buying votes, which can have inverse impacts in the final results (Molina & Lehoucq, 1999). As Molina & Lehoucq (1999) outlined in their study, while the unilateral use of vote-buying can help one party achieve better results (win the election), if all parties engage in such process it can create a deadlock and even disadvantage specific parties. They conclude that even if there is a victory, the high level of the perception of vote buying can deny their legitimacy (Molina & Lehoucq, 1999). This theory can be true if all parties had the same resources, however this is rarely the case. In Albania there are 116 registered parties. Out of these parties only the main parties have the means to compete in elections: the Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, and the Socialist Movement of Integration Party.

Parties in power have more access to resources that can be used as rewards compared to parties in opposition (Çarkolu and Aytaç, 2014). As Çarkolu and Aytaç, (2014) argue, parties target their strong partisans and socio-economically vulnerable voters. They focus on the 2011 parliamentary elections in Turkey. Those that were more likely to be targets of vote buying were the loyal partisans of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi), less educated citizens and citizens from urban areas (Çarkolu and Aytaç, 2014). Moreover, they found that the targeted population for vote-buying was one-third of the total electorate (Çarkolu and Aytaç, 2014).

Thus while vote-buying seems to target the most economically vulnerable individuals, the information on what kind of voters are targeted in relation to their political affiliation varies across the literature of vote-buying. Some parties target swing voters, others target their most loyal members that in turn will act as middlemen to engage in vote-buying. In conclusion, the variation can be due to factors such as the level of inequality, the presence of perverse accountability, the lack of secrecy in the voting ballot, the size of the communities, as well as the type of the electoral system.

## **2.6 Incumbent Vote Penalty, *Personalism* and Weak party identification**

Theory of anti incumbency factor argues that individuals can vote the challenger particularly when the incumbent has not performed well during its mandate. It can also occur when incumbents have been in power during successive mandates despite their performance only because the voter is convinced that change is needed and thus votes the challenger. Countries in transition have shown that vote against the incumbent can happen for a variation of reasons such as: the incapacity to provide good governance that



would lead to better public services, high unemployment (Uppal, 2009), discontent regarding incumbents' governance among Latin American and Caribbean countries (Molina, 2001), particularly during the 1980s where anti-incumbent voting and voters' volatility was highly correlated with economic policies and party system fragmentation (Remmer, 1991), or the declining role of the dominant role of the parties because of widespread corruption (Trease, 2005). This declining role of the dominant parties can be also as a consequence of *personalism* in politics argued Trease (2005). Personalism in politics refers to the growing role of authority from the leaders within a party system. In Central- Eastern Europe this phenomenon is observed as well particularly during the electoral campaigns. The link between the electorate and the party are mainly based by the links that leaders make with the electorate instead of ideology or programs.

Personalism in politics is particularly studied in Latin America. Otherwise named *Caudillos* they are strategic and apparent thinkers that make use of ideologies of their times (McMamara, 2014). Partitocracy as term has also been used to define Italian political system. In this system parties are the ones controlling the state institutions through their militants. Consequently party interests are over institutions interests. As Caliso (2000) argues, after the 90s the Italian party system got transformed among "*partito personale*" indicating a level of individualism that has constantly increased. In this system individuals' interests overarch party interests as well.

In Albanian politics the level of partitocracy has transitioned to a form of *personalistic system*,<sup>7</sup> this in turn has resulted in crisis of representation. As such it has weakened the

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<sup>7</sup> Definition of partitocracy in Mauro Calises' Partito Personale (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000), If interested you may read more about it online: [www.maurocalise.it](http://www.maurocalise.it)

party affiliation link among the voters making them less resistant in front offers to sell their vote.

The weak party identification on the other hand, has shown to influence vote-selling particularly in the setting of a hybrid democracy. Corstange (2010) in his second hypothesis brought evidence that if voter's reservation price increases vote selling decreases, as such elastic voters are more likely to sell their vote than the inelastic ones. Hence, those whose political affiliation is weak or simply are disinterested in politics become cheaper to be bought, consequently more targeted by the parties to sell their vote (Corstange, 2010).

### **3. Vote-buying in the 2013 Albanian election: Historical context and theoretical predictions on the determinants of vote selling.**

Current literature on vote buying has covered a wide range of countries; however, there is a comparative lack of analysis of vote buying in post-communist Eastern Europe, despite widespread public evidence brought by the media that such practices exists ("Macedonia: Buying votes through employment in public sector," 2015; "Buying votes in Kosovo", 2013). Many Eastern European countries embraced shock therapy to the adoption of democratic institutions, following a liberalist approach; the success of democratic reforms and EU integration varied from country to country and depended on the degree of liberalization they inherited (Goldstein, 1997). The importance of these studies is crucial as countries advance in their democratization process, as by bringing evidence on those targeted to sell their vote, we can draw recommendations and propose

policies to improve political accountability. In this section, I provide a brief summary of the three main political parties in Albania, vote-buying practices before the June 2013 general election and a brief historical account of why vote-buying is a widely used practice among Albania's three mainstream political parties. I conclude with theoretical predictions of how party affiliations in Albania influences vote-buying.

### 3.1 Overview of Albanian corruption, electoral processes and democracy score from 2005-2014

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores										
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Electoral Process	3.75	3.50	4.00	4.00	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.00
Civil Society	3.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Independent Media	4.00	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
National Democratic Governance	4.25	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.50	4.75	4.75	5.00	4.75
Local Democratic Governance	3.25	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	3.00	3.25	3.25	3.50	3.50
Judicial Framework and Independence	4.50	4.25	4.00	4.00	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.75	4.75	4.75
Corruption	5.25	5.25	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.25	5.25
Democracy Score	4.04	3.79	3.82	3.82	3.82	3.93	4.04	4.14	4.25	4.18

Fig.1. Freedom House report on Albania 2014

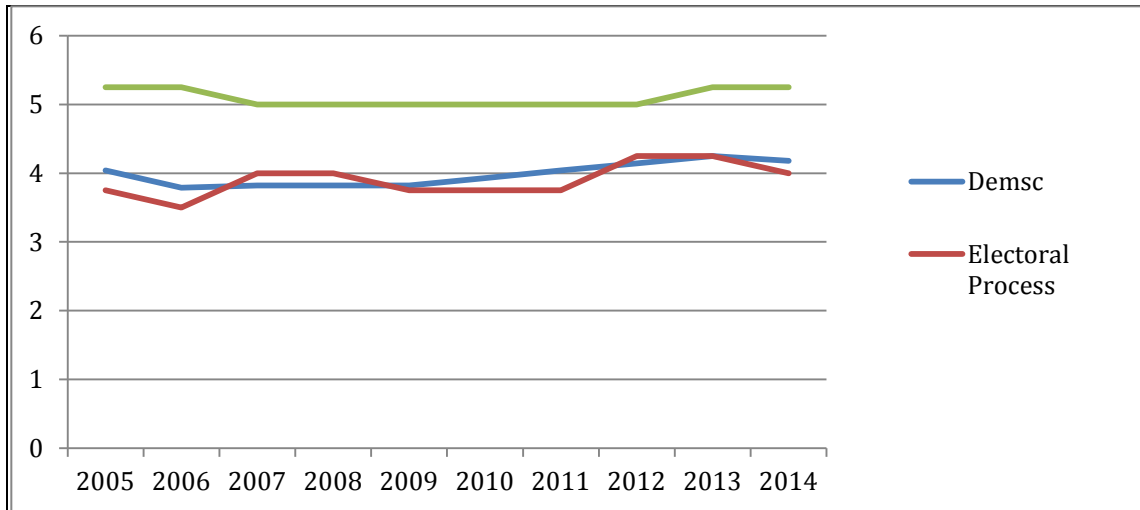


Fig.2. Freedom House scores on Albania's democracy, electoral processes and corruption set in this graph.<sup>8</sup>

Albanian transition so far has shown to be very difficult. One of the main problems that has accompanied the post communist period is the rampant corruption that has touched all government branches. From 2005 to 2014 Albania's democracy score according to Freedom House has met a visible decline. Same is valid in regards to the electoral processes and corruption. Albania's democratization and the EU integration process keeps being impeded by the high level of corruption (Freedom House 2014). Lack of political will is seen as responsible for not having results despite efforts to identify cases of corruption in 2013. The corruption rating for Albania shows a slight improvement in 2007, following a long period of stagnation and worsens again after 2011 (Freedom House, 2013). Globally, Albania met a downgrade in its fight on corruption ranking 116<sup>th</sup> with a score of 31 (Transparency International, 2013).

### 3.1.1 Corruption

<sup>8</sup> For Freedom House unlike Transparency International, higher values denote worse results.

In 2005 Freedom house report on corruption would identify as most problematic the lack of law implementation while affirming that the legislative framework to combat corruption was there. Furthermore corruption perception during 2004 was catalyzed by many scandals of state institutions. In the global level for corruption Albania is ranked as 126<sup>th</sup> country out of 175 (Transparency International, 2006) with a score of 2.4.

Freedom house report of 2006 highlights two achievements in Albania. First had to do with the DP led coalition that won the elections on the anti corruption campaign and secondly the adoption of the Law on the Prevention of Conflicts of Interests as a mean to combat corruption. However, the corruption rating did not change, it remained at 5.25 score as an increasing number of cases of corruption from public administration occurred during the prolonged election period and lack of anti corruption results from the new administration. Albania's ranking in the global level as for corruption is 111/ 175 countries (Transparency International, 2006) with a score of 2.6.

In 2006 corruption perception index met a slight amelioration from 5.25 to 5 (Freedom House, 2007). This was due mainly to some important achievements regarding the arrests of some high profile organized crime gang leaders as well as a perception that the immunity era of corrupt officials was over. In the same line with Freedom House, Transparency International (2007) ranks Albania 105/175 countries with a score of 2.9.

During the local election of 2007 the anticorruption campaign remained the leitmotif of the incumbent central government (Freedom House, 2008). Nevertheless the 2007 European Commission's Progress Report on Albania still considered corruption to be pervasive in Albania. Corruption perception index remained at 5.00 (Freedom House,

2008). In the global level Albania is ranked 85<sup>th</sup>, with a score of 3.4 from Transparency International (2008).

Freedom House report of 2009, highlighted as dramatic failure government's anti-corruption policy addressing the way it managed corruption within its own ranks. Pressure on the judicial system (prosecutor and judges) increased. Favoritism and use of tools such as postponement of the processes were due to the hesitation of the judges regarding key corruption cases linking top politicians. Corruption index remained unchanged for the third year in the row: 5.00. Transparency International (2009) on the other hand, ranked Albania as 95<sup>th</sup> with a score of 3.2 marking a downgrade in its fight on corruption.

During 2009, Prime Minister Berisha kept refusing to discharge key allies facing indictments by the Prosecutor General Ina Rama (Freedom House, 2010). Moreover, one deputy transport minister that was sentenced for corruption related crimes in 2008 was acquitted on appeal in 2009. Corruption score remained unchanged at 5.00. Globally Albania ranked 87<sup>th</sup> marking a slight improvement in its corruption fight (Transparency International, 2010). Even though officially Albanian officials sought to complete the anti-corruption legislative framework during 2010, corruption remained widespread in all public service sectors in Albania (Freedom House, 2011). Information based on surveys demonstrated that Albanian citizens are faced with bribery three times more often than the citizens in their neighboring countries. Freedom House (2011) stressed that lack of political will and insufficient institutional capacities showed to be weak to combat corruption, despite Albania's High Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets (HIDAA) exposing conflicts of interest cases and enforced asset declaration. Corruption

score remained 5.00. Transparency's International report (2011) downgrades Albania ranking it as 95th globally with a score of 3.1.

Despite EU integration requirements where anticorruption policies for Albania are a crucial element, Freedom House (2012) reported that there are no results as there is no political will to do so. This statement is based on the fact that the Supreme Court declared non guilty the former deputy prime minister Ilir Meta on corruption charges. The Supreme Court based this decision on insufficient evidence. Moreover, in this report it is stressed that this case, whose video material had been verified as authentic by FBI with a request of the Albanian prosecutor Ina Rama put an end to a notorious case that had catalyzed violent opposition protests in 2011 (Freedom House, 2012) where four protesters were killed. It is for this case and other corruption scandals that Freedom house considers Albanian's corruption rating to get worse from 5.00 to 5.25. In the global level Albania is downgraded in its corruption fight with a score of 33, ranked 113<sup>th</sup> (Transparency International, 2012).

### 3.1.2 Electoral processes

Even though electoral code was going through amendments in 2004, so to correct for loopholes there is a lack of political that remains an obstacle (Freedom House, 2005). The continuous disagreements between the main parties over the Central Elections Committee became an obstacle for the advancement of the electoral reform. Because of this Freedom House rated electoral process score as it was in the previous year 3.75.

The 2005 parliamentary elections, even though demonstrated that Albania has still a lot of work to do in order to insure free and fair elections, still were seen as positive as the cooperation between the political parties made improvements in the electoral code and brought a peaceful rotation of power. It is for this reason that electoral process scores better, from 3.75 to 3.50. However, as Freedom House (2006) reported, the main political parties distorted the proportionality principle by calling their voters to vote for their parties in coalition.

During 2006, initially, all parties agreed in presidential round table so to work on the electoral reform, however, lack of negotiations on the appointment memberships in the Parliamentary committee on the Electoral Reform, voter's list, role of prefects and date of elections seriously "jeopardized" Albania's chances to hold free and fair elections meeting constitutional time deadlines (Freedom House, 2007). This situation, as reported by Freedom House (2007) led many opposition parties to declare their intentions of boycotting the elections in case electoral reform did not succeed. Because of this situation Freedom house downgraded Albania's score on electoral processes from 3.50 to 4.00.

Politically, the 2010 year was marked from the parliamentary results of 2009 where the opposition kept requiring a parliamentary committee so to investigate the 2009 electoral process, but the DP led government argued that all legal steps were taken already and there was none left (Freedom House, 2010). Consequently the focus on previous elections postponed the electoral reform required by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) even though it had to be done at least 6 month before the 2011 local elections (Freedom House, 2010). Because of this situation Albania's electoral rating drops from 3.75 to 4.00.



In 2011 Albania had to conduct local administrative elections. These elections were accompanied by an electoral campaign dominated by violent incidents and abuse of public administration employees who were obliged to participate in campaign. The elections were contested by the SP which in turn led the election dispute to go through a legal battle (Freedom House, 2012). As the judicial system which was particularly controlled by the ruling party showed the absence of political will to be able to organize free and fair elections. Consequently Freedom House (2012) downgraded Albania's electoral process from 4.00 to 4.25

Albania's electoral code was amended only with the consensus of the two main parties (DP and SP) not taking into account the small parties. Some technical flaws were encountered even though the international committee had urged Albania to do further reforms. Many deadlines were not met as for pre election preparation (Freedom House, 2013). The electoral process rating for Albania remains at 4.25.

Albania's June 2013 elections were considered as fulfilling the international standards according to Freedom House (2014). As the results of this election met no contestation from the parties due also to the results where SP coalition largely won and rotation took place peacefully. During this year Albania's electoral process goes from 4.25 to 4.00.

### **3.2 Albanian political parties**

In Albania currently there are two main parties: the Democratic Party – DP – and the Socialists – SP; and a smaller but consequential third party -- the Socialist Movement of Integration -SMI which has placed itself very strategically and *sine qua non* in coalition

building. DP was founded in 1990 with leader Sali Berisha. There was no rotation of leadership in the DP until 2013, thus for 23 years Berisha's leadership was characterized by an authoritarian style (Pridham and Gallagher, 2012. p 240) not only within the party but also when he was President (1992-1996) and later prime minister (2007-2013). His party encountered its initial cleavages in 1992 where several high-ranking members of DP formed a breakaway party the Democratic Alliance (DA). These cleavages came as result of Berisha's authoritarian leadership style. The lack of rotation in leadership combined with the antagonistic style with which Berisha led his party led to Berisha losing support from critical voices within the DP until there were very left none to openly criticize.

Despite initial success in some areas such as the fighting to combat human trafficking, policies for which Berisha and his government was applauded by the European Union, his governance of total *laissez faire* economic policies increased corrupt practices. Berisha often ran on "clean hands" and "anti-corruption" platforms (Freedom House, 2006) to weaken his political adversaries in the Socialist Party, who were also highly corrupt. Lack of democracy within this party led to the lack of a clear ideological platform and along with it, the lack of a traditional constituency. The need to control the judicial system, the presidency and the prime ministership, which he was already controlling, led to more political battles. He and his party have been accused of manipulating the results of elections in 2009 (Rama, 2009) and 2011 (Likmeta, 2011). While he resigned in 2013, after losing to the PS and SMI coalition, his resignation for many analysts is seen as *de jure* but not *de facto* (Marku, 2013). He appointed as successor his most loyal figure *and protégé* Lulzim Basha. Accusations that the elections

for leadership of the PD were not fair were made by several DP members (Xhepa, 2013: Olldashi, 2013).

Unlike DP, the socialists (SP) inherited their party infrastructure from the former communist regime. Its leader and founder Fatos Nano, was previously a government minister under the communist regime. His leadership has also been described as autocratic. Consequently, SP also has witnessed fractions within its party. One of the most important figures of SP, and a key adversary of Nano, was Ilir Meta. In order to break with Nano, Meta eventually created his own party (SMI).

Nano was appointed PM in the 1997 elections because the socialists won the most seats. However, after these elections, Nano was forced to resign due in most part to the threat and instigation of political violence by the DP. Nano's first resignation happened after the 1997 election, following the attempt of *coup d'état* from the DP. After the SP won the 2002 elections, he resigned again following Berisha's protests and alleged accusations of corruption (Freedom House, 1999). As SP lost the elections in 2005, he resigned as the head of the party and withdrew from political life. His position as party leader was succeeded by Edi Rama who was then the Mayor of Tirana (Bugajski & Balaj, 2010, p 48), the capital and most important city in Albania as far as elections and economic power. His leadership was also considered authoritarian. Rama is alleged to have clientelist connections particularly with construction firms. As a leader of SP, Rama has shown to be very determined to oust the DP from power. He organized protests, boycotts and finally made "peace" with SMI in 2013 with the clear goal of overthrowing Berisha from power.

Albania's third mainstream party, the Socialist Movement of Integration (SMI), was founded in 2004 by Ilir Meta. Initially he was seen as more moderate than other political leaders. In 2008, in the face of the new electoral reform done with the approval of the two larger parties, Meta accused them both of an outright attempt at creating a code that would benefit only the main parties. The small parties were excluded from the negotiations regarding the above said electoral reform. Despite this, after the 2009 elections, Meta's SMI entered a coalition with DP, who granted important ministries to the SMI party. This move decreased the level of Meta's popular support, because before this coalition the political debate stemming from SMI was highly antagonistic toward both Berisha and Rama. Like DP and SP, SMI's party leadership has been accused of systemic corruption (Gjipali, 2014). Because of these accusations from within the party, SMI had the first fraction from former SMI Minister Dritan Prifti, who accused Meta for open and serious corruption, showing evidence through secret taping of meetings where monetary bribes were allegedly discussed with private individuals. Despite investigations, where the US Embassy through FBI also aided to validate the authenticity of the video, Meta was never convicted. However, the main perception remains that this party is highly clientelistic and corrupt.

Albania's political parties share common features, of the lack of democracy within their parties and widespread engagement in clientelism. They lack clear ideological and policy platforms that could connect them with a loyal electorate. Their leaders stay in power even when they lose the elections (i.e. Berisha was the leader of DP for 22 years despite bad governance, leading the country towards collapse in 1997, and a great number of alleged corruption scandals). Political parties lack of accountability and

rotation. Berisha was re-elected as leader of his party with 90% support, as was Rama and Meta. Albanian parties lack clear and different political platforms. This failure has led to election campaigns that are conducted through by candidates using antagonistic rhetoric toward each other; attacking each other's character, individuality and family. This leads to candidates not being representative and consequently not connecting with the electorate. All the above factors facilitate vote-buying as political affiliation is based on very thin ties.

### **3.3 Political platforms and electoral campaign of 2013 general elections**

Although electoral campaign was set to start the 24th of May, all parties broke the law by starting at least two weeks earlier (NDI, 2013, ELIAMEP, 2013). The leaders of SP and DP campaigned from North to South to pass their political agendas, introduce their candidates and meet the communities. Marketing tools included banners with slogans, television spots, town hall meetings as well as concerts. The media coverage of these meetings was not done by professional journalists; instead parties delivered recorded meetings as reported by their staff to the media channels (Coalition of Local Observers Report, 2013) as on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, CEC (Central Election Commission) passed a blurred decision with instructions to the Media Monitoring Board (MMB). As NDI (2013) reports, this decision while not looking to oblige TV channels so to use party –provided campaign materials instead of their own, it allows to interpret that media channels can refuse only air party materials that do not meet technical requirements. The enforcement of this decision would be done from MMB which in turn would fine those channels that decline to air the provided materials from the parties. This decision met a protest from the journalists' union (Agolli, 2013). Moreover, there were media debates between

candidates, however no debate took place between the leaders of the parties. Political discourse between leaders was done by distance instead. The SP leader accused the DP leader of being corrupt and that the real function of its mandate was to enrich his family through corrupt affairs. Additionally the SP leader making also allusion of his age, would call the incumbent leader of DP “ grandfather “ whose mission is to tell fairy tales (“Rama: Berisha Rama: Berisha “Katragjyshi me antiplumb që tregon përralla”, 2013)

### 3.3.1 Socialist Party platform

Socialist Party differently from 2009 elections where some of its party members accused SP of presenting no program, in 2013 they presented and published online their platform where the keyword and the main slogan was “renaissance”. This program had four pillars: Regeneration of the society, Revival of the economy, Restoration of Democracy and Reunification with Europe (SP, 2013).

The regeneration of the society pillar included reforms of cultural and creative nature, environment, sports, education reform, promotion of equal opportunities and reform in public services adapted by the needs of the society. More in details reforms related to culture, environment and sports had to do with a regeneration of sports, better governance and innovation. Reforms related to education and science included digitalization, regeneration for scientific research, higher standards in education and restructured professional education. Reforms related to equal opportunities promised financial rewards for the politically persecuted individuals, respect for the veterans, progress of the youth and gender equality.

Economic revival pillar included: rural renaissance, productive economy, and well-being through work. Rural renaissance included the modern development of the rural areas, livestock and agriculture. Productive economy would be based on the solution of land property, European infrastructure, energy independency, better administration of the natural resources, regional integration development and whole year tourism development. Welfare through work contained sections such as debt management, support for entrepreneurs, fair taxation and real employment.

Restoration of Democracy in Albania had to do with the regeneration of civil society, dismantlement of corruption and the culture of impunity as well as installation of the rule of law. Regarding civil society SP aimed free press as an obligation towards the public, the inclusion of civil society as collaborative in democracy building. Some of the steps to combat corruption included the compilation of an anti corruption strategy in the judicial system within the first 100 days as SP would take power, setting fair competition as a foundation in the good governance, development and implementation of e-governance and e-justice as platforms for better service to the citizens etc. Rule of law and security would be achieved through several steps that had to do with fair service from the judicial system for the businesses, reform in the institution of the prosecutor, and reform in the judicial system.<sup>9</sup>

Reunification with Europe included more dedication towards the Albanians that work and study abroad, reformed diplomatic services, strategic partnership with Kosovo, become an inspiration model of governance in the region, more efficient accomplishment

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on SP's party platform you may check their program in their official page [www.ps.al](http://www.ps.al)

of EU integration required processes. SP promised to achieve the EU candidate status and open negotiations of accession within the first year of its mandate.

### 3.3.2 Democratic Party Platform<sup>10</sup>

Prime Minister Berisha opened his campaign inaugurating the reconstruction of nine km road near Durres. DP's slogan was "We are the Change, Forward". There was not party program published online. The content of DP's plans was mainly based on DP's achievements as incumbent expressed in the public meetings. DP carried on the anti-communistic discourse alleging the SP and accusing Rama (SP leader) as corrupt particularly during his period as mayor of Tirana. Berisha claimed that during DP's mandate Albania has progressed remarkably, noting that some of the most historic achievements towards democratization and prosperity. Albanians would have to vote him again (for a 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive mandate) so to move forward and carry out the promises he made in 2005. The NATO accession, the liberalization of visas in the EU, major infrastructure projects such as Tirana- Elbasan tunnel were some of the claims DP made during the campaigns. Berisha would praise the 10% flat tax (law on taxation passed during his last mandate) as a tool that would catalyze foreign direct investment and open 250,000 jobs. Among promises counts the abolition of visas with the USA ("Berisha: Do heqim vizat me SHBA", 2013).

### 3.3.3 SMI Party platform

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<sup>10</sup> DP had not compiled a party program for the 2013 elections. Information regarding their program is based on public declarations only.



Under the slogan “Let us advance faster”, SMI’s opening of the program states that the political program of SMI for the European Albania, aims a constant reformation of governance, higher standards of living, constant and sustainable and competitive economic growth as well as the strengthening of the rule of law and stronger institutions that make the implementation of the rule of law possible. Moreover, SMI promises to undertake reforms that support the poor for a better future and support for the Albanian youth’s aspiration in the EU integration process. The program published in their website had three pillars: 1) Progress, 2) Economic Development, 3) Securing the future, 4) Employment.

In the first pillar SMI wants to strength the institutions so to make possible the implementation of reforms and rule of law. Several keywords in this section are related to the European Albania, and the European Albanian citizen. Moreover SMI promises to support Albanian emigrants in their right to vote, efficient public administration and EU standards in governance.

In the development section, SMI aims a sustainable economic development, highlighting the comparative advantage as strategy where Albania would focus its development in what makes her more comparatively advantageous. Keywords such as green Albania, partnership with the private sector and employment mark the rest of this section.

In the “guarantee of the future” section, SMI envisages synchronization between the economic and social values highlighting social cohesion where the investment in the youth is seen as the engine to advance Albania towards the EU integration. Main goals

here include more investment in social capital, opening of professional schools and a better system of education.

In the employment section, SMI has listed five points: Promise to open 50 000 jobs in the agricultural sector catalyzing self employment of 35.000 new farmers and employing 15.000 people in the food industry related sector. This would be achieved quadrupling the government budget for agriculture that was 0.5% of GDP to 2%. SMI also promised to create 50.000 jobs in the infrastructure industry through the implementation of public sector plans such as the construction of roads, schools hospitals as well as through the empowerment of the small and medium businesses. In the energy sector SMI promised to open 40, 000 jobs. This would be through the Public- Private partnership combined with the foreign investments in projects of a regional importance in the energy sector (and renewal energies). In the service sector SMI envisages to employ 35,000 people. Here, 15.000 would be employed in the tourism industry ad 20,000 would be employed in the financial services sector (Insurance companies, Banks, Transport services and Telecommunication).<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3.4 EU and political slogans of 2013 elections

EU was the main keyword in the electoral campaign discourse throughout the post-communist period; this was no exception for the 2013 elections. While DP accused SP for the blockage of three laws that consequently became an obstacle to obtain the EU

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<sup>11</sup> For more details on SMI's political platform see <http://www.lsi.al/>

candidate status (“Berisha: Rama bllokoi statusin”,2013) , SP on the other hand would accuse DP’s bad governance plagued by corruption as the main reason for the refusal of EU candidate status for the third year in the row (“Integrimi, Rama: Qeveria e korruptuar la Shqipërinë pa status”, 2012).

All parties in their political platforms, whether provided as such through their official websites (SP) or through public declarations (DP), had as core message the EU integration. As such, there were not any main differences among parties, but promises on how one party would be more efficient in attaining the demanded criteria from EU institutions, or accusations how the incumbent party’s performance had been inefficient in this regard. Furthermore, these programs were not backed ideologically when it comes to the described economic reforms (SP) or promises (DP), making the lack of difference factor in front of the electorate even more evident.

### **3.4. The underlying context of fraudulent voting in Albania’s 2013 general elections**

When SMI joined DP in the aftermath of the 2009 election, the SP was not the only one to protest. This coalition was seen as deceiving in the eyes of public opinion. SMI had campaigned against both parties and more specifically against both of its leaders. Moreover, SMI contends to be a party of the leftist political spectrum. As such, many of those who would have seen some hopes that SMI presented a third option were deceived. SMI was a part of the governing coalition during the previous government with the DP, but dissolved the arrangement only a few months before June 2013 general election in order to build a new coalition with the SP. The June 2013 general elections

brought rotation, where the coalition between SMI and SP finally replaced the coalition between SMI and DP, which was in place during the previous two electoral cycles. We may then say that the rotation was partial, as SMI was already part of the previous government.

The fact that the SMI party quadrupled its number of seats in parliament despite severe and serious allegations of corruption and its unpopular decision to form a coalition with DP after the 2009 elections (“Albanian deputy PM quits following videotaped bribe scandal”, 2011), caused suspicion of fraudulent voting on a significant scale among the Albanian public (Karaj, 2015). The different forms of payments were used in exchange of votes during the last Albanian general election included money, airplane tickets, and food payments. Sometimes fraudulent voting was accomplished by putting pressure on public sector employees such as teachers, municipality staff, police and health officials, to vote for a particular party. In many cases, the consequence of failing to vote for the party could result in the voter’s forced resignation from public employment.

Alternatively, most people working in the public administration were simply asked to take a photo of their ballot to prove that they voted for the DP. One particular case that made the news was the publication of the photographed vote in the social media from the Minister of Interior Affairs (“Flamur Noka fotografon dhe deklaroi voten ne Facebook”, 2013). The most common reward in exchange for a vote, particularly from the SMI, was the promise of placement in public administration offices, promises of new jobs from parties in opposition, or maintaining employment status by parties in power (Balkaninsight, 2013). The results were not contested officially, as the practice of the parties exercising vote-buying is a common practice. Furthermore, the lack of

independent media also ensures that such practices do not become highlighted. Many critics see media in Albania as clear extension of party and business interests, this promotion of fraudulent voting did not receive adequate attention (Likmeta, 2015).

Media reports from last elections in Albania show that for the main parties, party finances used to buy votes were around 100 million Euros. 25% of this sum came from outside the country (“Deputy Minister of Berisha: The foreign powers overturned us. They paid 25 million Euros for the electoral campaign”, 2013) and were provided by powerful businesses linked with politicians. Seven and a half million Euros were provided by the state (Krasniqi, 2013), while the remaining funds were provided by the private business sector. ZaLart agency reported that efforts to buy votes from the most marginalized communities such as Roma were prominent in the last elections (Balkan Insight, 2013). Cases of pressure on the electorate employed by party members and party militants were frequent during campaigns and even on election day. The most violent example of this coercive pressure was an episode when one SMI member was shot in front of a voting center (Semini, 2013). Additional reports showed that in traditionally conservative areas, SMI bribed voters through monetary incentives.

For the first time in Albania’s history, in part because the practices of vote – buying were so pervasive during the electoral campaign, there was a public debate on fraudulent voting that took place in the online media and to a certain extent the print media. This debate was tied to *Vota e Bardhe Movement (Vote Blanc Movement)*, which was a movement that called on the electorate to challenge to the political system by casting a protest vote and nullify their ballots (Rama, Karakushi, Karanxha, Mertiri, Erebara, 2013). The voter would choose none of the candidates. In some cases they

would write messages or simply cross all names of candidates to show their dissatisfaction with the politics and the political class. Even though this movement was mostly ignored by the mainstream media, an increasing number of Albanian citizens dissatisfied with the current political class organized in a visible way and presented a threat to the politicians. Some politicians for the first time were concerned about their hold on the electorate (Rroji, 2013).

Some scholars have argued that the history of bad governance in Albania by the two main parties since the transition to a democratic system (1991), and the clear lack of ideological distinction between them, has contributed to the public's perception that there is no significant difference between the parties (Kalemaj, 2015). Additionally, the frequency of politicians betraying their party and joining others to use their pivotal power to pass certain policies has also increased the level of distrust toward politicians among voters (ESS, 2014). Given the non-ideological nature of Albanian politics which in turn is facilitated by the common political goals of EU membership and persistent party-switching among politicians, we may conclude that vote-buying finds more advantageous ground in Albania because people lack ideological ties to a political party – in other words, the ideological “cost” of selling a vote, is low compared to the monetary benefit that comes with it. This lack of ideological connection and cost between segments of the public and mainstream political parties is reflective of Albania's political history and its democratic transition. The next section briefly outlines this political history and explains what economic and political conditions make Albania particularly prone to the practice of vote-buying and selling.

### **3.5 The history of political parties and vote-buying in Albania**

As the Eastern bloc of Europe was finally leaning toward the West in the 80s, Albania was among the last countries in Europe to abandon communism. Albania's communist regime was able to put down every movement or dissident that would challenge the party line and solidify its dictatorship. Consequently, Albania, in the aftermath of its break from communism had little experience with democracy compared to other Eastern communist countries that had some degree of freedom and democracy either prior to, or during the years of communism. As Albania adopted pluralistic party system and was transitioning to democracy, several parties, including the SP & DP, were established. Most of the leaders of the new parties were former communists that had high positions in the bureaucracy of the communist regime, sometimes as high as former ministers. The DP had a different genesis but not in terms of the ultimate leadership. Its creation came through the protests of Albanian students demanding regime change. Many of those supporting its creation were dissidents or former political prisoners. Many authors argue that the PD was an anti-communist party, with no clear class or interests-based ideology outside of its anti-communist platform (Tarifa, 1995).

During the transition to democracy in the 1990s and 2000s a number of factors made Albania's political system prone to widespread, systemic corruption and with it widespread vote-buying. Economically, Albania is a very poor country, due not only to flawed (neo-liberal) economic transition policies, but also due to the rise and collapse of several major pyramid (Ponzi) schemes in the country (Benzemer, 1999), in which investment was promoted by the DP and then President Sali Berisha in the early and mid-1990s (Abrahams, 2015. p 174-175). With the collapse of these schemes in 1997, some

reports claim that as much as 50% of Albania's total GDP was invested in them (Jarvis, 2000), incomes and savings were wiped-out, prompting a quasi-civil war and mass migration out of the country. Such significant declines in income made Albanian voters more susceptible to vote-selling, in order to supplement their incomes.

Politically, very few institutions exist in Albania to hold governments and political parties accountable for corrupt practices. Internally, the press in Albania shares close relations with mainstream political parties – consequently, they have failed to scrutinize politicians and party members in the public sphere. Externally, though Albania is a candidate country for the European Union (EU), which requires accession states to adopt transparent democratic institutions and fair electoral systems in order to receive membership, the effects of EU conditionality on mitigating corruption and vote-buying have been minimal on invoking change among the mainstream political parties. Each election aftermath the EU echoed the lack of free and democratic elections as problematic but little was done by Albanian governments to address this issue (EU Commission report on Albania, 2014).

Albania also has a history of personal rather than policy-driven electoral campaigns, which effectively removes the politics of policy making from the public arena, and hence decreases the ideological costs of vote selling. In the 2009 elections, for example, rather than being a public debate on different policy platforms among Albania's three largest parties, the electoral campaign was based on mutual accusatory and defamatory campaigns. The SP's campaign focused mostly on defamatory messages against SMI leader Ilir Meta and DP leader Sali Berisha, rather than criticisms of these



parties as and their programs, policies and past governance. The bulk of the PD's campaign was based on defaming the leader of SP party, but was not outspoken as to express any negative advertising against the SMI party and its leader. SMI on the other hand pursued a negative campaign against both parties and their leaders. In light of significant defamatory campaigning, in the aftermath of the 2013 elections, Albanians witnessed in disbelief a new post electoral coalition between Ilir Meta of SMI and Edi Rama of SP. This was shocking as the video-scandal showing SMI leader in voice and figure engaged in corruption affairs (Likmeta, 2011), led the SP denounce corruption and call for protests against the corrupt government (Likmeta, 2011). In the protests that followed against SMI-DP governance, four people were killed (Koleka, 2011). The killing of four protesters made SP leader sharpen even more the rhetoric against DP-SMI coalition governance.

We may argue that this led to a mutual dissatisfaction from SMI's electorate and DP's supporters. However, this new political alliance led to a wave of *antipolitics* discourse which expressed a crisis of representation (Kajsiu, 2010). As Kajsiu (2010) argues, this crisis did not come only from the inability of parties to represent different societal categories, but also from their incapacity to represent them politically and constitutionally. The combination of this political climate with a bad and still declining Albanian economy increased the number of societal categories vulnerable to sell their votes. According to Abrahams (2015) in 2001, a candidate could buy one electoral zone for \$100,000; its price could go as high as \$300 in swing zones. Moreover, as Abrahams (2015) reports, in the swing zones, a businessman would become the broker that would buy votes for the parties, while in the past voters would bring a clean ballot for the next

person as they were handed a pre-marked ballot and dropped it in the box. Cell phone cameras became useful to prove individuals voted for the candidates that paid for since 2005.

### **3.6 Theoretical predictions about the political determinants of vote-buying in Albania**

Considering the high level of personalism in Albanian politics, the level of poverty and economic stagnation, the level of non representation, the pivotal shifting of the MPs, and the coalitions that were build on the basis of leader's interest as opposed to the country's, I expect that political affiliation is too weak to motivate voters to abstain from vote-selling in order to support a party that holds their ideology.

Taking into consideration the theory of incumbent vote penalty, DP was very likely being penalized as incumbent. This is true particularly as DP was seeking a third mandate. Berisha as DP leader was not just seeking a third mandate, he had been as a central figure of Albanian politics since the fall of communism. We may argue that in order to keep the power DP's motivation to buy votes was very high. Being in power DP had the financial resources to enact vote-buying. Lack of ideological connection with its supporters makes transactions more necessary.

On the other hand As DP lost the last elections; I expect to see that those more prone to vote selling were the DP affiliated voters. This party's affiliated voters might have been disappointed from all the scandals of corruption that accompanied DP's coalition governance particularly during the second mandate of the unorthodox alliance with SMI in aftermath of 2009 general elections – hence, in order to maintain their

support, DP was under greater pressure to secure votes. This alliance might have increased the social distrust in this part of the electorate not only because SMI, its leader is a former SP member, was a left wing party. Also due to the antagonistic discourse between these party leaders during the electoral campaign of 2009 we may say that party affiliation weakened making this part of the electorate more prone to either feel unrepresented and not vote but also more likely to sell their vote.

SP might have benefited from the incumbent's vote penalty on DP. The slogan of this DP's bad governance makes SP profit from DP's incumbent vote penalty. SMI- does not get impacted by the incumbent vote penalty same as DP does. SMI was part of the governing coalition until six months before the elections. If classified in the incumbent position as it was we may say that SMI had the financial means and motivation to buy votes (and it also suffers from an incumbent penalty, which means they must act like DP and buy votes). The motivation comes as SMI has proved to seek power and build coalitions based on power dynamics, and use it pivotal power very efficiently.

I expect to see SP affiliated voters less likely to sell their vote, not only because of the perceived need for rotation, but also because of bad governance by the DP's coalition. Another reason why I have this expectation lays in the fact that those PS affiliated part of the electorate might not have been as targeted to sell their vote compared to the DP's one. Additionally, when it comes to the non affiliated SP individuals working in the public sector but who voted SP, very probably, intimidation as tool was not very efficient considering the level of the secrecy of the vote during Albania's last general elections compared to the previous ones. As for SMI affiliated voters, I believe that because it was a highly clientelistic party in the aftermath of the 2009 coalition built with DP, this

party's connections with the electorate is based mainly on promises in employment in the public sector. While in this paper we cannot determine to whom the vote was sold (i.e. party with whom one is affiliated or other party), because of the nature of this party I expect that its affiliation to be based in the clientelistic nature, thus its party affiliated are also more likely to engage in vote-buying (as defined in this paper, including intimidation and promises of employment in the public sector).

#### **4. Data and Methods**

In order to examine the determinants of vote buying in the 2013 Albanian elections, I use data from a survey conducted by Eunacal Institute, based in Tirana, the capital of Albania, one week after the Albanian general elections of June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013. The survey was implemented in two ways: respondents were contacted using 20,000 randomly selected e-mail addresses. These e-mail addresses were selected from previous surveys done in the terrain throughout the 2000-2012. Additionally, the survey was also promoted via social networks such as Facebook, via Facebook ads where it reached 1.4 million Albanians. The sample does not guarantee a complete lack of selection bias as it focused on the online population, which is more critical of the mainstream parties and their practices, relative to those that do not engage with online social networking or the internet media. The sample originally had 10,000 observations, which was reduced to 972 observations after thoroughly cleaning the dataset because of a very high number of missing values.

My dataset provides evidence on vote buying in Albania's 2013 general elections as declared by the Albanian respondents in this survey. Vote buying was coded 0 if people were not offered benefits in exchange to their vote and 1 if it occurred based on the question whether people were

offered benefits in exchange of their vote (be it money, promises of employment or retained employment, and benefits-in-kind). I excluded those observations where respondents replied that they were offered benefits but did not accept them.

**Table I**

<i>Variable</i>	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
<i>SPvote</i>	792	.4974747	.5003096	0	1
<i>SMIvote</i>	792	.0606061	.2387571	0	1
<i>Employed</i>	792	.489899	.5002139	0	1
<i>Student</i>	792	.2184343	.4134448	0	1
<i>Unemployed</i>	792	.1957071	.3969947	0	1
<i>Vote fraud</i>	792	.2840909	.4512653	0	1
<i>SP affiliation</i>	792	.6628788	.4730254	0	1
<i>DP affiliation</i>	792	.25	.4332863	0	1
<i>SMI affiliation</i>	792	.0568182	.2316412	0	1
<i>High SES</i>	792	.125	.3309279	0	1
<i>Less than 8 years school</i>	792	.010101	.1000581	0	1
<i>High school</i>	792	.1717172	.3773728	0	1

<i>Age</i>	792	31.75505	12.06464	18	70
<i>Female</i>	792	.3459596	.4759807	0	1

I used logistic regression to analyze the data because of the binary nature of the dependent variable. Logistic regression is appropriate for analyzing the variance of a binary dependent variable for several reasons. Logit regression overcomes the non-normal distribution of errors and heteroskedasticity problems that follows from the use of OLS on binary outcome data, and does not produce infeasible estimates (i.e. probabilities greater than 1) that OLS may produce (Studenmund, 2010).

My model equation is:

$$Pr(y_i = 0 \text{ or } 1 | x_i) = \Lambda [\beta_0 + \beta_1(SP \text{ Partyafi}) + \beta_2(SMI \text{ Partyafi}) + \beta_3 \text{Vote SP } i + \beta_4 \text{Vote SMI } i + \beta_5 \text{Empstat } i + \beta_6 \text{economic sit } i + \beta_7 \text{educ } i + \beta_8 \text{age } i + \beta_9 \text{female } i + \epsilon_i],$$

where  $\Lambda$  is the logit estimator,  $e^\beta / (1 + e^\beta)$ , of vote-buying with outcome 0 or 1. Fraudulent voters (coded with a 1) include those who reported selling their vote in exchange for money, were promised jobs in the public administration, were promised not to be fired if already employed in a public administration position, were promised contracts for businesses, and (in the case of students) were provided air plane tickets. In our sample, 30% of the respondents indicated that they sold their vote in the last election. While 30% of this sample confessed to fraudulent voting, when asked what motivated them less than 7% responded. Of those who did respond, some of the answers were: "I had to keep my job", or "my friend asked me to", or "I am member of that party."

Another voter clearly stated that “I voted for SMI as they promised to employ me in the public sector.” In this question many responded “my ballot is secret, I do not need to tell you why I voted a certain way.” SMIParty and SPParty are the political affiliations of our respondents, to the Socialist Movement of Integration and the Socialist Party, respectively – DP affiliation is the baseline category (I exclude people who are affiliated to minor parties as they constituted a small share of my data - small parties count only 18 observations out of 1021 - and hence would display unreliable results due to the lack of variation of people in this category. Vote SP and Vote SMI represent those who voted for this party in 2013 regardless their political affiliation- DP voters is the baseline category. Empstat is a vector of n-1 employment dummy variables. The dummy variables here are employed (other, paid work, employed, self-employed), student, unemployed (unemployed and actively looking for work, I want to work but I am not looking for a job), and the baseline are respondents who are not in the labor force (as they are permanently incapacitated, retired, military service or working for the community, or housewives). I expect that those that are students and employed to be less likely to sell their vote compared to those not in the labor force. Educ is a vector of n-1 categorical dummies related to the level of education. The education dummies include (*educ*) the completion of elementary school (no education, school 4 years, and elementary school of 8 years), the completion of high school, with the baseline category being having some experience with college or having a college degree. I expected to see those less educated to be more prone to sell their vote as usually lower levels of education are also linked with lower economic status.

Sit is the family economic status n-1 variable, where those in good economic situation take value 1, those in bad situation take value 0. Included in the bad situation category are those who reported that cannot meet their monthly ends. I expect to see that those denoting a high economic status, to be less likely to sell their vote, however. I also control for age and gender. Age as independent variable is a continuous one taking values from 18 to 99. I expect to see older people less likely to sell their vote as they belong to a generation more inculcated with moral values, however, this might not be the case if they are poor or very poor. The independent gender variable takes the value 1 if female and 0 if male I expect women to be less likely to sell their vote, based in previous research in Benin; women are more interested in social public policies (Wantchekon, 2003). In our sample the rural respondents were not significant in number. This could be as a result of the lack of internet in the majority of parts of rural Albania. It is for this reason that I dropped the rural and urban variable. I also realized that the sample was not representative in regional levels, so I did not control for regional effects.

#### **4.1 Results: The Influence of Party Affiliation in Vote-buying**

Output results are presented in Table II. In this table we have the results from our baseline regressions, which include party affiliation, the way people voted in 2013. control dummies such as: employment, gender, age and education. I ran six models combining and excluding baselines. In the first model, I check to see the party affiliation, employment status, age and gender impacts vote-buying. In this model our baseline for party affiliation is DP. Baseline for employment dummies is: retired, housewives and incapacitated. I also check how age and gender impacts vote-buying.



In Model II, instead of party affiliation I add the way people voted in 2013, keeping as baseline those who voted for the DP. I also check for level of education, keeping as baseline those who have some college. In Model III I added the party affiliation variable to see whether the inclusion of these variables could impact or levels of significance. In Model IV I added the high economic status variable to check whether those with satisfactory levels of income would behave differently than those who cannot meet their monthly ends in regards to vote buying. I remove the way people voted from the regression. In Model V I replaced the party affiliation with the way people voted in 2013. In the final Model I included all the independent variables.

**Table II**

<i>Variable</i>	<b>Model I</b>	<b>Model II</b>	<b>Model III</b>	<b>Model IV</b>	<b>Model V</b>	<b>Model VI</b>
<i>SMI Affiliation</i>	-0.5191		-0.5244	-0.6152		-0.5282
<i>SP Affiliation</i>	-0.4477***		-0.4645***	0.5125***		-0.4680**
<i>Unemployed</i>	-0.0575	0.0286	-0.0804	-0.0804		0.0463
<i>Student</i>	-0.124	-0.0626	-0.0447	-0.1137	0.0311	-0.0539
<i>Employed</i>	-0.3912	-0.427	-0.04211	-0.4504	-0.4313	-0.4277
<i>Age</i>	-0.0252***	-0.0253***	0.0252***	-0.0238***	0.0254***	-0.0253***
<i>Female</i>	-0.0796	-0.0817	-0.0995	-0.0693	-0.0778	-0.0936
<i>High School</i>		-0.1621	-0.2005	-0.166	-0.1606	-0.1985
<i>Elementary School</i>		-0.0969	-0.2701	-0.0041	-0.0886	-0.2586

<i>High SES</i>				0.3087	0.0608	0.7051
<i>SMI Vote 2013</i>		-1.0579**	-1.0182**		-1.0485**	-1.0035**
<i>SP Vote 2013</i>		-0.6603***	-0.6383***		-0.6513***	-0.6244***
<i>Cons</i>	0.7774	0.5334	0.8608	0.485	0.522	0.8464*
<i>N</i>	768	768	768	768	768	768
<i>Chi2</i>	45.6177	39.9439	46.4921	30.6731	40.0047	46.6345

Note: \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* indicate significance on a 90%, 95% and 99% confidence interval.

Across all our models we see a pattern. Those who are SP affiliated, are less likely than the DP affiliated people to engage in vote-buying.

The way people voted in 2013, shows us that both SP voters and SMI voters were less likely to sell their vote compared to the DP voters. The significance of the results remains particularly high for the SP voters (over 99%).

In the last model while SP affiliated output remains significant, its significance decreases when in the same model is the way people voted variable. This could be due to levels of collinearity. However, those who *voted* for a listed party in our survey were way more than those who declared to be *affiliated* with a certain party, the inclusion of this variable makes our model more significant. Age does have a negative effect: a one year increase in age decreases the likelihood of committing fraudulent voting. The other variables remain insignificant suggesting that no matter the employment status, level of income or gender, in front of vote fraud they are all equal.

The chi2 reveals that our models are significant. In Model III, we see that those having a high socio-economic level do not behave differently in relation to the vote-fraud

compared to those who are poor or very poor. However, this may be driven by the skewed nature of this variable - those who have reported good socio-economic status represent only 10% of our sample. In this model we see that age remains significant. The other variables do suggest that no matter the educational level or employment status they are not immune to vote-fraud.

## **4.2 Discussion:**

SP affiliated individuals are less likely to sell their vote compared to DP and SMI ones. This may be the case because SP's leader Rama might have been more popular as opposed to the former leaders in the coalition government (Meta and Berisha). It might also be so as SP affiliation was stronger because of the feeling of stolen elections from DP in 2009 and particularly of 2011 local elections where SP contested the results or simply a general desire to remove DP, and SMI, from office. SMI affiliated voters were not less likely to sell their votes relative to DP affiliated voters, which may be explained by the fact that this party is founded in 2005 (later than the other parties) and the affiliation is mainly based in clientelist relations. Moreover, as SMI party was in power; as such its candidates were incumbent ones until six months before the elections, indicating they have the means to reward and make clientelistic deals look more reliable before the election day as opposed to those who are not in power (Wantchekon, 2003). SP voters and affiliates were less likely to sell their vote. It may have been so for two reasons: 1.) SP was not in power and hence may not have had equal means to buy votes,

and 2.) SP did not suffer from a “rotten incumbent” effect, and hence its voters may have been more tied to their vote politically so they could vote DP out of office.

### **4.3 Limitations:**

While there are several limitations in this study in relation to selection bias, this limitation is not to be taken into account considering the Albanian context where the sensitivity to conduct such surveys face to face would have made this project unfeasible. In relation to selection bias even though, internet is widely used in Albania, some reports of 2013 showed that only 41% of the population has access to the internet. As such in the sample are excluded those who do not have email. Bias could come also from literacy factors, not all people might be informed on the importance of these surveys. Some people are more or less likely to go to the end of the questionnaire. This is obvious as in our sample we had to reduce the number of observations from 10, 000 to 790. Because of this I did not use many variables such as the demographic ones (urban/rural), and the geographic (North vs. South). Age variable in our sample is also well represented as the median age in Albania in 2013 was around 34.

## **5. Conclusion**

Studies of political corruption with a focus in vote-buying are an important focus for new democracies or countries trapped in transition. This paper analyzed vote-buying from the perspective of voters, with a particular focal point in the party affiliation and incumbent vote penalty. It argued that weak party affiliation makes voters more likely to sell their vote and consequently be targeted by the party machines. I argued that this weak

party affiliation is present as parties' connection with the electorate has diluted because of lack of democracy within, resulting also in a crisis of representation, and that where there is an anti-incumbency effect party affiliation weakens further.

As case study we analyzed the determinants of votes selling in Albania's 2013 general elections. As hypothesized, vote-selling was more likely to happen among DP affiliated voters, as opposed to the SP ones. Also, when compared with SMI affiliated voters, SP ones were less likely to sell their vote. This may be driven by an incumbent effect – SP voters and affiliates may have been more tied to their vote in order to keep DP out of office, whereas DP voters may not have had such adversarial ties to their vote.

Perhaps the most striking finding in these empirical results is the anti-incumbency effect. As predicted people SP voters despite their affiliation were significantly (over 99% of significance) less likely to sell their vote compared to the DP voters. This was confirmed as we also found that the correlation between party affiliation and way of voting was low.

When it comes to poverty level and vote-selling, we found that people's economic status did not play any role in vote-selling. However, it is possible that in the sample we lack respondents from those poor regions where vote-buying was more rampant. I attempted to explain that factors that might lead toward vote-buying can have deep connection to social distrust which in certain circumstances, such as: communism, regime change, type of political and economic transition adopted, bad elites and bad governance, geopolitical situation, can negatively impact the affiliation between parties and the electorate.

This case study contributes to the wider literature on the lack of party identification in Eastern Europe, and how vote buying behavior may be driven by the strategic penalizing of an incumbent. Party system in Albania has created another level of vote penalty as leaders do not rotate and there is lack of democracy within parties, creating what Calise (2000) defines “*partito personale*”. This situation has exacerbated the crisis of representation and has weakened the link between parties and the electorate which in turn explains our findings.

Albanian Parliament so far, has not undertaken any reforms to tackle this phenomenon. Neither have other institutions such as the judiciary through the channels like the Albanian CEC has undertaken steps to fight vote-selling. Albania has to take serious steps to combat this type of political corruption and Albanian parties should meet a reform that would raise the level of democracy within and reconnect with the electorate so to fill this vacuum of representation. Studying vote-buying empirically is still very challenging, particularly where there is a collective action situation and where social distrust is very high like the case of Albania and corruption is pervasive. Moreover, self-reporting of vote selling may not be entirely honest. This paper is only a first one grasping this topic empirically. Further studies are imperative particularly covering poor remote areas and marginalized societal classes where this phenomenon is not simply more present but also less identified.

Many individuals can be motivated to sell their vote as they see no change between parties, however, it is particularly at that point that at the same time they are not able to hold politicians accountable, and politicians in turn might be interested to keep this kind of connection as it costs less for them. Consequently, those elected would not

only be less likely in favoring public policies beneficial for the society and development, as opposed to clientelistic behavior, but could also be people who come from a direct criminal background.

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Note: All translations from Albanian into English are done by the author.

## 7. Appendix

Location: In which county of Albania is the city/ village you reside?

1	Berat
2	Dibër
3	Durrës
4	Elbasan
5	Fier
6	Gjirokastrë
7	Korçë
8	Kukës
9	Lezhë
10	Shkodër
11	Tiranë
12	Vlorë

Urban vs. Rural : Do you live in urban areas or rural ones?

1	Urban
2	Rural

Employment status:

Which of these descriptions best defines your status in the last 7 days? (Please select only one option)

0	Other
1	Paid work (employed, self-employed)



<b>2</b>	Student
<b>3</b>	Unemployed and actively looking for work
<b>4</b>	Unemployed, I want to work but I am not looking for a job.
<b>5</b>	Ill or permanently incapacitated
<b>6</b>	Retired
<b>7</b>	Military service or working for the community
<b>8</b>	Housewife
<b>9</b>	I don't know
<b>10</b>	I refuse to answer

Education: What is your level of education?

<b>1</b>	None
<b>2</b>	Elementary school (4 years)
<b>3</b>	Elementary school (8 years)
<b>4</b>	Currently(studying) high school
<b>5</b>	I have finished high school
<b>6</b>	Currently University student
<b>7</b>	I have graduated (university)
<b>8</b>	Currently studying graduate studies (master)
<b>9</b>	Done with master
<b>10</b>	Currently PHD
<b>11</b>	Done PHD
<b>12</b>	Refuse to answer

Economic level: Which of the following options comes closest to defining how you see your family income?

1	Current income is enough
2	With current income we barely make it
3	With current income we face difficulties
4	With current income it is very hard for us to live
5	I do not know
6	Refuse to answer

Age?

From 18 and up.

Gender? 0 male 1 female

Party affiliation: With which political party do you feel closest to?

0	Other party (please write your party's name)
1	Socialist Party of Albania
2	Democratic Party of Albania
3	Socialist league of Integration
4	Party for justice, Integration and Unity (ethnic Albanians expelled from Greece before and during WWII)
5	FRD New Democratic spirit party
6	Party of unity for human rights (Greek minority)
7	Republican Party
8	Social Democratic Party
9	Party of Alliance red and black (nationalist party)

<b>10</b>	I don't know
<b>11</b>	I refuse to answer

Vote fraud: In the last 3 months did you or your acquaintances were promised to be paid cash or otherwise in exchange for vote?

<b>1</b>	Yes to me or people I know, I was offered...
<b>0</b>	No

Why did you vote this way? Answers are qualitative: I sold my vote: money, tickets, promises of jobs in public sector (coded 1). Other reasons, such as: I voted strategically, I am affiliated to that party, etc were coded 0.