**The Spread of Ideas Related to the Developmental Idealism Model in Albania**

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Abstract

In this paper we use data from a nationally representative survey conducted in Albania in 2005 to study the spread of the worldviews, values, and beliefs of developmental idealism in the country. We find that Albanians have adopted developmental idealism, with ideas about development and developmental hierarchies that are similar to those of international elites. A substantial majority of Albanians also endorse the developmental idealist belief of an association between socioeconomic development and family matters. Many perceive development as both a cause and an effect of family change, but with more seeing it as a cause than as an effect. Albanians also perceive development as more closely related to fertility and gender equality than to age at marriage. But despite believing that development and family change are related, most Albanians continue to endorse lifetime marriage and strong intergenerational relations. This unique perception of development and demographic behavior reflects Albania’s unique history with regard to economic, political and social change. We conclude that despite living in one of the most radical state socialist regimes in the world, which tried to keep its population sealed off from the outside world for many years, Albanians endorse many of the elements of developmental idealism.

Keywords: developmental idealism, Albania, family, fertility, marriage

INTRODUCTION

This paper is motivated by a desire to understand the extent to which developmental idealism (DI) is understood and accepted in everyday life around the world. It has been argued that the worldviews, values, and beliefs of DI have been widely disseminated internationally and that the spread of these ideas has been important for international family and demographic change. In this paper we examine the extent to which the worldviews, values, and beliefs of DI are present in Albanian society.

DI is a cultural system of worldviews, beliefs, and values that grew out of the related frameworks of developmentalism and modernization theory, which have been major cultural schemata for centuries. DI suggests that the societies and families it defines as modern are more desirable than societies and families it defines as traditional. It also suggests that economic development produces family change and that family change affects economic growth. The development-and-modernity worldview also presents a dynamic world where development is natural and to be expected.

The worldviews, beliefs, and values of DI provide policymakers and ordinary people frames or schemata to guide goals and decision-making. This is important because it has been suggested by many that a wide range of beliefs and values can have substantial influence on many family and demographic behaviors (Chesnais 1992; Cleland and Wilson 1987; Johnson-Hanks et al. 2011; Lesthaeghe 1983; Lesthaeghe and Neels 2002; Mason 1997; van de Kaa 1987; Yount and Rashad 2008). The DI literature has indeed argued that DI has spread to many parts of the world, where it has influenced many behaviors (Allendorf and Pandian 2016; Cammack and Heaton 2011; Loeffler and Friedl 2014; Thornton 2005; Thornton, Dorius, and Swindle 2015; Thornton and Xie 2016; Yount and Rashad 2008).

Two studies in particular have argued that DI has had important influences on a range of family and demographic behaviors in the region surrounding Albania. Thornton and Philipov (2009) made this argument for the former state socialist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe, and Kavas and Thornton (2013) for the country of Turkey, which for centuries has been important for Albania, in terms of shaping its values and beliefs. But these two papers did not have direct data about the beliefs and values of ordinary people concerning development and how it is related to family matters.

Although the effects of DI on family matters are interesting, in this paper we report data from Albania about the views of people concerning several aspects of DI. We do this by asking to what extent ordinary Albanians have conceptualizations of development in their worldviews and associate modernity with the same family attributes associated with modernity by DI. We also ask whether ordinary Albanians believe that economic growth leads to family change or that family change improves or harms economic growth. And we study the values that Albanians have concerning several elements of family life. Because our data about people’s endorsement of DI come from a single cross-sectional survey, we cannot investigate how these DI schemas influence or are influenced by family and demographic change. Thus, examination of these causal questions is outside the scope of our paper. However, we do discuss in the conclusions how the endorsement of DI in Albania may be related to actual changes in family life.

Albania has an unusual social structure and history which make it an intriguing place to study how widespread the ideas of DI are among its ordinary citizens. One important feature of Albania is the radical application of communist doctrine in Eastern Europe from after WWII until the collapse of state socialism in 1990. The country first implemented a form of Stalinism in all aspects of society and economy, and later an early Chinese model of communism. The country also isolated itself for a long period from both the West and the East, becoming the most closed society in Europe. While movement in and out of the country was restricted to a few individuals linked to the government, we argue that this is not the case regarding the infusion of ideas of development. Under the state socialist regime, the country experienced substantial economic change, but still emerged as the poorest of all state socialist countries of Eastern Europe at the end of state socialism in the early 1990s. At the same time, the country achieved unparalleled low levels of fertility compared to its level of economic achievement (Falkingham and Gjonça 2001; Gjonça, Aassve, and Mencarini 2008, 2010). And despite being very poor, the country made enormous gains in education and health during the period. Such circumstances create a unique environment for social science to study the acceptance of DI in a population that has had a unique experience in terms of social change and access to the wider world for almost half a century. In this respect the combination of the implementation of a radical communist model of development and the system of patriarchal values in the society make Albania unique among countries that have been studied within the DI framework.

This paper uses data from a representative national sample of Albanians aged 15–64 in 2005. The data we analyze focus on the beliefs and values of ordinary Albanians concerning developmental hierarchies, marriage, fertility, and gender equality. We also investigate the ways Albanians perceive the possible interconnections of these elements of family life with economic development.

This introduction is followed by a discussion of DI as a cultural model containing worldviews, beliefs, and values. We then provide a brief background of Albania, explaining its economic and social structures and the changes in the twentieth century. That is followed by a description of the data and methods used. The results of the survey are then presented, followed by our conclusions.

Before proceeding with our discussion of the worldviews, values, and beliefs of DI, we note that we do not present these elements of DI because we advocate them as good or true, but because acceptance or rejection of them can have significant implications for behavior. Whether these ideas are good or bad, true or false is important, but not the subject of this paper, and our analysis is neutral with respect to this issue.

DEVELOPMENTAL IDEALISM AS A CULTURAL MODEL OF WORLDVIEWS, VALUES, AND BELIEFS

Many people since the Enlightenment have assumed that all societies develop, perhaps at different rates, through the same uniform stages of advancement (Harris 1968; Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet 1969; Sanderson 1990). Scholars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries combined this idea of development with cross-sectional information to claim that in the past the societies of northwest Europe and their overseas populations—believed to be the most developed at the time—had in the past been like people currently living in other parts of the world, which were believed to be less developed. It was further posited that in the future the less developed nations would advance to become more like northwest Europe (Harris 1968; Sanderson 1990).

Observers of the family also recorded that family life in northwest Europe was quite different from what it was like in many other places (Thornton 2001, 2005). There was of course considerable family heterogeneity outside northwest Europe, but personal and family life in these places was often characterized by extensive family solidarity, extended households, universal marriage, young ages at marriage, considerable parental authority, arranged marriages, low valuation of women, and natural and high fertility. By comparison, northwest European societies were observed to have more individualism, less parental authority, fewer extended households, more people never marrying, older ages at marriage, couple involvement in the mate-selection process, higher respect for women, and planned and low fertility (Alexander [1779] 1995; Hajnal 1965; Malthus [1803] 1986; Montesquieu [1748] 1997; Morgan [1977] 1985; Westermarck [1891] 1894).

These data and conceptual ideas led generations of scholars to the conclusion that development had transformed individual and family life from the patterns outside northwest Europe and believed to be traditional to the so-called modern patterns observed in northwest Europe (Alexander [1779] 1995; Durkheim [1892] 1978; Engels [1884] 1971; Le Play [1855] 1982, [1872] 1982; Malthus [1803] 1986; Westermarck [1891] 1894). The socioeconomic systems in northwest Europe at the time were perceived as causally connected to the unique personal and family systems of northwest Europe. Many scholars perceived this causation as being from socioeconomic development to personal and family change, while others believed that the effect was from family change to socioeconomic development. These ideas and conclusions permeated the scholarly literature from the 1700s through the middle 1900s (Thornton 2001, 2005; Thornton, Dorius, and Swindle 2015).

These models and conclusions were not just frameworks for interpreting the world but also formed a cultural framework of values and beliefs telling people how to live in the world, which Thornton and his colleagues labelled developmental idealism (Thornton 2001, 2005; Thornton, Dorius, and Swindle 2015). This DI culture includes beliefs in development and developmental hierarchies. It also identifies attributes that are desirable and to be pursued, a causal framework identifying how certain personal and family elements will help bring development, and statements declaring certain human rights. These models and conclusions also provide so-called less developed societies a model for development that lies in northwest Europe and North America.

The cultural model of DI asserts that modern society is good and attainable, with modern society defined as including such things as urbanization, industrialization, and high levels of education and income. DI also indicates that modern family life is good and attainable, with modern family life defined as including individualism, nuclear households, the autonomy of the younger generation, marriages arranged by mature brides and grooms, courtship before marriage, gender equality, and planned and low fertility. DI also includes the beliefs that modern families foster modern societies and that modern families are products of the development process. These propositions of DI are important because their acceptance can substantially change important family and demographic behaviors such as marriage and childbearing, and on the other hand, resistance to these propositions can perpetuate patterns of family life.

The DI literature has argued that this cultural model originated in the West and subsequently spread to other regions (Thornton 2001, 2005; Thornton, Dorius, and Swindle 2015). There have been many mechanisms spreading various aspects of DI around the world, including mass education, the United Nations, communist movements, foreign aid programs, tourism, foreign travel, and the mass media. In addition, international movements were formed to spread key elements of DI, including family planning, older ages at marriage, and gender equality. The mix of mechanisms spreading DI has varied by region and historical period.

A substantial body of research has shown that the general ideas of modernization and development give ordinary people frameworks for living and managing the world (Ahearn 2001; Blaut 1993; Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1988; Dahl and Rabo 1992; Ferguson 1999; Guneratne 1998, 2001; Osella and Osella 2006; Pigg 1992, 1996; Wang 1999). Research focusing directly on DI has also demonstrated that many of the worldviews, values, and beliefs of DI have spread far beyond international and national elites to the grass roots in several countries. Surveys have documented that ordinary people in several countries believe in the ideas of development and developmental hierarchies (Binstock and Thornton 2007; Binstock et al. 2013; Dorius 2016; Melegh et al. 2013, 2016; Thornton, Dorius, and Swindle 2015; Thornton et al. 2012c; Xie et al. 2012). Surveys have also documented that large fractions of ordinary people in many countries value elements of family life defined as modern and believe that economic development is both a cause and an effect of many dimensions of family life, including nuclear households, gender equality, self-chosen marriage at a mature age, and low fertility (Abbasi-Shavazi, Nodoushan, and Thornton 2012; Allendorf 2013; Allendorf and Thornton 2015; Binstock and Thornton 2007; Lai and Thornton 2015; Thornton et al. 2012a, 2012b, 2014). Importantly, this widespread prevalence of DI at the grass-roots level persists despite latter-twentieth-century academic critiques of modernization theory (Baker 1998; Mandelbaum 1971; Nisbet [1969] 1975; Szreter 1993; Tilly 1984).

ALBANIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND HISTORY

The social organization in Albania in the first part of the twentieth century was based on a patriarchal system, which disfavored women in all aspects of social life (Halpern, Kaser, and Wagner 1996). The structure of Albanian society was basically tribal in the north and semi-feudal in the middle and south of the country. The central organization of society was based on kinship and descent (Gruber and Pichler 2002; Kaser 1996). The size of the families, as basic units of social and economic organization, was very large; some had 60 or 70 members. The decision-making in Albanian families/households rested in the eldest male of the household, with very little delegated to the younger generation and almost nothing to women (Kaser 2008). This male dominance was manifest in almost every aspect of life, as property and civic rights were vested in men. Most marriages were arranged, and women lacked the right of divorce, though a husband could easily divorce his wife.

In the twentieth century before the Second World War, Albania was almost a protectorate of the Italian government, with Italy influencing many aspects of Albanian life (Hall 1994). The Italians greatly expanded the country’s infrastructure and created a few new industries. Although Albania remained very poor, it was open to the outside world, and this was evident in at least two ways. First, in the 1920s and 1930s there was significant migration from Albania to the United States. Second, there were fairly open channels of communication with the West, as demonstrated by the June Revolution of 1924, which established, for a very brief period, a democratic government (Austin 1999; Fischer 1988). This revolution was led by the Albanian American priest and internationally recognized author, Fan S. Noli. Although it was short-lived, the establishment of this democratic government shows the openness of the country and the acceptance of the ideas of democracy that were coming from as far away as the United States.

In the 1920s, the Rockefeller Foundation established a center in Albania to analyze and treat infectious diseases, with a focus on malaria. After the Italian occupation in 1939–41 this work was taken over by the Italian Istituto di malariologia Ettore Marchiafava (Gjonça 2001). Under this program, and a government scholarship scheme, a number of doctors were trained abroad. At the same time, many engineers, economists, and other specialists were trained in Western countries, particularly in Italy and Austria (Selenica 1928). King Zog I, who ruled Albania from 1922 to 1939, was himself educated in and lived for a number of years in Vienna and Rome before returning to Albania. Thus, when Albania came out of WWII, the country already had an established elite that was educated and had considerable knowledge, ideas, and experiences from the West.

Despite the changes taking place in Albania before the Second World War, when the communists took control after the war, Albania was still the poorest country in Europe (Maddison 2001). The communists inherited a semi-feudal society where farming was the main economic activity, with about 85% of the population involved in it. The country had few industrial establishments, and agriculture was supplemented only with small-scale forms of cottage industry. Most of the Albanian population was illiterate: 80% overall, and over 90% in rural areas (8 Nëntori 1982). Illiteracy was more common among women, with the female illiteracy rate at about 92%.

Postwar Albania remained basically tribal in the north and semi-feudal in the central and southern parts of the country. The organization of society continued to be based on kinship and descent, with a patriarchal system that disfavored women in all aspects of social life (Kaser 1994, 1996, 2008; Todorova 1997). Fertility was high: about six children per woman (total fertility rate in 1950 of 6.1), and the population was growing very rapidly, at an annual rate of 2.9% during the 1950s (Falkingham and Gjonça 2001).

Life expectancy was only 51.6 years for both sexes combined, and there were 143 infant deaths per 1,000 live births (Gjonça, Wilson, and Falkingham 1997). There was little health system infrastructure in place, with only 10 hospitals in the country and one Institute of Hygiene in the capital, Tirana. There were all together only 102 Albanian doctors and a small number of foreign ones. There were 1.2 physicians for every 10,000 people, and 0.98 hospital beds for every 1,000 people. There was no health or social insurance scheme in place. Tuberculosis was a major killer, with almost 15.2% of deaths in 1950 (Gjonça 2001).

Under state socialist rule following WWII, Albania adopted ideas and programs from both Western societies and the state socialist governments of the region. Very importantly, the country adopted a centralized mode of economic production. The postwar government followed a policy emphasizing the growth of an industrial base that would bring basic structural changes and the movement of the country from an agricultural society (85% of the population being rural in 1939) to a balanced industrial-agricultural one. Following a Stalinist model of economic growth, by the mid-seventies, the Albanian government was moderately successful in industrializing the economy, and per capita income increased rapidly, at an average of more than 8.2% a year (Hall 1994). This was accompanied by vast changes in the labor force, as the percentage of the population involved in industry increased to almost 45% by the mid-1980s (Gjonça 2001). However, despite the accomplishments of these early decades, by the end of the state socialist regime in 1990, Albania was still the poorest country in Europe, with a GNP per capita of about USD 380 (Gjonça, Wilson, and Falkingham 1997). And the country was only 34% urban—even by the most recent census, in 2011, 50% of the population still lived in rural areas.

The state socialism era brought enormous changes in other aspects of Albanian life. The government introduced a national health system and a coherent social insurance system. By 1990 life expectancy for both sexes combined had risen to 72.8 years (based on official statistics).

The state socialist government introduced the Education Reform Law in 1946, a year after the end of the war, aiming to win the “struggle against illiteracy.” By 1949 the government had introduced a further policy targeting literacy for ages 12–40 (Keefe et al. 1971). The last education reform under state socialism, in 1970, made primary education obligatory, and a widely standardized secondary school program became available. Because of the long history of patriarchy in the country, these policies affected women more than men. Female enrollment in primary school soon increased to the level of males—by end of the 1980s, in secondary school as well. The illiteracy rate among women fell to less than 5% by the end of state socialist rule.

The push for education in Albania also extended to universities. Immediately after WWII, major scholarship schemes were introduced that resulted in hundreds of young Albanians attending and graduating from East European universities, particularly in the Soviet Union. In addition to the many graduating from universities in former communist countries, there was a large movement in the 1950s to improve higher education in Albania itself. The first Albanian university (the University of Tirana) was established in 1957, followed by a number of other higher education institutions. The effects of such surges of education were clear, with Albania experiencing dramatic economic and social changes during this decade and the following one (Prifti 1978).

In addition to females entering school in large numbers, they became important contributors to the labor force. In 1985, women were 46.6% of the entire labor force, with similar rates as men in important sectors of the economy, such as industry (44%), agriculture (52.5%), and trade (54.1%) (Hall 1994). However, despite general equality in economic activity, women mostly remained in subordinate roles and made up a disproportionate share of workers in low-paying and low-status occupations. Women also remained under-represented in the machinery of power; in 1967 they made up just 12% of party members.

The great participation of females in school and the labor force during the state socialism era undoubtedly changed many dimensions of life for men and women. However, it is easy to exaggerate their effects in bringing emancipation and empowerment to Albanian women. And private domestic life remained patriarchal to a large degree. Even when the family code changed in 1965 and the divorce law changed in 1974, giving women the same rights as men for divorce, this equality on paper was never fully implemented in life, as a result of societal pressures which were guided by the norms and values of patriarchy. The number of divorces increased little—much less than the legal changes promised (Hall 1994).

Following its establishment after WWII, the state socialist government exercised tight control over Albanian society, but the late 1960s and early 1970s brought an important period of liberalization, with substantial changes toward liberal values. These shifts were reflected in more liberal policies toward the “class struggle.” There was also greater incorporation of values from Western societies, such as more positive attitudes toward female emancipation and privacy, although still within a patriarchal society. One factor that enabled this movement was the presence of television in neighboring countries, mainly Italian television, which was widely allowed in Albania at the time (Mai 2001).

While these changes probably left marks in the values of the population, especially the urban portion, they were not well received by the state socialist government, which crushed this liberal movement in the first half of the 1970s. Many liberal politicians, artists, economists, and others from different sectors of life in the country were imprisoned. The extreme measures of the state socialist government were influenced by, if not directly shaped by, the Chinese cultural revolution. Albania had developed close ties with China after Albania’s break with the Soviet Union in 1960, and the crushing of liberal ideas in the 1970s followed thinking very similar to what went on in the cultural revolution in China (Marku 2017).

Accompanying the crushing of the liberal movement in the 1970s was a nearly complete sealing off of the country from the outside world. There was no free movement of people into or out of the country. This self-isolation greatly restricted access to outside information, but a “window” was maintained to Western cultures through the television of the neighboring countries of Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia, although it was very restricted (Logoreci 1977; Mai 2001). This closure continued until state socialism collapsed in 1990.

The death in 1985 of Enver Hoxha, the country’s communist leader since WWII, was accompanied by small relaxations of governmental controls. One was the liberalization of the transmission of Italian television in the country, which again started to play a role in shaping the ideas and values of the Albanian population. Another was an increase in the number of people studying in Western countries under UN scholarships. And 1990 saw the collapse of state socialism and the dramatic opening-up of the society, which allowed substantial migration out of the country. By 2011—20 years later—one-third of Albania’s population had left.

Albania’s social and economic history since World War II, as described in this section, is a unique case for the study of the infusion of ideas and development as predicted by the DI model. A semi-feudal society at the end of the WWII with strong aspects of patriarchy, even when the country was open in the early 1990s, its traditional Albanian norms and values might be expected to present strong barriers to the spread of new ideas about family and development. In this respect, one would expect Albania to be different from other eastern European countries that were part of the former state socialist bloc. On the one hand, state socialism in Albania, as in other former state socialist countries, drove a widespread social agenda, with particular focus on female education and labor-force participation, which would enable the spread of ideas as predicted by the DI model. On the other hand, the government tried to seal the country off for long periods, making it more difficult for the ideas and values of DI to spread and to shape the opinions and attitudes of the population. In this context Albania is unique from both the perspective of a poor society and the perspective of a former state socialist country.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The empirical foundation for our study is the 2005 Albania Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey, a large UNICEF Survey of about 5,400 households on maternal and child health.[[1]](#footnote-1) It used a nationally representative probabilistic sample based on the 2001 population and housing census. The sampling was based on a two-stage cluster design: the primary units were randomly selected from the 2001 list of enumeration areas, and the second selection was a fixed number of households for each primary unit. The survey consisted of three long questionnaires, with a large number of modules on education, household conditions, child mortality, marriage, contraception, and breastfeeding.

Our data analysis centers on a subset of interviews in approximately 1,200 of these randomly selected households. Women in these households aged 15 and above provided fertility histories; women 15–49 provided information on values and attitudes; and both women and men 15–64 gave their views concerning DI. Thus, for 1,200 households, data are available from both the fertility and DI portions of the survey, as well as from the larger UNICEF survey.

We asked our respondents four batteries of questions concerning DI. The first set of questions was designed to find out whether ordinary Albanians actually have views about development. We addressed this issue with the following introduction:

Now we would like you to consider how developed different places in the world are. Here is a scale of development—with the least developed place in the world being here (at 0), the most developed place in the world here (at 10), and moderately developed places here in the middle (at 5).

Following this introduction, we asked, “Where would you put the United States?” For respondents who said that they did not know, we followed up with, “Even if you don’t know exactly, what would be your best guess for the United States?” Using the same questions and probes, we then asked respondents to rate India, Nigeria, Albania, Pakistan, Italy, the Central African Republic, and China. We did not give respondents a definition of development; we believed it was important to let them use their own definitions.

For each of the eight countries rated in the survey, we plotted the distribution of respondent scores from 0 to 10 (Figure 1). We also calculated each country’s average rating across all respondents (Table 1). Table 1 also reports the UN Human Development Index (HDI) for each of the eight countries rated by Albanian respondents. The HDI has four components: adult literacy; enrollment in primary, secondary, and tertiary school; life expectancy at birth; and GDP per capita. It is usually given in a range from 0 to 1, but we multiplied each score by 10 to make the scale more comparable to our survey ratings.

[COMP: Figure 1 and Table 1 near here.]

Our second set of questions focused on respondent beliefs about the distribution of five family attributes between poor and rich places. We introduced this set of questions with the statement, “I would like to get your opinion on some matters concerning family life around the world.” The five matters were “families having fewer children,” “people marrying at young ages,” “young people choosing their own spouse,” “women having low status,” and “young married children living away from their older parents.” For each item, we asked, “Is that more common in countries that are poor, rich, or about the same?” (Table 2).

[COMP: Table 2 near here.]

Our third set of questions was designed to elicit respondents’ views about the effects of economic expansion on five dimensions of family life. We introduced these questions this way: “Now I would like to get your opinion on some matters concerning economic growth in poor countries. People marrying at older ages—if a poor country became richer, would marrying at older ages become more common, less common, or be about the same?” Similar questions were asked about “families having more children,” “women having high status,” “young married children living with their older parents,” and “young people choosing their own spouse” (Table 3).

[COMP: Table 3 near here.]

The fourth set of questions was about the influence of family change on economic well-being: “I would like to get your opinion on some matters concerning family change in poor countries. If families in poor countries had fewer children, would that help make poor countries poorer, richer, or about the same?” Similar questions were asked about the economic consequences if “more people in poor countries married at younger ages,” “women in poor countries had higher status,” “more young married children in poor countries lived with their older parents,” and “more young people in poor countries chose their own spouse” (Table 4).

[COMP: Table 4 near here.]

The fifth set of questions analyzed in this paper focused on values concerning marriage as an institution and patterns of living arrangements believed to affect both fertility and family formation. Respondents were asked, “To what extend do you agree or disagree with the statement that marriage is an outdated institution?”—and a similar question about “marriage is a lifetime relationship and should never be ended.” The questions on living arrangements were asked in a similar way: “To what extend do you agree or disagree with the statement that children turning 18 to 20 should live independently?”—followed by “children should look after their parents when parents are in need of care,” and “grandparents should look after grandchildren when parents are unable” (Table 5).

[COMP: Table 5 near here.]

RESULTS

We begin our discussion of the survey results with Figure 1, which shows the percentage of respondents rating each country on the development scale from 0 to 10. The ratings for the United States are amazingly high, with more than 60% giving it a 10. No low scores were given for the United States. Individual scores for Italy and China are also strongly weighted in the positive direction, with the modal score for each being 8. However, the distribution for Italy is weighted more in the positive direction than the distribution for China. The individual scores for the other five countries—Nigeria, Pakistan, Central African Republic, India, and Albania—are all weighted toward the low end of the scale, with many more 0 and 1 ratings than 9s and 10s.

In Table 1 we shift our attention from the distribution of individual ratings to the average ratings of the eight countries. Those data indicate that, on average, Albanians have an exceptionally clear gradient of international development levels in their heads. Consistent with Figure 1, the United States anchors the high end, with an average score of 9.5—an amazing average on a 10-point scale. Next in order are Italy at 7.7 and China at 7.1. Anchoring the low end are several countries with a rating near 3: Albania itself, the Central African Republic, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

Though we did not give respondents a definition of development, their average scores are very close to the UN’s HDI. Of these eight countries, the UN also rates the United States the highest, with a score of 9.5, exactly matching (within rounding) the average scores of Albanians. Like the Albanians, the UN has Italy in second place in this set of eight countries, but with a score of 9.4, substantially higher than the average Albanian score for Italy. The UN’s score for China, 7.7, is also similar to the average score Albanians gave China. And, like the Albanians, the UN places the Central African Republic, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan at the low end of the development scale, although with less extreme scores for these countries, especially India, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

The biggest discrepancy between the Albanians’ ratings and the UN’s is for Albania itself. The UN rates Albania at 8, but the average Albanian rating for Albania is only 3.1. Albanians rate their own country’s development much lower than the UN’s composite index of income, literacy, school enrollment, and longevity.

Nevertheless, the overall Pearson correlation between the two sets of scores is 0.82, indicating very close correspondence overall between average Albanian scores and the HDI. This correlation is also consistent with studies in other countries using the same methodology (Melegh et al. 2013; Thornton et al. 2012).

This high correlation is particularly impressive because it depends on several conditions being fulfilled simultaneously: first, that respondents can reliably navigate our crude development rating scale; second, that respondents have a view of development that is accessible in an interview; third, that the development concept held by respondents is very similar to that of the UN; and finally, that respondents have some knowledge of the rated countries. If any of these elements were absent, the correlations would be small. These results suggest that the ideas of developmental hierarchies reflected in the UN HDI are widespread in Albania.

We now turn to people’s views concerning the distributions of family attributes across poor and rich places (Table 2). Several elements of these answers bear comment. First, for each of the five questions, the modal answer is the one predicted by DI, with low fertility, choosing one’s own spouse, and independent living viewed as associated with rich countries and young marriage and low status of women seen as associated with poor places. Furthermore, with the exception of people choosing their own spouse, well over half the respondents gave the DI answer. That is, 70% and 72%, respectively, said that having few children and independent living of young married children is more common in rich countries, while only 14% and 11%, respectively, said that these things were more common in poor countries. Similarly, 60% and 77%, respectively, said that young age at marriage and women having low status are more common in poor places, with only 12% and 10%, respectively, saying that these things are more common in rich places. These distributions are clearly in the direction predicted by DI.

Table 3 reports the responses to the questions about the effects of economic growth on family matters. Again, the modal answer for each of the five questions was the one predicted by the DI framework, with economic development viewed as bringing fewer children, later marriage, more spouse choice, higher status for women, and fewer married children living with their parents. However, this predicted modal answer was given by more than half of the respondents for only three of the family attributes: high fertility, women having high status, and married children living with their parents. For each of these questions, between three-fifths and two-thirds said that a country becoming richer would lead to high fertility and intergenerational co-residence being less common, and women having higher status more common—as compared to one-sixth or less saying the opposite. However, even in the two cases where the majority did not give the answer predicted by DI—age at marriage and people choosing their own spouse—more than 40% still said that greater wealth would increase both age at marriage and the likelihood of choosing one’s own spouse.

In Table 4, we turn to the fourth set of DI questions, those about the influence of family change on economic change. The only two questions where the answers predicted by the DI framework are the modal answers are those about the expected influence of lower fertility and higher women’s status. We see that 52% and 62%, respectively, said that lower fertility and higher status for women would make a country richer, whereas only 12% and 7%, respectively, said the opposite.

Interestingly, the modal answer for Albanians concerning the expected economic consequences of young age at marriage, more intergenerational co-residence, and more self-choice in mate selection was that there would be no effect. About half of Albanians gave this answer. And for both younger age at marriage and for more intergenerational co-residence, about as many said it would increase well-being as said it would reduce it. Clearly, for these three dimensions of family life, there is little evidence that Albanians see them as important determinants of economic well-being.

Looking now at answers for individual items across Tables 2–4 together, we see that the two items that Albanians most consistently relate to economic well-being are small families and high status for women. For each of the three versions of our questions, most respondents connect low fertility and high status for women with economic well-being. These two things are seen as correlated with the wealth of a country, as being products of economic expansion, and as causes of economic expansion. Very few respondents gave answers that suggest the opposite. Thus, for women’s status and fertility, there is clear and substantial overlap between the predictions of the DI framework and the views of ordinary Albanians.

Interestingly, most Albanians also see age at marriage as being correlated with a country’s economic standing. However, for most Albanians this correlation is much more the product of economic growth causing people to marry later than age at marriage influencing economic growth. In fact, the percentage of people that see younger age at marriage as a negative for economic expansion is about equal to the number seeing it as a positive, with many more people seeing it as having no effect at all.

A similar story holds for intergenerational co-residence. Most Albanians see intergenerational co-residence as inversely correlated with economic prosperity and see greater economic prosperity as reducing intergenerational co-residence. However, when it comes to change in intergenerational co-residence, about half see it as having no effect on economic well-being, while the rest are almost perfectly split between seeing increased co-residence as helping and as hurting the economy.

There is also a tendency to see self-choice of spouse both as being positively correlated with economic well-being and as an effect of economic expansion. However, these tendencies are weaker than for any other family aspect we asked respondents about. And three-fifths said that more self-selection of spouses would have no effect on the economy, although the great majority of the rest said it would make a poor country richer.

In Table 5 we shift our attention from DI beliefs to DI values and see continuing positive evaluations of marriage. Here we find that most Albanians continue to see marriage as an important institution, with about two-thirds disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that marriage is an outdated institution and about three-fifths saying that marriage is a lifelong commitment. These results clearly indicate that for these two questions the DI response—that marriage is outdated and is not a lifetime relationship—is the minority response. However, 17% or more give the DI responses, agreeing that marriage is an outdated institution and disagreeing that marriage is a lifetime relationship.

About 50% of Albanians agree or strongly agree that children aged 18–20 should live independently from their parents, as opposed to 32% who disagree or strongly disagree (row 3). This suggests some support for the DI view of this family relationship, but that support is weak.

There is very little support for the DI position of limited intergenerational connections (rows 4 and 5). Only 1% and 10%, respectively, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the propositions that children should look after their parents when the parents need it and that grandparents should look after grandchildren when the parents are unable. In contrast, 94% of Albanians agreed or strongly agreed that children should look after their parents when they need it, and 81% agreed or strongly agreed that grandparents should look after children in the family when parents are unable. These results emphasize the exceptionally weak support for DI in this dimension of life and a strong commitment to intergenerational support.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This work shows that many of the worldviews, beliefs, and values of DI are widespread in Albania. Albanians are very similar to other populations around the world where DI has been studied (Thornton et al. 2012c) in that they understand well the ideas of development and developmental hierarchies. Their views of developmental hierarchies are very similar to the development hierarchies constructed and published by the UN in its HDI. The ideas of development have been disseminated to the people of Albania, as they have to people in other settings.

But though Albanians understand hierarchies of development very well, they undervalue Albania’s level of development relative to its actual educational, health, and economic levels. Albanians do not perceive their level of development as close to the UN’s HDI for Albania but as much lower, like parts of Africa and South Asia. This finding is not new and does not just apply to Albania: Melegh and his colleagues (Melegh 2006; Melegh et al. 2013) found that Bulgarians also underrate themselves when it comes to comparison to the HDI and to other European countries. Melegh et al. (2013) suggest that this underrating might be part of “low self-esteem among the Balkan populations.” Historians and sociologists have suggested that it might be due to the negative perspectives that other Europeans have historically had on Balkan populations. These external perspectives have helped create this negative view of national identities in these countries, which do not rate themselves as high as relatively similar European countries (Todorova 1997). There is also probably an element of relative deprivation in these comparisons. People in Balkan countries such as Albania have always compared themselves with other European countries, and due to the large economic differences that have existed over the centuries, they may have formed a very negative opinion about their own levels of development. But, while this negative perspective about themselves might apply to the Balkan countries that have been investigated, such as Albania and Bulgaria, Melegh et al. (2016) could not find the same attitudes in Romania and Hungary.

As we have reported, Albanians also have beliefs about the association between development and various family attributes that are consistent with the belief system of DI. By that, we mean that Albanians generally believe that family attributes pictured as modern in the DI framework are more common in countries defined as developed. Similarly, Albanians generally perceive that development affects family structures and behavior and that family structures and behavior affect economic well-being. But Albanians see development as a cause of family change more than as an outcome of family change.

It is also useful to note that the perceived interrelationships between development and family structure vary across the five family attributes considered in this paper. In general, the perceived association with development is stronger for the attributes of fertility, living arrangements, and gender equality than for age at marriage and selection of a spouse. This indicates that there has been differential spread of DI across attributes in Albania.

At the same time that our results confirm widespread beliefs in DI in Albania, the responses of Albanians about the value of certain family attributes do not line up well with DI. The great majority of respondents indicated that marriage is not an outdated institution, and that it is a lifetime relationship, and that intergenerational relations are important. These results suggest that many aspects of family life in Albania can be and in fact are very resilient and resistant to change, even in the face of other substantial social changes. At the same time, however, a significant minority agreed that marriage was an outdated institution and disagreed that marriage is a lifetime relationship. Although we do not have information on Albanians’ views of these things in the early or middle twentieth century, it is easy to speculate that the familial and patriarchal nature of Albanian society in the past would have produced views that were even more pro-marriage at that time than at present. If so, the introduction of DI in Albania may have played a role in this change.

One question that naturally arises is how DI became so widespread in Albania. This is a particularly relevant question because the closure of Albania to the outside world for an extensive period under the state socialist government after World War II is well known. Just how did the worldviews, beliefs, and values of DI penetrate into the minds of Albanians? A sub-question is how DI beliefs and values can still apply even in a country that applied a radical communist mode of development. The answers to these two questions are interrelated.

Our previous discussion of Albanian social structure and history suggests several answers to both questions. An especially important one is that the state socialist government that came to power after World War II had its own version of development, which it promulgated and instituted with exceptional vigor. Also, as we discussed earlier, even in the first half of the twentieth century Albanians had significant interactions with Italy, contacts brought through international migration, and some education outside the country. The state socialist period also brought extensive increases in education and industrial employment for both women and men, which would have facilitated access to DI. This is particularly important for the second question, implying that even under a communist model of development, emphasis on education and the emancipation of women can be crucial in facilitating the widespread views and ideas of DI. There was also access to Greek and Italian television during some of the state socialist period. Finally, after the collapse of state socialism in 1990, the country had substantial access to outside sources of information through such mechanisms as the mass media and extensive international migration. Unfortunately, it is not possible to establish the relative contributions of each of these mechanisms to the spread of DI in Albania.

We would of course like to know how the introduction of DI into Albania has affected the behavior of people in the country. Has it affected fertility, marriage, gender roles, and living arrangements? Or, have the changes in these dimensions of family life affected the views of people concerning DI? Or have the introduction of DI and the changes in family life been causally independent? With our cross-sectional data concerning DI, it is extremely difficult to address such questions, and we leave them for further research.

We do, however, offer one speculation about the intersection between Albanian endorsement of DI and Albanian behavioral changes over several decades. We observed earlier that Albanians tend to identify a much stronger relationship between fertility and economic well-being than between age at marriage and economic performance. Here we observe that previous work has found that Albanians brought fertility down to 1.85 children per woman in 2005 and 1.56 in 2015, levels well below replacement, while there has been relatively little change in the mean age of entrance into marriage, exceptionally low fertility outside marriage, and almost no nonmarital cohabitation (Gjonça, Aassve, and Mencarini 2008; Falkingham and Gjonça 2001). It is possible that the fertility–marriage differential in support of DI is related to the fertility–marriage differential in behavioral trends. This could occur because the stronger support of Albanians for fertility-related DI than for marriage-related DI produced a stronger effect on fertility than on marriage—or it could be the result of differential trends in fertility and marriage producing differential endorsement of fertility-related DI and marriage-related DI. Another explanation comes from the interpretation of the DI framework itself, which, as we have shown in this paper, has wide global application, including in Albania. However, as most cultural models would predict, even under an extreme communist model of development, like in Albania, the local context means that one would expect variation in the implementation of these models. In Albania marriage behavior seems to be determined more by the traditional Albanian attitudes toward marriage and cohabitation.

This matter is related to previous work on how development and Albanian tradition interact in affecting different family and demographic behaviors (Gjonça and Guilmoto 2012). Gjonça has argued that in Albania, the persistence of patriarchy has been very strong in determining two demographic outcomes. The first is entrance into marriage, with female mean age at marriage changing only by two years in a 50-year period and 92% of females entering marriage by age 35 ( Gjonça, Aassve, and Mencarini 2008). The second is the imbalanced sex ratio at birth, with son preference and selective abortion prevalent in Albanian society even at the present time (Guilmoto et al. 2018).

Albanian experience and the application of the DI framework in the country during state socialism reveals to us that the widespread values and ideas of developmental idealism can be and are widely implemented, even in countries that have applied radical forms of communism like Albania, and even in countries where patriarchy is still strongly shaping some demographic behaviors. This was likely due to the education policies constantly implemented in the country under state socialism, which fostered the acceptance of development ideas, as predicted by the DI model.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Survey development scores and UN Human Development Index, 2005

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Development (avg.) | Development (rank) | HDI\* | HDI rank |
| United States | 9.5 | 1 | 9.5 | 1 |
| Italy | 7.7 | 2 | 9.4 | 2 |
| China | 7.1 | 3 | 7.7 | 4 |
| India | 3.4 | 4 | 6.2 | 5 |
| Albania | 3.1 | 5 | 8.0 | 3 |
| Central African Rep | 3.1 | 6 | 3.5 | 8 |
| Pakistan | 3.0 | 7 | 5.5 | 6 |
| Nigeria | 2.6 | 8 | 4.7 | 7 |

*\*Multiplied by 10 for comparability to survey development scores*

Table 2. Distribution of views of where certain family attributes are more common in poor or rich countries (%)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Poor | Rich | About the same |
| Families having fewer children | 13.8 | 69.8 | 16.4 |
| People marrying at younger ages | 59.7 | 12.0 | 28.3 |
| Young people choosing their own spouse | 9.3 | 47.8 | 42.9 |
| Women having low status | 76.6 | 9.9 | 13.5 |
| Young married children living away from their older parents | 10.9 | 71.7 | 17.4 |

Table 3. Distribution of views concerning whether economic growth in poor countries would result in family attributes becoming more or less common (%)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | More common | Less common | About the same |
| Families having more children | 13.7 | 62.2 | 24.1 |
| People marrying at older ages | 41.9 | 25.6 | 32.5 |
| Young people choosing their own spouse | 47.7 | 13.4 | 38.9 |
| Women having higher status | 63.4 | 14.7 | 21.9 |
| Young married children living with their old parents | 14.5 | 62.7 | 22.8 |

Table 4. Distribution of views concerning whether family changes would help make poor countries poorer, richer, or about the same (%)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Poorer | Richer | About the same |
| If families in poor countries have fewer children | 12.2 | 52.3 | 35.5 |
| If people in poor countries married at young age | 24.2 | 27.1 | 48.7 |
| If more young children in poor countries chose their own spouse | 5.6 | 33.9 | 60.5 |
| If women in poor countries had higher status | 7.3 | 62.1 | 30.6 |
| If more young children in poor countries lived with their older parents | 24.5 | 24.3 | 51.3 |

Table 5. Distribution of views concerning attitudes to marriage and patterns of living arrangements (%)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree or disagree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | Total |
| Marriage is an outdated institution | 7 | 10 | 15 | 36 | 31 | 100 |
| Marriage is a lifetime relationship | 29 | 29 | 18 | 17 | 7 | 100 |
| Children 18–20 should live independently | 23 | 27 | 18 | 24 | 8 | 100 |
| Children should look after their parents when parents are in need of care | 63 | 31 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 100 |
| Grandparents should look after grandchildren when parents are unable | 45 | 36 | 9 | 6 | 4 | 100 |

Figure 1. Albanian perceptions of development for selected countries, 2005

1. The Multiple Indicators Cluster Surveys have been conducted by UNICEF over the past two decades to collect and analyze data on children and maternal health. The main objective of the surveys is to provide internationally comparable data to monitor the Millennium Development Goals and more recently the Sustainable Development Goals, and to help policymakers formulate policies to improve children and maternal health. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)