

A Domain of Informality: Football in Serbia and Croatia

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Declaration Page

Declaration of Authorship:

I, Keith Sonia, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Date: 12/07/2023

Abstract

This thesis argues that football represents an important domain of informality within both Serbia and Croatia. With acknowledgment that the study of informality lacks a consistent framework and otherwise requires a robust, multidimensional approach to analyses from different states, structures, processes, and individuals, the thesis employs Polese's "flavours of informality," specifically top politics, economic informality, and corruption, to demonstrate through multiple empirical examples that each state has been inundated with forms of informality for decades. The thesis then utilises case studies that demonstrate the entrenchment of informal processes and their interplay with football in each state. In Serbia, this is examined through an analysis of the relationship between elites and the leadership of certain football supporter groups and how that relationship compromises relevant state institutions. Through the case of the now deceased football supporters' group leader Alexander Stanković, who enjoyed access to Serbian government officials and was regularly able to avoid incarceration despite evidence of criminal wrongdoing, the thesis illustrates how Serbia's push to reform its judiciary is threatened by such informal ties. In Croatia, the most notorious man in football, Zdravko Mamić, who leveraged political connections to exploit Croatia's privatisation and procurement processes, regularly exercised informal forms of power over the governance of football to coalesce control over the sport on behalf of himself and his network. The introduction of concepts of informality with that of football and politics & society in Serbia and Croatia represents an original approach to the study of both; the use of relevant examples and case studies satisfies the view that the study of informality requires a multifarious approach to generate greater understanding of its impact on local societies.

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Introduction: The Puzzle - Football as a Domain of Informality

After the shocking murder of French football fan Brice Taton in Belgrade in 2009, the Serbian government reacted swiftly. Members of Partizan Belgrade's Grobari – Gravediggers – supporters' subgroup Alkatraz were arrested and quickly put on trial to quell international observers wondering if the issue of hooligan violence had spiralled completely out of the control of Serbian authorities. In 2011, four members of Alkatraz were sentenced to 30 years in prison for the crime, including Ljubomir Marković, a prominent member of the group. Marković, better known as Kica,¹ later had his sentence reduced to 13 years. He was eventually released in 2017 after having served eight years in prison for murder - a short amount of time considering the gravity of the crime. Marković's early release from prison demonstrated inherent flaws within the Serbian judiciary – a lax system in which hooligan and supporters' groups, long close to the political elite of the country, are rarely prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. In 2019, Marković became yet another statistic highlighting the failure of the Serbian government to curtail the activities of these groups when he himself was shot dead outside a Belgrade gas station.² With a judiciary system unable or unwilling to take decisive action to solve the problem and with the political elite content to preserve the status quo in which supporters' groups enjoy links to representatives of Serbian politics and society, the negative aspects of football are symptomatic of the pervasiveness of informal ties and processes observed in both Serbia and its neighbour, Croatia. Structural deficiencies in electoral law, corruption, the judiciary system, and civil society in these states attract the analysis of international organisations and non-governmental organisations seeking to illuminate perceived flaws in governance and recommend policies that would address those issues. Serbia and Croatia's key defects in governance have been scrutinised and point to a failure to remedy inadequacies which contribute to the primacy of informal relations and processes in important domains.

¹ A documentary about the case, *The Presumption of Justice*, argues that while Taton's death was a tragedy, the trial that convicted Marković and others was rushed and rife with errors.

² Deutsche Welle, "Killer of Toulouse Football Fan Brice Taton Gunned Down in Belgrade," (2019). Accessed here: <https://www.dw.com/en/killer-of-toulouse-football-fan-brice-taton-gunned-down-in-belgrade/a-51094036>

Freedom House, a US-based non-profit organisation founded to chart and analyse the relative health of democratic institutions in states around the world, authors multiple reports annually. Two relevant and highly influential publications are the *Freedom in the World (FitW)* survey and the more regionally oriented *Nations in Transit (NiT)*. To scrutinise developments in politics and governance in every state of the world, Freedom House relies on regional experts and consultants, in addition to the organisation's "academic advisory board." They review specific sub-categories to generate a numerical value that determines whether or not the state has improved or regressed year to year in those categories. The annual reporting done by Freedom House has often served as the empirical foundation for relevant scholarships³, and often generates significant discussion in public policy domains.

The *Freedom in the World* survey proffers a system of analysis that broadly categorises states as "free," "partly free," or "not free" and, though at times edifying, *FitW* employs measurements that produce results that are lacking in greater profundity. States are graded from 1 - 7 on "freedom rating," "political rights," and "civil liberties," with an aggregate score between 1 - 100, with 100 being the "most free."⁴ In the 2019 *FitW* report, Freedom House lowered Serbia's aggregate score to 67, rendering the state as being "partly free." Though conspicuous, and not without some qualitative explanation, the system is, in a comparative sense, otherwise obtuse. Serbia's "freedom rating" is a three, the same score as that of the Seychelles and Fiji. One may understand that there are barriers to freedom in politics or civil rights in each of those three states, but beyond that, our understanding of the elements that prevent liberal democracy in Serbian politics and society is no more or less robust than our grasp of those same elements in Fiji. In sum, *Freedom in the World* allows for

³ Diamond, (2008, 2015); Levitsky & Way, (2015).

⁴ According to Freedom House, the average Freedom Score required for a state to be "Free" is between 1.0 to 2.5; "Partly Free" is between 3.0 to 5.0; and "Not Free" is between 5.5 and 7.0. The definition of a state with a 1 rating for Political Rights includes those states that "enjoy a wide range of political rights, including free and fair elections. Candidates who are elected rule, political parties are competitive, the opposition play a vital role and enjoys real power, and the interests of minority groups are well represented in politics and government." For a comparison, a state with a 3 only "moderately protects" the political rights of citizens. *Freedom of the World, Methodology*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/methodology-freedom-world-2019>.

sweeping generalisations⁵ that, considering its popularity in the literature, do less to measure the robustness of governance structures in a given state than the more ambiguous concept of “freedom.”⁶

The *Nations in Transit* analysis allows for greater nuance, owing to a quarter-point ratings system (again, between 1 – 7 with 1 being considered consolidated) and seven ratings categories.⁷ Unlike *FitW*, *NiT* evaluates progress toward consolidated democratisation in 29 countries from the Baltics to the Balkans, and from Russia down through the Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union. Each state is classified as either a “consolidated democracy,” “semi-consolidated democracy,” “transitional government or hybrid regime,” “semi-consolidated authoritarian regime,” or “consolidated authoritarian regime.” Serbia and Croatia are both classified as a “semi-consolidated democracy,” with each state trending away from greater democratic consolidation.

⁵ Freedom House summarised their 2019 report by declaring worldwide democracy to be “in retreat.” The organisation points to “challenges” to American democracy and argues this had an effect globally. See Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2019*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019>.

⁶ Munck & Verkuilen (2002).

⁷ The *NiT* report is from 2018 and includes national democratic governance, electoral process, civil society, independent media, local democratic governance, judicial framework and independence, and corruption as ratings categories for twenty-nine states from Central Europe to Central Asia. See Freedom House, *Nations in Transit Methodology 2018*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit-methodology>.

Table 1: Serbia NiT ratings, 2011 – 2018. ⁸

Category	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
National Democratic Governance	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	4	4.25	4.50
Electoral Process	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.5	3.5
Civil Society	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.25	2.50
Independent Media	4	4	4	4	4.25	4.50	4.50	4.75
Local Democratic Governance	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.75
Judicial Independence	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50
Corruption	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25
Democracy Score	3.64	3.64	3.64	3.64	3.68	3.75	3.82	3.96

Table 2: Croatia NiT Ratings, 2011 – 2018. ⁹

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
National Democratic Governance	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.75
Electoral Process	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25	3	3	3
Civil Society	2.50	2.50	2.50	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75
Independent Media	4	4	4	4	4	4	4.25	4.25
Local Democratic Governance	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75
Judicial Independence	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50
Corruption	4.25	4	4	4	4	4.25	4.25	4.25
Democracy Score	3.64	3.61	3.61	3.68	3.68	3.68	3.71	3.75

Though designing a model that creates a wider spectrum of regime types alleviates the apocryphal binary of simply labelling states as either “democratic” or

⁸ Freedom House, *Nations in Transit: Serbia*, 2018.

⁹ Freedom House, *Nations in Transit: Croatia*, 2018.

“authoritarian,” gaps linger and additional dimensions of analysis are warranted to help further illuminate the characteristics of a state or regime. Though the reports for each state are authored by either local journalists, academics, or observers, and though each report features a comprehensive summary explaining the ratings given, issues of subjectivity permeate - as do questions regarding terminology.

Dawson¹⁰ points out quite convincingly in his assessment of Freedom House’s analysis of civil society, that there is little evidence provided about the degree to which NGOs or protesters or any other formal or semi-formal groups are promoting the rule of law and pluralism. A “vibrant” civil society might include organisations committed to democratic institutions, but this is not always the case. For example, conservative war veterans’ groups in Croatia, when advocating or campaigning, generally prioritise nationalist beliefs over pluralism.¹¹ Though Dawson primarily focuses on Bulgaria in his critique of Freedom House, and though the latest *NiT* report predates current developments in Serbia, outsiders may view protests against Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, for example, as being populated largely by inherently liberal forces opposed to Vučić’s increasingly authoritarian approach to governance.¹² While many Serbs committed to a form of liberal democracy have indeed marched in such protests, one of the most vocal and often-seen to regularly protest the ruling Serbian government is Boško Obradović, leader of the far-right *Dveri* movement which is rabidly nationalist and hostile to the LGBTQI+ community. Because these protests were undisturbed by pro-Vučić forces and regularly maintained their schedule and sizable attendance figures, it makes sense that *Dveri*’s presence in the protests would not hinder the view Freedom House takes toward civil society in Serbia. These discrepancies thus provoke a need to more comprehensively understand how structures and individuals manifest preferred results – be it in the political, economic, or social realms. Relying strictly on the study of formal institutions or structures often fails to capture meaningful nuance.

¹⁰ Dawson’s work on “Cultures of Democracy” in Serbia (and Bulgaria) is discussed in chapter one. Dawson, (2010).

¹¹ On Croatian war veterans’ influence on electoral politics, see Lesschaeve, (2020).

¹² During the latter months of 2018, tens of thousands marched in cities across Serbia and, for some of that time also in areas of Kosovo, in protests against Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić.

The reliance of Freedom House on formal institutions is best described by Dawson when he concludes that as “the name ‘Freedom House’ suggests, the legal ‘freedom’ to form a civil association to challenge political elites is considered to be analytically equivalent to evidence that civil actors actually use those freedoms.”¹³ Much of the literature that examines the trajectory of governance in Serbia, Croatia, and the wider Balkan region follows the lead of Freedom House in providing a top-down view of the adoption of democratic institutions. For example, Keil, Vachudova, and Pridham are among those that have argued that the prospect of European Union (EU) accession has helped boost the fortunes of democratically inclined forces while also prompting change among entities not formerly in support of pluralism.¹⁴

Others have argued that formal institutions like the EU have fallen into a trap of their own design: states that have adopted mandated institutional reforms have, as Noutcheva argues, been “faking” compliance with EU conditionality.¹⁵ Croatia has achieved EU accession; Serbia has achieved candidate status and has closed multiple chapters of the EU *acquis communautaire* while opening many more. This has not resulted in a strengthened democratic culture in either Serbia or Croatia. Instead, Boduszyński refers to this as a “simulated democracy.”¹⁶ The literature on informality stresses that even when liberal forms of governance are broadly supported by the general populace of a state, there are processes and interactions and what they may believe are “common sense” exchanges that are not formally enshrined. With this in mind, a substantive effort at achieving “social normalisation” must be undertaken if any arbiter of institution-building expects widespread compliance with new rules and regulations.¹⁷ Instead, the European Union has employed a largely elite-driven accession process and, with it, welcomed Croatia in as a member while Serbia’s Vučić has been warmly welcomed in the capitals of Western Europe and beyond, despite an early political career defined by his role in the Milošević government and punctuated

¹³ Dawson (2014:35).

¹⁴ Brinks & Coppedge, (2006); Keil, (2013); Vachudova, (2009; 2014); Pridham, (2006).

¹⁵ See Freyburg & Richter, (2010); Bieber, (2011); Noutcheva, (2009).

¹⁶ Boduszyński, (2010).

¹⁷ On “common sense” as an impetus for informal processes and exchanges, see Jovanović, (2019).

by extreme nationalist ideology. Reform and the adoption of institutions that typify consolidation – the judiciary, legislative oversight, transparency, a free and independent media – has either stagnated or regressed, despite the external oversight of formal and institutional bulwarks of a liberal democracy. This is now reflected in models like *FitW* and *NiT* as it relates to Serbia and Croatia, but the top-down characteristic of Freedom House’s models, and the proclivity of scholars to appropriate data gleaned from those models to their contributions, has commodiously left practical analyses under-researched.

The argument advanced in this thesis is anchored by the fundamental belief that a proper academic analysis of informal networks and processes must consider the transactions and engagements elites and non-elites alike have with bureaucracy, business, media, elections, the courts, and the degree to which the rules and regulations are universally applied – in lieu of the formal, institutional standard. Thus, there must also be studies of “everyday informality,” of the vulnerabilities to greater acceptance of pluralistic institutions that have persisted or have been ushered in by opportunistic elites, and of normative conventions - the habituality of acting outside formal institutions through an unconsolidated democratic culture or the failure to normalise formal structures or regulations.¹⁸ This thesis does not attempt to quantitatively measure the effect that certain transactions have as it relates to a “informality score,” “illiberal score,” “authoritarian score,” or anything in between. Rather, this thesis is an empirical, comparative analysis that considers case studies featuring an array of actors from Serbia and Croatia as examples of normative and functional informality in transitioning states.

The central research question of this thesis is whether the informal processes and networks that have existed within the sport for decades in each state renders football an important domain of informality in Serbia and Croatia. In answering this question, the thesis employs a novel framework that engages with examples of Abel Polese’s “flavours of informality” from the 1990s until the present day as best to demonstrate

¹⁸ Rupnik, (2007).

the variety of ways in which informality permeates the sport. In doing so, the thesis not only discerns the functionality of football and sport in Serbia and Croatia, but also contributes to wider discussions related to development more broadly in each state via the pervasiveness of informal processes and networks.

In his analysis of informalities, Polese has sought to define the processes which lead to the repeated and routine rejection of formal institutions by wide swaths of society. This is summarised by what he characterises as “flavours,” or types, of informality.¹⁹ Some of these types of informality, Polese points out, work with or in conjunction with the state. These are processes in which the state tacitly recognises its inability to meet the needs and requirements of its constituents via formal institutions. Thus, auxiliary institutions through informal relations aid in meeting the assorted needs and demands of the population.

Other informalities work against the state, including those that may be carried out by state actors - typically in service of personal networks or corrupt individuals and used for self-enrichment or political or social gain. This thesis focuses on this form of the exercising of informal power – institutions and processes that serve the needs of networks or individuals at the expense of the state and its ability to foster healthier development.

As is discussed in chapter one, Polese and others are keen to point out that even inherently negative forms of informal association or process do not necessarily equate to illegality. Some actions or processes purposely bypass formal rules, laws, or regulations, and thus can be deemed to be illegal; others, though, exist within the gaps created by the state’s failure to formalise laws around certain interactions or exchanges. A frequent theme found through this thesis is that though informal associations are not inherently illegal, networks that work within and around football often exist as best to plot or otherwise disguise illegal activity. The case studies involving football employed to demonstrate that the sport, its actors, its structures, and

¹⁹ Polese, (2018; 2019).

its processes represent bastions of informal interactions and exchange in each state substantiate this throughout the thesis.

In scrutinising informal structures and networks in Serbia and Croatia through the prism of football, I consider the role of elites, of broader groups and individuals within wider society, and of processes or behaviours that contradict long-established or newly introduced formal rules and institutions.²⁰ Demonstrating that football – or any social, political, or cultural subset of wider society – represents an area of the state inundated with informality, contributes to the broader understanding of civic and political cultures that are, for any number of reasons, resistant to adopting newly established institutions. As Edmunds notes:

“Local political cultures tend to be much slower to change than the transitions literature commonly assumes [and] instead of leading outright resistance, this creates scope for a more dynamic interaction between the demands of democratisation and illiberal traditions of governance. What we see therefore are a series of adaptive mechanisms through which illiberal actors and interests in transforming societies can co-opt and colonise the language, institutions and in some cases even the practices of democratisation...what is at stake here is not democracy itself – in terms of electoral competition, democratic institutions and so on – but the character and nature of democratic politics itself.”²¹

This is also expanded upon by Mujanović, who argues that the Western Balkans are governed with a purposeful degree of elasticity that allows for the exploitation of gaps between formal institutions and the way processes are overseen and governed in practice.²² Similar to that of Edmunds, the argument is that opportunistic elites have manipulated the process of democratisation and the adoption of formal institutions to tailor it to their often-nefarious needs. Others, including Bieber, expand on this by arguing that this has been aided by the acquiescence of international actors typically

²⁰ As Edmunds (2007) notes, there has been some debate over whether measuring progress or regression through the lens of “democratic” transition is too simplistic a paradigm to try and gauge what is effectively occurring in a state moving from one form of governance to another. This is central to the thesis in that, as many researchers have worked to expose across a broad range of states and domains, merely adopting certain “democratic” institutions or reforms does not necessarily lead to a smooth transfer of actual process. Instead, long-standing relationships and processes that run contrary to reform often persist.

²¹ Edmunds, (2007:6).

²² Mujanović, (2018).

seen as the arbiters of consolidated democracy – that is, the European Union, the United States, and the network of international organisations that operate to ostensibly preserve and expand the liberal democratic order.²³ Though I scrutinise this in chapter one, arguments like Bieber’s are features of the problem, but not the cause. Rather, the “transformation” of actors and processes toward an acceptance of formal institutions has been opportunistic and because of this, the civic and political cultures in Serbia and Croatia have remained shallow with respect to engagement with and normalisation of formal institutions. This then perpetuates a cycle in which a mostly disengaged citizenry perceives state governance to be flawed and that disengagement allows for the very resilience of informal structures and networks that entrenches general disillusionment. Instead of actively engaging with the state, citizens of Serbia and Croatia are instead routinely confronted by, or participate in, processes that hamper enthusiasm or belief that reforms they hear or read about are influencing the day-to-day governance of their communities. Football represents a microcosm of this phenomenon in that it is widely seen as an area of public life that is rife with deficiencies and has instigated a hardening of that perception and the view that this is something of an open secret. This then ultimately leads to weak oversight and the maintenance of such activities that serve as the impetus for this thesis.

The research within the thesis is significant in that it synthesises two existing bodies of literature – informality and football – and it also demonstrates the practical ways in which informality manifests in sport. By developing a framework around Polese’s “flavours,” the thesis not only works to state that informal networks or processes exist in and around football in each state, but does so in a richer, more nuanced manner, in which *types* of informality are considered. This is a unique approach and represents not only an opportunity to more completely gauge how informality suffuses football, but to consider how such networks and processes pervade wider society and how this limits the effectiveness of formal reforms in any given domain. As Eitzen notes,

“...sport is a microcosm of society. If we know how sport is organised, the type of games played, the way winners and losers are treated, the type and amount of compensation given the participants, and the way rules are

²³ Bieber, (2018).

*enforced, then we surely also know a great deal about the larger society in which it exists. Conversely, if we know the values of a society, the type of economy, the way minority groups are treated, and the political structure, then we would also have important clues about how sport in that society is likely organised.*²⁴

By introducing concepts of informality to the study of football in Serbia and Croatia, and by applying new and existing material related to football onto an original framework from which to view the influence of informality within the game, the thesis advances an exciting approach towards better understanding football's significance and influence in Serbia and Croatia. In doing so, the thesis holds a proverbial mirror up to Serbian and Croatia development and society more broadly through sport.

Case Selection

In advancing the argument that in both Serbia and Croatia, football is replete with informality, this thesis employs football as a novel variable to better understand how those networks and informalities are utilised on the ground in each state. Football has intersected with the politics of Serbia and Croatia before, and since, the dissolution of Yugoslavia. As opportunistic politicians like Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman sought popular support while Yugoslavia collapsed, they each found it in the form of football supporters. In Belgrade and in Zagreb, football supporters' groups – a relatively new phenomenon in the waning days of the Yugoslav state – eventually found themselves in sync with each man during a time in which nationalist rhetoric and ideology, long banned across Yugoslavia during the long reign of Marshall Josip Broz Tito, became a defining characteristic of football grounds across the country. As it became evident that Yugoslavia was in terminal decline, each man devised ways to instrumentalise these supporters in a way that advanced their respective causes.

This included using sport and sporting supporters as tools for propaganda and, in the case of Milošević, installing a crony into the leadership of Belgrade's largest

²⁴ Eitzen, (2000:1).

supporters' group.²⁵ Finally, this also included the mobilisation of some hooligans into paramilitary units when war did eventually break out. As Yugoslavia's military, under the control of Milošević, faced elevated levels of desertion, militias partially made up of football supporters filled the gap and helped establish black market networks that funded the regime when it was ostracised and isolated globally. On the other hand, Tuđman sought out compelling symbols that glorified the birth of a new Croatian state, which he temporarily found in the form of football supporters groups committed to serving in or celebrating the "Homeland War."

Following the cessation of hostilities and the establishment of independent states across the former Yugoslavia, the approach taken by Milošević and Tuđman to football and its actors differed greatly. Milošević continued to partner with supporters' groups for political and economic ends. Tuđman instead had an antagonistic relationship with some supporters' groups while he installed partners and cronies into positions of power within football as part of a wider state building effort. Indeed, the then-political elite of both Serbia and Croatia formed networks involving football: Milošević with supporters' groups content to conduct street crimes and serving as an at-the-ready force that could be mobilised based on the needs of the regime; and as a tool for institutionalised grand corruption for Tuđman. In each instance, informal, network politics defined the relationship each regime had to football, its actors, and its governing structures.

These networks, formed over a quarter of a century ago, remain in place today. Serbia's president, Aleksandar Vučić, himself a former member of a supporters' group and a former propaganda minister for Milošević, has a consolidated grip on power in Serbia and has routinely refused to take a more active approach in curtailing violent hooliganism within Serbia. In Croatia, the government led by Tuđman's Croatian Democratic Union (*Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* – HDZ) has retained links to Croatia's nouveau riche, despite the undemocratic way much of Croatia's upper class

²⁵ In defining supporters' groups, this thesis relies on the definition of Spaaij. Supporters' groups are comprised of individuals that engage in "the competitive violence of socially organised fan groups in football, principally directed against opposition fan groups." Spaaij, (2006:9).

were awarded their wealth - including those involved in the governance of football in the country. From the elite to bureaucratic functionaries to criminal elements, informal processes and networks related to football in Serbia and Croatia include a diverse cross-section of actors reflective of the broader population.

This thesis utilises case studies to best demonstrate the resilience of such actors and processes. The case studies within the thesis reflect the general point about football's ability to serve as a reflection of wider political, civic, and societal issues by demonstrating that informal networks and processes can attract ostensibly very different types of individuals into participating. This ranges from infamous criminals like Arkan and his celebrity entertainer widow Ceca to successful Croatian businessmen and from up-and-coming (and poorly paid) footballers to political sycophants thrust into action on behalf of their leaders. In addition to the actors themselves serving as distinctive elements from which to scrutinise informality's influence within football, the case studies also are organised using the "flavours" of informality framework. This multidimensional approach is designed to present a comprehensive view of informality within football and to illustrate that it has lingered in each state for decades.

Overview of Thesis Chapters

Chapter one analyses and scrutinises existing literature first on the interaction between football and politics and society in Serbia and Croatia, and the approaches used by researchers, including contributions that emphasise identity and nationalism; on politics specifically; on the history of the relationship between football and the state in the region; and on the sociological and ethnographic dimensions of that relationship. Next, the chapter examines the relationship and differences between informality and illegality before advancing explanations for the prevalence of informalities in Serbia and Croatia, including cultural embeddedness; externally instigated institution building; and trust networks and political relations.

Chapter two of the thesis discusses the methodological approach taken in advancing the central contention that football serves as an important domain of informality in Serbia and Croatia. The chapter outlines the framework employed to achieve its central aim through the amalgamation of the literature on football and politics and society within Serbia and Croatia with that of informality. In using this framework, the thesis presents a comprehensive view of informality within football as best to capture the unique position of Serbian and Croatian football relative to wider society. To do this, the thesis consults relevant literature, journalism, and primary and secondary government documents to support the central argument. This novel framework and approach to the analysis of informality serves as the key contribution to the literature as it uncovers a new layer of understanding as it relates to football and how it interacts with the Serbian and Croatian states via informal processes and networks.

Chapter three offers the theoretical basis on which the thesis rests and does so by employing the “flavours of informalities” framework that scrutinises football in Serbia through the prism of those types of informality. This includes an examination of economic informalities; corruption; and informal relations within political networks before concluding with a summary. The aim of the chapter is to demonstrate that each of the key three “flavours” have been present within football in Serbia over decades and that they often include a myriad number of distinctive actors.

Chapter four is structured into sub-sections that analyse the laissez faire approach taken toward rooting out criminality amongst some members of supporters’ groups in Serbia as a result of the informal relationship between those members and representatives of the Serbian government. This includes an in-depth analysis of the failures of judicial reforms in Serbia, the relationship Serbia’s political elite has benefitted from with football supporters’ groups,, and how this contributes to a perpetuation of informal processes.

Chapter five utilises the flavours of informalities framework to analyse the intersection between football and informal processes in Croatia. This includes examples of match-

fixing, the employment of economic informality in the relations between clubs and municipalities as well as the transfer of youth players, and the use of functionaries to achieve aims within football, by top political actors. Like chapter three, this chapter is organised using a timeline effect and with an array of actors included as best to demonstrate the resilience of informal processes across eras and the myriad types of individuals that could be invited to participate in informal networks.

In chapter six, there is an analysis of the poor implementation of public procurement law and the exploits of Zdravko Mamić, longtime boss of Dinamo Zagreb, and Croatian football more broadly, and how he coalesced power and expanded his wealth through procurement and privatisation abuse and a corrupt approach to management and governance of the sport.

Finally, the conclusive chapter discusses the findings presented throughout this thesis and outlines conclusions related to the central research question: whether football constitutes an important domain of informality in Serbia and Croatia. The concluding chapter also stresses how the findings illuminated throughout the thesis amount to an original contribution of the knowledge in multiple spheres, most notably football and informality in Serbia and Croatia.

Chapter One: Football and Informality - Positioning the Thesis in the Literature

In addressing the central question of this thesis, whether football constitutes a valid informal domain in Serbia and Croatia, the following chapter situates the thesis in broader discussions of football and “flavours” of informality.

This thesis joins a small but active library of scholarship that contributes to the notion that football is an essential window into broader society in Serbia and Croatia. This links football to the questions posed by informality scholars to demonstrate that football is an informal domain in both Serbia and Croatia. In doing so, additional opportunities are created for defining other aspects of the state as being susceptible to informality, as well. To compliment and attempt to bridge two bodies of literature, the chapter also presents broad, competing arguments within existing scholarship that examine the role of football and informal processes and structures in Serbia, Croatia, and beyond.

The chapter is organised into two sections. Part one covers football, its actors, and their place within informal, illiberal networks in Serbia and Croatia as a novel approach to understanding how those networks operate in each state. Part two is a discussion of informality, or what Gordy summarises to be the “disjunction between the world as it is described by official policy and the world that is confronted by citizens in their everyday experience.”²⁶ This includes the virtues of filling the gaps leftover by structural, institutional approaches to democracy with nuanced arguments that suggest informal processes and networks are more representative of how citizens of Serbia and Croatia experience governance in their respective states.

²⁶ Gordy, (2018:4).

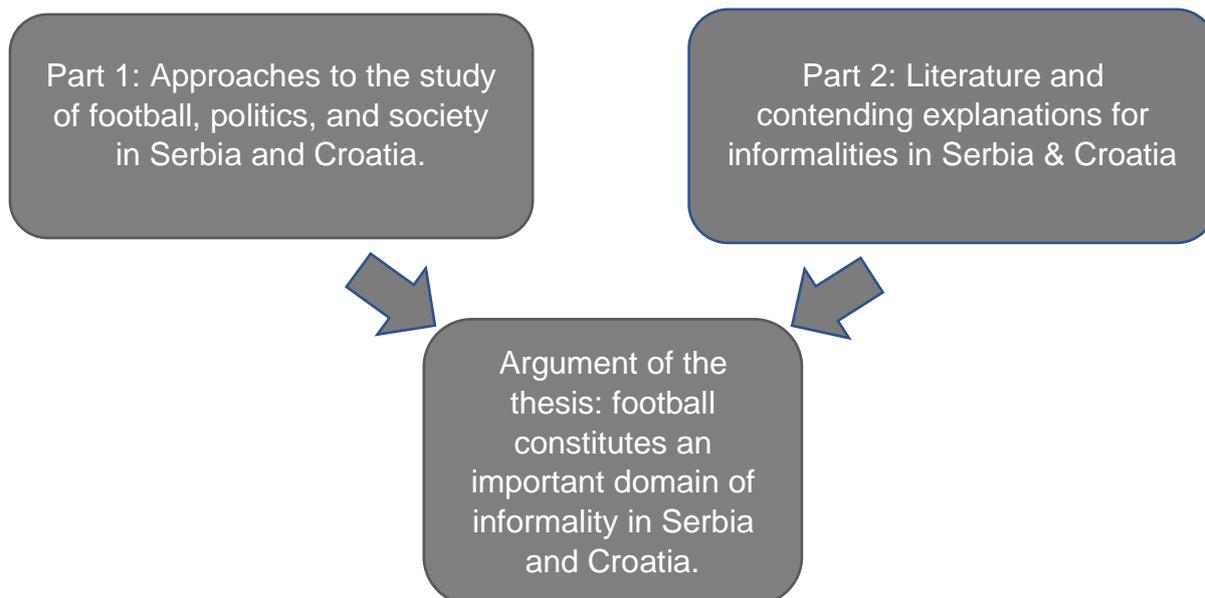


Figure 1: Workflow diagram for the literature review and how this approach contributes to answering the central research question of the thesis.

The chapter contributes to the overall argument presented within the thesis: that the gaps between formal structures and the actual practices citizens engage in within each state is better understood through the analysis and observance of informal processes and that nefarious activity that surrounds football serves as a unique opportunity to expand the literature on informality in Serbia and Croatia.

Part One: Football

In one of his key contributions to the literature on sport in Croatia, Dario Brentin quotes Franjo Tuđman, who pontificated about the role of sport and its ability to interact with politics and wider society: "...it is politics, which [should] decisively influence sport [because] everything is politics [and while] they say sport should be separated from politics, that economy should be separated from politics...I am telling you, such a thing does not exist."²⁷

²⁷ Brentin, (2013).

Given that football has played an outsized role in the political sphere in Croatia, Serbia, and states the world over, Tuđman's statement is an entirely prescient comment on not only his governing philosophy, which amounted to a concerted effort to build a patriotic, nationalist state that largely consisted of his own confidants and supporters being placed in positions of relative power and prestige, including in football and sporting bodies, but also on the character of sport in general.

Across societies and cultures, there are spheres that regularly demonstrate the ability to inspire actions or reactions from the public at large that influence the trajectory of politics. The regular interplay between sports and politics in states around the world is well documented.²⁸ The following subsections analyse the small but meaningful body of literature that illuminate football's considerable influence within Serbia and Croatia, including in politics. The subsections include historical approaches; literature that analyses football's relationship with nationalism in Serbia and Croatia; sociological and ethnographic studies; and political analyses. Each subsection chronicles the literature and its proximity to informality. As previously discussed, much of the literature acknowledges that leaders like Tuđman, Milošević, and others perverted sport, and specifically football, for political expediency. Yet, as is demonstrated throughout the chapter, very few consider the interrelation between informality and football as being central to that endeavour.

The Historical Approach

In 1991, club football in Yugoslavia reached its prime. Red Star Belgrade, in particular, was on a strong competitive run in both domestic and international competitions and was performing at an impressive level in that year's European Cup tournament, the precursor to today's Champions League.²⁹ They ultimately won the tournament, having dispatched some of Europe's traditional footballing giants. However, it came just as the Yugoslav state was collapsing and nationalist rhetoric and demonstrations

²⁸ Grix, (2013); Cottrell & Nelson, (2011); Tomlinson & Young, (2006); Houlihan, (2014).

²⁹ Red Star Belgrade achieved notable results in the late 1980s, including showings against European football behemoth's Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid in the European Cup and the Winners' Cup tournaments, respectively. Domestically, they were in the midst of a run that would include winning four out of five Yugoslav Cups in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

became commonplace at football grounds. Mills notes that on international broadcasts of the match, including on large networks like the BBC, supporters in attendance at the Stadio San Nicola in Bari, Italy, were captured on video unfurling an enormous Serbian flag and that there was a “noticeable absence of Yugoslav flags in the stadium, while a number of other Serbian flags are clearly visible in the aforementioned BBC footage.”³⁰ Though there were celebrations across Yugoslavia, and though the club itself was comprised of an ethnically diverse roster, it nevertheless had the feel of a Serbian victory.

Red Star’s 1991 win came as “the country this club represented, Yugoslavia, started the final episode of [a] process which in the coming years ended in [the] final dissolution of the state and the bloody civil war that accompanied it.”³¹ Croatia under Tuđman had already begun fielding its own national team and participated in a controversial, albeit successful, exhibition against the United States. The riot at the Maksimir Stadium in Zagreb in May 1990 generated international headlines and hardened the perception that Yugoslavia’s brotherhood and unity was giving way to irreconcilable differences amongst the constituent nations of the country and, ultimately, of terminal decline.

Unsurprisingly then, football in Serbia, Croatia, and the wider former Yugoslavia has drawn the attention of historians eager to delve into the sport and its wider impacts on society across eras. From under the control of the socialist government of the former Yugoslavia, where football started as an amateur cultural pursuit before giving way to de facto professionalisation, to football’s proximity to the decline and collapse of the Yugoslav state – including the devastating wars that accompanied that collapse – historians have sought to examine events, clubs, and the very sport itself in an effort to better understand how football and the state interact.

³⁰ Mills, (2009:1198).

³¹ Đorđević, (2016:117).

Literature on Football & The Yugoslav State

Richard Mills is the preeminent English-language historian of football in Yugoslavia. His influential work, *The Politics of Football in Yugoslavia: Sport, Nationalism, and the State*, attempts to chart football's relationship with the socialist government of Yugoslavia from its post-World War II inception through its violent disintegration in the last decade of the twentieth century. Throughout his work chronicling sport and politics throughout Tito's Yugoslavia, Mills crucially establishes that under the socialist government, where sport was initially viewed and stressed to be something of an extracurricular activity that would serve to strengthen social and community bonds, football eventually grew in cultural and societal stature as clubs and the national team achieved success and earned invitations to international tournaments. This success compelled the state to invest in football accordingly, which led to players being able to play abroad. Combined, this essentially amounted to Yugoslavia becoming home to a professionalised league. This contrasted with how Tito himself viewed sport in the country; as Petrov notes, Tito primarily viewed sport as an outlet for Yugoslav youths to engage in physical activities that would improve their mental and physical conditioning. She quotes Tito as saying sport would lead to an array of benefits, including "higher biological and health value, improving their work abilities, helping their cultural upbringing, and increasing the level of wellbeing and satisfaction."³²

Tito manifested this belief into what Mills referred to as a Yugoslav "stadium revolution" in which the state mobilised to construct stadia, playing fields, and other athletic surfaces as part of an "initiative to build the sporting infrastructure that would underpin a mass physical culture shaped by the state's unique path to socialism."³³ These athletic grounds, and sport itself, would ultimately serve as something of a showcase for "Yugoslav youth" as a projection of the Yugoslav state – a cohort best served to showcase sport as a valuable tool of camaraderie. One of the great exhibitions for young Yugoslavs became club and international football. That necessitated the need for greater financial investment from the state, as best to match the social and cultural enthusiasm prevalent across the country. As state resources flowed into clubs, some

³² Petrov, (2017:757).

³³ Mills, (2017:748).

of which were affiliated with various apparatuses of the state, club officials and patrons became heavily invested in earning as much funding for their associated football clubs as they could. This became something of an internal competition across the state between clubs and the bureaucrats running them.

Mills found that the economic discontent fostered in 1960s Yugoslavia, in which wealthier constituent nations like Croatia and Slovenia voiced frustration that they were contributing more to the federal Yugoslav budget and that those contributions were being misspent by representatives from poorer constituent states, and which instigated reforms that included increased decentralisation, eventually reached the governance of football.³⁴ The “lie of amateurism” echoed by most communist states carried on while the scramble for financial resources led to an era in which Yugoslav football “was a corrupt law unto itself.”³⁵

Klasić noted the rise of international sport as a tool of diplomacy during this era.³⁶ He notes that in “the competitive atmosphere which dominated the world after the Second World War, sports became one of the indicators of superiority. Losing to an enemy in a gym or on a track was considered to be both an athletic and political defeat.”³⁷ Whether during Olympic Games, chess matches, or on football pitches, sport became so politicised that it sometimes led to an abandonment of principles from states like Yugoslavia, which ultimately oversaw a system of resource allocation that led to the establishment of informal processes in pursuit of sporting success. Blasius notes that

³⁴ See, for example, Woodward, (2003).

³⁵ Mills, (2018:131).

³⁶ Sbeti also chronicles how football served as a tool for diplomacy between Yugoslavia and Italy over a disputed border in Trieste. Sbeti concludes that during such diplomatic conflicts, sport is invariably impacted but that it is also the case that sport can serve as a bridge toward normalisation of relations. In sum, sport matters to diplomacy. See too Grgić & Tot, who chronicle the national football team of the nascent independent state of Algeria and how, via competitive football matches held in Yugoslavia, the latter was able to increase sympathy for the cause of Algeria. Interestingly, the authors find that there is little evidence that the Algerian diplomatic mission sent to Yugoslavia during these matches were swayed by the socialist imagery of Yugoslavia; instead, Algerian success was measured in the favourable and fawning press their national team received in the Yugoslav press. This increased support for their cause amongst the general public of Yugoslavia. In short, football itself was the key harbinger of great interest and approval of the Algerian pursuit of sovereignty. Sbeti, (2017). Grgić & Tot, (2021).

³⁷ Klasić, (2017:843). Also see Jovanović, (2017) on the 1984 Olympic Games in Sarajevo and its role as one of the last vestiges of “Yugoslavness.”

football, particularly with respect to larger clubs like Red Star Belgrade and Dinamo Zagreb, was susceptible to political interventions, and was bereft with illicit funding.³⁸ The literature that analyses Yugoslav football in this era captures that football had evolved into a segment of culture that bred unorthodox processes contradictory to the stated aims of Yugoslavia's governing philosophy.³⁹ Indeed, as Brentin & Zec conclude, informal relations between sporting clubs and political elites in Yugoslavia were established because the socialist self-management system ensured clubs could not earn enough to not rely on funding from the state or state-sponsored bodies.⁴⁰ This reference to the term "informal relations" is one of very few within the literature, and as is the case throughout the breadth of the library on football and politics in the region, there is no remit within Brentin & Zec's chapter, nor more voluminous works like Mills', to pursue linkages between the workings of Yugoslav football and theories of informality. Instead, the research serves as an enticing entrée into the pursuit of linking such contributions to a broader research domain.

Literature on Football and the Dissolution of Yugoslavia

Football's outsized role in the collapse of Yugoslavia has attracted increased scholarship. Existing contributions are each primarily grounded in a fascination rooted in the concept that football was more than just a curious bullet point in the story of Yugoslavia's demise, but a unique window into the calamity itself. This is most exemplified by the importance placed on the May 1990 riot at the Maksimir Stadium. For many observers, it was and is easy to summarise Yugoslavia's collapse by elevating the Maksimir riot into an event synonymous with the collapse itself. It is easy to see why as the event itself was first marked by the foreboding

³⁸ Blasius, (2017).

³⁹ Mijatov acknowledges the privileged position that was afforded football in Yugoslavia, noting that the government position was that certain athletes, including footballers, were to be known as "non-amateurs." Because the Yugoslav government acquiesced to the financial demands of football, Mijatov argues that football was prematurely transitioned toward capitalism, well ahead of most of Yugoslav industry and society. "In this micro part of...Yugoslavia, these "non-amateurs" competed in their chosen sports and subdued to imperative of results that is ideologically closest to Laissez-faire capitalism and quite far from...socialist ideology. It was a micro part of [the] purest form of capitalism in socialist Yugoslavia that was not just tolerated, but also embraced by the government for "higher" purposes...when it comes to material gains and salaries of football players in Yugoslavia, the only thing that mattered was the [sporting] result." Mijatov, (2021:516).

⁴⁰ Brentin & Zec, (2017:719).

bravado of disparate voices chanting in nationalist singsong before spiralling into a spectacle of violence. Other theories that have sought to explain the behaviour of football supporters – whether that be excessive drinking, or ritual and habitual violence – argue that it manifested as a result of economic stagnation, social and class barriers, and the appeal of belonging to a group.⁴¹ Football supporter groups regularly include often radical political statements in their rituals in other parts of Europe and the world, generating primarily negative perceptions of such groups. Yugoslavia was not immune to this prior to the Maksimir riot, as the 1980s ushered in terrace chants and political rhetoric that began to make clear that “loyalty to a football club...translated into loyalty to a national group.”⁴²

The violence that was part of the ritual of Yugoslav supporters’ groups was not necessarily destined to become as politically charged as it did. Maffesoli and Marsh each argue that the “ritualised warfare” found in the grounds of football stadiums can be a net positive for society – the violence is contained and the aggression that the participants feel they need to release is done so through the phenomenon of spectator violence rather than society in general.⁴³ Rather than engage in physical violence in the workspace or at home, supporter groups can usually do so outside football grounds within a set of parameters that limits the danger for innocent spectators. However, as Yugoslavia’s decline accelerated and the future of the state became more precarious, the role of the supporter became inherently more political as “fans looked like a specific avant-garde group of a social movement for national rights, or even a National Liberation Front.”⁴⁴ Though the literature explains that leaders like Milošević recognised the potential benefit to harnessing supporter groups for the benefit of his political project, the central role afforded those same groups in contributions analysing Maksimir and the broader violence associated with the collapse of Yugoslavia, provoked their own debates.

⁴¹ Dunning, Williams, & Murphy, (1986); Dunning, Maguire, & Murphy, (1982); Giulianotti, (1995).

⁴² Andjelić, (2014:118).

⁴³ Maffesoli, (1996); Marsh, (1978).

⁴⁴ Perasović, cited in in Wood, (2013:1080).

Concerning the riot at Dinamo Zagreb's Maksimir Stadium between supporters, police, and even players, Sack & Suster claim that the symbolism of the event provides evidence of the spiralling situation at that time, and that star player Zvonimir Boban's kicking of a police officer was not just an attack on a single cop but instead an act that began "symbolically challenging the legitimacy of the entire Yugoslav Federation."⁴⁵ Vrcan & Lalić summarised the environment leading to and following the riot as one in which "waving banners and scarves was replaced by the brandishing of weapons" and where the symbolic ritual of supporters groups gave way to genuine violence and the realities of conflict.⁴⁶ This led to the symbolic declaration that the war began at Maksimir, a hyperbolic contention that was nevertheless in line with the headlines of the incident found in local and international media.⁴⁷ More than serving as the *casus belli* of the wars of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, Maksimir instead served as a crucial event in the co-option of football for political means.

Debating the outsized importance placed on the riot, Đorđević concludes that, obviously, the war did not begin with the riot. The event was given extensive media coverage and afforded symbolic weight even though other similarly notable events occurred at the same time. For example, Đorđević quotes Dražen Lalić as saying that the burning of the Yugoslav flag during a football match between Hajduk Split and Partizan Belgrade was a much more significant event.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Mills acknowledges that members of supporters' groups like Red Star Belgrade's Delije and Dinamo Zagreb's Bad Blue Boys, the main instigators of the Maksimir riot, did in fact join paramilitary organisations that participated in war-time campaigns. With that in mind, it was not the riot at Maksimir itself, but rather that a certain percentage of

⁴⁵ Sack & Suster, (2000:312).

⁴⁶ Vrcan & Lalić, (1999:177).

⁴⁷ Nuredinović & Vukušić conducted a mass media study of Croatian news outlets and found that the immediate intensity of the event in which newspapers took a visceral approach to Maksimir and Dinamo and its supporters were framed as victims of Serbian chauvinism; over time, recollections in the media both framed the Bad Blue Boys and Dinamo players as heroes for overcoming a "ritualised trauma." To be sure, the conclusions found demonstrate the resilience of the mythology surrounding Maksimir. Nuredinović & Vukušić, (2021).

⁴⁸ Đorđević, (2012).

football supporters subsequently participated in genuine conflict, that the “Maksimir myth” became something bordering on accepted belief.⁴⁹ Mills concludes that,

“Although the riot constitutes an escalation of tensions, it must be seen in the context of a wave of broader unrest afflicting Yugoslav football. The subsequent armed conflict immeasurably added to its mystique. The fact that supporters fought and died, and that Arkan had been present at Maksimir, ensured that the incident passed into legend. Regardless of its veracity, the myth is an important part of the history of the Yugoslav game.”⁵⁰

Maksimir, for all the contentions and analyses about it, remains worth evaluating here. Although Arkan’s remit of presiding over the Delije, bestowed on him by Milošević and the Yugoslav secret services, constitutes an informal political arrangement, Maksimir was not necessarily a by-product of that arrangement.⁵¹ Instead, Maksimir serves as an example of how supporters group members were put on a proverbial pedestal by opportunistic media outlets and politicians, which made them more entrenched in the social fabric of both Serbia and Croatia.⁵² Confronting a group which was viewed as a “war vanguard” in the years following the conclusion of hostilities proved to be politically detrimental to Tuđman in Croatia and undesirable to Milošević in Serbia. This informs the trajectory of each state’s relationship with these actors and how that defined political informality involving football in the years since.

⁴⁹ As Mills notes, reports ranging from London-based newspapers to a biography of Arkan, presented the riot as something resembling a purpose driven mission - pre-planned with intricate detail as if the riot were indeed an example of what would later be actual instances of warfare. Mills and others rightly dispute this and quotes a passage from Kuper’s *Football Against the Enemy* in which a contemporary Croatian intellectual who immediately recognised the symbolic power of the event, stated that “you don’t need a century for this to become myth.” Kuper, cited in Mills, (2018:238).

⁵⁰ Mills, (2018:242).

⁵¹ Arkan is discussed in greater detail in chapters three and four.

⁵² Though Milošević’s employment of Arkan serves as a prime example of the politicisation of football and the utility of organised supporters, the consensus view that football supporters’ groups were politically relevant was not immediately apparent. Hrستیć, Perasović, & Mustapić found, upon an analysis of archival documents, that the Yugoslav State Security Service (SDS) thought that Croatian groups like the Bad Blue Boys and Torcida, among others, were not an inherent threat to the security of the state as the groups were primarily made up of young, undesirable men. “Emphasizing supporters young age, immaturity, poor financial and social status, lack of education, and tendency towards alcohol, drugs, and crime, SDS operatives’ characterizations of supporters trivialized and underestimated the potential danger they represented.” Hrستیć, Perasović, & Mustapić, (2021:1602).

Analyses of football during wartime are limited. Mills again is an authoritative voice, demonstrating that football in Serb-occupied territories went forward despite the proximity of bombs, bullets, and the devastation of war. In the Serb-held territories of Republika Srpska (RS) and Republika Srpska Krajina (RSK), football matches, held as both Yugoslavia and the Yugoslavia First League each suffered through collapse, served to boost morale amongst war-ravaged soldiers in contested areas of both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. The matches also served to solidify the Serbian claim over each region. The activities included matches, journalistic coverage of the results, and a fan-styled magazine meant to inspire additional interest in the incipient league while extolling the athletic exploits of players in “national leagues.” This was not, Mills contends, spontaneous,

*“Both of the states in question demonstrate the extent to which football was exploited in the service of state building, aiding in the imagining of these incipient polities. It is clear that football journalism acted as a conduit for such ideas, reporting upon ‘nation’ league and cup competitions and banally ‘mapping’ their geographical scope in the process. Disputed territory was also claimed via football and the journalists who wrote about it...”*⁵³

The plight of FK Željezničar also serves as an example of a beseeched Yugoslav club, in this case local to Bosnia-Herzegovina and besieged by the war and its encroachment on everyday life, and the recognition amongst political leaders that football served as a taste of normality, even in decidedly unprecedented circumstances. Just as RS and RSK leaders were attempting to replicate the everyday with football, so too were Bosnian forces. The latter held tournaments in the war-torn capital of Sarajevo in 1993 as the conflict continued. The works demonstrate the view of elites that football could help draw boundaries, fortify “imagined communities,” or, at the very least, capture the imaginations of beleaguered masses.⁵⁴

⁵³ Mills, (2013:966).

⁵⁴ Mills notes the foundation of a Serb-oriented replica of Željezničar that laid claim to the then-seventy-year-old club and its history. This club played in the Republika Srpska league and served as something of a microcosm of the ethnic reconfiguration and cleansing punctuated by Yugoslavia’s dissolution.

The literature taking a historical approach to the study of football, politics, and the state in Serbia, Croatia, and Yugoslavia before them, advances key empirical evidence that is of interest to this thesis: that the Yugoslav state was served by a political class that found the “non-amateur,” privileged status of football an opportunity to establish networks around clubs and to benefit personally from the funding that flowed toward the sport; the political and media exploitation of specific events to maximize support and harness the energies of the masses; and the fundamental belief that football itself serves as an unparalleled tool to distract or unify nations, even during wartime.

The Identity and Nationalism Approach

In their analysis of sport, nationalism, and media, Rowe & McKay ask,

“Where...can the contemporary nation be found? The immediate answer is that the nation is conjured up at those moments when an affective unity can be posited against the grain of structural divisions and bureaucratic taxonomies. This is the cultural nation we experience through diverse feelings, policies, and practices, the parameters of which are inherently difficult to define...[the] symbolic binding of the people of a country through culture is a concept derived from social and political theory and public policy, but popular culture...is the site where populations are targeted by different forms of governmental and commercial knowledge/power.”⁵⁵

Football, as concluded by a large tranche of the literature, is not merely a competitive, athletic spectacle that can temporarily elicit emotional outbursts because of any one match or tournament; nor is it strictly a capitalistic endeavour in which the enterprising can financially benefit from the popularity of the sport. Instead, football in Serbia and Croatia has often been used as an identity tool and an instrument for the expansion of nationalist symbols, iconography, and sentiment. Nationalist rhetoric permeated Serbian and Croatian football grounds prior to the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and opportunistic political actors recognised that football could serve as a conduit to the masses as supporters’ groups served as a sounding board for members of wider society. As is well-established throughout this thesis, the governments of Milošević in

⁵⁵ Rowe & McKay, (1998).

Serbia and Tuđman in Croatia – and those that followed them into the present day – continued to recognise the usefulness of football for political aims. Beyond the political, though, the literature also explores the role football and its actors occupied, and occupies, as arbiters of “Croatianness” or “Serbianness.” Football could “reproduce the nation” or oversee the “invention of tradition” as what it meant to be a *Croat* or to be a *Serb* was being adjudicated by those that otherwise are in a crowd to support eleven men kicking a ball.⁵⁶

Sport, and football specifically, in Croatia serves as a “natural laboratory” for the examination of sport and its interaction with nationalism (or patriotism), given its role as a “unique and malleable source of social knowledge contributing greatly to the formation, establishment, and conservation of emerging national identity after the country’s secession from Yugoslavia in 1990 – 1991.”⁵⁷ From the outset in Tuđman’s Croatia, nationalist symbols and narratives were ubiquitous. This served multiple purposes, all in service of the president’s concept of the nation and Croatian identity: signalling to the populace what did or did not amount to being legitimately Croatian; the promotion of favourable perceptions of national politics and history (particularly as it related to the wars associated with the collapse of Yugoslavia); and moulding malleable forms of Croatian culture into outlets for nationalist and/or patriotic symbols, idolatry, and discourse.

Brentin has written extensively on the role of nationalism and football in Croatian state and identity building and the curation of sport as a sphere of politically beneficial characteristics. Brentin notes that Tuđman, as a former Yugoslav bureaucrat within the Partizan Belgrade sport association, understood the interplay between sport and politics and frequently reiterated his belief that only genuine warfare captured the

⁵⁶ As Biti notes in his analysis of the conflict between localised versus globalised approaches to the consumption of sport, there are disagreements on the absorption and subsequent expression of support, enthusiasm, dissatisfaction, etc. as it relates to sport by the general populace. Because of globalised (capitalist) sport, norms are learned and replicated because of the mass consumption of sport. Here, the contention would be that Serbian and Croatian supporters’ groups saw English hooligans and Italian and South American ultras and replicated the behaviour – drinking, fisticuffs, pyro/flares, chants, and even political expression – because of what they saw in football grounds from around the world. Biti, (2008).

⁵⁷ Brentin, (2013:993).

attention of the masses more than sport. Tuđman was of the belief that sport features similar symbolic narratives and characteristics: “us versus them,” “heroes,” “villains,” and an impossible struggle to overcome. This allowed Tuđman, his allies, Croatian footballers and coaches, and the general population to view every football match – particularly those played by the Croatian national team – as a symbolic war to wage and win, a renewed fight for legitimacy, independence, and national pride.⁵⁸ Indeed, Tuđman had similar goals for football and sport as he did for wider society: “This mission, which equalled ‘his’ mission for Croatian society as a whole, was to ‘Croatize’ and thereby centralize the institutional level of sport, while reassembling its social and cultural field under ethnic and exclusionary terms.”⁵⁹ Football, its supporters’ groups, and its sponsors in government would serve as “legitimizers of politics,” “legitimizers of international diplomacy,” and as a “national motor.”⁶⁰ Football also served as an opportunity to build a Croatian identity separate from “others.”⁶¹

Tuđman, to cultivate Croatian identity through sport, inadvertently provoked conflict amongst former allies - most notably the Bad Blue Boys. As Bellamy notes, though some members of the Bad Blue Boys served in the war on behalf of an independent Croatia that Tuđman would lead, the relationship between the supporters’ group and the president was tenuous,

⁵⁸ The “Homeland War,” as Croatia’s war of independence from Yugoslavia was termed within the country, was alluded to often in and around football grounds, including in monuments to the war-deceased, as well as in gatherings held specifically to commemorate the war by football supporters. Professional and well-known athletes also frequently spoke in favour of Croatian veterans and those associated with the war, including in response to actions taken by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. See Brentin, (2019).

⁵⁹ Brentin, (2014:194).

⁶⁰ The 1998 World Cup tournament, in which Croatia finished a shock third, was subsequently exploited on behalf of Tuđman and the HDZ, as dizzying crowds supporting the national team were repeatedly told by footballing notables, including Zvonimir Boban and Miroslav Blažević, that Tuđman played an “invaluable role” and was “the father of the national team.”

⁶¹ Brentin notes that since the defining principle of Tuđman’s state and identity building programme was to stand in opposition to anything perceived to be “Yugoslav,” most Croatian international matches against the rump state of Yugoslavia were seen as opportunities to divorce Croatia even further from its Yugoslav past. Invocations of the wars of the dissolution of Yugoslavia frequently occurred during these matches, most notably a 1999 European Championship qualifying match which saw illusions to the siege of Vukovar emanating from the stands. Also see Dustin Tsai’s work on how football has symbolised regional identities and divides within Croatia, particularly between those in Croatia’s capital region in Zagreb and those along its coast in Split. Brentin, (2013); Tsai, (2021).

“Many [Bad Blue Boys] were killed in the earliest fighting and the Bad Blue Boys erected a monument to their fallen friends outside the stadium at Maksimir...in 1994, Tuđman wrote that he was a ‘Dinamo supporter like most Zagreb and Croatian...patriots, because it was the most Croatian club in the Yugoslav federation.’ Not many in Zagreb believed him...Dinamo supporters claimed that not a single government or club official paid their respects at the monument.”⁶²

When Tuđman changed the name of Dinamo Zagreb to HŠK Građanski, and then again to Croatia Zagreb, in an effort to purge the club of what Tuđman perceived to be its Yugoslav identity and create a “Croatian champion with a Croatian name,” the uneasy relationship with the Bad Blue Boys turned into an outright feud over who truly best understood football’s place in Croatian society.⁶³

As Sindbaek notes, Tuđman frequently defended the name switches in public, arguing that “Dinamo” was a Bolshevik name with no attachment to Croatian history. Instead, Croatia Zagreb would, in Tuđman’s estimation, marry the history of Croatian football in the inter-war years with his goal of legitimizing his state-building project abroad, as Croatia Zagreb would, owing to their dominance in Croatian football, frequently play in European competitions. That logic did not impress the Bad Blue Boys, who remained opposed to any name change at all. “The president, not used to criticism, launched an acrimonious political campaign which included branding the BBB as ‘foreign agents,’ ‘anti-Croatian,’ ‘alcoholics,’ ‘drug-addicts,’ or ‘Yugonostalgics,’ demonizing their behaviour and blatant exposure to police harassment and persecution.”⁶⁴ In challenging a group “that laid down their lives at the altar of the Croatian homeland” to a debate on who best exemplified “Croatianness,” Tuđman suffered a self-inflicted wound that remained an issue for him right up until his death. His battle with the BBB also revealed the nature of Croatian football by demonstrating that the politicians and cronies who were largely in charge of it were out of touch with rank-and-file football fans.⁶⁵

⁶² Bellamy, (2003:118).

⁶³ Sindbæk, (2013).

⁶⁴ Brentin, (2013:1002).

⁶⁵ This is elaborated upon in chapter five, where the focus shifts primarily to the political sycophant that carried out Tuđman’s wishes on football.

As Lalić & Galić and Brentin demonstrate in their respective works, that philosophy has continued in Croatia long after Tuđman's death. Lalić & Galić note that much of the contemporary nationalist political elite, including former President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and current Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, made sure to appear as frequently as possible with the 2018 Croatian national team that finished as runners-up in that year's World Cup tournament. They presented themselves as genuine fans, all the while tolerating the subject of chapter six of this thesis - Zdravko Mamić – as a fixture in Croatian football and Croatian life, despite his many failings.⁶⁶

Although this thesis delves more deeply into the relationship between the political elite and Mamić, Lalić & Galić's work provides space for engagement and expansion on the exploitation of Croatian football by very well-connected individuals. The authors, along with a separate work from Brentin, also refer to an incident in which well-known footballer Joe Šimunić, following a World Cup qualifying match against Iceland, led 25,000 spectators at the Maksimir Stadium in a chant of "*Za dom – spremni*," translated to "for homeland – ready." The origin of the saying dates to the German Nazi-collaborating Ustaše movement that led Croatia during the Second World War. As Brentin notes, the chant became ubiquitous around football grounds as the governing body of Croatian football declined to adequately address the issue despite the connotation.⁶⁷

The aftermath of Šimunić's display eventually saw him fined and sanctioned by FIFA. Appeals failed at every level, including the European Court of Human Rights. However, Šimunić found support in the governing body of Croatian football, the *Hrvatski nogometni savez* (HNS – Croatian Football Federation). He was also defended by footballing legends like famed manager Miroslav Blažević, as well as in some segments of the public, many of whom argued the saying had become so ubiquitous that it had evolved into more of a banal patriotic salute. Šimunić eventually

⁶⁶ Galić & Lalić, (2021).

⁶⁷ Brentin, (2016).

retired from active play and was made an assistant coach of the Croatian national team in an unsubtle demonstration of how the powers within Croatian football felt about his behaviour. The sweeping conclusion Lalić & Galić arrive at – that football has an integrating role within society but also seems to regularly serve as a negative influence on the Croatian body politic – is clear enough. The argument made in this thesis, that Croatian (and Serbian) football is rife with informal processes and relations, assists in advancing their claim.

In Serbia, “being a Red Star fan is to be a Serb,” Đorđević claims. In his work on Red Star Belgrade, the Delije supporters’ group, and the role each plays in formulating a contemporary Serbian identity, Đorđević notes the “patriotic aura” of Red Star and its supporters at the forefront of recent Serbian history, much like their Croatian counterparts. Red Star, with its sporting success, was a “pillar of Serbdom” and the red star logo, once synonymous with socialist Yugoslavia, is instead held aloft by the club and the Delije as an icon of Serbian nationalism and identity. “Football club Red Star has crossed a long road from its creation until this day. It was a club that enjoyed all the privileges within the system of socialist sport. Its fans defined themselves as “true Belgraders” in the local identity play, unlike those ‘newcomers’ [and] ‘regime’ fans of their rival Partizan FC.”⁶⁸ As Čolović notes, “the mythical space is constructed as a network of symbolic places”; these spaces could conceivably be a historic battlefield, a cemetery, a church, a former military installation or, the stands within the club’s stadium, the Marakana.⁶⁹ In sum, Red Star and its symbolic relationship to ethno-nationalist myth was advanced by supporters, including the Delije, who serve(d) as custodians of that myth within spaces like the Marakana, where banners, chants, flares, and other symbolic tools were employed.

The identity and nationalism approach analyses and challenges the view that football and football actors, such as supporter groups, occupy a unique space in both Serbia and Croatia. As a result of football’s outsized role in the dissolution of Yugoslavia and in the wars associated with Yugoslavia’s collapse, football became an accelerator for

⁶⁸ Đorđević, (2016:130)

⁶⁹ Čolović, (2000). Accessed here: <http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/colovic/past.php>.

a “patriotic agenda” in both states. Matches were played and watched with the fervour of genuine conflict (particularly those contested between former Yugoslav constituent nations); individual players and managers and supporters were deemed “heroes of the nation,” as if they were soldiers of a cause far greater than football; and stadia were seen as shrines or temples in which to practice observance and to participate in renewed conflicts about the nation.⁷⁰ What contributions like those from Brentin and Lalić & Galić find, though, is that these sentiments, practices, and genuine beliefs often served merely as an opportunity for exploitative actors to associate with the mythology when convenient and to disown it when burdensome. This thesis takes the next step and defines that form of exploitation as being centred on informal relations and exchanges.

The Sociological and Ethnographic Approach

As the literature demonstrates, football supporters are generally more nuanced than mainstream coverage suggests. While there are aggressive hooligans that participate in fights and other antisocial activity, others have sometimes proven to be positive “social actors” in Serbia and Croatia. Fieldwork in the region illustrated the diversity amongst supporter groups and fans of football. Interviewees each conceded that football and supporter groups were often coerced by self-seeking elites or criminals that took control of certain groups as best to enhance their power inside and outside football terraces. However, a non-profit employee in Belgrade, who also happened to be an ardent supporter of Red Star, made it clear that even though he and some of his friends might fit the typical demographic profile of those that one might suspect would engage in unruly behaviour, this was not the case. Though he personally knew others that participated in fights, he and his cohort did not. They were fans who enjoyed the loud atmosphere and the sport. Conversely, while observing a bar operated by leaders of the Bad Blue Boys in Zagreb, far-right paraphernalia was

⁷⁰ As Trošt & Kovačević note, this association of football with extreme forms of Serbian nationalism and identity manifested itself in the discourse related to Belgrade’s Gay Pride Parade; in their study of online comments surrounding the 2010 parade, they found that much of the hyper misogynistic and homophobic discourse permeated by supporters’ groups was adopted by many that commented on online stories related to the parade. Though the authors themselves acknowledge the limitations of applying online comments to wider society, it nevertheless demonstrates a degree of normalisation or the excusing of otherwise derogatory language among those that consider themselves the most representative of Serbian social values. Trošt & Kovačević, (2013).

visible, and strangers were greeted with hostility. The guide that brought me to the bar, though, was himself a former BBB member that left the group, had a family, worked a steady job, and was generally friendly.⁷¹ One of the central contentions of the thesis is that to understand informality and how it impacts domains like football, it is essential to understand the variety of nuanced ways it manifests. It is equally as important to understand the actors that sometimes participate in informal arrangements, but also the many supporters who do not.

For example, in rebelling against “modern football,” Croatian football supporters, through organised protests, democratisation efforts, and spasms of lividity, have aided in the exposure of misdeeds and mismanagement. The literature unpacking those rebellions necessitates a further analysis of what precisely supporters have rebelled against. Benjamin Perasović & Marko Mustapić have sought to adequately profile contemporary football supporters, particularly those that follow the two largest Croatian clubs: Hajduk Split and Dinamo Zagreb.⁷² Much of their contributions chronicle the supporter response to “modern football,” which Perasović & Mustapić define as.

“The common denominator of a worldwide, heterogenous social movement comprised of various actors and the methods of conflict: simple, symbolic actions like slogans written on flags, banners, or walls; boycotts, petitions, demonstrations, direct actions, and the foundation of new football clubs by supporters...the movement is primarily focused on the fight against the rigid commercialization of football and against turning supporters into ‘consumers of football merchandise.’”⁷³

Specific to this movement, contributors including Perasović & Mustapić, Tregoures & Šantek, and Tregoures have each examined how supporters of Hajduk Split and Dinamo Zagreb, normally arch-rivals, have each initiated their own individual

⁷¹ Author interviews, (2018).

⁷² Perasović, in addition to frequently publishing on Croatian subcultures, has been a key figure within the Hajduk Split supporters’ structure. In this capacity, he has been elected as a representative of the supporters on the board of Hajduk, which operates as a joint stock venture and is owned by multiple shareholders, the largest of which is the City of Split. There has been a sustained effort from the likes of Perasović to ensure that supporters retain a voice within the club governing structure.

⁷³ Perasović & Mustapić, (2017:3). Also see Vukušić & Miošić, (2018). On efforts “against modern football” in other regions, see Gonda, (2013); Kennedy, (2013); Webber, (2014).

movements to increase democratisation within their respective clubs and then subsequently banded together to protest football governance in Croatia. These partnerships between supporters' groups that otherwise would stage often elaborate demonstrations in reference to each other – generally in negative terms – emerged as a result of the HNS working to curtail some of what it believed to be “the excesses of the supporters' groups,” including the use of vulgar language and perhaps more crucially, the incorporation of violence. Perasović & Mustapić note the example of Hajduk's largest support group, Torcida, using flares in celebration following a Hajduk goal and the Bad Blue Boys throwing stones in return, an obviously dangerous act, including for spectators unaffiliated with either group.⁷⁴

In response to events like these, the HNS heavily regulated the ability of supporters' groups to travel *en masse*, implementing a policy in which the visiting supporters' club would have to provide funding for a police presence at the ground. More infuriating for the supporters' groups was a new policy which required that any away supporters traveling to an away match would have to provide personal data ahead of time. From the perspective of committed supporters, these policies emerged, because of the continued gentrification of the sport. As football has grown into an international behemoth of profit and media spectacle, the characteristics of the spectators have evolved, particularly at some of the world's largest clubs in places like England, Spain, and Germany. Global television rights and the influence of foreign sources of funding, including international ownership groups, have ensured that attending a football match is typically a more family-oriented activity and one that costs more than it once did. Because of this, the game has become more profitable for owners, sponsors, and players, but has also disillusioned many spectators as the experience has shifted from one that previously appealed to “blue-collar” attendees to a more generic, “plastic” event.

In Serbia and Croatia, however, even top clubs like Red Star Belgrade and Dinamo Zagreb do not currently enjoy the benefits of their domestic league matches being

⁷⁴ Perasović & Mustapić, (2017). Also see Hodges & Brentin, (2018).

broadcast on global television networks, nor do they attract as many high-earning spectators that, as they often do in other global locales, might treat attending matches as a social event. Instead of being priced or gentrified out of games, organised supporters have argued that they are taken advantage of by an inherently corrupt system and those that lead it. Tregoures & Šantek chronicle social movements like “Together for Dinamo” and Naš Hajduk., In doing so, they also reveal cleavages between supporters – those that adhered to the supporters’ group tradition of violence and excess, and those that sought to build a social movement capable of instigating reforms.

“...this specific case of the struggle between football fans and the Croatian Football Federation highlights a growing contradiction between civic initiatives...on the one hand, and hardcore football fans on the other, regardless of their common interest and love for their respective club. Namely, according to the testimonies of [Together for Dinamo] members, it seems that they were often embarrassed by the violent behaviour of the Bad Blue Boys and tried to adapt their relationship accordingly...advocating for more transparency and democracy in football through expertise and lobbying, and raise public awareness of corruption, requires being viewed as a legitimate actor with which to deal at the political and civic level...this legitimacy can be jeopardised by violent actions...”⁷⁵

Similarly, Perasović & Mustapić highlight the identity crisis experienced by some members of the Torcida supporter group. For most, violence, off-colour chanting, flares, and conflict with authorities are core features of being a member of a supporters’ group. Within groups and the wider subculture, there are also differentiating qualities, characterised as “carnival” behaviour vs. “hooliganism,” with the former defined more by drinking and outward expression and the latter characterised by violence.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the authors found that even for the former group, the spectre of violence and riots was something of a bonus feature and that the excitement generated from participating in fights, while not necessary for them to have an enjoyable time, was embraced.⁷⁷ Still, others began to shift their attention away

⁷⁵ Tregoures & Šantek, (2017:8).

⁷⁶ Perasović & Mustapić, (2017).

⁷⁷ It is often the case, the authors found, that many members of Torcida would attend matches with no intention to participate in fights, but being forced to do so because supporters of the other clubs would

from typical activities toward social protest – this group was largely comprised of those that had “aged out” of fighting and excess drinking but wished to remain vocal and active supporters.⁷⁸

The literature goes to great lengths to demonstrate what should be obvious to anyone with a casual understanding of subcultures and the individuals that populate them – that defining a collective in broad terms, in this case “violent uneducated,” “drunkards”, etc., would not sufficiently capture the variances within those subcultures and that the ethnographic research conducted enriches our understanding of who participates, how members participate, and for what purpose(s) they participate. This thesis interacts with ethnographies in that it buttresses the findings by providing a fuller explanation for the causes associated with increased civic engagement in Croatia, chiefly as a response to economic informality, political interference, and corruption in football. Attempting to better understand why one member of a supporter group expresses universal detestation for politicians and political parties, and why others understand the need to overcome the scepticism they feel about the political process as best to achieve favourable outcomes, requires not only additional time spent within supporters’ groups, but also a robust understanding of the processes, people, and structures they are often at odds with. This thesis works to fill that latter gap.

The Political & Governance Approach

The interplay between politics in Serbia and Croatia and football-related actors – clubs, players, owners, managers, supporters – often serves as a backdrop within the existing literature. Rank-and-file supporters of football clubs in each state are typically in the foreground, while the analysis generated generally relates to how those

instigate and attack them was often a feature of the matchday experience. In sum, some members went looking for fights while others responded to challenges.

⁷⁸ Though it is true that most supporter groups are primarily comprised of young men, Bartoluci, Perasović, & Dergić examined the role of female members of supporters’ groups and found that while there were not many, some women did engage in what could be classified as typical “hooligan” or “ultra” behaviour. The authors found, though, that the hierarchy within supporters’ groups was highly patriarchal, the use of sexist or misogynistic terminology was rampant, and that women were often the first to be left outside the grounds if there were not enough tickets available. Bartoluci, Perasović, & Dergić, (2021).

supporters have interacted with their respective states insofar as those states, or state institutions (such as national football governance bodies), have instituted policies that run counter to either the political ideology that supporters subscribe to or that specifically aim to marginalise supporters in favour of wealthy or well-connected individuals. It is surmised that football and politics in Serbia and Croatia are linked, and quite possibly could be forever, because of football's role in the dissolution of Yugoslavia,

“[Football supporters] taking part in active combat on the former Yugoslavia territory caused the permanent colonization of football by politics and the ideology of nationalism. In the coming decades, football fans gained patriotic capital...by means of the symbolic power they had at their disposal, football fans were granted the role of important advocates regarding the issues of the so-called “national interest,” and they were transformed into a significant political force, whose opinion was closely considered during the 1990s.”⁷⁹

Here an initial divergence between Serbia and Croatia in the years following the cessation of hostilities in the region is observable. In the 1990s, football supporters, some of whom returned from service in military or paramilitary outfits, held themselves aloft as heroic figures of each fledgling nation. In Serbia, where the Milošević regime was mired in criminality and where illicit networks established during wartime, some of which were comprised of state institutions and were constructed for the benefit of regime actors, were maintained throughout the 1990s, football supporters held significant value. Vrcan & Lalić provocatively declared in a 1999 book chapter that “the previous commitment of these fans to nationalist politics caused the war, making them, at least at the beginning, a war vanguard. It was not the case that the whole society was immersed in a tidal wave of organised political violence, rather, the football fans acted as the catalyst for political violence on a mass scale.”⁸⁰ Though, as Čolović notes, Serb nationalist sentiment and rhetoric incrementally grew as a feature of supporters' groups in the 1980s, and although some members of supporters' groups did participate in wartime activities, it is more likely that football and its fans presented a useful tool for opportunistic politicians in

⁷⁹ Đorđević, (2019:163-164).

⁸⁰ Vrcan & Lalić, (1999:177).

both Serbia and Croatia who sought to exploit nationalist sentiment for personal political gain. It is during this era that politicians weaponised and emboldened some football supporters into believing that by chanting things like “Red Star Serbia, never Yugoslavia...,” they were somehow the spark that eventually grew to destroy Yugoslavia, rather than an easily manipulated force.⁸¹

For example, as Milošević and his allies sought to coalesce power in the 1990s via state institutions, black market networks, and sources of news and information, football was often a fountain of regime-friendly messaging or activity. The literature regularly notes the influence of figures like Željko “Arkan” Ražnatović as a paramilitary leader and as a well-known Serbian figure during the 1990s, partially owing to his leadership of the Delije and as the owner of his own club. However, it does not delve beyond the consensus understanding that Arkan embodied something of a defining example of the mafia-like conditions Serbia was governed under during this time. Because of this, he is frequently mentioned in analyses of the era, primarily as a device to demonstrate the absurdity of the time considering that he undoubtedly participated in some of Europe’s worst war crimes since the Second World War yet became something of a social and cultural touchstone in Milošević’s Serbia. Čolović, Vrcan & Lalić, Mills, and Đorđević each cite Arkan as a feature of Yugoslavia’s collapse, but there is little attention paid to Arkan’s post-war forays within football. Doing so would reveal the nurturing of war-time networks within post-war enterprises (such as football) and in state institutions.⁸² Establishing football’s position as a feature of informal networks may better explain why even contemporary Serbia is forced to confront football supporters’ groups within its politics.

Attempting this, Christian Axboe Nielsen has scrutinised the failure of the contemporary Serbian state to reconcile the criminality so frequently associated with football, wondering if supporter groups and their enablers are “stronger than the

⁸¹ Đorđević, (2016).

⁸² The Serbian intelligence services, for example, were staffed by ex-paramilitary figures that were both suspected of war crimes and in the maintenance of illicit black-market networks. Milorad Ulemek, once head of the now infamous Special Operations Unit (JSO) and the convicted assassin of future Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić, served with Arkan during the war. See Mladenović, (2012).

state.”⁸³ Nielsen first presents the issue of fan violence and criminal practices within the management of the sport – including the arrest of Ceca, discussed in chapter three – and presents it as symptomatic of Serbia’s flawed transition from socialist Yugoslavia to authoritarianism under Milošević to a hybrid regime in the years since Milošević left office.⁸⁴ Serbia’s inability to sufficiently address even the clearest examples of crime – including extreme violence – rendered the state, in Nielsen’s view, impotent.⁸⁵ Nielsen surmises that this could be because certain actors receive political protection and that many supporters groups and individual members of those groups, are tied to “patriotic” organisations, political parties, and the Serbian Orthodox Church,

“In summary, the political utilization of hooligan groups that characterized the 1990s and 2000s in Serbia acted as an open invitation for these groups to enter the political arena and to act as political agents. As Serbia has normalized its relationship with the outside world, moved towards EU members and attempted to introduce the rule of law internally, the nexus of violent hooligan groups and political opponents of this path have repeatedly challenged the stated monopoly on power.”⁸⁶

Nielsen considers that ruling parties in Serbia can benefit from supporters’ groups that may be publicly hostile toward them because it forces international actors such as the European Union to grant Serbia additional leverage on issues like Kosovo’s independence.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, his own analysis of the Gay Pride parades held in the early 2010s in Belgrade demonstrates that the Serbian government can limit the influence of radical supporters’ groups on the social, political, and cultural trajectory of

⁸³ Axboe Nielsen, (2013).

⁸⁴ Axboe Nielsen, (2010).

⁸⁵ Axboe Nielsen specifically cites the Serbian judiciary as apparently incapable of rendering verdicts that would potentially serve as a more pronounced deterrent, or that would at least signal to wider Serbian society that the state was able to meet the most basic demands of its mandate – disrupting criminal activities and distributing meaningful penalties. Crucially, Axboe Nielsen notes that many members of Serbia’s judiciary were or have been holdover appointees of the Milošević regime, indicating that judges and prosecutors themselves are potentially compromised, but does not pursue greater clarity on judicial reforms and the gaps left between formal policy and the accepted expectations that often accompany the job. Nielsen’s analysis is best summarised as the observance of a festering problem – the inability of the state to rid itself of football violence linked to politicalisation – and the opening of a dialogue relating to Serbia’s flawed transition and the informal loopholes often utilised as a result.

⁸⁶ Axboe Nielsen, (2013:1048).

⁸⁷ This is achieved by presenting extreme nationalist groups, including those aligned to supporter groups, as a threat to the general political stability of the country.

the Serbian state. When the Serbian state felt external pressure to hold the parade in 2010, it did so. In the years following the cancellation of the parade in 2011, it has been held numerous times. Nielsen's argument is rooted in the idea that the state must capitulate to extremist hooligans because those hooligans are so powerful that they could sway the outcome of parliamentary elections, as was thought to be a contributing factor to the 2011 cancellation of the parade.

Though it is undoubtedly true that many of the members of supporter groups in Serbia have adopted an extreme chauvinistic political orientation, the power ascribed to supporters because of their politics – and the belief that the political elite has little choice but to acquiesce to these “patriots” – appears to overstate the role of political ideology and discount the importance of political opportunism and informal relations. Why the Serbian state refuses to undertake meaningful progress on this issue seems to have less to do with the idea that supporter groups and individual hooligans associated with far-right “patriotic” organisations grew to become an amalgamation of undemocratic forces beyond the capacity of the state to control, and more to do with why Milošević and his allies bestowed political agency on them in the first place: opportunism and links to informal or otherwise deeply criminal networks. Much of the rank-and-file supporter groups take their cues from the small group of leaders within the groups, as was expressed by a Serbian MP, investigative journalist, non-profit employee, and researcher in Belgrade.⁸⁸ Those leaders are often shrouded in criminality, but – as is outlined in the thesis – they also maintain clear links to elements within the state. Those links make it easy for court cases to remain unresolved; for supporters groups to provide security at political events; for those same supporters groups to either protest or hold back from protesting during certain events; and for activities that are otherwise described as criminal, to continue. The maintenance of these links is possible because the state chooses to not regularly abide by rules, policies, and regulations introduced across a variety of institutions, including its judiciary.

⁸⁸ Author interviews, (2018).

In sum, Nielsen's contributions introduce the notion that the contemporary state of Serbia is home to football supporter groups with ties to the state itself, to extremist political organisations, and to criminal elements. In doing so, Nielsen provides a cornerstone from which to build on and contend with; this thesis, as an example, argues that Serbia's unwillingness to sufficiently root out criminal elements within those supporter groups is because those groups are often operationalised by the Serbian political elite for opportunistic reasons. In return, individual supporter group members can often avoid significant oversight or penalties by the Serbian justice system. The power of these links – and the exercising of informal forms of governance to maintain them – seems more in line with reality than the contention that supporter groups and their allies are powerful enough to instigate a change in government when provoked.

Instead, as Đorđević & Pekić find, the average football supporter group member in Serbia practices anti-politics and the right-wing nationalist political character that is synonymous with groups like the Delije and the Grobari is “naturalised,” having been initially established in the final years of Yugoslavia. Because supporters, including the Grobari members featured in their article, consider engaging in politics at the individual level to be “bullshit,” this ensures that the accepted status-quo – that the groups can be classified as nationalist-oriented – cannot be meaningfully challenged.⁸⁹ The authors ask whether left-wing or progressive oriented politics can become a more recognised characteristic of supporters of Partizan Belgrade, given that small subsets within the group have adopted forms of Yugonostalgia. However, those same subsets, consisting of punk rockers and fan-zine editors that advance an image of Partizan in line with its Yugoslav past and clear left-wing connotations, do not necessarily engage politically. Instead, the subjects of the article characterise their motive for advancing a socialist view of Partizan as being an effort to confront Red Star Belgrade's nationalist culture. The authors thus conclude that there is little chance that these subsets will provoke a broader shift within Partizan fan circles because they purposely do not attempt to do so. This aides in perpetuating a broader right-wing orientation. What is most revealing about the conclusions presented in the article is not that the left

⁸⁹ Đorđević & Pekić, (2018).

struggles for legitimacy within traditionally right-wing subcultures, but rather that actors regularly profiled as being inherently political – symbolic frontline warriors advancing a nationalist cause – present, at an individual level, as being disinterested in practicing politics. Rather, they utilise political rhetoric and symbols purely to antagonise rival supporter groups without giving the philosophy behind the politics much thought. The conclusion lends credence to the idea that such groups could be mobilised on behalf of, or against, political actors that interact with group leadership and that such relationships are predicated less on political ideology and more on maximising positive results for all parties.

In analyses of Croatia and the interactivity between football actors and politics, the demarcation between those in elite political circles – owners, managers, governing figures – and the average active supporter group member is pronounced and is a source of contention.⁹⁰ Hodges, in what amounts to one of the finest contributions regarding the political inclination of supporters groups and actors in contemporary football, adopted Vrčan's contention that supporter groups constitute sub-political social movements in present-day Croatia. That is to say that supporter groups in Croatia practice a performative, or "prefigurative" style of politics in and around football grounds across the country, elevating those spaces as legitimate arenas of political discourse, the majority of which challenges dominant political narratives.⁹¹ Hodges expands upon the contention registered by Perasović & Mustapić, Brentin, and Lalić & Wood, that particularly violent rhetoric, such as "Kill the Serb!," or the employment of fascist symbols is less about genuine political feeling and more to do with protesting against the HNS and because that rhetoric and those symbols are not permitted by the governing body, making it more appealing even for those that were not necessarily far-right sympathisers. Hodges argues that many of those that produce far-right political rhetoric as a gesture of protest, do so because they see the hegemonic authoritarian nationalists – the political elites primarily in the HDZ – as opportunists who only register nationalist sentiment as a means of accessing informal networks,

⁹⁰ Though this is not uniform, as demonstrated by the case of Zlatko Hasanbegović, a former first generation Bad Blue Boy who eventually became the Croatian Minister of Culture.

⁹¹ Hodges, (2019).

“In sub-political moments, a dialectic may occur between an oppositional patriotic habitus, and the authoritarian nationalists...who use patriotic tropes as a code through which to access resources and benefits...it also enables the production of a dialectic between those claiming that the authoritarian nationalists are ‘false patriots,’ a fact that is compounded because of the interrelation between the patriotic register and the pursuit of networks of personal connections.”⁹²

Hodges argues that a greater understanding of what the use of far-right symbols means internally within supporter groups is paramount. If a political moment arises in which sub-political actors can influence wider society, it may be that those far-right symbols become the incumbent imagery of a movement aligned against an elite that has only ever instrumentalised nationalism as a tool for personal gain or enrichment. It is quite right that there should be more attention paid to whether the use of far-right rhetoric and iconography within supporters’ groups implies that supporters are indeed inclined to fascist sympathies. However, it is also right that greater analysis on the informal ties binding the elites on the opposite side of the coin – including those in football – is required to best grasp why supporter groups would, for example, use a swastika as a form of protest against those relationships. The passing notice that supporters dislike Zdravko Mamić and loathe the HNS is helpful insofar that it offers an opportunity to expand the literature to better understand why that is.

Part Two: Informality

The study of informality has generated increased interest both broadly and specifically relating to the Western Balkans.⁹³ In the case of the latter, it is perhaps because the states within the region serve as appealing “laboratories” owing to diverse cultural and political structures. From fascist regimes to socialist Yugoslavia, and from war-torn transitions to European Union-led periods of reform, the types and forms of

⁹² Hodges, (2019:114).

⁹³ Geographically speaking, Croatia is considered as being part of the Western Balkans region. Since its accession to the European Union, it is often the case that references to the Western Balkans exclude Croatia, perhaps owing to EU parlance in which many of the Union’s references to the region are with its engagement with non-member states in mind. See Kolstø, (2016). In any event, Western Balkans here includes Serbia, Croatia, Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, and North Macedonia.

government have changed dramatically over the course of a century. What processes and interactions between individuals, their government, and each other outside the scope of formal rules, legislation, and regulation survive as governance structures and economic models evolve? What gaps and cleavages form between official policy and the day-to-day interactions that are prevalent within each state?

Serbia and Croatia have made unquestionable progress in many areas of society and state building over the last two decades, earning Croatia membership into the European Union and Serbia candidate status. This progress is despite the resilient nature of the patterns of informalities that emerged during the Milošević and Tuđman regimes – the actors, the tactics, and the outcomes. The best possible avenue to examine informal processes, actors, and networks in Serbia and Croatia is not found solely in the structures and institutions created and enacted in bids for international assent, but rather in the gaps between the objectives of formal institutions and the everyday practices that have left those objectives incomplete. The following discussions situates this thesis within literature that elaborates on the type of networks and practices that exist within those gaps between the formal and informal. In doing so, it examines the potential explanations for why informal processes in Serbia and Croatia are entrenched, including the idea that these processes are embedded culturally in each state as a result of frequent changes in governance models and norms; that external attempts to formalise institutions from entities like the European Union have inadvertently ushered in reforms that created institutions without acquiescence from either local elites or the population at large, ensuring that informal processes remain widely practiced; and the existence of long-standing trust networks that create and leverage weak governance processes to maximise results for those within the networks.

To summarise what informality often constitutes, including in states like Serbia and Croatia, Eric Gordy, in his introduction to a special volume that analysed informal practices in Southeastern Europe in the journal *Region*, notes that,

“There are large portions of the system by which political power and influence operate that are not represented by the official structures of formal power and not described by law. They represent, on the one hand (in their corrupt form), ways in which gaps in the system are exploited by people in a position to take advantage of them for personal gain, and in that sense are threats to the establishment and consolidation of a rule-based system that is predictable, efficient, and bound by regulations that act to protect the interests of citizens. At the same time, they also represent (in their complementary form) strategies and networks that citizens draw upon in order to accomplish tasks that are not facilitated by systems established in law but not enacted into practice.”⁹⁴

As Gordy articulates, informalities can simultaneously serve as an active threat to the establishment of crucial state-based architecture, including fair and transparent judicial and financial processes, while also, for example, serving as an alternative for citizens burdened by bureaucratic structures that are unfamiliar, underfunded, or rendered impotent by states unwilling to do more than formally establish new regimes.

The following section begins with a discussion of both the virtues and deficiencies of informality and how informal processes abut otherwise illegal activity – most notably, that illegal activity is often enabled and excused by informal networks. The balance of the chapter is organised in subsections that include legacies of informality and the inability or unwillingness of societies to eradicate informal processes that are often generations old; how formal state-building as a result of European Union candidacy and accession, respectively, have influenced the approach Serbia and Croatia have taken to addressing certain informalities; how economic and democratic malaise often precedes certain informal practices; and how political actors like Milošević, Tuđman, and others coalesced long-standing informal networks that catered to their political projects.

Informality as Both Virtue and Illegality

⁹⁴ Gordy, (2018:5).

This thesis analyses the detrimental effect that informal networks and processes have on football in Serbia and Croatia. However, in states, regions, and other areas around the world, informal exchanges often provide essential services or goods. Further, even in circumstances in which informal networks or processes are deleterious, this does not always necessarily equate to illegality, though it sometimes does. What this thesis contends is that informality does not correlate to illegality, but that informality often allows for the cultivation of networks that enable the pursuit and execution of processes, deals, and other activities that are illegal. These networks allow for greater shielding of illegal activities, rendering corrupt forms of informality as an end stage type of the phenomenon, one that features most prominently in areas where maintenance of networks and process trumps the shared will or desire to foster reforms.

The multifaceted, complex nature of informality provokes the need for the framework used in this thesis to better organise empirical approaches to the study of informality. The balance of the subsection discusses first concepts that consider the practical benefits of informality in some contexts before discussing the grey area between informality and illegality or public abuse.

In certain contexts, informal relationships and exchanges constitute a lifeline for beleaguered populations, many of whom might live in precarious circumstances as the result of conflict, economic malaise, or stagnate development. For example, during wider economic or business downturns, informal economic activity tends to increase as individuals attempt to meet their needs during otherwise scarce conditions. As Elgin, et al. note,

“The informal sector can serve as a buffer and safety net for the poor if it absorbs [labour] during recessions. This can facilitate an economic recovery provided that re-entry into the formal sector is possible when the formal economy returns to expansion...the informal economy can behave ‘countercyclically’ in the sense that the share of informal employment rises during business cycle downturns...more procyclical fiscal policy in less developed economies with weaker institutions may contribute to the countercyclicality of informal activity. Fiscal policy tends to be more procyclical in countries with high informality. In particular, procyclical fiscal

consolidation during recessions, including through higher taxes, may encourage more informal employment and output.”⁹⁵

Thus, when the formal economy inevitably ebbs and flows and governments are either unable or unwilling to intervene, instead preferring to allow the market to make corrections, informality flourishes. In certain areas, such as urban environments or scarcely populated rural areas where economic conditions may never reach capacity even during favourable periods, conditions that instigate informal activity continue perpetually, allowing individuals living in such circumstances to survive. Governments overseeing such conditions are likely to allow them to continue as a policy choice – to eradicate informal processes in settings and situations like this would amount to severing a lifeline. Instead, housing, food, and other critical needs are often negotiated outside the purview of the official rules and regulations.

Cultural attitudes and conditions also contribute to more necessary informal interactions. For instance, Alunni considers “therapeutic informality,” a system of informal processes navigated by vulnerable populations in areas where formal regulations may prevent them from receiving necessary care or services. For example, the Roma population engage in informal arrangements in Italy so that they might receive healthcare despite lacking formal citizenship.⁹⁶ Where and when healthcare providers are unable or unwilling to provide care to Roma populations because they lack “formal” citizenship, informal arrangements are offered and often made. When medical care is needed, informal interactions and exchanges between impacted populations and healthcare bureaucrats become vital. It is with interactions like this in mind that Polese himself points out that informality, in and out itself, is not inherently negative for those that participate. He states,

“...informality could be used to improve state performance, governance structures and dynamics. Each policy measure brings forth both advantages and disadvantages on various parts of the population. Some segments of a population might find it advantageous to abide by a certain rule or a rule elite might impose

⁹⁵ Elgin, et al., (2021:6).

⁹⁶ Alunni, (2020). On the discrepancy between EU regulations on Roma, human rights, and health care, see Monasta, et al, (2008).

some additional costs for some parts of a society, or even its entirety, in order to achieve their overarching goals. In other words, it becomes convenient to go beyond 'good' and 'bad' to move through other categories such as long or short-term benefits for a given category or segment of a population.”⁹⁷

There is further discussion on cultural propensity for informality in the states of the former Yugoslavia later in the chapter. What is evident here, though, is that there are instances in which informality serves a positive or neutral purpose in societies around the globe. Although the thesis examines informality as a frequent barrier to reform and a contributor to the wider failure to consolidate pluralism and liberal institutions, it is nevertheless clear that in certain contexts, arrangements and processes that exist beyond the scope of the state serve an important, beneficial purpose.

Indeed, as previously mentioned, even obviously negative informal processes are not necessarily illegal. Polese, in his work to organise types of informality into “flavours,” notes the complexity that informal forms of corruption often present. Polese does acknowledge the widely held belief that corrupt, informal relations typically have a corrosive effect, particularly in developing states.⁹⁸ He also asks, though, if some informal forms of corruption are necessary and harmless, even if technically illegal. Similar to the above example about Roma securing healthcare through informal associations, Polese problematises the notion that a bribe to a medical professional or bureaucrat, in which all parties involved in the transaction might consider it to be a “gift,” is universally improper.⁹⁹ Polese’s argument compounds the need for a thesis such as this, adding that such transactions and how they are judged should be done so contextually and empirically. Polese goes so far as to contend that there could be positive outcomes from corrupt deals, arguing that such arrangements sometimes “allow a large amount of people to survive” and that they “can be used as a starting point for tax and other reform.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, he

⁹⁷ Polese, (2018:17).

⁹⁸ Polese, (2014). See also Jong-Sung & Khagram, (2005).

⁹⁹ The debate on whether corrupt practices “grease the wheels” or, on the other hand, “sand the wheels” of society, government, or bureaucracy has gone on for decades. For the former, see Leff, (1964) or Nye, (1967); for the latter, see Kreuger, (1974) or Tanzi & Davoodi, (1998).

¹⁰⁰ Polese, (2018:16).

notes that such processes can obviously have a negative effect in the form of lost state revenue, the diminished light it casts a state in, and the additional costs it inevitably generates to secure compliance.¹⁰¹ And so it again becomes crucial to analyse certain circumstances and specific domains as best to discern the degree in which informal networks and processes – particularly those laden with illegality – have varying impacts on the state entire. In the context of this thesis, as is discussed in chapters three, four, five, and six, there are informal, corrupt exchanges that are clearly detrimental and are representative of the pernicious effect such arrangements have across wider society.

Here, it is worth considering Ledeneva's analysis of the blurred boundaries between informality and corruption. Like Polese, Ledeneva understands that corruption often represents a challenge for states, but that in certain circumstances, it can have an equalising effect. This constitutes what she terms an "economy of favours," in which citizens trapped in a stagnated, developing state with high degrees of economic inequality build networks to survive and get what they need.¹⁰² Though these processes may be morally ambiguous, what also develops within generally unequal societies, according to Ledeneva, are highly corrupt informal networks that reward and protect patrons and members of the network at the expense of the masses.¹⁰³ Ledeneva differentiates *blat*, the system of favours utilised by the many, from *sistema*, a model of governance that rewards the elite. She summarises this by stating that,

"If the blat 'economy of favours' had to some extent an equalising effect on the chances of accessing resources for networked individuals and thus reduced the privilege gap between insiders and outsiders of the centralised distribution system, the trickle-down effect of the present-day 'economy of kickbacks' seems to be

¹⁰¹ Ibid. See also Franić & Williams, (2015), which discusses informal employment in Croatia and the revenue shortfalls facing the state because of the practice.

¹⁰² Ledeneva cites a well-known Russian proverb that says, "Don't have a hundred Rubles, have a hundred friends," which came to mean more than just having meaningful friendships in the traditional sense, but also in assisting in securing access to goods and services. Theoretically these relationships could lead to illegal activities, but Ledeneva finds that this mattered little less to the many who were attempting to get by on little money while political elites enjoyed significant wealth. These processes, while often not broadcast publicly, were nevertheless greeted by everyday people with a "knowing smile." Ledeneva, (2014).

¹⁰³ On the increased likelihood of corrupt forms of informality emerging in developing states, see also Dreher & Schneider, (2010).

reversed: it undermines competition, excludes the outsiders, and rewards insiders through network-based allocation and mobilisation. If blat networks tended to operate on the basis of obligations perceived as 'mutual help,' power networks tend to operate on the basis of a hierarchical, patron-client logic..."¹⁰⁴

This model leads to informal and often technically illegal processes intermingling as the result of societal acquiescence and ambivalence. The networks carrying out informal processes become so entrenched that there is widespread acceptance amongst the public and, in some cases, the informal processes, including corruption, become so commonplace that to eliminate them would risk the stability of the state. This leads to some societies developing governance models that are consistently violating the same formal regulations and laws that they are meant to be enforcing and that to enable such a state requires many to service the needs of the networks in charge. The state itself reinforcing the needs of the networks contributes to, as Darden finds, the hardening of hierarchies within the states and thus perpetuates the notion that informal processes take primacy. This includes obviously illegal processes and behaviours that are often monitored closely by those at the top of networks to ensure compliance. He finds that,

*"...graft also creates novel opportunities for leaders to exert informal pressure on their formal subordinates. The use of graft as a ubiquitous method of informal payment can enhance central control over state agents by increasing the potential sanctions to which subordinate officials are vulnerable in the event of noncompliance...in a state hierarchy where much of the compensation has been illicit, the disobedient bureaucrat faces much harsher punishment. Assets acquired with illegal funds can be seized, which makes all assets of the corrupt official vulnerable. Moreover, evidence of prior abuse of office may be grounds for imprisonment, which in addition to the loss of freedom, constitutes a loss of future income and generally leads to the impoverishment of the official's family. In sum, the entire livelihood and freedom of the official in the graft-ridden state are dependent on the continued goodwill of his superiors within the state hierarchy. Hence, the threat of exposing and enforcing his wrongdoing constitutes an enormously powerful sanction and places lower-level officials in an especially vulnerable position."*¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Ledeneva, (2014:20).

¹⁰⁵ Darden, (2008:42).

Informal processes in Serbia and Croatia are abetted by networks like that which Ledeneva and Darden describe. In Serbia and Croatia, networks formed decades ago are consistently refreshed with processes and individuals that serve the needs of the network, allowing for a prolonged – if not impossible – effort to root out detrimental/illegal forms of informality.

As this subsection demonstrates, individuals in different circumstances may use informal processes to avoid bureaucratic frustrations or to compensate in economically challenging situations. However, others form informal networks and engage in blatantly illegal processes repeatedly, shielded and protected by members and patrons within those networks. For example, as will be discussed later in the thesis, match-fixing networks in Serbia and Croatia continue to plague football as low-level participants often withstand the worst of the consequences when caught, while their more powerful enablers generally go un-punished. Thus, illegal behaviour perpetuates. It is primarily this form of informality that is analysed in the thesis.

Informality Through Cultural Embeddedness and Transition

The manifestation of informal processes as the result of cultural embeddedness through the practice of long-standing social or political traditions and as a feature of transition both economically and politically represents both a regular point of emphasis and, at times, a core debate within the burgeoning literature on informality, including in Western Balkans states like Serbia and Croatia. Informality in this context is often defined as something to overcome – usually through the introduction of more robust democratic institutions. These institutions would, theoretically, improve the quality of governance and assist in achieving pluralistic outcomes. What the implementation process must overcome, however, are citizens with expectations that to get whatever it is they may need or want at any given time – a job, a place in a university, a permit – they may need to look beyond formal institutions.¹⁰⁶ Exacerbating the issue is the

¹⁰⁶ It is obvious that, when confronted with the inability or the unwillingness for formal state institutions to meet their needs – including basic needs – alternatives to the state will develop, and processes will be replicated with enough frequency that they often may take the form of institutions themselves. See De Soto, (1986).

overwhelming perception amongst the population that they must exercise personal connections or otherwise risk falling behind their neighbours.¹⁰⁷ Because of this, and because these perceptions are more prevalent in developing countries, local elites are able to take advantage of societies in flux and gain control over key institutions. This ensures the entrenchment of informal institutions, which in turn cements the existing belief amongst the populace that one must consult those informal institutions to achieve preferred outcomes. It is also the case that the employment of informal institutions is not a universally negative phenomenon, even for the long-term trajectory of the health of democratic consolidation. Rather, they often work “in spite of or because of the state.”¹⁰⁸

Much of the literature profiles informality as a bug of transition punctuated by a set of processes that emerge because of actors of bad faith that exploit the tumult that often defines political and economic re-alignment. In transitional states, there are increased opportunities to rig contracts, to stack boardrooms with sycophants, or to take control over key resources. As Bhattacharyya & Hodler discovered when analysing natural resources and corruption, the elite in developing states tend to leverage whatever resources they take control of during the transition process as a means of rent-seeking.¹⁰⁹ This might be natural resources like oil in Venezuela or precious minerals in Central Asia, or it might be a corrupted judiciary or public procurement contracts, depending on what may be at the disposal of those in control of such resources. In either case, the willingness to make political support a condition for access to those resources is often a feature of developing states. This generates and perpetuates the need for informal relations between economic and political actors that require regular access to those resources. The demands for valuable resources and the need to achieve access via personal relationships subsequently ensures that the elites achieve political success in emerging democracies because they can trade resources for support. These exchanges increase inequality, particularly in post-war transitioning societies as there could be a number of factors that would prevent any given individual

¹⁰⁷ In surveys, 88.4% of Serbian citizens responded that they felt that they must do this. Cvetičanin, Popovikj, & Jovanović, (2019).

¹⁰⁸ Polese, (2021).

¹⁰⁹ Bhattacharyya & Hodler, (2010).

from accessing informal networks – including political disposition, geographic considerations, and socio-economic or ethnic differences.¹¹⁰

In addition to broader issues of transition, informalities have been hypothesised to develop because of “particularism” in the region. As Cvetičanin et al. note, it is often the case that authors scrutinise the “Balkan mentality” as being the primary driver of continued reliance on informalities in the region.¹¹¹ That is to say, political and social legacies – Ottoman, socialist – play a crucial role in the social acceptance of informalities as a feature of daily life in states like Serbia and Croatia. As Giordano points out, many in the region have a deep mistrust of the state and that mistrust has been passed down as each generation continues to have unfavourable experiences with the public sphere.¹¹²

This scepticism leads to the utilisation of personal networks in a variety of contexts. In both Serbia and Croatia, individuals often rely on their personal *veze* (connections) networks. *Veze* refers to the use of informal networks to secure opportunities not otherwise available to wider society. “Where an individual is concerned, *veze* may be used instrumentally to serve the purpose of personal consumption, interests, or goals; this may include access to services such as medical care, or obtaining formal documents such as a certificate, licence, or permit. *Veze* ties may also be used by public or private organisations in order to secure privileged results.”¹¹³ Though these informal personal ties are common, Williams & Franić found in a survey of 2,000 Croats, that six in ten respondents held a negative view of the *veze* system - again indicating that if there is any particularism to be found in the region, it is the widespread frustration, yet begrudging acceptance, with the way things get done.¹¹⁴ This

¹¹⁰ See Bojičić-Đelilović, (2013). Dell’Anno, (2021) concurs that widespread informality can limit economic redistribution, but also finds that informal exchanges also provide necessary opportunities when rent-seeking or excessive regulatory burdens otherwise impact production potential.

¹¹¹ Cvetičanin et al., (2019).

¹¹² Giordano, (2013). See also Uberti, (2018).

¹¹³ Stanojević & Stokanić in Ledeneva, (2018:59-59). See also Pantović, (2019); Hodges, (2017); and Franić & Williams, (2017). These types of social relations are common in other parts of the world as well, such as *guanxi* in China. In post-Soviet societies this is referred to as *blat*. On the latter, see Ledeneva, (2006; 2008; 2013).

¹¹⁴ This includes interactions with those thought to be conduits to the government and/or formal institutions at the local level. Mohmand & Mihajlović, (2014:81) found that individuals in Western Balkan states like Serbia and Croatia often rely on *mesni zajednicas* (MZs), “a traditional form of sub-municipal, community-based self-

negatively influences wider civic participation, which subsequently perpetuates poor governance.

On this, Dawson argues that the buoyancy and overall health of democratic values in a specific place cannot be captured in analysis that relies primarily on discussions of functionality, such as Freedom House or the Economist Intelligence Unit. In doing so, he concludes that:

“Democracy is itself dependent upon the existence of public spheres through which individuals can come together and discuss matters of public concern, constituting themselves as democratic citizens in the process. Moreover, it is simply not reasonable to expect that citizens will be inclined to uphold liberal democratic institutions unless they identify with the principles underpinning these same institutional forms”¹¹⁵

Others argue that in prescribing liberal democratic norms or institutions in transitioning states, practices that are no less “democratic” than those followed in western democracies are not promoted. This form of democratic coaching may prevent a localised form of democracy and civic culture that encourages broadly agreeable values but, owing to its local flavour, is potentially more resilient than a formal, structural approach to institution building. Similarly, Blokker argues that democracy does not necessarily require a liberal democratic culture, as constituted in the already consolidated democracies of the world, and that insisting on one represents only a narrow view of what constitutes a democracy. While Dawson’s conclusion – that Serbia has a more robust democratic culture because “counter-publics” made up of democratically engaged citizens that are both more willing to express their political opinions with friends and acquaintances and less likely to support nationalist parties – was contradicted by the 2012 and 2014 election results in Serbia. His thesis: that

government that are recognised and regulated by local government laws across many countries in the region and are recognised as forums where citizens can come together to discuss issues, decide on strategies, and formulate proposals on issues of local significance.” As MZs began to fall outside formal structures, there was an observable decline in citizen interaction with local governing bodies; MZs continue to exist and serve as an informal conduit between citizens and government representatives. MZs align with Helmke & Levitsky’s view of complimentary institutions – those which might exist outside prescribed rules and regulations but nevertheless provide auxiliary support to formal institutions. Helmke & Levitsky, (2004).

¹¹⁵ Dawson, (2014:27).

“mere elections”¹¹⁶ and other functional forms of democracy fail to capture nuance in how states are actually governed is worthy of further exploration.

Similarly, scholars like Mair and Greskovits considered that “hollowing” was responsible for weak institutions. Hollowing is defined as “citizens’ exit from the democratic arena and political parties’ exit from bonds with their constituencies and alliances with civil society organizations.”¹¹⁷ In short, those concerned with hollow democracies endeavour to discover to what extent citizens have “checked out” on their democratic responsibilities and additionally to what extent political parties and elites are so disengaged with civil society that they are “ruling the void.”¹¹⁸ For a political elite reliant on a disengaged electorate, where informal arrangements can help them maintain supremacy over governing structures, that may be preferable.

Though broadly speaking, informalities have remained present in both Serbia and Croatia, and while public sentiment may be such that there is a belief within each state that informal transactions are necessary to retain employment or secure a loan or to receive permits and other official paperwork, what processes and activities exist in the informal space has continued to evolve over time based on the needs of the political elite and wider society alike. In this contemporary era of democratic institution building within each state, observers generally consider informalities to be part of an outdated system that must be eliminated as best to foster democratisation and a more robust rule of law.¹¹⁹ What this sentiment fails to capture is that in many cases the adoption of formal institutions has not necessarily improved the daily lives of Serbs and Croats, and that informalities exist as a means to a better end for everyday citizens. Cvetičanin

¹¹⁶ A long-fought debate in transitology centres on the role of fair elections as the tipping point of democratic consolidation. Dahl (1973) notably argued that a “polyarchy” (consolidated democracy) featured competitive elections plus civil and political rights. Schmitter & Karl (1991) offer a reductionist view arguing that elections are the barometer of democratic health. Some have reduced regimes that hold clean elections but do not award additional civil or political rights as being “electoral democracies” that hold “mere elections.” For an overview, see Schedler, (1998).

¹¹⁷ Greskovits, (2015:29).

¹¹⁸ Mair, (2006).

¹¹⁹ Though organisations like the IMF acknowledge that some informal economic activity serves as a safety net for some populations, they typically encourage states to reign in informal exchanges. This is perhaps unsurprising. See IMF, “What is the Informal Economy?,” (2020). Accessed here: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2020/12/what-is-the-informal-economy-basics>.

et al. conducted survey research with respondents in a number of states in the Western Balkans and they ultimately conclude that among respondents, distrust of wider society is pervasive, but so too is the belief that compromises must be made as it relates to informal transactions.¹²⁰ It is in this environment in which the political elite of both Serbia and Croatia each seek to navigate European integration with an insatiable desire for long-term power as well as a cynical population weary of their leadership.

Externally Initiated Institutionalism

In 2018, five years after Croatia's accession to the European Union, the EU released a new strategy document outlining the prospects for further integration with the states of the Western Balkans, including Serbia. Though progress with the integration progress was observed in Serbia (and Montenegro, as well), the document details an array of shortcomings, including the scourges of corruption and linkages between political elites and organised crime elements. In attempting to provide a stratagem towards greater integration, the document concludes with suggested policy and reform adoptions that states within the region would necessarily have to undertake,

“In order to meet the well-established membership criteria and in their own interest, the Western Balkan countries need to implement comprehensive reforms in crucial areas. The rule of law, fundamental rights and governance must be strengthened significantly. Judicial reforms, the fight against corruption and organised crime and public administration reform needs to deliver real results and the function of democratic institutions seriously enhanced. Economic reforms must be pursued with vigour and structural weaknesses, low competitiveness and high unemployment addressed.”¹²¹

And how best to address these issues? Each of which would amount to a titanic effort of reform and the shepherding of established localised norms and processes constructed and entrenched over significant amounts of time into impersonal,

¹²⁰ Cvetičanin et al., (2019).

¹²¹ European Commission, (2018). Accessed here:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

standardised institutions bestowed from far flung bureaucracies. “Advisory missions” and “Action Plans” and “Normalisation Agreements” and “Investment Frameworks.” These initiatives, ensconced in banality, may dictate the trajectory of the outer flank of Europe’s eastern most states prospects for greater integration, but as is demonstrated in critical analyses of the flaws of the European Union accession process, the homogenisation of EU processes with those of states like Serbia and Croatia appears to breed opportunity for informal activity to flourish.

Thus, the added emphasis placed on informality in the Western Balkans within the literature in recent years is owed partially to the region’s various states of integration with a number of external legitimisers – most prominently the European Union – and the observance that reforms initiated from above lead to a “hollow” adoption of rules and regulations, manifesting only “empty shells.”¹²² This leads to both the practices most known to local populations, some of which are not included in the formal incorporation, and the creation of informal processes that exploit newly formed gaps between the new rules and regulations and the recurrent routines that demonstrate how certain things are accomplished practically.

Moreover, the geopolitical climate has significantly shifted in recent years. Previously, the western powers, notably the United States and the European Union, were viewed through an aspirational lens. However, this perception has shifted to one in which the drawn-out reform process, coupled with political developments like the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU, has resulted in authoritarian actors, such as China, Russia, and Persian Gulf states having increased influence. Consequently, the European Union, and its individual member-states, have expressed concern that arrangements between candidate states like Serbia with non-western, authoritarian, illiberal regimes represent another barrier to accession.¹²³

¹²² Dimitrova, (2010).

¹²³ French President Emmanuel Macron has proposed alternatives to the traditional European Union enlargement process in a bid to enhance relations with Europe’s proverbial hinterland without the same degree of formalisation of full accession. This has been critiqued as essentially creating a two-tiered EU. See Moyer, (2022). Accessed here: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/macrons-european-political-community-risks-two-tiered-european-union>.

For much of the 21st century, as Serbia and Croatia began the process of recovering from the wars of the 1990s, the respective governments of each state embarked on a process to greater integration within the European community. With both states seeking to progress in their transitions from socialist to market economies replete with the trappings of democracy – multiparty elections and a transparent approach to governing – the populations of both countries began to look westward. Hoping that they would ascend to a standard of living defined by higher wages, increased freedom of movement (and thus employment or educational prospects), and a more robust social safety net.

Initial analysis of the European Union’s policy of conditionality and its ability to reform political actors to accept democratising reforms as the requisite pathway to accession was favourable and had a “democratizing effect”¹²⁴ This became the conventional wisdom and as Vachudova notes, institutional belief in the normative (transformative) power of the European Union is evidenced by the fact that a state like Germany, where domestic support for EU enlargement is low, supported the opening of negotiations with Serbia in an effort to use EU conditionality to elicit genuine reform. If it was *only* about geopolitics, the EU could have brought Serbia into its orbit as an “associate” or “observing” member, but the only deal offered was conditionality (reform) and, ultimately, full membership.¹²⁵ Of course, this was not an action devoid of foreign policy strategy – there is obvious value to ensuring that the EU’s “backyard” is free of conflict, economic breakdown, and general instability.¹²⁶

Despite belief in the values of enlargement based on conditionality, the literature has identified considerable flaws in the “carrot-and-stick” approach undertaken. For example, Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier analyse the domestic considerations that

¹²⁴ Cameron, (2007); Vachudova, (2005); Lankina & Getachew, (2006); Obydenkova, (2012); Pridham, (2006); Levitsky & Way, (2010).

¹²⁵ Vachudova, (2014). For more on the concept of an “associate EU membership,” see Schimmelfennig, (2003) and Schimmelfennig & Moravcsik, (2009).

¹²⁶ Rather than any sort of binding “associate member” status offering, the EU instead devised the European Neighbourhood Policy for Eastern European and near-European states as a first step engagement of the region on democratisation. See Smith, (2005) or Kelley, (2006).

state-level governments will inevitably consider when debating the EU's conditionality – a rigid conditionality programme may, they surmise, lead to a scenario where meeting those conditions would be so unpopular for the incumbent government that they may fall from power.¹²⁷ This may compel fragile governments to postpone or reject continued negotiations. Steunenberg & Dimitrova demonstrate that EU conditionality can vary in both intensity and in time, suggesting that the EU and applicants from the proverbial “backyard” must be willing to engage in long term negotiations.¹²⁸ The unwillingness of the EU to set firm dates for targets of conditionality to be met has undoubtedly created a negotiating process in which applicant governments can prioritise the concerns for themselves and their (sometimes informal) networks without losing their spot in the accession queue.

For some, Croatia might be seen as an example of the success of conditionality and EU accession. Conditionality compelled the leader of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Ivo Sanader, to re-position his party from a vehicle of Franjo Tuđman's ardent nationalist agenda to a broadly centre-right party moulded to Germany's Christian Democratic Union or Britain's Conservative Party. By the time the Serbian Progressive Party came to power in Serbia as reformed former arch nationalists committed to leading the country into the EU, there was room to be optimistic that Serbia would follow Croatia's lead. And though Serbia has taken a number of formal steps toward greater integration with Europe, its inability to reform key institutions is evident. This paradox has brought into question the effectiveness of EU conditionality in inspiring genuine reforms and has demonstrated that the budding autocratic regime of Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić is a beneficiary of geopolitical manoeuvring.¹²⁹

Bieber argues that Serbia (along with other neighbouring Western Balkan states) was helmed by an illiberal regime that nevertheless enjoyed external validation from the EU – indeed, a “stabilitocracy.” He defined the specific case of Western Balkan stabilitocracies, saying they:

¹²⁷ Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, (2005).

¹²⁸ Steunenberg & Dimitrova, (2007).

¹²⁹ Foreign Policy, “How Aleksandar Vučić Became Europe's Favourite Autocrat,” (2018).

“Fit into a larger context of illiberal regimes that have established themselves within the EU and its neighbourhood, but the comparatively high influence of the EU in these countries, combined with the EU’s relatively substantial support for membership of Western Balkans countries, restrains and structures authoritarian tendencies differently than elsewhere. Western Balkan stabilitocracies thus combine semi-authoritarian features, while claiming to be reforming democracies and receiving external support, in particular from EU member states, for the sake of the (false) promise of stability. Thus, a stabilitocracy is a regime that includes considerable shortcomings in terms of democratic governance, yet enjoys external legitimacy by offering some supposed stability.”¹³⁰

Bieber argues that the governance of a stabilitocracy is fragile and relies on continued external support. Because of this, the governments of such states cannot take excessive authoritarian action as it would risk a loss of EU validation. However, in contrast, Richter & Wunsch argue that external acquiescence has not only created stabilitocracy in Serbia but is actively responsible for expanding opportunism through the system of conditionality, leading Serbia and states like Croatia away from the consolidation of rules and regulations and toward state capture by inherently anti-democratic forces. In assessing the unintended consequences of the EU’s engagement strategy with Serbia, they,

“Identify three distinct linkages that connect EU conditionality to the consolidation of state capture. First, external pressure for the liberalisation of markets in the absence of a comprehensive legal framework allowed a small economic elite to realise private gains and build powerful networks that influence political decision-making (money). Second, strong top-down conditionality stifles domestic deliberation and weakens internal mechanisms of accountability, allowing ruling elites to silence domestic opponents (power). Finally, progress towards EU membership and frequent interactions with high-ranking EU and member state officials serve to legitimise ruling elites (glory). As a result, the countries of the Western Balkans are stuck in a ‘state capture trap’ that leads to stagnating democratisation and the inability to implement deep reforms.”¹³¹

¹³⁰ Bieber, (2018:179).

¹³¹ Richter & Wunsch, (2020:3).

Bieber's conclusion on stabilitocracy argues that these types of regimes are unlikely to persist because they operate in a vacuum of geopolitical reality – that is to say that the EU of today must tolerate regressive domestic behaviour on the part of the Serbian government because they presently lack the structural power to demand differently, and they desire continued stability in the region. Additionally, these relationships that support regimes are structured in a way that will inevitably lead to either the dissolution of those relationships and greater potential for reform or the cementing of those relationships and greater chance of stagnation. But what Richter & Wunsch have demonstrated is that governance and its reliance on informal processes and structures within what might be termed a stabilitocracy, is not only derived from a tolerant EU but is augmented and bolstered by the EU's own processes, limiting the appeal to go beyond what is expected of them by EU conditionality.

What much of this debate ignores is the obvious: that the EU knew what they were getting when they granted Serbia official candidate status and weighed against the option of not fully engaging Serbia and risking instability. The EU elected to engage with a network of political elites it knew to have a problematic history. Similarly, a cursory understanding that Croatia was a state that had struggled with issues of corruption since its independence should have dictated the trajectory and manner of delivery of institutional reforms mandated by its candidacy and eventual accession to the European Union.

In July of 2013, when Serbia achieved EU candidate status, Vučić was already both the most powerful politician in Serbia and well-known to the European community. The prevailing wisdom that the EU's glow dimmed after the 2007-2008 economic crisis¹³² and its aftershocks may be accurate – including within the domestic political affairs of prominent western states. Nevertheless, the EU has A: remained a logical partner for a Serbian elite that was receptive to taking advantage of accession, and B: remained steadfast in its desire to shore up its outermost flanks and prevent potential crises.

¹³² Perceptions of the European Union shifted at a localised level due primarily to economic fluctuations, particularly the 2007-2008 global financial crisis. Naturally, the worse the crisis sunk in, the harder the fluctuation of approval by state. See Braun & Tausendpfund, (2014).

When the EU began dealing with Vučić, they were reportedly impressed with his acumen and shrewdness in handling sensitive issues, like Kosovo and his willingness to prosecute corruption. This inspired confidence that Vučić would be both a valuable partner in the region and that he would be genuine in his support for the introduction of western prescribed reforms.¹³³

Yet, the EU continues to engage Serbia within the accession process despite glaring and obvious signs that Vučić has consolidated his power and is presiding over a state with a deeply flawed governance model. It is apparent that the European Union has adopted a policy not rooted in the expansion of liberal democracy, but rather the expansion of its own sphere of influence. Because of this, the possibility that certain governance models will achieve the bare minimum in meeting conditionalities and will survive through the negotiating process despite observable flaws, has become a stark reality. Bieber's deduction that a fork in the road will eventually present itself for states making seemingly purposefully incremental progress in the accession process or risk that the geopolitical circumstances which have compelled the EU to negotiate with such states will shift, is both optimistic and not in line with current trends. Instead, it's possible that any changes to the geopolitical climate may occur after Serbia has achieved EU membership despite only completing the shallow reforms required by conditionality.

But it is not just the European Union, or the west in general, that has influenced the trajectory of reforms in states like Serbia and Croatia or the ability for noxious informal processes to persist. Prelec notes the detrimental influence of states like the United Arab Emirates and Turkey, which offer what she terms "corrosive capital." She defines this as strong financial investment without many of the proverbial "strings" prevalent in western-backed investment schemes. These financial entanglements from states less concerned about democracy, human rights, or the rule of law, help entrench informal processes and actors. She concludes that "...the workings of this 'vicious circle' are as follows: the presence of illiberal democracy in the region facilitates the access to

¹³³ Pond, (2014). Pond's work captures a moment in time in which Vučić adopted a reform agenda and signalled to the west that he would act rationally on issues like Kosovo.

corrosive capital, which in turn solidifies the elites in power and destroys political competition, ossifying state capture and reinforcing the circle.”¹³⁴ This issue has become more salient as domestic support for the European Union has plateaued and as actors like Vučić have been afforded the flexibility to pursue European Union accession in a manner that maximises personal political results for themselves and their partners.

Though Bieber & Tzifakis outline a number of “myths” designed to disabuse the notion that external investments from actors like Turkey, China, Russia and others would (either purposefully or organically) preclude states like Serbia from achieving accession to the EU, they nevertheless acknowledge that it is the tenuous relationship with the rule of law in places like Serbia that renders it more a more attractive investment opportunity for those states,

“The attractiveness...for investments from these external actors is also to some extent explicated by the weakness of their domestic rule of law systems. The ability of [leadership] to put aside competition rules, public procurement procedures and environmental and energy norms coupled with the weakness of their public institutions’ capacity to monitor agreement implementation and safeguard public interest are largely responsible for most of the negative effects of this external economic engagement in the region. Therefore, consolidation in the...rule of law institutions would act as a firewall against the disruptive effect of external actor involvement in the region.”¹³⁵

Bieber & Tzifakis note that even as EU oversight, designed to manifest the sort of consolidation of the judiciaries and enforcement arms of both member-states like Croatia and candidate states like Serbia, is implemented and the attempted institutional reforms proffered by that oversight is undertaken, the inability of those reforms to lead to better governance ensures that economic activity from authoritarian or illiberal states remains more likely. What has been clarified in the literature is that the reform process itself is incomplete in how it seeks to implement and enforce new regulations. External arbitrators of reform like the EU have seen reform-minded policy

¹³⁴ Prelec, (2020:175).

¹³⁵ Bieber & Tzifakis, (2019:19).

packages pass through national legislatures and parliamentary bodies with ease in some cases, but what researchers have found with some regularity is that the failure to better anticipate the need for greater norm socialisation and acceptance amongst both the political and economic elite, as well as the general populace of each respective state, has led to the formal adoption of certain measures but not their actualisation.¹³⁶ Because neither the EU, nor in some cases the member or candidate state in question, attempt to better phase-in reforms in a manner that would realise the political and social acceptance required for their genuine implementation, enforcement of those reforms is often ignored and not adequately invested in. This ensures the continuity of informality. To paraphrase Kmezić, without the knowledge or empowerment required to enforce new regulations, judicial officials or other state agents will not be able to effectuate even the most well-meaning or crucial reforms. This perpetuates ineffective or loosely administered governance models.¹³⁷

The approaches that the EU or other external bodies undertake to achieve best-practices (as it relates to reform processes), may in certain states wilt under the strain of having to overcome the entrenched political, economic, and social interests of the entrenched networks of well-connected individuals or entities.

Political Relations and Entrenched Networks

Just as individual members of society often rely on informal networks and connections to bypass poorly performing, redundant, or overly burdensome formal institutions, members of the political and economic elite often seek to leverage, manipulate, or expand governing dysfunction in an attempt to take advantage of informal opportunities.¹³⁸ To better manage those opportunities, those in a position to do so

¹³⁶ As Lavrić, Senjković, & Klanjšek found, in EU member-state Croatia there has not been an expansion of state resources to meet the capacity required to enforce newly adopted regulations. With little “buy-in” from local elites on certain policies, local populations often feel empowered to bypass reforms. Lavrić, Senjković, & Klanjšek, (2019).

¹³⁷ As Williamson found, the ability of those implementing new formal institutions in a state or region to consider existing, often informal, processes as part of that implementation process leads to wider acceptance amongst the general populace. See Williamson, (2009) and also Lund, (2006); Tsai, (2007); Khan, (2010); and Stacey & Lund, (2016).

¹³⁸ Though it is thought that a reliance on informality is a poor harbinger for the long-term trajectory of the formalisation of institutions, the rigid dichotomy that contends that formal institutions are good and informal

generally create barriers to entry to those seeking to maximise their own personal returns as a result of the exploitation of institutions. This can include traditional clientelist relationships from both the top-down- where neo-patrimonial models of governance prioritise electoral and relational exchanges in which political elites exchange resources that they claim ownership over for support- and the bottom-up - where those often shut out of access to formal institutions deliberately utilise illegal tactics to stake their claims.¹³⁹

In his analysis of political clientelism and the reliance on informal relations and institutions in Serbia, Slobodan Cvejić concludes that the political and economic relations exercised by elites have been solidified over decades – from the latter days of socialist Yugoslavia to the present. “Clientelism and informality represented one of the structuring principles of socio-economic and political development of Serbian society under the conditions of weak formal institutions and socio-historical heritage of late [Yugoslav] modernization. This means that clientelism was not only induced on the macro-structural level of society, but also penetrated into the micro-level of everyday life.”¹⁴⁰ The broader argument advanced by Džankić et al. is that there has been a failure to consolidate formal institutions in the Western Balkans because of the reliance on informal, clientelist arrangements by the political elite as a tool for power consolidation.¹⁴¹ These networks have allowed the elite to take control over the economy, the media, and the judiciary in each state, severely hampering the opposition along the way.¹⁴² The argument presented throughout this thesis is that despite the occasional change in government during the 21st century, the networks that govern Croatia and Serbia are products of the networks that emerged out of the

institutions are bad has been convincingly disputed by those that argue that formal and informal institutions often blend with or complement one another. Indeed, as Ledeneva & Efendic found in their surveys of local Western Balkan entrepreneurs, “informal networking is primarily used to support their business activities – from providing comfort, support, and advice through established networks to making new business deals within existing and expanding networks. What the majority of entrepreneurs underline is that informal networking eases cumbersome and demanding formal institutions and their procedures.” Ledeneva & Efendic, (2019:97-98). See also Bromley, (1978).

¹³⁹ On the latter point, see Tarrow, (2012). As mentioned, a controversial tactic employed in recent years by Croatian football supporters includes the deliberate breaking of rules to both humiliate and yield punishments for Croatian football governing bodies.

¹⁴⁰ Cvejić, (2016:250).

¹⁴¹ Džankić et al., (2018).

¹⁴² Given the recent defeat of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in the Croatian presidential election, there are clearly degrees to which this programme of power consolidation has been effective.

explicitly illiberal regimes of the 1990s. The informal networked system that emerged then saw a small contingent attaining significant control over state governing structures.

This system appears to be punctuated by the existence of elite versions of what Tilly refers to as trust networks, which he defines as “ramified interpersonal connections within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance... of others.”¹⁴³ These networks are typically built over long periods in which those at the top of the networks establish, amend, and re-establish rules and regulations that benefit those within the network at any given time. Some of these networks adopt rules that explicitly benefit a particular political party or individual. This has been examined in the greatest detail by the previously discussed Alena Ledeneva, who has authored analyses of vertical power in Vladimir Putin’s Russia that includes the *sistema* system, which she defines as “an open secret that represents shared, yet not articulated, perceptions of power...it stands for the working of power networks and methods of informal governance applied by political elites, intertwined with the existing formal institutional structures.”¹⁴⁴

In Croatia and Serbia, though it might be argued that although this type of personal power cultivation was observable during the reigns of Milošević and Tuđman, trust networks in each state since 2000 appear to be more devolved, despite specific actors having remained key figures for decades.¹⁴⁵ Where trust networks in Serbia and Croatia resemble the Russian model is in the need to sweep a variety of officials, administrators, law enforcement personnel, and clerks, for example, into the network at a low-level to guarantee preferred outcomes. As Favarel-Garrigues argues, networks rely on the vulnerability of corrupt individuals both at the top – politicians, business leaders, etc. – and at the bottom to ensure the longevity of the network. To

¹⁴³ Tilly, (2005:12).

¹⁴⁴ Ledeneva, (2011:1). See also Ledeneva, (2013); Ledeneva, Granville, & Hanson, (2012).

¹⁴⁵ There has, thus far, been an inability for leaders in states like Serbia and Croatia to build a cult of personality similar to Putin’s Russia. Pavlović, however, argues that under Aleksandar Vučić, similar features are emerging in Serbia, as the state tilts toward a radical form of competitive/electoral authoritarianism. See Pavlović, (2021).

participate as either a wealthy entrepreneur who pays off a politician to secure a permit, for example, or as the administrative official who stamps and signs off on a license as a result of pressure from above, is to be severely compromised and bound into the workings of the network.¹⁴⁶

Networks not necessarily beholden to any particular individual nevertheless demonstrate that it remains governed by certain rules or expectations. This includes the concept of “deals” and who gets to make them. Pritchett et al. notes that deals – political favours, economic preferred treatment, and the “constant negotiability of value” - are generally reserved for those within a narrow elite.¹⁴⁷ Deals also appear to occur within “political bargaining environments in which participants continuously negotiate over how best to manipulate, exploit, or disregard formal institutions.”¹⁴⁸ As has been the case in either Serbia and Croatia - including in the spectacular downfall of Milošević and that of the subject of chapter six, Zdravko Mamić, in Croatia - there is also the potential to negotiate one-self out of trust networks as a result of the weakening of norms related to trust and potential reciprocity. If members of trust networks are compromised publicly in a manner that would threaten the longevity of trust networks and the normalised relations built over time, they may be expelled. This includes even those that once dominated the network.

The space in which these networks cultivate and the rules that they abide by are, Yiftachel argues, bestowed by the state. Though Yiftachel uses geography in urban settings as an analogy of informal “grey” spaces, here we can conceptualise that these grey spaces can include segments or processes of society and culture that are weakly governed and thus ripe for the introduction of informal institutions. Yiftachel argues that the state deliberately creates these “grey spaces” in which informal action takes place under the guise of progressive “whitening” or threats at “darkening.”¹⁴⁹ In other words, states can create what this thesis terms “domains” in which informal networks can carry-out processes that benefit that network in areas of life that include elements

¹⁴⁶ Favarel-Garrigues, (2011).

¹⁴⁷ Pritchett et al., (2018). See also Roy & al-Sayyed, (2004).

¹⁴⁸ See Goodfellow, (2020).

¹⁴⁹ Yiftachel, (2009).

of both legality (white) and illegality/informality (black). Football, for example, is governed locally in both Serbia and Croatia by organs of the state that are staffed by political appointees. Internationally, meanwhile, the sport is run by organisations like UEFA and FIFA, both of which have previously been found to be susceptible to political dealmaking and corruption in their own dealings. Football is subject to oversight in some areas by law enforcement agencies, but in others, it is governed by very weak institutions that often provide minimal oversight. For those wishing to extend trust networks into “grey” areas of Serbia and Croatia, football would thus be an attractive option. These compromised areas of society are targeted by trust networks because those networks have built relations within those areas over many years. This includes during periods of transition, where such areas are more vulnerable and where networks can establish control over grey areas in such totality that reform via the introduction of more robust formal institutions becomes an ever more complicated process.

Snyder & Mansfield reason that this is especially true in the earliest days of transitioning states, as they argue that “once a country starts on an illiberal trajectory, ideas are unleashed, and institutions are established that tend to continue propelling it along that trajectory.”¹⁵⁰ For example, Franjo Tuđman’s project of casting himself as a Washingtonian figure of Croatia – the father of his country – did not belay him from building a network designed to buttress his power.¹⁵¹ From raising the vast majority of HDZ party funds through opaque uses of state subsidies to creating parallel structures in which he could circumvent the Croatian parliament on issues as crucial as national security and national finance policy, Tuđman crafted a system of governance that rewarded personal loyalty and enabled his party and his business class backers to take control over both the day-to-day management of Croatia, as well as key resources and industries.¹⁵² This was achieved initially through the privatisation process in which HDZ cronies and members of his own family were more or less given large portfolios

¹⁵⁰ Snyder and Mansfield, (2007:7).

¹⁵¹ Tuđman did attempt to curate a cult of personality, often appearing in public in a white uniform similar to that which Tito was known for. By the time Tuđman died of cancer in 1999, after nine years leading Croatia, he was still popular with the bulk of the Croatian populace, even as support for his party declined. See Ramet, (2011).

¹⁵² Ramet, (2011).

of state-owned property, creating an elite class consisting of as few as 200 families faithful to the ruling coalition.¹⁵³ This continued through the process of *uhljeb* as functionaries were placed in key public administration positions across a variety of sectors – including football.¹⁵⁴ Given that these networks and processes were established as features in the earliest days of independent Croatia, it is perhaps not surprising that they have become deeply entrenched.

Sørensen & Torfing analysed the effect of network politics on governance by considering three factors in which political actors are able to engage in the functions of governance: “the level of access that they have to decision-making processes (endowment); their capability to make a difference in these processes (empowerment); and their perception of themselves as political actors (political identity).”¹⁵⁵ They ultimately conclude that when legitimate actors are deprived of their endowment, empowerment, and political identity in lieu of informal networks, democracy inevitably suffers. The pro-pact literature could not rectify a situation like Serbia where “soft-liners” from the Milošević regime were scant and the “revolutionaries” themselves were so divided that the only pacts available to them were with utterly compromised actors. While the pro-pact literature warns against creating pacts with hardliners from the old regime, it fails to adequately address the obvious: what if hardliners are the only option? Only one outcome exists when genuine political reformers are too weak to impose structural and normative change, and when illiberal and informal actors harbour more power than the democratic (however consolidated) state in which they operate - continuity.

Ekiert et al. conclude that “when one political faction or constellation of political parties has ruled for long periods of time and controlled the organs of the state, the trend has

¹⁵³ Kusovac, (2000). By 1993, a new policy on privatisation was introduced in which employees and managers were limited to purchasing 50% of a former state-owned asset. This was apparently a method of attracting external investment by offering larger chunks of the industry. Because of the ongoing conflict at the time, foreign investment was unlikely and thus privileged, informal domestic networks were given carte blanche to create a loyal “tycoon class.” Here, loyalty can be defined as willing to become the economic base of support for the HDZ. For more on this period, see Barrett, (2012).

¹⁵⁴ On this feature of Croatian society, see Ledeneva, (2018:398).

¹⁵⁵ Sørensen & Torfing, (2007:610).

been toward greater corruption and authoritarianism.”¹⁵⁶ While in agreement with this basic premise, a key observation is that the political factions that preside over informal networks in Serbia and Croatia are not just traditional political actors, such as government ministers or political parties (although undoubtedly many are). They are industrialists or football supporters’ groups or drug traffickers and they are embedded throughout segments of society in each state. They benefit from weak processes, structures, and rules enforcement. And they have been in the blood stream of political life in Serbia and Croatia before and after institutional reforms were introduced. The soundest argument remains that to understand the existence of power networks and the utilisation of informal processes, one must accept that malignant actors, practices, and processes never left.

Conclusion

The literature on the intersection between football and politics has analysed the effect football and its actors have had on Serbian and Croatian society from a number of perspectives. First, historical contributions sought to reveal how football was an important variable across a variety of events that influenced the trajectory of states and peoples in the region, from the Titoist period and through the collapse of Yugoslavia and the subsequent wars in the region. The identity and nationalism approach scrutinises contributions around football’s place as a symbol of national identity and either progress or decline in Serbia and Croatia, most of which considers the virulent strain of nationalism that was a defining feature of Yugoslavia’s collapse. The literature also reveals how politicians like Tuđman capitalised on the nationalist ideology permeating society and advancing football as a tool to further his state building aims and legitimacy at home and abroad. The ethnographic approach seeks to better understand the defining qualities of supporters’ groups and their members, including what compels them to participate in activities ranging from ritualised fighting to strategic protests against governing elites. And finally, the political approach analysed literature that specifically seeks to address football’s relationship with contemporary political actors in both states. The second section examined approaches

¹⁵⁶ Ekiert et al., (2007:16).

to understand informality in Croatia and Serbia: (i) the interplay between informality and illegality and the power of informal networks to ultimately shield and enable illegal activities; (ii) the embeddedness approach, which argues that there is a particularism to informality in the region as a result of both major political and social shifts over the course of the 20th century as well as a perennial sense of distrust and malaise toward formal institutions and the civic space; (iii) the externally initiated institution building approach argues that Serbia and Croatia, through their respective engagements with the European Union and other external actors, have adopted a series of reforms to an array of institutions within the governing structures of each state but have not enforced the new regulations that came with those reforms, leading to a widespread failure of normalisation and acceptance of rules; and (iv) the political and entrenched networks approach argues that existing networks in each state create a series of exceptions to rules and regulations for themselves and their allies as they see fit.

A considerable amount of the football literature touches on the corruption and failure to eradicate the worst excesses of supporters' groups due to weak institutions; much of the informality literature advises that to best understand informalities and how they are exercised in any given place, one must analyse informalities through local, empirical examples. This balance of the thesis works to marry the former with the latter.

Chapter Two: Methodological Approach & Considerations - Constructing the Final Thesis

The aim of the following chapter is to elaborate on the purpose of the thesis, why it represents a meaningful contribution to the literature, and the organisation of the chapters. In meeting that aim, the chapter serves as a proverbial roadmap that guides the reader through the process undertaken to complete an original thesis designed around the actors and literature employed here, notably on football, informality, and Serbia and Croatia. The novelty of this thesis is that the work strives to link the two literatures by using a new framework which attempts to crystallise football's role as a domain of informality. In support of that framework, I applied crucial conclusions found in existing literature and reinforce the work by including primary and secondary data not previously used in academic work. The chapter is organised into multiple subsections that elaborate on the sources and methods included in the thesis to best inform the conclusion that football in Serbia and Croatia is replete with informal processes, transactions, and networks.

The chapter opens by building on the work of chapter one, the literature review, by narrowing the focus to the specific contribution and framework offered in this thesis and a discussion of its originality and usefulness to the literatures on football and informality, respectively. This includes an analysis of the central approach of the thesis which introduces theories of informality to the literature on politics, society and football within Serbia and Croatia. In doing so, the thesis advances the notion that football in Serbia and Croatia is rife with informal relations, processes, and forms of governance and oversight, has been for decades, and is thus represents a novel method of analysing barriers to institutional reform in each state.

This argument is supported by employing an original framework that considers multiple case studies and analyses that advance the contention that football is a domain of informality in contemporary Serbia and Croatia and has been in its current form since the Milošević and Tuđman regimes, respectively. The thesis relies on the collection of

empirical data from multiple sources, including news articles, election results, reports from non-governmental organisations, documentaries, and economic data. Married to these sources throughout the thesis is the academic literature both on forms of informality – economic, corruption, and political – as well as existing contributions on football in Serbia and Croatia. The following subsections then elaborate on the sources used and the justification for their inclusion. Additionally, the chapter considers field work undertaken in the summer of 2018, the choice of interview subjects, and the ethical dimensions of the information gathered during that process and how that information contributed to the final thesis.

The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the previous subsections and a final statement of the purpose of the thesis.

The Literature and Framework

In his own attempt to precisely define informality and its scope, Ravi Kanbur concluded in the years since Keith Hart's research in Accra, Ghana, and his observance of informal processes there, that:

“It would be fair to say that though individual studies apply tight definitions and consistently, the literature as a whole is a mess of alternative conceptualisations and different measures...this lack of coherence seems to lead to analytical and policy problems. Analytically, information can be used inconsistently across different conceptualisations all of which are lined only by the use of the common term ‘informality,’ Policy analysis can also be affected, since very disparate situations are all given the same label, of ‘informality,’ with a related tendency to apply the same policy instrument to very different situations.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Kanbur, (2009:5-6). Hart, (1973) is credited with introducing the term in his seminal work describing the types of employment offered to inner city residents of Accra, noting that many would not be classified as employed in any official capacity, but in practical terms, worked frequently in positions designed to avoid tax regimes. In coining the term, Hart helped foster the dichotomy often present in the literature between formal vs. informal, which is activity that is regulated as opposed to those processes and relations that lie outside the parameters of state oversight. Though Hart popularised the term in the literature, characteristics that would become synonymous with informality were present in past contributions. See, for example, Lewis, (1954) and Geertz, (1963).

Here, Kanbur finds two issues. First, that those concerned with informality in the academic space spend a considerable amount of time deconstructing Hart's initial dichotomy and fill the space with what Kanbur believes are imprecise definitions of informality.¹⁵⁸ In arguing that informality amounts to more of a continuous exchange, a swirling constellation of processes that incorporates multiple facets of society (economic, political, criminal), researchers moved beyond the duality of processes, interactions, or relations being either formal or informal. In doing so, they began to proffer numerous definitions and analyses of what informality is and when it arises. This includes moving beyond the initial scope of Hart's analysis – what is colloquially referred to as “under the table” employment – to include examinations of political informality, corruption, clientelism, and other forms of informality. Kanbur argues that this poses an epistemological problem on what informality amounts to.

The problem of imprecision in the academic literature leads to the second issue cited in Kanbur's work, that of the policy implications of failing to adequately convey what informality is and how it manifests itself across domains. Without understanding the intricacies of informality there is risk that those interested in pursuing policies to eradicate them, particularly in the case of informal processes deemed detrimental to society, will be hampered by that lack of a confident understanding.

In attempting to contribute to solving these dual problems, this thesis concurs with the conclusion that Goodfellow reached about how best to confront the study and analysis of informality via the employment of relevant empirical examples,

“The question of why...informality takes certain forms is primarily an empirical one. Answers will depend on political and institutional conditions in specific contexts and how they have changed over time. Different kinds of [informality] may also coexist in the same space, and it takes empirical analysis to tease out and explain this.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ See Bromley, (1978); Roitman, (1990).

¹⁵⁹ Goodfellow, (2020:287).

The context chosen to explore informality in Serbia and Croatia is football. Football's intersection with politics, societies, and cultures around the world is visceral and often influences peoples and events in profound ways. For many, football is not merely a game, but something much more recondite. As Foer summarised, "Soccer isn't the same as Bach or Buddhism. But it is often more deeply felt than religion, and just as much a part of the community's fabric, a repository of traditions."¹⁶⁰ In Serbia and Croatia, the influence football has had on politics and wider society is incontrovertible. From major political figures like Milošević, Tuđman, and Vučić to unique characters like Željko "Arkan" Ražnatović, Zdravko Mamić, and Miroslav Blažević, and from highly vocal supporters' groups like the Delije and Bad Blue Boys to prosaic bureaucrats, football and informal processes and networks intersect at all levels of society in both states. The quality of football that was previously played in the region contributes to the sport's importance within Serbia and Croatia. As Wilson notes,

*"There was a time when Yugoslavia was the Brazil of Europe. So obsessed were Yugoslavs by the belief that they were the representatives of free-flowing samba football in the old world that Red Star Belgrade's ground is known as the Marakana, after the great stadium in Rio De Janeiro. Ludicrous as it may at first seem, Brazil having won five World Cups and Yugoslavia none, there is some truth to the claim...Yugoslavia were what Brazil would have been had they been European, self-doubt suppressing imagination and bringing to the surface the cynicism that has always underlain the technical excellence."*¹⁶¹

The wars that marred Yugoslavia's dissolution triggered crises that eventually reached football, helping to ensure that a promising era of football ended just as one of the region's top clubs, Red Star Belgrade, achieved its greatest success in becoming European champions. The networks that emerged as a result of the wars and the new governments in Serbia and Croatia enveloped football, as informal processes that typically benefitted a select few took precedent over the quality of the athletics on the pitch.¹⁶² This pattern has, as is demonstrated throughout the thesis, continued and

¹⁶⁰ Foer, (2004:4).

¹⁶¹ Wilson, (2006:98).

¹⁶² See Pritchett et al., (2018), which argues that personalised networks invariably create deals that are very often not available to wide swaths of the societies in which they operate.

though the literature has scrutinised the intersection of politics and football in Serbia and Croatia from a number of perspectives, none have yet incorporated concepts of informality.

As was thoroughly reviewed and analysed in chapter one, there is a small but valuable body of literature that has emerged in the last ten years which looks at the number of ways in which football plays a role in Serbian and Croatian life extending beyond pitches, boots, kits, and goals. From the notion that symbols and myths associated with football help nationalists and patriotic elements within society to coalesce support around a flag or a political programme to the historical, or ahistorical, impact football had on the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, there is a rich breadth of literature to contend with. Those that have contributed to the literature have also provided valuable data worthy of re-examination and re-evaluation in service of an original perspective on football's cultural, political, and social positioning within Serbia and Croatia.

The academic literature scrutinised and built upon in the thesis is in English unless a non-English contribution is cited and quoted in the English literature. The works of Brentin, Mills, Hodges, Sindbæk, and Nielsen, among others, who write exclusively in English, are sufficient to allow researchers to expand on the arguments and dimensions included within those works. Further, seminal Serbo-Croatian language scholarship is fortunately analysed in English works, including by the original authors in subsequent English contributions, ensuring that relevant concepts and arguments are included in the thesis. This includes the contributions of scholars like Srđan Vrcan, Dražen Lalić, and Ivan Čolović – works that have advanced the literature on sociological, symbolic, and political concepts and how they apply to football.

Football and its interaction with politics and society in Serbia and Croatia has been scrutinised and analysed through multiple approaches. As noted in the previous chapter, those approaches include historical approaches, political approaches, approaches that consider nationalism, and the sociological/ethnological approach. However, scholarship that amalgamates the study of football and politics in Serbia and

Croatia with the literature on informality, specifically, is missing and serves as an opportunity to better understand how informal relations and processes manifest in an important domain within Serbian and Croatian society. To do this, the thesis employs a typology that presents a comprehensive view of the relationship between characteristics of informality and football in Serbia and Croatia.

In pursuing a compendious account of informality within Serbian and Croatian football, the framework applied in the thesis is derived from Polese's contention that there are many "flavours" of informality. To illustrate the influence of informal networks and processes on Serbian and Croatian football, I will consider three of the most prevalent flavours: top politics, economic informality, and corruption. Informality in top politics and economic informality allow for the examination of informal processes and interactions in both licit and illicit contexts, while corruption demonstrates how informality materialises as a criminal pursuit. Research on informality serves as both an opportunity and a conundrum: that there is no shortage of ways in which informality saturates all types of states and societies around the globe allows for innovative or intuitive approaches in its study. The approach used in this thesis credence to Goodfellow's conclusion that thorough, inclusive approaches to empiricisms or case studies represent the best opportunity to grasp the profundity of informal processes and networks in any given state, society, or domain. To gain the most insight possible, processes, networks, and domains should be explored through multiple categories (flavours) of informality to achieve a reasonable understanding of how informality influences the trajectory of governance or oversight. To achieved that in this thesis two major case studies, Aleksandar Stanković in Serbia and Zdravko Mamić in Croatia, are considered in combination with two chapters that analyse informality in football in Serbia and Croatia, respectively, through the deployment of a framework that incorporates the three selected flavours of informality.

Economic informality: The informal economy has, as previously noted, been the subject of research and academic analysis for decades, even before Hart advanced the notion of "informality." Since, researchers have attempted to define and audit what may constitute informal economic activities and processes. Smith defines the informal

economy as “market-based production of goods and services, whether legal or illegal, that escaped detection in the official estimates of gross domestic product (GDP).”¹⁶³ Schneider notes that what constitutes the informal economy includes otherwise legal activities purposely designed to avoid taxation, as well as illegal activities like the sale of guns, drugs, and anything deemed illicit by state or international authorities.¹⁶⁴ By the 21st century, estimates by international bodies suggest that nearly 40% of the GNI in developing states and nearly a fifth of GNI in highly-developed OECD states, demonstrates that these practices are not relegated to fledgling nations. As is expanded on in this thesis, football in Serbia and Croatia is teeming with economic informality; this manifests itself via hidden transfer fees from the sale of players, discrepancies in compensation to players or officials, and personal management contracts that allow certain individuals to illegally profit from the wages of players, typically in violation of the rules of governing bodies like FIFA and UEFA.

Corruption: Scholars like Heidenheimer have invited significant debate on engagement with corruption and how it pervades politics, economies, bureaucracies, and social interactions. Corruption is “above all a politically polysemic term signalling any disruption noxious to the smooth running of the State.”¹⁶⁵ Corruption was, Heidenheimer surmised, defined in three arenas: (i) public opinion, in which the public at large determines which actions they believe constitutes corruption; (ii) public interest, in which actions are deemed corrupt if they violate the public good; and (iii) public office, in which corruption is defined as any exploitation of the formal rules of an official office. Philip offers a robust definition of political corruption: “Most commonly, political corruption involves substituting rule in the interests of an individual or group for those publicly endorsed practices which effect an ordered resolution to conflicting individual or group interests.”¹⁶⁶ Polese himself simplifies the definition to “anything from a one-off payment to a bureaucrat to previously-agreed payments to the medical staff upon giving birth to a payment to a politician to get a given law approved in the parliament.”¹⁶⁷ The thesis considers examples that are very evidently contrary to public

¹⁶³ Smith, (1994:18).

¹⁶⁴ Schneider, (2002).

¹⁶⁵ Génaux, (2004:15). See also Heidenheimer, (1970).

¹⁶⁶ Philip, (1997:458).

¹⁶⁷ Polese, (2018:13).

expectations and, in some instances, the law itself, including bribing referees and players to fix football matches. It also considers examples that are less explicitly in violation of the law, but are nevertheless detrimental to key institutions, such as the overapplication of judicial loopholes in cases involving football. In sum, the thesis demonstrates that football in Serbia and Croatia is inundated with various forms of informality.

Top politics: Alena Ledeneva's work has contributed significantly to the understanding of methods of informal governance in top political structures. Her analysis of Vladimir Putin's Russia, in which Putin's ability to influence otherwise ineffective governing bodies or bureaucracies, to the benefit of himself and his closest allies, advanced the notion that informal approaches to governance can be systematic. This politicised type of informality relies not only on the elite, but also on law enforcement agents, judicial officials, and bureaucrats who regularly must carry out processes that might defy official laws, rules, and regulations. Although Ledeneva's work relies heavily on the extraordinary powers of a single individual, here it is surmised that networks that were birthed because of the wars of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia instituted informal processes amongst the politically well-connected, judicial officials, and bureaucrats in services of those networks. These practices have continued in the twenty-plus years since armed hostilities in the region concluded, including in football, where ties to the political elite and expectations placed on judicial officials and other bureaucrats lead to unequal outcomes and the exercise of informal forms of power.

The chapters 4 and 6 also speak to these flavours. The Stanković chapter illuminates the flaws that have saturated the Serbian judiciary primarily because of political overreach and corruption. This chapter speaks to the corruption and top politics flavours of informality in the states failure to adequately prosecute Stanković, and to economic informality, as Stanković's influence was observed to be a result of his ties to illicit markets. The Mamić chapter chronicles the subject's professional career – much of which was owed to his close ties to well-connected elites – and his abuse of the various positions he held within Croatian football. This chapter describes and

documents activities that amount to economic informality, corruption, and informality in top politics.

It is the case that any thesis that centres football in Serbia and Croatia through the prism of informality would constitute an original contribution as that gap in the literature is clearly established. This thesis goes beyond merely attempting to fill that gap by also considering the issues raised by Kanbur and Goodfellow and incorporating a framework based on a more comprehensive approach to the analysis of informality.

Here, there is opportunity to summarise the most basic description of the contribution the thesis makes to the literature: that it examines football in Serbia and Croatia in an important and interesting way by incorporating examples, concepts, and theories of informality. More to the point, in outlining the numerous ways in which a thesis can successfully make a small yet valuable contribution, Phillips & Pugh argue that there are at least fifteen approaches to satisfying the need for novelty and originality for any thesis. Of those, four are of interest to this thesis: (i): synthesising existing work; (ii): using known material but with new interpretations; (iii): applying known material in new contexts; (iv): and applying known material in a new area or field.¹⁶⁸ Through the use of the “flavours” framework, the thesis synthesises literature on football in Serbia and Croatia with that of informality; it interprets key events, some previously discussed in the literature and others that have not been, in Serbian and Croatian football through the prism of informality; and in exploring new contexts as it relates to Serbian and Croatian football, it advances an important notion about the prolong effect of informality on key domains within transitioning states like Serbia and Croatia. That is, to understand why states like Serbia and Croatia might grow stagnant in their development or process of reform, consideration must be given to the entrenchment of detrimental forms of informality. Here, the thesis considers football as a reflective, informative domain from which to view Serbia and Croatia’s modern struggle to eradicate nefarious networks and processes.

¹⁶⁸ Phillips & Pugh, (2010).

The following subsections describe sources incorporated into the thesis to reach its conclusion.

Governmental, Non-Governmental, and Journalistic Contributions

To support the academic literature and framework, supplemental sources of information and analysis aid the thesis in its argument. The following subsection details and justifies the inclusion of the additional sources.

- **Journalistic Contributions**

There exists a long-standing debate in academia about the research value of journalism.¹⁶⁹ Ethical quandaries ensure that in certain instances, journalists can reach conclusions that academics may otherwise not be able to. For this reason, the utilisation of journalism – particularly investigative reports compiling information about criminal or clandestine processes and networks – is essential. Additionally, it is journalism that confirms otherwise mundane but essential facts: dates, locations, who scored a goal and in what minute, and the final score, for example.

Further, there are journalists concerned with football, and in some instances football specifically in Serbia and Croatia, who would sensibly be included in most contributions related to the sport. This includes Jonathan Wilson and Alex Holiga, among others. Investigative journalism, including from sources that report directly on the region and expose key relevant information as it relates to football and the actors discussed in the thesis, informs examples used here. This includes the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK). Further, the database maintained by the OCCRP, which includes news reports, diplomatic cables, government documents, and other intercepted materials serves as a uniquely valuable resource. Given the nature of

¹⁶⁹ See Pearson & Patching, (2010), who argue that journalism is a research method.

informal processes and networks, this style of reporting braces both the framework and case studies employed in the thesis as the information gathered and disseminated would otherwise be difficult or impossible to discover. Given the participation of many key figures and the presentation of information regarding the exploitation of football, *Istinomer's* ground-breaking documentaries regarding the intersection of football, politics, and crime are also cited.

Mainstream outlets like the Guardian, the BBC, the New York Times, the Financial Times, and the Economist provide necessary facts, figures, and details used throughout this thesis. Regionally focused sources like Balkan Insight, N1, and B92 provide additional anecdotal information. In sum, journalistic contributions abet the argument of the thesis and assist in supporting the included case studies.

- **Government, Non-Governmental, and Intergovernmental Reports and Documents**

There are a number of reports compiled by governmental, non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations that provide the in-depth empirical context required to organise this thesis. The reports chosen for inclusion highlight issues like state capture and corruption; media capture; economic inequality; democracy; and political extremism. These reports were authored by organisations such as the European Union/European Commission, the United Nations, the governments of Serbia and Croatia, Transparency International (and their state-specific offshoots, Transparency Serbia and Transparency Croatia), the Open Society Foundation, the British Council, the United States Department of State, Freedom House, the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, and the Centre for European Policy Studies. These studies or documents either represent primary data – such as translated government documents or legal briefs relating to relevant case studies – or secondary research, such as analysis of legal proceedings or investigative reporting.

I have limited my research of legal documents to relevant cases, though many of the reports incorporated relate to both the case studies included in this thesis, while also providing a wider berth of contextual analysis that demonstrates ongoing issues of informal governance. This includes court documents and financial reports, as well as data gathered and reported by non-governmental organisations. Additional reports apply findings from government documents and open-source evidence that supports the broad conclusions that elements within football in Serbia and Croatia uniquely operate within an informal space. These reports are authored by government agencies and actors, including diplomats, relevant departments and ministries, and judicial bureaucrats.

- **Field Work and Ethical Considerations**

The initial approach to this thesis included a dimension grounded in sociological elements that incorporated and would have built on the works of those like Murphy, Williams & Dunning, Spaaij, Giulianotti and others which analysed the space occupied by “hooligans” – who they were, why they devoted a considerable amount of their time to aggression, and examples in which they waded into politics and wider society. It was the individual members and former members of supporters’ groups, their backgrounds, socioeconomic situation, and political dispositions, which would be centred in the thesis around the pertinent questions of how the characteristics of these groups had evolved and what remained of the appeal of memberships. Subcultural theory has been advanced by scholars not just of football groups, but of additional subcultures that are both mainstream and on the fringes of society in Serbia, Croatia, and other states and regions around the world.¹⁷⁰ The initial intention was to use semi-structured interviews with contacts made through proverbial “gatekeepers” and the use of snowballing¹⁷¹ to generate new contacts to aid in the data gathering phase of the thesis.

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, Tomc, (2010) for an illuminating entry on punk culture in Yugoslavia. See also Del Lago & De Biasi, (2013) for the influence of Italian footballing groups on the wider culture, including in Yugoslavia.

¹⁷¹ On snowballing, see Spaaij, (1998).

I contacted politicians, academics, prominent journalists, and representatives of non-governmental organisations from Serbia and Croatia, all of whom were interviewed to discuss links between football and political actors within their respective states. Further, through links established with a fellow graduate student, I was able to establish contact with a former member of a prominent football supporters' group in Croatia that committed to introducing me to current members, including the then-leader of the group.

Field research commenced in the Summer of 2018 and included work carried out in both Serbia and Croatia. Interviews were arranged prior to travel to the region with the goal of initial interviews leading to introductions to additional subjects. The following groups of individuals were interviewed during field work.

- *Members of Parliament*

I sought to interview Members of Parliament with the intention of gathering information about the governmental and political response, knowledge, and perception of the intersection between football and politics. Interviews occurred with two Members of the Serbian Parliament, each representing opposition parties. The conversations were free-flowing and both MPs were quick to acknowledge their belief that members of the government knowingly acquiesce when confronted with the opportunity to introduce reforms that might sufficiently prosecute members of supporters' groups, for example. These conversations also revealed the degree of hostility that exists between opposition figures and the Vučić government and, by extension, the Serbian Progressive Party. Though the subjects' hostility toward the government may have influenced the information they provided, their responses nevertheless provided me with valuable perspectives on the apparent unwillingness of the government to pursue relevant reforms.

- *Journalists*

An interview was held in the offices of a well-known investigative journalism publisher in Serbia. This background interview, which was semi-structured to ensure focus was placed on football and actors like supporters' groups, were valuable in that the subjects provided responses that undermined existing clichés regarding the subject and instead encouraged me to view the intersection of supporter groups and criminal and political groups as one in which a very small subset participate in. Although the discussion centred on supporters' groups, the conclusion drawn helped in the process of shifting the focus of the thesis to one scrutinising informal relations between narrow groups of people and their enablers.

- *Non-Governmental and Civic Groups*

I interviewed representatives from a civic-minded non-profit NGO with a youth focus in Belgrade. These interviews aligned with what journalists relayed - that while there is a known narrow subset of supporters' groups members that participate in criminal activity, that most supporters participate for the spectacle and because they genuinely enjoy football.

- *Informal Experience with and Observance of Supporters Group*

A meeting with the leadership of a subset of the Bad Blue Boys was arranged by a contact in Zagreb gained from an academic colleague. The contact made it clear that, for safety reasons, it would not be prudent to announce myself as a researcher. Rather than interview those I interacted with at a local bar, I observed members of a subculture that were initially hostile to my presence before offering beer and showing a video of their exploits at stadia around Europe. This experience was illuminating; data collection from supporters' groups members like those I met, would not be possible. This instead instigated the pivot toward a thesis that employed a theoretical framework and case studies gleaned from academia, journalism, and governmental reports and documents.

The interviews provoked a shift away from sociological aspects and toward concepts of informality. This information was and remains valuable, as each respondent provided responses that both confirmed and questioned many of the stereotypes and ahistorical clichés often associated with football and football culture in Serbia and Croatia.¹⁷² This proved invaluable in the organisation of the final thesis.

Conclusion

To complete a thesis that serves as an original contribution to the literature, I considered and re-considered multiple research designs and approaches that would help answer a central question related to football's place in Serbian and Croatian society. As ethical dilemmas instigated a shift in approach, the key question(s) nevertheless remained grounded in similar themes and a hypothesis that perpetuated despite changes in design: that elements of football in Serbia and Croatia interact with wider society – politics, the judiciary, security, and more – in the crevices that exist between the links that bind societies together in states and regions across the globe. Alternatively put, those grey areas that exist between formal institutions and the way that some practices are actually conducted.

As addressed above, the conclusions reached in the thesis are aided by a novel framework that applies case studies to demonstrate that football constitutes a domain of informality in Serbia and Croatia. The case studies included in the thesis were chosen after consulting reliable sources of primary and secondary data and applying them to the “flavours” framework. The case studies were also chosen to illustrate that informal forms of power and exchange have occurred in multiple eras: the authoritarian 1990s, the initial years of proposed reforms, and the present day. Additionally, the case studies include a litany of actors as best to demonstrate that elites and opportunists rely upon and engage with criminals, bureaucrats, football officials,

¹⁷² Some of the literature directly engaging with football in Serbia, Croatia, and the Western Balkans and former Yugoslavia more broadly directly challenges some of the assumption's commentators or analysts without a great deal of expertise often fall into: around the Maksimir riot or the generalisation of supporters' group members or participants as typically holding far-right political tendencies, for example.

football players, and members of the business community to achieve favourable outcomes. The thesis also serves to concatenate the literature on football with theories of informality, proffering the initial contribution through this process. Using the framework, the thesis determines that informality has beseeched Serbian and Croatian football over the last three decades.

The following chapter employs the “flavours of informalities” framework to analyse informal processes and relations in Serbia.

Chapter Three: Flavours of Informality in Serbian Football

The following chapter examines informality in Serbian football using case studies cast into the “flavours” of informality framework. As is demonstrated early in the chapter, informal processes impacting the sport became a feature even under Tito in Socialist Yugoslavia, ensuring that by the time opportunistic networks associated with Slobodan Milošević consolidated power, the sport was already being exploited. This chapter builds upon and expands that understanding by exploring three case studies – each as a specific “flavour” – that demonstrate the resilience of informality within football over the last three decades. It is thus situated along a timeline effect, with the case studies organised chronologically, beginning with economic informality (1990s/early 2000s), followed by top politics (2000s), and finally corruption (2000s – 2020s).

The case studies chosen to demonstrate the pervasiveness of informal processes and networks within Serbian football are illustrative of two key points. First, via the “flavours” framework, that rather than informality within Serbian football arising in any singular fashion, it is instead the case that narrow, surreptitious networks and individuals can participate in informal arrangements through multiple avenues. Second, the central actors within each case study hold diverse backgrounds and roles, underscoring that informal processes and networks are not defined by the participation of any one type of individual or group. The economic informality example considers the role of an infamous individual – Arkan – and his celebrity wife Ceca in bypassing rules and regulations to personally enrich themselves through football. The top politics case study demonstrates the value elite politicians place in their ability to mobilise football supporters to best achieve favourable outcomes. And the corruption example illustrates the susceptibility of the sport and its integrity based on the desires of often faceless criminals, excessive and bizarre owners, and low-level officials and players in making money by fixing matches.

This amounts to an innovative approach to the study both of football's outsized influence in Serbian politics by incorporating concepts of informality and in the study of informality in the country by introducing a novel framework and variable in football. In doing so, the chapter contributes to an understanding of informality both as it relates specifically to football in Serbia, but also given the array of actors and processes, informality more broadly.

Brief Notes on Informal Politics and Football in Socialist Yugoslavia

Before delving into the networks that were established between political elites and football actors as Yugoslavia collapsed and as Milošević emerged as Serbia's undisputed leader, it must be noted that football was also a murky enterprise in socialist Yugoslavia. Rooting interests, sometimes along ethnic lines, evolved as the game was de facto professionalised. Sport in Yugoslavia was primarily organised under the *Fiskulturni savez Jugoslavije* (FISAJ) governing body with an emphasis on athletics as an amateur pursuit, and an effort to harmonise "brotherhood and unity" through competitions and sporting events largely free from the influence of enterprise, as in the United States and Western Europe, for example. The socialist regime advertised its football clubs as being comprised of fellow workers. However, eventually the costs associated with ensuring Yugoslav clubs could train, travel, and compete at the level required not only domestically, but also against prominent football clubs and national teams from England, Germany, Spain, Italy, and beyond, led to the emergence of patronage networks.¹⁷³ With state and state-sponsored funding becoming increasingly available as the quality of football improved, including for the top clubs based in Serbia, Red Star Belgrade and Partizan Belgrade, prominent officials involved themselves in football and sought to leverage their positions in order to increase funding for their respective clubs.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ As Mills (2018:111) points out, beginning in the late 1940s and into the 1950s, football became a diplomatic opportunity for Tito and the Yugoslav state, particularly following Tito's "split" from Joseph Stalin. As Mills summarises, "Through football, the state nurtured relations across the globe, and the game did much to boost Yugoslav prestige after a perilous rupture with the Soviet Union." In short, the opportunity football presented to enhance diplomatic relations inevitably meant that clubs and the Yugoslav national team would require additional resources from the state.

¹⁷⁴ The quality of football did improve quickly following the founding of many of the clubs in the years after World War II. For example, Red Star Belgrade advanced all the way to the quarterfinals of the 1957-1958

Blasius points this out, stating that some of those with influence became “burning fans of [clubs]” and would help steer funds into clubs of choice.¹⁷⁵ In the case of Slobodan Krcun Penezić, chief of Serbia’s secret police force, this meant leveraging his position to “[work] for his Red Star at the heart of the Titoist Communist Party.”¹⁷⁶ Other well-connected individuals within political or bureaucratic structures were able to influence not just the amount of funding that went to clubs, but also interfered in player transfers and salaries, ensuring that players graduated from amateurism to what essentially amounted to the life of a professional athlete. Although this is an early example of state officials wading into the game of football, it represents the seedlings of how football would become a conduit for nationalist expression in the 1980s and 1990s. This was at least in part a by-product of genuine feelings of personal attachment to the results that certain clubs, like Red Star, achieved, rather than strictly viewing football as an area of Yugoslav society to nurture and cultivate political alliances. This is more in line with what Karadzoski & Siljanoska argue is the inevitable form of political-sporting back and forth in which increased attention necessitates better preparation and training, which requires vested interests, like state actors, to involve themselves.¹⁷⁷

Although top political actors were engaged in corrupt practices – “black funds” that were amassed from a variety of often clandestine sources were subsequently used to ensure players were well-compensated – men like Penezić operated as a patron that also happened to be a supporter.¹⁷⁸ This is in contrast to the more iterative informal political networks that would eventually be formed in Serbia as Yugoslavia collapsed.

European Cup tournament before losing narrowly on aggregate. The Yugoslav national team, meanwhile, was a fixture at World Cup Finals and European Championships throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

¹⁷⁵ Blasius, (2017:793).

¹⁷⁶ Zlatar, cited in Blasius, (2017).

¹⁷⁷ Karadzoski & Siljanoska, (2011),

¹⁷⁸ Mills, (2018) goes into detail on the failure of the Yugoslav state to maintain the initially desired amateurism in sport and the subsequent tactics that clubs and their well-connected patrons used to improve results. A key finding is the alarmed letter that Yugoslav state officials released in 1952 which included a passage that noted the ‘misconception’ that clubs should have well-known patrons to ‘protect it’ which, the authors of the letter state, should not have been the case.

Economic Informality – CECA! – 1990s

Nestled into the leafy confines of Vračar, a district of Belgrade most known for its green spaces, its relative wealth, and being home to the Temple of Saint Sava, the largest Serbian Orthodox church and one of the largest houses of worship anywhere on the planet, is a 4,000-plus seat football stadium. Initially constructed in the early 1950s, as Tito's Yugoslavia finished digging itself out of the rubble of World War II and as it invested a significant number of resources into the construction of sporting facilities, the ground itself is fairly unremarkable, save for an interesting glass façade that houses boxes for important spectators.¹⁷⁹ For much of its existence, the football it hosted was conventional if not mediocre, acceptable for a small club that played much of its matches outside top divisions and without a great degree of success. The ground is Obilić Stadium. For decades it was home to the unexceptional FK Obilić, before years of economic and sporting mismanagement led to it becoming a dormant organisation.¹⁸⁰

For much of its sporting existence, FK Obilić played in lower divisions of the Yugoslav footballing pyramid. It was not until the late 1980s that it ascended enough rungs on the sporting ladder that it qualified to play in a division that would see the team travel across Yugoslavia to compete. Up to that point, the team had played primarily in Serbia and without any significant achievement. But the fortunes of the club would take a dramatic turn in 1996 when Željko Ražnatović – Arkan – took over after returning to Serbia. Considering Arkan's privileged place in Serbian society and his well-established role in the structure of Red Star Belgrade, it is likely the case that he could have had the choice of any number of clubs to preside over. Mills surmises, though,

¹⁷⁹ Mills (2017) provides a fascinating insight into the construction of sporting facilities and stadia in the aftermath of the Second World War as part of a Five-Year Plan released in 1947 by the Yugoslav government that committed nine hundred million Dinars to the effort.

¹⁸⁰ The club took its name from Miloš Obilić, a Serbian knight and folk legend that participated in the 1389 Battle of Kosovo and allegedly assassinated Murad I, an Ottoman Sultan. Obilić was later canonised as a saint by the Serbian Orthodox Church, and he features prominently in Serbian mythology, poetry, and general folklore. The club was temporarily forced to change its name in by the Yugoslav communist government owing to the decidedly Serbian character of "Obilić," but after a merger with another small, local Belgrade club, the government reversed its decision and allowed the club to revert to its original name. See Kühle & Laustsen, (2006); Mills, (2012); and Babić in Beyond the Last Man, "Heroes & Villains: The Rise & Fall of FK Obilić Belgrade," (2016). Accessed here: <https://beyondthelastman.com/2016/07/20/heroes-villains-the-rise-fall-of-fk-obilic-belgrade/>

that Arkan gravitated toward the otherwise mediocre club because of its name and the mythology, symbolism, and Serbian heroism associated with Obilić the legend.¹⁸¹ In any event, Arkan's arrival saw Obilić transformed to sudden, controversial success.

In its first year under Arkan's brand of peremptory leadership, Obilić handily won promotion to the top level of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia First League, managing to outpace the next best club by fifteen points. The following season, Obilić defied all reasonable expectations and won the league, finishing two points ahead of Red Star.¹⁸² Unsurprisingly, there were and have been a number of questions about the club's ability to win the league in such a short timeframe. Referees and opposing players have since stated that before matches involving Obilić, Arkan would threaten that much of the crowd supporting Obilić at matches throughout the season were no longer the rank-and-file fans that had attended matches during the team's lean years, but was instead constituted of paramilitary veterans and criminals, adding another menacing dimension experienced by visiting clubs.¹⁸³

Victory in the league assured that Obilić would play European football during the following year's season, a shocking proposition to much of the continent, considering Arkan's infamy. Obilić advanced to face German behemoths Bayern Munich, an occasion Arkan was not able to attend as he was refused entry into Germany. Obilić would eventually lose 5-1 on aggregate, ending a brief interlude at the top of Serbian football, one punctuated by a terrifying degree of manipulation. Arkan's club never reached the same degree of success, finishing second in the league the following year, and lower each successive year. The crux of this subsection, though, is not about Arkan's threats or about Arkan himself. Instead, it is about the exploitation of the club as an enterprise by the person who succeeded him as club president, his wife,

¹⁸¹ Mills, (2012). Arkan had previously taken control of PC Priština, a club based in the Kosovar capital, where he subsequently sold or otherwise released players of ethnic Albanian descent. When the club, which had been successful in the years prior to Arkan's arrival, failed to achieve expected results, Arkan moved on and eventually took charge of Obilić.

¹⁸² Obilić clinching the league title represented the first time since 1989 that a Serbian champion was a team other than Red Star or Partizan. Since the launch of the current Serbian first division in 1992-1993, Obilić is the only team other than Red Star or Partizan to win the league.

¹⁸³ See Foer, (2004) in which chronicles the story of an opposition player that was locked in a garage by agents of Arkan, ensuring he would not be able to play against Obilić.

Svetlana, and the use of football clubs as shields to launder funds, generally through player transfers and other football business.¹⁸⁴

Arkan was perhaps the best known of the “Balkan merchants” that participated in and profited from the informal and clandestine economy that emerged in the 1990s along historical trade routes in the region.¹⁸⁵ For Arkan, this meant profit streams derived from an array of black-market businesses that he was able to leverage into a legitimate enterprise like Obilić, which he also sought to exploit via a number of informal transactions. That Obilić became not just an enterprise in which Arkan could exert himself to instigate unprecedented sporting success for the club, but also another avenue to conduct grey and/or black-market activities via informal economic processes, is generally in line with the deeply exploitative policies of the Milošević regime. As Ramet & Wagner note,

“As early as 9 July 1992, just three months after the initiation of hostilities in Bosnia Herzegovina, the Serbian Assembly passed legislation which conferred on President Milošević emergency powers over every facet of the economy; Milošević would use those powers to build a huge private fortune and to aggrandize the coffers of his closest collaborators – all at the expense of ordinary Serbian citizens. But theft is not the same as privatization. Indeed, Milosevic was generally hostile to Western-style capitalism and preferred to preside over a corrupt form of socialist economics.”¹⁸⁶

The war-time economy, heavily reliant on illicit activity and governed primarily via informal networks, became entrenched within Serbia and was representative of a state mired in an unequal transition. Serbia, like other former socialist economies during transition, faced the prevalence of informal economic processes and subsequent conflicts amidst dramatic shocks as the result of Yugoslavia’s dissolution. As the Milošević regime engaged in greater criminality, informal trust networks tied to the president emerged. As Uvalić notes, by the end of the 1990s, “the directors of the thirty

¹⁸⁴ Arkan’s dominance over some areas of the informal, clandestine, and criminal economy led to these areas being dubbed “Arkan-sas.” See United Nations, “Crime and its Impact on the Balkans,” (2008). Accessed here: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Balkan_study.pdf.

¹⁸⁵ See Andreas, (2004); Hozić, (2006); Pugh, (2002); Mittelman & Johnston, (1999).

¹⁸⁶ Ramet & Wagner, (2010:39).

most important enterprises were also the key politicians, members of the Serbian parliament, ministers in the Yugoslav government, and the closest political collaborators of President Milošević.”¹⁸⁷ What initially distinguished Serbian economic informality and the networks that emerged is that they were primarily internal. The opening of markets in other post-socialist/post-Soviet spaces ensured that new networks, many of them cross-border, would emerge. Serbia’s desperately stunted transition – due in large part to international sanctions and the character of the regime in power – put it on a path that made informality ubiquitous. This condition led to its own form of particularist trust networks that elevated individuals like Arkan (and others like him) from criminal to important ally and ensured that the networked capital generated would be severely compromised by the environment of illicitness that permeated the country. The emergence of these features perpetuates informal processes. As Endre notes,

*“Informality, particularistic trust and network capital are mutually reinforcing each other due to the following reasons: The actors have a common interest to be invisible to the authorities. They share secrets, hidden investments, and codes...and something that could be called a culture of anti-etatism (corruption gives prestige, circumventing the system if not only acceptable by the basis of pride and self-esteem. These factors mutually reinforce the conditions for the path-dependent nature of particularistic trust and of network capital, which in turn maintain the favourable conditions for informality.”*¹⁸⁸

With football serving as one of the few avenues in which to yield international profits during this period in Serbia, it is not surprising then that the trust networks that emerged targeted football as a domain to be exploited for gain. Arkan was most certainly a beneficiary of this, and his family would take advantage following his death.

After Arkan was shot dead in a hotel foyer, leadership of FK Obilić transferred to his widow, Svetlana Ražnatović, better known by her stage name, Ceca.¹⁸⁹ Ceca’s marriage to Arkan was a national event in Serbia - owing to his war exploits during the

¹⁸⁷ Uvalić, (2011:16).

¹⁸⁸ Endre, (2012:54). See too Humphrey, (2002); Endre, (1994); Portes et al., (2002).

¹⁸⁹ This occurred after a bridge period in 1999, during which Arkan initially temporarily ceded the presidency of the club to Ceca and then to the club’s Vice President, Žarko Nikolić, before it reverted to Ceca.

dissolution of Yugoslavia and her status as quite probably the most famous Serbian singer in the country. Ceca's genre is a regional blend of techno dance music infused with folkish lyrics known as turbo-folk, which began populating airwaves in multiple states in the region in the early 1990s. Ceca came to serve as one of the physical manifestations of what the genre presents as something of an ideal Serbian woman. As Kronja states,

"...a turbo-folk protagonist praises: tolerance toward criminal activities and involvement in them; agreement with war actions; the idea that the end justifies the means; expressing status by means of money; expensive cars and exclusive clothes; [and] considering women just as sex object and status trophies...Ceca, who, thanks to media propaganda, paradoxically stood for her audience both for a desirable sex-object and an exemplary "Serbian mother" and wife of a "patriot," a symbolic "mother of the nation."¹⁹⁰

Ceca's persona, then, was not just a typical, Hollywood version of celebrity excess. Instead, she became the mainstream entrée to virulent chauvinism and to excusing the criminal excesses of 1990s Serbian leadership to an audience comprised of (primarily) young Serbs. It is unsurprising that she would be drawn to criminal surfeits and the financial surplus they provide. Nor is it surprising that she would seek to replicate the behaviour of many others by using the football club she inherited from her murdered husband to hide profits as to best enrich herself.

Under Ceca's stewardship of FK Obilić, the club quickly reverted to their historic form, falling down the pyramid over the course of multiple footballing campaigns. Although one might understandably suggest that the decline in Obilić's fortunes had more to do with the intimidating Arkan's absence, it was also due to the club selling players of quality at pace in 2000. What made these transfers, which are an otherwise frequent part of football business, noteworthy is that they were carried out in a manner that would have personally benefitted those that negotiated them – in this case, Ceca.

¹⁹⁰ Kronja, (2004:108). See also Baker, (2013).

During the wars that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia, football became one of the few institutions that could attract foreign financial dealings in Serbia. As mentioned, the Serbian state colluded with black marketeers like Arkan and many others to generate income through illicit financial activity, including oil and cigarette smuggling. For similar reasons, football is co-opted. Indeed, “football clubs and popular passion for the game were thus used...to achieve national aims by political means.”¹⁹¹ Throughout the 1990s and the earliest years of the new millennium, members of the Serbian political elite furthered their aims by employing football as an instrument to circumvent sanctions amid wars and economic isolation.¹⁹² Because Red Star and Partizan, in particular, were widely accepted by clubs across Europe as being capable of developing talented players, Serbian clubs were able to carry out business with worldwide clubs in the form of transferring players.¹⁹³

Many of these transfers would be conducted in a manner that would allow club officials to personally benefit from sales. Notably, FIFA and UEFA (respectively governing bodies of global and European football) allow negotiations between clubs and players to be conducted in a manner that all parties are comfortable with, which then allows local officials governing football in Serbia to claim that they are following FIFA and UEFA in not interfering in negotiations. Through FIFA and UEFA’s joint refusal to maintain oversight on transactions, Serbian officials – many of whom were in or close to the Milošević regime – personally benefitted from this lack of oversight as transfers were not scrutinised like they might be in other states.

¹⁹¹ Andjelić, (2014:113).

¹⁹² Mills, (2009) charts both the anguish felt by average Serbs following the harsh sanctions placed on clubs like Red Star, mere months after the club won the European Cup, but also the apparent financial shocks clubs like Red Star and Partizan were forced to absorb. Each club would have earned valuable qualification to European competitions but were unable to participate.

¹⁹³ Crucially, many of these transfers would be completed using German deutschmarks, helping to bring foreign currency into the Serbian economy. Even as FIFA and UEFA applied stringent sanctions on football from the rump Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) that prevented club participation in certain competitions, Western European clubs were buying quality players from Serbian clubs regularly. In the 1992-1993 season alone, Red Star sold many of its best players: Darko Pančev to Italian side Inter for the equivalent of US\$13.2 million; Dejan Savićević was sold to Italian side AC Milan for US\$5.06 million; Siniša Mihajlović also went to Italy, to AS Roma for US\$4.95 million; and Miodrag Berlođević went to Spanish side Valencia for US\$1.85 million. In short, there was money to be made in football, even as sanctions tightened. See Transfermarkt, “Red Star Belgrade 92/93.” Accessed here: https://www.transfermarkt.com/red-star-belgrade/transfers/verein/159/saison_id/1992.

For Arkan and Ceca, personally profiting from the sale of players was a part of regular order not only for themselves, but for many others involved in the administration of the sport. This informal approach to managing was systematic and thus easy to emulate for those in a position to do so. Indeed, the list of those accused of leveraging football for their benefit is long and includes prominent business owners and, in one notable instance, a beloved former player.

Dragan Džajić was one of the great stars of both Red Star Belgrade and the Yugoslav national team, having 389 appearances over two stints with the former and 85 for the latter, including as part of the 1968 Yugoslav team that finished runners-up in that year's European Championship where Džajić was the top scorer of the tournament. Džajić's accolades are long and prestigious, and he is considered one of the all-time great players to come from the former Yugoslavia. Following his playing career, Džajić became a fixture in administrative roles at Red Star Belgrade, eventually becoming the president of the club in 1998, an obviously turbulent time in the history of the team. Despite operating under perilous conditions in Serbia, the club developed good talent under Džajić's stewardship, including right back Ivan Dudić and centre back Nemanja Vidić. In 2000, Džajić sold Dudić to Portuguese side Benfica and in 2002 sold striker Goran Drulić to Real Zaragoza, among many other player transfers over his tenure. Džajić was later accused of operating a scheme in which he would open bank accounts under player names, unbeknownst to them, and instruct the clubs buying players from Red Star to deposit transfer funds designated for the players in question into the accounts that Džajić established. Džajić would then transfer that money to Red Star Belgrade and personal accounts. In the case of Drulić's transfer to Zaragoza, Džajić forged documents to show that Drulić was to receive eighteen million German deutschmarks in the transfer. Zaragoza then sent the funds to the designated account where Džajić and others would subsequently forge Drulić's signature to make withdrawals.¹⁹⁴ This additional example typifies the football business ecosystem that

¹⁹⁴ The Guardian, "Puff goes Magic Dragan's Reputation," (2008). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2008/feb/12/europeanfootball.sport1>. Džajić would eventually be pardoned of all criminal wrongdoing by Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić of the Vučić's Serbian Progressive

Obilić's administrators operated in, one in which a legendary player that enjoyed a great deal of respect and adulation across the footballing world nevertheless participated in a deleterious system of economic informality for personal gain.

Ceca's involvement in schemes to generate personal financial gain from the transfer of players began under the auspices of Arkan. Arkan had established in club documents that Obilić would transfer players to other clubs without requiring restitution to the club, a policy that in normal circumstances outside of a system inherently designed to bypass formal processes would immediately be scrutinised as being counterintuitive to the football business. Instead, to expand the couple's influence over the club, a company he founded and transferred to Ceca served as Obilić's chief sponsor. It was revealed later that the money the company would use to invest into Obilić was comprised primarily of funds received through player transfers.¹⁹⁵

With Ceca in charge of Obilić, the club transferred a number of players were transferred to foreign teams, all of which resulted in financial gain for Ceca and her sister, who had been nominally employed as Obilić's club secretary. In court documents, Ceca admitted to a number of informal economic transactions as part of a plea agreement reached with Serbian authorities in 2011.¹⁹⁶ Notably, many of these player transfers occurred in the months immediately following the murder of Arkan. Nikola Lazetić, a promising winger, earned the largest return when he was sold to the Turkish side Fenerbahçe in June 2000. Lazetić's transfer was for six million German deutschmarks. With exception of a reimbursement to Fenerbahçe of 700,000 deutschmarks, the balance of funds was spread across multiple accounts under the control of Ceca and her family and were used to pay off loans and invest back into the

Party in 2012. He eventually would return to Red Star Belgrade where, today, he serves in the role of "Honorary President," a title created specifically for him.

¹⁹⁵ Vizantin, the company established by Arkan, served as an entity in which he could launder funds gained from wartime smuggling activities. OCCRP, "War Years: Legacy to Serbian Football," (2009). Accessed here: <https://www.occrp.org/en/game-of-control/war-years-legacy-to-serbian-football>.

¹⁹⁶ Prior to this agreement, Ceca was under house arrest while living in a luxury villa initially acquired by Arkan. In accepting the plea bargain, the judge in Ceca's case was effusive, describing the singer and her sister as people of "good character." Reuters, "Top Serb Pop Star Avoids Jail on Fraud, Gun Charges," (2011). Accessed here: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-serbia-crime-popstar/top-serb-pop-star-avoids-jail-on-fraud-gun-charges-idUSTRE7482XP20110509>.

club as best to ensure Ceca would be the largest shareholder should the club have been privatised. In other transactions for less valuable players, funds were deposited into offshore accounts by agents and then withdrawn by Ceca's sister before being delivered to Ceca in cash.¹⁹⁷

In examining what compels individuals, firms, and networks to bypass formal regulations, the regulatory environment, and the strength of legal institutions to enforce regulations are essential variables. In attempting to determine why actors elect to hide profits, Johnson et al. note four explanations,

“Why do firms operate in the unofficial economy? There are four main hypotheses...First, entrepreneurs may go underground when taxes are high and other official regulations are onerous. According to this view, cutting taxes and red tape are the main ways to bring firms into the official economy. Second, the unofficial economy may be due primarily to predatory behaviour by government officials, seeking bribes from anyone with officially registered economic activity...Third, firms might hide some of their output to escape extortion by criminal gangs...Fourth, the unofficial economy may result from the inadequacy of the institutional environment.”¹⁹⁸

Arkan and Ceca were not government officials in the context of their oversight of Obilić, but the predatory environment within Serbia meant that for a considerable period, there existed an enormous gap between regulatory language and what would be enforced by judicial courts or bureaucrats in practice. Actors like Arkan and Ceca, known to be within the political orbit of Milošević, were especially insulated from the legal repercussions of hiding output for their own gain.¹⁹⁹ The environment in which these particular activities took place was deeply criminal; it is not surprising that the application of judicial and/or bureaucratic oversight mechanisms were not equally or

¹⁹⁷ Novi Magazine, “All of Ceca’s Confessions,” (2012). Accessed here: <https://novimagazin.rs/english/12020-exclusive-all-of-cecas-confessions>.

¹⁹⁸ Johnson et al., (2000:496). See Kaufmann, (1997); Shleifer, (1997); Shleifer & Vishny, (1993).

¹⁹⁹ Dabla-Norris et al. (2008) finds that the quality of legal regulations and the ability for those regulations to be universally implemented is a key determinant in the size and proclivity of the informal sector in states around the world. Here, informal economic networks and processes were able to flourish as a result of the regime’s unwillingness or inability to adequately employ the law. As Frye & Zhuravskaya find, it is in these environments, too, in which formally engaged firms, such as Obilić, are subjected to rackets that emerge to exploit poor legal enforcement. See Frye & Zhuravskaya, (2000).

universally administered. Nevertheless, in contemporary Serbia, many of the same issues remain. The United States Department of State notes that Serbia faces the dual problem of an ineffective judiciary and a “large informal economy.” The report notes that as of 2020, there has been no progress made by Serbian officials to bolster the effectiveness of its judiciary. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that there has been no progress in shrinking the informal economy.²⁰⁰ Thus, the hiding of output for personal gain or for the use of bribes or other clandestine activities remains an ongoing feature of Serbia’s entrepreneurial environment. This supports the notion that once informal processes and actors are manifested, they are difficult to extinguish without a sustained reform effort that Serbia has not adequately undertaken.

Though Arkan and Ceca were but two of the most infamous actors involved in fostering a system of economic informality, Serbian football was awash in controversial financial transactions that enriched many during a time in which the average Serbian citizen was unable to procure basic foodstuffs and other essentials as its leadership oversaw devastating conflicts. As one considers the likelihood that Serbia was eager to foster punitive punishments for the exercising of informal processes, the lack of profound consequences for those prosecuted should disabuse that notion. Ceca received a favourable plea offer in 2011 and carries on as a semi-retired entertainer and Džajić is still a member of the Red Star Belgrade front office. That serious consequences have befallen so few despite ample evidence that the issue of suspect transactions was widespread, is itself evidence that football in Serbia was fraught with informal economic arrangements.

Football and Top Politics: Networks Sprung into Action – 2000s

Rather than promote genuine reforms at home – political, bureaucratic, social – and rather than promote greater normalisation of programmes and policies set forth by

²⁰⁰ United States Department of State, “2021 Investment Climate Statements: Serbia,” (2021). Accessed here: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-investment-climate-statements/serbia>.

international stakeholders, the Serbian government has exploited crisis situations as best to maintain or draw out the status quo. As Bieber explains,

“‘Crisis management’ – both allowing (or causing) these crises and their subsequent de-escalation to occur – serves the function of supporting regimes’ legitimacy domestically and internationally. Domestically, they underline the danger of international and external threats and provide ‘extraordinary’ circumstances that overshadow more mundane problems. They also serve the classic nationalist purposes of maintaining the threat of the other, be it from foreign powers (state, or other actors) or a minority or opposition party within. Second, they serve an important role externally as they highlight the external threat to a government and thus can shore up support.”²⁰¹

White defines “emergency politics” as being employed when “actions departing from conventional practice are rationalised as necessary responses to exceptional and urgent threats.”²⁰² History is dotted with authoritarian or illiberal regimes abusing emergency situations for their own benefit, but White’s broader definition includes the extraordinary steps taken by ostensibly liberal institutions – including the European Union – during periods deemed to be exceptional. For a political elite open to integrating Serbia into liberal Europe, presenting Serbia and the wider region as a powder keg of nationalism needing just the smallest spark to devolve into a chaotic situation has been an incredibly useful tool. Whether or not these crises were purposely manufactured or merely exploited by the Serbian political elite is murky and ultimately unknowable.²⁰³ What is observable, though, is that in the case of some of these crises, the central actors in instances of property destruction, extremist political demonstrations, and rioting have been members of football supporters’ groups. Just as members of supporters groups like Delije were at times mobilised to advance the strategic aims of the Milošević regime, subsequent governments have watched as the behaviour of supporters groups has influenced the trajectory of multiple incidents, leading some to question whether the state had the capacity to curtail supporter

²⁰¹ Bieber, (2018:346).

²⁰² White, (2015:301).

²⁰³ As Bieber notes, and as Jovanović (2018) expands on, the media environment in Serbia is such that newspapers warn of impending war on a near daily basis and present the current government frequently as victims of domestic and international plots. The lack of a robust media environment able to hold the government to account and to report on crises accurately, continues to mar Serbia’s democratic transition.

groups.²⁰⁴ Official police records have detailed the percentage number of football supporters detained for violent crimes, finding that hundreds engaged in violent behaviour.²⁰⁵ With established, often violent core supporters and many thousands of low-level, rank-and-file members, supporter groups serve as a formidable force that have both advanced the cause of the elite and protested against elites in charge. It is no wonder retaining links with supporters' groups remains an act of political preservation in contemporary Serbia.

Beyond utilising football supporters as agents of black and grey market activity, the political elite in Serbia have strategically cast supporters' groups as agitators during times of political crisis or in pursuit of preferred outcomes. The mobilisation of supporters' groups and their allies is often either actively or tacitly encouraged in the service of provoking enough disruption or destruction to manifest the point of view held by elites. Supporters' groups are often cast alongside radical, right-wing organisations in Serbia that have an outsized influence on political discourse and activity within Serbia. As Gordy has noted, giving space and empowering the most radical of nationalists and right-wing agitators is a political tactic that has been employed as to best ward off any genuine opposition to the ruling elite.²⁰⁶ Groups with a distinctly right-wing orientation have often partnered with supporters' groups to protest liberal reforms, at times with the tacit approval of the government. As Tomić notes regarding the far-right environment and their agenda in Serbia,

“All radical right groups in the region articulate a strong anti-Yugoslavism in their political views. They all consider Yugoslavia an ‘historical mistake,’ arguing...that the common state of the Southern Slavs hindered the development of the respective nations...and represented some kind of unnatural, prison-like political construction...Like other European nationalism, the post-Yugoslav new right also constructs ‘its’ respective nation as an ethnically pure community. This purity should be achieved by excluding the ‘other’ from society. The ‘other’ can, depending on the specific profile of each right-wing groups, encompass the ‘bastards’ from mixed marriages, as well as other groups like gay and lesbian persons,

²⁰⁴ Axboe Nielsen, (2013).

²⁰⁵ Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, “Youth and Hooliganism at Sporting Events,” (2013). Accessed here: <https://www.osce.org/serbia/118397?download=true>

²⁰⁶ The 2022 elections in Serbia, for example, featured a deeply fractured opposition, with numerous parties to the right of the ruling Serbian Progressive Party, which itself is considered a big tent right-wing party.

*Roma, and anybody with contrary political opinions. The nation is regarded as the highest political and individual priority.*²⁰⁷

These organisations, including supporters' groups, have mobilised to advance or defend these issues. No issue is as sensitive in Serbia and in the wider Western Balkan region as the status of independent Kosovo. Following the NATO led air campaign against Serbia in 1999, Kosovo's geopolitical position was left in limbo, a precarious position that fuelled contention with each passing year. Much of the discussion about the future of Kosovo that emerged from the West in this period was shaped by the concept of a "European solution," notably the promise of wholesale integration into Europe for both Serbia and Kosovo.²⁰⁸ The proverbial carrot offered by the United States and the European Union – a potential future within the EU for Serbia mere years after existing as a global pariah state – was being touted as a compromise Serbia should be satisfied with in exchange for the loss of Kosovo. That this was a legitimate belief held by bureaucrats in Washington and in Brussels proved to be naïve. The Milošević regime found value in advancing mythology around Kosovo to beleaguered Serbs in the 1980s and 1990s and the regime instrumentalised a 600-year-old myth that Serbs were consistently victimised by its neighbours.²⁰⁹ Kosovo's hypothetical independence – and the subjugation of Serbs in Kosovo – were presented as a continuation of hundreds of years of Serb victimhood. The NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 succeeded in advancing victimhood discourse amongst Serb nationalists and cemented the importance of Kosovo to the myth.²¹⁰ Rather than this

²⁰⁷ Tomić, (2016:242). Tomić also notes the close relations between far-right groups and the Orthodox Church of Serbia. The latter is considered a powerful force for nationalism within Serbian politics and society and one that the political elite must abet.

²⁰⁸ This period was marked by the 2003 Thessaloniki Declaration that declared the future of the Balkans would be within the European Union. See Yannis, (2009) and Obradović-Wochnik et al., (2014).

²⁰⁹ The myth stems from the 1389 battle between the Orthodox Christian army of Serbia and the Islamic Ottoman army. Historical record contrasts sharply with much of the Serb mythology: notably, the battle itself likely ended in a stalemate, not in an Ottoman victory. In the Serbian myth, the Serb general Knez Lazar Hrebeljanović was given the choice of a heavenly or an earthly kingdom. He chose the former, giving Serbs an infinite spiritual homeland, but preventing his victory in battle. The myth itself, though, was expanded on hundreds of years later, in the 19th century, before becoming a weapon for Serb nationalists in the 1980s. As Bieber (2002) details, it was not until 1981 that the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serb nationalists began equating Kosovo's status as Serbian with the 1389 myth. Milošević and his allies were able to connect the proverbial dots and connect both real and exaggerated Serb grievances in Kosovo with myth, with contemporary historians eager to contribute to the myth as a bedrock of the very concept of the Serbian nation. Milošević himself acknowledged "it is difficult to separate the legend from the history, but this doesn't matter." Indeed, between the regime and the Church, the myth – and the importance of Kosovo to that myth – was ubiquitous.

²¹⁰ Jansen, (2000).

perception waning with the demise of the Milošević regime, Milošević was routinely charged in public as having “betrayed” the Serbian cause, and the broad belief that the status of Kosovo was crucial to Serbian national identity, lingered.

By 2007, the United States and its partners prepared for the potential fallout of a Kosovar independence declaration. The Serbian government – at this point represented by President Boris Tadić and Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica – routinely expressed its dismay to western diplomats and authorised a public relations campaign that included billboard advertisements featuring Serbian celebrities asking Serbians to “remember the suffering of Serbs in Kosovo.”²¹¹ The Serbian government acknowledged to their counterparts in the West that in the event of Kosovo declaring independence, the government would have to react, though it would do so without resorting to violence. The reaction amongst the broader public, however, would be more difficult to predict and contain. Serb representatives warned western diplomats that a western backed independent Kosovo would represent the final humiliation of Serbia in a process that began with the 1999 NATO bombing of Belgrade.²¹² Nevertheless, after negotiations between Serbia and Albanian Kosovars undertaken between August and December 2007 – talks overseen by the troika of Russia, the United States, and the European Union – failed to produce a satisfactory agreement on the status of Kosovo, the momentum was decidedly behind an independent declaration.²¹³ When Kosovo declared independence on 17 February 2008, it would take just days for the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, France and many other states to recognise Kosovo as an independent state. The reaction in Serbia was, as promised by Serbian government representatives to western diplomats, swift in its unwillingness to accept Kosovo as anything more than a province of Serbia.

This led to the 21 February “Kosovo is Serbia” protests in Belgrade, an event headlined by speeches from members of the Orthodox Church, Koštunica, and Serb Radical

²¹¹ Wikileaks/United States Department of State, “Serbia Prepares for Peaceful Retaliation to Kosovo Independence,” (2007). Accessed here: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BELGRADE1632_a.html

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Borgen, (2008).

Party leader Tomislav Nikolić. The journalist Dejan Anastasijević reported that much of the large crowd assembled in central Belgrade was in fact peaceful, but a small, violent contingent of protestors would define the day. This band of protestors began throwing stones at embassies before eventually entering and destroying much of the Slovenian embassy and then lighting fire to the American embassy. A security camera positioned in the Slovenian embassy captured a damning moment for the Serbian authorities: as protestors raged inside, the camera caught sight of members of the Serbian police standing idle and eventually moving away, allowing the pillaging of the embassy to continue unburdened. A subsequent investigation by B92/Insajder revealed that police received direct orders to stand down and to allow the ransacking of the embassies to continue.²¹⁴

After moving on to the torching of the American embassy, the death of a protestor inside the embassy revealed the ties the rampaging group had to football supporter groups. The deceased was Zoran Vučić, a 21-year-old member of Partizan's Grobari supporter group. Given this revelation and given the history of violence that defined supporter groups in Serbia, Serb authorities quickly shifted blame and declared that "hooligans" were responsible for the destruction of the embassies.²¹⁵ The investigation into who specifically was responsible was extraordinarily slow to materialise. In a December 2008 meeting with the U.S. Congressman Ted Poe, Serbia's then-Foreign Minister, Vuk Jeremić, deflected when Poe asked if the Serbian government was working to identify and prosecute those responsible for both lighting the embassy on fire and those that ordered the police to stand down. Rather than assure Poe that an extensive investigation was underway, Jeremić instead assured Poe that those responsible had "paid a political price."²¹⁶

²¹⁴ B92/Insajder, "The Case of the Burned Embassies: Nine Years Without Answers," (2017). Accessed here: <https://insajder.net/en/site/news/3289/>

²¹⁵ The rampage was not limited to the attack on foreign embassies. Those responsible looted businesses and attacked symbols of those deemed responsible for the loss of Kosovo. Indeed, multiple McDonald's restaurants withstood the worst of the wrath of the perpetrators.

²¹⁶ Wikileaks/United States Department of State, "Congressman Poe's Meeting with Serbian Foreign Minister Jeremić," (2008).

While this could have been an example of Jeremić avoiding giving a representative from the United States government a direct answer on an internal police matter, it also could have been a tacit acknowledgment that the burning of the U.S. embassy was an example of the very top of the Serbian political establishment employing supporter group members to carry out an action that legal representatives of the Serbian state could not. America's then Ambassador to Serbia, Cameron Munter, chronicled the sacking of the U.S. embassy for *Foreign Policy* and the subsequent steps he took to hold the person the Americans thought to be most responsible for the attack to account: Vojislav Koštunica, the prime minister. Munter revealed that he was given evidence that it was Koštunica that personally allowed the embassy to be attacked, and as a result, he worked with allies in Spain and Greece to win influence with the leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia, Ivica Dačić, and instigate Dačić to modernise the SPS into a pro-European party that could earn the support of western actors in lieu of Koštunica. Dačić, hungry for international legitimacy, turned on the nationalist Koštunica and the man the American government perceived to have been responsible for strategically operationalising supporter groups to carry out an unlawful act was shortly to be defeated, his political career largely over.²¹⁷

Though Koštunica's time at the top of Serbian politics was over, U.S. and German officials continued to demand action in the investigation of those responsible, linking Serbia's integration into Europe with sufficient progress in bringing the culprits to justice. Internal investigative pieces examined the culpability of far-right, hyper-nationalist organisations *Obraz* and *1389* – each with significant ties to football supporters.²¹⁸ The leadership of those organisations each regularly issued provocative statements arguing that one could not blame the young people on the front lines of the action for reacting violently to Kosovo's independence.²¹⁹ Despite these brazen

²¹⁷ Foreign Policy, "America's Other Army," (2012). Accessed here:

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/13/americas-other-army/>

²¹⁸ In an interview with B92, Milan Obradović, then the leader of *Obraz*, intimated that many supporter group members can be classified as being members of "patriotic, pro-Serb organisations." For this reason, they were happy to collaborate. Further intermingling between supporters' groups and far-right organisations came about through the promotion of relations with Orthodox groups abroad, including in Moscow. See B92/Insajder, "(Im)potent State: Episode Three Transcript," (2009). Accessed here: <https://insajder.net/en/site/nemocdrzave/206/>

²¹⁹ *Obraz* would eventually be declared an illegal organisation due to their full-throated opposition to Belgrade's Pride parade and subsequent threats of violence against those participating.

statements and despite a considerable amount of visual evidence, it would take years – and additional pressure from international stakeholders – for the Serbian government to make an announcement on progress in the investigation. Shortly after the 2012 parliamentary elections that brought the SNS to power on a pro-reform, pro-EU platform, twelve indictments were issued to suspects in the case, the vast majority of them being young members of Partizan's Grobari, including: Dejan Vucković, Dragan Marinkov, Marko Novitović, Milan Tomaš, Đorđe Tomin, Nikola Košanović, Mladen Nebrigić, Draženko Nikolić, and Filip Backović.²²⁰ The case against each man follows a pattern within the Serbian judicial system in which the courts rarely reach a satisfactory conclusion against those with ties to both well-documented crimes and the Serbian political elite. Each of the defendants were convicted for their participation in the riots and received the following sentences:

- Dejan Vucković: ten months
- Nikola Košanović: ten months
- Đorđe Tomin: eight months
- Dragan Marinkov: eight months
- Mladen Nebrigić: eight months
- Marko Novitović: eight months
- Milan Tomaš: six months
- Filip Backović: six months
- Draženko Nikolić: five months²²¹

In each instance, the sentence handed down was for a suspended jail term, ensuring that the convicted would not have to serve any prison time. By 2019, all the convictions were thrown out after appellate courts ruled that prosecutors failed to provide sufficient evidence that the individual men in question lit the fire. In summation, supporter group members received *carte blanche* by the prime minister – as the western diplomatic

²²⁰ Balkan Transitional Justice, "Serbs Accused of Torching US Embassy Acquitted," (2019). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/01/17/serbia-acquits-defendants-in-us-embassy-torching-case-01-17-2019/>

²²¹ Balkan Transitional Justice, "Serbia Convicts Nine of Torching US Embassy," (2015). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/09/09/nine-people-found-guilty-for-torching-us-embassy-09-09-2015/>

community believes – to attack the embassies of sovereign states in retaliation for western support of Kosovo’s declaration of independence. Despite the high-profile nature of the crime, zero perpetrators served jail time. In a crisis moment in which the Serbian government needed to save face with hard-line elements domestically, it was the Grobari that was relied on to accomplish that goal. This form of exercising informal ties to achieve political aims has occurred in the years since, demonstrating its perceived effectiveness amongst the elite.²²²

Corruption – Match Fixing in Serbian Football – 2000s – 2020s

Match-fixing in football is a ubiquitous problem that regularly threatens the security and the integrity of the world’s most popular sport, association football, as well as a bevy of other sporting competitions. Corruption in sport, in general, threatens the integrity of the games in question, but also reinforces wider corrupt and informal practices in affected states.²²³ In 2011, INTERPOL established the INTERPOL Match-Fixing Task Force (IMFTF) in an attempt to harmonise legal and social approaches to eradicating the problem of match-fixing, which has become a more difficult task as a result of globalisation and the threat of cross-border influence on the outcomes of sporting competitions. From the World Cup to the Olympic Games, sport has long had to contend with the allure of substantial financial rewards in exchange for the purposeful manipulation of outcomes. Although the issue of match-fixing can and does infiltrate sport in even the most developed states, a report from the European Parliament summarised the problem of match-fixing by stating that it,

²²² In January 2020, an incident similar to the 2008 riots unfolded in Belgrade after the government of Montenegro announced a policy shift that would potentially target property owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church to the benefit of the smaller Montenegrin Orthodox Church. As a result, members of supporter groups and other ultranationalists took to the streets, eventually arriving at the unguarded Montenegrin embassy. There, rioters launched a firework that burnt the Montenegrin flag. Montenegrin officials expressed anger at the lack of protection outside the building from Serbian police; Vučić ignored the flag burning and noted his government would work to solve the issue diplomatically. Though one cannot know if, as was the case in 2008, the supporter group members were allowed to carry out their protest with the explicit approval of Serbia’s political elite, it is the case that as of this writing, no one has been arrested for participating in the riot. See Radio Free Europe, “Montenegro Slams Serbia Over ‘Uncivilised’ Embassy Attack,” (2020). Accessed here: <https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-slams-serbia-over-uncivilized-embassy-attack/30359059.html>

²²³ See Aquilina & Chetcuti, (2014); Forrest, (2012); Mazanov et al., (2012).

“...has become clear that criminal organisations have deeply penetrated the football establishment. Strong ties have been detected between the football establishment and criminal organisations especially in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. In countries such as...Serbia criminals have infiltrated the clubs and federations and are operating from within, while using the clubs as covers for a multitude of criminal activities.”²²⁴

In Serbia, match-fixing has often been identified as an unfortunate feature of the sport, one in which actors resolved to exploiting the lack of strong oversight in football utilised the corrupt practice of match-fixing to ensure immediate and longer-term financial reward. The problem of match-fixing dates to Yugoslav football and developed into a regular feature during the turbulent 1990s, where a clique of club officials would regularly make and keep to arrangements that saw matches end in a pre-determined fashion. The following subsection charts the problem of match-fixing in Serbia, how it became a regular feature of the sport, how the problem of match-fixing fortifies the argument that Serbian football is rife with informal transactions, and how Serbian officials have been unwilling or unable to adequately address the issue.

On March 20th, 2004, two mid-level clubs in the First League of Serbia and Montenegro, OFK Beograd, a Belgrade based team, and FK Sutjeska Nikšić, a Montenegrin club that plays its matches in Nikšić, Montenegro’s second largest city, participated in a match. The match concluded with a final score of 2-1 in favour of Sutjeska, who played hosts to OFK. The 2003-2004 campaign had been a good one for OFK Beograd, resulting in a fourth-place finish and qualification to the UEFA Intertoto Cup. Sutjeska finished the season eighth, far removed from the danger of relegation. The 2-1 result was significant in that it was the twelfth straight meeting between the two clubs, dating to 2001, to end in favour of the home side. Spectators in the crowd that day publicly demonstrated their dismay at the result and extolled their collective belief that the match was contested in an irregular fashion.

By 2004, Branko “Bata” Bulatović was General Secretary of the Football Association of Serbia and Montenegro (and its past iterations) for eleven years, the head of a

²²⁴ European Parliament, (2012:2).

governing body that was tasked with overseeing a sport severely compromised by politics, crime, declining quality of play, and financial hardship exacerbated by the conflicts that punctuated Yugoslavia's collapse. Bulatović, a Montenegrin, had for years dealt with football's most portentous individuals, including Arkan, and managed to remain in his position throughout the bulk of the 1990s as football spiralled into a cacophony of informality and criminality. By the early 2000s, following the 5 October revolution and the collapse of the Milošević regime, there was an attempt to better police match-fixing. In 2002, updates to the criminal code of the country declared match-fixing to be a felonious crime punishable by prison sentences. The new law read,

“Any agreement about the outcome of sports or other competition, wherein an individual gains personal advantage or benefit for others, is punishable by administration of prison terms lasting up to three years. If the committed act...gained benefit of more than 200,000 dinars to the individual involved, the individual will be administered a prison term lasting six months to five years. If the committed act...gained benefit of more than 600,000 dinars to the individual involved, the individual will be administered a prison term last one to ten years.”²²⁵

The March 2004 match between OFK Beograd and Sutjeska generated controversy not just in the terraces of the Nikšić Stadium, but in the offices of the Football Association of Serbia and Montenegro and the First League Association, a subnational governing body that oversaw competition and the clubs in the First League.²²⁶ It was announced by the First League Association that because the match did not meet the standards of transparency expected of First League clubs, that the result would not be recorded due to “irregularities.” Bulatović, as General Secretary of the Football Association of Serbia and Montenegro, released a statement that extolled a belief that

²²⁵ Insajder, “The Rules of the Game: Second Episode Transcript,” (2008). Accessed here: <https://insajder.net/english/series/therules/the-second-episode-transcript>

²²⁶ At this point, the First League Association was led by Dragan Bulić, often referred to as Aca. Bulić served in Arkan's paramilitary forces and was the son of Jusuf Bulić, who ran top-flight club FK Železnik and a chain of betting parlours, in addition to his apparent ties to both the Serbian underworld and Serbian intelligence, before he was fatally shot in 1998. Aca Bulić was a young man when he ascended to the presidency of the First League Association at just 31 and has since had a turbulent life in and around sports, including a 2012 arrest under suspicion that he was involved in the bombing of the home of Dragan “Piksi” Stojković, an all-time great Red Star Belgrade player and a former Serbian Football Association and Red Star Belgrade president who left the club a deeply unpopular man following a period of financial turmoil. B92, “Ex-Football Official Arrested for Bomb Attack,” (2012).

match-fixing was not as rampant as he believed it to be in countries like Spain and Italy.²²⁷ Nevertheless, just days after the match and the initial reaction to it, a gunman entered the premises of the Football Association of Serbia and Montenegro in Belgrade and fatally shot Bulatović.²²⁸ Protests regarding the match and any irregularities that were observed quietly dissipated following his death. Such was the danger of failing to maintain the status quo on behalf of networks committed to exploiting the sport.

For much of the 1990s and early 2000s, match-fixing followed an easy-to-understand principle: “three for three.” Teams would play each other at least twice every season – once at home, and once away. Clubs would make an agreement that in each instance of play, the home team would win the match. This policy would ensure that the clubs in question would earn enough points to finish somewhere mid-table or higher, guaranteeing that they would remain in the First League and avoiding economically costly relegation. This policy saw match officials turned into “silent observers.”²²⁹

Although in most years, clubs would concede the league to either Red Star Belgrade or to Partizan Belgrade, the impetus to fix matches was not only the prospect of short-term gambling winnings, as is often the case in global match fixing, but longer-term financial prospects, as well.²³⁰ Maintaining a position in the First League meant increased exposure for players that club officials could sell to European clubs for an

²²⁷ Insajder, “The Rules of the Game: Second Episode Transcript,” (2008). Accessed here: <https://insajder.net/english/series/therules/the-second-episode-transcript>. See Costa, (2018).

²²⁸ It did not take long for speculation to reach international newspapers regarding Bulatović’s death. The New York Times quoted a former senior police official who declared that he thought Bulatović “failed to keep his end of the deal” with those that fix matches, demonstrating that even after the collapse of the Milošević regime and the cessation of the sanctions that made football an attractive avenue to personal enrichment, the allure of improper financial gain through football remained a pertinent issue in Serbian society. The New York Times, “The Sport’s Fiscal Moment of Truth is at Hand,” (2004). Accessed here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/31/sports/IHT-soccer-the-sports-fiscal-moment-of-truth-is-at-hand.html>.

²²⁹ Zoran Arsić, a former football referee before becoming president of the Vojvodina Football Association, recalled being told before matches what the outcome would be and that he would be sent to different parts of the country to ostensibly referee a match but, in actuality, would merely ensure that the agreed on result was not interfered with. Insajder, “The Rules of the Game: Second Episode Transcript,” (2008). Accessed here: <https://insajder.net/english/series/therules/the-second-episode-transcript>.

²³⁰ Carpenter, (2012).

increased fee. Obviously, as part of any “three for three” agreement, certain players had to score the goals, driving up their player statistics and making them a more attractive option for international buyers. There was also the prospect of European football, should any one club finish in a qualifying position behind Red Star or Partizan. Opportunities to play in Europe in the latter part of the 1990s and in the early 2000s was a crucial financial opportunity for Serbian clubs and was made most possible with continued play in the top league on the pyramid.

What the “three for three” scheme employed by clubs most readily demonstrates is the structural rot in football in the country at the time. It only worked if a variety of actors who were deeply involved in the informal machinations created networks of trust within a system that, while nominally governed by rules and regulations – including those that would theoretically be enforced within criminal courts, and not just within internal apparatuses of football governance – was regularly proven to be subject to unorthodox processes that those with the power to do so were unwilling or unable to eradicate. These schemes have not only contributed to a broader environment of corruption, but they also have the potential to limit enthusiasm, and thus, the overall health of the game. As Nowy & Breuer note,

“Assuming that all football matches are expected to focus on determining the better team based on fair competition, match-fixing threatens the credibility of a fair competition and, thus, the integrity of it. A loss of credibility will undermine the public’s interest in and demand for football because its trust has been violated. This is in particular dangerous for football as it depends on the interest of the public, both in terms of immaterial support and economically.”²³¹

Well-connected networks, though, prioritised maximum returns for themselves and the network, rather than reform that might strengthen the integrity of football. Although the 2002 law introduced new penalties to prioritise the mitigation of match-fixing in Serbian football, it has proven to be difficult to enforce, even if police or judicial actors have occasionally sought to do so. Dragomir Tanović, a former referee, was asked by Serbian journalists why match-fixing in Serbian football, a “worst-kept” secret that was

²³¹ Nowy & Breuer, (2017:26). See Feltes, (2013); Gorse & Chadwick, (2010).

well-known to club officials, players, spectators, and the political class of the country, was so prevalent and yet not able to be dealt with. He replied, "I can only imagine. Simple, the state institutions never dealt with the Football Association, police never filed reports, and [the criminal justice system] primarily work based on a report."²³² The penalties for match-fixing introduced in 2002 thus resemble many rules, laws, and regulations that govern contemporary Serbia today. They present as being stringent and written and enacted with the intention to curb abuses or exploitative actions, but nevertheless provide ample opportunity for entrepreneurial and well-connected actors to bypass many of the burdensome regulations.²³³ As it relates to match-fixing, the burden of proof is rather high in that it generally requires either enterprising police work or for some of the participants to file a report with the police to begin a criminal investigation. Given the violent history of Serbian football, it is may be asking too much for certain people to courageously reveal organised match-fixing as it occurs. Because the burden of proof is so formidable, there have been instances where even attempts by the authorities to pursue individuals for match-fixing has failed. This is in line with theories of corruption as a form of public secrecy – the percolating sense that there is a widespread issue and that the few instances exposed do not fully underscore the gravity of the problem. This is a ubiquitous issue in states or domains in which corrupt processes fester because of the existence of trust networks. As Numerato notes,

*"Corruption and social networks that are constitutive of corruption represent a typical example of secret societies. Furthermore, as some understanding of endemic corruption would suggest, corruption represents not only a secret but also a public secret. In the macro-societal context in which corruption has increasingly been discussed in public and been a focus of policy makers, its latency and potential pervasiveness is clearly apparent."*²³⁴

Networks that abet corrupt and/or informal processes rely on secrecy and are often undisturbed from the wider public's suspicions or general beliefs that certain

²³² Insajder, "The Rules of the Game: Second Episode Transcript," (2008). Accessed here: <https://insajder.net/english/series/therules/the-second-episode-transcript>.

²³³ The expectation that elites and their associates or clients will be able to bypass rules and regulations, even those newly introduced, creates regimes of exception. In other words, the rules do not apply to all. This generally breeds trust within elite networks. See Pow, (2017); Goodfellow, (2020); Roy, (2005).

²³⁴ Numerato, (2016:702). See also Della Porta, (2000); Della Porta & Vannucci, (2016); Warren, (2004).

individuals and enterprises are engaged in illicit activity. Nevertheless, there are examples in which network membership is not enough to guarantee immunity from the light of public scrutiny. When revelations are made public about nefarious activity it is often the result of network infighting.

Perhaps the most well-known example of match-fixing accusations of well-connected individuals in Serbia is the 2008 arrest of the ultra-flamboyant hotelier-turned-football club president Ratko Butorović, otherwise known as Bata Kan Kan.²³⁵ Butorović became President of FK Vojvodina in 2006 and began constructing a club that developed a string of very talented young players, immediately producing a third-place finish during the 2006 campaign, the club's best result in a decade.²³⁶ Meanwhile, Butorović himself continued to consolidate an over-the-top image that earned him global attention.²³⁷ Butorović, who wore garish clothing that often stood out even more as a result of his advancing age, found himself on a global list of the world's most "insane" football owners and cultivated friendships with celebrities such as the American rap artist Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson. Nevertheless, Bata Kan Butorović stood out, and his club was achieving strong results under his leadership.

In January 2008, Butorović was arrested along with a board president at FK Vojvodina, Milan Čabrić, referees Mihajlo Jeknić, Borislav Kašanski, and former referee Goran Kovačić. Police suspected that Butorović and Čabrić funnelled money to Jeknić and

²³⁵ B92, "Serbian FA 'Shocked' at Referee Arrests," (2008). Accessed here: https://www.b92.net/eng/news/crimes.php?yyyy=2008&mm=01&dd=30&nav_id=47348. Bata Kan Iannucci was a nickname that Butorović acquired while living for a time in Paris and is the name of a night club he frequented.

²³⁶ The best known of these young Vojvodina players was Dušan Tadić, a forward who has captained both the Serbian national team as well as Dutch footballing powerhouse Ajax.

²³⁷ Butorović earned his fortune by selling Italian clothes in Serbia after time spent in Vienna where he attempted to become a bodyguard after a career as an engineer failed to materialise. Butorović befriended the previously mentioned president of Stujeska, Branislav Mićunović, leading to assumptions that Butorović's career trajectory from engineer to bodyguard to clothing aficionado to hotelier to football president was related to regional underworld activities. Among his other friends and associates was Đorđe Božović, the head of a paramilitary unit who was killed in 1991. Butorović retained ties to those suspected of criminal wartime activities, including war crimes, and his Novi Sad hotel was frequented by nefarious characters. For example, Goran Hadžić, just prior to his indictment by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia stipulated to investigators that he would only meet at Butorović's hotel. Dzuro, (2019); The Guardian, "The Joy of Six: The Ups and Downs of Football Chairmen and Owners," (2014). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2014/aug/01/joy-of-six-football-chairmen-owners-ups-downs>.

Kašanski through Kovačić, along with instructions and preferred outcomes for games that FK Vojvodina – at that time still achieving strong results and sitting third in the table behind Red Star Belgrade and Partizan – played in. Specifically, authorities alleged that Butorović and Čabrić fixed a December 2007 match between Vojvodina and FC Mladost Lučani, based in the small Serbian town of Lučani. The game ended 1-0 on a goal by Vojvodina’s Nino Pekarić, a seemingly innocuous result in which the league’s third-best team achieved a close but expected result. Authorities suspected that the referees involved received money in exchange for overseeing the result.²³⁸

Butorović’s case generated headlines globally, as his outsized personality and the general belief amongst those following the sport around the world that Serbia’s football leagues were inundated with corruption made for a fascinating iteration of an often-told story. Vojvodina fans, pleased with the positive results the club achieved under his ownership, were vocally supportive of Butorović throughout his time in detention and as the authorities commenced a search of his Novi Sad villa.²³⁹ Despite a very specific accusation – which game, which officials, how the money changed hands and who it went to and for what purpose – Butorović was released from custody and the charges against him were dropped after the prosecuting authorities revealed that they did not have enough evidence to convict those accused of match-fixing. Butorović continued to lead Vojvodina, eventually becoming embroiled in another scandal as his players walked off the pitch of the 2011 Serbian Cup Final against Partizan Belgrade in protest of what they believed was suspicious officiating by the match referee.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ The arrest of Butorović and his associates came during an ostensible attempt to reign in corruption in Serbian football. In the days following Butorović’s arrest, authorities issued a warrant for the arrest of the previously mentioned Zvezdan Terzić on fraud charges pertaining to hidden player transfer profits. The New York Times, “Warrant Issued for the Arrest of Serbia’s Football Association President,” (2008). Accessed here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/04/sports/04iht-soccerserbia4.10702482.html>.

²³⁹ Butorović was thought to be heavily involved in illicit activity in Serbia’s second largest city, Novi Sad. The city has been a hub for smuggling owing to its proximity to routes towards both Eastern and Western Europe, as well as its port on the Danube. Butorović’s death in 2013 unleash a spate of murders which observers believe occurred as competing forces battled to fill the vacuum left by Bata Kan Kan. The Global Initiative Against Organized Crime, “Hotspots of Organized Crime in the Western Balkans: Local Vulnerabilities in a Regional Context,” (2019). Accessed here: <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Hotspots-Report-English-13Jun1110-Web.pdf>.

²⁴⁰ Fox Sport, “Serbian Cup Final Abandoned After Players Walk Out,” (2011). Accessed here: <https://www.foxsports.com/stories/soccer/serbian-cup-final-abandoned-after-players-walk-out>.

The 2008 incident punctuated the ineffectiveness of Serbia's ability to employ its own laws relating to match-fixing. Axboe-Nielsen deftly articulates the impotent response of the Serbian authorities as a feature of a faulty transition to a pluralistic, liberal system of governance owing to the lingering participation of Milošević-era figures in important segments of the political, social, and cultural life of Serbia.²⁴¹ What has remained a feature of both the deeply criminal 1990s and the difficult transition of the 21st century is the "inevitability" of the type of informal intermingling that prevents institutions from uniformly carrying out their supposed functions on a consistent basis.²⁴²

Even in instances where match-fixing was accepted to have taken place, penalties did not inspire deterrence and limit the appeal of match-fixing. Nor have clubs taken the proper steps to prevent potential scandals. This includes the ongoing issue of not compensating players fully and/or on-time, cited as a contributing factor to the pervasiveness of match-fixing.²⁴³ Additionally, Serbian football was found to not be immune to the 21st century tech influences on match-fixing. As Huggins explains,

"The global growth in (often unregulated) internet betting platforms in the past two decades...the increased accessibility of online betting across all societies and the substantial expansion in the involvement of international criminal gangs, whose activities are hugely profitable, span the contents and affect an ever-growing number of sports...according to most commentators, the digital era has transformed match-fixing. It has left sport far more vulnerable. Anyone in Asia can now place a bet on a relatively unimportant sports result in any small European country and vice versa. Criminal gangs have found the manipulation of sports results for betting purposes on the globalized sports gambling market an effective tool for make and laundering money around the globe, with relatively high

²⁴¹ Axboe Nielsen, (2010).

²⁴² Cvejić, (2016); Radeljić & Đorđević, (2020).

²⁴³ On the importance of player pay, see Cashmore & Cleland, (2014); Hill, (2009). The plight of players that appear even for top Serbian teams like Partizan and Red Star Belgrade has been well documented in recent years. In 2017, Partizan Belgrade was given a one-year ban from European competitions for unpaid wages, and it was revealed that over 60% of professional Serbian footballers were given late compensation. In 2021, a Partizan striker, Japanese-born Takuma Asano, terminated his contract with the club after Partizan failed to pay Asano his wages. Given that wages in Serbia are already significantly lower than those earned by players in Western European leagues, for example, the appeal of match-fixing remains potent. The Japanese Times, "Takuma Asano Terminates Partizan Contract Over Unpaid Wages," (2021). Accessed here: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/sports/2021/05/02/soccer/asano-partizan-contract/>.

revenues, often little oversight and control by local authorities, low detection rates and low sentences if caught.”²⁴⁴

By 2021, UEFA had reportedly sent Serbian officials dozens of warnings that matches governed by the Serbian Football Association were suspicious and were likely fixed.²⁴⁵ That year, the governing body of European football requested that Serbia specifically investigate whether Serbian second division matches that generated highly suspicious gambling patterns from locations all around the world, with spikes in activity registered from East Asia, were fixed or not.

The matches, played between GFK Jagodina and FK Trayal Kruševac, as well as the Čačak-based Borac 1926 playing FK Želeničar Pančevo, would not, in normal circumstances, generate much interest even in Serbia. While Jagodina had some success in the 2010s, earning their first Serbian Cup in 2013, and though Borac achieved a place in European competitions because of a fourth-place finish in the top-flight in 2007-2008, both teams had been beseeched by financial trouble and fluctuated between the lower divisions of Serbian football. Trayal and Želeničar are each even more obscure, with both clubs playing in small facilities and fluctuating between regional and lower division leagues on the footballing pyramid. The matches, which did end with the inferior club winning in each, as Trayal defeated Jagodina 3-0 and Želeničar defeated Borac 1-0, were reported by UEFA to the Serbian Football Association and its Integrity Committee. After a brief review, Jagodina and Borac were punished in the form of relatively small fines and deductions of six points from each club. Zero individuals were subject to either sporting or criminal penalties because of either UEFA's reporting or the Serbian Football Association's subsequent investigation.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Huggins, (2018).

²⁴⁵ Radio Free Europe, "UEFA Calls on Serbia to Investigate Alleged Match-Fixing," (2021). Accessed here: <https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-uefa-alleged-match-fixing/31198275.html>. These warnings, paired with player revelations earlier in the decade from Savo Milošević and others that they had been approached or forced to fix matches, further illuminated the crisis of match-fixing in Serbia.

²⁴⁶ Dawn, "Two Serbian Football Clubs Punished Over Match-Fixing," (2021). Accessed here: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1618463/two-serbian-football-clubs-punished-over-match-fixing>. Similar penalties were and have remained the norm if UEFA reports matches to the Serbian Football Association. After a 2015 match between OFK Beograd and FK Spartak Subotica, which ended with a 2-0 OFK Beograd victory,

During the review process undertaken by the Serbian Football Association, the organisation stated again that it was not able to prove the guilt of individual actors without the assistance of Serbian police and prosecutors. The Football Association will act as it did when presented with unambiguous evidence from UEFA as best to avoid wider penalties to Serbian football in general from its continental governing body by disregarding the accusations. Although the Football Association claims it is powerless without the assistance of clubs or individuals, it is often the case that the Serbian Football Association will never call the police for assistance and that match-fixing investigations begin and end internally.²⁴⁷

The dominant hold match-fixing continues to have on Serbian football is the result of years of learned behaviour perfected primarily by a cadre of opportunistic and corrupt individuals that have long held power over the sport. It is the result of a finance model that prioritises personal self-enrichment; and it is the result of a neutered state that remains unwilling to proactively increase its efforts to limit football's exposure to informal networks and processes. Football's uncanny ability to reflect wider societal issues in Serbia provokes the need to update Andjelić's contention that "the entire history of Yugoslavia, especially its problems, seems to have been reflected in football" to include 21st century Serbia, as well.²⁴⁸

Conclusion:

The preceding chapter illustrated how Serbian football's "flavours of informality" remain influenced by the state's collapse into broader criminality during the 1990s

Spartak was accused of deliberately altering the outcome and was given a two- point penalty. Once again, no individual was penalised.

²⁴⁷ Long-time Serbian Minister of Youth and Sports, and former professional water polo player Vanja Udovičić, when confronted about the ubiquitous nature of match-fixing in Serbian football, acknowledged in 2015 that it was an issue following repeated warnings from UEFA. Udovičić noted that the state could not adequately address match-fixing, blaming long prosecution times, but instead arguing that match-fixing could only be curbed through "better ethical choices" by clubs and individuals. Info Balkans, "Clubs Organize Match Fixing, Says Sports Minister," (2015). Accessed here: <https://www.infobalkans.com/2015/06/16/clubs-organize-match-fixing-says-sports-minister>.

²⁴⁸ Andjelić, (2014:102).

under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević. The case studies employed, most notably Ceca's pillaging of Obilić, serve as an example of how lingering ties to a culpable political elite served as an entrée to ignoring formal processes in the pursuit of self-enrichment. The decline of the quality of football within the country – seen as the result of a well-connected elite ignoring all but big clubs like Red Star and Partizan – opened the door to match-fixing in contests with minimal oversight. Similarly, the employment of members of supporter groups to make a political point, as was done in the sacking of the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade following Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, points to a continuity-of-process stemmed from the utilisation of supporter groups in the final days of Yugoslavia.

What is significant and unique about the findings presented in the chapter is that it underscores the role of informality over time and the variety of actors that engage within networks to participate in informal processes and activities. By creating an original framework from which to gauge the interfacing between football and informality, the chapter revealed, first, that informality in Serbian football is observable in multiple "flavours." Second, it revealed that it is not one sort of group or individual that participates in informal processes or that might be involved in networks related to football. And third, the framework constructed from which to observe informality's impact on Serbian football not only speaks to why development of the sport's domestic infrastructure has been poor since the collapse of Yugoslavia, but it reveals a wider problem of informality within the state. Though the framework employed in the chapter illuminates issues of informality in Serbian football, it could be applied to any number of domains that would ultimately expose the broader problem that has plagued Serbia for three decades: that there are spheres of society and the state that, despite years' worth of reform efforts, are still exploited by opportunistic networks and individuals.

As the next chapter demonstrates, those informal links have survived efforts for greater pluralism and reform and limit the effectiveness of key institutions such as the Serbian judiciary, which often contradicts its own stated aims in service of those informal links. The case of Aleksandar Stanković, and others like him, who committed significant crimes with little consequence, provide substantial evidence to this claim.

Chapter Four: Serbia, Football, the Informal Elite, and Supporter Groups: An Informal Bargain and a Paralysed Judiciary

The argument advanced in this chapter is that the approach taken toward the prosecution of crimes related or adjacent to football and its supporter groups in contemporary Serbia is symptomatic of a wider issue in the country: that key institutions like the Serbian judiciary are subject to interference because of informal networks of power and association. This is best exemplified by the narrow subset of supporters that enjoy access to government representatives; the lack of successful prosecutions; the loopholes exercised that allow even convicted criminals to delay or altogether avoid incarceration; and the brazen politicisation of the judiciary by political actors. In putting forward this specific argument, this chapter concludes that the Serbian judiciary remains highly susceptible to political interference and because of this, prosecutions are often met with varying degrees of obstruction by political actors and their allies. That informal relationships allow cases involving football or individual members of supporter groups to either go unprosecuted or to be severely hindered is a microcosm of a wider issue that is detrimental to Serbian democracy: that it is a hollow, “Frankenstate” that has constructed institutions in the model of liberal democracies that are otherwise spurious façades.²⁴⁹

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the contemporary history of the intersection between politics, football, and football supporter groups in Serbia. There is then an analysis of Serbia’s failure to reform its judiciary, leading to the continued politicisation of courts, court officers, and outcomes. Next, there is a discussion of the relationship between the post-Milošević Serbian elite, football, and football supporter groups as best to demonstrate how informal ties led to the avoidance of

²⁴⁹ Krastev & Holmes, (2018). The authors expand upon the work of the sociologist Kim Scheppelle by describing a “Frankenstate” as being “an illiberal mutant composed of ingeniously stitched-together components of western liberal democracy.” Scheppelle, (2018:117). Though this description was originally in reference to describe Viktor Orbán’s Hungary, it unfortunately describes an increasing number of states, including Serbia.

significant consequences for violent behaviour and a small but powerful subset of supporter groups serving as security for members of the political elite. It then progresses to a discussion surrounding poor judicial outcomes in cases involving football or supporter groups, including a distinction between cases against or involving “leaders” – both of supporter groups and clubs – and “followers.” Finally, the argument that Serbia’s judiciary has been highly compromised as the result of informal networks and processes is reiterated in the conclusion.

The case study presented – that of the relationship between the political elite of Serbia and criminal elements within football supporter groups and the influence that relationship has on sport and governance incorporates each “flavour” of the framework used in the thesis. Further, it also demonstrates the variety of actors that participate in activities on behalf of informally maintained networks. Indeed, politicians, criminals, and bureaucrats all have a role in fostering informal processes and maintaining networked relationships in Serbian football. Despite efforts to improve the performance of the country’s judiciary, the relationship between the state and members of football supporter groups has proven to be symptomatic of informality’s prevalence as a barrier to greater reforms.

An Outsized Role: Football and Supporters’ Groups in Contemporary Serbia

Football supporters’ groups in Serbia have played an outsized role in the trajectory of contemporary Serbian public and political affairs since many of the tribes coalesced and formally organised primarily in the 1980s, just as the Yugoslav state demise was accelerating. The following subsection analyses the organisation of supporters’ groups in the 1980s, influenced primarily by characteristics of English, Italian, and South American supporters’ culture, a period of economic and political upheaval. Subsequently their role in the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and the post-conflict influence of supporters’ groups on nationalist politics, the Bulldozer Revolution, and the post-Milošević landscape in Serbia is discussed alongside the conclusion that members often participate in informal processes at the behest of a narrow group of leaders.

By the end of the 1980s, as the Yugoslav state began to face an increasing number of issues that fostered its decline and collapse. It was during this period that the establishment of organised supporters' groups for clubs across Serbia and the rest of Yugoslavia rose exponentially.²⁵⁰ Prior to this, groups of fans and supporters were generally less organised.²⁵¹

Table 3: Examples of supporter groups for first division Serbian clubs

Associated Football Club	Supporters' groups and Subsidiaries (if applicable)	Year Umbrella Group Established
Red Star Belgrade	Delije: Red Devils; Ultras; Zulu Warriors; Belgrade Boys.	1989
Partizan Belgrade	Grobari: Janissaries; Alcatraz; Head-Hunters; Južni Front; Zabranjeni.	1970/1990
Rad Belgrade	United Force	1987
OFK Belgrade	Plava Unija	1994
Vojvodina Novi Sad	Red Firm: Stara Garda; Freaks; G-3; Pandora; Firma.	1989
Radnički Niš	Meraklije	1989
Spartak Subotica	Marinci	1989
FK Novi Pazar	Torcida Sandžak: Ultra Azzurro; Ekstremiti	1989
FK Zemun	Taurunum Boys: Boys 1995; Dragons 1995	1987

Many more supporter groups were founded across Yugoslavia in this period, including at least eighteen additional groups in support of first division clubs alone.²⁵² Those supporter groups founded in the 1980s and early 1990s were heavily influenced by

²⁵⁰ In the case of the supporter group that would emerge linked to Partizan Belgrade, the nickname Grobari – translated to “gravediggers” – was used derogatively by supporters of Partizan’s rivals (primarily those of Red Star Belgrade) but was later adopted by Partizan supporters themselves. Similarly, Partizan supporters would often refer to Red Star supporters as Cigani – “gypsies.” The Grobari claim to have begun organising under that name in 1970, though it did not grow in size or stature in European footballing circles until the 1980s before proper organisation in 1990. Some Red Star supporters continue to incorporate the Cigani name into their songs and chants, but it did not become an official name of any tribe or sub-group associated with Red Star.

²⁵¹ A key exception is that of the Torcida – “twisting” – the supporter group associated with Hajduk Split. The group is thought to have formed initially in the 1950s after a small group of supporters of Hajduk attended the 1950 World Cup and were left inspired by the fan culture synonymous with Rio’s Maracanã Stadium. However, the group eventually drew the ire of Yugoslav officials, which instigated a period of dormancy. On this, see Mills, (2018).

²⁵² This includes Torcida, which had resumed most of its activities by 1980. See Mills, (2018).

their European counterparts. The liberalisation of travel rules and media in Yugoslavia meant that supporters were easily exposed to supporters' culture from other states.²⁵³ Perhaps unsurprisingly, this eventually led to the establishment and increased popularity of subcultures specific to the era, including punk music and related counter-culture idiosyncrasies.²⁵⁴ This extended to supporters' groups which, by this point, were staples of footballing culture in leagues across Europe.

English and Italian supporters' groups each significantly influenced Serbia and wider-Yugoslav fan culture. English supporter groups – often defined as “firms” made up of hooligans – were purveyors of the dreaded “English disease” that spread across Europe and eventually reached Yugoslavia, leading to regular examples of excessive drinking, violence, and more innocuous characteristics like the wearing of team-coloured scarves. The Union-Jack flag of Great Britain was also a fixture at grounds across Yugoslavia. Mills surmises that for those supporter groups that chose to fly or demonstrate the Union-Jack alongside their own colours, it was a symbol of respect to the English firms that most Europeans regarded as the most aggressive in Europe.

Italian Ultras typified a more choreographed, elaborate style of support. While English firms often prioritised the “aggro” – the drinking and the fighting – Italian Ultras placed a greater emphasis on eye-catching spectacle. As Dal Lago & De Biasi point out,

“The ultra-style of support is based upon visibility, and this is also relevant to the issue of hooliganism. If we consider that in England, several years ago, some hooligans even travelled incognito for a match...so that the police could not identify them, Italian ultras, on the contrary, clearly want to be conspicuous.”²⁵⁵

²⁵³ To clarify, the policy of allowing travel or exposure to cultural aspects of Western Europe did not coincide with the 1980s. As Vučetić (2010) explains, Tito's 1948 rebuff of Soviet premier Joseph Stalin was in many ways a conscious choice to say no to Stalin while “saying yes to Louis Armstrong, Hollywood, Coca-Cola, and denim jeans.” After unemployment became a chronic issue for the Yugoslav economy, the government actively encouraged its citizens to attempt to find work abroad. Though there were many opportunities to expose oneself to the trappings of western culture, bona fide subcultures were slow to develop in the Yugoslav space.

²⁵⁴ Tomc, (2010) uses a slightly amusing anecdote in which a member of Yugoslavia's punk scene was detained after wearing a t-shirt that read ‘Nazi punks fuck off!’ complete with a no-entry logo fashioned over a swastika. Though the shirt was quite obviously meant to illuminate an anti-fascist message, the authorities detained the punk before later releasing him after they were convinced the shirt was not pro-National Socialism.

²⁵⁵ Del Lago & De Biasi, (2013:78).

Indeed, for many Italian Ultras, it was about the glorious act, the choreography, the commitment to ensuring that their group was visible to as many spectators and members of the public as possible. Similar to how clubs in Milan and Rome would incorporate intricate sound and light displays to their choreography, flares and firecrackers became a common sight in the stands of Belgrade and beyond in Yugoslavia. Italian magazines exclusively dedicated to football and football fan culture were widely read in parts of Yugoslavia.²⁵⁶ In sum, between the brutish English and the flamboyant Italians, supporter groups in Serbia adopted similar traits and behaviours of their contemporaries abroad, and quickly established themselves as formidable entities.

Lalić & Wood note that Yugoslav supporter groups were, like the English and the Italians, ritualistic in their pursuit of violence, particularly as more individual groups emerged and became organised.²⁵⁷ Although the behaviour of groups in any one state was not precisely identical to those in others, Yugoslavia's supporter groups generally engaged in violence with similar objectives. Rather than politics or ethnicity, or any other socioeconomic factor, groups engaged in violence to symbolically humiliate their rival groups.²⁵⁸

“During the 1980s, football supporter violence became less spontaneous as organized groups arose and the basis of their antagonism shifted away from club, city, and region to supporters groups themselves. Football supporter violence until the end of the decade nonetheless remained mostly symbolic: the attempt, above all, was to humiliate rather than serious injure a rival supporter.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ *Supertifo* magazine was particularly influential in Italy and beyond its borders, including in Yugoslavia. *Tifo* was defined in Italy to mean supporting one's preferred team enthusiastically at a sporting event; outside its borders, it has come to be a catch-all term for the spectacular displays that originated in Italian football grounds.

²⁵⁷ Lalić & Wood, (2014).

²⁵⁸ On broader hooligan perceptions of violence, see Dunning, Murphy, & Williams, (1986); Marsh, (1978); Giulianotti, (1999).

²⁵⁹ Lalić & Wood, (2014:155).

This is in line with analyses of hooligan behaviour elsewhere – that the motivating factors are to outwit and embarrass rivals while staving off the monotony of everyday existence.²⁶⁰

The organisation of supporter activity at football grounds across Serbia during this period coincided with the parallel rise of nationalist sentiment and politicians eager to manufacture and exploit ethnic-based grievances for personal political gain. The rise of ethnic entrepreneurs like Milošević came as Yugoslavia’s economy faced crisis. Supporter groups, primarily made up of young, often economically stagnant men, were growing more organised in an era which saw unemployment among young people rise considerably.

Table 4: Youth Unemployment Rate²⁶¹

Year	Serbia	Croatia
1980	35%	14%
1983	36%	21%
1984	34%	22%
1985	33%	24%

Yugoslavia’s middle class faced greater difficulty in securing basic goods due to the average salary falling over the course of a decade between the late 1970s and the late 1980s.²⁶² But just as Yugoslavia was “withering away,” ethnic nationalism was there to take its place.²⁶³ Brentin & Zec note,

“The economic and social crisis of the mid-1980s, the rise of nationalist sentiments, and the inadequate response from the authorities created an explosive mixture that frequently caused outbursts of physical violence, as well as nationalist and xenophobic abuses at sporting events...the increased politicisation of everyday life “from above” was accompanied by the politicization of sport “from below” through athletes and spectators. The

²⁶⁰ Dunning, (2000). The author demonstrates in interview snippets with hooligans that outwitting the police is a habitual goal for groups, though this is not necessarily because of politics, but rather the consideration that the police are barriers towards fulfilling behavioural goals.

²⁶¹ Woodward, (1995).

²⁶² Milanović, (1990).

²⁶³ Jović, (2009).

atmosphere within stadia emulated political discourse, with mobilizing expressions of nationalist sentiment frequently articulated.”²⁶⁴

Although the image of the rowdy and violent young supporter is one that some may find easy to link to antisocial behaviour, there was not necessarily something about sport itself that was inherently vulnerable to ethnic nationalist ideology in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was home to multiple national sports teams that were multi-ethnic and often successful in international competitions. The Yugoslav national football, basketball, and water polo teams achieved remarkable success and were ranked highly right until the disintegration of the state.²⁶⁵ In the Yugoslav republics, there was not the unwillingness to support a national team player of a different ethnic origin. Instead, it was club level football matches where the nationalist dimension of supporter groups was more apparent.

Đorđević notes the perception that existed within supporter circles that Red Star Belgrade was a “true Belgrade club” while cross-town rivals Partizan, maintained a “Yugoslav” orientation owing to the belief that, because Partizan was linked to the Yugoslav military, it was a “state project” and thus to choose to be a Red Star fan was “a cultural preference bound with expressing...a political stand, and with demonstration of [the] social background of an individual.”²⁶⁶ Blasius, too, notes the multidimensional “symbolic contents” of being a Red Star fan during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, and how the club rivalry between Red Star and Partizan (first dimension) often gave way to a “Serbian” or “anti-Yugoslav/anti-communist” characteristic (second dimension). Attending matches and supporting Red Star provided those with nationalist leanings the opportunity to express that through their fandom. On Red Star, Blasius notes,

²⁶⁴ Brentin & Zec, (2017:722).

²⁶⁵ Perica, (2001) provides an overview of the Yugoslav basketball team, but also a good primer for the national clubs of Yugoslavia and their characteristics.

²⁶⁶ Đorđević, (2016:119). Đorđević points to the 1983 book “Belgrade for Beginners,” in which the author, the well-known journalist Bogdan Tirnanić, characterised Red Star supporters as being against authority of any kind, including that of the Communist Party; instead, they viewed their fandom as a conscious act of rebellion and were considered arbiters of what it meant to be from Belgrade and from Serbia.

“If Partizan was the representative of the Yugoslav People’s Army, the second great club from the capital had a stronger potential to be the representative of Belgrade and Serbia. It could encompass a diverse set of fans by putting emphasis on the club’s Belgrade tradition and a Serbian socialist identity” inside the federation, but also attracting those who held “revanchist” views.”²⁶⁷

And so, as Lalić & Wood and much of the sociological and ethnographical literature of hooligan behaviour note, supporters adopt behaviour which differentiates themselves from their counterparts at other clubs into their rituals and symbolic actions. The activity and the violence that was present at Serbian and other Yugoslav grounds was not different in this respect initially; even in the context of nationalism, Red Star supporters incorporated pro-Serb elements into their activity primarily as a means of differentiating themselves from their fiercest rival, Partizan, another Serbian club. In any event, just as is the case in present-day football, the thousands of supporters who attended matches, whether they aligned with a specific supporters’ group or were simply fans of the team, were not rabid chauvinists seeking to contribute to wider chaos in the country.²⁶⁸ But as the political winds of change continued to shift within the country, the tenor within football grounds did as well.

As Milošević was winning over ethnic Serbs by appearing to act on behalf of their grievances, he would maximise Yugoslav institutions to his benefit, appointing media professionals to party roles to earn favourable notices, while leveraging the many layers of party bureaucracy to alienate and denigrate potential opponents.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Blasius, (2017:791).

²⁶⁸ It is important to note that this remains true today. Even for those individual members that do align themselves with a supporters' group, there is evidence of a wide distribution of personally held political beliefs, including by those that do not necessarily subscribe to right-wing politics but who, as part of the ritual of their group, use right-wing rhetoric or symbols performatively. The rhetoric and symbolism are used to win the day by generating headlines or using it to embarrass other supporter groups or governing structures within football. See Đorđević & Pekić, (2018); Perasović & Mustapić, (2017).

²⁶⁹ Božić-Roberson notes the influence Milošević’s rhetoric and media campaigns had on the trajectory of ethnic-based grievance. “The politicization of ethnicity is a process by which ethnic differences are emphasized and then utilized by ethnic leaders to achieve political ends...the ethnic entrepreneurs, with a conscious interest in mobilizing ethnicity, are given this opportunity in transitional societies in which politicized ethnicity has become the crucial principle of political legitimation and delegitimizing of systems, states, and regimes.” Božić-Roberson, (2005:395).

As the economy declined and Yugoslavs suffered because of it, the space to voice dissatisfaction seemed to open. “The 1980s witnessed a society-wide search for the historical truth and the expansion of autonomous space.”²⁷⁰ In football terraces, where some nationalist affectations had been simmering, the shifting political dynamics from the top of the Yugoslav state were now influencing action in the stands, and vice versa.

“The stadiums were the first, and according to Srđan Vrcan, the only places at this time where nationalist slogans and symbols were publicly articulated and presented. The inhibition threshold is known to be considerably lower in stadiums than elsewhere. The mass gatherings in stadiums can sometimes seduce even enlightened individualists who would otherwise disapprove of the creation of political-national communities in the context of sports...For this reason, stadiums were able to become platforms for rising nationalism in the SFRY. Events there reproduced this surging nationalism in an intensified form and illustrated the political mainstream arising in the country.”²⁷¹

Čolović described the rise of nationalist rhetoric by supporter groups as the perpetuation of Serbian folklore and myth, infused with themes of identity that was “until then, sporadic and proscribed.”²⁷² Police reports from the era noted the exponential rise in incidents at football grounds related to supporter groups as the 1980s went on. Additionally, as those incidents became more frequent, the number of repeat offenders year after year grew as well, suggesting that groups were increasingly populated by rank-and-file “die hard” supporters.²⁷³ It was during this time when nationalist rhetoric and demonstrations became a regular feature, as Mills concludes, “...it was in the period before this, while Yugoslavia was still attempting to hold on to a fragile unity, that the Red Star supporters showed the world where the club’s loyalties lay.”²⁷⁴

As nationalist and chauvinistic rhetoric became a regular feature of football matches in Serbia and other Yugoslav republics, leading politicians began to understand the

²⁷⁰ Grunewald, (1992:181).

²⁷¹ Galijaš, (2014:173).

²⁷² Čolović, (2002).

²⁷³ Mills, (2018:196). In a sign of the times, in parts of Yugoslavia, including big cities like Zagreb, nearly half of those arrested for offenses at football matches were unemployed. In Belgrade, fans tended to have attained lower than average education results. Lalić, (1993) cited in Mills, (2018); Popadić, (1987); cited in Mills, (2018).

²⁷⁴ Mills, (2009).

value that hooligans and the wider game represented to their political aims and ambitions. It was as Milošević consolidated his grip on power atop Serbia's political hierarchy that football was incorporated into power networks which leveraged informal associations to best ensure preferred outcomes. In describing the network that Milošević established to consolidate and maintain power in Serbia, Eric Gordy details how Milošević viewed proxies of his regime,

“By rotating its cast of ideological surrogates through the musical chairs of power, the regime protects itself from its own positions and actions. Rarely speaking or otherwise appearing in public, Slobodan Milošević can rightly claim he never advocated nationalist or any other positions...all the crucial ideological, political, and military work of the regime is performed by surrogates. These surrogates are dispensable, and a round of discrediting articles in regime newspapers suggests the impending arrival of their expiration dates.”²⁷⁵

Gordy goes on to list a short roster of actors that Milošević employed to serve as the public locum tenens for his regime before their usefulness dissolved and they were cannibalised by the network they served. Serbia, at the collapse of Yugoslavia, then developed its own network - initially overseen by Milošević and his inner circle – to service the needs of those closest to power. Like in Ledeneva's analysis of Putin's Russia, Milošević's state was inclusive of “grey” areas and the actors included in such networks at prominent levels were bound by proscriptions that essentially decreed that any one servant of the network was useful right up until the minute they no longer were. In Milošević's quest to win over – or at least pacify – increasingly political football supporter groups, he turned to a career criminal with apparent ties to the state security services to provide oversight of Serbia's “proxy warriors” in football terraces to ensure that control would be exercised to the benefit of Milošević and his allies.

Around this time, Arkan was tasked by the Milošević network with providing oversight over the Delije, the most prominent and vocal group supporting Red Star Belgrade. By this point, Milošević had based much of his political project around exploiting the ethnic grievances that had become a feature of local football stands. Given that the tenor of

²⁷⁵ Gordy, (1999; 17-18).

protest was one against the bureaucracy from which Milošević emerged, it was possible that supporter groups would oppose Milošević in favour of a more explicit nationalist, such as Vojislav Šešelj. To prevent this, Milošević turned his media savvy toward supporters.

“As a member of the communist establishment, it took time for Milošević to win over football supporters. His actions in the political sphere and the mass rallies that accompanied them went some way to achieving this, but he also used the sporting press to attract new adherents. As a product of the loyal Politika publishing house, the sports weekly Tempo was favourable to his political projects and critical of those of his opponents...in January 1989, Tempo carried an exclusive with Yugoslav footballer-of-the-year Dragan Stojković. The title is evocative enough: ‘I support Slobodan Milošević!’”²⁷⁶

As leader of the Delije, Arkan instilled order and introduced new rules for match-day behaviour, most of which were directed from the secret service that was paying him to undertake the role. By the end of the 1980s, Milošević adopted a preference for the Serbian State Security Service (*Resor državne bezbednosti* – RDB) as he was able to leverage the agency with greater efficiency than federal Yugoslav agencies, given his leadership position in Serbia. Under Milošević, the RDB became something of a proxy for the Milošević project, carrying out a host of politically motivated missions.

“...the RDB was used for all manner of clandestine and unscrupulous activities, including political assassinations, sanctions busting and blackmail. Many of these tasks involved the cultivation of links with the criminal underworld, including such notorious figures as Željko ‘Arkan’ Ražnatović. These connections contributed to the steady criminalisation of the RDB throughout the 1990s, both because criminals were explicitly brought into the organisation itself, but also because of the massive profits that existing personnel (and particularly its leadership) found they could make from their illicit activities.”²⁷⁷

Under the auspices of the RDB, Arkan was to serve both as a conduit to illicit activities and as a leadership figure for the Delije with the understanding that the Delije was to refrain from mentioning individual politicians in their chants, as best to keep Milošević’s

²⁷⁶ Mills, (2018:200).

²⁷⁷ Edmunds, (2008:33).

name out of the terraces. It was here that supporter groups began attaining political capital as a result of their proximity to the Serbian elite. Milošević via the RDB, Arkan, and the Delije engaged in a “feeding” exchange as “useful friends,” allowing Milošević to continue to coalesce power while, in exchange, Arkan and the RDB were given licenses to profit from criminal enterprise by the regime.²⁷⁸

Following the Maksimir Riot in 1990, which occurred shortly after Tuđman scored a victory in elections held in Croatia, subsequent media coverage paid to the riot and the chauvinistic displays of violence seemed to confirm nationalism as the political movement of the moment.²⁷⁹ As Galijaš notes, “football became an example of, and a barometer for, everyday nationalism.”²⁸⁰ Arkan’s role in Maksimir is ambiguous as a result of the significant amount of propaganda that emerged in the aftermath of the riot. Croatian propaganda, in particular, elevated Zvonimir Boban – along with the Bad Blue Boys and other Croats in attendance - to mythic status for the role he played in a the fight against the state as well as the “hooligans under the leadership of war criminal Željko Ražnatović Arkan.”²⁸¹ Though, as Mills notes, Arkan was at the Maksimir that evening, it is unclear how much, if at all, he had to do with the events that took place. He did, however, later claim he knew he would soon need to recruit for war because of the riot.²⁸²

When war broke out, Arkan populated his paramilitary unit, the Tigers, with elements from the Delije. Throughout the wars in both Croatia and then Bosnia, the Tigers were accused by international observers of having committed a number of war crimes under

²⁷⁸ Ledeneva, (2013:1146) argues that in informal governing structures, groups and individuals will “feed” from the remit they have been given with those structures; in the case of Arkan and the RDB, this meant “surviving” off of what was generated from illicit networks that they were in a position to control and/or monitor. In this case, the Arkan and the Delije served as “useful friends,” those bestowed with opportunity from those in a position to grant it (Milošević/RDB) who in turn provide useful returns that prolong the survival of the network itself.

²⁷⁹ By this point, Tuđman’s nationalist Croatian Democratic Union won a landslide victory in Croatia’s first free elections; Milošević would earn a similar result later that year.

²⁸⁰ Galijaš, (2014:175).

²⁸¹ Croatian television report cited in Đorđević, (2012:209). The article also cites Čolović, (2000:342) regarding Arkan’s activities with the Delije: “Arkan is a man close to the club with a good insight in the happenings at the Marakana stadium, who helps the fans to leave politics to the political arenas.”

²⁸² Mills, (2018).

Arkan's leadership. As a result, in 1997, Arkan was secretly indicted by The Hague for war crimes allegedly perpetrated in Sanski Most in Bosnia.²⁸³ After the prolonged siege of the Croat city of Vukovar – one of the most violent episodes of the war in Croatia – Arkan saw an opportunity to rile up his most ardent supporters. In a stadium packed with Serbian nationalists during a derby match between Red Star and Partizan, Arkan and his men emerged from the stands and held aloft signs: “20 Miles to Vukovar,” “10 Miles to Vukovar,” “Welcome to Vukovar.” The implication that Arkan's Tigers had ravaged their way into Vukovar and participated in extraordinarily violent actions there caused the stadium to erupt into deafening applause.²⁸⁴ Arkan – despite his well-known crimes – was now something of a quasi-celebrity in Serbia. This was ever more evident during his wedding ceremony to Ceca, which the international press dubbed the “wedding of the decade, if not the century”²⁸⁵ in Belgrade society.

Arkan used the cloudiness of war to build a criminal empire, overseeing a smuggling operation that trafficked in cigarettes and oil, often across ethnic lines, proving that if money is to be made, his nationalist views could be elastic.²⁸⁶ As Serbia was rendered a pariah state by the international community, the money earned through illicit networks became ever more crucial to the Milošević regime. Thus, many of the routes that were utilised by Arkan and other racketeers were protected by Serbian state entities, including the RDB.²⁸⁷ At home, Arkan also participated in Serbia's largely spurious elections, winning five seats in parliament in 1992 under a party banner that featured just his name. When Milošević had a falling out with Vojislav Šešelj, leader of the Serbian Radical Party, Arkan's ties to Milošević grew closer. As Woodward (1995) notes,

“Milošević arrested forty of Šešelj's local party bosses on charges of war crimes in Bosnia-Herzegovina, ended [Šešelj's] media coverage, and beamed the light of favour further right onto Ražnatović

²⁸³ International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, “The Prosecutor against Zeljko Raznjatovic – Indictment.” 23/9/1997. Accessed here: http://www.icty.org/x/cases/zeljko_raznjatovic/ind/en/ark-ii970930e.pdf.

²⁸⁴ Mills, (2009).

²⁸⁵ New York Times, ‘Serbia Dazzles Itself: Terror Suspect Marries Singer,’ Roger Cohen, 20/2/1995.

²⁸⁶ Griffiths, (2004) provides a good analysis of cigarette smuggling in this era, touching on Arkan's role.

²⁸⁷ Mladenović, (2012).

instead...the consequence of this tactic of domestic power politics was to create, keep alive, and tolerate – even use – groups that pursued terrorist, semilegal, and criminal activities.”²⁸⁸

The opportunity to profit from illicit trade from black and grey market activities, coupled with a sense of deep paranoia about his political standing, led Milošević to forge stronger ties with Arkan. Though after the Dayton Accords of 1995, the Delije began to show signs of turning on Milošević, protesting unofficially against the regime in response to the 1996 local elections that were seen as a sharp rebuke to the incumbent.²⁸⁹ As mentioned in the previous chapter, Arkan eventually took ownership of FK Obilić around this time - leaving his control over the Delije ambiguous and his usefulness to Milošević’s informal political network diminished. Arkan was eventually fatally shot in the lobby of a Belgrade hotel in 2000.

Arkan’s place within the upper echelons of Milošević’s network and his outsized involvement in football helped to establish the characteristics of the relationship between self-serving elites and actors within football. As these informal relations formed, football became entangled in the wider exploitation of a deeply fragile economy,

“Serbia was in the 1990s a ‘cash-economy’, with the government successfully plundering the resources of the population, large-scale criminal networks integrating intimately with the government, and paramilitaries and criminals creating wealth from looting in war-areas. The legal breakdown, corruption, and widespread clientelism rapidly produced a re-stratification of Serbian society. As the wider layers of society faced poverty, there was a small group of war profiteers, criminals, and circles connecting to the ruling family that gathered enormous wealth.”²⁹⁰

It was under these circumstances that Milošević, and his inner circle encouraged greater corruption and formed feudalistic informal networks that persist in some

²⁸⁸ Woodward, (1995:356).

²⁸⁹ Đorđević, (2016).

²⁹⁰ Sørensen, (2003:77).

measure to the present day.²⁹¹ And it is through men like Arkan that football was enveloped into those networks.

In July of 2000, after Milošević looked to be defeated in that year's presidential election by the opposition candidate, Vojislav Koštunica, he briefly attempted to cling to power, sending Serbia into a political drama in which the Delije featured prominently. As Đorđević describes,

“On [July 27th, 2000], a huge clash occurred between the police and the Red Star fans, after the police raided a segment of the Northern stand, as a reaction to the first-time sang ‘Save Serbia and kill yourself, Slobodan’ slogan. These riots at the stadium marked a beginning of an open war between Red Star fans and Milošević’s regime and the mentioned slogan became an unofficial anthem of the protests led by the opposition parties.”²⁹²

Although the toppling of Milošević has come to be more colloquially known as the Bulldozer Revolution, the heavy involvement of supporter group members contributed to the event being briefly dubbed in headlines as the “Red Star Revolution.” Unquestionably, the Delije and other supporter groups participated in the demonstrations that accompanied Milošević's fall from power, but as Foer (2011) notes, the Delije and other well-connected groups were not rebranding as democrats. Like the bulk of the Serbian political elite, their public characteristic was extremist and they were unapologetic for the Arkan years. Foer notes,

“Ever since the late eighties, Milosevic had worried that the Delije’s sincere attachment to Serbian nationalism might stand in the way of his cynical machinations. Now the Delije rose to obstruct him. Red Star fans like to say that they were the agents of political change. Indeed, the guys at the front of the barricades and the ones who stormed government building in search of evidence proving Milosevic’s corruption wore replica Red Star jerseys...Serbs have placed Milosevic’s overthrow in 2000...in the pantheon of great anti-communist revolts...but had this revolt changed a nation? For a revolt to change a nation, the Serbs wouldn’t just have to pull down the iconography of the dictator Milosevic, as the Russians had knocked over the figures of Lenin. They would have had to topple Arkan,

²⁹¹ Shlapentokh, (2013).

²⁹² Đorđević, (2016:126).

the wicked id of the country, from his central place in the culture. When I visited Belgrade, Arkan's image remained upright."²⁹³

As Serbia embarked on attempted democratic reforms, supporter groups like the Delije have mostly served as allies to those that would disrupt such efforts.²⁹⁴ From Vojislav Koštunica to Boris Tadić and to Aleksandar Vučić, there has been no appetite or political will to meaningfully reign in the influence of the leadership of supporter groups broadly. As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, this is because of what Milošević discovered during his ascent to power: that supporter groups are politically useful. And so, although Arkan met a gruesome fate and Milošević himself eventually left office under pressure, the precedent of manipulating football in the service of networks tied to political elites has outlived them both.²⁹⁵

Serbia's Post-Milošević Judiciary: Vulnerable to Politicisation

When the Milošević regime collapsed in 2000 and the coalition Democratic Opposition of Serbia assumed office, there was broad agreement that the painstaking process of reforming structures within the country was necessary, even if the methods of accomplishing that reform came across as being heavy-handed. However, as this subsection demonstrates, meaningful reform of the judiciary - even with the introduction of European Union conditionality through *acquis* accession chapter 23 after Serbia received candidate status - is incomplete, particularly as it relates to the politicisation of the Serbian judiciary. The exploitative relationship that political figures exercise with the Serbian judicial system is evident in multiple processes: in the appointing, retaining, or termination of a judicial officer; in procedural conduct; and in the

²⁹³ Foer, (2004:27-28). The author is referencing the aforementioned FK Obilić. Ceca ensured that allusions to Arkan were frequent within the club before it eventually bottomed out.

²⁹⁴ Milorad Ulemek, the leader of the Red Berets, a key figure in the Serbian underworld, and one of the convicted assassins of Serbian prime minister Zoran Đinđić joined Arkan's Tigers and served in the unit in both Croatia and Bosnia. During this period, Ulemek allied himself with other notable criminal elements, including the Zemun Clan. For the relationship between Ulemek, Arkan, and the symbiosis between supporter group members and the criminal elite, see B92, "The Unit: The Untold Story of the Red Berets," Accessed here: <http://www.b92.net/specijal/jedinica-eng/index.php>.

²⁹⁵ This is not necessarily unique and the network each man was a part of in Serbia would not necessarily collapse because of their absences. Ledeneva, (2006) notes that informal networks preserve the vulnerability of its individual members until, if it is determined those individual members are no longer serviceable, that vulnerability is exploited, and they are purged from the network.

perversion of the media to undercut judicial action. The harmonisation of the Serbian judiciary and its functions with the standards set out in chapter 23 of the EU accession process was always going to be a difficult proposition – even if the process was entirely genuine and transparent. However, owing to the lack of political will in de-politicising the judiciary, European agencies like the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) continue to evaluate Serbia as a transitional laggard, despite the oversight of the EU. This subsection expands beyond the classification of Serbia as sluggish and instead argues and uses relevant examples to establish that Serbia’s judiciary, as currently constituted, has been governed informally by an opportunistic Serbian political elite.

In 2001, the DOS government that came into office did not “catch the constitutional moment.”²⁹⁶ Instead of developing a new Constitution to supersede Milošević’s 1990 version, it opted for a reformist approach. This programme of reform included five laws designed to oversee and reform a judicial system mired in issues leftover from the Milošević years; these laws included: (i) Establishing the High Judicial Council; (ii) The Law on the Public Prosecutor; (iii) The Law on Judges; (iv) The Law on the Organisation of the Courts; (v) The Law on Seat and Territorial Jurisdiction of Courts and Public Prosecutors’ Offices. Furthermore, professional judicial associations were formed by the government, some law-breaking judges were removed from the bench, and the possibility of a lustration process for the judiciary was publicly introduced. The law that established the High Judicial Council (HJC) came into effect immediately, while the rest of the reform package began enforcement in the spring of 2002. Most of the laws were designed to streamline judicial efficiency and, particularly in the case of the establishment of the HJC, to expand judicial independence and internal oversight over judicial practices.

The HJC, as constituted in November 2001, included five permanent members: The President of the Supreme Court of Serbia; the State Prosecutor; the Minister of Justice; and two additional members elected by the Bar Association of Serbia and by

²⁹⁶ Beširević, (2014).

the National Assembly, respectively. Eight additional, non-permanent members also serve: six judges appointed by the Supreme Court of Serbia and two prosecutors chosen by the State Prosecutor. Those processes were varied and extensive, including determining the criteria for the number of judges and court personnel; the vetting of judges, prosecutors, and deputy prosecutors; nominating judges, prosecutors, and deputy prosecutors for consideration in the National Assembly; exemption requests of the State Prosecutor; remuneration; and hearing and ruling on various complaints regarding judicial functionality. In interviews conducted by the OSCE, judges and prosecutors expressed satisfaction with the adoption of the five laws in November 2011, including the establishment of the HJC, citing greater status²⁹⁷ and independence in the judiciary.²⁹⁸ In addition to the HJC, the government formed the Judicial Reform Council (JRC) in January 2002. The main stated goal of the JRC was to “Analyse the situation in the judiciary by examining personnel, material, and space requirements for the work of courts and propose measures for rectifying observed problems.”²⁹⁹ The JRC would be overseen by the Minister of Justice (then Vladan Batić) and a committee of twenty members.

July 2002 proved to be a consequential period for the post-Milošević judiciary. First, the Constitutional Court of Serbia was revived after seventeen months of dormancy. When the Court reconvened, there were nearly five hundred backlogged cases, including dozens that pre-dated February 2001, when the latency of the Court arose. Much of the early months of the Court’s restoration were spent authoring guidelines for the Court relating to future considerations – including ruling on hypothetical constitutional violations by the President of Serbia and the institution of constitutional appeal. Additional proposals included voiding the lifetime mandate given to Constitutional Court justices in favour of ten-year terms of office and designing additional Court functions, like plenary sessions designed to increase Court efficiency. This process – envisioning and designing a democratic Court modelled on similar institutions in Western Europe – corresponded to the reformist agenda of the era.

²⁹⁷ By this point, judges in Serbia were severely underpaid, rendering corruption an attractive option when trying to provide during disastrous economic conditions. Many judges were estimated to be earning around US\$70 a month.

²⁹⁸ OSCE, “Report on Judicial Reform in Serbia,” (2003).

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

Although the scope of this section does not go beyond the Serbian republic, the Federal Constitutional Court, which mostly operated quietly and out of the public consciousness, oversaw a highly political dispute between the most powerful men in the country. When Đinđić temporarily suspended 45 Democratic Party of Serbian MPs from the National Assembly over allegations of chronic absenteeism, the Court was thrust into the political struggle that had come to personify the two largest parties of the DOS that came into power in 2000. When the Court ruled that the MPs must be sat, despite their absenteeism, as annulling the electoral mandate conferred to the MPs by voters of free will and sound mind, would be a precedent likely to cause significant damage to Serbia's institutions. The failings of the then-government to divorce politics from the judiciary were further made evident when the president of the Federal Constitutional Court was accused of corruption and being beholden to Koštunica by a Democratic Party-aligned student activist group.

Also in July 2002, much of the reforms of November 2001 were amended in a manner that re-established political influence over judicial processes.³⁰⁰ Notably, the HJC was expanded to include two more appointed members (increasing the number of prosecutors appointed by the State Prosecutor from two to four – ultimately diluting the input of judges) and the rules on appointing court presidents, judges, and public prosecutors were also changed to apportion more power to the National Assembly. Before the July 2002 amendment, the HJC received exclusivity in the appointments process – the National Assembly could reject nominees, but the HJC would retain the right to deliberate and propose a suitable alternative. The amendment stripped away that exclusivity – instead of the HJC immediately replacing a failed nominee, the National Assembly's Judicial Committee was now able to nominate their own candidate for the role and have that nominee voted on by the wider National Assembly.

³⁰⁰ The rollback of reforms is attributed to a feud between Prime Minister Đinđić and his Minister of Justice with the wider judiciary. In 2002, a BK TV camera crew was dispatched alongside officials from the Justice Ministry to a Belgrade courthouse. This was done to demonstrate the cavalier approach judges took to their job – the camera crew showed up at 9:30 AM and found that only twenty-three of the 109 judges were in their offices on time. Then, the government released a 12-point plan for quickly reforming the judiciary (though this was later claimed to be an internal Justice Ministry document for reference rather than an official statement of purpose). The judges housed in the Belgrade courthouse claimed their efficiency had risen exponentially and authored a scathing open letter to Đinđić that was published in Serbian press outlets. See IHF, "In the Shadow of Nationalism: Serbia 2002," (2003).

In short, the HJC would be compelled to nominate only candidates that the National Assembly would approve in the first instance or otherwise have their nominee defeated in lieu of a preferred candidate anyway. The International Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights noted that such precedent is in contrast with democratic norms and concluded that the amendment put over two hundred court presidents at risk of losing their jobs should they defy the parliamentary majority. An amendment to the Law on Judges mandated that court presidents could not concurrently serve as a judge – this meant that small courts were at risk of falling behind as a result of an increased workload and one less judicial officer to preside over proceedings. This “undermined the very principle of division of power and laid the groundwork for anti-constitutional influence on the judiciary... the judiciary was regressed to the status marking Milošević’s era.”³⁰¹

Indeed, judicial purges became something of a norm.³⁰² Just a week after the assassination of Đinđić in March 2003, the National Assembly dismissed thirty-five judges from office. The apparent motivation for the dismissal of the judges, of which seven sat on the Supreme Court, was because the judges had failed in their efforts to prosecute organised crime and former allies of the Milošević regime. However, this was contradicted by the Justice Ministry when it claimed that the judges were purged because they had reached retirement age. For his part, the Justice Minister, Vladan Batić, claimed the judges were dismissed because they were too often tardy for work. While some of the fired judges may have had documented culpability in Milošević-era judicial criminality, there were instances reported of justices who were previously dismissed by Milošević for exercising judicial independence, reinstated by the DOS government, and again relieved of their duties for exercising judicial independence. This prompted the International Commission of Jurists to author an open letter to Serbia’s leadership urging that proper procedures in the dismissal of judges be utilised.³⁰³ Shortly following the first round of dismissals, the President of the Supreme

³⁰¹ IHF, “IHF Focus: Federal Republic of Yugoslavia/Serbia,” (2003:5).

³⁰² The culling of judges became easier for political actors to do following reform of the High Personnel Council in 2002.

³⁰³ On this episode, see International Commission of Jurists, “Attacks on Justice: Serbia and Montenegro,” (2008).

Court, citing political and media pressures, resigned her position. By June 2004, another ten judges and eighteen prosecutors were purged from office.

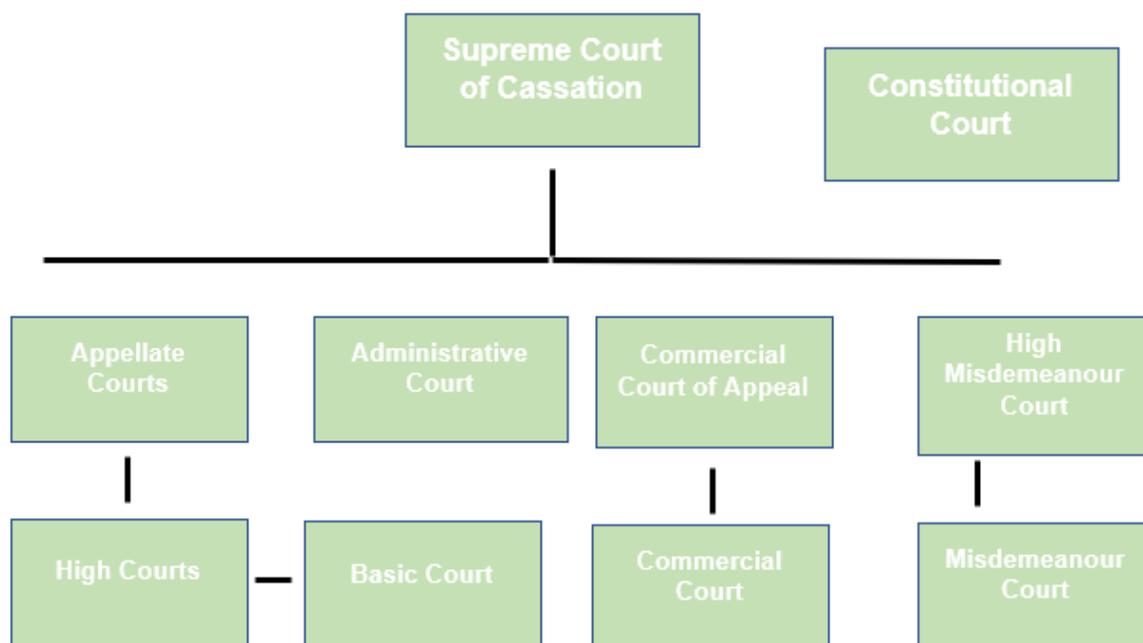
While additional amendments applied to existing judicial law were passed in 2004,³⁰⁴ it was not until 2006 that a more structured approach to reform was initiated by the government. In 2006, the National Assembly, under the EU accession guidelines, adopted and released the National Judicial Reform Strategy (NJRS), 2006 – 2011. The stated aim of the NJRS was to “regain the public trust in the Republic of Serbia judicial system by establishing the rule of law and legal certainty” through the application of the following principles: a judicial system that is independent; a judicial system that is transparent; a judicial system that is accountable; and a judicial system that is efficient.³⁰⁵ The NJRS was seen to be a welcome recalibration for Serbia toward establishing democratic norms within its judiciary while signalling its commitment to Europe. The new Serbian Constitution that was adopted in the same year included many of the recommendations of the NJRS and other reforms of the High Judicial Council, the Law on Judges, and the State Prosecutorial Council.

Following the adoption of the NJRS framework and the new Constitution, a package of new reforms passed in 2008. A new Law on the Organization of Courts reorganised the court system, removing over one hundred courts, establishing Basic, High, and Appellate Courts; and simultaneously establishing the Supreme Court of Cassation as the highest court in the judiciary. Specialised courts, including the Misdemeanour Courts, the High Misdemeanour Court, the Administrative Court, the Commercial Courts, and the Commercial Appellate Court, were each formulated.

³⁰⁴ Including the establishment of the Commission on Judicial Reform, which supplanted the Judicial Reform Council as the main body responsible for initiating judicial trainings and cooperation with international relations standards for the Serbian judiciary.

³⁰⁵ Republic of Serbia, “National Judicial Reform Strategy,” (2006).

Figure 2: A flow chart of Serbia's judicial courts.



Despite the introduction of the NJRS and the enshrinement of many of its principles into the Constitution, gaps between democratic norms in the judiciary and regressive practices remained, leading to continued politicisation within the judicial system. This is best evidenced by a decision of the HJC to instigate a reappointment procedure for all of Serbia's three thousand judges; a similar process was undertaken by the State Prosecutorial Council for all of Serbia's prosecutors. This process of reappointment was concluded in 2010 and led to a 30% reduction of judges and prosecutors, as some eight hundred judges and one hundred and seventy prosecutors were not retained. The Constitutional Court, which was once again reformed and re-established in 2008,³⁰⁶ began hearing the appeals of 90% of those that dismissed judges in the process. As Beširević notes,

“An absence of sufficient guarantees for a fair election opened the door to the intervention [of] political parties. The Constitutional Law established a comprehensive and quick reappointment procedure within a very short timeframe, which, combined with the fact that the task was entrusted to the High Judicial Council, completely dependent on the Parliament and the

³⁰⁶ The Constitutional Court was reconfigured during the authoring of the 2006 Constitution. The Court would be comprised of fifteen judges initially appointed to a nine-year term that is renewable. The Supreme Court of Cassation, the President of Serbia, and parliament each appointed five judges to the Court.

Government, created an additional risk of overly politicizing the appointment process...Both [the HJC and SPC] procedures were riddled with inconsistencies and [a] lack of transparency and were clearly subject to political manipulation.”³⁰⁷

Months into the Constitutional Court’s investigation into the matter, the government reconditioned the law and sent the process of appeal back to the High Judicial Court – the same body that initially oversaw the reappointment process. This fostered consternation both at home and in Brussels, as the HJC’s decision-making process came under scrutiny.³⁰⁸ When evaluating judges, the HJC was to take qualifications, integrity, diligence, efficiency, and competence into account, but it became clear that political consideration trumped these principles and that there were instances of severely compromised judges remaining on the bench in lieu of others. The Anti-Corruption Council, a government agency itself, determined that some judges that retained their jobs had poorer records than many who were dismissed. The Anti-Corruption Council also highlighted that some judges that were retained were candidates for dismissal in 2001 on grounds of past wrongdoing under the administration of Slobodan Milošević, when the Democratic Opposition came to power.³⁰⁹ The HJC eventually reviewed the cases of those that were initially dismissed, deciding to overturn and reinstate one hundred and nine judges; the SPC reinstated twenty-nine prosecutors. Those judges that were initially dismissed and were refused their former jobs a second time again appealed to the Constitutional Court. The Court initially ordered the reinstatement of 194 judges and 122 prosecutors before ultimately ruling that the statute that allowed the initial reforms to take place was unconstitutional, thus forcing the reintegration of all 800 judges and 120 prosecutors and deputy prosecutors into the judiciary.³¹⁰

The process of reforming the judiciary through this quasi-lustration process began under the leadership of the Democratic Party and very well could have resulted in the overdue dismissal of judicial officers that had presided over courtrooms in an iniquitous

³⁰⁷ Beširević, (2014:970).

³⁰⁸ The HJC meetings remained strictly out of public view and while the EU sent observers to HJC meetings, they were not allowed to remain in the room during HJC votes.

³⁰⁹ On this, see Balkan Transitional Justice, “Jury Out on Serbia’s Botched ‘Reform’ of Judges,” (2012). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2012/03/23/jury-out-on-serbia-s-botched-reform-of-judges/>.

³¹⁰ World Bank, “Background Information on the Serbian Judiciary,” (2015).

manner during the 1990s had it not been for the sort of constitutional overreach that had become synonymous with reformist elements in the government since the premiership of Đinđić. Instead of designing an airtight, legal system of lustration, a flawed process rife with political consideration was undertaken and was so mismanaged that it drew the ire of the Europeans, putting EU representatives in a position in which they called for the rights of tainted judges when they otherwise would have almost certainly preferred to refrain from doing so. Beširević argues that it is wholly possible that if Boris Tadić won re-election to the Serbian presidency in 2012, the Constitutional Court may have ultimately ruled differently.³¹¹ Instead, after Tomislav Nikolić won the presidency and Ivica Dačić became prime minister, the Court reasoned that these old allies of Milošević would prefer to see the old cadre of Milošević-era jurists rehabilitated. Thus, political, and ultimately unconstitutional machinations by reformers not only hindered genuine judicial reform, but it also caused the process to drag on to such a degree that with their defeat and with the elevation of the Milošević allies to government, the Constitutional Court was provoked to act politically, detecting a sea-change. The reform process as it was carried out not only stunted actual reform, but it also vitiated the Constitutional Court, rendering it susceptible to politicisation. Instead of reform, the Serbian court system was still replete with pernicious elements.

The Serbian Progressive Party came to power with a message of rehabilitated nationalism and a European future for Serbia. By the time the Progressives took office, Serbian judicial reform was both analysed to be well below expectations by Europe and perceived to be utterly corrupt by the Serbian public. In this sense, the 2006 - 2013 NJRS was a failure. Just as the EU was questioning the validity of the Progressive commitment to EU-mandated reforms, the functionality of the Serbian judiciary – at a very fundamental level – was faltering. As Rakić-Vodinić et al. note,

“Over the past ten years the lack of a serious public debate on what kind of judiciary Serbia should have and whether it may meet the elementary need for legal protection of citizens is evident. It is also worth asking whether the judiciary in Serbia can change in a satisfactory manner within the existing

³¹¹ Beširević, (2014).

constitutional framework, or should such framework be abandoned...Therefore, can the Serbian judiciary change for the better within the existing constitutional framework? Our answer is: no, it cannot.”³¹²

In 2013, a year after the EU awarded Serbia with candidate status, the new Serbian government adopted an updated version of the NJRS to cover the years 2013 – 2018.³¹³ The committee assembled to author the new NJRS was itself controversial. Representatives from the Judges and Prosecutors’ professional associations temporarily left the committee as a response to the addition of HJC and SPC members – including those that oversaw the attempted judicial purges – to the committee. This was conditionally rectified to the extent that the professional association members later contributed, but that the HJC and SPC members who presided over the mismanaged judicial reforms later deemed unconstitutional were assisting with the authoring of a judicial reform strategy tainted the process.³¹⁴

The objective of the updated NJRS was “the improvement of quality and efficiency of justice, while strengthening judicial independence and responsibility, thus also strengthening the rule of law, democracy, legal certainty, access to justice, and restoring faith in the judicial system.”³¹⁵ Similar to the 2006 – 2013 document, the NJRS was “guided by five key principles: independence; impartiality and quality of justice; competence; responsibility; and efficiency.”³¹⁶ Much like the previous document, the new NJRS simultaneously advocated constitutional reforms to align the Serbian judiciary with EU standards, but also included reforms that were subject to politicisation. For example, the Judicial Academy would be the singular method of becoming a judicial officer – however, it is the HJC and SPC that recommend who attends the Judicial Academy. Given that the HJC and SPC remain politicised bodies,

³¹² Rakić-Vodinečić et al., (2012:227).

³¹³ As a stipulation of Serbia’s accession negotiations with the EU, closing *aquis* Chapter 23 was made a requirement before other substantial Chapters could be negotiated. This was a response to the difficulty that Croatia, Bulgaria, and Romania had previously in closing Chapter 23 during their respective accession negotiations.

³¹⁴ Reljanović & Bojović, (2014).

³¹⁵ Republic of Serbia, “National Judicial Reform Strategy, 2013 – 2018,” (2013).

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

it could be assumed by observers that they would only nominate politically palatable candidates to attend the Judicial Academy.

As part of Serbia's accession negotiations with the European Union, the Venice Commission has consistently mandated constitutional reform as necessary to successfully close Chapter 23. This was initially communicated by the Commission shortly after Serbia adopted the 2006 Constitution. However, there was no significant effort to engage with constitutional reform of the judiciary until 2017, when the Venice Commission reiterated more firmly to the Vučić government that Chapter 23 negotiations would remain stagnant without engagement on amending the Constitution. Subsequent efforts by the Serbian to comply with Venice Commission requirements – notably, amending the Constitution of Serbia to better limit the influence of the National Assembly over the judiciary – were still inadequate. In 2018, Serbia requested that the Venice Commission evaluate draft amendments to the Constitution relating to the judiciary. In their conclusion, the Venice Commission determined that amendments as currently drafted would not fulfil the requirements of the European Union. This includes amendments on (i) the composition of the HJC and the role of the National Assembly; (ii) Composition of the HPC³¹⁷ and the role of the National Assembly; (iii) Dissolution of the HJC; (iv) Dismissal for incompetence; (v) Method to ensure the uniform application of laws; and (vi) Public Prosecutors and Deputy Public Prosecutors. In each instance, the Venice Commission concluded that judges, prosecutors, the HJC, and the SPC would all still be vulnerable to the political influence of the National Assembly.³¹⁸ Amending the Constitution is, of course, an undertaking that requires significant consultation with relevant parties and public debate. But if certain political actors were concerned with the independence of the Serbian judiciary, they could personally alter their behaviour. To start, they could stop using the bully pulpit of the media to influence judicial action. The Minister of Justice and the chair of the National Assembly's Justice Committee could forgo attending HJC and SPC meetings without causing any delay in proceedings; and the judiciary could

³¹⁷ The SPC, the body that oversees Serbia's prosecutors.

³¹⁸ Venice Commission, "Serbia: Opinion on the Draft Amendments to the Constitutional Provisions on the Judiciary," (2018).

be allowed independence over its budget.³¹⁹ But, in sum, the political will required to move the Serbian judiciary forward toward independence, efficiency, and ultimately, conformity with EU standard, is presently absent.

How Networks Manifest: Football Supporter Groups as Security

In multiple instances, members of football supporter groups have served as a parallel security structure in Serbia in lieu of official Serbian police or auxiliary forces. These informal structures continue to exist despite official government efforts to pursue “democratic security sector reform” as required by Europe’s conditionality regime.³²⁰ As Ejodus chronicles, police reform was a priority for Serbia’s post-2000 government and additional reforms hastened following the assassination of Đinđić in 2003,

“Police reforms...started shortly after the democratic changes. These changes were at first symbolical and encompassed the introduction of new police uniforms to replace the old camouflage ones, international re-integration and a gradual opening to civil society. An important reorganisation step was the detachment of the secret service from the Ministry of Interior (MUP) and the establishment of a separate Security Information Agency (BIA) in 2002. Initially, the police reforms were not systematic but unfolded without any coherent plan or strategy...The assassination of Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić in 2003 moved police reform up the political agenda and certain structural reforms soon started to take place. In the following years capacities for criminal investigation were strengthened at the expense of the uniformed police.”³²¹

Despite this early commitment to democratic reform of the police, in subsequent public opinion polling, 84% of Serbs believed that politicians exert too much control over police operations; 75% believed that the police were too often operationalised to protect the interests of the government; 66% believed the same was done to protect the interests of political parties; and just 36% felt that police were working on behalf of the interests of the general population.³²² Though the European Commission

³¹⁹ Open Society Foundation/Transparency Serbia, “When Law Doesn’t Rule: State Capture of the Judiciary, Prosecution, and Police in Serbia,” (2018).

³²⁰ On democratic security sector governance, see Ball, (2005); Cottey and Averre (2002).

³²¹ Ejodus, (2010:8).

³²² Ibid.

acknowledged in 2019 that some progress had been made on policing, they concluded that,

“...despite further amendments to the Law on Police, the legal framework is still insufficient to guarantee the operation independence of the police from the [Ministry of the Interior]. Thus, the police continue to also report to the Mol and not just to the prosecution office during the pre-investigation and investigation phase. Media relations, including press releases on ongoing operations, are still managed mainly by the Mol and not by the prosecution and/or the police.”³²³

Because stakeholders like the European Commission are closely monitoring Serbia's commitment to democratic policing and security reform, informal ties with supporter groups are often exercised in situations that would have led to severe criticism of the police if they were the forces operationalised. Alarming, this has not prevented these parallel structures from gaining proximity to Serbia's political elite. This reflects Helmke & Levitsky's analysis of clientelism in post-socialist spaces, where they argue “...in much of the developing and post-communist world, pattern of clientelism, corruption, and patrimonialism coexist with (and often subvert) new democratic, market, and state institutions.”³²⁴ Fieldwork in Belgrade revealed a universal acceptance amongst interviewees that the relationship between political elites and supporter groups is genuine, though these relationships involve only a select few members of supporter groups. This is sensible when considering the nature of trust networks and the fact that those identified as having worked as security for political events wound up having existing ties to representatives of the Serbian government.³²⁵ Although members of supporter groups undoubtedly occupy a space toward the bottom of the proverbial pyramid, given the relationship they enjoy with those at the very top of that same pyramid, those relations symbolise Serbia's continued approach toward informal networks.³²⁶

³²³ European Commission, “Serbia 2019 Report,” (2019). Accessed here: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-serbia-report.pdf>

³²⁴ Helmke & Levitsky, (2004:725). See also Cvejić, (2016).

³²⁵ Author interviews, (2018).

³²⁶ For a conceptualisation of clientelism, see Muno, (2010).

Following Aleksandar Vučić's overwhelming victory in the 2017 Serbian presidential election, the new president held his inauguration ceremony in May of that year. While the office of the president of Serbia was betrothed with powers deemed to be primarily ceremonial in nature, the conventional wisdom was that Vučić was planning to reform the office into the most powerful political position in the country, with Vučić indisputably becoming Serbia's most powerful person.³²⁷ Because of this sharp shift in the political trajectory of the state, protestors and journalists eager to gauge whether or not Serbia was on the verge of inaugurating a new autocrat attended the ceremony which was otherwise open to the public. Given the stakes of the moment – a new president, espousing a pro-reformist message designed to win friends in Europe – Vučić's allies ensured that the crowd was overwhelmingly favourable of the Serbia's new leader. Nevertheless, security was not primarily handled by an elite police unit or even the regular police; instead, the day was marked by skirmishes between protestors, journalists, and those hired to oversee crowd control - members of football supporter groups. When protestors began chanting and accusing Vučić of being a dictator, scuffles between the privately hired security forces and the protestors erupted. When nearby journalists began filming the altercations, the new president's security forces took aim on them. One reporter told Reporters Without Borders that when she refused to give up her phone to security, she was roughly handled and removed from the scene. She also revealed that as the supporters were forcibly removing her, she identified two police officers in plain clothes that merely watched as the skirmishes unfolded, indicating that, on the day, it was the private security forces that were given jurisdiction.³²⁸

In subsequent reports, investigative journalists in the region discovered the information of many of the individual members of the security forces that were at the inauguration. The most prominent was Borko Aranitović, who the press photographed as he physically removed protestors and journalists from the scene of the inauguration. Given his striking features – a large nose, a prominent mole, a

³²⁷ Expert Briefings, "Vučić, Not New Premier, Will Control Serbian Government," (2017). Accessed here: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/OXAN-DB221791/full/html>

³²⁸ Reporters Without Borders, "Reporter's Attacked During New Serbian President's Inauguration," (2017). Accessed here: <https://rsf.org/en/news/reporters-attacked-during-new-serbian-presidents-inauguration>

noticeable scar on his forehead – Aranitović was easily identifiable in his social media posts. What investigative journalists then discovered is that Aranitović posted photos of himself with prominent organised crime and supporters’ group leadership.³²⁹ This buttresses the belief articulated by multiple interviewees in Belgrade and that which is articulated in the thesis that the network that includes political elites and supporters’ group members is not populated by the masses that demonstrate or fight at football matches. Instead, it is a narrow band of leaders that command respect in the terraces and on the street that are then given access to informal networks and processes.³³⁰

This often earns them public support. For example, on Twitter, in the immediate aftermath of the incident, a senior SNS MP tweeted his support of the security forces: “Full support for the boys who removed the provocateurs from the lawful SNS gathering.”³³¹ Interior Minister Nebojša Stefanović later tried to claim that the SNS did not actively recruit Aranitović and would potentially pursue action against him and others, but this came after the SNS and Vučić applauded the actions of the security guards on the day, suggesting this was a face-saving exercise.³³² A letter to the Council of Europe in April 2018 from the Serbian Ministry of Culture and Information regarding the attack on journalists indicated that the Ministry had consistently argued for the protection against journalists and would argue that a criminal investigation could be worthwhile. However, a month later the Public Prosecutor’s Office of Serbia rejected the complaints of the journalists.³³³ The state shielded their hired security from prosecution.

³²⁹ This includes Aleksandar Stanković. Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, “Serbian President’s Party Tied to Football Hooligans,” (2017). Accessed here: <https://www.occrp.org/en/28-ccwatch/cc-watch-indepth/6744-serbian-president-s-party-tied-to-football-hooligans>

³³⁰ Author interviews, (2018).

³³¹ Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, “Serbian President’s Party Tied to Football Hooligans,” (2017). Accessed here: <https://www.occrp.org/en/28-ccwatch/cc-watch-indepth/6744-serbian-president-s-party-tied-to-football-hooligans>

³³² KRIK, “Minister Stefanović’s Remarks on Mafia-tied Guard Contradicts Earlier SNS Statement,” (2017). Accessed here: <https://www.krik.rs/en/minister-stefanovics-remarks-mafia-tied-guard-contradict-sns-earlier-statement/>

³³³ Council of Europe, “Serbian Journalist Lidija Valtner Attacked During New Serbian President’s Inauguration,” (2019). Accessed here: https://www.coe.int/en/web/media-freedom/detail-alert?p_p_id=sojdashboard_WAR_coesojportlet&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_col_id=column-1&p_p_col_pos=1&p_p_col_count=2&sojdashboard_WAR_coesojportlet_alertId=26436844

What also emerged during the investigation into Aranitović is that he was a security guard at a nightclub headquartered on a barge floating on the Sava River. The private security industry remains notoriously unregulated in Serbia. Investigations into private security firms have revealed that well-known organised crime figures routinely established private security firms, allowing them and their “employees” to legally carry firearms. These outfits often serve as a front for racketeering and drug trafficking, much of which is conducted at Serbian nightclubs.³³⁴ By 2009, the National Security Strategy of Serbia incorporated private security firms into emergency planning – in many cases, private firms could be deputised to assist in situations deemed by the government to warrant emergency mobilisation. Given that these firms are known to often serve as a front for very well-known criminals, it should be surprising that the Serbian government remains the single largest buyer of private security contracts.³³⁵ New laws introduced in 2013 began to regulate private security firms, including requiring training for those requesting to legally carry a firearm.³³⁶ However, the law is overseen by Serbia’s Ministry of the Interior, suggesting that licenses are susceptible to politisation and that those close to the Serbian elite could receive favourable treatment in an industry that the Serbian government essentially subsidises.³³⁷ What remains an undisputed reality is that the ranks of private security firms are populated by football supporter group members, provoking frequent co-mingling between Serbian politicians and parties that often hire these firms and supporters to police nightclubs and drug distribution at any given

³³⁴ Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, “Serbia: Nobody’s Policing the Security Guards,” (2010). Accessed here: <https://www.reportingproject.net/security/index.php/serbia/serbia-nobodys-policing-the-security-guards>

³³⁵ Very few private security firms have been forcibly liquidated by the Serbian government. Those that have were run by prominent criminals. One was Lupus, a private security firm owned and operated by Milorad Ulemek, the chief mastermind of the assassination of Zoran Đinđić; Ulemek continued to operate the firm from prison, much to the consternation of the Serbian public. The protests against Lupus were such that the government forced its closure. In addition to briefly allowing Ulemek to operate a security firm from jail, the government of Serbia granted firearm permits to Total Security Systems, a security agency owned by Darko Šarić, a known criminal and a fugitive from justice at the time the firearm permits were granted. For more, see Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, “Serbia: Nobody’s Policing the Security Guards,” (2010). Accessed here: <https://www.reportingproject.net/security/index.php/serbia/serbia-nobodys-policing-the-security-guards>

³³⁶ This has spurred on the creation of new firms that train existing firms on getting up to date with the law. These firms, often run by ex-police officers, have helped ensure otherwise criminal firms remain in business.

³³⁷ Jeremić, “Foul Play: Serbia’s Football Hooligans Get Down to Business,” (2019). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/22/foul-play-serbias-football-hooligans-get-down-to-business/>

location. This relationship is summarised as a quid pro quo by Saša Đorđević in which supporter group members advance a nationalist political doctrine in the body politic and make themselves available for mobilisation. In return, the political elite allows the supporter groups and their allies to conduct illegal operations with few consequences.³³⁸ The following two subsections examine how the discrepancies between the law in Serbia and how supporter group members are prosecuted by the state.

Followers and Casuals: How Violence at Sporting Events is Prosecuted in Serbia

In addition to opposition leaders like Koštunica and Đinđić, the popular revolt that forced Milošević from office in October 2000 briefly made heroes out of the members of the Delije that publicly opposed the regime and took part in the Bulldozer Revolution.³³⁹ The DOS government thought so highly of their new “partners” in progress that on 7 March 2001, in the first iteration of the Eternal Derby to take place since Milošević left office, police details were pared-down with the belief being that, five months after the Bulldozer Revolution, the Delije would curtail some elements of their behaviour. Instead, the match saw an overmatched police detail fail to reign in the use of flares and the subsequent rioting that took place in the stands of the Marakana. Indeed, despite the initial belief that the Delije would regulate themselves and soften their image, it and other Serbian supporters’ groups doubled their efforts to project supremacy in the stands. As such, the DOS government that was content in briefly aligning with the Delije while in opposition, would shortly thereafter begin to author amendments to the Serbian criminal code designed to better police and prosecute violent or destructive behaviour at sporting events. As this subsection demonstrates, despite adopting more rigid policies in line with European standards, notable incidents have continued to occur. Additionally, application of the laws varies

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ In the autumn of 2000, the Delije were primarily responsible for popularising the anti-Milošević refrain “Save Serbia, Kill Yourself.” In the aftermath of the successful revolution, some declared it the “Red Star Revolution,” owing to the Delije’s participation. The liberal network B92 even presented the Delije with an award for their role in overthrowing Milošević.

widely in the Serbian courts and often seems dependent on the Serbian press and Serbian politicians.³⁴⁰

Following the collapse of the brief alliance between the DOS government and football tribes, the Serbian government quickly moved to bring its laws on violence at sporting events in line with European standards. Before 2003, if tribe members were arrested and charged for a crime stemming from a violent incident at a football match, the perpetrator would be charged of a broader crime, such as “causing bodily harm.” In 2003, the government introduced the Law on the Prevention of Violence and Misbehaviour at Sporting Events to target offenders that specifically attended a sporting event to cause violence or misbehaviour. As the OSCE summarised,

“The offence is perpetrated by a person who enters sports grounds without authorisation, or by entering the sports grounds or the part of the grandstands intended for opposing supporters and provokes violence; physically assaults or confronts participants at the event; causes violence when arriving at or leaving the sports event; takes in the sports facility or throws on the sports ground or among spectators objects, pyrotechnics or other explosive, flammable or damaging substances which may inflict bodily injuries or jeopardise the participants’ health; damages the sports facility, its equipment, devices and installations; or provokes national, racial, and religious hatred and intolerance with behaviour or slogans resulting in violence or physical brawls at a sports event.”³⁴¹

The law was subsequently revised in 2005 and 2007 but nevertheless remained broad enough to provide a chance for Serbian law enforcement to strictly police sporting grounds and, if convicted, perpetrators would be subject to prison sentences between six months and five years depending on the severity of the crime they were accused of. A particular emphasis within the law involved the “complicity” of members of groups of three or more. Although the legal language would make it hard to prove one was a “ringleader,” a person accused of being one and inciting violence that they themselves

³⁴⁰ In 2009, Serbian Minister for Sports and Youth Snežana Samardžić-Marković revealed that although police often make arrests of offenders, only 2.4% of those arrested were sentenced for their crimes, suggesting the primary issue in combating the activity of supporters’ groups rests in the inability or unwillingness of the Serbian judiciary to properly adjudicate cases. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, “Hooliganism Spills from Political onto Sports Terrains,” (2009).

³⁴¹ Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe, “Youth and Hooliganism at Sporting Events,” (2013:82). Accessed here: <https://www.osce.org/serbia/118397?download=true>

did not participate in, can be charged with a crime. With that said, a cursory examination of the atmosphere at most Serbian football matches reveals that the behaviour of spectators is not scrutinised as closely as the law would otherwise permit. Although it was surmised that spectators were able to hide pyrotechnic flares in the confines of football grounds to avoid them being taken away during the match day security process, many Red Star and Partizan matches typically featured prominent pyrotechnic displays before and during matches, technically in violation of rules on behaviour. In 2009, the law was amended to further scale back criminal culpability as it relates to pyrotechnics to those that launch flares or other fireworks onto the pitch or amongst the crowd causing either physical or material damage. However, rules against violence and against stoking national or racial hatred through chants or displays remained firmly in place. The biggest change to the law, however, was its adoption to all public events and not just sporting events – in short, any public gathering was now subject to the same rules governing sporting events, essentially duplicating the language of the Law on Violence and Misbehaviour at Sporting Events into the Law on Public Assembly.³⁴²

Despite the wide berth given to authorities to potentially prosecute offenders at football and other sporting events for certain offenses, the most common charge levied against criminal spectators is unauthorised entry onto the sporting ground – otherwise known as “pitch invasion.” This offense became so common that an amendment to the Law pertaining to that specific crime was accepted; penalties were lowered to the potential of 30 – 60 days in prison and fines. Typically, those found guilty of this crime were particularly violent or egregious in their behaviour:

“...the Higher Court in Kragujevac found two defendants guilty for [this offense]. The first accused entered the sports ground without authorisation and physically assaulted participants in the match – in the second half of the football match between FC [Vinogradar] and FC Kragujevac, he entered into the sports ground and kicked a player of FC Kragujevac in his body, [causing] the player to fall to the ground. The second accused entered the sports ground, as a player of FC [Vinogradar], and physically assaulted a participant – in the second half of the same match, after the [victim], a player for FC Kragujevac made a foul with a sharp start against

³⁴²Ibid.

a player of the other team, the accused approached the [victim] and pushed him in his chest, [causing the victim to fall].”³⁴³

Many of these incidents involve heavily intoxicated spectators of lower league games, not necessarily members of the most prominent or well-known supporter groups in Belgrade’s largest grounds. Though, as interview subjects in Belgrade noted, leaders and members of prominent supporter groups can establish connections to elites and representatives of the Serbian government, this is not often the case for rank-and-file supporters of low-level clubs in smaller cities and towns, rendering the latter more susceptible to drawing the ire of local police, for example.³⁴⁴ However, much of this has to do with how the language of the law has been interpreted and implemented by officials. For example, many instances of provocative or extremist racial or national hatred have featured prominently at football matches in Serbia. However, the Law notes that racial or national chants or displays must “fuel” feelings of hatred to be deemed criminal. This is a broad interpretation heavily dependent on the individual reactions of spectators and a legal opinion on what “fuelling” amounts to. Additional legislative amendments have since caught Serbia up with Europe as it relates to discrimination based on protected categories at sporting events.³⁴⁵

Knowing that violence, extreme political rhetoric, and other criminal acts occur often at Serbia’s football grounds, why is it that the Serbian judiciary has been so ineffective in prosecuting offenders? As previously noted, under 3% of cases result in a criminal conviction, despite a robust law against violence and misbehaviour at sporting events. In an interview for Insajders’ (Im)potent State documentary, the then-Deputy District Attorney for Belgrade clarified the strategy often undertaken by those arrested for crimes at or around football matches: their defence attorney will argue that in order to

³⁴³ Ibid. This instance involved an actual player – not authorised to be on the pitch at the time of the offense – shoving an opposing player and being charged for it. The incident demonstrates two things: first, that the authorities and courts seem more willing to police lower division football matches rather than those involving clubs like Partizan or Red Star; and second, that it is often unique situations that compel the police and courts to act.

³⁴⁴ Author interviews, (2018).

³⁴⁵ Though much of the language that is designed to protect protected groups from discrimination is only codified in relation to sport, leaving room for interpretation for incidents that may occur before or after matches, for example.

convict the accused, the court would have to hear from many who would have witnessed the crime in question. It then becomes difficult for the court to locate these witnesses, delaying court proceedings to the point that the statute of limitations is often reached.³⁴⁶ Rather than uniformly convict lower-level members for their behaviour at matches, the model that Serbia appears to have adopted is to react based primarily on the amount of public outcry.

One such incident involved Brankica Stanković, a journalist for B92 and Insajder that produced the above mentioned (Im)potent State documentary which brought to light the Serbian state's failure to properly curtail violent or otherwise criminal behaviour amongst members of football supporters' groups. The programme incited members of supporter groups, all of whom refused to participate in the documentary.³⁴⁷ At a match between Partizan and Shakhtar Donetsk in 2009, Grobari/Alkatraz leader Miloš Radisavljević (better known as Kimi) led chants against Stanković and violently passed around a doll designed as an effigy of Stanković. The incident generated headlines as an example of a Serbia remaining a hostile environment for journalists, and that supporters' groups retained a deeply violent, chauvinistic characteristic. Perhaps because the incident was so clear cut, and perhaps because Stanković enjoyed an outsized role as a presenter on Serbian television, the case against Radisavljević remained indisputable. The courts convicted him and he served all 16 months of his sentence in prison.³⁴⁸ It was also around this time that the French fan, Brice Taton, was murdered by members of Radisavljević's Grobari subgroup, Alkatraz. As is later discussed, this period severely weakened Alkatraz, eventually causing a leadership vacuum that was filled by former Red Star fans, known as the Janissaries. Whether Radisavljević was forced to serve out his sentence because of political intervention into the Grobari supporter group is unknowable. However, that his crime was less

³⁴⁶ Insajder, "(Im)potent State: Episode One Transcript," (2009). Accessed here: <https://insajder.net/en/site/nemocdrzave/204/The-first-episode-transcript.htm>

³⁴⁷ This may have been because of the subject matter but also because Grobari members participated in a US based documentary about hooligans and were subsequently indicted because they waived guns they were not authorised to carry in front of the camera.

³⁴⁸ B92, "Hooligan Group Leader Sent to Jail," (2010). Accessed here: https://www.b92.net/eng/news/crimes.php?yyyy=2010&mm=08&dd=04&nav_id=68885. The story captured the attention of American sports outlets as well; for example, see Fox Sports, "Serbian Hooligan Sentenced to 16 Months," (2010). Accessed here: <https://www.foxsports.com/soccer/story/serbian-hooligan-sentenced-to-16-months-58019398-080410>.

severe than those often committed at football matches across Serbia – while remaining disgusting – is unquestionable. How Serbia’s judiciary chooses to prosecute low-level offenders can be summarised as being sparse and unequal. Offenders have learned the flaws within the judiciary; judges and prosecutors remain scared to rule against offenders with ties to larger supporter groups; and the process is subject to political interference.³⁴⁹ Although it is the case that some supporters’ group members have been convicted of crimes and have served prison terms, the rarity of those outcomes and the unequal disbursement of that particular punishment renders the Serbian judiciary worthy of close scrutiny.

The Case of Aleksandar Stanković

As it relates to leadership within supporters’ groups – those with the closest relationship to the Serbian political elite – the Serbian judiciary is even more dysfunctional. Leaders of supporter groups and their respective subgroups accused of crimes as severe as violent assault, attempted murder, and drug trafficking, have routinely been able to remain out of prison, their cases often drawn out over years. A notorious example is that of Aleksandar Stanković – Sale Mutavi – one of the most well-known supporters’ group leaders in Serbia.

On 13 October 2016, Aleksandar Stanković, the leader of the Janissaries supporter group, a subgroup attached to Partizan Belgrade, was shot dead in his car in central Belgrade. His bodyguard, an employee of Serbia’s Ministry of Justice, was severely wounded in the attack, which took place just minutes away from Belgrade’s central prison. The murder generated headlines throughout Serbia, prompting responses from both the then-prime minister, Aleksandar Vučić, and the interior minister Nebojša Stefanović, with the latter giving a straight-forward speech excoriating the Serbian underworld. The rhetoric was tough, and the minister promised to wage war against

³⁴⁹ In an interview, a prosecutor from Belgrade remarked that he thought politicians did not have to make calls to judges as it relates to specific cases because they did not have to – judges knew who to convict and who not to convict. Insajder, “(Im)potent State: Episode One Transcript,” (2009). Accessed here: <https://insajder.net/en/site/nemocdrzave/204/The-first-episode-transcript.htm>

the scourge of criminal organisations in Serbia. The minister never referred to Stanković by name, nor did he remark on the fact that Stanković himself was a key figure in the Serbian underworld. The speech also never touched on Stanković's lengthy list of criminal charges and convictions. Finally, the question that most were asking, but was never addressed: why was Stanković in a position to be shot in his luxury car instead of in prison for crimes he had been convicted of? The speech ended and so too did the government's interest in solving the crime – no arrests have ever been made in the murder of Stanković.

The following subsection situates Stanković and his contemporaries in the context of Serbia's ongoing unwillingness to confront supporters' groups, underworld figures, and the judicial malpractice that allowed Stanković and other supporters' group members to remain free to conduct criminal acts and, in the case of Stanković, to be murdered. It does so by examining specific cases in which those members, like Stanković, were either never charged with a crime despite obvious criminality or were convicted of a crime but through extraordinarily liberal procedural motions, were able to remain out of prison.

An aforementioned case – that of the murder of Brice Taton – helped usher in leadership changes at the top of a key supporter group. In September 2009, Partizan was to play French side Toulouse in a Europa League match. Before the match, at a bar in central Belgrade, members of Partizan's Alkatraz supporter group attacked Taton, a French supporter of Toulouse. Taton was brutalised and was eventually thrown from a ledge by the Partizan supporters. Taton suffered severe brain injuries and died twelve days later.³⁵⁰ The wider Serbian public was outraged. The French ambassador in Serbia bemoaned Serbia's approach to criminal supporters' groups and argued that the "lynching" of Taton cast a negative image of Serbia globally.³⁵¹ Fourteen assailants were charged and convicted; after the appeals process played out, all received prison sentences ranging from four to fifteen years.³⁵² One of the

³⁵⁰ See Axboe Nielsen, (2013).

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Two of the fourteen were charged and tried in absentia while the last fugitive was arrested on an Interpol warrant in Greece and extradited to Serbia in 2016. The arrest drew attention because while avoiding arrest,

prominent members of the convicted group was Đorđe Prelić, a leader within Alkatraz and a criminal with over twenty charges filed against him, though there had only been one conviction to a six month prison sentence. In the aftermath of the Taton murder, Ivica Dačić remarked that Prelić was known to be one of the most active drug dealers in Serbia. The charges against Prelić included drug manufacturing and dealing, arms dealing, and theft, but because of judicial procedure and delays, he was free to participate in the murder of Taton.³⁵³

While the Taton case was debated in courtrooms and across segments of Serbian society, the Alkatraz supporters group suffered as a sizable portion of its core membership would now be imprisoned for years. With a vacuum at the top still evident in 2013, a new subgroup within Partizan's Grobari formed – the Janissaries (*Janicari*). The name of the group, a reference to the Ottoman Janissaries that were made up of young Christians that were kidnapped from the Balkans, converted to Islam, and conscripted into military service, was bestowed because many of the members of the Janissaries group were previously aligned with other supporters' groups. This includes those that were affiliated with the same umbrella group but previously a different subgroup – Alkatraz in the Grobari, for example – or those that came from supporting completely different clubs. A former supporter of Red Star led the Janissaries. Aleksandar Stanković, usually referred to as Sale Mutavi, which translates approximately to Sale Dirty Deals, became the leader of the new dominant group aligned with Partizan. The rise of the Janissaries coincided with SNS representatives arriving at Partizan to integrate themselves within the administration of the club, as had been customary for previous ruling parties; just as that was happening, the Janissaries were routinely fighting with their fellow Grobari, Alkatraz, for control of the south stand at Partizan Stadium.³⁵⁴ The Janissaries were quickly able to establish

the fugitive became an Orthodox monk and was apprehended while in monastic robes. See b92, "Last Fugitive in Case of Murdered French Fan Extradited," (2016). Accessed here:

https://www.b92.net/eng/news/crimes.php?yyyy=2016&mm=04&dd=15&nav_id=97702.

³⁵³ Insajder, "(Im)potent State? (Part One)," (2009). Accessed here:

https://www.b92.net/eng/insajder/index.php?yyyy=2009&mm=12&dd=03&nav_id=74534.

³⁵⁴ See Vreme, "The Mutilated State," (2016). Accessed here:

<https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1436620>.

dominance within the Grobari hierarchy with a leader, Stanković, that should have already been in prison.

Stanković was a functionary in the Balkan drug trafficking trade that emanated from Montenegro through routes that had been established during the wars of the 1990s. By 2009, Stanković was running a small inexperienced crew of drug dealers that retained links to the Kavač gang, one of the two major drug trafficking gangs based in Kotor, Montenegro. By March 2010, after monitoring phone calls between Stanković and some of his associates, the police arrested Stanković and nine others, charging them with crimes ranging from drug possession to weapons violations. The evidence gathered by police pointed to Stanković as the leader of the gang. Stanković admitted this during the subsequent trials but claimed that they were not drug dealers but hooligans who sometimes participated in loan sharking. The court found Stanković guilty of drug offenses and sentenced him to nearly six years in prison.³⁵⁵ This was upheld in 2013 just as Stanković took control of the Janissaries at Partizan and Stanković began utilising a long series of exemptions that would keep him out of prison.

Stanković's ability to remain out of prison through loopholes is but one example of an ongoing failure by the Serbian judiciary to properly carry out sentences and actively retire blatantly obvious cases of criminality tied to football supporters' groups. This pattern of avoiding serious prison time began when Stanković was nineteen years old after his involvement in a physical altercation. Stanković accompanied Tomislav Antić, the owner of a furniture shop and an apparent friend of Stanković's father, to an apartment rented by customers of the shop. The customers were behind on payments for items purchased. Court documents describe what followed,

"In an interview with [victim], police officers have established that they had purchased furniture, payable in instalments, in a furniture shop located in Gospodara Vučića street. In oral agreement with Toma, the shop owner, they were supposed to pay for furniture in instalments. On 12 December

³⁵⁵ See KRIK, "Court Sentenced Sale Mutavi to Jail 12 Times," (2016). Accessed here: <https://www.krik.rs/sud-saletu-mutavom-12-puta-odlozio-zatvor/>.

*2007, around 18:00 hours, aforementioned Toma came with a person of unknown identity who threatened aforementioned persons that he would 'kill them, butcher their kids, and cut off their ears,' unless they paid the money as agreed...Toma then told them that their debt would thereafter be transferred to the second suspect, Aleksandar Stanković, who acts as his security guard. Subsequently, suspect Stanković reached beneath his jacket, feigning he had a gun and threatened the others by saying, 'if you won't do it willingly, then you will be forced to do it.'*³⁵⁶

Despite summons' to appear at a local police station, Stanković briefly went into hiding after this incident. After speaking with investigators, Antić initially claimed he would have brought Stanković to the police station himself, but Stanković was ill with a high fever. Incredibly, the charges against both Antić and Stanković were eventually dropped after the municipal court ruled that because the victim in the case did legitimately owe money to Antić, the victims invited the threats that they received.³⁵⁷

This incident potentially served as a lesson to Stanković, then a young man, on how inefficient and incomprehensible the Serbian judiciary could be. The inability or the unwillingness to prosecute the crimes of football supporters' groups continues to be a blight on both the Serbian judiciary and the wider Serbian state. Despite violent criminal behaviour and links to organised crime, conviction rates remained in the low single digits by 2010. This contrasted with broader judicial conviction rates which, following an announced "war on crime" by Vučić, rose from 51% in 2012 to 63% in 2014.³⁵⁸

Even the most egregious examples of criminality and brutality have been thrown out at various stages of the judicial process. In 2007, during a match between Red Star Belgrade and Hajduk Split, a police officer approached a stand of Red Star supporters. Uroš Mišić, a supporter of Red Star approached the police officer and, after demanding to know why the cop was in the stand, initiated an attack that many other nearby tribe members participated in. The police officer was kicked and stomped before being

³⁵⁶ Republic of Serbia, "Ministry of Internal Affairs: Report," (2007).

³⁵⁷ Republic of Serbia, "Third Municipal Court Ruling," (2009).

³⁵⁸ See Insajder, "(Im)potent State? (Part Two)," (2009). Accessed here: https://www.b92.net/eng/insajder/index.php?yyyy=2009&mm=12&dd=10&nav_id=74525.

dumped over a 10-meter-high railing. Not satisfied, Mišić lit a torch and inserted it into the police officers' mouth, causing severe injuries. At trial, Mišić claimed that he thought the police officer was a "Grobar," a supporter of Partizan Belgrade, infiltrating the stand of Red Star groups. The police officer in question disputed this in court, testifying that Mišić referred to him as a cop during the attack. Initially, Mišić was sentenced to ten years imprisonment for the attack; in the courtroom, fellow Red Star members watching the proceedings shouted threats at the presiding judge and shortly following the verdict, Red Star players warmed up in t-shirts that read "Justice for Uroš!" Subsequently, the Supreme Court vacated the verdict issued by the lower court with the stated reason being – incredibly – that it cannot be said for sure whether a torch like the one used by Mišić in the attack could potentially cause fatal injuries.³⁵⁹ Mišić's subsequent re-trials languished before he was incarcerated for half the original time he was convicted for. He has since been freed and continues to associate with Red Star supporters' groups.³⁶⁰ This was the judicial environment Stanković abutted, and which undoubtedly contributed to his expanding criminality.

Stanković, meanwhile, continued to operate freely despite his drug conviction. While he was routinely photographed participating in activities at Partizan matches as the leader of the Janissaries, he was able to consistently delay his incarceration date using a litany of excuses that better reflect the haphazard standard of judicial enforcement concerning members of supporters' groups than it does Stanković's ingenuity. Experts would review delay requests from Stanković for any number of medical reasons – many of them minor. Delay requests were signed and approved by judicial officers after Stanković claimed he had a sore knee; a slipped disc; neck problems; and a urinary tract infection.³⁶¹ Despite the conviction against Stanković, Partizan officially hired him as a "coach" in 2013. Stanković petitioned the court to delay his incarceration

³⁵⁹ For more on this, including Red Star's justification for wearing t-shirts in honour of someone who nearly burned a police officer to death, see Insajder, "(Im)potent State? (Part Two)," (2009). Accessed here: https://www.b92.net/eng/insajder/index.php?yyyy=2009&mm=12&dd=10&nav_id=74525.

³⁶⁰ Just a few months after being released from prison, Mišić was back in the headlines for a fight he allegedly instigated with two U.S. Marines in a Belgrade bar. See b92, "Hooligan Remanded in Custody Over Fight with US Marines," (2013). Accessed here: https://www.b92.net/eng/news/crimes.php?yyyy=2013&mm=03&dd=06&nav_id=85026.

³⁶¹ See OCCRP, "Serbia's Deadly Mix: Football, Politics, and Crime," (2017). Accessed here: <https://www.occrp.org/en/blog/6016-serbia-s-deadly-mix-football-politics-and-crime>.

so he would not lose his position with the club; the court granted delays on two separate occasions because of Stanković's employment contract.³⁶²

Similar judicial decisions led to supporters' group members accused of crimes as extreme as murder, having their cases left in legal limbo while they remained out of prison. Alen Kostić (Kubi), the leader of the Grobari's *Zabranjeni* subgroup, was initially charged for fourteen crimes relating to an incident in which Kostić attacked and stabbed multiple minors in a park, causing life threatening injuries. Despite the severity of the crime, he was never jailed for it. The presiding judge, Zoran Pašalić, threw out proceedings after arguing that police could not locate Kostić and, thus, the trial could not proceed. Kostić would subsequently appear before Pašalić again only to be released on bail rather than be remanded as an obvious flight risk. While Kostić would do brief stints in prison for physically assaulting a police officer at the opening of his restaurant, he was allowed to remain free from long-term incarceration. In 2013, Kostić survived being shot in the thigh before being fatally shot in 2016. Alleged constant harassment caused a young neighbour to retaliate.³⁶³ Pašalić, the judge who allowed Kostić to remain out of prison, ascended to the board of Red Star Belgrade during this period and then as head of the Ombudsman office in Serbia. In a similar case, Pašalić presided over the proceedings of Alkatraz member Aleksandar Vavić who had an instance of attempted murder on his list of charges. Vavić would avoid staying at his legal address and attending court sessions. Vavić himself was shot nine times in 2011 but survived and was eventually imprisoned for just under two years for a knife crime.³⁶⁴ This did not prevent him from celebrating at an Election Day party with Socialist Party leader Ivica Dačić in 2012.³⁶⁵

³⁶² See KRIK, "Court Sentenced Sale Mutavi to Jail 12 Times," (2016). Accessed here: <https://www.krik.rs/sud-saletu-mutavom-12-puta-odlozio-zatvor/>.

³⁶³ On Kostić, see Insajder, '(Im)potent State? (Part One),' (2009). Accessed here: https://www.b92.net/eng/insajder/index.php?yyyy=2009&mm=12&dd=03&nav_id=74534; These Football Times, "The Troubling Relationship Between Serbian Politics and Football Hooliganism," (2018). Accessed here: <https://thesefootballtimes.co/2018/06/22/the-troubling-relationship-between-serbian-politics-and-football-hooliganism/>.

³⁶⁴ See Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, "The Majority Terrorizes Common Sense," (2013). Accessed here: https://www.helsinki.org.rs/hcharter_t49a04.html.

³⁶⁵ This contributes to the notion articulated by a Serbian MP interviewed during fieldwork that certain supporter group leaders, many with long histories of criminal behaviour, rarely face significant consequences. Author Interviews, (2018). See also BIRN, "Football Hooligan Embarrassed Serbian Socialist Celebration," (2012). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2012/05/07/football-hooligan-at-socialists-celebration/>.

The Serbian public learned of Stanković after an incident in 2016 in which Stanković and two associates attacked the bodyguards of the chairman of Partizan, Miloš Vazura. Surveillance cameras at the club's facility caught Stanković and his men arriving; Stanković is seen giving the middle finger to the camera; and finally, it captures the brutal beating that ensued.



Figure 3: An image of Stanković gesturing toward a security camera.

Court documents describe what followed Stanković's arrival:

“The suspects...found themselves in the parking lot. Vazura came out of the car in order to talk to the suspects and one of them addressed him by saying ‘you are playing with fire, there is life after Partizan as well.’ [A Vazura bodyguard] came out of the car and suspect Veljko Belivuk approached him and after a short verbal quarrel, hit him with an elbow to the head, therefor [the bodyguard] fell to the ground and while he was laying on the ground, suspects Belivuk and Darko Ristić kicked him several times in the head. Vazura ran into the management building of Football Club Partizan. The suspect Ristić moved on toward the security guard who stood in front of the entrance to the management building...to whom he inflicted a blow with his hand to the head. After a short quarrel with security guards who were standing inside the management building, the suspects returned to where [bodyguard 1] was lying on the parking lot and where

suspect Belivuk kicked him one more time to his head. At that moment, [security guard 3] came out of the management building and suspects set off towards him, which made him retreat back into the management building...the suspects approached the door before pausing a little and going off in the direction of the west stand of the stadium.”³⁶⁶

Stanković remained remanded in custody for the maximum forty-eight hours before learning he would not be charged with a crime, though his associates, Ristić and Belivuk would be. After video of the incident was released, the Serbian public was disturbed enough that Vučić was asked by the press why Stanković was not charged with a crime despite his obvious involvement. Vučić replied that the video only showed Ristić and Belivuk use physical violence; when Vučić received pushback on this reply, he asked “should our authorities, the police, prosecution, and judicial authorities act in accordance with the wishes of journalists?”³⁶⁷ Amazingly, Vučić was not asked about why a man claiming health exemptions was still allowed to claim those exemptions despite being captured on video engaging in a physical assault.

In other instances, names appear in police reports, but prosecutors never follow through with questioning in relation to the crime. In 2013, members of the Janissaries, in this instance led by Veljko Belivuk, one of the assailants that accompanied Stanković on the 2016 assault on the bodyguard of the chairman of Partizan, arrived at the Hollywood Café, a small restaurant owned by Aleksandar Vavić, a fellow Grobari but in the rival subgroup Alkatraz. At this point, the Janissaries were still a new formation within the Grobari and Alkatraz, then led by Vavić, were severely weakened by the outcome of the Brice Taton investigation. According to court documents, Belivuk learned that there had been an altercation involving a friend and Vavić. This led Belivuk to organise a caravan of three cars to the Hollywood Café. Once there, Belivuk and his accomplices proceeded to vandalise the restaurant. After fleeing the scene, Belivuk returned a set of car keys

³⁶⁶ Republic of Serbia, “Criminal Behaviour Report Under Article 344, Paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia,” (2016).

³⁶⁷ See OCCRP, “Serbia’s Deadly Mix: Football, Politics, and Crime,” (2017). Accessed here: <https://www.occrp.org/en/blog/6016-serbia-s-deadly-mix-football-politics-and-crime>.

to Nenad Vučković. After police arrested some of those connected with damaging of the restaurant, this transfer of car keys was noted in the police report.³⁶⁸ However, Vučković was never questioned about any knowledge he might have had about the plan to destroy the Hollywood Café before he lent those responsible used his car. Vučković was a member of the armed forces of Serbia and sat on Partizan's assembly alongside Novak Nedić, now the secretary-general of the government of Serbia, where the duo collaborated to limit the influence of club administration in assembly meetings.³⁶⁹ Vučković's dual role as a member of the armed forces and as someone close to the supporters' groups of Partizan compelled interior minister Nebojša Stefanović to state that the government was aware of Vučković's involvement with Partizan, but that he had passed a background check and that "being a football fan is not a crime."³⁷⁰ Vučković's ties to Stanković and the Serbian political elite would be further exposed after it was revealed that senior military officers allowed men including Stanković and Vučković to use an army shooting range and military weaponry for target practice.³⁷¹ Additionally, at the presidential inauguration of Vučić in 2017, the new leader of the of the Janissaries, Borko Aranitović, was hired as security and was captured in photographs roughly manhandling anti-Vučić protestors. Another beating that Aranitović participated in

³⁶⁸ Belivuk also had a long history of either light sentence or avoiding convictions altogether. After being accused of stabbing two minors on one of Belgrade's infamous floating barges in 2007, Belivuk had those charges dropped in 2015 after paying a fine; in 2017, Belivuk was arrested as an accessory to the murder of Vladimir Milošević but was later acquitted pending appeal; and in punishing Belivuk for the assault of the bodyguards of the chairman of Partizan, Belivuk received one year of unsupervised house arrest. Since an arrest in 2021, Belivuk has since declared that he and his allies have worked closely with members of the Serbian government. See, BIRN, "Fatal Gang Clashes Rock Serbian Cities," (2017). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/02/13/criminal-gang-fight-erupts-in-serbia-02-10-2017/>.

³⁶⁹ In the years since, Nedić – who remains Secretary-General of the Serbian government – has been accused of directly intervening on behalf of Belivuk to prevent his arrest. Documents and accounts from the era illustrate how he diverted the investigation and tipped off supporter group members about potential future arrests. See, NIN/Geopost, "NIN: General Secretary of the Government Novak Nedić Protect Veljko Belivuk's Group," (2022). Accessed here: <https://thegeopost.com/en/news/nin-general-secretary-of-the-government-novak-nedic-protected-veljko-belivuks-group/>.

³⁷⁰ On the Hollywood Café incident and the lack of police questioning of Vučković, see Center for Investigative Journalism of Serbia, "Prosecutor's Office Did Not Investigate Connection Between Nenad Vučković and Demolishing of Café Belonging to Aleksandar Vavić," (2017). Accessed here: https://www.cins.rs/english/research_stories/article/prosecutors-office-did-not-investigate-connection-between-nenad-vukovi-and-demolishing-of-cafe-belonging-to-aleksandar-vavi.

³⁷¹ Belivuk was also allowed to use the shooting range and military grade weaponry. On this, see BIRN, "Serbian Army Chiefs 'Gave Hooligans Shooting Practice,'" (2017). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/02/07/serbian-soldiers-demands-probe-over-football-fans-military-links-02-07-2017/>.

became public after it was reported that Vučković was revealed to have gleefully watched a video of the incident.³⁷²

After successfully delaying his prison sentence twelve times over the course of three years, Stanković was fatally shot, allegedly on orders from Montenegrin drug traffickers over an unpaid cocaine deal.³⁷³ The discussion brought forth in this subsection was not authored in an attempt to deduce whether specific members of the Serbian political elite are personally profiting or complicit in drug trafficking or extrajudicial murder – that would be far beyond the capabilities of this (or any) thesis. What it has proven instead is a pattern in which the Serbian judiciary, institutionally weak and lacking a real mandate for action from Serbia’s elected political elite, have allowed a cadre of thugs, drug dealers, and murderers to avoid long jail terms and to continue their associations. The Janissaries demonstrate the obvious: this behaviour and its founding is not about sport or loyalty to Partizan football club.³⁷⁴ Instead, a group of entrepreneurial gangsters muscled into an opportunity to run criminal enterprises that were once organised by Alkatraz. Unfortunately, as their crimes spilled out into the streets and onto the front pages, the government’s “war on the mafia” failed. Without substantial judicial reforms and a committed political strategy to disassociate supporters’ groups from those in power, Serbia football will remain replete with informality.

Conclusion

Serbia’s judicial system has been manipulated by opportunistic actors since the fall of Yugoslavia and the regime of Slobodan Milošević. In Serbia today, those that are afforded blind justice are not limited to a wealthy elite, but also to the perpetrators of

³⁷² On this connection, see OCCRP, “Serbian President’s Party Tied to Football Hooligans,” (2017). Accessed here: <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigations/6744-serbian-president-s-party-tied-to-football-hooligans>.

³⁷³ See the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, “Hotspots of Organised Crime in the Western Balkans,” (2019). Accessed here: <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Hotspots-Report-English-16May1245-Web.pdf>.

³⁷⁴ This does not mean that Partizan was not loyal to Stanković – or was at least keeping supporters’ groups pacified – as players from the football team wore t-shirts during their warm-ups with Stanković’s face on the front following his murder.

violent and dangerous street crimes. What this chapter captures is the continuity of an informal arrangement as it relates to both the Serbian judiciary and to football supporters' groups. For three decades, Serbian supporters' groups have enjoyed remarkable status within Serbia's wider societal, criminal, and political structures that differs sharply from similar groups in neighbouring Croatia. In Serbia, those supporters' group members that fell into paramilitary organisations during the wars of Yugoslav succession received *carte blanche* to pillage and plunder; on their return to Serbia, few faced serious repercussions. Successive Serbian leaders – reformists included – have demonstrated their unwillingness or inability to stridently curtail criminal elements embedded in supporters' groups, and despite the structural reforms that are required of Serbia's pursuit of accession to the European Union, Serbian leaders have also refrained from adopting badly needed reforms of its judiciary. Because drug dealers and the purveyors of violent crime have benefitted from the lack of progress on improving the standards of the judiciary, and because Serbia's judiciary remains rife with structural flaws in place for decades, one can conclude that informal relations and processes like those discussed in the preceding chapter are influential in the trajectory of reform.

The conclusions reached in the chapter amount to a significant development in the understanding of the relationship between politics, the Serbian state, and football supporter groups. Scholars like Axboe-Nielsen wondered if supporter groups were "stronger than the state" and thus were able to frequently commit violent acts with little long-term consequences. The chapter demonstrates that it is often those that represent the state itself that maintain informal networks that hamper reforms and that prolong development.

Chapter Five: Flavours of Informality in Croatian Football

The following chapter explores “flavours of informality” in Croatian football as a means of demonstrating its pervasiveness. The chapter utilises the “flavours” framework in a similar manner to chapter three and, like with Serbia, illustrates that Croatian football is inundated with informal processes and networks comprised of a variety of actors with diverse profiles that participate within circumscribed networks. This chapter also follows a timeline effect to demonstrate the resilience of informal activities. The chapter includes a subsection on top politics (1990s – early 2000s) that features a political aide of Franjo Tuđman that was thrust into a position of governance over football because of his willingness to carry out the directives of his benefactor. In the corruption section (2000s – 2010s), the allure of match-fixing is discussed in the Croatian context, as actors as diverse as wealthy owners and underpaid athletes pain conspiracies to undermine the sport for profit. And the subsection on economic informality (2010s – 2020s) details the exploits of a successful Croatian businessman who took control of his hometown team in Rijeka, sought to disguise potential profits, and to benefit from the loose application of formal regulations by authorities as the result of the maintenance of informal networks. The case studies have been chosen to establish that informal networks and processes do not penetrate football in any one fashion, but in multiple ways, while also confirming that not one type of actor is involved in networks or processes – instead, networks rely on diverse participants to achieve favourable outcomes. It situates football as a domain inundated with networked informalities and does so in a manner that is indicative of wider issues of informal associations of power and governance in Croatia. This includes elite politicians in the post- Tuđman era and the failure not only to curtail abuses, but their own participation in them.

The broader backdrop in Croatia is one that is representative of its inability to root out informality even as it introduces and implements reforms. Though Croatian leaders since Tuđman have attempted to introduce a reform agenda, including the apparent strengthening of the Office for Combating Corruption and Organised Crime (*Ured za suzbijanje korupcije I organiziranog kriminaliteta* - USKOK), in practice, many of those same leaders were engulfed in scandal. This includes the former Prime Minister, Ivo Sanader, who led a government that released a Croatian government report that

documented significant abuse and failings during the era of privatisation during the Tuđman years. Despite this, and despite pledging to reign in corruption, European progress reports were direct in their criticism, concluding that “A serious implementation of anti-corruption procedures on the part of state administration is lacking, while many political bodies support the centrally coordinated anti-corruption effort only in words.”³⁷⁵ The analysis provided by observers proved to be prescient, as Sanader eventually resigned his office after he and aides were accused of various forms of corruption.

Despite successor governments working with European stakeholders to improve anti-corruption efforts within Croatia – enough to satisfy the EU that Croatia achieved membership within the bloc - perceptions of corruption remain high in Croatia. Transparency International currently scores Croatia a 48 on a 0 – 100 scale (0 being “highly corrupt”), which places Croatia at 60th worldwide.³⁷⁶ Corruption scandals have plagued both the Social Democratic Party of Croatia (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske* – SDP), which was elected to government in 2011³⁷⁷ following the Sanader scandals, and the HDZ. Scandals has also befallen big business, as Agrokor, the region’s largest conglomerate, collapsed under the weight of financial impropriety committed by its politically well-connected executives.³⁷⁸

It is in this environment – one in which reform measures designed to satisfy European observers have failed to be universally applied and have failed to deter corruption – that informality in Croatian football has become ingratiated.

³⁷⁵ European Council, “Croatia: EU Enlargement 2009 Progress Report,” (2009).

³⁷⁶ Transparency International, “Croatia,” (2019). Accessed here: <https://www.transparency.org/country/HRV>.

³⁷⁷ The SDP PM, Zoran Milanović, sacked his powerful finance minister, Slavko Linić, after revelations that Linić allowed a wood-processing firm to avoid bankruptcy in exchange for land that was appraised at over US\$5 million its actual value. See Economist Intelligence Unit, “Finance Minister Sacked,” (2014). Accessed here: http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=291793413&Country=Croatia&topic=Politics&subtopic=F_4.

³⁷⁸ Agrokor was once one of the largest employers in the region but collapsed under the weight of scandals enabled by “crony capitalism.” On this, see Ivanković, (2017).

Top Politics: Franjo Tuđman's Political Minion – 1990s

Football in Croatia has been an arena in which political influence, power, and opportunism have been defining features, both before and since its separation from Yugoslavia. From the outset and through the first decade of independence, spent primarily with Franjo Tuđman and the HDZ in power, football, as in other political, social, business, and cultural institutions, was leveraged and exploited and perverted in pursuit of greater political power, greater access to political power, greater access to money, and ultimately greater access to the informal networks that governed the state. The bodies that governed Croatian football were politicised and stacked with politicians and functionaries loyal to the government and to Tuđman; prominent matches were purposely and strategically exploited for political gain; and the power of the state was exerted in efforts that even included helping to secure preferred outcomes in matches. The consequences of incorporating football into the wider nationalist cronyism nation-building project undertaken by Tuđman and his circle of allies were two-fold: first, it ensured that football would, in the long term, remain a domain in which political and business actors could build or utilise informal connections to increase the likelihood of preferred outcomes both inside and outside football; and second, that the exploitation of the sport and its structures has led to many football fans and supporters maintaining a fundamental distrust and distaste for the manner in which the game is governed in Croatia.³⁷⁹

As Brentin, Sindbæk, Sack & Suster, and Lalić & Galić have argued, football was of symbolic importance to Tuđman for a host of reasons. The iconography and the pageantry – flags, songs, chants, logos – that accompanied football (and wider sport) made Croatia's independence and its new dawn as an independent state appear more

³⁷⁹ Perasović & Mustapić chart the very origins of sceptical public perceptions of elites, stating "The development and establishment of this type of national capitalism, as well as the political and social processes by which it is accompanied, could not, due to its speed of development, pass without serious socio-tectonic tremors and collateral victims of this process, which are colloquially referred to as transition losers. Most Croatian citizens are considered to be transition losers, because their self-perception is not related exclusively to the objective indicators showing the standard of living or some other economic and statistical categories. However, beside these transition losers...there are also citizens whose aspirations and achievements in transition are markedly discrepant, and so all those people together form the dissatisfied majority in society and spur distrust in the political elite, whose legitimacy is at stake," Perasović & Mustapić, (2013:264).

immediate and more visceral. And as an outlet of patriotic pride, it was unrivalled in its potential to demonstrate a sort of national commitment amongst people of all types to the project that was before them - that of a new Croatian nation-state. It also demonstrated that same commitment to nations abroad, including those states whose acceptance and recognition was vital to the near-and-long-term potential of an independent Croatia. That this commitment could be transmitted via matches of football, some of which would be broadcast on television the world over, where the most layman of people could watch and accept that Croatia was an independent state unto itself, was something Tuđman intrinsically understood.³⁸⁰ Sport, in essence, would move people and it would inspire people – both Croatians reeling from the devastation of warfare and great uncertainty that lay before them; and the rest of the world, impressed and moved by the resilience on display.

What Tuđman figured he could not do, though, is risk football and its symbolism becoming about something else other than the Croatian state. He could not allow the wrong team to win. He could not allow disruptive fans and supporter groups to usurp the message that he wanted to the people of Croatia to take from the match. He could not allow allusions to the past and to Yugoslavia to blunt the government's nationalist, patriotic characteristic. And so, officials would manage football politically in deference to the wishes of Tuđman and the government. And so, for Tuđman, as it was across Croatian society, he and his allies ensured football would be governed by those that would be willing to implement Tuđman's vision for the sport. The exercising of control over football led to both hyper politicisation and, ultimately 'crony bias'.³⁸¹ The Croatian form of cronyism, particularly under Tuđman, is in line with Aligica & Tarko's definition in which they note that the "key distinguishing feature is that the prevailing rent-seeking structure is legitimised by means of a populist ideology."³⁸² The Tuđman-led network

³⁸⁰ As Brentin notes, a key early example of this was an exhibition match played in 1990, prior to Croatia's formal declaration of independence, between the United States national team and the "Croatian national team." The match was a diplomatic triumph for Tuđman. "Extensively using Croatian national symbols, particularly the checkerboard pattern, to juxtapose the present US symbols, the event also served to associate the proclaimed government's political affiliation with 'western values' and to suggest an informal recognition by the USA." Brentin, (2013:998).

³⁸¹ See Hellman et al., (2000); Johnston, (2005); Rose-Ackerman, (2005); Johnson & Mitton, (2003).

³⁸² Aligica & Tarko, (2014:156-157). Usefulness in these crony systems is measured not in effectiveness in office or the performance of any one firm or individual, but in how reliably they act on behalf of those in a power.

that governed Croatia draped itself in the proverbial flag of the new state while simultaneously narrowing opportunities for power and wealth to a select few. Hand-picked lieutenants often governed this system.

The first president of the HNS upon Croatia's independence was an HDZ politician, Mladen Vedriš, who first filled the position in 1990, as Yugoslavia's collapse began to intensify. Vedriš had been a key voice in Croatian football's apparatus as divisions within Yugoslavia emerged across varied areas of society, including football, which constituent nations of Yugoslavia wished to reform. Some of the negotiations and proposals offered by Vedriš on behalf of the HNS and Croatia, seemed to be made with international legitimacy in mind – an early indicator of what Tuđman understood to be a powerful tool toward national recognition. As Mills noted,

“The Croats proposed an orderly dismantling of the [Yugoslav Football Association], with each national association emerging as a sovereign entity. The latter could then freely decide whether to enter a new confederal relationship, which would more closely resemble what the FSJ was supposed to be: ‘an association of all associations’...Vedriš stressed that ‘disassociation’ did not mean withdrawal and that the Croats were interested in a ‘marriage’ based on genuine partnership. A key objective was to secure separate international recognition for member associations.”³⁸³

So it was that the final days of Yugoslav football would help chart the path forward for an independent Croatia that would employ football as a stratagem towards political and diplomatic legitimacy. That carried over into the early years of independent Croatian football. The HNS ensured that a Croatian national team participated in matches of great symbolism and elevated its players to being representatives of the nation incarnate in scenarios in which “the imagined community of millions seem[ed] more real as a team of eleven named people.”³⁸⁴

³⁸³ Mills, (2018:273).

³⁸⁴ Hobsbawm (1991:143) cited in Brentin, (2014:187). The state investing in the HNS and the Croatian national team brought positive results quickly, as Croatia defied all expectations to finish third in the 1998 World Cup tournament.

In domestic football, Tuđman believed in equal measure that a dominant Croatian club, made more competitive because of robust investment from the state and from allied industry (much of which was populated by Tuđman loyalists), would represent the nation well in European club competitions. Croatian football featured several competitive clubs and proud supporters, ensuring that if Tuđman wished to promote a single club as being the most dominant in the country, it would require the efforts of the state and more actors in critical positions – those individuals that would work to advance the Tuđman agenda in football. To manifest the results that he sought, Tuđman turned to an ally to who he would bestow an impressive array of titles over the course of the 1990s - Zlatko Čanjug. Čanjug, a crony of the regime, ensured that preferences were given to allies of Tuđman and informal control over football was continuously leveraged. Čanjug exemplified the promotion of otherwise generally unqualified individuals to roles in which they were given by the president because of pre-existing relations with elites and their willingness to advance the priorities of those same elites. In describing an *uhljeb*, Banović states,

*“An uhljeb is a party member, a relative or a friend who obtains a...job irrespective of his competences, based solely on his friendship, kinship or political party links, and whenever possible contributes to the multiplication of uhljeb or favouritism towards his in-groups as a payback favour. An uhljeb provides a robust illustration of the embeddedness of social relations in the economic behaviour of post-socialist societies, Croatia in this case.”*³⁸⁵

The appointment of Čanjug to lead in a domain considered important by the leading figures in Croatian society, including Tuđman, is symbolic of wider expectations within Croatian society that one's value – and thus their suitability for public employment – is based on their personal connections and what they may be able to provide to those connections in return for jobs, or other such opportunities. Individuals like Čanjug ascending to important roles as a result of his relationship to Tuđman is something of a cultural expectation in Croatia, surmised to be a relic of the nomenklatura legacy and the view that to get ahead, one must negotiate social connections as fiercely as they might acquire relevant skills.³⁸⁶ Networks developed under Tuđman may have

³⁸⁵ Šimić Banović, (2019:293).

³⁸⁶ Ibid. See also Šimić Banović, (2015).

benefitted from societal acquiescence and the implied understanding that individuals like Canjuga are exactly the type that would fill essential roles.

Canjuga served as the president of the Zagreb City Council, the president of the Zagreb branch of the HDZ, president of the Council of Croatian Radio and Television, vice president of the national HDZ, advisor to Tuđman for internal affairs, and president of the assembly of the football club Croatia Zagreb. Canjuga's close relationship with Tuđman earned him his impressive number of portfolios and his outsized degree of power and ego led him to refer to himself as "Caesar."³⁸⁷ His political influence grew as he demonstrated to Tuđman that he could assist in the managing of crises that threatened the President. Ultimately Canjuga was "typical of the small group of trusted lieutenants who ran every aspect of Croatian life on behalf of the...president" and who eventually presided over "a system which bred inefficiency and brought poverty and high taxes for the majority."³⁸⁸ Until the detrimental nature of Tuđman's system of governance was exposed in the days leading up to and immediately following his death, it was individuals like Canjuga that catered to and fostered informal networks designed to implement the president's agenda and solve political quandaries.

By the middle part of the 1990s, Tuđman had succeeded in moving the HDZ further to the right and toward authoritarianism. The 1995 "Zagreb Crisis" exemplifies the latter, as the HDZ was defeated in that year's local election in the capital.³⁸⁹ However, a provision in the Croatian Constitution of 1990 mandated that the elected mayor of Zagreb had to be confirmed by the president. Tuđman refused to confirm the mayoral

³⁸⁷ Central European Review, "The Art of Playing Football, (2000). Accessed here: <https://www.pecina.cz/files/www.ce-review.org/00/10/cvijetic10.html>. Canjuga's appointment to head of the Council of Croatian Radio and Television (HRT) was seen as a negative development by the OSCE in an analysis of the state of free media and related legislation in Tuđman's Croatia. "The credibility of the Government's stated intention to convert HRT from a state to a public service broadcaster was further harmed in February 1999 when Mr. Zlatko Canjuga, a deputy president of the ruling HDZ party, was appointed as head of the new HRT Council." Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), "Report on Media in Croatia," (1999). Accessed here: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/d/25459.pdf>.

³⁸⁸ Irish Times, "Croat Right Admits First Poll Defeat Since 1990," (2000). Accessed here: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/croat-right-admits-first-poll-defeat-since-1990-1.230704>.

³⁸⁹ In parliamentary elections held on the same day, the HDZ achieved their highest percentage of ballots cast, likely due to Croatia's overwhelming military in Operation Storm in August of 1995.

nominee of the new centre-left coalition that formed the majority of the Zagreb city council, instead referring to the opposition as being full of dilettantes and Yugo-provocateurs.

For the first time under his leadership, Tuđman was confronted with large-scale civil opposition as over 100,000 people joined demonstrations in Zagreb.³⁹⁰ Tuđman targeted independent news and ordered the police to move against the demonstrators, but the order was not carried out. Tuđman's national government attempted to separate the city of Zagreb from its suburbs, where the HDZ was stronger. However, owing to a centre-left coalition comprised of prominent former members of the HDZ who left the party responding in protest to Tuđman's heavy-handed approach to governing, even these tactics did not earn the HDZ the majority it sought on the Zagreb council. For two years Zagreb went without a mayor as Tuđman and his allies continued to argue that it was somehow unnatural for the governing coalition of a capital city be comprised of the national opposition. In 1997, elections were carried out yet again, although this time the HDZ performed well enough with voters to only be two seats shy of a majority. To ensure that the HDZ would govern the city, Tuđman tasked Canjuga with winning over elected representatives from other parties, convincing them to join the HDZ caucus. In return, Canjuga would be named President of the Zagreb City Council. Eventually, the HDZ regained the majority in the city council after it was alleged that two councillors from the Croatian Peasant Party accepted bribes from Canjuga to cross the aisle and sit with the HDZ.³⁹¹ Canjuga had earned his reputation as a political fixer for Tuđman and thus was placed into ever more sensitive and politically useful positions.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ By this time, Tuđman was aware that he was suffering from stomach cancer and was in Washington, DC receiving treatment as protests swelled. Part of the protest against Tuđman was because of the government closing Radio 101, a popular station that provoked a number of different social groups. This included the Bad Blue Boys who were already staunchly opposed to Tuđman, to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the government. Global Nonviolent Action Database – Swarthmore College, "Croats Protest Closure of Radio Station (Radio 101), 1996." Accessed here: <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/croats-protest-closure-radio-station-radio-101-1996>.

³⁹¹ See Dolenc, (2013) and Central European Review, "The Art of Playing Football," (2000). Accessed here: <https://www.pecina.cz/files/www.ce-review.org/00/10/cvijetic10.html>.

³⁹² Begović, (2022) notes that a framework for the general acceptance of informal or corrupt practices in sports is developed as politicians elect to weigh in on sporting governance. This is often accomplished through the employment of networks to implement regime goals. See also Numerato, (2009); Begović, (2020).

As head of Croatia Zagreb, Canjuga worked to satisfy the demands of Tuđman in a manner consistent with the debilitating cronyism that was rampant throughout the Croatian state and various adjacent sectors. This came to include interacting directly with footballers and managers in attempts to sign players or influence football strategy ahead of matches, exercises that seemed to demonstrate that while Tuđman leveraged football for political purposes, he was also willing to use the power of his office because he was a fan of the sport.³⁹³ Another adviser, Slaven Letica, thought that “fifty percent of [Tuđman’s] time and eighty percent of his emotions” were spent on football.³⁹⁴ International stories of Tuđman’s supporter-like mentality were often authored in an endearing way, particularly as a result of Croatia’s improbable 1998 World Cup performance. The New York Times, for example, described Tuđman as:

“The president of Croatia and a huge soccer fan [who] had lunch with the team...before Saturday’s match...’he put the pressure off,’ defender Slaven Bilić said. ‘He said we’re already knights of Croatia.’ Afterward, Tuđman visited the team in its locker room and, giddy with victory, told the players that they could make it to next Sunday’s championship game. ‘He was like a little child,’ Bilić said.”³⁹⁵

This image of Tuđman as Croatia’s supporter-in-chief was betrayed by the utilisation of raw state power in pursuit of beneficial outcomes for the president’s political tribe.

Canjuga’s reign as president of Croatia Zagreb included an event marked by the involvement of state security agencies in influencing the outcome of a football match at the behest of Tuđman. Croatia Zagreb was at risk of losing the league to Rijeka - a result that Tuđman did not find palatable. On the last day of the season, Rijeka were

³⁹³ Describing Tuđman’s eagerness to influence on-field decisions and his fandom, he was reported to have “[A]ttended the club’s matches and at times even acted as their director of football – in 1997, he talked Prosinečki into returning to the club he had left as a youngster a decade ago; two years earlier, he had secured the signing of 19-year-old Mark Viduka, an ethnic Croat, during his ceremonial visit to Australia. ‘The president wanted me to board his plane and fly to Zagreb with him straight away, but I told him I needed some more time,’ the striker said.” Holiga in The Football Quarterly, “The Captain’s Coup,” (2016).

³⁹⁴ The Guardian, “Where Secret Agents Tail Referees,” (1999). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/1999/aug/15/newsstory.sport9>.

³⁹⁵ The New York Times, “World Cup ’98; Croatia and its Fortunate Sons,” (1998). Accessed here: <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/06/sports/world-cup-98-croatia-and-its-fortunate-sons.html>.

to play Osijek and, if they were victorious, Rijeka would finish just above Croatia for the title – a loss or a draw would ensure Croatia won the league. During the match, it appeared that Rijeka clinched a 2-1 victory with a late goal from the Bosnian striker Admir Hasančić, but the referee deemed that Hasančić, for Rijeka, was offside and disregarded the goal. The game finished 1-1 and Croatia were crowned champions of the league, a result that led Tuđman to declare that “there is a god!”³⁹⁶ In the aftermath of the match, television pundits, including the president of the referee’s association, went over the dramatic result in great detail, with the consensus being that the referee’s call was the right one. However, this was before another angle of the offside call was shown on screen across the country courtesy of a Slovenian television network that had obtained the additional footage – it showed with absolute certainty that the referee had gotten the call wrong and that Hasančić was very clearly onside. The newspaper Nacional then reported that it had obtained documents demonstrating the involvement of Ivan Brzović, a member of the Croatian secret service, as well as football official, Rene Sinovičić, and “Zadar businessman,” Zdravko Mamić.³⁹⁷

It was later revealed that 200,000 German deutschmarks were transferred to Osijek and that club’s president, Antun Novalić, through a phantom contract for services never rendered.³⁹⁸ A Service for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (*Služba za zaštitu ustavnog poretka* – SZUP) report that was obtained by the Croatian press, revealed that the secret service specifically sought to include Rene Sinovičić because

³⁹⁶ Malović & Selnow, (2001:78).

³⁹⁷ Ibid,

³⁹⁸ Novalić’s reign in charge of Osijek was, even beyond this particular incident, controversial. Novalić was a banker from Osijek who became president of the football club in 1996 as his ties to Tuđman and the HDZ solidified. Novalić made substantial donations to some of Tuđman’s preferred causes and gifted the president expensive art before it was alleged that his bank facilitated the anonymous – thought to be HDZ-led – purchase of the Zagreb-based daily newspaper, Večernji. In 2000, just after the SPD-led coalition formed a government, Novalić was arrested for embezzlement when it was alleged that he personally profited from the sale of players from Osijek to the German side Bayern Leverkusen. Novalić’s defence, which was successful, was that when he took control of Osijek, the club was in such dire financial straits that he had no choice but to circumvent transactional rules in order to pay, and then transfer, Osijek’s most promising players. In 2007, a judge acquitted Novalić when he ruled that Osijek’s financial quagmire allowed Novalić to violate Croatian law - a rather incredible conclusion. Novalić died a young man in 2009; Osijek later faced bankruptcy before being privatised and sold. This affair also involved the subject of chapter six, Zdravko Mamić. AIM Zagreb, “Arrests in High Society,” (2000). Accessed here: <http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/trae/archive/data/200003/00308-004-trae-zag.html>; Nacional, “Documents That Prove that Dinamo Bought the 1999 Football Championship,” (2002). Accessed here: <http://arhiva.nacional.hr/en/clanak/18098/documents-which-prove-that-dinamo-bought-the-1999-football-championship>; IWPR, “Tapes Nail Tuđman Cronies,” (2000). Accessed here: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/tapes-nail-tudjman-cronies>.

the referee had previously been implicated in a wide array of crimes ranging from theft to racketeering. After the publishing of these allegations, the HDZ launched a sustained attack on journalists at Nacional, threatening legal action.³⁹⁹

The utilisation of Croatian intelligence agencies on behalf of a political project favoured by the HDZ (or factions within the HDZ) was in line with the era, in which agencies, including the *Hrvatska izvještajna služba* (HIS – Croatian Intelligence Service) overseen by Tuđman's son Miroslav, frequently interfered in public life or the political process. Intelligence services in this era were:

“Plagued with political intrigues and infighting. It saw the components of the intelligence system serve political ends and work at protecting their interests to the detriment of the national interest of the Croatian state. There was insufficient control and coordination of their activities and too high a turnover in leaders. Challenges to their activities and half-hearted attempts at reform, however, began to surface as Tuđman and the HDZ were increasingly losing their grip on power.”⁴⁰⁰

Canjuga's reign over the club occurred as political infighting and mismanagement throughout Croatia contributed to severe economic malaise. After nearly a decade of independence and years marked by war and recovery, the political mood in Croatia by the end of the 20th century, was forged by the public's response to ten years of Franjo Tuđman and the Croatian Democratic Union in power. Tuđman's support was derived from his leadership of the country during the wars of the 1990s, but by 1999 and 2000, the attention of the Croatian electorate veered away from the war and toward economic issues and “normal” politics. By 2000, the per-capita GDP of Croatia was just US\$4,873 – a figure that Tuđman and representatives from the HDZ disputed.⁴⁰¹ Unemployment was pervasive, reaching nearly 20%, while the government introduced import and export taxes on good bought from or brought to Croatia, contributing to consumer prices doubling as wages stagnated. With little investment in social programmes or infrastructure, the public of Croatia was left to contend with the

³⁹⁹ These threats eventually subsided without the HDZ taking action following Tuđman's death.

⁴⁰⁰ Lefebvre, (2012:129).

⁴⁰¹ See Bellamy, (2001). Tuđman argued that the figure provided could not be true and that it was surely US\$15,000.

consequences of a war fought on Croatian soil on their own or through their own social networks. At the conclusion of the war in Croatia, there were 13,500 dead, 30,000-plus wounded, and over 400,000 homeless. Rural roads were left scarred and banks almost routinely collapsed - owing to an economy that was being propped up by a “cadre-policy” of well-connected individuals, some of whom either: A) intentionally plundered firms they were put in charge of, becoming extraordinarily wealthy while leaving behind a shuttered business; or B) had no natural predication to running any sort of enterprise which thus closed due to mismanagement.

It was this policy, a privatisation process conducted largely through informal connections and networks tied to the president, that constitutes the “original sin” of Croatia’s transitional economy.⁴⁰² This structure and its related processes began to buckle under the weight of its own hubris and mismanagement by the end of the 20th century and this continues to reverberate today. In trying to create a *nouveau riche* with a “Croatian face,” the governments,

“Real goal [was] a capitalist economy distinguished by the close interrelation and penetration of a fairly narrow new national and economic political elite, controlling the most valuable national resources, commanding the superior knowledge of collective, national priorities, and showing highly paternalistic and clientelistic attitudes and behaviour toward citizens.”⁴⁰³

Tuđman’s government sought to build an economy that was aligned with the nationalist political doctrine that it adopted as part of its governing strategy. This manifested itself in two ways. First, by taking a hostile position toward foreign investment in state-owned firms during the privatisation process.⁴⁰⁴ Second, by turning state-owned enterprises over to an exclusive roster of well-connected Croatians that the government hoped would ably embrace, serving as an impressive elite to rival established European and North American families of prestige. These attractive

⁴⁰² See Grubiša, (2005).

⁴⁰³ Franičević, (1999:33).

⁴⁰⁴ Foreign investors occasionally attempted to take over state-owned enterprises in Croatia, but these offers were rare in the mid and late 1990s following the conclusion of the conflicts in the region. The Tuđman government limited foreign investment to new endeavours.

dignified clans would, the policy assumed, help attract capital for new ventures in Croatia, helping to create sustainable opportunities for the middle class. The approach the government took to achieve this goal, was to operationalise a privatisation policy that would funnel state-owned enterprises to two hundred families through a perverted system of “meritocracy” that favoured members and supporters of the HDZ, family members of the political elite, and pro-Tuđman veterans of the Homeland and Yugoslav wars.

The regime accomplished this through the Law on Privatisation, which was initially passed in the Croatian parliament in 1991. What made the law effective policy for the government was its “bewildering complexity.”⁴⁰⁵ From its initial introduction in 1991 through 1996, the law was amended twelve times to suit the needs of the moment. By complicating the law, those other than the preferred buyers of the government were either left confounded or shut out of the process because they were unaware of changes.⁴⁰⁶ Additionally, wartime clouded the public consciousness for the initial years of privatisation; while the ambiguity of the Privatisation Law helped undermine challenges to government policy, those that were able to navigate the murky legislative language and make appeals were criticised for questioning the government during the wars. In this way, the HDZ government successfully appealed to the fear many Croatians were understandably living with, while silencing protest. Banks, many of which were already under the auspices of the state, were often pressured into making risky loans to preferred buyers, relying not on collateral or other forms of capital, but on promises to pay. Contrary to traditional business practices, banks turned away more qualified buyers in favour of government backed candidates.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵ Frydman & Rapaczynski, (1994).

⁴⁰⁶ When employees of state-run enterprises were able to raise the capital to buy shares of the newly privatised firm, the government was hostile. They would either introduce limits to the number of shares in the firm that the employee(s) could acquire, or they just annulled the purchase. See Grubiša, (2005).

⁴⁰⁷ An example of this involved a state-run women’s leather and embroidery accessory outfit, Rukotvorine. In 1994, the firm was made available for purchase from the government. The firm yielded three bids: an offer of eight million deutschmarks from an Italian businessman with Croatia roots with a loan fully guaranteed by a bank in Italy; five million deutschmarks from existing managers who would mortgage private property as collateral to secure a bank loan; and an offer of 3.5 million deutschmarks from two HDZ members who would secure the purchase through a loan from the same bank negotiating the sale. The HDZ members were awarded the firm, which they then sold the office building the firm used as a headquarters, rented out the storefronts that the company owned to new shops, and fired the bulk of the workforce. The HDZ members became fantastically wealthy in short order while hundreds lost their jobs. See Ramet, (2011).

Unsurprisingly, this policy was detrimental to the Croatian banking industry where, in 1996 alone, five banks, responsible for over half of all bank loans in Croatia, fell into insolvency and had to be taken over by the state.⁴⁰⁸ By 1999 and 2000, it was abundantly clear that the outcomes the government had intended to occur as a result of its *nouveau riche* project had succeeded in just one way: there now existed an upper-class made up almost entirely of HDZ functionaries and their families. Otherwise, the policy was an abject failure: unemployment rose as a result; a quarter of the privatised firms went bankrupt; and 64% of the firms were left to fester with no development or subsequent investments ever put into the companies. Rather than investing in a war-ravaged populace in a more democratic fashion, Tuđman's government built a society born with inequality in its veins. Unsurprisingly, the general populace turned their noses to the *nouveau riche* and instead referred to them as the *nouveau niche*: the new nothing. Unfortunately, this was in perception only as the policy that created the new rich of Croatia continues to influence politics and policy decades since it was initiated.⁴⁰⁹

To achieve favoured policies for the in-group built and overseen by Tuđman, the president relied on individuals like Canjuga.⁴¹⁰ Canjuga, and those like him, served their political benefactor – Tuđman – right up to the moment that the president died of cancer. For Canjuga, this included seconding Tuđman in the latter's conflict with the Bad Blue Boys, the supporter group for Croatia Zagreb regarding the name of the club. In a bid to eradicate socialist nomenclature from Croatian life, Tuđman renamed Dinamo Zagreb, arguing that “Dinamo” – the name itself – was historically tied to communist Yugoslavia. A more “Croatian name for a Croatian champion”⁴¹¹ was more

⁴⁰⁸ See World Bank, “Episodes of Systemic and Borderline Financial Crises,” (2003). Accessed here: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRES/Resources/469232-1107449512766/648083-1108140788422/23456_Table_on_systemic_and_non-systemic_banking_crises_January_21_2003.pdf.

⁴⁰⁹ Grubiša, (2005).

⁴¹⁰ Csillag & Szelényi, (2015) argue that because of the effort of Tuđman and his allies to build a strong network around the president, many of the elites of the late 1980s and early 1990s were not refreshed or supplanted over the course of the initial decade of Croatian independence. This helped entrench certain elites over time even as governments changed and as political managers reliant on individual patrons were cast aside.

⁴¹¹ Sindbæk, (2013).

fitting according to the president and more in line with Tuđman's project of centring the image of the state in highly visible cultural and political arenas.

For Tuđman, this represented a self-inflicted wound that lieutenants like Canjuga had to answer for in public as the name changes provoked some of the fiercest opposition Tuđman had experienced to that point. Some of the organised supporters of Dinamo – including members of the Bad Blue Boys supporter group⁴¹² – served in the Croatian armed forces during the Homeland War. Like most veterans, they harboured nationalist sentiments and were a natural base of support for Tuđman. This became tenuous when Tuđman, as part of his policy to eradicate socialist nomenclature, renamed the team HAŠK Građanski, an amalgamation of the names of two historic clubs that ceased play in 1945, and then Croatia Zagreb,

“Tuđman argued that most young football fans would soon realize ‘what and how much it means to us when a Croatian champion enters Europe with a Croatian name.’ Thus, Tuđman saw in naming the club Croatia a way of binding pre-communist national tradition to the present, while at the same time using the club and the publicity it created to brand the new nation-state internationally and support the internal nation-building project.”⁴¹³

Amongst Dinamo's strongest supporters, the name change was unacceptable and protests against the change and the president were organised. In turn, Tuđman branded the Bad Blue Boys as being “Yugo-nostalgic drunks, drug addicts, and anti-Croatian.”⁴¹⁴ The feud against the BBB may not have translated to any significant decrease in overall public approval of Tuđman – in fact, both public polling and the HDZ rewriting electoral law so that the party leader's name would appear above their

⁴¹² The Bad Blue Boys (BBB) supporter group, formed in the 1986 and named after a Hollywood film, is considered one of the two largest supporter groups in Croatia, along with Hajduk Split's Torcida. Putting a precise figure on how many members feature in groups like the BBB and Torcida has long been difficult owing to members “aging out,” becoming disinterested, and the need to discern which members are more casual and which populate the core of each group. Mills cites Lalić's early attempts to gather information on Torcida, which states that their presence at matches ranged from 150 – 10,000 depending on the match; meanwhile, Mills also cites Prnjak who noted that the BBB is comprised of 400 – 500 core members with up to 10,000 “sympathisers.” See Mills, (2018:196).

⁴¹³ Sindbæk, (2013:1015).

⁴¹⁴ See Brentin, (2013).

respective parties (i.e., Tuđman's List: HDZ) indicate that Tuđman remained broadly popular even if the HDZ itself was sliding in popularity.⁴¹⁵ It nevertheless demonstrated that Tuđman was willing to confront members of what was thought to be his core constituency, to remain the ultimate arbiter of "Croatian-ness." But with his health declining, the HDZ's ability to retain its position as the natural governing party of Croatia, to this point based primarily on nationalism and Tuđman's leadership, was in a delicate position as new elections approached.

After Tuđman's death, the absence of his political patron left Canjuga struggling to keep his own political career intact. Dinamo Zagreb's name was restored, with Canjuga claiming that Tuđman ordered him to change the name back before his death. This claim was not widely believed and Canjuga fell from power in Zagreb and never achieved significant political success again, tainted by the perception that he was merely an underling for Tuđman without much use given Tuđman's absence. In subsequent elections, the HDZ was beaten into the opposition nationally and Canjuga, now outside the party, was not able to maintain his place within either serious political circles or in football, giving way primarily to the subject of chapter six, Zdravko Mamić, by then seen to be a more powerful and valuable actor. Canjuga's tenure is symptomatic of wider issues in Croatian society and politics owing to the prioritisation of informal relations consolidated under Tuđman. Indeed, Canjuga's singular talent may have been doing what Tuđman told him to do, a valuable trait to the late president, but one that proved to be divisive and detrimental to Croatian football.

Much like initial iterations of the HNS, today's governing body of Croatian football remains a mixture of genuinely qualified individuals given their sporting histories, coupled with those that have earned seats through politics or business. The current HNS officers include well connected individuals like Marijan Kustić and Damir Mišković.

⁴¹⁵ This is not to say that Tuđman himself was never subjected to wider public scrutiny. In 1998, a bank clerk leaked a bank statement attached to the account of Tuđman's wife. Despite a public persona as a modest woman, the statement revealed that the account held over 200,000 German deutschmarks, prompting a series of articles to appear in the Croatian independent press regarding the Tuđman's finances. See Fisher, (2006).

Table 5: Current leadership of the HNS.

Name	Title
Marijan Kustić	President
Ante Vučemilović Šimunović	First Vice President
Nenad Črnko	Vice President
Damir Mišković	Vice President
Slavko Priščan	Vice President
Mario Smodlaka	Vice President
Tomislav Svetina	Executive Director
Ivan Meštrović	Special Advisor

In addition to the above, a further eleven men serve as Executive Committee members without further titles. The HNS Assembly that last met in December 2021 constituted a players' representative; a coaches' representative; a women's football representative; a futsal and beach soccer representative; thirty-eight representatives from twenty Croatian counties and the City of Zagreb Football Association; three representatives from the Croatian Second Division; five representatives from the Croatian Third Division; and fourteen representatives from football centres. Through a large executive committee, and with a preference for political appointees, the HNS remains structured in a way that influence appears to matter most.

As men like Canjuga and Mamić – as will be discussed – demonstrate, sport itself becomes secondary to service of informal networks.

Corruption: Match-Fixing in Croatian Football – 2000s-2010s

Croatian football, like in Serbia, has been tainted by the cardinal sin of match-fixing, and often for similar reasons. Clubs, including those which have had competitive sporting success at various points in their histories, have been forced to declare

bankruptcy and either completely dissolve or reform into a new entity. Players are paid paltry sums and clubs often request that players restructure their contracts as a means of staving off financial calamity. In short, similar to the conditions in Serbian football, the existing financial conditions within Croatian football ensure that match-fixing and the perversion of the sport for financial gain remains an attractive option for a variety of actors: underpaid players, clubs that struggle to survive the fiduciary pressures of the sport, and opportunistic, corrupt, and exploitative figures that seek to leverage those elements to earn monetary rewards.

As previously discussed, match-fixing in Croatia also manifested itself as a means of advancing the nationalist agenda of the Tuđman regime. Functionaries of Tuđman and Croatian football at times interfered in matches to instigate preferred outcomes, most notably an end-of-season match between Croatia Zagreb and NK Rijeka in which Croatia, Tuđman's preferred team, was given the benefit of favourable officiating to win the match and the league. Investigative reports later revealed that the match was fixed to guarantee Tuđman's project of turning the Croatia Zagreb team and its players into the "physical embodiment of the nation" in an era defined by the purposeful, nationalist construction of the state.⁴¹⁶

In the years since Tuđman's death, match-fixing has largely progressed from being a feature of politics to a corrupt financial pursuit that, even as prominent scandals dominated headlines in Croatia, was often rationalised by politicians and other key officials as being the result of the grim financial reality of Croatian football.⁴¹⁷ Couple this reality with the staggering financials of contemporary sports betting and the allure of match-fixing becomes inevitable despite the consensus that participating in a rigged

⁴¹⁶ Jon Fox, (2006:226) cited in Brentin, (2014:188).

⁴¹⁷ Perasović & Mustapić note the financial turbulence that greeted many lower league Croatian clubs upon the establishment of independent Croatian football leagues. "Numerous clubs went bankrupt due to financial difficulties, however all of them were financed significantly by local government and sponsored by large state-owned companies for many years. Politics, both local and national, had a profound influence on the management structures and financing of clubs, just as it had during socialism." Perasović & Mustapić, (2018:474).

sporting event, particularly as an athlete, is an egregious affront to those that follow sport and support clubs and players passionately.⁴¹⁸

In 2005, police in Berlin, Germany arrested the proprietors of a nondescript sports bar, Café King. Journalistic reports described the bar as average, with large TVs, palm trees, and a framed David Beckham jersey on the wall. The owners, a trio of Croatian-German brothers – Ante, Filip, and Milan Šapina – were taken into custody as part of an investigation into fixed matches in both German domestic and international competitions. A young German referee, Robert Hoyzer, was observed to have awarded controversial penalties in matches which were then inundated with irregular betting patterns.⁴¹⁹ After fellow officials later told German officials that Hoyzer approached them with an offer to fix matches, authorities pursued the matter and uncovered a fixed-match scheme that brought them to the Šapina's sports bar. Following the revelations about the Šapina and Hoyzer case in Germany, further investigations continued. What was eventually uncovered amounted to one of the most pervasive match-fixing scandals in European history, in which the Šapina's coordinated with officials and players to fix matches that included domestic league games and international matches, including a World Cup qualifier between Finland and Lichtenstein.⁴²⁰ Given the seriousness of a potentially compromised World Cup, coupled with a diminished view of German football, the authorities continued to

⁴¹⁸ FIFA estimates that \$15 billion dollars a year is taken by organised crime and corrupt actors because of global match-fixing. The Oregonian, "Soccer Match-Fixing is a \$15 Billion-a-Year Industry," (2013). Accessed here: https://www.oregonlive.com/today/2013/02/soccer_match-fixing_is_a_15_bi.html.

⁴¹⁹A key incident was an August 2004 match between Hamburg, a strong German first division club, and the second division Paderborn, in the first round of the German DFB Cup competition. Hoyzer awarded a red card to a player rarely disciplined by match officials and awarded Paderborn with multiple free kick opportunities, leading to the underdog winning 4-2 over the favoured Hamburg. German betting monitors observed the match to have yielded far more interest than what was typical for a first-round contest. The Guardian, "Hoyzer Jailed for Match-Fixing," (2005). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2005/nov/17/newsstory.sport12#:~:text=A%20German%20referee%20was%20today,a%20Croatian%20man%2C%20Ante%20Sapina>.

⁴²⁰ After Hoyzer admitted his involvement in the scheme to German authorities, he documented instances in which Ante Šapina would communicate with him before and even during matches at half-time to ensure that a certain result was achievable. This would then generate a rush of betting that would enrich Šapina, his brothers, and his associates. It is thought that Šapina and his associated made £1million just from the German matches overseen by Hoyzer. Wired, "Inside the Endless Fight to Kill the \$1 Trillion Match-Fixing Industry," (2019). Accessed here: <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/football-betting-match-fixing-odds-sportradar>. See also ESPN, "Šapina Match-Fixing Sentence is Reduced," (2014). Accessed here: https://www.espn.com/soccer/news/story/_/id/1785621/ante-sapina-imprisoned-match-fixing-including-world-cup-qualifying-champions-league-games.

investigate a large web of match-fixing that included matches and leagues across Europe. This uncovering of a multitude of entanglements eventually forced the Croatian authorities into action after exposing a scandal that engulfed and severely impacted three clubs and nearly two dozen individuals.

In 2010, USKOK, in coordination with German officials investigating match-fixing in both international and domestic league competitions, charged twenty-two players and officials in what would eventually be coined “Operation Offside,” in which the Croatian state accused those charged of fixing matches in the Croatian football competitions.⁴²¹

The players and officials charged were all affiliated with one of three clubs found to be manipulating the outcomes of matches. NK Međimurje was a comparatively new club at the time, having been founded in 2003. The club, based in Croatia’s northernmost county of the same name, immediately earned promotion to the Croatian First League after its first campaign, a potentially promising sign of things to come. However, in the years leading up to the match-fixing scandal, the club, like many others, was faced with the financial realities of trying to compete against larger clubs like Dinamo and Hajduk and was eventually relegated back to the second division where economic growth is difficult to achieve.

NK Varteks was initially founded in 1931 as Slavija Football Club. After a first name change in 1945, the club eventually became NK Varteks in 1958, named after the area’s largest textile manufacturer (and the club’s chief sponsor). The club was also based in northern Croatia, in the city of Varaždin, home to a number of baroque palaces and Stadion Varteks, where NK Varteks enjoyed consistent degrees of modest success, reaching a Yugoslav Cup final in 1961. The club was an inaugural member of the Croatian First League in 1991 and went on to have three third-place campaigns and multiple appearances in European competitions before financial issues began to plague the team. The financial fortunes of its chief sponsor led to

⁴²¹ Balkan Insight, “Croatia Indicts 21 Over Match-Fixing Scandal,” (2010). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2010/12/08/croatia-indicts-21-over-match-fixing-scandal/>.

diminished investment into the club and instigated a fourth name change, this time to NK Varaždin. According to Perasović & Mustapić, the name change provoked an initial round of anger from key supporters, known as the White Stones, who boycotted matches in protest, further increasing the financial hardship the club was faced with.⁴²²

NK Croatia Sesvete spent much of its time in Yugoslav football as NK Sljeme before multiple name changes followed in the 1990s, during the earliest iterations of independent Croatian league football. It finally became Croatia Sesvete in 1998, named for the easternmost municipal area of Zagreb. The club spent much of its existence on the fringes of success in Croatian football, with most of its campaigns played out in the second division. Its chief accomplishment was winning the second division during the 2007-2008 season, earning a brief two season turn in the first division.

In short, the players and officials that participated in the match-fixing scheme were not wealthy professional athletes that sought to add additional monies to their bank accounts (with few exceptions). Rather, the majority of those involved were barely able to pay their bills and provide for their families. Transparency International notes that one of the failures of match-fixing prevention is that groups and individuals that international sporting organisations like FIFA or UEFA hire to provide information to players are making exponentially more than the players themselves, leading to a scenario in which “there are groups of relatively well-paid consultants...giving lectures to relatively badly paid players about the ‘ethics’ of match-fixing.”⁴²³ Croatia was, and remains, full of vulnerable players that have not had their contractual terms met - as was the case for those charged during the Operation Offside investigation.

Those charged included a diverse range of players, with many aging veterans who were likely never going to ascend to the professional heights of earning seven or eight-

⁴²² Perasović & Mustapić, (2018).

⁴²³ Transparency International, “Why Sport is Losing the War to Match-Fixers,” (2014). Accessed here: <https://www.transparency.org/en/files/content/feature/4.1-WhySportsLosing-Hill-GCRSport.pdf>.

figure incomes and living in Italian or Spanish villas, as well as very young players that were more likely to be persuaded and drawn to the appeal of fast money. The players, officials, and operators of the scheme charged included:

- Jasmin Agić, a midfielder for Croatia Sesvete who previously spent considerable time with both Rijeka and Dinamo Zagreb and who had made over a dozen appearances as a member of the Croatian national team.
- Miljenko Bošnjak, an attacking midfielder for Croatia Sesvete who was at the outset of his career when he was charged for his involvement in match-fixing as uncovered during the Operation Offside investigation. He has since played professionally, primarily for clubs based in Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- Andrija Balajić, a defender for Varteks that made three appearances for the Croatian national team in the 1990s. His career was highlighted by his frequent returns to Varteks after short spells with larger clubs like Hajduk Split and Sporting CP.
- Ivan Banović, a goalkeeper from Croatia Sesvete. Banović's career was derailed by his involvement in Operation Offside until 2019, when he came out of retirement to play for second division side NK Mosor.
- Mario Darmopil, a central midfielder from NK Međimurje who had previously played for NKK Ingrad and signed for Slovene side NK Zavrč but never made an appearance.
- Mario Čižmek, a midfielder for Croatia Sesvete who later chronicled his involvement in Operation Offside and described the financial pressures that led to his participation.
- Zoran Ivančić, a defender for Varteks who previously played for clubs including Rijeka and made a small number of appearances for lower-level Croatian clubs in the years after being charged in Operation Offside.
- Marko Guja, a young centre forward for Croatia Sesvete that subsequently played professionally primarily in Austria and is, as of this writing, signed to Croatian fourth division side NK Mladost Ždralovi.
- Danijel Mađarić, a goalkeeper for Međimurje who previously spent two long stints with Varteks.

- Nikola Melnjak, a left back for Međimurje who had previously spent a considerable amount of time with Varteks. He briefly appeared for Slovak side FC Spartak Trnava in the immediate aftermath of his charge for being involved in Operation Offside.
- Saša Mus, a defender for Croatia Sesvete who went on to play for clubs in Croatia, Austria, China, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Hong Kong.
- Miljenko Mumlek, a midfielder for Varteks that had previously made multiple appearances for Dinamo Zagreb and the Croatian national team. Following his charge and conviction for his involvement in match fixing, Mumlek was given the opportunity to manage the successor club to Varteks, NK Varaždin.
- Ante Pokrajčić, an attacking forward for Croatia Sesvete who was eventually signed to lower division Croatian club NK Imotski following his charge because of Operation Offside.
- Dario Šušak, a right back for Croatia Sesvete that eventually signed for lower division side NK Ivanja Reka following his charge because of Operation Offside.
- Neven Vuljanko, a goalkeeper for Međimurje that continued playing for multiple seasons with lower division Croatian clubs following his charge because of Operation Offside.
- Goran Jerković, an assistant coach for Croatia Sesvete who was charged during the Operation Offside investigation for serving as an interlocutor for players and those organising match-fixing.
- Tomislav Zubak, a club official with Croatia Sesvete and the son of the club chairman, Zvonko Zubak, the owner of Bosnia-Herzegovina-based Winsley Defence Group, an arms dealing enterprise.⁴²⁴
- Mario Marenić, a player manager who served as Mario Darmopil's manager and was charged with helping to facilitate match-fixing because of the Operation Offside investigation.

⁴²⁴ Zvonko Zubak's arms dealing was vital to the Croatian war effort in the 1990s, as Zubak funnelled weaponry to the fledgling Croatian armed services. His involvement in football included a bid to become president of Dinamo Zagreb, which was unsuccessful. Nacional, "Zvonko Zubak: I Have a Witness to Prove that Ružman wanted a \$2.5 m bribe to help me win my case against the Government," (2002). Accessed here: <https://arhiva.nacional.hr/en/clanak/18100/zvonko-zubak-i-have-a-witness-to-prove-that-ruzman-wanted-a-25m-bribe-to-help-me-win-my-case-against-the-government>.

- Vinko Šaka, a former assistant coach for Dinamo Zagreb youth players, served as one of the chief conduits between match-fixing organisers and players. His flashiness made him both appealing to poorly paid players and to the German authorities who instigated the Operation Offside investigation.
- Dino Lalic and Admir Suljić, both Slovene nationals, were deemed to have worked with Šaka as intermediaries between those financing the schemes uncovered in Operation Offside and the players and officials that participated in match-fixing on the pitch.⁴²⁵

Mario Čižmek, the midfielder for NK Croatia Sesvete, eventually became the most outspoken participant in the scheme, outlining to local and international press how and why conspirators tempted he and his fellow players and officials into participating in the scheme. A study commissioned by FIFPro, the representative organisation for professional footballers worldwide, estimated that 60% of Croatian footballers were not being paid by their clubs on time.⁴²⁶ Čižmek documented that he and his teammates became marks for Vinko Šaka, a former coach that spent time with Dinamo Zagreb's under-21 side. Šaka spent time around training facilities at clubs on the financial fringe, including those like NK Croatia Sesvete that were in a precarious position.⁴²⁷ In the case of Davor Šušak, another player not being regularly paid by his club, he was leant money from Šaka that he was unable to pay back as the club continued to miss payments to players. Šaka then required Šušak to assist in match-fixing. For Čižmek, a dinner led to an agreement that he and five other players would split just under \$25,000 to throw a match. For players that had not regularly received wages, this was an appealing option that led to repeat instances of managed outcomes and the eventual recruitment of club coaches and officials to participate in the corruption.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁵ On those charged, see TPortal, "Offside Culprits Looking at Possible Prison Terms," (2010).

⁴²⁶ FIFPro, "The Black Book of Europe," (2012). Accessed here: <https://fifpro.org/media/boeapcuc/fifpro-black-book-eastern-europe-final.pdf>.

⁴²⁷ In the months before the match-fixing scandal, NK Croatia Sesvete players had not been paid for over a year. Reuters, "Analysis – Soccer – Paying Players Can Reduce Match-Fixing Threat," (2013). Accessed here: <https://www.reuters.com/article/soccer-matchfixing-analysis/analysis-soccer-paying-players-can-reduce-match-fixing-threat-idUKL3N0JO3B520131209>

⁴²⁸ Čižmek documented that eventually he could not convince certain players to participate, which necessitated the need for Šaka to recruit club officials. Čižmek earned just over \$26,000 but had to return most

The scheme ruined the careers of many players involved and led to significant prison time for many. Those that led the operation, Šaka, Lalic, and Suljić, each were afforded the opportunity to make deals with Croatian prosecutors and received prison sentences and financial penalties. For Šaka, who preyed on economically vulnerable players, this meant fractions of the total amount he collected as a result of his coordination of match-fixing in Croatia.⁴²⁹ The players involved received prison sentences ranging from ten months to a seven-month suspended sentence. The investigation also contributed to the demise of NK Croatia Sesvete and Varteks.⁴³⁰ However, despite the testimony of players like Čižmek, who stated that club directors were involved, the investigation did not limit the appeal of match-fixing in Croatia, nor did it go beyond the surface issue of the bad behaviour of those involved in the scheme specific to what was uncovered as a result of Operation Offside. Subsequent scandals regularly demonstrate that the fallout of the investigation, the prison terms, the financial penalties, and the social trauma of being known as a match-fixer, are not enough to dissuade those that wish to corrupt the game for financial gain from doing so.⁴³¹

Poor governance is regularly observed to be an element that makes corruption more possible. The HNS, long politicised to the point of excusing poor oversight and governance, is also rife with corruption that has previously amounted to incidents

of that to the authorities. He reported only getting to keep a set of bunk beds he bought for his children. The National News, "Croatian Footballer 'Destroyed 20 Years of Hard Work' After Accepting Money to Fix Games," (2013). Accessed here: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/sport/croatian-footballer-destroyed-20-years-of-hard-work-after-accepting-money-to-fix-games-1.566771>

⁴²⁹ Šaka had to pay \$58,000 in penalties after earning nearly \$850,000 in profits from match-fixing in Croatia. Journalists report that he still drives luxury cars and lives in an affluent section of Zagreb. Ibid.

⁴³⁰ NK Croatia Sesvete declared bankruptcy. Varteks rebranded as NK Varaždin before financial difficulties, including the continued inability to pay players, forced the club into insolvency, as well. Supporters of the club founded NK Varteks in 2011 in the aftermath of the match-fixing scandal; that club competes today in the fourth tier of Croatian football. A "phoenix club" for Varaždin was formed in the aftermath of the original club's bankruptcy; that club today competes in the Croatian first division. The third club involved in the scheme, Međimurje, survived and currently plays in the third division of Croatian football.

⁴³¹ Brentin, (2013) and Sindbæk, (2013) note the elevated place that Croatian elites allowed football to occupy as a means of state-building. What Operation Offsides exposed is that as this privilege is extended to the very top of Croatian football – the national team and larger clubs like Dinamo – and not to young professionals and lower division clubs. Evidenced by players not receiving their pay for months on end, it is football as a propaganda tool rather genuine pride that motivates some political elites. See also Perasović & Mustapić, (2017).

included match-fixing. Under the auspices of the HNS, a governing body that has been subjected to scandal and public perception that it is a poorly managed institution, research suggests that match-fixing becomes more probable. Hill notes three factors that drive up the likelihood of match-fixing: “strong illegal gambling networks; high levels of relative exploitation of players, and perceived corrupt officials.”⁴³² As Operation Offsides demonstrates, Croatian football faces the stark reality of being home to all three of these factors, increasing corruption within the sport, even amongst some of its most respected participants.

Željko Širić was, for many years, one of Croatia’s top football referees, if not its best. He regularly officiated matches between heated rivals Dinamo Zagreb and Hajduk Split, while also serving as a match official for a number of European football contests in continental tournaments, including the FIFA Youth World Cup and the UEFA Champions League. For his service to football and his reputation as being a powerful actor from Osijek, Širić eventually graduated to becoming the Vice-Chair of the Croatian Football Federation, which allowed him a significant degree of influence on match-day affairs. Širić was viewed as an outsized personality both in and out of the sport of football and, coupled with his ascension within the HNS and his privileged status as the top referee in Croatian football, Širić often pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable under the law in his personal and business affairs. Owing to his substantial influence in Osijek, he maintained relations with judges and other prominent individuals through his businesses and establishments, which contributed to the perception that he was more than just a football referee and instead was worthy of an executive role with the HNS.⁴³³

⁴³² Hill, (2010:38). On poor governance leading to corruption in sport, see also Forster, (2016).

⁴³³ Širić did have multiple encounters with the police for a variety of alleged infractions, including a 2006 incident in which he was accused of drunkenly beating his daughter with a belt. He was later sentenced to an eight-month suspended prison sentence for illegal construction after building a large, luxurious property on environmentally protected coastal land. Širić had also been investigated for his acquisition of a significant amount of property and land. Nacional, “Convict Zeljko Siric Started a Private Business While Serving His Prison Sentence in Glina and Became a Procurator,” (2020). Accessed here: https://www-nacional-hr.translate.google/osudenik-zeljko-siric-na-odsluzanju-zatvorske-kazne-u-glini-pokrenuo-privatni-biznis-i-postao-prokurist/?_x_tr_sl=hr&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=sc.

Širić's role within the HNS was as the governing body's chief liaison to Croatian football's refereeing commission and officiating in general. Working with the commission, Širić would, in his capacity with the HNS, ensure that Croatian football and its players, officials, referees and other actors within the sport-maintained standards set by the HNS itself, as well as governing organisations like FIFA and UEFA. For Širić, much of that oversight was summarised in the statutes of the HNS, which states that as part of Executive Committee and Assembly meetings, it is required that "Referees, Refereeing, and Referees' Instructors Regulations" are established and that the responsible party "verifies the list of delegates, referee observers, and referees for the competitions of the First Division of the Croatian Football League and other competitions falling within the Federation's direct powers, and appoints officials responsible for the management of competitions."⁴³⁴ Širić would also "appoint...the list of referees and referee observers for the purposes of FIFA and UEFA."⁴³⁵

For Širić, probably the most well-known Croatian referee and then the Vice President of the HNS, this offered significant potential leverage over football officiating. In partnership with the head of the refereeing commission, Stjepan Djedović, who would work directly with Širić on referee assignments, Širić could and did attempt to influence the outcomes of key matches. Given his association to Osijek, it is not surprising that Širić would have had a keen interest in NK Osijek's matches with fellow coastal team, and fellow perennial first division club, Hajduk Split. The clubs represented two of the four cornerstones of the first division, alongside Dinamo Zagreb and NK Rijeka and thus their matches were generally considered more important than most first division contests, perhaps only behind those that each team would play against the other two key clubs of the division, given the long-standing Dinamo-Hajduk and Osijek-Rijeka rivalries. In short, it would have been a key match on the competitive calendar.

⁴³⁴ Croatian Football Federation, "Statutes of the Croatian Football Federation." Accessed here: <https://hns-cff.hr/files/documents/2384/HNS%20Statutes%2002.06.2021.pdf>.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

The 2011-2012 season was defined by a dominant Dinamo Zagreb side, as was often the case. They only lost one contest throughout the campaign and a satisfactorily competitive Hajduk side finished a distant second. The balance of teams fell in line behind as either average or well-below the mark, including Osijek after a season in which they finished directly in the middle of the table. A year after Operation Offsides - a scandal that already provoked anger and resentment amongst the Croatian public and supporter groups - what initially appeared to be something of a typical Croatian first division season would be upended by a match-fixing scandal that would help confirm the suspicions of many supporters: that actors within the HNS itself were nakedly corrupt and that the HNS represented the “football swamp.”⁴³⁶

Širić was rumoured to have leveraged his position, and his role in overseeing professional refereeing within Croatian football, for his personal financial gain. To prove this, the president of Hajduk Split, Hrvoje Maleš, met with Širić to discuss an upcoming edition of Hajduk Split versus Osijek. Maleš was certain that Širić had been partnering with Djedović to extort football clubs under the threat that they would direct the referees under their control to rule against those clubs in future matches. Maleš endeavoured to record any conversation he would have with Širić. During the meeting with Maleš, Širić requested the equivalent of \$40,000 not to guarantee that Hajduk would win its match against Osijek, but rather that the match would not be influenced in any way by the referees and that the contest would be officiated ‘fairly’.⁴³⁷ This is to say that the match would be officiated as it always should be, without bias or favouritism.

The recording Maleš made of his conversation with Širić was subsequently provided to authorities who, based on the content of that conversation, charged both Širić and Djedović with demanding a bribe in exchange for “fair refereeing,” lending the scandal the moniker of the “Fair Play Affair.” After initially being charged in December 2011, Širić was sentenced to four years imprisonment after his trial concluded in 2014. Rather than a lifetime ban, as was earned by some of the players guilty of their

⁴³⁶ Perasović & Mustapić, (2013).

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

involvement in Operation Offsides, Širić was given an 8-year ban from involvement in Croatian football.⁴³⁸ Remarkably, during this period, Širić authored a book regarding the management of first division clubs in Croatia.

Despite the blunt in spectator confidence following the Operation Offsides investigation and the confirmation that the HNS itself was home to morally dubious individuals resulting from the Fair Play Affair, there have nevertheless been additional indications that match-fixing has never been fully eradicated from Croatian football.⁴³⁹ In the years after the dual scandals, individuals like Davor Šuker, a one-time head of the HNS and one of Croatia's all-time great footballers, were forced to deny relations with known match-fixers, including the Šapina's.⁴⁴⁰ Ideally the degrees of corruption that has previously beseeched Croatian football will not again be reached, however, the elements that previously rendered it more possible – low wages, financially fragile clubs, poor governance, fairly meagre penalties for infractions – all remain features of the sport. The failure to strengthen conditions mirrors Croatia's inability to reign in corruption more generally.

Economic Informality in Croatian Football: Rijeka and Damir Mišković – 2010s – 2020s

Rijeka, in western Croatia on the coast of the gulf of Kvarner in the northern Adriatic Sea, is a historical melting pot of cultures, owing to periods of Italian and Hungarian rule, which is physically evident in the diverse architecture and recently re-instated multilingual Croatian and Italian language signs within the historical Fiume district of the city. It was, during the early years of Yugoslav communist party rule, also home to

⁴³⁸ Croatia Week, "Former Croatian FIFA Referee Jailed for Bribery," (2014). Accessed here: <https://www.croatiaweek.com/former-croatian-fifa-referee-jailed-for-bribery/>

⁴³⁹ The methods have evolved with technology. For example, in 2017, authorities arrested Croatian individuals, among others, for their involvement in cross-border match-fixing scheme. AP News, "11 Arrested in Croatia, Slovenia in Sports Corruption Case," (2017). Accessed here: <https://apnews.com/article/1ab1b52ef4a244e6a264c66d8d976b62>.

⁴⁴⁰ Investigations found that Šuker had allegedly communicated with Šapina prior to the latter's arrest. The National News, "Croatia Football Chief Davor Šuker Rejects Link to Europe's Biggest Match-Fixing Scandals," (2015). Accessed here: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/sport/croatia-football-chief-davor-suker-rejects-link-to-europes-biggest-match-fixing-scandals-1.100019>.

harsh political measures enacted by the Yugoslav government in a bid to forcibly instigate its program of “brotherhood and unity” in a city noted for its multiculturalism.

Like many other former industrial hubs in the former Yugoslavia, Rijeka’s key industries – shipping, paper, manufacturing – have experienced significant decline, giving way to a demographic shift that saw the city and wider region experience considerable population decline. However, its 21st century pivot toward a service and tourist-based economy, coupled with ongoing international investment, has led to increased development opportunities. Central to some of Rijeka’s key development projects is Damir Mišković, a Rijeka native who came back to the city after earning a substantial fortune abroad in the oil and gas industry, and his most well-known business holding, HNK Rijeka, the city’s football club. Mišković and his football club are both also crucial to understanding economic informalities in Croatian football and in Rijeka, as officials have investigated the man and the club for transactions that have led to international penalties.

The networks that Mišković aligned himself with included formal institutions – including government agents and governing bodies. During the development of networks – or the initiation of new firms or individuals into existing networks – formal entities are made key partners. As a result, favouritism in certain aspects of the economy, such as public procurement and construction, partners formal actors with informal networks and processes. As Holt & Littlewood note on informal economic activity,

“Informal economy enterprises typically trade or produce licit products but utilise either illicit distribution mechanisms or production processes. They rarely comply with all regulations that apply to their trade, for example concerning registration, tax payment, conditions of employment and operation licenses.”⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴¹ Holt & Littlewood, (2014:5). On network formation, exchanges, and behaviours, see Coviello, (2005); Hite, (2005); Jack, (2010).

In investing in Rijeka via the football club, Mišković was a beneficiary of a climate that welcomed informal processes as drivers of the local and national economies.⁴⁴² Having served as its chairman since 2012, Mišković purchased HNK Rijeka in 2017 from his own boss, Gabriele Volpi. Volpi, an Italian-Nigerian businessman, led Orlean Invest Holding, the oil and gas logistics company in which Mišković himself served in a senior capacity. Volpi, through his firm Social Sport, sold his 70% stake in the club to Teanna Limited, a London-based company founded by Mišković and nominally run by his daughters, in a quick transfer after the Mayor of Rijeka, Vojko Obersnel, as the representative of the Rijeka municipality, which owns 30% of the club, waived any rights of refusal.⁴⁴³ Though Volpi is involved in other sporting ventures, it was Mišković who helped instigate the 2012-2013 takeover of the club by Volpi's Social Sport, as Rijeka, Mišković's boyhood club, faced perilous financial difficulties.

Although Rijeka was, and is, considered one of the key clubs in Croatian football both during the Yugoslav years and as an inaugural member of the Croatian league, it had accumulated €2 million in debts and was facing administration, a deleterious situation for a club that had previously enjoyed modest periods of success.⁴⁴⁴ Founded in the 1900s as Club Sportivo Olimpia, it underwent a number of name changes owing to Rijeka's status as a border city. The club became U.S. Fiumana, then S.C.F. Quarnero, then NK Rijeka and, finally, in 1995, the club added "Croatia" to its name to become HNK Rijeka.

Its greatest successes in Yugoslavia came in the late 1970s, when the club won back-to-back Yugoslav Cups and spent 18 months under the management of Miroslav Blažević, although it was never able to finish higher than fourth in the Yugoslav First League. Its fortunes in the independent Croatian First League were often similar: consistently behind league leaders Dinamo Zagreb and Hajduk Split. As previously

⁴⁴² It is important to note that Rijeka has been something of a political stronghold for the Croatian Social Democratic Party, demonstrating that both major political parties in Croatia participated in informal economic activities. See Hoffman et al., (2017).

⁴⁴³ City of Rijeka, "The City Council of the City of Rijeka Has Adopted the 2018 Budget," (2018). Accessed here: <https://www.rijeka.hr/en/city-council-city-rijeka-adopted-2018-budget/>.

⁴⁴⁴ HoćuRi, "HNK Rijeka: The Rise of the Phoenix," (2014). Accessed here: <http://www.hocuri.com/hnk-rijeka-rise-phoenix/>

mentioned, Rijeka was denied its first ever First League title following the interference of the Tuđman regime in 1999, and for much of the 21st century the club struggled to regain that brief flash of exceptional form. Coupled with financial strife, the club reach the nadir of its competitive prowess in 2011-2012, when it was very nearly relegated, a fate which may have resulted in the demise of one of the region's most visible clubs.

However, under the direction of Mišković as president, the club experienced a rapid turnaround in their competitive fortunes after suffering from three seasons mired in mediocrity. In 2013, the club won the domestic cup and in 2016-2017, shortly before Mišković became its largest shareholder, the club achieved its best ever season since the advent of the independent Croatian Football League, winning both the Croatian First Football League and the domestic cup.⁴⁴⁵ By this point, Volpi, having paid the €7 million price for the Social Sports shares in the club in instalments, had completed the privatisation process that ultimately led to Mišković's takeover of the club through Teanna Limited.⁴⁴⁶ Although the club has yet to repeat as champions of the league, it has finished runners-up multiple times and is in a strong competitive situation. It also benefits from Mišković's outsized role in Croatian football more broadly, as he serves as a powerful Vice President of the HNS.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁵ The club achieved financial flexibility following the injection of cash by Volpi, but also by committing to the painful decision to sell the talented Andrej Kramarić to Leicester City of the English Premier League in 2015. The move was for £9.5 million and was undoubtedly a victory for Rijeka, who earned a key monetary infusion while Kramarić was unsuccessful in England, eventually moving to German club Hoffenheim a year later. TransferMarkt, "Andrej Kramarić Transfer History." Accessed here: <https://www.transfermarkt.us/andrej-kramaric/transfers/spieler/46580>.

⁴⁴⁶ Mišković's purchase of Volpi's shares in the club was finalised in 2018 after the adoption of that year's city budget by the Mayor and City Council of Rijeka. The mayor stated that "...Social Sport decided to withdraw from Croatia, and it submitted its offer for the sale of its interest to the City of Rijeka, which in accordance with the concluded agreement is entitled to a pre-emption right. I propose to refuse the offer, thus providing an opportunity to Social Sport to sell its interest to other interested partners." Obersnel then directly referenced Teanna and the Mišković family as worthy buyers. City of Rijeka, "The City Council of the City of Rijeka Has Adopted the 2018 Budget," (2018). Accessed here: <https://www.rijeka.hr/en/city-council-city-rijeka-adopted-2018-budget/>.

⁴⁴⁷ Mišković has regularly demonstrated his ability to compel the HNS Executive Committee to act on his initiative, including multiple instances of having the entire refereeing committee replaced after protests that Croatian officiating was so poor that it was negatively impacting his club. Total Croatia News, "HNS Sacks Entire Croatian Football Referees' Committee?," (2021). Accessed here: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/sport/50494-croatian-football-referees-committee>.

Per their roles in reviving the fortunes of HNK Rijeka, Mišković and Volpi have also been key actors in multiple instances of economic informality through connections to foreign capital and the well-established network of Rijeka administrators and business elites that have benefitted from an ecosystem which rewards longstanding connections and a deeply politicised and stagnant judiciary.⁴⁴⁸ During Volpi's ownership, he and Mišković began discussions with the city of Rijeka on the construction of a new stadium for the club. The new stadium, an ambitious project that would see seating capacity grow exponentially and that would feature modern accoutrements, was to be paired with additional commercial development along Rijeka's waterfront. Obersnel, as representative of the city of Rijeka, approved a contract with Volpi and Mišković to build a new stadium and adjacent commercial properties on land owned by the city.⁴⁴⁹

An ongoing investigation of Volpi's financial dealings in Nigeria, coincided with this agreement.⁴⁵⁰ His Orlean Invest Limited was a major entity in oil and gas and Volpi forged close ties to the Nigerian government. Shortly before taking ownership of HNK Rijeka, Volpi was investigated by the United States Senate for a money laundering scheme in which funds embezzled from the Nigerian government were placed into offshore trusts administered by Volpi, through corporations owned by himself and family members, to then be placed in financial institutions in the United States.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸ Croatia's judicial independence is often situated near the bottom of global rankings alongside states like Venezuela, as was the case in the 2019 World Economic Forum judicial independence surveys, ranking 126th out of 141 ranked nations in that category. Despite having the most judges per 100,000 inhabitants in the European Union, Croatia's judiciary is saturated with backlogs, often resulting in statutes of limitations being exhausted and cases dropped. World Economic Forum, "The Global Competitiveness Report 2019", (2019). Accessed here: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf

⁴⁴⁹ International Leaders' Summit, "Capital of Corruption 2020, Rijeka Croatia," (2020). Accessed here: <https://ileaderssummit.org/eu-capital-of-corruption-2020-rijeka-croatia-evidence-photographs/>

⁴⁵⁰ The companies involved included Orlean Invest Limited, of which Mišković was a director. The companies oversaw three firms, all based in offshore tax havens, which made regular deposits to the U.S. The accounts in the U.S. were those of Jennifer Douglas, the wife of Abubakar Atiku Bagudu, a close associate of both Gabriele Volpi and former Nigerian military dictator Sani Abacha, notorious for the staggering amount of funds he and his regime embezzled from Nigeria.

⁴⁵¹ United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, "Keeping Foreign Corruption Out of the United States: Four Case Histories," (2010). Accessed here: <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/FOREIGNCORRUPTIONREPORTFINAL710.pdf>.

According to the United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, information it received over the course of its investigation into the matter, confirmed that,

“Gabriele Volpi is the key beneficial owner of both LetsGo and Sima Holdings. Mr. Volpi is also a beneficial owner of Orleans Invest Holding Limited, which served as the initial trustee of the Abubakar Blind Trust from 1999 to 2003, as well as one of the three beneficial owners of the Guernsey Trust Company, which replaced Orlean as the trustee of the Abubakar Blind Trust from 2003 to the present. The documentation indicated that through his associations with LetsGo, Sima Holding, Guernsey Trust Company Orlean, Intels, and the Abubakar Blind Trust, Mr. Volpi was involved, directly or indirectly, with many, if not most, of the wire transfers of offshore fundings into the Douglas-related accounts. Ms. Douglas and Mr. Abubakar’s legal counsel...have described Mr. Volpi as Mr. Abubakar’s ‘trusted friend and business partner.’”⁴⁵²

Given the acknowledgement that suspicious funds were placed into the accounts of firms and trusts overseen by Volpi as part of the attempt to utilise U.S. financial institutions to launder those funds, the purchase of HNK Rijeka during this period of time, in which Volpi’s financial transactions were investigated in the United States and in Italy, without a significant degree of oversight, is symptomatic of a Croatian political and business elite that has an insatiable appetite for investment. Through his business relationship with Mišković, in Rijeka Volpi found a community in which those tasked with oversight regularly demonstrated a preference for a favourable business environment over the rule of law and administrators eager to look beyond a U.S. Department of Justice investigation into Volpi’s financial dealings.⁴⁵³ The environment that Mišković and Volpi operated in was welcoming and symptomatic of wider issues of informal, or crony capitalism. As Ivanković notes,

⁴⁵² Ibid. Volpi claimed that the payments in question were part of a “moral responsibility” he felt he had towards Abubakar, claiming that shares in firms under Volpi’s control belonging to Abubakar were seized by Sani Abacha. Volpi allegedly told Abubakar that he would ensure Abubakar’s shares would be returned to him when circumstances were favourable, though how the value of those shares were calculated over time was not disclosed.

⁴⁵³ In 2014, after Volpi’s privatisation of HNK Rijeka was finalised, the United States Department of Justice froze over \$450 million in U.S. accounts determined to have originated because of the extraordinary embezzlement scheme conducted by Abacha of which Abubakar was a beneficiary. International Leaders’ Summit, “Croatia – A Member of NATO and the EU – Ranked as the Most Corrupt Country in Eastern Europe,” (2019). Accessed here: <https://leaderssummit.medium.com/croatia-a-member-of-nato-and-the-eu-ranked-as-most-corrupt-country-in-eastern-europe-vladimir-df564ecd547f>.

“...the development of crony capitalism in Croatia was characterised by the following well known patterns: (i) corruption; (ii) the revolving door method of strengthening personal relationships between business and politics, enabling an influence of particular business interests on legislation and securing a privileged market position; (iii) partnership between the government and privileged companies in a chosen policy of economic development through cooperation in the execution of a particular business project.”⁴⁵⁴

Mišković and Volpi’s partnership with Rijeka met aspects of these criterion. The accord Volpi and Mišković made with the city of Rijeka on the construction of a new stadium (as well as the additional commercial properties) would eventually incorporate a local contracting firm that was and remains prevalent in construction projects in Rijeka. GP Krk, one of Croatia’s largest civil contractors, is particularly active in Rijeka and in projects that cross the border into Slovenia. The company, whose origins date back to a small entity established in the late 1940s on the island of Krk to help rebuild roads and other infrastructure damaged in the Second World War, was managed by the same family since the 1980s even through the privatisation process. GP Krk’s ubiquity in Rijeka ensured that the firm and the city’s political elite forged close relations. Issues identified by the European Union as it relates to informality in Croatia’s construction sector include the use of restricted procedures to reward allies, as well as the prevalence of sole bidders being awarded lucrative contracts,

“The use of restricted procedures... is one way in which government agents may seek to restrict competition in the public procurement process, thereby benefiting cronies or allies...such procedures are legitimate...in emergency conditions or when negotiating in specialist areas. In our sample, a significant proportion of contracts, representing 27% of the total value, was contracted through negotiated procedures without being announced publicly...[i]n conditions where favouritism is rife...competition may be low for two reasons. First, systematic favouritism over a long period would have driven out of the market companies which were unable to win contracts because they lacked relevant political connections. Second, if competitors expect a contract to be allocated in a particularistic way, they will not incur the costs of tendering and hence will opt out of the market...given the extensive pressures on the construction sector in Croatia, it is reasonable to expect that competition would be intense.”⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴ Ivanković, (2017:54).

⁴⁵⁵ The report notes that a clear majority of projects yielded three or fewer bidders and 40% of projects were awarded to sole bidders. European Union Taskforce Municipality Audit, “The Public Procurement of

Despite a crunch in the Croatian market, while money flowed in from both the World Bank, as part of a development agenda that included infrastructure improvements in Croatia, and later through the European Union's European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and additional cultural funds following the announcement that Rijeka would be declared the 2020 European Capital of Culture, GP Krk retained dominance over construction in Rijeka.⁴⁵⁶ The firm was awarded the contracts for numerous projects despite general concern about the quality of work performed, the frequency of cost overruns, and the firm's reliance on subsidies and the avoidance of regulations governing the construction industry.⁴⁵⁷ GP Krk was awarded the Volpi and Mišković stadium concept. This first included the construction of the Rujevica Stadium which GP Krk built in 2014 following the transfer of land from the city. The mortgage on the land owed to the city by Volpi and, later, Mišković was abruptly cancelled without the land reverting back to the city.⁴⁵⁸ These processes are demonstrative of wider issues of informal processes, including in construction. As Podumljak & David-Barrett summarise,

“...the construction sector [is an] industry [that] is a major recipient of public procurement contracts, as well as the observation that construction works are typically prone to corruption. Research suggests that the procurement of major infrastructure is often associated with irregularities including extensive re-negotiations of contracts in the post-award

Construction Works: The Case of Croatia,” (2015). Accessed here: <https://www.tfma.eu/files/files/The%20Public%20Procurement%20of%20Construction%20Work-The%20Case%20of%20Croatia.pdf>.

⁴⁵⁶ The situation in Rijeka with GP Krk is symptomatic with wider issues in procurement and construction in Croatia. On this, see Ateljević & Budak, (2010).

⁴⁵⁷ International Leaders' Summit, “Capital of Corruption 2020, Rijeka Croatia,” (2020). Accessed here: <https://ileaderssummit.org/eu-capital-of-corruption-2020-rijeka-croatia-evidence-photographs/>. This includes the regulation that construction firms cannot themselves monitor the safety and quality of their own projects; nevertheless, that was a standard feature of GP Krk projects. This earned scrutiny following an earthquake that caused more damage to infrastructure constructed by GP Krk than would be expected should impacted structures have been built to standard. Additionally, GP Krk's reliance on government subsidies is representative of the wider construction industry in Croatia, where highly favourable subsidies given to firms with ties to politicians led to the arrest of Croatia's construction minister on corruption charges. Balkan Insight, “Croatian PM Criticises Timing of Minister's Arrest for Corruption,” (2022). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/02/21/croatian-pm-criticises-timing-of-ministers-arrest-for-corruption/>.

⁴⁵⁸ International Leaders' Summit, “Capital of Corruption 2020, Rijeka Croatia,” (2020). Accessed here: <https://ileaderssummit.org/eu-capital-of-corruption-2020-rijeka-croatia-evidence-photographs/>.

implementation phase, as well as mid-forecasting of costs and demand, which may in some cases be explained by 'strategic deception.'"⁴⁵⁹

The relations between interested parties in Rijeka seemed to include some of these elements. The Kantrida Stadium plan, which would be paired with the aforementioned commercial development, involved an agreement worth tens of millions of dollars between Volpi, the city of Rijeka, and GP Krk which was facilitated by the city, as well as the agreement to waive fees on the land for 50 years. Volpi sold HNK Rijeka to Mišković before any construction took place. Mišković has instead signed an agreement with a Chinese firm to assist in the construction, ensuring that another layer of investment is folded into the proposal.⁴⁶⁰

In summary , the city of Rijeka, through a network which included: politicians eager to acquiesce to investment regardless of origin; a local (Mišković) who made millions abroad returning with a billionaire (Volpi) ready to invest in Rijeka via football; a construction firm (GP Krk) with an undisclosed ownership structure, a record of ignoring or manipulating regulations, and ties to Rijeka's political elite that regularly earned tenders on projects funded either by international development loans and grants or by monies of suspicious origin; and a mostly paralysed judiciary, turned its football club and multiple valuable plots of land with very favourable terms to actors investigated for financial crimes in exchange for investments into a politically connected construction firm. Mišković appears to be a genuine fan of his boyhood club, but the leveraging of a loose interpretation of standards of investment coupled with a construction industry highly reliant on informal agreements by his billionaire boss with ties to one of the greatest embezzlement stratagems in history is how he came to control HNK Rijeka. Football, in this case, was a convenient interlocutor for the exercising of informal economic ties.

⁴⁵⁹ Podumljak & David-Barrett, (2015:69). On the particularist environment employed in states like Croatia in this sector, see Mungiu-Pippidi, (2011).

⁴⁶⁰ Total Croatia News, "Damir Mišković and Chinese Investors Make First Step for New Kantrida Stadium," (2019). Accessed here: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/sport/35264-kantrida>.

The partnership between Volpi and Mišković and their entry into Croatian football is not the only case of economic informality involving the pair and the football club they traded ownership of. Through Volpi's Social Sport, a football training academy, Football College Abuja, was established in Nigeria, where Volpi and Mišković were highly active in oil and gas logistics.⁴⁶¹ Ostensibly, Football College Abuja would provide enhanced training for potentially gifted young Nigerian athletes free of charge and was ostensibly a charitable endeavour undertaken by Volpi in an effort to invest locally in a country that had helped make him a very wealthy individual. A subsequent investigation by FIFA, revealed that Mišković, who was managing the operations for Social Sport and its holdings, engaged in player transfer practices outside FIFA regulations to yield potentially substantial financial gain.⁴⁶²

Although Social Sport established Football College Abuja initially as a youth training facility for young Nigerian footballers, it eventually acted as a club itself, participating in matches sanctioned by the Nigerian Football Federation, the country's football governing body. Through the management of Mišković and Social Sport, young players from Football College Abuja participated in under-17 tournaments, including in Croatia. A report from Abuja's local Daily Trust newspaper chronicled the academy's triumph at an invitational tournament held in Croatia not long after its founding, besting sixteen teams from five countries to win the tournament. After chronicling the exceptional sporting exploits of some of the young players, the report goes on to state that "11 of the players who made the team to Croatia were instantly picked by licensed player scouts and are currently undergoing trials with some of the top clubs in Croatia." It would later be revealed that the trials were taking place at HNK Rijeka, managed by Mišković, and owned by Volpi.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶¹ Volpi's deep political ties within Nigeria were longstanding, but Mišković, too, was leveraging his success in the country to earn flattering titles. In 2017, he was made an honorary consul from Croatia to Nigeria. This bestowed upon Mišković the rights and privileges enjoyed by the diplomatic class. Business Day, "Orlean Invest Boss to Oversee Croatia Embassy as Consul," (2016). Accessed here: <https://businessday.ng/uncategorized/article/orlean-invest-boss-to-oversee-croatia-embassy-in-nigeria-as-consul/>.

⁴⁶² Now, Volpi – via Social Sport – owned HNK Rijeka in Croatia, as well as Italian side Spezia Calcio.

⁴⁶³ The Daily Trust, "Abuja Football College Going 'The Extra Mile' for Talents," (2013). Accessed here: <https://dailytrust.com/abuja-football-college-going-the-extra-mile-for-talents/>.

In 2015, a young Nigerian player, Goodness Ajayi, was loaned by his club, HNK Rijeka, to Široki Brijeg, a club based in Bosnia-Herzegovina. During routine due diligence while processing the loan move, FIFA uncovered that when Ajayi initially was registered as a player with HNK Rijeka in 2013, his transfer from Football College Abuja in Nigeria was not processed through FIFA's Transfer Management System, a bureaucratic process every FIFA recognised club must utilise when transferring or loaning players.⁴⁶⁴ HNK Rijeka's response to initial questions was to state that Ajayi was never registered as a professional footballer in Nigeria and that it was in 2013, at HNK Rijeka, where he initially registered, rendering his move from Nigeria as being outside the jurisdiction of FIFA. However, as part of their response to FIFA, HNK Rijeka provided documentation from the Nigerian Football Federation that contradicted that claim, as it showed that Ajayi had been registered within Nigeria and that his originating club, Football College Abuja, was registered within the Transfer Management System of FIFA, having previously transferred over a dozen players.⁴⁶⁵ As a result of Ajayi's improper transfer, HNK Rijeka was fined €10,000 and the HNS was fined €16,000.⁴⁶⁶

Processes like those undertaken here resemble broader resistance to compliance within regulatory frameworks, most obviously taxation and the economic rules set forth by governing bodies like FIFA. Working to get around these rules and regulations is a defining feature of the informal economy, and such processes occur much more frequently in states struggling to contain broader financial malfeasance.⁴⁶⁷ If Mišković, his managers, and his contacts in Nigeria constitute a trust network, then their actions as it relates to the shielding of profits and/or the bypassing of expenses in order to move players from one league to another would be symbolic of informal processes. Alon & Hageman note that tax and other regulatory requirements are more frequently

⁴⁶⁴ Nacional, "Football Leaks: How the Croatian Football Federation and FC Rijeka Breached FIFA Rules During Transfers of Young Nigerian Players," (2019). Accessed here: <https://www.nacional.hr/football-leaks-how-the-croatian-football-federation-and-fc-rijeka-breached-fifa-rules-during-transfers-of-young-nigerian-players/>.

⁴⁶⁵ There was also initial concern that Ajayi had been brought to Croatia while he was a minor, which requires additional oversight by FIFA; however, there was a discrepancy in his birthday – one record stated that he had been born in 1994, which would have made him 18 when he initially registered with HNK Rijeka; another stated that he was born in 1996, which would have made him 16. Eventually it was accepted that he was born in 1994 and that the error was a result of Nigeria's poorly managed record-keeping processes.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ See Uslaner, (2010).

disregarded in states or domains in which economic exchanges are more often governed via particularist trust networks.⁴⁶⁸ These networks are built over time through the repetition of processes, enabling a close familiarity amongst network partners.⁴⁶⁹ Here, it is important to stress that Mišković was an esteemed member of communities in both Nigeria and Croatia.

Actors outside the network traversing Croatia and Nigeria – in this case, FIFA – helped expose the scheme. A FIFA spot audit of Croatian football and its clubs occurred in 2016. HNK Rijeka was a key focus of this audit. As part of the process undertaken, FIFA officials met with an HNK Rijeka administrator who provided background into the management of the club, as well as Social Sport, Volpi, and Mišković.⁴⁷⁰ The administrator described Volpi as a billionaire with a philanthropic characteristic that viewed Social Sport as a venture designed to invest in social development through sport, most notably football. More importantly, Volpi founded Social Sport with the intent to develop infrastructure projects, such as playing fields and stadia. The administrator also revealed that HNK Rijeka did not invest club funds in international scouting for amateur or youth players, but rather relied on reports from “friends and ex-players” who might attend matches and spot a talented player worth further review. The administrator, when asked specifically regarding Nigerian players acknowledged that young Nigerian players were brought to Croatia by the club and were placed in local schools, but that as it pertained to registering them with the club, there were “issues.”⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁸ Alon & Hageman, (2013).

⁴⁶⁹ On various forms of trust networks and how they influence compliance with economic regulations, see Murphy, (2004); Scholz & Lubell, 1998); Li, (2009); Rothstein & Uslaner, (2005).

⁴⁷⁰ The administrator acknowledged Volpi and Social Sport as the club’s largest shareholder but claimed that Mišković himself was also investing millions into HNK Rijeka.

⁴⁷¹ As was previously discussed, Volpi and Mišković invested heavily in the city of Rijeka via the football club and associated infrastructure projects. Here it should also be noted that Social Sport was technically registered in the Netherlands behind a trust based in the Bahamas and was financially managed by a Panamanian company, an arrangement not typical of an apparently benevolent foundation as its structure appeared designed explicitly to avoid as much tax as possible. Though at the time FIFA officials did not find evidence that Social Sport retained economic rights over any of the players from Nigeria, they did find that Social Sport violated FIFA rules by maintaining third-party rights over several Croatian players. FIFA officials did, however, find evidence of third-party influence in the case of Football College Abuja product Muhammed Kabiru, a distinction but nevertheless also a violation of FIFA regulations. Nacional, “Football Leaks: How the Croatian Football Federation and FC Rijeka Breached FIFA Rules During Transfers of Young Nigerian Players,” (2019).

In 2017, FIFA followed up with a subsequent investigation into the practices of Football College Abuja and Social Sport. Although questions regarding Ajayi's were settled without HNK Rijeka or the HNS receiving any penalties that would have been applicable should it have been determined that Ajayi had been a minor when he registered with the Croatian club, FIFA apparently remained concerned enough about Social Sport's habits with young Nigerian players that they instigated a more comprehensive examination of Football Club Abuja's players and former players. The investigation cited concern about players under eighteen being transferred without proper vetting and approval by FIFA and its relevant committee, but also that players that originated from Football College Abuja were being professionally managed by Social Sport, a clear conflict of interest given that Social Sport operated the academy itself.

Once again, to persuade FIFA that the operations of Football College Abuja and Social Sport were compliant with all applicable rules and regulations, a response to FIFA's inquiries by the administrator of Football Academy Abuja inadvertently revealed violations of FIFA bylaws. The administrator provided a list of nearly 150 players that were products of Football College Abuja, all of whom were registered with the Nigerian Football Federation. However, seven players, including the aforementioned Ajayi, that were listed were contracted to HNK Rijeka, the club that the HNS designated as those players' first registration. This is a contradiction that was tantamount to violating FIFA rules which state,

“Any professional player who is registered with a club that is affiliated to one association may only be registered with a club affiliated to a different association after an International Transfer Certificate (ITC) has been delivered by the former association and the new association has confirmed receipt of the ITC. The ITC procedure must be conducted exclusively via the Transfer Management System. Any form of ITC other than the one created by TMS shall not be recognized...[a] professional player is not eligible to play in official matches for his new club until the new association

Accessed here: <https://www.nacional.hr/football-leaks-how-the-croatian-football-federation-and-fc-rijeka-breached-fifa-rules-during-transfers-of-young-nigerian-players/>.

has confirmed the receipt of the ITC and has entered and confirmed the player registration date in TMS."⁴⁷²

Although HNK Rijeka could have concluded a transparent free transfer from Football College Abuja, a common practice in professional football, there is another FIFA regulation that rendered it apparently worthwhile to bypass the ITC and TMS systems while claiming HNK Rijeka represented these players' first professional registration. FIFA, even in free transfer scenarios, requires that the purchasing club provide "training and solidarity" restitution to the originating club when the players in question received training at their originating club and are between the ages of 18 – 23. In this scenario, Social Sport would have had to compensate itself, though the implication here is that such an arrangement would have led to scrutiny over potential conflicts of interest between Social Sport, HNK Rijeka, Football College Abuja, and the players in question.⁴⁷³

It was revealed in leaked emails between FIFA administrators that they believed that the case in question was a scheme to bring talented young Nigerian players to HNK Rijeka outside of FIFA oversight and to eventually sell the players on to earn transfer fees and contracts that FIFA came to believe would have financially benefited Social Sport through the management of individual players.⁴⁷⁴ Eventually, when confronted with questions about the affair publicly, HNK Rijeka responded that the players in question were free players that were not subject to the TMS because they did not come from a professional club – not accurate due to Football College Abuja's registration within the TMS system – and incredibly claimed that HNK Rijeka and

⁴⁷² FIFA, "Regulations on the Status and the Transfer of Players." Accessed here:

<https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/4c9a61a3e5b2c68e/original/ao68trzk4bbaezlipx9u-pdf.pdf>.

⁴⁷³ Conflicts of interest involving Volpi, Mišković and Nigerian officials were frequent. For example, Orlean Invest West Africa Limited, owned by Volpi and managed by Mišković signed an obscure agreement with the Nigerian Football Federation while later, Orlean Invest Africa Limited, a separate company also owned by Volpi, founded Football College Abuja. Vanguard, "Maigari Explains Partnership with Orlean," (2014). Accessed here: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/04/maigari-explains-partnership-orlean/>.

⁴⁷⁴ This informal endeavour also included Volpi's Italian club, Spezia Calcio, as well as the broader Italian Football Federation, where Volpi maintained key personal and business relationships. This led to an investigation into prominent club AS Roma regarding a player from Football College Abuja regarding the illegal transfer of a player under the age of eighteen. FIFA Disciplinary Committee, "Notification of the Grounds of the Decision," (2021). Accessed here: <https://sennferrero.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Decision-FDD-8069.pdf>.

Football College Abuja had “no particular business relationship” despite both entities being owned by the same parent company and despite the sheer number of Football College Abuja players that eventually made their way to HNK Rijeka.⁴⁷⁵

In a final series of contradictions, the administrator of Football College Abuja, when asked about the Goodness Ajayi transfer and the other players that were transferred through FIFA’s TMS system, claimed that the transactions did not amount to transfers and that the players in question simply left Nigeria without the consent of Football College Abuja, a claim that runs counter to the fact that both HNK Rijeka and the HNS had already been sanctioned by FIFA for the manner in which the Ajayi transfer was carried out. The administrator then claimed that Football College Abuja had never carried out any international transfer because it lacked the connections to do so - this despite the fact that the owner of Football College Abuja owned two professional football clubs in Europe. This also defies the account of a former HNK Rijeka administrator, who acknowledged that he brought Football College Abuja prospects to Croatia while they were minors, placed them in local schools, and registered them with the club when they turned eighteen.⁴⁷⁶

The Football College Abuja players brought to Croatia outside formal rules for economic gain did not yield the financial gains that Volpi and Mišković were hoping for. Two players spent time at other Croatian First League clubs; one played in the German second division; one played at a Norwegian second division club; and others stayed with Rijeka and were frequently loaned out to clubs in Croatia, Hungary, and beyond.

As of this writing, Mišković remains in charge of HNK Rijeka via the London company his United Arab Emirates-based daughters technically own and remains an HNS Vice President. Mišković’s tenure as a high-ranking, highly visible football official is

⁴⁷⁵ Nacional, “Football Leaks: How the Croatian Football Federation and FC Rijeka Breached FIFA Rules During Transfers of Young Nigerian Players,” (2019). Accessed here: <https://www.nacional.hr/football-leaks-how-the-croatian-football-federation-and-fc-rijeka-breached-fifa-rules-during-transfers-of-young-nigerian-players/>.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

symptomatic of a state and a governing body unwilling to provide rigorous oversight over football.⁴⁷⁷

Conclusion

The preceding chapter sought to illustrate Croatia's "flavours of informality" by scrutinising a number of relevant examples of informalities within the structures of football, as exercised by a diverse number of footballing stakeholders, including players, executives, governing officials, and criminal elements. It is clear that informal networks and processes run the gamut in Croatian football – from political appointees like Zlatko Canjuga to well-connected businessmen-turned-football chairmen and executives like Damir Mišković and the processes he and his partner, Gabriele Volpi, undertook through the exercising of informal networks and economic activities, to poorly paid players and high-ranking HNS officials participating in corrupt match-fixing schemes. The chapter also illustrated that informal networks and processes that permeate football have not been confined to any one time – they appear in the Tuđman, post-Tuđman, and EU-accession eras, confirming its comparability to general forms of development stagnation that have been observed over the same period.

Croatia's "flavours" illustrate that football is not only a domain of informality, but that those same processes are liable to be utilised in a variety of institutions within the Croatian state. This is made more evident in the following chapter, in which one man, Zdravko Mamić, engaged in rank corruption, the use of informal political networking, and economic informality to coalesce unprecedented degrees of power within Croatian football.

⁴⁷⁷ Total Croatia News, "Damir Mišković and 'Teanna Limited' Owner of NK Rijeka!" (2017). Accessed here: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/sport/24154-damir-miskovic-and-teanna-limited-new-owner-of-nk-rijeka>.

Chapter Six: Elite Informality and Football in Croatia

The following chapter examines how networks in Croatia foster informality and does so primarily by analysing the trajectory of Croatian football leader Zdravko Mamić, who became wealthy and powerful largely due to his being in the orbit of Franjo Tuđman. Before looking specifically at Mamić, the chapter begins with an overview of the evolution of laws surrounding public procurement in Croatia and how Tuđman began instituting policies that benefitted himself, his family, and his friends, leading to profitable public contracts becoming contingent on one's allegiance to the president. The chapter then chronicles Mamić's early upbringing and his passion for football – leading him to a front office position with Dinamo Zagreb and proximity to Tuđman. Mamić's exploitation of Tuđman's public procurement and privatisation laws helped him become wealthy enough that by the time he returned to football, he was able to swiftly become the most powerful person in the sport. With friends in high places, Mamić was untouchable. What this chapter demonstrates is that the Croatian political elite will tolerate a significant amount of corruption but as Mamić came to discover, too much attention can be disastrous.

The case study proffered in this chapter is illustrative again of how informal processes and networks have inundated football in multiple ways. Mamić benefitted from informality in top politics, earning wealth and power through his proximity to decisionmakers at the dawn of Croatian independence. He increased his power through economic informality, often bypassing FIFA rules and regulations in dealings involving sought after players. And he participated in nakedly corrupt activities for years, all while working within a network that included elite politicians, players, managers, officials, and bureaucrats. In short, the chapter and the activities Mamić engaged in signal football's saturation with informality, with the Croatian state's broader issues with informal networks and processes as a backdrop.

A Brief Overview of the Evolution of Public Procurement Law in Croatia

Despite accession to the European Union in 2013, Croatia's public procurement sector, which accounts for over 12% of Croatia's total GDP, remains highly vulnerable to abuse and corruption. In 2004, 57% of business owners interviewed agreed that their everyday business transactions were exposed to or resorted to corruption in public contracting.⁴⁷⁸ By 2014, Croatia's first year as a member of the European Union, the European Commission reported that more than 60% of companies that conduct business in Croatia believe that corruption in public procurement is "widespread" in both national and local transactions.⁴⁷⁹ European Union standards allowed Croatian law to introduce additional safeguards that would protect transparency and value for money while curtailing inconsistent management standards and pay-to-play schemes. The advent of an electronic bidding process on all public purchases equal or greater in value to €9,700 was designed to limit previous exposure between bidders and facilitators as to best prevent previously "agreed-to" arrangements, a modern standard that has curbed corruption in other European Union member-states. Despite this, significant gaps remain. For example, 27% of tenders awarded in the construction sector were awarded public funds in restrictive or uncompetitive circumstances during the period 2012-2013 with a value of over HK 1.5 billion.⁴⁸⁰ Despite reforms of the public procurement sector that date to the Tuđman-era, loopholes remain. The perception of corruption in Croatia remains stubbornly high, and the system is frequently exploited.

Prior to 1998, Croatia did not have a formal public procurement law established; like much of the privatisation process that was initially introduced in 1991, public works were awarded to clients of the Tuđman regime. While the first law was introduced in 1998, it was not until the SDP-led coalition government of Ivica Račan came to power

⁴⁷⁸ This is in addition to the 25% of respondents that estimated corruption payments up to 3% of the company's total income or between 4-5% of total income. Only 40% reported that no corrupt transactions were necessary to secure public tender. See Ateljević & Budak, (2010).

⁴⁷⁹ European Commission, "Businesses' Attitudes Towards Corruption in the EU," (2014). Accessed here: https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/flash/fl_374_en.pdf. On this point, Croatia's public procurement laws were harmonised (including amendments) with European Union standards. Nevertheless, corruption remained (and continues to be) a significant issue.

⁴⁸⁰ Podumljak & David-Barrett, (2015). The construction industry accounts for a significant amount of the total value of public contracts; indeed, the ten most valuable construction contracts in 2013 accounted for a quarter of the total value of public procurement and public contracts accounted for three quarters of the total value of the construction industry in Croatia.

that a law that would bring Croatia's public procurement structures more in line with European standards was instituted. This came to pass in 2001 and notably established two central offices dealing with public procurement: The Public Procurement Office and the Public Procurement Supervisory Commission.⁴⁸¹ Further reforms were incrementally introduced in an effort to further harmonise procedures with EU standards as Croatian accession became more conceivable, ultimately culminating in the more comprehensive 2012 law enacted to dovetail accession in 2013.⁴⁸² The implementation of the 2012 law followed what remains to be the most egregiously corrupt misuse of the public procurement system in place in Croatia. By 2007, Croatia's prime minister, Ivo Sanader, had surprised observers in Europe and beyond after helping return the HDZ to power for the first time since the death of Tuđman and many were concerned that Sanader would reintroduce authoritarianism to Croatia just as it was beginning to make the requisite strides required to formally join the European community. Instead, Sanader proved himself to be proactive on Croatia's path toward Europe. However, in practical terms, anti-corruption legislation brought forth by Sanader's government was cosmetic and enforcement was slow, compelling both a rise in the perception of corruption and the EU to renew its focus on the issue.⁴⁸³

It was during this period that Sanader presided over a meeting of government ministers, chief executives, and representatives from enterprises which were wholly or partially owned by the Croatian state. Exploiting his role as prime minister and as head of a government that appointed many of the managers overseeing government-owned firms, he instructed those in attendance to enter into business agreements with a small marketing firm called FIMI-media.⁴⁸⁴ FIMI would be offered public tenders without

⁴⁸¹ This coincided with Croatia's signing of the EU Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The former's chief function was to oversee the implication of public procurement laws; the latter was established to review public procurement complaints. See EBRD, "Croatia: Reforms to Meet the Terms of the EU *Acquis*," (2014). Accessed here: <https://www.ebrd.com/downloads/research/law/lit113h.pdf>.

⁴⁸² One such reform that was introduced included an anti-corruption measure that stated contracting authorities should not offer contracts to any enterprise if the manager of the contracting authority owns 20% or more of the tendering firm. While this demonstrated some commitment to combating a more straight-forward form of corruption, politicisation gaps were not reformed thoroughly.

⁴⁸³ The European Union nominated corruption as one of the three most critical issues facing Croatia on its path to accession during a 2006 review. See Freedom House, "Nations in Transit: Croatia," (2007). Accessed here: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2007/croatia>.

⁴⁸⁴ In subsequent engagements with other firm managers, Sanader dispatched one of his closest aides, Mladen Barišić, to compel business with FIMI. Barišić was concurrently serving as a State Secretary and as the party treasurer of the HDZ. See Vuletić, (2014).

having to go through a public bidding process – a manoeuvre that contradicted even the relatively weak public procurement law in place in Croatia at this time – and then would send a bill for services that never occurred to the various state-owned enterprises. Conspirators would then use public money to pay FIMI and the payments would be converted to cash and subsequently delivered to Sanader and his cronies. The money would either be kept for personal use or be deposited into slush funds in support of the HDZ. The scheme carried on until 2010, when Sanader abruptly resigned his office and briefly fled Croatia after parliament stripped him of immunity. Sanader's crimes – many of which were chronicled in chapter four – were numerous, but the FIMI case helped expose the corruptible rot present in the HDZ – one of the key arbiters of public life in Croatia. The verdict in the case discovered a pattern of corruption in which prominent businessmen would contribute significant sums of cash to the HDZ and then subsequently be rewarded with public contracts without having to engage in a bidding process.⁴⁸⁵ Eventually Sanader, the HDZ itself, and other functionaries were convicted for crimes relating to the siphoning of public funds in the FIMI-media case.⁴⁸⁶

Much of the additions brought forth in the aftermath of FIMI-media were introduced to bring about greater transparency through technology, including the establishment of an online register which must include searchable information regarding public tenders, including,

“1: the subject matter of procurement; 2: the file reference that the contracting authority/entity allocated to the procurement and the number under which the procurement was published; 3: the type of public procurement procedure conducted; 4: the amount of the awarded public procurement contract or framework agreement, as applicable; 5: the date of the conclusion and the term for which the public procurement contract was awarded, the name of the entity with which the framework agreement was concluded, the name of the tenderer to whom the public procurement

⁴⁸⁵ These individuals included: Marijan Primorac who donated over EURO320,000 and bought Sanader a BMW while his company was awarded a lucrative contract to rent office space for Croatia's Lottery bureau; Miho Zrnić Marinović, who donated over EURO260,000 and raided the state out of millions through the state-run Fund for Environmental Protection and his raw materials firm; and Božidar Longin, who donated EURO36,000 and was the manager of public procurement for a Croatian logging firm. See EU AntiCorrp, “Corruption and Public Procurement: Findings and Recommendations,” (2015). Accessed here: <http://anticorpp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/FIMI-Media-Case-Study-EN.pdf>.

⁴⁸⁶ Subsequently, the Croatian Supreme Court ordered a re-trial; proceedings are ongoing as of this writing.

contract – based on a framework agreement – was awarded, and the name of the subcontractor, if any; 7: the final date of the supply of goods, provision of services or execution of works; and 8: the final amount which the contracting authority/entity paid on the basis of the public procurement contract, and, where this amount is higher than the contracted amount, and explanation for that difference.”⁴⁸⁷

Although the 2012 law brought Croatia in line with European standards (and did not hinder its 2013 accession), significant issues remained. Most notably, the new law failed to address the remaining gaps that allowed for the politicisation of the procurement process. The law allowed for four types of legal entities in Croatia that undertake public procurement: (i) Central government bodies; (ii) Local and regional cities and municipalities; (iii) Legal persons and firms without formal ties to public administration; and (iv) Organisations owned at least partly by either central or local government agencies and that occupy a unique position in the economy (for example, providers of public services). As Podumljak & Barrett note, politicisation of public contracts is difficult to carry out directly by government bodies, either central or regional/local. However, the other two types of entities are prone to corruption.⁴⁸⁸ Critically, procurement authorities that deal both with the day-to-day management of the implementation of rules and those that review complaints as members of the Public Procurement Supervisory Committee are appointed by parliament. Additionally, a common feature of public procurement offices is their mismanagement – whether by design or through incompetence. These offices tend to require budget subsidies which make close relationships with political actors a necessity. Furthermore, authorities are empowered to appoint a Chief Procurement Officer that oversees procurement officers across Croatia. This person is required to hold a professional qualification that renders much of the staff populating procurement officers unable to review the work of the Chief Procurement Officer because they lack the qualification to do so. Thus, the Chief Procurement Officer role that is appointed by a functionary put into place by parliament is at risk for politicisation as they would be able to carry out their work largely unabated.

⁴⁸⁷ EU AntiCorrp, “Corruption and Public Procurement: Findings and Recommendations,” (2015). Accessed here: <http://anticorpp.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/FIMI-Media-Case-Study-EN.pdf>. A system of fines was introduced to ensure up-to-date online information. However, one key aspect of the award process that was not required to be reported either online or otherwise is a report from the contracting authorities regarding the economic value of the contract (i.e., whether the contract was the most economic advantageous).

⁴⁸⁸ They are also more common in specific industries, including the aforementioned construction industry that accounts for a significant portion of public procurement. Over half of all public procurement tenders were managed by authorities of non-public bodies that are subject to weaker oversight.

That the appointment of public procurement officers is itself a politicised process is best evidenced by the remarkable amount of turnover that followed the 2011 election in Croatia. Podumljak & David-Barrett determined that twenty-four out of twenty-eight contracting authorities that they examined, experienced at least one change in management following the election at the end of 2011 and in 2012.⁴⁸⁹ This accounted for half of all the turnover between 2010 and 2013 in public procurement offices.

The latest iteration of Croatia's public procurement law was passed in late 2016 and brought into force in January of 2017. The new law features over four-hundred and fifty provisions with the most crucial being the mandate that the tender does not go simply to the bidder with the lowest cost, but the bidder providing the most economically advantageous tender. This has added another dimension to a system that observers have critiqued as being overly formal and bureaucratic while doing little to combat the issues that have plagued the procurement process, since laws regulating public contracts were introduced over two decades ago.⁴⁹⁰

Because those gaps continue to linger, high-level incidents continue to occur, notably in Croatia's defence sector. Although Croatia is a member of NATO, it contributes less than the treaty-required 2% of defence spending, and its air force has fallen into disrepair.⁴⁹¹ Following incidents that forced the substandard state of the air force into public consciousness, improving defence capabilities – particularly air force equipment – became a contentious issue in Croatia. With an added political dimension, the incentive to spend public money on defence improvements grew greater. The failure

⁴⁸⁹ Podumljak & David-Barrett, (2015).

⁴⁹⁰ See Schoenherr, "Croatia: New Modernised Public Procurement Law Will Take Effect on January 1, 2017," (2016). Accessed here: https://www.schoenherr.rs/uploads/tx_news/Croatia_New_modernised_public_procurement_rules_will_enter_into_force_on_1_January_2017.pdf.

⁴⁹¹ Estimates indicate the Croatia's air force may consist of less than five fighter jets. By 2014, the Croatian defence budget had been cut considerably and Croatia's air force, made up primarily of Russian made MiG's, were barely serviceable. Indeed, in August of 2014, a Croatian MiG crash landed after returning from a public demonstration; the pilot safely ejected and no one on the ground was hurt, but the impetus to rectify the air force quandary began after this incident drew public recriminations. See Balkan Insight, "Croatian Jet Crash Blamed on Defence Cuts," (2014). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2014/08/06/croatian-jet-crash-blamed-on-defence-cuts/>.

to root out corruption in public procurement, though, has led to a number of scandals within the Croatian government.⁴⁹²

Public procurement laws in Croatia were introduced just as the friends and compatriots of Franjo Tuđman were enriching themselves through privatisation. Despite multiple amendments designed to bring Croatia in line with European standards, it continues to be the case that the politically well-connected are often able to skirt the rules and it is indeed the case that the public procurement sector in Croatia is susceptible to politicisation. This background is essential to understanding the environment in which Zdravko Mamić and other officials in the Croatian Football Federation (HNS) could enrich themselves through a combination of corrupt deals and the spoils of public money earned through informal networks.

Tuđman, Mamić, and the Rise of “Alpha and Omega.”

As the series of events and crises unravelled Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, hurtling Croatia toward independence, Franjo Tuđman and his allies commenced a political programme that operationalised fervent nationalism in the pursuit of a sovereign Croatia and, as independence was achieved, as a tool of state-building that initially sought to “finally bury [Croatia’s] dead and get on with the future.”⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² For example, a 2016 scandal involving the procurement of MiG fighter jets from a Ukrainian state-owned firm led to the indictment of a Croatian Defence Ministry official after it was revealed the official demanded a bribe in exchange for the firm to be awarded the public tender. See OCCRP, “Croatia: Fighter Jet Deal with Ukrainian Company Under Investigation,” (2016). Accessed here: <https://www.occrp.org/en/27-ccwatch/cc-watch-briefs/5089-croatia-fighter-jet-deal-with-ukrainian-company-under-investigation>. Appearing on Croatian television, the Ukrainian ambassador professed ignorance while then Croatian president Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović ensured an investigation would be carried out.

⁴⁹³ Sadkovich, (2009:63). This is in reference to Croatia’s World War II era culpability in assisting and overseeing atrocities at the behest of their Nazi allies. Tuđman’s own writing – which eventually led to his ousting from the Yugoslav Communist Party and multiple prison terms – outlines his model for state-building in a small nation, arguing that small states should throw off the proverbial shackles of supranational entities and doctrines, instead concentrating on the construction of a self-governing, sovereign state. Nevertheless, Tuđman often sought legitimacy through the acknowledgment of international actors, including through sport. For more on Tuđman’s writings, see Đurašković, (2014).

Sport in Croatia quickly became another domain in which Tuđman and the HDZ could advance both a model of state-building based on dogmatic nationalism, as well as the personal stake many of the most connected members of Croatia's new political elite would have in state, quasi-state, and newly privatised enterprises. Through explicitly nationalistic symbolism and international engagement, sport served as a useful auxiliary in the broader propaganda strategy of the Tuđman regime.

It was to Tuđman's benefit that Croatia was home to a cavalcade of internationally recognised athletes who, during the war in Croatia, served as messengers of the cause; that many of the athletes in question were well-known in their respective sports – thus frequently profiled and interviewed – aided Tuđman's propaganda offensive.⁴⁹⁴ Tuđman's efforts to allow sport to serve as a driver of national unity frequently worked in the earliest days of the Republic. As previously noted, in 1990, the United States agreed to play in an exhibition match against a band of Croatian "All-Stars." The match was a major propaganda victory for Tuđman in that it served to symbolise the tacit approval of the United States for an independent Croatia and it stoked existing nationalist fervour ever more, as war became a starker reality.⁴⁹⁵ Tuđman held a massive rally in Zagreb that saw the restoration of a nationalist statue that had been removed by the Titoist regime. The following day, the match between the US and Croatia took place in the Maksimir Stadium. Symbols, including of the newly re-erected Ban Jelačić statue adorned programmes and the stadium – it was clear that this was to be a celebration of "Croatian-ness." The Croatian All-Stars won a celebrated 2-1 victory; during the proceedings, nationalist slogans were frequently shouted out, including "Let's Go to Knin!" Tuđman achieved a significant coup in that he was able

⁴⁹⁴ This included multiple stars in the National Basketball Association (Dražen Petrović, Toni Kukoč, Dino Rađa) and in professional tennis (most notably Goran Ivanisević). Ivanisević was famously outspoken regarding tennis and during the wars of the 1990s, frequently employed political messages while playing abroad, including wearing a warm-up suit during a 1991 tournament in Paris that was emblazoned with "Stop Aggression against Croatia" on the back. See Washington Post, "Weight of Croatia's War Strengthening Ivanisević," (1992). Accessed here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/sports/1992/08/25/weight-of-croatias-war-strengthening-ivanisevic/f09259aa-8faf-4d46-8e2a-5af6f1868a4b/>.

⁴⁹⁵ It was in this period that ethnic Serbs living in the Krajina region of Croatia sought to breakaway and form a miniscule state for Croatia's Serbian population. When Tuđman sent helicopters to try and quell the uprising, they were forced to turn around. Subsequently, the Krajina Serbs prepared for war with the support of Milošević. Sack & Suster, (2000).

to orchestrate an event in which the Croats in attendance would get to experience the symbolism of an independent Croatia before it was legally independent.

Football remained key to Tuđman's strategy to promote patriotism as a vital part of life in Croatia once the Republic achieved independence. Notably, the president ran afoul of the Bad Blue Boys when he instituted a name change, eventually calling the club "Croatia Zagreb." This caused great consternation and a feud between the BBB – many of whom served in paramilitary units on behalf of the nationalist project Tuđman promoted during the war – and Tuđman himself. The feud with football supporters' groups, including the BBB, Torcida, and others, continued as it became clear that, much like broader privatisation, football would be a domain reserved for Tuđman allies. At clubs and in local football associations, the HDZ dominated membership rolls, ensuring that the spoils associated with the sport would go primarily to Croatia's new, manufactured elite.⁴⁹⁶

The chaotic, inherently corrupt nature of Croatian football was a symptom of the equally chaotic, inherently corrupt nature of Croatia's broader economy in the 1990s. Although Tuđman's insular approach to privatisation made members of his family and political inner circle wealthy in short order, others were still able to capitalise and ingratiate themselves into the new Croatian elite more meticulously through relationship-building.⁴⁹⁷ Zdravko Mamić grew up in the outer suburbs of Zagreb with

⁴⁹⁶Though Croatian club football experienced a precipitous decline in the 1990s, the national team, in its first World Cup as an independent republic, defied all expectations in 1998 to finish third in the tournament. This made heroes out of Davor Šuker and further endeared Croats to Zvonimir Boban and Robert Prosinečki. Additionally, the manager of the team, Miroslav Blažević would forever be known as "the coach of all coaches" in Croatia from that point forward. Blažević's success led to a sustained friendship with Tuđman.

⁴⁹⁷ Others were able to navigate often hostile political terrain while consolidating their wealth. Emil Tedeschi often ran afoul of the HDZ and Tuđman while his firm, Atlantic Grupa, nevertheless grew into a genuine international success. In 1992, after Tuđman's government effectively shuttered the magazine *Danas* because of its willingness to critique the HDZ government, Tedeschi helped found *Novi Danas* as a private-sector replacement that utilised the same editorial line. Because Tedeschi printed the magazine in Graz, Austria, the Croatian government labelled the magazine as being foreign and taxed it along those lines, rendering the venture unprofitable and Tedeschi ceased production. By the end of the year, the government resuscitated *Danas* as a pro-HDZ publication. Tedeschi eventually became one of Croatia's wealthiest people, retaining political connections (most notably with the SDP prime minister Zoran Milanović, a childhood friend), and is often still publicly critical of the HDZ. See Human Rights Watch, "Civil and Political Rights in Croatia," (1995). Accessed here: <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1995/Croatia.htm>; Christian Science Monitor, "Communist Past Weighs on Croatian Press," (1993). Accessed here:

few connections and little discernible physical skills. However, he became simultaneously powerful and, through his domination of Dinamo Zagreb (and Croatian football generally), wealthy and politically well-connected. Through those connections, Mamić was able to expand his wealth exponentially, extending his influence and rendering him a fixture in Croatian public life. Through a combination of his political connections, his (mis)management of Dinamo, and his notoriously explicit public persona, Mamić drew the ire of not only Dinamo supporters, but of most committed football fans in Croatia. His criminality became apparent – as did his staggeringly close connections to the upper echelons of Croatia’s political elite – and he was finally indicted and convicted for multiple financial crimes before fleeing to Bosnia-Herzegovina. This subsection spotlights the career of Mamić and how his wealth, power, and connections were consolidated because of the adulterated nature of Croatia’s economic and political transition; his criminally corrupt – yet largely unimpeded – management of Croatian football; and his inevitable downfall and the cloak of nationalism that his patrons hid under as Croatia’s successful 2018 World Cup campaign unfolded to occlude substantive questions of impropriety. Mamić’s exploits demonstrate a continuation of a pattern in which Croatia’s political and economic elite abide by corruption and cauterise any potential ramifications through the blatant embrace of nationalist propaganda when convenient, impeding significant reforms and perpetuating a cycle of informal relations and processes.

Although he would be viewed as a great villain by many of Dinamo Zagreb’s fiercest supporters, Mamić began his association with the club as a genuine fan and aspired to play for the team. Mamić’s parents emigrated to Bjelovar, Croatia from Zidine, Bosnia-Herzegovina in the mid-1950s as the economic discrepancies between Yugoslavia’s republics began to emerge. By 1972, 19% of employed Yugoslavs, nearly a million people in total, were working abroad; this included Mamić’s father, a beneficiary of Germany’s *Gastarbeiter* (“guest worker”) programme.⁴⁹⁸ From Mamić’s

<https://www.csmonitor.com/1993/0126/26131.html>; and Total Croatia News, “Tedeschi: We’ll See what Plenković Can Do for HDZ; My Friendship with Milanović Was Not Beneficial,” (2016). Accessed here: https://www.total-croatia-news.com/item/12766-teseschi-we-ll-see-what-plenkovic-can-do-for-hdz-my-friendship-with-milanovic-was-not-beneficial?fbclid=IwAR2kzMo-Qt-_LzKRp5Zm2hvmBB1ShQ1xu94qvInxQrC3te0hze3EcXrg6vc.

⁴⁹⁸ For figures, see Baučić, (1976).

own account of his childhood, the family survived on a meagre existence and lacked many of the relative comforts of their neighbours.⁴⁹⁹ Mamić and his two younger brothers, according to Mamić himself, even lacked proper shoes and instead played football barefoot outside. Mamić was spotted by a coach for Dinamo and along with his brother, Stojko, was offered a place at Dinamo's youth academy. Before long, Mamić was cut from the team, eliminating any genuine chance he had to play club-level football.⁵⁰⁰

In the 1960s, when Mamić was a boy, Dinamo Zagreb had perhaps their finest decade as a club, winning multiple domestic trophies as well as the 1966-1967 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup, the forerunner to today's UEFA Europa League. Frequent success, the popularity of individual players like Slaven Zambata and Rudolf Belin, and protracted rivalries against Hajduk Split and Red Star Belgrade precipitated a rise in fan support. In this period, Mamić established himself as a committed supporter of the club as organised supporter groups were still in incubation. In the 1970s, the club could not repeat the success it had earned in the previous decade, but players like Zlatko Kranjčar ensured that the quality on the pitch would not completely subside, even if trophies became elusive. Though Mamić was no longer a player for Dinamo, he remained a fixture at the Maksimir by working around the stadium selling Styrofoam seat cushions to spectators. His fortunes shifted dramatically when, in 1980, Dinamo hired the previously mentioned Miroslav "Ćiro" Blažević to manage the club.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁹ This included the ability to watch the successful local handball club, Partizan Bjelovar, that won numerous Yugoslav league titles in the late 1960s and early 1970s and won the European championship in 1972.

⁵⁰⁰ Much of Mamić's childhood was discussed in detail at a wide-ranging, often rambling press conference that Mamić held following his criminal indictment. Mamić claimed that he was a "peasant kid" that was kicked off the Dinamo youth team for being "the most combative player in the club's history." See Total Croatia News, "My Truth": Zdravko Mamić Holds Two Hour Long Press Conference," (2018). Accessed here: <https://www.total-croatia-news.com/sport/24335-my-truth-zdravko-mamic-holds-two-hour-long-press-conference>. Most other accounts of Mamić's time as a youth player state simply that he was not good enough to merit his place on the youth team of the most successful football club in Croatia. See Jonathan Wilson in The Guardian, "Another Rant in the Life of Mamić." (2007). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2007/oct/03/europeanfootball.sport>.

⁵⁰¹ Blažević also began his playing career as a youth player with Dinamo but, like Mamić, never saw any playing time with the club. However, he was good enough to make scattered appearances for Lokomotiva Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Rijeka in the 1950s and 1960s before embarking on a far more successful management career. This required Blažević to move to Switzerland, where he worked as a janitor while learning enough French to be able to communicate. See ESPN, "The Amazing Story of Ćiro Blažević is Far from Over," (2014). Accessed here: <https://www.espn.co.uk/football/blog/name/93/post/1841059/headline>.

Blažević, who found management success in Switzerland by winning a domestic cup with Sion in 1974, returned to Croatia and took over at Dinamo after the club dropped to 14th in the Yugoslav First League and had gone 22 years without winning the league (despite European and other domestic success in the 1960s). It was during this period that Blažević met Mamić, then in his early twenties, and hired him for an entry-level role with the club's front office. Blažević's managerial reputation skyrocketed when, in his second year at the helm of the club, Dinamo won the Yugoslav First League - their first league title in nearly a quarter of a century. Blažević left after another season in Zagreb to manage Grasshoppers in Switzerland but by this point, Mamić was embedded in the Dinamo front office. In the 1980s, Mamić remained an employee of the club and was also something of a liaison to the Bad Blue Boys during an era in which the BBB, in its infancy as an organised group, adopted Croatian nationalism as a core characteristic.⁵⁰² Blažević would return to the club as manager between 1986 – 1988, corresponding with the establishment of the BBB and a rising nationalist credo serving as a hallmark at grounds across Yugoslavia, including in Zagreb. As Mills notes,

“By the end of the decade, nationalism was rampant in stadiums. Admittedly, sport related arrests for insults on a ‘socialist, patriotic, or national basis’ fell in Zagreb between 1985 and 1987. This was likely the result, however, of changing attitudes to nationalist chanting on the part of law enforcement, rather than a reduction in such behaviour. The apparent decline is juxtaposed with a concurrent drastic rise in the number of arrests for the possession of weapons. Moreover, 48 per cent of football arrests occurred in the context of fixtures between Dinamo and Serbian rivals Red Star.”⁵⁰³

Tuđman formally established the HDZ in 1989 and in 1990, while managing in France for Nantes, Blažević cemented his own personal friendship with Tuđman and joined the HDZ.⁵⁰⁴ Through his longstanding professional and personal relationship with

⁵⁰² Goldblatt, (2019).

⁵⁰³ Mills, (2018:203).

⁵⁰⁴ As discussed previously, this relationship would be professionally beneficial for Blažević after he was appointed the first manager of independent Croatia's national team during his third stint managing Croatia Zagreb, the former Dinamo.

Blažević, the former cushion salesman Mamić was now in the orbit of Croatia's new political elite. It would not be long before he was invited to take full advantage of the spoils system that defined the independent Croatian economy. Indeed, in 1993 Mamić was named a director of Croatia Zagreb and although he left the club the following year, subsequent events demonstrate that Mamić (along with, and through, Blažević) was a part of a new Croatian elite that emerged through association with Tuđman and his political allies.⁵⁰⁵ As Sekulić & Šporer observe,

“In the 1989-96 period the ‘political control’ over the political part of the elite changed its nature because of the introduction of parliamentary democracy. But in spite of this, political and economic life in Croatia was characterized by the absolute domination of one party (HDZ). The state played a dominant role in the privatization process and the continuation of state ownership of large sectors of the economy ensure the continued political influence of the HDZ in the appointment of managers...the fact that more than half of the managers were new entrants to the position starting from 1989 was probably to a large extent a reflection of the ‘cadre’ policy of the new ruling party, which clearly did exercise control over key sectors of the economy. In this sense the circulation was ‘politically induced’ in the same way as it had been in the communist period, the direction was different...the new regime obviously exercise[d] more control over the economy and consequently introduced more circulation among the managerial elite.”⁵⁰⁶

It was during this period, after Blažević left to manage the Croatian national team and Mamić himself eventually officially left the Croatia Zagreb (previously known as Dinamo) front office in 1993, that Mamić capitalised on Croatia's “shock therapy” privatisation to expand his own personal wealth.⁵⁰⁷ The advent of the HDZ's control over all aspects of the economy, including in the hiring of managers and the directing of once socially-owned shares to preferred owners through a thoroughly undemocratic

⁵⁰⁵ Mamić has maintained that his decision to leave Dinamo during this period was due to his disagreement with Dinamo's name change. See FourFourTwo, “Football's Most Infamous Man, FFT Meets Zdravko Mamić,” (2019). Mamić was unable to overcome the political power of the previously discussed Zlatko Canjuga. As a symbol of how much the most resolute Dinamo supporters reviled Mamić, by the 2010s fans openly chanted for the return Canjuga.

⁵⁰⁶ Sekulić & Šporer, (2002:92). The authors found that 70.3% of the “elite” in Croatia between 1989 – 1996 were not already an elite in 1989, indicating a high degree of HDZ-led turnover. They also found that those 1989 – 1996 elites were less educated than communist-era elites from the decade prior, which the authors credit to an adherence to a populist platform. This is also likely due to network politics and the “cadre policy” the authors reference. In either case, this policy was directly beneficial to the previously anonymous Mamić.

⁵⁰⁷ It should be pointed out that Mamić was out of the front office during this period, but that his links to football – particularly as an agent – grew stronger.

privatisation process benefitted those with connections to the new Croatian elite, but also brought about a dramatic collapse in Croatian industry. In the 1980s, foreign debt obligations instigated a stagnation in industrial exports in Yugoslav-era Croatia. This decline was exacerbated by the repurposing of the Croatian economy away from industry and into the service sector. It was industrial firms that were most often transferred from social ownership into privatised firms under the control of associates of Croatia's new elite. In most instances, owners and managers of these newly privatised firms would plunder before becoming the firm eventually became insolvent. The results were transformative and, for those granted safe passage into the upper-class of independent Croatia, enriching. Mihaljević argues that western-mandated "economic stabilisation" programmes succeeded in controlling inflation in post-war Croatia, but that such programmes inflamed negative economic and societal aspects, with the worst of it befalling industry. Mihaljević observes,

"The loss of jobs was strongest in industrial production, then the most powerful Croatian economic sector, accounting for more than one-third of GDP in 1990, although the problems for industry had already begun a decade earlier...[but] the break-up of Yugoslavia and the ascent of new political elites brought to industry only one disaster after another. Restoration of capitalism, through the process of privatisation during the war at the beginning of the 1990s, had a ruinous effect on the production process in most factories and appreciated domestic currency made a presence on foreign markets much more difficult."⁵⁰⁸

The analysis concludes that from 1990 – 2000, nearly half of all jobs in industry were lost and unemployment overall more than doubled, from 161,000 unemployed persons in 1990 to 358,000 unemployed persons in 2000. A single example of what brought about the steep decline in industrial output and the marked rise in unemployment over the course of the 1990s, involves the marauding of one of Croatia's then-largest regional industrial firms, Česma, after the majority of the firm's shares were funnelled into the portfolio of Zdravko Mamić.

⁵⁰⁸ Mihaljević, (2014:357).

By the mid-1990s, in the immediate aftermath of war-time activities in Croatia, the Bjelovar region in the north of Croatia remained an industrial hub. By 1995, agriculture employed over 28% of the workforce in the region while nearly a fifth were employed in various types of industrial firms.⁵⁰⁹ In addition to being home to Croatia's few oil and natural gas reserves, the majority of its mineral deposits, and over 10% of all agricultural land in the state, the Bjelovar region contributed greatly to Croatia's industrial output through wood, timber, and related industries. Indeed, Bjelovar's "rich and varied stands of timber, with a high percentage being beech and oak, make up 33% of the total timber stands and woodland areas of Croatia."⁵¹⁰ This allowed for the processing of raw timber, finished products, and paper products - accounting for 20% of the region's total exports. Though multiple firms traded in wood processing and related industries, the largest was Česma ("Faucet"), a firm in which Mamić's father previously worked.

In December 1992, with Croatia at war, the state converted Česma into a joint stock company. At the time, the firm was turning over a gross profit of over 1.3 million Croatian dinars and employed 1,218 persons in various positions.⁵¹¹ Between 1994 and 1995, Mamić acquired 14,616 shares in Česma while his two brothers acquired a total of 30,669 shares. As was the case with multiple former socially managed enterprises, Česma retained the same manager, Ivan Ljubanović, from the end of the socialist period through the decline of the firm. In 1995, the company was restructured, devolving from one primary entity into eight subsidiaries,⁵¹² each with a different primary operation:

⁵⁰⁹ Richardson, (1994).

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹¹ In 2003, the Croatian government conducted an audit of the privatisation of Česma under the suspicion that shareholders, including Mamić, were awarded substantial stock in the company at a deeply discounted rate that they were not entitled to. Although Croatian authorities ruled that there was nothing improper about Česma's privatisation, the document nonetheless acknowledges that processes related to that privatisation were extraordinarily favourable to shareholders. The original document can be accessed here: <http://www.revizija.hr/izvjesca/2007/revizije-pretvorbe-i-privatizacije/155-drvna-industrija-cesma-bjelovar.pdf>.

⁵¹² Two additional subsidiaries, Česma Trgovina (Faucet Trade) and Česma Energana (Faucet Energy) were established in 1997.

- Česma Iverica (Faucet Particleboard)
- Česma Interijeri (Faucet Interiors)
- Česma Namještaj (Faucet Furniture)
- Česma Šperploča (Faucet Plywood)
- Česma Furnir (Faucet Veneer)
- Česma Pilana (Faucet Sawmill)
- Česma Turizam (Faucet Tourism)
- Česma Usluge (Faucet Services)

Shareholders argued this strategy was undertaken in a bid for renewed profitability after an apparent immediate downturn in business in the three years since Česma had been privatised. The largest of these new firms was Česma Iverica with a valuation of over fifty-eight million Kuna, over twice the value of Česma Interijeri. This restructuring revealed total capital of the eight firms to be worth 166,252,800 Croatian Kuna which was divided into 415,632 shares valued at four hundred Kuna each. Following this restructuring, small shareholders – including Mamić – proposed swapping Česma's company held stock in exchange for a comparable share of stocks from the eight diversified subsidiaries. This exchange increased the value of Česma's company held stock as the ratio of prior company shares did not align with the value of new stocks (i.e., the nominal value of Česma's shares were set at 100 German deutschmarks and, in exchange, new stocks were acquired at 372 Kuna in lieu of the set price of 400 Kuna, leaving these new stocks with a value of 107.2 deutschmarks). Following this stock conversion, small shareholders sold 336,275 shares valued at one hundred deutschmarks each to Česma; Česma then immediately sold 315,000 shares of stock priced at 107.2 deutschmarks back to the shareholders – this equalled the total value but ensured that shareholders like Mamić retained shares that were more valuable.⁵¹³

During this restructuring, additional improprieties occurred, as it was discovered that the Česma Particleboard subsidiary publicly reported a loss when, on inspection, the firm had a healthy profit of nearly six million Croatian Kuna. Before and after the

⁵¹³ Ibid.

restructuring of the company, many of the shares that were held by stockholders remained deeply discounted and, at various points, unpaid for. Shares were acquired not with cash, but with instalment plans for payments. Such an arrangement was given to Mamić and his brothers after they acquired additional shares in the largest of the eight Česma subsidiaries, Česma Iverica. Like others, the Mamić's withheld payment for a significant percentage of the stock. This would coincide with the release of substantial capital from relevant subsidiaries,⁵¹⁴ diminishing the value of the unpaid shares over time and what shareholders were liable to pay back.

By the late 1990s, Mamić acquired a larger stake in Česma Iverica, rapidly expanding the value of his personal portfolio. In 1999, Mamić acquired enough shares in Česma Iverica to trigger a requirement that should have compelled Mamić to report an official takeover bid, but he failed to do so. This was acknowledged by the Croatian Securities and Exchange Commission, but Mamić was not penalised. By 2001, Mamić acquired over 83% of Česma Iverica and, with his brothers, was frequently moving money between Česma's other subsidiaries, often purchasing shares but never fully paying for them, eventually depreciating their value, and then terminating contracts. Once contracts were terminated, unpaid shares would be returned to various funds set up in the aftermath of the Česma's restructuring. Notably, monies generated from shares within these funds were earmarked for Croatian war veterans that were left disabled following their military service. In short, Mamić, his family, and other well-placed shareholders were extracting value from shares they owned without paying for them, returning shares with limited value to a dying firm and disabled veterans. In 2000, an initial report by Croatian police, instigated following a routine check of Česma's books, estimated that the privatisation of the firm – and the constant laundering of unpaid shares through subsequent subsidiaries – had cost the Croatian economy fourteen million Kuna. Mamić's holdings in the subsidiaries were considerable, as Česma Iverica, of which Mamić was by far the largest shareholder, owned a plurality of shares in Česma Šperploča and Česma Trgovina. When Mamić's portfolio was at its largest, the financial health of each of the Česma subsidiaries was failing.

⁵¹⁴ Where this released capital eventually ended up can only be speculated about at this juncture.

Revenues were down between 1994-1997 but the government's audit of Česma's finances revealed that the restructuring of the firm into ten separate joint stock companies caused a precipitous decline in profitability in the latter half of the 1990s. In 1999, the government of Croatia approved a loan of one million Kuna to the firm, ostensibly for employee and redundancy management. By 2000, Česma's workforce had been cut in half, from 1300 at the time of privatisation to just over 650 employees eight years later. After some of the Česma firms were eventually declared insolvent, the Croatian government mediated negotiations with creditors, who, on average, received a quarter of what was owed, while the government wrote down debts through pension insurance plans. The government concluded that the incredible mismanagement of Česma's privatisation and subsequent management was improper and in violation of numerous Croatian laws. These violations include,

- After not meeting payment deadlines at the outset of privatisation – thus earning unagreed to discounts on shares through currency fluctuations that occurred after previously agreed to deadlines were ignored – the enterprise was found to have violated Article 18 of the Law on the Conversion of Socially-Owned Enterprises.
- The audit found that 3,528 shares were wrongly withdrawn in 1995. Records indicated that Ivan Ljubanović was listed as the party responsible for reconciling this discrepancy as the manager in charge. As previously noted, Ljubanović had been the last manager of Česma before it was privatised and remained with the firm.
- In April 2000, Česma Iverica, of which Mamić was the largest shareholder, purchased 71,256 treasury shares following its merger with Česma Trgovina; subsequent stock acquisitions by Iverica from small shareholders were not paid for in the mutually agreed timeframe.
- In February 2002, 6,169 shares were withdrawn from Česma Iverica. In violation of Section 233 of the Companies Act, Iverica failed to provide the required reserves for the withdrawal of those shares.

- Between March 1996 and July 1999, small shareholders from Česma and each subsidiary – apart from Česma Namještaj – transferred unpaid shares to new acquirers. The acquirers were then required to pay for the shares within six months; none of the acquirers fulfilled this obligation, a violation of Article 36 of the Privatisation Act. The acquirers included two Mamić brothers.
- The audit found that there were six violations of Article 3 of the Law on Takeover Procedure since Česma's privatisation. The Article states that when a shareholder acquires 25% or more in a joint stock company, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Croatia must be alerted, and a de facto takeover bid must be declared.
- Article 74 of the Law on the Issuance of Securities was violated four times since the privatisation of Česma. The Article states that shareholders must alert the Securities and Exchange Commission when the shareholder acquires enough stock to have earned voting rights within the joint stock company.

In addition to this, despite a 1999 rehabilitation loan of 4,548,266.22 Kuna, it was concluded that,

“Since the goals [initially] planned by the development programme, [Česma] has reported losses from 1994 to 2000, restructuring goals were not fully met because the newly formed joint stock companies showed a loss in business, and of the ten newly created joint stock companies, three were bankrupt. The number of employees fell from 1,298 at the end of 1991 to 663 at the end of 2002...no goals were achieved related to the provisions of Article 1 of the Privatisation Act.”⁵¹⁵

In a legal reply, shareholders argued that the company failed to meet the goals set out in the development programme because privatisation occurred just as the Croatian economy was thrown into tumult as a result of Croatia's wars and “decisions of the government of the Republic of Croatia.”⁵¹⁶ Notably, they argued that the introduction of currency control measures relating to the products of state-owned enterprises in 1997 ensured that private firms would be left disadvantaged. While economic

⁵¹⁵ Republic of Croatia, “Audit of Bjelovar Wood Industries, Česma,” (2003:81).

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

conditions in Croatia did deteriorate over the course of the 1990s, the wood industry in Croatia began to grow by 2000 and, save for a modest decline as a result of the global economic crisis of 2007-2008, has continued to grow since then.⁵¹⁷ Indeed, following the sale of Mamić's shares in the firm and its subsidiaries, the existing Česma entities began to grow. Česma was one of the most critical regional firms in Croatia and was financially healthy at the point of privatisation. Rather than macroeconomic trends causing the firm to deconstruct at the rapid pace in which it did, the gross mismanagement of shareholders – of which Zdravko Mamić became the largest – and the “cadre” policy of Tuđmanist Croatia sparked an exponential decline. It is unclear how much money shareholders like Mamić walked away with given the nature of state aided negotiations with creditors and banking interests, but given that the state itself acknowledged frequent improprieties overseen by Mamić himself, it can be deduced that when punitive measures were warranted, Mamić was left unpunished following the sale of his shares in the firm.⁵¹⁸ The audit of Česma's potentially criminal mismanagement was completed in April 2003. In November 2003, Ivo Sanader led the HDZ to victory in that month's general election, a positive outcome for the HDZ-aligned Mamić. Mamić, a man who claimed to have played football barefoot in the winter, helped oversee the pillaging of a once-profitable firm, costing hundreds of jobs and millions in the Croatian treasury.⁵¹⁹ The managed decline of Česma also serves as a microcosm of the inability of the SDP-led reformist government of 2000-2003 to properly punish corruption, and the continuity of informal networks and processes that would permeate under subsequent governments.

Mamić Coalesces His Power

⁵¹⁷ Kersan-Škabić, (2014).

⁵¹⁸ For his part, Mamić claimed in 2003 to have not earned a single Kuna as the largest shareholder of Česma. See Nacional, “Croatian Tycoons Lose €500 Million,” (2003). Accessed here: <http://arhiva.nacional.hr/en/clanak/18192/croatian-tycoons-lose-8364500-million>.

⁵¹⁹ The contrast between Mamić the barefoot child who grew up modestly and Mamić the financial beneficiary of elite corruption renders Mamić to be what Jansen (2005) defined as an “urban peasant.” A hallmark of Mamić's often longwinded press conferences and interviews is his referencing of his humble origins, as if his youth should afford him a long enough leash to enjoy the materialistic “fruits” of his corrupt “labour.”

Even as Česma was collapsing, Mamić's influence in Croatian football and wider society continued to grow.⁵²⁰ Following his influential role in the fixing of the 1999 league results by influencing a match between Croatia Zagreb and Osijek, Mamić's role in football expanded.⁵²¹

It was in this period that Mamić plotted his return to what was then the Croatia Zagreb front office. Mamić retained ties to the club as the agent of many of the club's most promising players of the era, including Ivan Turina; Marko Šarlija; Patrice Kwedi; Boštjan Cesar; Dario Smoje; Eduardo Da Silva; Dario Zahora; Drago Papa; Ante Tomić; and Hrvoje Čale. With few exceptions, these players came through the Dinamo youth club where Mamić was able to sign many to terms - very much to his benefit. Mamić's near universal control over Dinamo's roster came during a period in which the club was in a precarious financial position. In 2000, Velimir Zajec, the club's manager, was given the task to run its front office operations.⁵²² After Zajec assumed control of Dinamo's front office, Mamić agreed to serve as an adviser and transferred formal control of his player agency to his son, Mario.⁵²³ Mamić's return to the club fell on Valentine's Day and was also the day that the Executive Board capitulated to the

⁵²⁰ In addition to Česma, Mamić was briefly the largest shareholder of the Badel beverage company before turning a profit by selling his stake in that company to the often-bizarre former intelligence officer and arms dealer Ferdinand Jukić. Jukić served Croatia in its wars, including in Vukovar where Jukić claimed he procured arms for Croatia from Serbian paramilitary leader Zeljko Ražnatović with millions of US dollars paid to him by Croatian emigres for the purpose of defending Vukovar; it was alleged, however, that Jukić procured those funds without purchasing any weapons. As a leader of the Service for the Protection of Constitutional Order (SZUP), Jukić was notably placed in charge of investigating the potential war crimes of Tomislav Merčep. Owing to his proximity to the investigation of Merčep, he was believed to be the victim of an assassination attempt. Later, it became clear that on multiple occasions, Jukić staged attempts on his own life, telling police fantastical stories of his narrow escape from harm. Jukić died in prison in 2014. See Amnesty International, "Behind a Wall of Silence: Prosecution of War Crimes in Croatia," (2010). Accessed here: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4d0083532.pdf>; Nacional, "Merčep Going to the Hague, Gregurić Before Investigators," (2003). Accessed here: <http://arhiva.nacional.hr/en/clanak/18190/mercep-going-to-the-hague-greguric-before-investigators>.

⁵²¹ Malović & Selnow, (2001).

⁵²² Zajec played for a decade at Dinamo and captained Yugoslavia's 1982 World Cup squad. While managing Croatia Zagreb in 1998 and 1999, the club performed better in European competitions, eventually finishing second in their group at one point. UEFA, "Zajec Makes Dinamo Return," (2010). Accessed here: <https://www.uefa.com/memberassociations/news/newsid=1492526.html>.

⁵²³ Mario Mamić figures prominently in his father's decline; however, as of this writing, Mamić is still a registered player agent with ASA International where he manages the careers of primarily Russian players. TransferMarkt, "ASA International," (2019). Accessed here: <https://www.transfermarkt.co.uk/asa-international/beraterfirma/berater/2107>.

BBB, reverting the club's name back to Dinamo Zagreb.⁵²⁴ Despite the jubilation that followed the return of the Dinamo name, the club was facing serious challenges. The financial issues plaguing Dinamo stemmed from the back pay owed to a host of former players, some of whom were quite prominent. The club owed fourteen players a total of 6,696,000 Kuna:

- Robert Prosinečki; 1,550,000 Kuna
- Igor Cvitanović; 1,411,000 Kuna
- Joško Jeličić; 800,000 Kuna
- Dražen Ladić; 500,000 Kuna
- Miljenko Mumlek; 400,000 Kuna
- Tomislav Rukavina; 380,000 Kuna
- Goran Jurić; 320,000 Kuna
- Nermin Šabić; 200,000 Kuna
- Saša Bjelanović; 200,000 Kuna
- Ardian Kozniku; 195,000 Kuna
- Miroslav Dujmović; 250,000 Kuna
- Mario Cvitanović; 145,000 Kuna
- Vladimir Vasilj; 110,000 Kuna

In addition to the backpay to players, the club owed NK Rijeka 1,017,810 Kuna for the rights to Jasmin Agić.⁵²⁵ A rift between Mamić and Zajec opened almost immediately as Mamić capitalised on his position as de facto manager of the careers of much of Dinamo's young players to expand his influence. Zajec earned the trust and respect of the most ardent Dinamo supporters as he managed to consolidate the club's fiduciary troubles through the sale of contracts of older players, which had the added benefit of allowing young players to thrive through additional playing time, improving

⁵²⁴ This coincidence has been bittersweet for Dinamo supporters over the years. See Futbol Grad, "Zdravko Mamić: A Resignation Without Substance," (2016). Accessed here: <http://www.futbolgrad.com/zdravko-mamic-a-resignation-without-substance/>.

⁵²⁵ Nacional, "Documents That Prove that Dinamo Bought the 1999 Football Championship," (2002). Accessed here: <http://arhiva.nacional.hr/en/clanak/18098/documents-which-prove-that-dinamo-bought-the-1999-football-championship>.

the competitive results of the club. But this also tilted the balance of power toward Mamić, who Dinamo supporters viewed as being a middleman only interested in driving up the value of his players and moving them without consideration of the long-term success of the club.⁵²⁶ Nevertheless, as an adviser and then a member of the club's Executive Board, Mamić coalesced enough support to force Zajec out of his position as chief executive.⁵²⁷ By 2003, Mamić was Dinamo's vice chairman in title and boss in practice. The fears of Dinamo's supporters were rendered true as Mamić continued to control the trajectories of Dinamo's most promising players as they developed. This included Luka Modrić, Dejan Lovren, Mateo Kovačić, Marcelo Brozović, Niko Kranjčar, and Domagoj Vida. Despite Dinamo frequently moving players, the club remained the most dominant in the Croatian First League for the majority of Mamić's tenure in charge. Between the 2005-2006 and 2015-2016 seasons, Dinamo won the league every year and were thus frequently qualified to participate in European competitions, with muted success. Dinamo's success at home but difficulties abroad, demonstrated that the club had indeed regressed to a provincial power and not one capable of re-capturing former glory; this was symptomatic of the overall decline of the Croatian First League, despite the obvious talent of many of its best players. Dinamo's play in Europe did ensure that the club's best young players were given the chance to audition their talents against much larger clubs from England, Spain, Germany, Italy, and others from more successful Western European leagues.

With Mamić in charge of Dinamo, ostensibly as a representative of the club and not himself, profits from the sale of young players amounted to €150 million, an impressive sum for a relatively small club.⁵²⁸ That amount of money should have contributed to the competitive and business growth of the club through sustained reinvestment; instead, much of the profits were diverted away from the team. This became the

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Zajec was eventually appointed to the same position with Portsmouth in the English Premier League before returning to Dinamo in 2010 for eight games as the club's manager. Zajec's second tenure with Dinamo came during a period in which Mamić hired and fired managers with endless impunity. The Guardian, "Zajec Brings Continental Style to Wary Portsmouth," (2004). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2004/nov/25/newsstory.sport6>.

⁵²⁸ Futbol Grad, "Zdravko Mamić: A Resignation Without Substance," (2016). Accessed here: <http://www.futbolgrad.com/zdravko-mamic-a-resignation-without-substance/>.

primary driver of Croatian football – to maximise profits and deprive club supporters of quality football. This led to sparsely attended matches and frequent protests. This practice began in the 1990s, but as Mamić’s power within the HNS grew, so too did the issues within Croatian football. Mamić’s power within Dinamo was unquestioned and he expanded on that nationally, becoming the vice chair of the HNS under the presidency of the aging former Dinamo player and manager, Vlatko Marković.⁵²⁹ In 2002 and 2006, Marković received overwhelming support in his re-election bids to the presidency. However, by 2010, Mamić’s influence in Croatian football led to Marković’s first genuine challenge. Igor Štimac, a former standout player for Hajduk Split and Derby County, invested in Hajduk following his playing career. Štimac was serving as its sporting director when he declared his candidacy for the presidency of the HNS in a contest that most Croatian football supporters saw as a competition between two desperately compromised and corrupt options. The evening of the vote proved to be controversial while also confirming Mamić’s power and flare for the dramatic. The six-month long campaign reached a dramatic climax as Mamić arrived at the hotel ballroom in which the vote was to be held accompanied by a hero of Croatia’s 1998 World Cup squad, Davor Šuker, implying that Šuker supported the re-election of Marković. As the vote commenced, Štimac noted that Mato Previšić was falsely credentialed as a voting delegate when, in fact, Previšić was never elected to the position. Štimac pointed this out but was met by shouts from Mamić and amidst the confusion, Previšić was allowed to vote. The final tally confirmed that Marković won with twenty-five votes to Štimac’s twenty-four.⁵³⁰ Within two years, Marković passed away, Šuker was installed as the new HNS president by Mamić, and a Croatian court concurred with an appeal filed by Štimac: the 2010 vote had been decided an illegal vote. Štimac did not pursue further action and was instead installed as the manager

⁵²⁹ Marković was first elected to the post in 1999 and was a hands-off manager. Although he is most remembered in Croatia for having allowed Mamić to wield immense power as his vice chair, Marković made global headlines in 2010 after he commented that he would not allow gay footballers to play in Croatia and crassly declared that gay people should “stick to ballet.” He was fined €10,000 by UEFA. See the Guardian, “Croatia Football Chief Vlatko Marković Hit by Gay Group’s Backlash,” (2010). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2010/nov/14/gay-backlash-croatia-football-chief>.

⁵³⁰ Upon leaving the ballroom, Štimac spoke to gathered members of the press and declared the proceedings to have been a “rape of democracy.” Nevertheless, Štimac himself eventually required the support of Mamić when he ascended to the role of manager of the Croatian national team. CroatianSports.com, “Marković Has an Ace Up His Sleeve,” (2010). Accessed here: <http://croatiansports.com.s110822.gridserver.com/?p=1169>.

of Croatia's national team; Mamić's long-term control over Croatian football carried on.⁵³¹

Parallel to Mamić's ability to bolster his position within Dinamo, the HNS, and Croatian football in general, his relationships with leading members of Croatia's political and social elite were strengthened. Mamić developed into a shrewd political operator as his profile increased and the need for political benefactors increased. In one instance, Mamić earned considerable praise for contributing financially to Croatia's Catholic Church.⁵³² In another, Mamić sought to endear himself specifically to Croatia's nationalists when he directed that \$94,000 collected from gate receipts at the Maksimir be donated to the legal defence of Croatians brought before the ICTY. Mamić recently defended that decision, saying,

*"We had a responsibility to the people who sacrificed themselves for our independence. I personally participated in the defence of Croatian army generals and am not ashamed to say that. I was not thinking about the reactions, because for me it is a matter of honour and I am immensely proud of that. You have to understand that the context and perception of defending our homeland in Croatia is very different to other parts of Europe."*⁵³³

Decisions like financially supporting accused war criminals may not be enough to placate the mostly nationalist Bad Blue Boys, but it did endear Mamić to HDZ politicians that were reliant on appealing to the electorate through themes of national pride and patriotism, particularly as it related to the "Homeland War." These contributions revealed Mamić to be savvy enough to know that if he were to continue to run Dinamo and Croatian football – already established as an important political domain in Croatia – he would need political cover to do so.

⁵³¹ Ibid; also see Tregoures, (2018).

⁵³² Croatia is an overwhelmingly Catholic country, with over 86% of Croatians identifying as Catholic. Beyond religious faith, Catholicism in Croatia is often defined as being part of the state's national identity. See Ramet, (2006) and Bellamy, (2002; 2018).

⁵³³ FourFourTwo, "Football's Most Infamous Man: FFT Meets Zdravko Mamić," (2019).

Demonstrating that Mamić was willing to occasionally look beyond the HDZ, the relationship that he cultivated with Zagreb's mayor, Milan Bandić – a member of the SDP – is of note. Bandić occupied his office as something of an old-fashioned big-city mayor all too willing to bend the rules in the favour of himself and his friends. As Hodges summarised,

“Bandić...is reputedly notorious for clientelist/corrupt practices. Bandić privileges the interests of a small number of stakeholders in his network of influence, at the expense of the social needs of a wider cross-section of people living in Zagreb. He has invested in several extremely expensive projects of little social value, such as ostentatious fountains. Simultaneously, he presents himself as a person who distributes gifts to the people of Zagreb, particularly in the pre-electoral period, for instance where he introduced new, cheaper tram tickets for short journeys, and, immediately following the election, roughly halved the cost of visiting public swimming baths. This kind of gentle patriarchal persona emphasizes the personalized connections along which he operates and mystifies the fact that the purchases he makes and contracts he draws up are funded through taxes.”⁵³⁴

The cavalier approach to public spending Bandić employed as mayor was directly beneficial to Mamić, even after the accession of Croatia to the European Union in 2013 should have limited what Bandić was able to steer toward Mamić and Dinamo. Prior to Croatia's accession, the 2006 Sports Act governed how public monies could be spent on sport. Article 76 within the Sports Act allowed regional and local municipalities to spend public money on sport under certain conditions. These conditions primarily relate to investing in youth sports activities, Croatia's participation in international competitions, and investing in any required health programmes for athletes. In addition to these basic features, the law also allows for public money to be spent on the construction and maintenance of stadiums and other facilities deemed to be vital by the governing authorities. In addition to these national stipulations, Zagreb officials created the Zagreb Sports Association to process applications for funding and to govern spending on “elite” clubs. To qualify as “elite,” a club must meet narrow standards, including winning or participating in European competitions and frequently winning domestic competitions. The only football club that met these criteria was Dinamo and owing to both the personal relationship between Mamić and Bandić,

⁵³⁴ Hodges, (2018:6).

public projects were often procured by Mamić having been approved by the mayor. Mamić's ability to guarantee that Dinamo would maintain the success necessary on the pitch to be deemed elite while fostering relations with approving authorities crucially ensured that public money would be turned in his direction.

Dinamo's financial disclosure forms detailed the high price that taxpayers were paying to subsidise Dinamo. Between 2006 and 2009, Dinamo received 160,000,000 Kuna from the city of Zagreb and other public entities based in Zagreb, such as the Zagreb Tourism Board, accounting for 20% of Dinamo's funding. This also includes sponsorship contracts signed with public companies. In most years, the amount of funding that the city of Zagreb provided to Dinamo was enough to cover over 100% of the club's expenses. How Dinamo – and thus, the public's – money was spent during this period was often directly beneficial to Mamić. During this period, Mamić used funds from Dinamo to fund a successful newspaper advertising campaign on behalf of the HDZ ahead of 2007 elections. Additionally, funds received directly from the city paid for luxurious resort stays and travel for Dinamo functionaries and players sold to European clubs.

The most notable misuses of public funds were procured for maintenance, land, and construction projects. Although maintaining the Maksimir Stadium would qualify as being in the best interest of the city and its people, Mamić often directed the city to give maintenance contracts to his preferred bidders; naturally, the bids accepted typically involved expenses above market value. This practice became so prevalent that it provoked a local journalist to investigate, often prompting Mamić to respond to questioning with vulgarities.⁵³⁵ Larger projects also figured into the relationship between Mamić, Bandić, and the city of Zagreb. With Mamić selling his prized players with regularity, he wanted to develop a training facility that would serve as a staging ground in which his most valuable players would practice shortly before he sold them. The city funded the project under the guise that the training facility would be used by Croatia's footballers, regardless of who their agent is, while also being trumpeted as

⁵³⁵ See The Guardian, "Another Rant in the Life of Mamić," (2007). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2007/oct/03/europeanfootball.sport>.

a future facility that could be used by the Croatian national team. The project was given substantial funding and projects to make room for the new facility in the vicinity of the Maksimir began. In an egregious example of impropriety, as the project stalled and yet continued to be funded using public money, Bandić himself personally invested in the project, a clear conflict of interest.⁵³⁶

It was not until Croatia formally joined the European Union, rendering the Sports Act in Croatia obsolete, that opponents of Mamić and Dinamo demanded answers as to why Dinamo continued to receive an extraordinary amount of public funds. A group of detractors, most of whom were associated with Hajduk Split, raised the issue of Dinamo's funding with the Croatian Competition Agency (CCA), arguing that the public funding gives Dinamo an unfair advantage over smaller clubs - a violation of Article 70 (1) (iii) of the European Union's Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The CCA dithered in its ruling, ruling that the various forms of funding given to Dinamo by the city was compliant. It was pointed out that the European Commission often deemed public funding for stadia, maintenance, and investment in youth sports to all be compliant with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Nevertheless, the CCA was able to sanction Dinamo for receiving public money after the 1 July 2013 EU accession date. They did not do this, leaving the partnership between Mamić, the city of Zagreb, and Bandić intact as each man's respective legal issues grew.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶ Hodges, (2018). It must also be noted that, as was the case with many of his personal relationships, Mamić and Bandić had public arguments. Bandić publicly declared that this was only because of Mamić's notorious temper and Mamić's frequent forays into politics with his public comments. 2009 also marked the first time that Mamić publicly proposed the idea that he might run for mayor himself. This never happened and his relationship with Bandić continued.

⁵³⁷ Asser Sports Law, "State Aid in Croatia and the Case of Dinamo," (2015). Accessed here: <https://www.asser.nl/SportsLaw/Blog/post/state-aid-in-croatia-and-the-dinamo-zagreb-case>. Beyond his relationship with Mamić, Bandić's long reign as mayor of Zagreb has been tumultuous. After years of being publicly accused of various forms of corruption, Bandić was arrested in 2014 and accused of embezzlement; tax evasion; influence peddling; illegal hiring; abuse of power; incitement to commit perjury; customs fraud, customs evasion; fraud; and obstruction of evidence. In 2018, he was acquitted of the fraud charge despite straight-forward evidence that Bandić allowed an ultra-conservative, church-affiliated pressure group to set up public stalls for a petition drive without remuneration, costing Zagreb \$50,000. Radio Free Europe, "Zagreb Mayor Acquitted on Fraud Charge; Faces Second Trial," (2018). Accessed here: <https://www.rferl.org/a/zagreb-mayor-acquitted-on-fraud-charge-faces-second-corruption-trial/29553378.html>.

Mamić also enjoyed a good relationship with Croatia's former president, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović. Mamić had previously served as a financial benefactor to the HDZ and other politicians that would be useful to keep in his orbit. In the case of Kitarović, Mamić spent lavishly to ensure that Kitarović would have the financial resources required to run a successful campaign. When she was elected Croatia's president, Mamić was an invited guest of honour.⁵³⁸ The relationship between Kitarović and Mamić drew media scrutiny after Mamić was spotted attending a birthday celebration for the president. Each side limited what they said to the press, describing one another as acquaintances; however, as Mamić's legal problems grew, so did the interest of both the press and the very same Croatian secret services that Kitarović has some authority over. It was eventually revealed that the extravagant parties the pair attended were planned and paid for by Mamić himself as a way of remaining on good terms with the president. This came to light only after phone conversations between Mamić and Kitarović, recorded by the Croatian secret service, were given to Kitarović, who had previously not been told by her intelligence chief that her calls with Mamić were being tapped.⁵³⁹ The revelations were potentially harmful to Kitarović as Croatian campaign finance law allows for only very small gifts of little value to be given to elected officials; the party itself could have potentially violated Croatian law.⁵⁴⁰ Although the manner in which wider Croatian society were made aware of how close Mamić and Kitarović were was not as expected, it was evident that the two shared a formal relationship and that Mamić was rewarded for consistent outreach.

The Managed Decline of Mamić

⁵³⁸ The Guardian, "Croatia's World Cup Run Divides Nation Where Football is Never Just Sport," (2018). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/jul/06/croatia-world-cup-success-divides-nation>.

⁵³⁹ This episode not only revealed the extent of the relationship between Kitarović and Mamić, but it contributed to the collapse of the Croatian government, sparking early elections. Kitarović's decision to dismiss the intelligence minister led to the withdrawal of the minority MOST party from the coalition government that was led by the independent technocrat, Tihomir Orešković. The government and opposition parties had simultaneously been warring over the "Consultant Affair," a scandal in the oil and gas industry. The HDZ eventually called and won a vote of no-confidence in the government. In the subsequent snap elections, the HDZ were returned to office. The Economist, "As Its Government Falls, Croatia is Arguing About Communists and Fascists Again," (2016). Accessed here: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2016/06/21/as-its-government-falls-croatia-is-fighting-about-communists-and-fascists-again>.

⁵⁴⁰ Freedom House, "Nations in Transit: Croatia," (2018).

Mamić was the undisputed king of Croatian football; he was friends with some of the country's most important political leaders; and he was the direct beneficiary of informal Croatian practices of public procurement that began in the Tuđman era and has since been held over for those that are discreet. Why was Mamić finally arrested? It clearly became an impossibility for the Croatian authorities not to arrest and try him given how Mamić conducted himself in public. There are three clear catalysts for his arrest.

First, Mamić himself was violent, loud, and vulgar. This persona helped contribute to his further growth from “urban peasant” to an often-discussed member of Croatia's political and social elite; but it also ensured that most people thought of Mamić with those negative qualities in mind. He was prone to use violence in bursts of rage; this included the assault of a delegate from Auxerre attending a match between the two sides; in 2003, he assaulted a traffic cop for citing him for a violation; and perhaps most notably, 2003 also saw Mamić get into a bloody brawl with Miljenko Mesić, then the head of the Zagreb Institute of City Planning and Protection of the Environment. Mesić informed Mamić that the Institute would not grant Mamić the building permit he was seeking to construct two office towers. Mamić was told that new standards had come into effect and that no new buildings over eight stories would be constructed in the area of Zagreb he was seeking to build in. Mamić, who had recently had knee surgery and was using crutches, flew into a rage and shattered Mesić's hand with a crutch. Mesić was able to gain control of the second crutch and struck Mamić on the forehead, causing a large contusion. The fight occurred in the mayor's office and it became obvious that Mamić had been promised the permit before the new building standards were introduced. It was Mesić who was punished – he was dismissed from his job as those that hired him feared reprisals from the powerful Mamić, demonstrating that enforcing the law in Croatia might earn you a broken hand and the loss of one's job.⁵⁴¹ In addition to violence, Mamić was extraordinarily hostile towards journalists and others that sought to question some of his actions. He was also prone to using extreme language when he wanted to demonstrate his displeasure.⁵⁴² In

⁵⁴¹ AIM Croatia, “Crime and Corruption in Croatia Continue,” (2003). Accessed here: <http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/dos/archive/data/2003/30725-dose-01-02.htm>.

⁵⁴² Mamić's often unhinged reactions to question he does not like have become popular on video sharing platforms like YouTube, where his outbursts have been edited together. An example can be found here:

2013, Serbia and Croatia were to play against each other in a match that would capture the attention of both nations. Days before the match was to be played, Mamić lashed out at the Croatian Education and Sports Minister, Željko Jovanović, an ethnic Serb. Mamić went on a prolonged rant that claimed Jovanović hated all things Croatian and was an “insult to the Croatian brain.” The incident led to Mamić’s arrest and brief detention for hate speech, though the prosecution languished.⁵⁴³

Second, the displeasure of football fans and, increasingly, footballers regarding Mamić’s domineering reign over Croatian football was generating a significant amount of negative attention. Fan protests against Mamić and other corrupt actors and elements within Croatian football did what few could - unite supporters of different clubs against a common enemy. Perasović & Mustapić summarise,

“In Croatia, this fight has taken the shape of a fight against corruption, against rule by the sole big boss of Croatian football (Zdravko Mamić) and his followers. In order to remove the mafia from Croatian football, Torcida sometimes cooperates with its fiercest rivals (like BBB) because they share a common goal – a ‘higher goal’ toward which not only Torcida members strive, but other actors in the Croatian Ultras subculture as well.”⁵⁴⁴

The aforementioned “Against Modern Football Movement” (AMFM) can trace its origins back to the terraces of 1980s English League grounds where supporters lamented the rising tide of corporate ownership of clubs and the loss of community-based club management. While much of the shift in Western Europe towards a sanitised experience for spectators was in response to anti-social behaviour (excessive drinking, fighting) limiting the appeal to attend matches and costing clubs at the turnstiles, in Croatia, the professionalisation of the sport has had little to do with altering what transpires in the terraces. Football clubs like Dinamo remained non-profit socially owned enterprises that should allow for the contributions of its

“Zdravko Mamić Is Asked About a Conflict of Interest,” (2010). Accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtsp8GtGY8A>.

⁵⁴³ Radio Free Europe, “Dinamo Zagreb Boss Stokes Ethnic Tensions Ahead of Historic Game,” (2013). Accessed here: <https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-croatia-historic-soccer-match-ethnic-tensions-dinamo-zagreb/24933301.html>.

⁵⁴⁴ Perasović & Mustapić (2017:973).

supporters in weighing in on decisions taken by the club. Instead, the non-profit status of teams left the clubs susceptible to the whims of opportunistic chairmen.

The “Against Modern Football Movement” has defined actors like Mamić as being vampiric – taking from the club, the supporters, and the public for personal gain. In response to this, multiple incidents have occurred that have sought to embarrass the HNS and leaders like Mamić. In 2015, Croatia was sanctioned by UEFA after crowds repeatedly chanted the previously discussed Ustaše-era slogan *za dom – spremni*. Though the chant is routinely used by genuine far-right elements within supporter groups, it is thought that this particular incident was one in which passionate supporters without a hard-right lean joined the chanting in the hopes that Croatia would be sanctioned. Officials forced the Croatian national team to host a qualifying match for the 2016 European Championship against Italy behind closed doors in Split. On inspection, a large swastika was found carved into the pitch. This provoked further sanctions – just as AMFM hoped for.⁵⁴⁵ And in 2016 at the European Championship tournament in France, a match between Croatia and the Czech Republic in Saint-Etienne was interrupted by Croatian supporters throwing over a dozen flares onto the pitch in the middle of the game.⁵⁴⁶ Although the latter incident happened after Mamić was arrested, supporters of a reformed, democratic, transparent football association nevertheless felt they had to crystallise what they stand for – and what they stand against.⁵⁴⁷ For Mamić and other Croatian football leaders, it was clear that these supporters were ready for meaningful change, even if it meant sabotaging their own team. This may even cross politically ideological lines. Though, as previously discussed in the thesis, public allusions or displays of everything from right-wing iconography to Yugonostalgia do not necessarily correlate with the personal political beliefs of individual members, certain BBB meeting points are clearly right-wing. As observed by the author, the men’s room at a bar operated

⁵⁴⁵ The Guardian, “Croatia’s Footballers May Become Biggest Losers in Swastika Fallout,” (2015). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2015/jun/17/modric-rakitic-mandzukic-swastika-croatian-football-federation>.

⁵⁴⁶ The Guardian, “Why Did Croatia Fans Disrupt Their Euro 2016 Match Against the Czech Republic?” (2016). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2016/jun/18/why-croatia-fans-disrupt-euro-2016-match-czech-republic>.

⁵⁴⁷ On the grassroots initiatives of supporters of both Dinamo Zagreb and Hajduk Split, see Tregoures & Šantek, (2018).

by BBB members in Zagreb was adorned with swastikas, allusions to the Ku Klux Klan, and Croatia's Nazi-collaborating WWII government. Despite HDZ politicians sometimes appealing to Croatian nationalism and despite Mamić's cosy relationship with the HDZ, political dogma gave way to the unified belief that Mamić was an enemy of all that cared about Dinamo and Croatian football.⁵⁴⁸

In addition to discontented fans, some players began to push back against Mamić, wrestling control of their careers – and wages. Eduardo Da Silva was scouted by Dinamo and moved to Zagreb from Rio, alone, at just 16 years old. He excelled in Dinamo's youth club and signed a professional management contract with Mamić that would have entitled Mamić to a share of his earnings for as long as Eduardo played football. Eduardo partnered with Luka Modrić at Dinamo to have one of the finest individual seasons in the league's history, scoring forty-seven goals – a new record. After the season, Eduardo was transferred to Arsenal where he showed flashes of brilliance before one of the most gruesome injuries in the history of the English Premier League forced him into a long rehabilitation. Following his recovery, Eduardo was sold in a £6 million-pound move to Shakhtar Donetsk. However, Mamić sued Eduardo for having failed to honour their management agreement since being at Arsenal. An initial countersuit filed by Eduardo was unsuccessful, but in 2014, a Croatian judge nullified the deal, ruling that Mamić was a club executive at Dinamo and should never have been managing Eduardo; that FIFA does not allow lifetime contracts and set the maximum length of an agenting deal at four years; and that at 18 and from a foreign country, Eduardo would have been unable to understand Croatian law.⁵⁴⁹ Rather than move on, Mamić revealed himself to be the imperious manager of footballers that most of the general public thought him to be, an unmitigated failure of public relations strategy.⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ Author observance, (2018).

⁵⁴⁹ Dalje, "Court Annuls Mamić-Da Silva Contract as Usurious," (2014). Accessed here: <http://arhiva.dalje.com/en-croatia/court-annuls-mamic-da-silva-contracts-as-usurious/495597>.

⁵⁵⁰ These Football Times, "Eduardo Da Silva and the Broken Dreams of a Spectacular Finisher," (2017). Accessed here: <https://thesefootballtimes.co/2017/11/29/eduardo-da-silva-and-the-broken-dreams-of-a-spectacular-finisher/>. To add to Mamić's frustration, he was ordered to pay Eduardo more than 180,000 Kuna for his legal fees.

Another player that went public with his refusal to do business with Mamić – at great personal expense – was Andrej Kramarić. Kramarić starred for Dinamo’s youth club and was viewed by Mamić as a top-tier prospect. Kramarić continued to excel past his 18th birthday when he would have been eligible to sign one of Mamić’s infamous contracts. Instead, Kramarić stalled while continuing to play at an elevated level for Dinamo. In retaliation, Mamić ignored overtures from European clubs interested in acquiring Kramarić and ordered that Kramarić’s playing time be reduced. Kramarić and his family went public with their frustrations, implicating Mamić as being responsible for Kramarić’s confusing lack of playing time because Kramarić refused to sign an agenting contract with Mamić. Once the allegations against Mamić went public, a rushed transfer went through and Kramarić was shipped off to Rijeka before eventually playing for bigger European clubs like Leicester City and Hoffenheim.⁵⁵¹ Kramarić’s refusal to sign with Mamić – and his willingness to temporarily suffer over it – rendered him a fan favourite and a respected member of the Croatian national team. It also demonstrated some fallibility with Mamić’s abrasiveness; the Kramarić episode removed some veneer from the “Alpha and Omega” version of Mamić.

The third reason Mamić had to be arrested was because his crimes were discovered by other European states. Swiss authorities revealed to their Croatian counterparts that Mamić and his associates were funnelling money out of Dinamo Zagreb through shell corporations and private bank accounts set up in multiple countries: Switzerland, the United Kingdom, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the United Arab Emirates, Belize, and Hong Kong. Mamić and his team moved large shares from the transfers of well-known players like Mateo Kovačić and Marcelo Brozović to firms like Rasport Management AG, a shell company that would then launder the money to different bank accounts around the world. Additionally, it was revealed that major European stars under the thumb of Mamić like Lovren and Dušan Tadić were depositing money they earned for the commercialisation of their respective images into the same Swiss shell company, confirming that these players were still paying Mamić. These revelations were also made available to Spanish investigators who

⁵⁵¹ The Guardian, “Andrej Kramarić: Croatia Hero Who Risked His Career for His Principles,” (2018). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/jun/05/andrej-kramaric-croatia-hero-principles-dinamo-zagreb-zdravko-mamic-world-cup>.

discovered that Luka Modrić had evaded taxes by having his image residuals deposited in offshore accounts. Switzerland passed the details of Mamić's criminality, powerless to do more than that.⁵⁵² Croatian authorities eventually handed over the materials collected by the Swiss to USKOK and the process of indicting Mamić for his crimes got underway. Mamić, in an act that resembled corrupt former prime minister Ivo Sanader's initial manoeuvres, announced he was taking temporary leave of the club before he was arrested.

The trial of Zdravko Mamić and the subsequent scandals that emerged during it, demonstrate the links Mamić enjoyed to the upper echelon of football and of politics in Croatia. It also confirms that when the HDZ is facing crisis, it leans on the same nationalist politics advanced by Tuđman, to survive and maintain the corrupt environment in which Mamić and others like him were allowed to operate unobstructed.

Mamić was formally accused of evading 12.2 million Kuna in taxes and diverting £14 million in profits made from the transfer of players to offshore accounts. His trial had to be moved from Zagreb because it was revealed that he was good friends with multiple judges presiding over Zagreb courtrooms. The trial was held in Osijek and the court heard from prosecutors that Mamić, his brother Zoran, and Damir Vrbanović profited immensely from the sales of Luka Modrić to Tottenham Hotspur (€21 million) and Dejan Lovren (€8 million) to Olympique Lyonnais because of clauses that Mamić argued were legal. Over the course of the trial, multiple dramatic moments animated an already volatile situation. At one point, Mamić organised a press conference and presented "text messages" to the gathered press, purportedly to be sent between the judges presiding over the trial and representatives from USKOK – evidence, Mamić argued, of a plot to frame an innocent man. Following

⁵⁵² Nacional, "Football Leaks: The Millions of Dejan Lovren and Mateo Kovačić Collected in Mamić's Swiss Company Investigated for Gross Crimes," (2018). Accessed here: <https://www.nacional.hr/football-leaks-the-millions-of-dejan-lovren-and-mateo-kovacic-collected-in-mamics-swiss-company-investigated-for-gross-crimes/>; Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative, "Croatia: Zdravko Mamić, Former Head of Croatian Club Dinamo Zagreb, Faces Corruption Charges," (2017). Accessed here: <http://www.rai-see.org/croatia-zdravko-mamic-former-head-of-croatian-club-dinamo-zagreb-faces-corruption-charges/>.

that, the testimony of Luka Modrić, a star for Real Madrid and genuinely one of the best football players in the world, sent shockwaves when he altered an account that he had previously given to authorities regarding his contract with Mamić, to the potential benefit of Mamić. This stemmed from Mamić's assertion that Modrić signed a contract with him in 2004, prior to Modrić's transfer to Tottenham. Modrić previously told investigators he signed his contract with Mamić in 2008, after the transfer had already taken place; during the trial, Modrić recanted that testimony and told the court he signed the contract in 2004. Prior to the verdict being announced, Mamić travelled to Bosnia-Herzegovina. He denied he was fleeing justice; regardless, Mamić, his brother, and Vrbanović were each sentenced to six and a half years in prison for fraud and tax evasion. Luka Modrić was charged with perjury as the court rejected his changing story.

The latter development, the dramatic – if temporary – public fall from grace of Luka Modrić, coincided with the 2018 World Cup. The Croatian public remained largely disillusioned with Croatian football as being too corrupt to care about. However, as the World Cup unfolded in Russia, it became clear that Croatia was a contender to win the tournament. An abundance of talent, led by the compromised Modrić, led the team to easily win its group, including defeating 2014 World Cup runners-up Argentina 3-0. The drama of each successive match in the “knockout stages” of the tournament grew; Croatia won penalty shootouts in both the round of sixteen and the quarterfinals, while needing extra-time to defeat England in the semi-final. The incredible run to the World Cup Final seemed to arrive fortuitously for Modrić, but also for Kitarović,⁵⁵³ who began attending Croatia's matches in Russia while eschewing the formal attire of other heads of state in attendance, in favour of the classic Croatian checkerboard jersey. At the end of every match, Kitarović greeted Croatia's players with big hugs. To the rest of the world, this was a motherly president with a genuine sporting interest in the outcome of the tournament. To others, this was Kitarović attempting to synergise Croatian nationalist imagery with

⁵⁵³ The Guardian, “Croatia's World Cup Run Divides Nation Where Football is Never Just Sport,” (2018). Accessed here: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/jul/06/croatia-world-cup-success-divides-nation>.

the national team as to best shore up support amongst patriotic Croatians at home while also extrapolating Modrić, the team, and herself from the Mamić proceedings.

This was compounded after Croatia lost to France in the World Cup Final and the team returned home to Zagreb to a heroic welcome. A celebration in central Zagreb seemed to belay the feelings many had about Croatian football before the tournament began. Although a celebration of a national team's success anywhere in the world would feature state flags and other associated iconography, far-right nationalism abounded when the turbofolk Ustaše apologist singer, Thompson, arrived to serenade the team. Audible chants of *za dom spremni* and "kill a Serb" were heard both in the crowd and in songs that Croatia's football heroes were happy to help sing to the crowd.⁵⁵⁴ The appearance with Thompson caused a minor controversy, but it served as part of a conscious effort to inject nationalist messaging into the proceedings to drown out the scandals that pre-dated the tournament. Modrić was celebrated globally as having been sublime throughout the tournament and he was presented with the Golden Ball, the award for the World Cup's best individual player. Less than three months after the World Cup concluded, Modrić's perjury charges were dismissed with little fanfare.⁵⁵⁵

Though Luka Modrić avoided punishment, the Mamić saga continued to plague Kitarović and the HDZ. The text messages that Mamić alleged were between court officials and USKOK were discovered to have been constructed by a former IT aide to the HDZ, giving birth to what local press has dubbed the "Text Message Affair." It is alleged that prominent members of the HDZ knew the aide was capable of illegally spying on others and forging fake text messages. Those same prominent members hired the aide to spy on at least four persons. The IT aide was arrested specifically for aiding Mamić in his charade.⁵⁵⁶ Mamić, meanwhile, has remained in Bosnia-

⁵⁵⁴ Balkan Transitional Justice, "Nationalist Singer Joins Croatia Players at Homecoming Party," (2018). Accessed here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/07/17/controversial-right-wring-singer-a-special-guest-of-croatian-footballers-07-17-2018/>.

⁵⁵⁵ The official judgment rendered stated that charges against Modrić for perjury were premature because the initial trial in which the charge emanated from was in appeal.

⁵⁵⁶ N1, "President Grabar-Kitarović Denies Having Any Knowledge About Text Message Affair," (2019). Accessed here: <http://hr.n1info.com/English/NEWS/a400589/President-Grabar-Kitarovic-denies-having-any->

Herzegovina. The Bosnian government has refused to extradite Mamić and, barring any extrajudicial rulings, it is unlikely that Mamić will ever return to Croatia to serve his sentence given that Bosnia-Herzegovina is a non-extradition state. As it stands, he will likely never have to answer for his crimes.

Conclusion

Franjo Tuđman sought to create a new state and a new society predicated on the foundational belief that Croatia had to “bury its dead” and build something that its people could be proud of. How he went about this – creating an atmosphere in which the new political elite he helped usher in, could perpetually plunder state funds; elevating “Croatia” as something of a brand name that should be front and centre within society – quite clearly reverberates to the present day. Although Croatia has formally joined the European Union, it has been hindered by persistent informality because of the actors and processes that were fostered within Croatian government and society under Tuđman in the 1990s. This is evidenced by the abuse of public funds and trust - evidenced by the loud, violent, corrupt, and yet well-connected life of Zdravko Mamić. The contemporary political elite has been mostly unwilling to mediate the flagrant disregard for the rule of law that existed under Tuđman. The inability for the HDZ to completely reform itself into what it claimed it wanted to be - a modern political party purpose-fit for Croatia’s European future - has damaged the country through the years-long acquiescence of men like Mamić and the party’s inability to evolve beyond the shadow of Tuđman. The inability of the SPD or any other party in Croatia to provide a stable, corruption-free alternative to the HDZ has limited the appeal of participating in civic life for many throughout Croatia, making it easier for the government to survive scandal and continue to exercise informal forms of power.

knowledge-about-Text-Message-Affair.html. It was eventually revealed that the aide who assisted Mamić with the fake text messages worked directly for Kitarović’s campaign in 2014.

Conclusion:

Shortly before this writing, the 2022 FIFA World Cup, controversially staged in the Gulf state of Qatar, concluded with Argentina, led by long-time national team stalwart (and one of the best players in the history of the game) Lionel Messi, defeating defending champions France 4-2 on penalties after an exciting, back-and-forth match that ended 3-3 following extra time. The match served as a particularly potent example of the drama and athleticism associated with football and its most prestigious and watched tournament. Would Messi finally join the pantheon of Argentine heroes and lead his team to a long-sought-after victory? Would France and its young superstar, Kylian Mbappé, usher in a dynastic era and repeat as champions, a feat not accomplished by any country since Brazil won the 1958 and 1962 iterations of the tournament? With an estimated global audience of 1.5 billion watching the match unfold, the world watched as Messi and his teammates restored Argentina's title of champions for the first time since the days of Maradona. For sporting superfans and casual onlookers alike, there was little dispute that the match accomplished riveting drama, sumptuous footballing quality, and emotional demonstrations of athletic grit and temerity. The athleticism served as a celebration of life itself.

In contrast to the exceptional quality of play seen throughout the tournament, the World Cup of 2022 elicited controversy from the moment FIFA awarded the rights to host the tournament to the country over bids organised by the United States, South Korea, Australia, and Japan. Allegations of vote-buying on behalf of the Qatari bid emerged almost immediately. By 2015, after FIFA, under the leadership of Sepp Blatter, curtailed the release of its own internal investigation into the allegations, U.S. and Swiss authorities charged an array of FIFA officials with crimes related to the bidding process. Those accused were charged with crimes ranging from wire fraud, embezzlement, bribery, and money laundering, with over two dozen individuals pleading guilty to numerous crimes. Blatter himself has avoided conviction but his tenure as FIFA president ended as the result of the investigations. As these investigations continued, Qatari oversight over planning related to the World Cup

was scrutinised, notably the country's use of migrant labour and its unwillingness to introduce robust health and safety standards for workers constructing playing fields, stadiums, and other new infrastructure for the tournament. Though reports about substandard working conditions and the subsequent deaths of migrant workers began to emerge in the years prior to the tournament, planning for Qatar's World Cup continued.⁵⁵⁷

Indeed, by the time Qatar was slated to host the 2022 World Cup, the U.S. and Swiss investigations had been going on for years. Blatter and many of his underlings were exiled from FIFA and banned from further association with the sport, criminal proceedings against many other FIFA associates continued, and press reports continued to investigate poor working conditions for labourers. As the tournament unfolded, the consensus amongst athletes, pundits, and (western) leaders was that the play on the field showcased the otherworldly talents of Messi, Mbappé, and Croatia's Luka Modrić, but that the management of the tournament by FIFA and the government of Qatar, in which thousands of migrant workers were thought to have been killed during the construction process of stadia and other infrastructure used for the tournament and in which LGBTQI+ individuals and their allies were not allowed to wear or demonstrate certain iconography, was symbolic of poor governance and oversight in sport.⁵⁵⁸ The 2022 World Cup demonstrates the need for further engagement with informalities within sport in two important ways. First, that states and other well-connected networks and individuals often manipulate sport as best to secure preferred outcomes; and second, it promotes the need for greater analysis and understanding of how the informal processes exercised by those networks influences sport and wider societies.

This concluding chapter is divided into two subsections. First, the chapter begins with a subsection that provides an overview of the central argument of the thesis.

⁵⁵⁷ See Amnesty International, "Reality Check: Migrant Workers Rights with Two Years to Qatar 2022 World Cup," (2019). Accessed here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2019/02/reality-check-migrant-workers-rights-with-two-years-to-qatar-2022-world-cup/>.

⁵⁵⁸ See BBC, "Qatar World Cup: Football is Leaving Behind its LGBT Fans," (2022). Accessed here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-birmingham-63676223>.

This serves to restate the existing gap within the literature and thus the impetus for the thesis. This subsection also reiterates the justification for, and value of, the case studies applied within the thesis. The second subsection notes the implications learned from the thesis and how the findings within constitute an original contribution to the knowledge. In doing so, it further demonstrates the contribution of the thesis to scholarship in two distinct areas of study: informality and the intersection of sport and society and politics in both Serbia and Croatia. This is buttressed with a reprise that the novelty of the thesis is derived from the application of theories of informality – in this case, Polese’s “flavours” of informality – to the study of football’s influential role within Serbian and Croatian politics, governance, and society at large. The second subsection also includes recommendations for scholars and policymakers, including suggestions for both those interested in informality and in the role of sport in societies, both of which instigate varied levels of influence in states like Serbia, Croatia, and beyond.

Summary of the Argument and Approach

I began this thesis by acknowledging two accepted beliefs. First, that Serbia and Croatia have struggled to fully adopt institutional and bureaucratic reforms and second, that the sport of association football in each country has, for decades, been a highly politicised sphere of public life. In the case of the former, this has been captured by global rankings investigating the health of democracy and institutions around the world, which continue to highlight the failures of Serbia and Croatia to reform their judiciaries, strengthen civil society, to enhance the role of the independent press, and to adequately address the issue of corruption, among other key indicators.⁵⁵⁹ Understandably, analysts, observers, and scholars have all endeavoured to better understand the causes of democratic recessions, backsliding, or stagnation not just in states like Serbia and Croatia, but globally.

⁵⁵⁹ For example, both Serbia and Croatia have become more corrupt in recent years according to Transparency International. See Transparency International, “Serbia,” (2022). Accessed here: <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/serbia>; Transparency International, “Croatia,” (2022). Accessed here: <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/croatia>.

An approach taken toward that analysis has included the role that informal forms of association or exercising of power in each state has had in prolonging their development in reforming key aspects of their bureaucracies. Informality studies has been deemed to be a “mess.”⁵⁶⁰ After being associated with scholarship on finance, management, and urban studies, the impact informality has had on politics and society more generally has attracted increased interest and attention from political science and international relations scholars. In Serbia and Croatia, this has led to a number of prevailing theories that attempt to explain how informal networks and processes in each state influence politics and civil society.

First, some of those scrutinising Serbia and Croatia’s democracy have argued that each state’s interactions with external entities like the European Union – full accession into the bloc for Croatia and candidate status for Serbia – and the EU’s reform agenda resulted in the hollow adoption of new rules and regulations, but not the whole, society-wide adoption of those rules and regulations in practical terms. This has instead led to what has been termed “simulated democracy,” in which states formally adopt measures that should lead to reforms and a civic and bureaucratic culture more aligned with western ideals, but instead states “fake” compliance.⁵⁶¹ This leads to a lag in the normative adoption of proscribed reforms and the emergence of gaps between what rules and laws are technically in place on paper and what tends to *actually* occurs in the common, mundane interactions citizens have with their state, their employer, or their neighbours. Reforms mandated by the EU, the U.S., or other western entities usually come in the form of “Action Plans” or “Normalisation Agreements” and they call for changes both in sensitive realms of the state like the judiciary or corruption-investigating authorities and the in the more mundane bureaucracies.

⁵⁶⁰ Kanbur, (2009).

⁵⁶¹ Boduszyński, (2010).

Second, other researchers propose that informal activity is a relic of former Ottoman rule and Yugoslav socialism that has persisted for decades since the latter's collapse as the result of social and cultural embeddedness. This notion is one in which adherents argue that there exists a "Balkan mentality" to social and cultural interactions, leaving a form of "particularism" in the region to emerge.⁵⁶² Certain processes that have existed for years through personal networks like *veze* have endured despite the apparent widespread frustrations held by local citizens of states like Serbia and Croatia. Whether it is getting a job or securing quality medical care, citizens have often turned to personal networks to navigate the burdens or failures of the state. Because of widespread frustrations with the state and the belief that personal connections are vital to accomplishing any desired outcome, vestiges like *mesni zajednicas* (MZs) – local, sub-municipal self-governance organisations designed to achieve results when the state is unwilling or incapable – linger.⁵⁶³ This all contributes to a fundamental distrust of the government, the state, and its processes, ensuring that democratic squares, those domains in which civic culture is meant to blossom through voting, exchanging views, and dialoguing with neighbours, are scarce and unproductive in organically generating reforms.⁵⁶⁴ This disassociation with state and democratic processes helps foster a cycle in which a disinterested citizenry remains idle while elites with a record of poor or corrupt governance remain in power perpetually. This simultaneously allows for the consistent need for informal association as governance rarely improves across every sphere of society.

Finally, other scholars argue that opportunistic political networks do not proactively work to consolidate state institutions as it allows for elites within those networks to instead maximize their own power.⁵⁶⁵ Networks that were formed as Yugoslavia disintegrated have lasted into the contemporary period, even as men like Milošević and Tuđman have each been dead for years. The ceaseless existence of networks designed to increase the power (or wealth) of members requires not only the participation of political and business elites, but also rank-and-file bureaucrats and

⁵⁶² Cvetičanin et al., (2019).

⁵⁶³ Mohmand & Mihajlović, (2014).

⁵⁶⁴ Dawson, (2010).

⁵⁶⁵ Džankić et al., (2018).

those in a position to keep the proverbial wheels of informality turning. Nevertheless, it is the case that a narrow political elite are the ultimate beneficiaries of networks that serve as the arbiters of deals – be they political, financial, or even judicial. In Serbia and Croatia, these networks have, scholars argue, persisted because there was no sustained effort to dissolve them and thus, as each state began its transition away from authoritarianism, it was the very network that benefitted from authoritarianism that oversaw attempted reform. Naturally, because that network was and remains comprised of self-serving elites, transition, development, and reform have been stunted in favour of maximizing power and outcomes on behalf of the network. Though the dealmaking within the network constitutes the exercising of informal forms of power in the first place, the pursuit of favoured outcomes ensures that networks will allow gaps between the state and processes put into practice remain unreformed.

I argue that it is likely that each of the above three elements contribute to the resilience of informal processes. A beleaguered citizenry, tempered by years of cultural, civic, and political shifts and development, and a political elite that has long benefited from power networks that work to expand their authority and influence defines a society susceptible to informal forms of power and association. What these broad explanations of Serbia and Croatia's vulnerability to informality lack, though, is an examination of how these processes and networks influence any given domain of society in each state using a framework that demonstrates a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the influence of informality.

I argued that incorporating such a framework and applying it to a specific realm of public and cultural life in each state would accomplish two vital tasks: first, it would bring order to the aforementioned "mess" that is the study of informality; and second, it would emphasise "everyday informality" in a specific domain, contributing to our shared understanding of how informal processes and networks ultimately contribute to stagnation in the development of the state. As best to understand some of the factors that have led to Serbia and Croatia's respective inability to achieve further consolidation of liberal institutions and norms, I argued that as best to understand

“everyday democracy” and how processes that exist in the interactions of elites and non-elites alike influence the overall trajectory of reform, it is crucial to explore examples of “everyday informality.” To accomplish this, I argued that given its history of politicisation and exploitation, as well as its cultural impact, football in Serbia and Croatia represented a credible domain from which to examine the influence of informal networks and processes. That has included examples of actors involved with football in each state that were demonstrative of the issues plaguing Serbia and Croatia’s governing structures and civil societies.

I also argued that the existing English-language literature on football’s intersection with politics and wider society in Serbia and Croatia can be organised into four distinct categories. First, scholars like Mills have worked to trace the history of football and its interactions with the broader state(s) dating back to socialist Yugoslavia and through the subsequent wars that punctuated the Yugoslav state’s demise. These contributions provide a robust overview of football’s transformation from amateur pursuit designed to foster greater adherence to the “brotherhood and unity” paradigm espoused by the Tito regime to the professionalisation of the sport as it became a global cultural behemoth. Sport and football specifically grew in Yugoslavia just as it did across the rest of Europe and in many other regions of the world; as such, international matches often became manifestations of global political gamesmanship where winning key games often amounted to attaining a broader diplomatic victory. Thus, the Yugoslav state became, over time, more committed to funding football teams and players.

Second, numerous contributions have stressed the interplay between football and nationalist rhetoric and dogma both in the waning days of Yugoslavia and in the nascent days of the independent republics that followed. Contributions note that as Yugoslavia began to disintegrate, giving way to the exploitative, grievance-based politics of “ethnic entrepreneurs” like Milošević and Tuđman, football played a unique role. As Yugoslavia began its collapse, nationalist expression had, by that point,

become a regular feature of football matches.⁵⁶⁶ Scholars have noted that, for example, supporters of Red Star Belgrade, many of whom eventually enveloped themselves in what would become the large supporter group Delije, incorporated pro-Serbian messaging in their demonstrations. The reasoning behind this seemed to evolve over time. Initially, because their cross-town rival Partizan was strongly associated with the Yugoslav state, it made logical sense that supporters might incorporate surface-level agitations to provoke reactions from rival supporter groups. However, as Milosević and others came into power, “to be a Red Star fan was to be a Serbian.”⁵⁶⁷ In Croatia, BBB members were “heroes of the nation,” meanwhile, for their participation in military activities.⁵⁶⁸ The mythology around football and supporter groups appeared to give them outsized influence. What I argue, though, is to understand whatever influence certain members of such groups had and continue to have, the informal networks they participate in is essential. That, until now, had been missing from the literature.

Third, literature on football in Serbia and Croatia has considered the role of sociology and ethnography in analysing members of supporter groups. What Perasović & Mustapić and other scholars have found is that it is essential to go beyond certain headlines as best to capture the attitudes and perspectives of individual members of supporter groups. For example, after Croatia was penalised by football governing authorities after supporters threw flares onto the pitch or drew a swastika into the field, the shallow analysis would ascribe this to the stereotypical right-wing political orientation of many supporter groups in the region. Though I personally observed far-right iconography in a BBB pub in Zagreb, contributing to the notion that many members do maintain a far-right orientation, what much of the literature in this category discerns is that actions taken by supporter groups that have yielded condemnation were done not out of political conviction, but out of frustration with entities like the HNS. It demonstrates that though organised football supporters are often classified as “drunkards” or “uneducated,” they were instead capable of possessing nuanced views and the ability to organize against what they perceive to

⁵⁶⁶ Božić-Roberson, (2005).

⁵⁶⁷ Đorđević, (2016).

⁵⁶⁸ Brentin, (2013).

be threats to the culture and experience of football. Crucially, the literature finds that there are deep frustrations held by supporters due to the way football in each state is governed. That last point serves as an entrée for this thesis, as I have been able to build upon the literature by analysing one aspect about the governance of football supporters find so vexing: informal power networks.

And finally, there have been a limited number of contributions that specifically examine football's interaction with politics and governance in each state. Early English language contributions focused on the interplay between football and actors like Arkan, declaring football supporters to have evolved into a "war vanguard" as Yugoslavia collapsed.⁵⁶⁹ Subsequent contributions consider the prolonged relationship between supporter groups and other collectives that can broadly be defined as "patriotic organisations." This includes organisations known to have strong links to the state, including the Serbian Orthodox Church and far-right groups. Scholars like Axboe-Nielsen wondered if supporter groups were "stronger than the state" given their ability to disrupt events like Belgrade's Gay Pride Parade and to exist in perpetuity despite a history of anti-social and violent behaviour. I argued that it is not that the supporter groups are stronger than the state; rather, they become amalgamated with other organisations that members of the political elite found frequently useful and, thus, it is the cultivation and management of informal links between them that explains their longevity.

I argued that the gap in the literature's of both informality studies and football in Serbia and Croatia is based on the need for their synthesis. The literature on informality in Serbia and Croatia would benefit from a comprehensive analysis of a single, important domain and the multiple ways in which informality permeates that domain. My approach to accomplishing this first began with the pursuit of a framework that would contribute not only to the knowledge on informality in football in Serbia and Croatia but would also be applicable to future studies of informality in other subsets of society.

⁵⁶⁹ Vrcan & Lalić, (1999).

Polese, while also acknowledging that the literature on informality often lacked cohesion, noted that there could conceivably be a limitless number of types (“flavours”) of informality observable around the globe. Certain “flavours,” though, are more ubiquitous and frequently observed in states, societies, cities, and other domains. To begin the work of better organising the study of informality in any given domain, I employed a framework that considered how informality manifests via three of the most prevalent “flavours” observed: informality in top politics, economic informality, and corruption. Though there have been a number of illuminating contributions on informality in Serbia and Croatia, there has not been a systematic analysis of its influence on football or sport more broadly. This thesis fills that important gap and provides an analysis that serves to better gauge the myriad types of informality in any given domain.

To determine how these “flavours” have intersected with football in Serbia and Croatia, I utilized corresponding case studies from each state. I argued that these case studies would reveal that football in Serbia and Croatia was inundated with informal processes that often seemed to benefit small networks and cadres of individuals seeking to benefit personally from the sport’s politicisation and poor track record of governance and oversight. These case studies simultaneously reveal how football is linked to important institutions within Serbia and Croatia via informal processes and networks, demonstrating the value of the framework employed in the thesis.

The case studies chosen were done so despite many potential examples for multiple reasons: first, they fit into the framework and could be classified as examples of political informality, economic informality, and corruption, respectively; second, the actors involved in each respective case study were ostensibly different, as they featured political elites and sycophants, otherwise successful business executives, entertainers, war criminals, football players, supporter groups, and plainly criminal elements, ensuring that as wide a cross-section of groups and individuals are included; and third, the case studies feature events and individuals from across eras

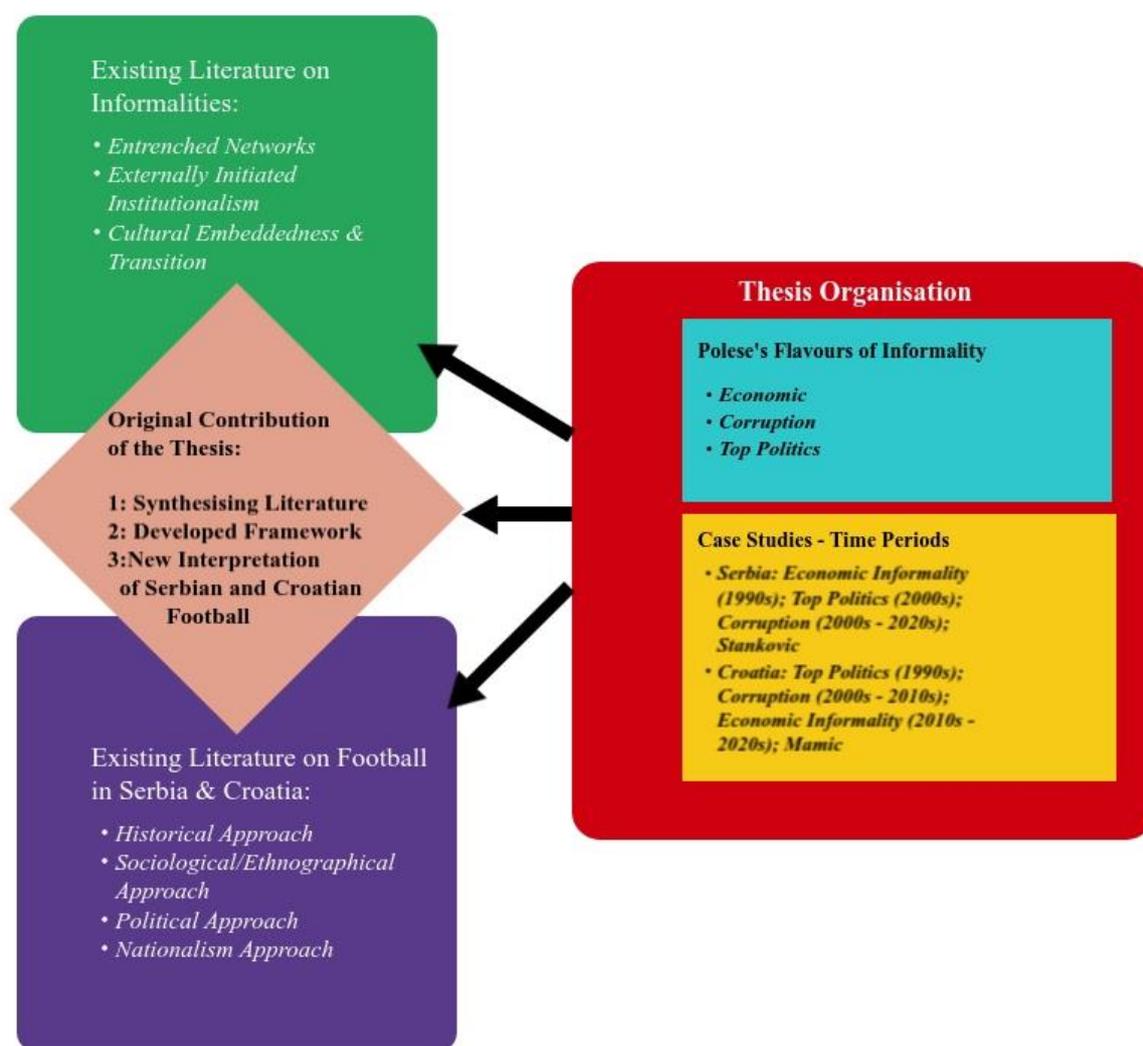
of recent history in both Serbia and Croatia, from the 1990s to the present. Ultimately, I argued that the framework and case studies utilised would synthesise the literature, present a novel, organised approach to analysing informality in each domain, and would demonstrate that the failure to eradicate informal networks and processes from an important cultural and social touchstone like football would reflect the broader inadequate approach to civic, bureaucratic, and political development and consolidation in both Serbia and Croatia.

Implications, Suggestions, and the Contribution of the Thesis

The exercise of constructing a framework to analyse the numerous ways in which informal processes and actors penetrate football in Serbia and Croatia proved to be illuminating. Results include an expansion of the knowledge as it relates specifically to football and its intersection with wider society in Serbia and Croatia, as well as informality in each state more broadly. This subsection details the originality of the thesis, while also offering suggestions for future scholarly contributions and policy development to strengthen sporting and broader governance.

In attempting to better classify informality by extrapolating types of informal processes and categorising them into “flavours,” Polese began the necessary process of looking under the proverbial bonnet and discussing in greater detail the various forms informality takes around the world. Though acknowledging that there could conceivably be a limitless number of diverse types of informality, the value of exploring the nuances within broader informality, as Polese worked to do, would have on addressing the need for greater clarity within the literature is substantial. Though I readily agree with this, I argued that the process of deriving various types of informality should not end at the ordering process, but rather that its inherent value is found in systematising those types into a usable framework and applying that framework to states or domains as best to understand the ways in which informality pervades. The framework satisfies both the need for greater nuance and additional empiricisms within the literature.

Figure 4: Organisation of the thesis and original contribution



Though informality scholars have engaged with empirical examples of a process or a network in certain contexts, I demonstrated in chapters three, four, five, and six that by employing a framework that introduces a more structured, methodical approach to understanding the relevance and influence of informality in a given domain, a more comprehensive view is possible. Because of the framework utilised, one can discern that informality was a significant component in the exploitation of football in Serbia and Croatia for decades. In chapter three, I demonstrated rife economic informality in the form of Arkan and Ceca at FK Obilić during the Milosević years, the

pervasiveness of corruption in the sport as the result of match-fixing scandals occurring over years, and political informality during an era in which the country was ostensibly led by “reformers” after football supporters were given carte blanche to riot amid Kosovo’s independence declaration. In chapter four, I moved into the contemporary period by demonstrating that progress and reforms are susceptible to delay as the result of informal networks, as evidenced by members of an elite unwilling to divorce themselves from football supporter groups and a vulnerable judiciary coerced into inaction despite large tranches of evidence of illicit behaviour by supporters like Stanković. Chapter five established that in Tuđman-era Croatia, informal political arrangements ensured that minions of the president were granted not just access to privatised firms or lucrative offices, but were installed into governing positions to carry out his directives within football; similar to chapter three, I demonstrated the years-long corrupt abuse by criminals, players, and club owners in match-fixing scandals; and I confirmed that in post-EU accession Croatia, wealthy, well-connected businessmen are afforded favourable deals in local development and construction, while their personal networks allow them to navigate around financial rules regarding the transfer of football players. And in chapter six, political, economic, and corrupt informality coalesces across decades through the activities of Zdravko Mamić, a man who became the most powerful man in Croatian football after ascending its ranks due to personal connections, established his wealth as the result of those same connections, exploited players for financial gain, and participated in corrupt schemes with his family, his friends, and his colleagues.

By evolving Polese’s initial effort from helpfully creating a simplified way to think about informality and expanding it into a more robust framework that marries empirical data with theories of informality, the thesis not only contributes to a more vigorous understanding of the politicisation of football in Serbia and Croatia, but to issues of informality in each state more broadly and how networks and processes contribute to the stagnation of civic, social, political, and bureaucratic reform and consolidation. By applying the “flavours” framework to football in Serbia and Croatia, the thesis did illuminate on the nature of informality within the sport, but also incorporates adjacent domains within the case studies: judicial matters, construction and procurement, political parties and elected officials, business and economic

development, and organised crime all feature within. This validates the notion that the use of the framework fosters a more nuanced grasp of informality in the sport, while also demonstrating that scholars could use the framework universally: in any domain, in any state, in any era, if relevant data exists.

Originality also lies within the thesis' expansion of knowledge as it specifically relates to football in Serbia and Croatia. Within the thesis, I have provided the first contribution to the English-language literature that constitutes an intentional analysis of informality within Serbian and Croatian football. Scholars previously noted political ties between supporter groups and elites, the chronic anger of supporter groups and their frustrations toward football governing officials, the conundrum of violent supporter groups avoiding serious consequences and penalties for their actions, and political elites exploiting football matches to advance political doctrines or their personal brands. But despite all this, the spectre of informality, always lurking underneath the surface, had not been analysed.

The thesis fills that gap in the literature and in doing so confirms the inveterate nature of informality within Serbian and Croatian football. As noted, initial strands of informal activity were present in the former Yugoslavia. During the Milošević and Tuđman years, networks and processes of informality were more frequently operationalised and in the subsequent quarter-century since, many of those same networks and processes govern the way in which football in each state is run. The introduction of theories of informality to debates within the literature adds a critical dimension in analysis of the sport.

The thesis demonstrates the prevalence of informal economic activity through “deals” on behalf of networks and well-connected individuals, as well as the exploitation of football by individuals that would shield profits from the club for personal enrichment. Introducing theories of economic informality to the study of Serbian and Croatian football represents a significant advancement of the paradigm that seeks to understand why there has been a precipitous decline in the quality of

club football in the region despite an abundance of quality players. In the thesis, I confirm that a contributory cause is that club owners and officials regularly treat football and its club as a personal bailiwick from which to plunder. Additionally, within the thesis, I added needed context to the political relations between political elites and actors in Serbian and Croatian football by examining those relations through the lens of informality. Much of the existing literature, correctly, points to the collapse of Yugoslavia as seminal in the rampant politicisation of football. What latter contributions, including Axboe-Nielsen's otherwise valuable articles, leave unsaid in their attempts to understand the resilience of violent supporter groups: that the informal relations those groups made while Yugoslavia disintegrated were never severed. Thus, as the thesis demonstrates, instances of informality have perpetuated for decades.

Theories of political informality contend that if networks survive at the outset of periods of reform, they are extraordinarily difficult to eradicate. Similarly, political informality states that networks survive as the result of the participation not only of political elites or supporter group members, but also vulnerable bureaucrats and those that acquiesce to the needs of the network. In Serbia and Croatia, these processes clearly relied upon the main actors themselves – individuals like Koštunica, Stanković, Canjuga, and Mamić, but also the police that stand idly by, the judicial officials that allow additional exemptions, the football officials that participate in politically-motivated schemes, and local officials that allow for the manipulation of rules and regulations in the face of political pressure. Introducing concepts of political informality again represents a crucial contribution in that informal relations within football continue to dilute not only the quality of play on the pitch, but the quality of governance overall.

Corrupt forms of informality clearly have diminished the development and quality of football in Serbia and Croatia. If one considers the ease in which opportunistic criminals preyed upon once proud professional athletes because they were underpaid or not paid at all and it becomes clear that the greed of owners evidenced in the economic informality sections, coupled with a political elite satisfied with the

status quo as evidenced in the political informality sections, leads to an abundance of corrupt informal exchanges. The penalties are rarely harsh enough for those either greedy or desperate enough to serve as a deterrent. Until this is remedied, corruption will remain an unfortunate feature of football in both Serbia and Croatia. The thesis established that corrupt practices like match-fixing have, like other forms of informality, persisted for decades. This represents a meaningful interpretation and contribution as it compels both scholars and policymakers to consider the detrimental effect of informal relations when seeking to extirpate match-fixing and other corrupt practices from the sport.

And so why is introducing a novel framework and a new interpretation of the woes that plague football in Serbia and Croatia so important? I return to the contention that sport reflects wider society. What this endeavour unveiled is that the development of football in the region hampered by informal processes and networks. In doing so, though, it also revealed evidence as to how informality broadly has contributed to the failure of Serbia and Croatia to fully adopt reforms and to leave the networked politics, economic greed, and corruption that punctuated the 1990s behind. By taking a comprehensive view of informality in football, the framework within the thesis worked to expose the sheer number of individuals and entities required to maintain networks and processes.

As analysts, observers, academics, political leaders, and other key stakeholders work to improve civic and political life in Serbia and Croatia, a critical step must be to acknowledge the power and hold that networks committed to working around rules and regulations have on the overall progress on society. To continue this process, scholars could use the “flavours” framework to consider additional important domains in each state to add an additional layer of evidence to the contention that informality has stunted development in each state. Scholars may also consider developing a database of empirical examples from which to draw from. The case studies employed here are highly relevant, as discussed, but others may add additional levels of validation. In short, because informalities often have an impact on development, scholars and other concerned parties must continue to advance

evidence like that which is contained within this thesis as best to inspire debate and reform.

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