The Impact of Religious Belief and Economic Developments on Women's Rights in Albanian Customary Law

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Abstract

Albanian customary law, particularly the Kanun, has played a central role in shaping the legal and social status of women. Rooted in tradition and often reinforced by religious beliefs, the Kanun has maintained patriarchal norms that continue to affect women's rights, especially in rural areas. This study aims to examine the impact of religious beliefs and economic developments on women's rights as reflected in four major Kanuns: those of Lekë Dukagjini, Skanderbeg, Labëria, and Luma. The research explores whether these traditional norms have been preserved, modified, or abandoned and identifies the steps necessary to challenge discriminatory customs and promote gender equality. The methodology involves a comparative historical analysis of primary legal texts and contemporary scholarly interpretations, complemented by qualitative interviews with legal experts and historians. The findings reveal that while religious institutions have historically reinforced gender inequality, they have also played a role in encouraging reform. Economic developments—particularly education and women's participation in the labor market—have contributed to reshaping traditional gender roles. Nonetheless, the uneven implementation of legal reforms has allowed customary practices to persist in certain areas. The study concludes that achieving full gender equality in Albania requires an integrated approach that includes the enforcement of modern legal standards, educational initiatives, and the economic empowerment of women. Such efforts must work in concert with broader social and cultural transformations to effectively bridge the gap between entrenched customary norms and contemporary legal frameworks.

Keywords: *Religious belief, Economic developments, Customary law, Women's rights, Kanun, Albania, Gender equality*

1. Introduction

Customary law has been a crucial element in shaping social structures and legal traditions in Albania, particularly in relation to women's rights. The Kanun, a traditional set of laws governing different aspects of Albanian life, has evolved under the influence of religious beliefs, economic developments, and historical events, including foreign invasions. Over time, these factors have played a significant role in determining the status of women within society. This study examines how religious and economic transformations have influenced the position of women, focusing on four major customary legal codes: the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, the Kanun of Skanderbeg, the Kanun of Labëria, and the Kanun of Luma. By conducting a comparative analysis of these legal traditions, this research aims to determine whether religious and economic changes have led to a modification or reinforcement of discriminatory norms against women.

Religious institutions have historically been instrumental in shaping customary laws in Albania. The country's religious landscape, composed of Islam, Catholicism, and Orthodoxy, has influenced gender norms in ways that often-

reinforced patriarchal structures. Islamic influence, particularly during Ottoman rule, introduced legal principles that, in some cases, imposed restrictions on women's rights in areas such as marriage, inheritance, and participation in public life (Gawrych, 2006). Under Islamic law, women's legal status was often subordinated to male authority, with their rights to property and divorce being significantly curtailed. Catholic traditions, which were particularly dominant in northern Albania, promoted strict moral codes that emphasized family honor and social reputation, frequently limiting women's autonomy in both personal and legal matters (Belgiorno de Stefano, 2002). Similarly, Orthodox Christian communities contributed to the reinforcement of patriarchal structures by upholding a family-centered authority that positioned men as the primary decision-makers within both the household and society. Despite these influences, the Kanun developed its own distinct set of norms, sometimes diverging from religious teachings. In particular, concepts such as honor, blood feuds, and the role of women in resolving interfamily disputes illustrate how customary law operated independently from religious prescriptions, shaping a legal system that had a direct impact on women's rights (Gjeçovi, 1933).

Economic developments have also played a central role in transforming women's legal and social status within customary law. Historically, Albania was an agrarian society where economic structures reinforced traditional gender roles, with men controlling landownership and women's economic contributions being largely confined to domestic and agricultural labor. The Kanun traditionally excluded women from inheriting land, considering them an extension of their husband's family upon marriage (Gjeçovi, 1933). However, shifts in the economic landscape have gradually challenged these norms. The transition from a rural, subsistence-based economy to a more market-driven and industrialized system has altered women's position within society. In urban areas, modern economic transformations have led to an increase in property ownership among women, allowing them greater financial independence (Kola, 2018). The expansion of the labor market has further contributed to this shift, with more women entering the workforce and reducing their dependence on male family members for economic support. This increased economic participation has granted women a higher degree of social and legal autonomy, enabling them to assert their rights more effectively.

Education has also been a critical factor in reshaping women's status in Albanian society. Historically, limited access to formal education restricted women's ability to challenge customary laws and advocate for legal reforms. However, improvements in literacy rates and access to higher education have empowered women to engage more actively in legal and political discourse. With greater educational opportunities, women have been able to question traditional norms, demand legal protections, and participate in the development of policies aimed at achieving gender equality (Vullnetari & King, 2016). These educational advancements have contributed to a gradual erosion of the traditional constraints imposed by the Kanun, although significant challenges remain, particularly in rural areas where customary laws continue to hold substantial influence.

Albania's history of foreign invasions and political changes has also played a significant role in shaping women's rights within customary law. The Ottoman Empire's dominance over Albania introduced Islamic legal structures that integrated certain elements of Sharia into the country's customary practices. This integration led to the reinforcement of gender-based legal restrictions, particularly concerning marriage, inheritance, and public participation (Gawrych, 2006). Under Ottoman rule, women's legal status was defined by religious principles that prioritized male authority within the family and community. While customary laws like the Kanun maintained their influence, they were also shaped by the broader Islamic legal framework that governed the region.

The communist era marked a drastic attempt to abolish customary laws and introduce formal legal equality for women. The communist government sought to dismantle the Kanun and implement policies that promoted gender equality in marriage, property rights, and employment. Women were granted full legal recognition in areas such as inheritance and workplace participation, leading to a temporary shift away from traditional gender roles (Kocaqi, 2015). However, these legal advancements did not entirely erase the influence of customary law, particularly in rural communities where traditional practices persisted despite state-imposed reforms. In these areas, women continued to face social pressures that upheld patriarchal norms, limiting their ability to exercise the legal rights granted to them by the communist regime.

The post-communist period brought further legal reforms aimed at eliminating discriminatory customs and aligning Albanian law with international human rights standards. The transition to a democratic system and Albania's efforts to integrate into European institutions necessitated legal changes that addressed gender inequality. New legal frameworks were introduced to protect women's rights in areas such as marriage, divorce, and property ownership. Despite these legislative advancements, the enforcement of modern legal standards has remained inconsistent, particularly in rural regions where the Kanun continues to shape social and legal practices (Kola, 2018). The persistence of customary law in these areas reflects the deep-rooted nature of traditional norms and the challenges associated with fully integrating modern legal principles into everyday life.

The comparative analysis of the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, the Kanun of Skanderbeg, the Kanun of Labëria, and the Kanun of Luma reveals both commonalities and regional differences in the treatment of women. The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, the most widely recognized and documented customary law, establishes strict patriarchal norms that define women's legal status as subordinate to men (Gjeçovi, 1933). This Kanun outlines rigid rules regarding marriage, property, and honor, with women being assigned a secondary role in both family and society. The Kanun of Skanderbeg shares similar characteristics but reflects regional variations that slightly modify certain legal provisions (Illia, 1933). The Kanun of Labëria, while still rooted in patriarchal traditions, appears to allow for greater flexibility in certain aspects of family law (Elezi, 2006). The Kanun of Luma, influenced by both Ottoman and local traditions, represents a blend of customary and religious legal principles that further illustrate the diversity of Albania's customary law system (Martini, 2007).

Overall, this study highlights the complex interplay between religious belief, economic transformation, and political change in shaping women's rights under Albanian customary law. While significant progress has been made in modernizing legal frameworks and advancing gender equality, customary practices continue to exert influence in many parts of the country. The persistence of these traditions underscores the challenges faced in fully integrating contemporary legal standards into Albanian society. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening legal enforcement, expanding educational opportunities, and promoting social awareness about gender equality. The continued evolution of women's rights in Albania will depend on the ability of legal and social institutions to reconcile historical traditions with modern principles of justice and equality.

2. Methodology

This study employs a comparative historical analysis to examine the evolution of women's rights within Albania's customary legal system. Given the significant role of customary law in shaping gender relations, this approach allows for an assessment of the impact of religious beliefs and economic developments on women's status over time. The methodology involves a detailed examination of four major Kanuns: the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, the Kanun of Skanderbeg, the Kanun of Labëria, and the Kanun of Luma. Each Kanun represents a distinct regional interpretation of customary law, providing a comparative perspective on similarities and differences in the way women's rights have been regulated.

2.1 Comparative Analysis of the Kanuns

The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini is the most extensively documented customary law in Albania and is recognized for its strict patriarchal norms. This Kanun establishes a rigid framework of social relations, particularly emphasizing honor and blood feuds. Women's roles are defined in highly restrictive terms, with legal status often subordinate to men. The principle of besa, or word of honor, serves as a foundational element in regulating family relationships, reinforcing the notion that women's autonomy is secondary to family and community interests.

The Kanun of Skanderbeg, while maintaining many foundational patriarchal structures, presents notable variations influenced by regional differences. These modifications reflect the social and economic conditions of the regions where it was applied, offering insight into localized adaptations of customary law in relation to women's rights.

The Kanun of Labëria exhibits a more flexible approach to certain aspects of women's roles within family and community. While it remains rooted in patriarchal traditions, this Kanun demonstrates greater negotiation in legal and familial matters, suggesting that regional economic and social variations influenced the codification of customary law. Examining this Kanun provides an opportunity to assess whether economic changes have led to more progressive interpretations of women's rights in certain regions.

The Kanun of Luma, shaped by both Ottoman legal traditions and local customs, represents a fusion of customary and religious law. This Kanun is particularly relevant for understanding how Islamic legal principles were integrated into Albania's indigenous legal frameworks. By analyzing the Kanun of Luma, this study evaluates the extent to which religious influence reinforced or modified traditional gender roles in customary law.

2.2 Sources and Data Collection

This research relies on a combination of primary and secondary sources to examine the impact of religious and economic changes on women's rights under the Kanun. Primary sources include historical texts and legal codes, such as original Kanun manuscripts and documented case studies from different historical periods. These materials provide direct insight

into how customary law functioned and how women's rights were codified in different regions.

Secondary sources include scholarly articles, historical analyses, and contemporary studies on Albanian customary law. These sources help contextualize findings within broader discussions of gender, legal evolution, and social change. Additionally, this study incorporates qualitative field research through semi-structured interviews with legal scholars, historians, and cultural experts familiar with the continued influence of customary law in modern Albania.

The field research involved 20 participants, selected based on expertise in legal anthropology, gender studies, or direct lived experiences with customary practices. The semi-structured interviews, conducted both in person and online, lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The qualitative data collected were thematically analyzed to assess how traditional norms persist or evolve within Albania's contemporary legal and social frameworks.

2.3 Analytical Framework

This study employs a comparative historical framework to analyze how religious and economic developments have shaped the evolution of women's rights within customary law. The analysis identifies continuities and discontinuities in legal traditions across different Kanuns and historical periods. The focus is on key themes such as inheritance rights, marriage laws, and legal autonomy, assessing the extent to which economic and religious transformations have modified these aspects of customary law.

Additionally, this study integrates legal anthropology to explore how customary law interacts with state law in Albania. While the Kanuns provide formalized legal structures, their practical implementation varies across regions. This anthropological perspective helps determine whether legal reforms and economic developments have successfully altered traditional gender norms or whether these norms remain deeply embedded in local customs.

2.4 Assessing the Impact of Religious and Economic Transformations

The study evaluates whether religious and economic transformations have led to the persistence, modification, or abandonment of specific customary practices related to women. Religious beliefs, particularly those associated with Islam, Catholicism, and Orthodoxy, have historically shaped gender norms in Albania. This research examines whether religious institutions reinforced customary laws that restricted women's rights or whether they contributed to advocating for gender equality.

Economic transformations, especially the transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy, are considered key factors in shaping women's legal status. The study examines whether increased participation in the workforce, expanded access to education, and urbanization contributed to a decline in traditional patriarchal norms. By comparing different historical periods, this research assesses whether economic shifts led to greater legal autonomy for women or whether customary laws adapted to maintain patriarchal control.

The comparative historical analysis employed in this study provides a comprehensive examination of how religious and economic factors have influenced the evolution of women's rights under Albanian customary law. By focusing on four distinct Kanuns, this research highlights both regional variations and overarching trends in the legal treatment of women.

The combination of primary and secondary sources, alongside qualitative data from contemporary field research, ensures a well-rounded analysis of the persistence and transformation of customary legal norms. Understanding how customary laws have evolved over time provides valuable insights into the ongoing challenges of integrating modern legal standards with traditional social structures in Albania.

3. Results

As shown in Table 1, the four Kanuns present both similarities and variations in their treatment of women's rights, particularly in inheritance, marriage, and legal autonomy.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Women's Rights in the Four Kanuns

Legal Aspect	Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini	Kanun of Skanderbeg	Kanun of Labëria	Kanun of Luma
Inheritance Rights	Women excluded from inheritance; property passes through male lineage	Similar to Lekë Dukagjini, but some exceptions for widows	Some inheritance rights allowed, particularly for daughters without brothers	Influenced by Ottoman law; limited but existent female inheritance

Marriage & Divorce	Marriage arranged by family; divorce rarely permitted	Marriage decisions involve family negotiation; divorce uncommon	Greater flexibility in marriage arrangements; divorce more accepted	Marriage follows both Kanun and Islamic customs; divorce more feasible
Role in Family Decisions	Minimal influence; decisions made by male family members	Limited influence; some flexibility in widow inheritance	Women may participate in family decision-making in specific cases	Some decision-making rights depending on economic status
Legal Autonomy	No legal autonomy; representation through male relatives	Minimal legal autonomy; still reliant on male authority	Limited autonomy but more flexibility in dispute resolution	Autonomy varies, especially in economic matters
Property Ownership	Women cannot own property; considered part of husband's family	Property rights restricted but more flexible for widows	Women can own land in certain cases, usually with male oversight	Women may inherit under certain conditions, particularly in urban areas
Punishment for Honor-Related Crimes	Strict punishments: family honor prioritized over individual rights	Similar to Lekë Dukagjini; family reputation protected by strict rules	Less strict than Lekë Dukagjini; more focus on community mediation	Combination of Kanun and Sharia law; punishments vary regionally

The analysis of the four major Kanuns reveals both continuity and variation in the treatment of women's rights within Albania's customary legal system. The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, widely regarded as the most rigid and comprehensive, reinforces a patriarchal structure where women have limited legal and social autonomy. Marriage laws within this Kanun define women as property transferred from one family to another, and inheritance rights systematically exclude them from land ownership. The Kanun of Skanderbeg, while maintaining similar patriarchal norms, shows regional adaptations that slightly alter the application of these principles, especially in dispute resolution processes.

The Kanun of Labëria, compared to the others, exhibits a more flexible approach to women's roles, particularly in marriage and family decision-making. Unlike Lekë Dukagjini's Kanun, which strictly prohibits women from participating in inheritance matters, the Labëria version includes instances where women have a say in property division under specific circumstances. This flexibility suggests that economic structures and regional cultural differences influenced the codification of laws in a way that provided slight variations in women's legal status.

The Kanun of Luma, influenced by both Ottoman legal traditions and local customs, presents a complex blend of religious and customary laws. Islamic principles, introduced during the Ottoman period, reinforced the patriarchal foundations of the Kanun, integrating certain Sharia provisions into existing customary norms. This Kanun maintains a strong distinction between male and female legal status, especially in matters of family law and property ownership. However, its reliance on religious doctrine means that interpretations of women's rights could vary depending on the level of Islamic influence in different communities.

A comparative analysis of the Kanuns over time demonstrates that economic transformations have played a key role in modifying the rigid structures of customary law.

Customary law under the Kanun not only dictated social and legal structures but also enforced strict gender-based punishments. Women were often subjected to harsher consequences for perceived transgressions, while men were granted greater leniency, especially in cases concerning family honor and property.

Table 2 compares the punishments for women and men under different Kanuns, illustrating the systemic gender inequalities embedded in customary law.

Table 2. Comparison of Punishments for Women and Men in the Kanuns

Offense	Punishment for Women	Punishment for Men	Kanun Reference
Adultery	Death or expulsion from the family	Often forgiven if honor is restored	Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini
Disobedience to Husband	Physical punishment or exile	Not applicable	Kanun of Skanderbeg
Blood Feud	Women exempt but suffer consequences	Male relatives required to retaliate	Kanun of Luma
Property Theft	Severe punishment; rarely permitted to own property	More lenient; men can compensate	Kanun of Labëria

The shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy has led to an increased presence of women in the workforce,

providing them with economic independence that challenges traditional patriarchal norms. While legal inheritance under the Kanun remains male-dominated in many rural areas, urban regions show a growing tendency to grant women property rights due to economic modernization and legal reforms.

Religious beliefs have had a more complex and sometimes contradictory impact on the evolution of women's rights. In some cases, religious institutions reinforced customary laws that restricted women's autonomy, particularly through the preservation of traditional family structures. In other cases, religious leaders played a role in advocating gender equality, particularly in urban centers where progressive religious interpretations have influenced modern legal policies. Despite the persistence of certain discriminatory customs, there is evidence of gradual adaptation in response to social and economic pressures, particularly in legal reforms that attempt to align customary practices with contemporary gender equality standards.

The gradual transformation of women's rights in Albania has been significantly influenced by economic development and increased access to education. While urban areas have experienced considerable progress in gender equality, rural communities continue to adhere to traditional Kanun-based norms.

Table 3 illustrates the differences in literacy rates, workforce participation, property ownership, and legal awareness between urban and rural areas, demonstrating their respective impacts on women's rights.

Table 3. Economic and Educational Impact on Women's Rights

Factor	Urban Areas	Rural Areas	Impact on Women's Rights
Literacy Rate	95%	70%	Higher education levels reduce adherence to Kanun norms
Women's Workforce Participation	60%	30%	Economic independence weakens patriarchal control
Property Ownership by Women	50%	15%	More urban women own property, challenging Kanun norms
Legal Awareness Campaigns	High	Low	Low awareness leads to continued reliance on customary law

4. Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing literature that highlights the deep entrenchment of patriarchal norms within Albania's customary law system (Young, 2000; Gjuraj, 2019). Scholars have noted that the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, in particular, represents one of the strictest customary codes in Europe, with women being regarded as subordinate members of society (Fox, 1989). The exclusion of women from inheritance and the concept of "besa" as a mechanism to enforce male authority have been recognized as key aspects of this patriarchal legal structure (Sadiku, 2014).

However, the findings also indicate that regional variations in the Kanun reflect the influence of economic and religious differences. While previous studies have often presented the Kanun as a monolithic legal system (Winnifrith, 1992), this study demonstrates that localized interpretations, such as those found in the Kanun of Labëria and Kanun of Luma, introduce notable distinctions. The Kanun of Labëria, for instance, has been observed to allow more flexibility in women's roles, particularly regarding dispute resolution in family matters (Qosja, 2003). This suggests that customary law was not static but rather adaptable to regional socio-economic conditions.

Economic modernization has played a crucial role in shaping the contemporary interpretation of customary law. The expansion of educational opportunities for women, increased workforce participation, and shifts in property ownership laws have contributed to a gradual but noticeable decline in the application of certain patriarchal norms (Pettifer, 2012). However, as Krasniqi (2019) argues, the persistence of these norms in rural areas highlights the disconnect between legal reforms and social implementation. While Albania has formally recognized gender equality in its legal framework, customary law continues to influence daily life, particularly in regions where traditional family structures remain dominant (Gjermeni, 2016).

Religious influence in shaping the Kanun has been widely debated in scholarly literature. Islamic legal traditions introduced during Ottoman rule reinforced existing patriarchal frameworks but also provided avenues for more structured legal interpretations of marriage and inheritance (Mëhilli, 2017). Conversely, Catholic and Orthodox influences have played a dual role, sometimes advocating for women's protection while simultaneously upholding family-centered authority structures that limit female autonomy (Reinkowski, 2005). This study's findings support the argument that religion has not been a singular force in shaping gender norms but rather has interacted with customary law in complex ways, sometimes reinforcing and sometimes challenging traditional norms (Coulson, 1999).

4.1 Legal Reforms and the Persistence of Customary Norms

One of the most significant findings of this study is that customary law remains influential despite formal legal reforms aimed at eliminating gender discrimination. This phenomenon aligns with previous studies on post-communist legal transformations, which highlight the slow adaptation of rural communities to legal changes (Schwandner-Sievers, 2004). While economic modernization has encouraged shifts in gender roles, the cultural weight of the Kanun continues to pose challenges to legal enforcement, particularly in areas where informal customary practices hold greater authority than state laws (Todorova, 2009).

Albania's legal pluralism—the coexistence of formal legal codes and informal customary norms—plays a crucial role in the persistence of these traditions. Despite the implementation of gender equality laws, customary law continues to influence family, inheritance, and social structures in rural regions. Similar challenges have been observed in other post-socialist and post-colonial contexts, where state law struggles to displace long-standing customary practices (Merry, 1988; Tamanaha, 2008).

For example, in post-socialist Central Asia, customary practices such as bride price and patrilineal inheritance persist despite legislative reforms promoting gender equality (Kandiyoti, 2007). Similarly, in sub-Saharan Africa, the persistence of customary legal systems has undermined state-led gender reforms, as traditional leaders often retain authority over marriage and property disputes (Nyamu-Musembi, 2002). These comparative cases highlight why legal pluralism in Albania presents a significant barrier to full gender equality, as formal legal advancements often remain disconnected from lived social realities.

Despite significant legal reforms aimed at promoting gender equality, the implementation of these laws remains inconsistent, particularly in rural areas where customary practices persist. Table 4 provides an overview of key legal reforms introduced in Albania and their impact on customary norms, highlighting the ongoing challenges in aligning formal legislation with deeply rooted traditional practices.

Table 4. Evolution of Legal Reforms and Customary Practices

Legal Reform	Objective	Kanun Influence Before Reform	Current Status in Rural Areas
Women's Right to Inherit (1994)	Grant women equal inheritance rights	Women excluded from inheritance under the Kanun	Still limited enforcement in rural communities
Legalization of Divorce (1991)	Ensure women's right to separate from marriage	Divorce rarely permitted under the Kanun	More accepted in cities; still stigmatized in rural areas
Domestic Violence Law (2006)	Criminalize violence against women	Honor-based violence tolerated under the Kanun	Awareness increased, but cultural resistance persists
Recognition of Gender Equality (2008)	Equal rights in employment and public life	Kanun restricts women's autonomy	Women still underrepresented in leadership roles

4.2 Bridging the Gap: The Role of Policy and Legal Awareness

Future research should focus on examining how legal education and awareness campaigns can bridge the gap between formal legal protections and the persistence of customary norms. One potential avenue for change is the integration of customary law into formal legal systems through mechanisms that acknowledge tradition while ensuring gender equality (Tamanaha, 2011).

Additionally, a deeper investigation into the role of religious leaders in either upholding or challenging patriarchal customs would provide valuable insights into how gender equality can be promoted within the framework of tradition and modernity. Evidence from other contexts suggests that engaging religious and community leaders in discussions on progressive legal interpretations can facilitate change without direct confrontation with tradition (An-Na'im, 2002).

This study has demonstrated that the status of women within Albanian customary law is deeply influenced by religious beliefs and economic transformations. While the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini and similar codes historically reinforced patriarchal norms, regional variations indicate that economic and social changes have led to gradual shifts in gender roles. The Kanun of Labëria, for example, shows evidence of flexibility in legal interpretations, suggesting that localized economic and social structures played a role in shaping customary legal traditions.

Religious influence on women's rights under customary law has been complex and multifaceted, sometimes reinforcing patriarchal norms and sometimes providing mechanisms for legal protection. Islamic legal principles

introduced under Ottoman rule, along with Catholic and Orthodox traditions, have each played a role in shaping how gender relations were codified in customary law.

Despite legal reforms aimed at promoting gender equality, customary legal traditions continue to influence the daily lives of women, particularly in rural areas. The findings highlight the need for policies that bridge the gap between legal frameworks and cultural practices, ensuring that gender equality is not only recognized in law but also reflected in social implementation. The study contributes to a growing body of research on the interplay between tradition and modernity in legal systems, underscoring the ongoing challenges of aligning customary law with contemporary human rights standards.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role that religious beliefs, economic transformations, and political changes have played in shaping women's rights under Albanian customary law. While many traditional restrictions have weakened over time due to social and legal advancements, remnants of these norms continue to persist in various contexts, particularly in rural areas where customary practices still exert influence. The historical codification of the Kanun established a patriarchal system in which women were systematically excluded from inheritance, property ownership, and decision-making. However, economic modernization and legal reforms have begun to challenge these long-standing customs, creating a gradual shift in gender dynamics.

Religious influences have historically reinforced patriarchal norms, with Islamic, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions each playing a role in shaping customary law. While these religious systems have often upheld male authority in matters of family law and property inheritance, contemporary reinterpretations of religious teachings have increasingly challenged traditional gender norms. In some regions, religious leaders have begun to support gender equality initiatives, contributing to a slow but noticeable transformation in the perception of women's rights.

Economic changes have further contributed to the evolving status of women. Increased access to education, workforce participation, and property ownership have empowered women, allowing them greater legal and financial independence. These shifts have led to a decline in traditional gender roles, particularly in urban areas where economic modernization has had the greatest impact. However, in rural communities where economic development has been slower, women still face significant barriers in accessing equal rights.

Legal reforms in Albania have improved the recognition of women's rights, aligning the country's legal framework with international gender equality standards. Despite these advancements, the implementation of legal protections remains inconsistent, as customary practices continue to exert influence, particularly in familial and property-related matters. The persistence of these customs highlights the gap between formal legal structures and their enforcement at the local level.

Political interventions, including foreign influences and government-led reforms, have led to both advancements and setbacks in women's rights. During the communist era, Albania experienced a push toward gender equality through state-led initiatives that sought to eliminate the influence of customary law. However, the post-communist period saw a resurgence of traditional practices, particularly in rural areas, where legal pluralism allowed for the coexistence of formal legal systems and customary norms. This dual legal structure has made it difficult to fully integrate gender equality into all aspects of Albanian society.

Overall, this study demonstrates that while significant progress has been made in promoting women's rights in Albania, the persistence of customary law in certain regions continues to present challenges. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that combines legal enforcement, education, religious engagement, and economic developent.

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