

Election Report

ALBANIA / Legislative Elections 23 June 2013

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Background:

Politics throughout Albania's most recent parliamentary term (2009-2013) was marred by discord between the ruling and opposition parties. Indeed, constant blocking of the Democratic Party's decisions by the Socialist Party thwarted its ability to legislate. The Socialists' accusations of electoral fraud and the illegitimacy of the ruling party were kept up following the 2009 elections. Political tension increased, reaching a peak in 2011 following local elections in which Edi Rama, the leader of the Socialist Party, was deprived of the mayoralty of Tirana.

Elections in 2013 were widely anticipated for a variety of reasons by both the Albanian public and the wider international community. Firstly, from an international perspective, Albania is awaiting ratification of its acceptance as a candidate for EU membership and as such needs to meet a series of democratic standards which have been monitored throughout the present electoral process. Secondly, from an internal perspective, during its four years in office the government endured a constant deadlock from an opposition party that never recognised Sali Berisa and his party as the winners of the 2009 elections. This led to public distrust and political fatigue among Albanians and ultimately disaffection towards politics itself.

As in previous elections, the political options could be divided into two main groups: on the one hand, the alliance created by the ruling Democratic Party (DP), headed by President Sali Berisa; on the other, the alliance formed by the Socialist Party (SP), headed by Edi Rama.

A third political grouping established in 2013 that has been of some concern to experts and observers due to its extremist positions, has been the nationalist grouping, the Black and Red Alliance. Its nationalist aspirations have been the focus of the international community's attention throughout these elections.

Quantitative indices of democracy:

Albania was classified in the following democratic performance rankings just before these elections:

Measurement	Name and year of report or database	Institution	Index	Points, ranking and classification
Political rights and freedom	Freedom House Report 2013	Freedom House (FH)	PR: political rights CL: civil liberties	PR: 3, CL: 3 (Scale of 1, free to 7, not free) Classification: Partially free
Consolidation of authoritarian and democratic institutions	Polity IV 2012	Center for International Development and Conflict Management, Univ. of Maryland	Democracy: consolidation of democratic institutions Autocracy: authoritarian consolidation Polity: synthesis of both	Democracy: 9 Autocracy: 0 Polity: 9 (Scale of +10, very democratic to -10, very authoritarian) Classification: Democratic

Perception of corruption	Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2012	Transparency International	TICPI: Perception of corruption index	TICPI: 33 points out of 100, (Scale of 0 very corrupt to 100 not at all corrupt) Ranking: 113 out of 176 countries
Democracy, including press status and corruption	World Democracy Audit Nov. 2012	World Audit	World Democracy Rank: political freedom (FH) + press and corruption (TI)	World Democracy Ranking: 63 out of 150 countries, Division 3 out of 4
Management of Political and Economic Change	Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2012	Bertelsmann Foundation	MI: Management Index, quality of change management	MI: 5.42 out of 10. Ranking: 50 out of 128 countries

Definition of the electoral and party systems:

The 2007 reform of the 1998 Constitution established that Albania's unicameral parliament, the People's Assembly, is comprised of 140 deputies, of whom 100 are elected in single-member districts using the rule of simple majority and the other 40 decided by proportional election in multi-member districts. But the 2008 reform introduced an innovation: all of the 140 seats were henceforth to be elected using a proportional system, with multi-member districts that correspond to the country's 12 administrative regions.

In theory, and according to Duverger's classic law (1957)¹, the new electoral system ought to produce a multiparty system. It was thought that the proportional electoral system would give rise to a multiparty system, which would in turn give parliamentary representation to an array of political parties. However, this has not come to pass in Albania where the two strongest parties have been winners, while the other parties have hardly obtained significant representation at all. Albanian multiparty politics is still influenced by years of a majority electoral system and a two-party system, factors which the new electoral system has not yet been able to modify.

According to the LaPalombara and Weiner's (1966) thesis, the Albanian party system would fall under the classification 'turnover ideological', given that since the fall of communism, there has been a constant struggle between the two dominant currents in the country: liberal and socialist.² Finally, according to

¹ The important variable here is the number of parties (single party, two-party or multiparty system) and its role in the electoral system, with a two-party system linked to the majority system, while proportional representation tends to a multiparty system. Duverger's classic law is not empirically applicable in every case since other factors like the size of the electoral district intervene in every electoral system. This was not considered here, which has opened the new Albanian system up to various kinds of criticism.

² LaPalombara and Weiner (1966) propose a classification according to the criteria of *competitiveness* (competitive vs. non-competitive), also bearing in mind a differentiation between ideological and pragmatic. The authors divide competitive systems into four subtypes: 1. turnover-ideological; 2. turnover-pragmatic; 3. hegemonic-ideological; and 4. hegemonic-pragmatic.

Sartori's thesis,³ (1976) which combines a numerical typology with criteria for party competition and interaction, the Albanian system corresponds to the model 'moderate pluralism', in which two coalitions led by majority parties, namely, the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party, attract most but not all the other political parties, some of which remain independent of these alliances.

Impact of the electoral formula and constituency size on the elections

According to the stipulations in Articles 162 and 163 of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania, approved by Law No. 10019 of 29 December 2008 and modified by Law No. 74/2012 on 12 July 2012, the number of seats is calculated for each of the coalitions in each of the districts by counting, on the one hand, the votes won by each of the parties in the coalition in their respective electoral districts and, on the other, the number of seats won by each coalition in its district. Firstly, the seats are assigned to the coalitions in each electoral district using the D'Hondt formula (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.). After that, the seats are distributed among the political parties that form part of a coalition using the Sainte-Laguë formula (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, etc.).⁴

The threshold to obtain parliamentary representation is 3% for political parties and 5% for coalitions. These thresholds, while not very high, do have an effect on which parties are represented in parliament.

The D'Hondt formula, following the criteria of proportionality, tends to produce a multiparty system, which when combined with the multi-member nature of the constituencies, has meant – before and after elections – that a system of coalitions is necessary to achieve consolidated majorities for governing. However, as can be observed in the results tables, Albania's is more of a two-party system (with two large coalitions and parties) than a multiparty one (only 2 parties receive a substantial number of votes). Practically speaking, it can be stated that the D'Hondt electoral formula in Albania favours large parties, increasing their overrepresentation and leaving smaller political parties without a share. The electoral threshold also contributes to this situation.

The country is divided into 12 constituencies coinciding with each of the 12 provinces in the administrative division of the country. The average magnitude of each constituency is 11.6. Kukës and Gjirokastër are the only two small constituencies – with 4 and 6 seats respectively; other constituencies like Tirana and Fier have more than 10.

³ Sartori (1976) combined numerical typology with criteria for competition and interaction among political parties, also considering the dynamic aspect: the possible transformation of one party system into another. Here, the party formats are inserted into a continuum that includes (updated by Sartori): 1. single-party systems; 2. hegemonic party systems; 3. predominant party systems; 4. two-party systems; 5. moderate pluralism; and 6. polarised pluralism. Beyond these types, the situation is one of political party fragmentation.

⁴ For more information on the above Highest Average seat allocation methods see 'Electoral Systems in Europe: An Overview' by the European Centre for Parliamentary Research & Documentation, available online at:

<https://ecprd.secure.europarl.europa.eu/ecprd/getfile.do?id=5063>

Results:

Out of a total electoral roll of 3,271,885 registered electors, 1,744,261 Albanians turned out to vote, a participation of 53.3% according to data from the Central Electoral Commission. Despite the political disaffection observed among the public during the outgoing government's term in office, turnout was slightly higher than at the last general elections.

Of the more than 65 parties registered for these elections, only 7 won seats.

Coalition	Party	Initials	Votes	% Votes	Seats
Alliance for Employment, Prosperity and Integration	Democratic Party	PD	524,800	30.5%	49
	Republican Party	PR	51,688	3%	3
	Party for Justice, Integration & Unity	PDIU	44,640	2.6%	4
	Others	-	0	0	0
TOTAL			676,433	35.6	56

Coalition	Party	Initials	Votes	% Votes	Seats
Alliance for a European Albania	Socialist Party	PS	711,765	41.4%	66
	Socialist Movement for Integration	LSI	179,449	10.4%	16
	Unity for Human Rights Party	PBDNJ	15,682	0.9%	1
	Christian Democratic Party	PKDSH	8,712	0.5%	1
	Others	-	3,877	0.2%	0
TOTAL			991,118	57.7%	84

Coalition	Party	Initials	Votes	% Votes	Seats
Parties outside of coalitions	New Democratic Spirit	FRD	29,051	1.7%	0
	Red & Black Alliance	AK	9,910	0.6%	0
	League for Justice & Progress	PBD	15,682	0.9%	0
	Independent Arben Malaj	-	3,035	0.2%	0
	Independent Dritan Prifti	-	6,169	0.4%	0
TOTAL			63,847	3.8%	0

Table compiled by author from data provided by the Albanian Central Electoral Commission

* In blue, parties from outgoing government. In red, opposition parties.

Qualitative analysis of the elections

Participation:

The experts forecast a very low turnout in these elections. While hardly excellent, the final tally of 53.3% exceeded that of previous elections (in 2009 turnout was 49%). The reason for this increase may have been Albanians' hankering to get out of the political trough in which the country's decision-making has been mired over the last four years.

Competition:

These elections were particularly competitive, with more than 60 registered parties spread between two major coalitions, several parties trying to mount a challenge from outside these strong alliances, not to mention a considerable number of independent candidates with popular profiles. The

constant accusations against the outgoing ruling alliance from all the other parties aspiring to seats in parliament tainted the pre-election period. Issues such as threatening to withhold the pay of civil servants if they did not attend Democratic Party rallies led the opposition parties to fear wholesale loss of votes and an undemocratic result.

Transparency:

All in all, these elections were much fairer and more transparent than the previous elections, as was noted in the reports of both national and international observers. Even the opposition party (PS) could not help but admit, after learning that the results had given it an absolute majority, that democratic standards had been respected.

That said, during the period prior to election day and especially the campaign itself, accusations of attempted fraud were rife, leading to fears that affected even the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), the institution responsible for monitoring the electoral process. Problems such as setting the boundaries of the constituencies or the time granted by the media for covering political messages led to fears that the results of the elections would be perverted. Ultimately this did not happen.

Representation and debate:

Electoral debate was encouraged by both the public and the party bosses. This debate was open and saw the relatively active participation of all candidates. As part of their campaigns, the major candidates included rallies in all constituencies.

The media was once again the parties' main tool for information and outreach. Television channels, as well as the press and radio stations, all added special editions about the elections. Internet became a forum whereby candidates could express themselves more directly via their Twitter and Facebook accounts.

Internal democracy inside the political parties is questionable. Hierarchy is still important and the manner in which leaders are elected is not open. It can be argued that the large number of small parties that compete within each alliance is proof that the different tendencies in Albanian society are largely reflected in its politics. However, the design of the electoral system prevents all these tendencies from winning representation in parliament.

Openness:

It seemed as if several new political parties were going to win representation in parliament on the strength of their rhetoric, but ultimately they were left out of parliament. This was the case of the Black and Red Alliance whose nationalist message resonated among the public but not sufficiently to win any seats. The proportional electoral system certainly punished this party.

As part of the Alliance for a European Albania, the Christian Democratic Party won one seat, which represents not just a step forward in opening parliament up to more parties, but also one for the representation of minorities.

Relevance:

These elections constitute a major advance in the democratic history of Albania. For the first time ever the opposition accepted the election results without casting any aspersions, and for the first time the electoral process was able to take place in a relatively democratic context, in spite of some accusations made during the campaign.

Consequences and impact on the political system

For the first time since the fall of communism, observers from the international community described an Albanian election as free and fair. In order to attain this qualification, the way in which election day and the counting of the votes went off was decisive. The Socialist leader Edi Rama's comfortable win removed any doubts about the manipulation of the results, in spite of the suspicions aroused at the beginning of the electoral process.

The Central Electoral Commission met with difficulties in carrying out its duties, due to the fact that only the PD members still occupied their seats on the commission following the resignation of the rest of the commissioners several weeks before the 23 June election. This led to complicated situations, such as the CEC not being able to announce the PS victory in the elections because all the members of that party had resigned because of allegations of fraud.

Another consequence of this change of government with such an overwhelming majority was Berisa's resignation and his acknowledgment of his responsibility for the public's lack of support for his party's platform and for his time as prime minister over the last four years. This may mean the beginning of a new phase in Albanian politics, given that since its foundation, the sole leader of the PD has been Sali Berisa – a politician with a very individual form of wielding power.

International political reaction

International political reaction to Albania's elections has been very positive in spite of the misgivings about fraud expressed by the PS, notably regarding unfitting use of resources during the campaign, the pressure placed on civil servants to attend political rallies, or disagreements among members of the Central Electoral Commission. Corruption and the gridlock on decision-making under the previous government led experts to positively welcome the change in government.

The announcement of Berisa's resignation and the recognition of the total failure of his election campaign also provoked positive reactions from the international community. Since the fall of communism in the 1990's, Sali Berisa

had been the sole leader of the PD which was obviously in need of some regeneration among its leadership.

In its preliminary report the OSCE confirmed the transparency of the electoral process, despite two isolated episodes of violence which provoked the death of a LSI Party supporter.

The EU also announced its willingness to resume dialogue with Albania if the country fulfils the recommendations necessary for transforming it into a candidate for accession.

Conclusion

These elections represent a step forward in the history of democracy and its institutionalisation in Albania, as well as a step away from corruption. Undoubtedly and in spite of the misgivings of political apathy and disaffection, the main instigator of this change was the Albanian public. Albanians followed the electoral process with political responsibility and maturity, turned out in their majority to cast their vote in an orderly manner, and respected the results once their votes had been counted. Notwithstanding the serious cases of violence registered on election day, these did not manage to put citizens off voting, nor complicate the situation.

It remains to be seen whether under a PS government the tremendous political corruption that has ravaged the country throughout its history can be reduced or whether its leader, Edi Rama, will be able to exercise the style of mature leadership – involving the opposition in his decision-making – he displayed in his political rallies and appearances in the press.

For now the most immediate consequence of the result of these elections is that Edi Rama's counterpart for discussions about issues of national interest is the mayor of Tirana, Lulzim Basha (PD).

Reference to other online analysis of the elections

1. Interim report of the OSCE electoral observation mission to Albania
<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/102474>
2. Preliminary report of the OSCE electoral observation mission to Albania
<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/103068>
3. Domestic Observers Coalition KRIIK Albania Report
<http://www.gndem.org/sites/default/files/KRIIK%20Albania%20statement.pdf>