

Albania

Last update:	20 december 2021
Population:	2,811,666 (World Bank 2021)
Prime minister:	Edi Rama
President:	Bajram Begaj
Governemental type:	Emerging democracy
Ruling coalition:	Socialist Party of Albania (PS)
Last election:	25 April 2021 (parliamentary elections)
Next election:	May 2023 (municipal & mayor elections)
Sister parties:	Socialist Party of Albania (PS)

The last Albanian parliamentary elections took place in April 2021. During the elections, the Socialist Party (PS) managed to maintain its majority in parliament. The party gained 74 seats once again, which secured the third consecutive term of former major of Tirana and PS leader Edi Rama as Prime Minister. The Democratic Party (DP) became second, winning 59 seats. The Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI), which lost the largest portion of its votes. Its number of seats decreased from 19 to 4. The minor Social Democratic Party of Albania (PSD) won 2 seats. Since the PS won a majority there is no government coalition. During the election campaign for the 2021 parliamentary elections confrontations occurred between Albania's president Ilir Meta from the LSI, and incumbent Prime Minister Edi Rama. Meta repeatedly accused Rama of trying to steal the parliamentary vote and referred to Rama's government as a "kleptocratic regime".

Albania gained EU candidate status on 24 June 2014 after reform efforts and encouragements were agreed by the EU's Enlargement Commissioner. This was a key step in the right direction for a country that still has to deal with major corruption and crime issues. On March 25, 2020, the European Council decided to greenlight the opening of accession negotiations with Albania if they had fulfilled 15 conditions that were set up by the European Union.

Political Situation

For the last decade, Albania has been plagued with several crises where the opposition boycotts the parliament. This happened again when the opposition parties Democracy Party (DP) and the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI) boycotted the parliament in 2019. However, this boycott was ended after an agreement on electoral reforms was reached in June of 2020. Nevertheless, tensions remained throughout 2020 and led to confrontations between Albania's President Ilir Meta from the LSI and Edi Rama. In 2019, the parliament started an impeachment procedure against Meta. As a protest against this action, Meta actively organized antigovernment rallies and accused Edi Rama of attempting a coup and accused him of having links with international organized crime.

During the election campaign for the 2021 parliamentary elections confrontations between Rama and Meta continued. Meta repeatedly accused Rama of trying to steal the parliamentary vote. The pre-election period was also marked by protests and violence. The incendiary rhetoric coming from both sides led the European Union to issue a warning that parties should uphold mutual respect, dialogue and refrain from hate speech. In April, the pre-election atmosphere turned deadly when a shouting outside of Tirana left one person dead and four other injured. The incident occurred a few hours after President Meta intervened in the pre-electoral debates and called the government run by Rama a "kleptocratic regime". He also accused Rama of inciting violence against opposition members.

Opposition protest regularly occur in Albania around election period. The corona pandemic and its restrictions have also led to protests in Albania. In December of 2020, a man was shot dead after he violated the country's overnight curfew. This led to nationwide protests during which the police clashed with protestors for several nights in a row. The protests eventually resulted in the resignation of Albania's Minister of Interior.

EU accession process and protests

On March 25, 2020, the European Council decided to greenlight the opening of accession negotiations with Albania if they had fulfilled 15 conditions that were set up. In October 2021, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Oliver Varhelyi, presented the European Parliament's progress report on Albania. The report stressed that Albania is ready to sit in accession talks with the EU. While there is still progress to be made in certain areas such as civil society and freedom of expression, the report commended the administration of the 2021 elections and the electoral reforms of 2020. However, regardless of the positive progress report, Albania's start of accession negotiations has been delayed because its accession path has been coupled to North Macedonia. Bulgaria has been vetoing the start of the accession talks with North Macedonia due to cultural, language and human rights issues. A veto for North Macedonia has meant that Albania has also been unable to move forward. However, this might change in the near future. In December of 2021 Bulgaria's EU Ambassador stated that Bulgaria would be in favor of uncoupling Albania and North Macedonia and assessing Albania independently. Bulgaria's new Prime Minister also pledged in December of 2021 that there would be an U-turn on its stance towards North Macedonia's EU ambitions, signaling Bulgaria would end its obstructions of Macedonia's efforts to join the EU.

Human rights

Domestic and international human rights groups are generally able to operate without government restrictions and government officials are generally cooperative and responsive to their views. However, Albania does have significant human rights issues. These issues include problems restrictions on free expression and the press, corruption in all branches of the government and failure to enforce child labor laws. The independence of the judiciary also remains a problem in Albania. While individuals and organizations will try and seek civil remedies for human rights violations, courts were susceptible to corruption, inefficiency, intimidation and political tampering. Albanian law guarantees the political rights for citizens regardless of ethnic, lingual, racial or religious identity. However, Roma and other marginalized people remain vulnerable to political exploitation.

Women's rights

Domestic violence is widespread in Albania. According to a UN Women survey from May 2019, 27 percent of the respondents experienced domestic violence from intimate partners in their lifetime. While the parliament has adopted some measures to combat domestic violence, few cases are prosecuted. Sexual violence against women also remains a problem in Albania. Rape, including spousal rape, is criminalized. The law also includes provisions on sexual assault. However the government fails to effectively enforce the law. Overall, the police is poorly equipped to handle cases of domestic violence or spousal rape, which is often not understood to be a crime.

The law provides the same legal status and rights for women and men. However, the government does not enforce the law effectively. Women are underrepresented in many fields at the highest levels. Furthermore, the law mandates equal pay for equal work, but this is not implemented by many private employers.

LGBTI rights

Violence and discrimination against LGBTI people is an issue in Albania. In 2019, 65 cases of sexual violence and 152 cases of physical violence were reported to a national NGO. With regards to psychological violence 232 cases were reported. Only 34 cases were reported to the police due to a lack of trust in the institutions, fear of coming out or negative experiences with the police. Of the 34 cases that were reported, the authorities only took measures in one case. Hate speech incidents also increased in 2019.

Same sex marriage is not recognized in Albania. While the Albanian NGO the Pink Embassy has requested the government to eliminate legal discrimination against LGBTI persons and allow for LGBTI persons to get married and adopt children, there has been no progress regarding the issue. However, a positive development with regards to LGBTI rights is that Albanian psychologists have banned the practice of conversion therapy. It is the third European country to ban the practice.

Elections

Electoral system

Albania is a parliamentary republic with a unicameral parliament: the National Assembly. It consists of 140 members elected for a

four-year term, and, under the constitutional guidelines, a government can be formed if a party or a coalition of parties gathers at least 71 seats in the National Assembly. The head of state in Albania is the president, who is elected for a five-year term by the parliament. The president has no legislative or executive power, but represents the state in foreign relations, and is the chief commander of the army. Since 24 July 2017, the President of Albania is Ilir Meta, leader of the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI). He was elected by the National Assembly by a vote of 87 to 53.

Albania has a regional proportional voting system divided into 12 electoral regions. Capital Tirana, which is the largest region population-wise, elects 34 MPs. Political parties nominate an MP list for each region for the total number of seats. According to the electoral code, 30 per cent of the candidates in the top tier of the lists should be women, a rule that few parties respected in the June 2013 parliamentary elections. The prime minister is approved by the president with the approval of the parliament.

The 12 electoral constituencies correspond to the country's 12 administrative regions. Within any constituency, parties must meet a threshold of 3 per cent, and pre-election coalitions must meet a threshold of 5 per cent. This is a consequence of the new electoral code introduced in 2009. The threshold has been largely criticised, because of the obstacle that it presents to smaller parties. In fact, of all the political parties in Albania, only the PS and the PD favoured the new electoral system. Smaller parties contended that the reform served only the interests of those two main parties, while largely, if not entirely, excluding small parties from entering the parliament.

The centre-left coalition headed by the PS declared after the June 2013 elections that all cabinet ministers will resign their parliamentary seats to provide for a better separation of power and checks and balances between the government and the legislative branch.

Parliamentary Elections

On 25 April 2021, parliamentary elections took place, in which the Socialist Party of Albania won convincingly by obtaining 48.7 per cent of the votes (74 out of 140 seats). Since 71 seats are needed for a majority, there will not be a parliamentary coalition. Former mayor of Tirana and SP leader, Edi Rama, will remain as Prime Minister for a third consecutive term. In the 2017 parliamentary elections, the PS also gained 74 seats. The unlikely opposition coalition of the Democratic Party of Albania (DP) and the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) was unable to gain a majority of the votes and topple Rama's government. Though the DP was the elections biggest winner, gaining 13, it did not matter. Most of its votes came from the LSI, which lost the largest portion of its votes. Its number of seats decreased from 19 to 4. The minor Social Democratic Party of Albania (PSD) gained 2 seats as well.

Election results

Parties	Votes	%	Seats	Seats in
Socialist Party (PS)	768,250	48.68%	74 (0)	74
Democratic Party of Albania (DP)	622,265	39.43%	59 (+13)	43
Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI)	107,536	6.81%	4 (-15)	19
Social Democratic Party of Albania (PSD)	35,477	2.25%	3 (+2)	1

International observers

The joint observation mission from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE PA and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), observed the election. Their report stated that the counting process was accompanied by smaller incidents, with vote-buying remaining a significant problem. In a similar manner to 2017, the election campaign was marked by a gunfight, which left a Socialist member dead, with several others wounded. Some PS officials also

seemed to have taken advantage of their governing positions, blurring the lines between the party and the government. During the heating campaign there were also concerns that the media failed to properly inform voters on the different political viewpoints of the parties, focusing mostly on the heated rhetoric between Prime Minister Rama, DP leader Basha and President Meta. However, observers also praised the “lively and inclusive campaign” and the “legal framework that helped ensure respect of fundamental freedoms”.

Aftermath

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing economic crisis, Prime Minister Rama faces a challenging task. Political stability seems to be in reach, with the opposition parties conceding defeat. Two years after the 2017 general elections the PD and LSI still boycotted parliament during the local elections, putting a strain on the legitimacy of Rama’s government. However, this does not seem likely to happen now. Although not in the most sincere manner, the opposition parties have conceded defeat. In his victory speech late on April 27 Rama claimed his most “most difficult but sweetest victory”. He suggested that he “broke the record” with this mandate for his “historic third term”. Rama vowed to make Albania the “Balkan champion, in tourism, energy, agriculture and in fast, qualitative, incorruptible digital services”. He also repeatedly promised government improvements as the country is dealing with an inefficient bureaucracy, high levels of corruption and high emigration rates.

Presidential Elections

The head of state in Albania is the president, who is elected for a five-year term by the parliament. The president has no legislative or executive power, but represents the state in foreign relations, and is the chief commander of the army. Since June 4, 2022, the President of Albania is Bajram Begaj, who was the army’s chief-of-staff since 2020. He was elected by the National Assembly by a vote of 78 in favour, four against and one abstaining. Most of the opposition boycotted the vote. Begaj succeeds Ilir Meta, who had frequent quarrels with PM Edi Rama, and it is expected that he will keep more of a low profile than his predecessor.

Social Democratic Parties

Socialist Party (PS)

Party Leader: Edi Rama

Number of seats: 74

<http://ps.al/>

The Socialist Party is the successor of the communist party, the Albanian Workers’ Party, during the communist time the sole legal political party in Albania. In 1991, the party participated in the first free elections and won a clear majority, 169 out of 250 parliamentary seats. However, the government formed after the elections fell apart after a month. Subsequently, a committee of national salvation was formed, but they also collapsed in half a year. In the national elections held thereafter in March 1992, the Socialists lost a large share of its supporters and the party was trumped by the Democratic Party; the SP won only 38 seats in 1992 and in the national elections in 1996 merely 10 seats.

According to the SP, the parliamentary elections in 1996 were not free and fair. The party accused the Democratic Party of intimidation, the DP won 122 out of 140 seats in the first round, and international observers concluded that the elections did not meet the international standards nor the standards of Albanian law. In 1997 premature elections were held, due to a period of riots after failed financial investment schemes by the government. The elections meant a clear victory for the SP and with 101 seats the Socialist formed the government. In the parliamentary elections of 2001 the SP was again the majority with 73 seats in parliament.

The parliamentary elections of July 2005 meant a comeback for the Democratic Party, after the SP lost its majority with 42 seats

and became subsequently an opposition party. Because of the election results, the party leader of the SP and former PM Fatos Nano, resigned in September 2005. Led by Nano, the SP helped to reform the old communist party and under his leadership the SP became a member of Socialist International. The successor of Fatos Nano is Edi Rama, the former Mayor of the capital Tirana between 2000 and 2011. With Rama, a new era of development for the Socialist Party began, as he never had direct links with the former Stalinist regime.

The loss of the party in the elections of 2005 could be partially explained by a split within the SP itself. In the summer of 2003, Paksal Milo, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, split from the Socialist Party due to internal disputes about the party's leadership. Milo formed a new party, the Social Democracy Party, and joined the government with this new party. In 2004, former Prime Minister Ilir Meta left the SP as well, due to persistent disagreements with Fatos Nano, which led to the formation of the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI). In the elections of 2005 the two new socialist parties won respectively 2 and 4 seats in parliament.

In the June 2009 parliamentary elections, the SP won as an individual party the highest number of votes, however, it was the centre-right coalition led by the Democratic Party that won a majority of votes and the largest share of seats in the parliament. The SP became again, with 65 seats, an opposition party. The SP accused the government, and the DP in particular, of electoral corruption, called for a recount, and boycotted the National Assembly for several months.

In the June 2013 parliamentary elections, the Alliance for a European Albania won convincingly by obtaining 57.7 percent of the votes (84 out of 140 seats). This left wing coalition – united under the name Rilindje (Renaissance) – was headed by the Socialist Party of Albania (SP). Left wing Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI), that was part of the former conservative led government, was part of the same Alliance. Former major of Tirana and SP leader Edi Rama was installed as Prime Minister.

On 25 June 2017, the latest parliamentary elections took place in which the SP won convincingly by obtaining 48.3 percent of the votes (74 out of 140 seats). Since 71 seats are needed for a majority, there will not be a parliamentary coalition. Edi Rama will remain as Prime Minister. During the 25 April 2021 elections, the party also gained 74 seats. This allowed Rama to continue as Prime Minister for a third consecutive term.

Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI)

Party Leader: Monika Kryemadhi

Number of seats: 4

<http://www.lsi.al/>

The Socialist Movement for Integration was formed as a splinter party from the SP after Ilir Meta quit the Socialist Party due to a disagreement about the re-election of Fatos Nano during a party Congress in December 2003. Ten other deputies, among which popular ex-members of the chairmanship, joined the movement. The LSI announced its conversion into an independent political party in a founding Congress in September 2004. In the June 2009 parliamentary elections, the LSI won 4 seats, and joined the Democratic Party led alliance to form a government coalition. In the run up to the election the reform of election law was discussed which would increase the threshold to get into parliament. This increase, supported by the SP, could have left LSI out of the parliament.

In the 2013 parliamentary elections the LSI gained 16 seats. While the LSI was part of the former conservative led government, the party was part of the winning left-wing coalition Alliance for a European Albania in the elections of 2013. In the 2017 elections, the LSI increased its number of seats by 3, achieving a total of 19 seats. However, since the Socialist Party gained a comfortable majority, there is no need for a parliamentary coalition. This puts the LSI in the opposition. After joining forces with the Democratic Party (DP) in an unlikely opposition alliance, the pre-election coalition was unable to gain a majority of the votes. In the 2021 elections, the party lost many of its seats, which decreased from 19 to 4.

The LSI is a social-democratic party in nature, oriented towards a liberal market economy that operates and progresses within a social welfare state. The party is based on social democratic values and the core objective is: a cohesive Albanian society integrated into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Social Democratic Party (PSD)

Party Leader: Tom Doshi

Number of seats: 3

The Social Democratic Party of Albania (PDS) is a minor political party in Albania founded on social-democratic principles. The party held seats in Parliament between 1992 and 1996, and again from 1997 until 2009. It is currently led by Skënder Gjinushi, a former Chairman of the Parliament of Albania (1997-2001) and Minister of Education (1987–1991).

The 1992 parliamentary elections were the first elections in which the Social Democratic Party of Albania took part, and the party managed to obtain 7 seats. The third election, in 2001, was less successful as they had to give up three seats. In 2005, the number increased again from 4 to 7 seats. Since the 2009 and 2013 elections did not result in any seats, 2017 was a small victory for the party. In 2021, the party increased its share of seats from 1 to 3.

Other Parties

Democratic Party of Albania (PD)

Party Leader: Lulzim Basha

Number of seats: 50

<http://www.pd.al/>

The Democratic Party of Albania is a centre-right political organisation, and the main governing party from 2005 to 2013. The DP is an observer member of the European People's Party (EPP), the European umbrella for centre-rights parties, and a full member of the Centrist Democrat International.

The Democratic Party was founded in 1991, following student demonstrations that brought down the communist regime. DP was the first opposition party to be formed after the fall of the one-party system. During his first time in government - between 1992 and 1997 - Berisha tried to increase presidential power but was accused of trying to impose an authoritarian regime. He also introduced changes towards a market economy, which only favoured a small percentage of the population, while the majority of Albanians lived in still harsher poverty. When in 1997 snap elections were called to pacify a civil unrest that broke out following the bankruptcy of a series of pyramid-style investment schemes, the DP became an opposition party.

The style of the DP has always been one of confrontation. Only in recent years - after significant pressure by the United States and the European Union - the party has adopted a more co-operative behaviour. In the period out of office, Berisha has retained his seat in parliament, but frequently boycotted the body in protest at alleged government corruption and incompetence. He often accused the incumbent government of Prime Minister Fatos Nano of masterminding a number of murders and assassination attempts on opposition politicians.

In the parliamentary elections of 2001, the Democratic Party formed and led the Union for Victory Coalition (UfV), a coalition of right-wing political parties. The four partners were Movement of Legality Party (ML), Republican Party (RP), National Front (NF) and Liberal Democratic Union (LDU). The UfV alliance won 46 seats in parliament, against 73 seats for the Socialist Party. The remaining 21 seats were allocated among five small parties.

It was not until the parliamentary elections of 2005 that the DP regained their power. In the elections of 2005 the party won 56 seats in parliament, and together with other small rightist parties, it formed the government and enjoyed a comfortable majority in the parliament. In the elections of 2009 the DP received 67 seats, however, still not enough to form a majority. Sali Berisha chose his former socialist opponent Ilir Meta and his LSI to form a coalition, and for the first time in the political history of Albania, a centre-left party coalition was formed. The LSI were offered three important ministerial portfolios, namely foreign affairs, economics and healthcare. Not surprisingly, Rama's SP loudly criticized the newly-formed coalition, considering LSI's alliance with Berisha as a betrayal of the left.

In 2013, with the win of the left-wing coalition Alliance for a European Albania, outgoing PM Sali Berisha's longest rule since the collapse of the communist regime in Albania ended. It took some time after the 2013 election results came in until Berisha conceded defeat on 27 June: "We lost this election and the responsibility falls only on one person, Sali Berisha," he said. "I have

decided to resign from all my leadership positions in the Democratic Party but stay on as a member and as an MP," he added.

During the 2017 elections, the party lost some of its seats, dropping from 50 to 43. The party remained in opposition. Two years later, during the 2019 local elections, it boycotted the election. Together with other opposition forces, they accused Prime Minister Edi Rama and his Socialist Party (PS) of election fraud and corruption. Shortly before the 2021 parliamentary elections, the DP joined forces with the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI) in a pre-election coalition. They were unable to gain a majority of the votes, despite the DP increasing its share of seats from 43 to 59.

Biographies

Edi Rama

Prime Minister

Edi Rama was born on 4 July 1964. At the time the Communist regime fell, Rama was a professor at the Albanian Academy of Arts. In 1995, he received a scholarship and moved to Paris. In 1998, he returned to Albania and was appointed Minister of Culture by the acting Prime Minister, a position he held until 2000. At that time he was not yet member of the Socialist Party of Albania (PS).

In October 2000, Rama ran in the local elections in Tirana as an independent candidate, yet supported by the PS. With 57 percent of the votes he was elected Mayor of Tirana. Many of Rama's most clear policies were aimed at transforming the appearance of the capital and its atmosphere. Rama united with students to improve the surroundings of the city, and with the Clean and Green Project he created 96,700 sq meters of green land. In December 2003 and in February 2007, Rama was re-elected for his second and third term, despite criticism he had faced.

In October 2002, Rama was awarded for his work in the field of environmental issues, which have contributed to the fight against poverty. The award was granted by the United Nations' General Secretary, Kofi Annan. In 2004, Rama was chosen World Mayor 2004 and in 2005 he was included in Time Magazine's list of European Heroes.

Rama joined the PS in October 2003. Two years later, he replaced Fatos Nano as the leader of the PS, after the party was defeated in the elections. He was re-elected as the party's leader in September 2009. The vote was called after the PS lost the general elections on June 28, 2009, to the Democratic Party. Since 2013, Rama has been Albania's Prime Minister. During both the 2017 and 2021 parliamentary elections his PS gained 74 seats in parliament, allowing them to form a government without a coalition partner. The 2021 elections paved the way for a third consecutive term as prime minister.

Rama was one of the founders of the Democratic Movement, which took part in bringing about the collapse of the communist state between 1990 and 1992. He was a founding member of the Movement for Democracy, a political group which played a determining role in the struggle for democracy during 1996 and 1997. Rama has written several articles and analyses for newspapers and magazines. He is also author of different personal painting exhibitions in Europe, North and South America.

Lulzim Basha

Leader of the Democratic Party of Albania

Lulzim Basha was born on 12 June 1972. After attending the Sami Frashëri High School, he studied Law at Utrecht University in the Netherlands and worked for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia as member of the investigation team of war crimes of Serbian forces in Kosovo. Basha joined the Democratic Party of Albania in January 2005 and became a member of the party's Presidency in May of that year. He has since held several ministerial positions in Democratic Party-led governments. In 2011 Basha was the governing party's candidate for the post of Mayor of Tirana. He defeated the leader of the Socialist opposition, Edi Rama, by a very narrow margin (only 81 votes after the recount) in a hotly contested election. He served as Mayor until 2015.

After the defeat of the Democratic Party-led coalition in the 2013 parliamentary election and the resignation of Sali Berisha as party leader, Basha was elected as chairman of the Democratic Party in 23 July 2013, following the first one-member-one-vote election in party's history. He has been the party's leader since then, despite the party losing some seats during the 2017 elections. Basha's position as party leader has been under criticism after the 2021 elections. Despite his party winning 13 seats and forming an

unlikely alliance with the Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI), he did not manage to topple Prime Minister Edi Rama's government.

Ilir Meta

Former President

Ilir Meta is the former President of Albania from 2017-2022. He was elected on 28 April 2017 with 87 out of 140 votes. He is also the Leader of the Socialist Movement for Integration of Albania (LSI). The LSI was established in September 2004 by Meta, after he left the Socialist Party of Albania (PS). During previous parliamentary legislatures, Meta served as the Speaker of Parliament (2013-2017), as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs (2009-2010) as well as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy, Trade and Energy of the Republic of Albania (2011). Meta is a strong campaigner and advocate for both regional and European integration, and strives for further stability and peace in the Western Balkans.

Bajram Begaj

President

Bajram Begaj (1967) is an Albanian former military officer and politician, and President of Albania from 24 July 2022 onwards. He succeeded Ilir Meta and is Albania's 9th president.

Begaj has served for 31 years in the military, in various positions. He has been the army's chief-of-staff since 2020, and before held post in public and military hospitals and trained in the U.S. on defense management.

Begaj was nominated by the incumbent Rama-led administration, and it is expected that he will keep a low profile in comparison to Meta, who frequently fell out with Rama on various issues.

Source

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