

## The Interminable Transition; An Analysis of the Electoral Behavior in Albania (1991-2017)

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### Abstract

Albania has been led by a communist regime, characterized by repression and isolationism for over 45 years. The transition, started at the '90 toward a democratic system and to an open society based on the occidental model couldn't be accomplished in a fast and bloodless way. There were too many reasons to explain this difficult transition, but just to mention, must be considered the absence of the democratic culture of the entire political ruling class (elite) (leadership). The transition process toward democracy in Albania began when the communist regime entered into crisis and its political elite (leadership) proclaimed the intention to open a new phase and to extend significantly freedom and rights. Starting from 1990 began to fail the obstacles that prohibited, till that time, the expression of the freedom, the disagreement and the pluralism. This transition process was characterized by its multiplicity, as the political changes was correlated with economic, cultural and social changes. Immediately after 1990, Albania had to face many challenges, but the most important concerned the institution of a new democratic order and the creation of a market economy, without, however, that this process was accompanied by a structural reform of the institutional framework. There is necessary to consider the communist heredity, while undertaking efforts to achieve a sufficient level of democracy. The heredity of the past means to consider dissimilar features like values, identity, standards, institutions, élite, behaviors and practices, that survived the transition and affected the later aspects, encouraging some changes, and hindering others. The communist regime let behind a flat socio-political landscape, a weak civil society, a fragile law domain, turbulent political coalitions and main political tendencies compromised. The experts that study this period state that Albania has undergone one of the most turbulent transformations at the post-communist world. There are, particularly, three dramatic moments that shook from the basis its institutions: a) the collapse of the communist regime at 1991-1992; b) the crisis of the financial pyramids at 1997; c) the influx of half million refugees from Kosovo in 1999. So, the transition process cannot be completely understood without considering the role of the old and new political elites, the mechanisms that regulates the internal activities of the parties, and the structure of the electoral behavior.

**Keywords:** interminable, transition, analysis, electoral. behavior, albania

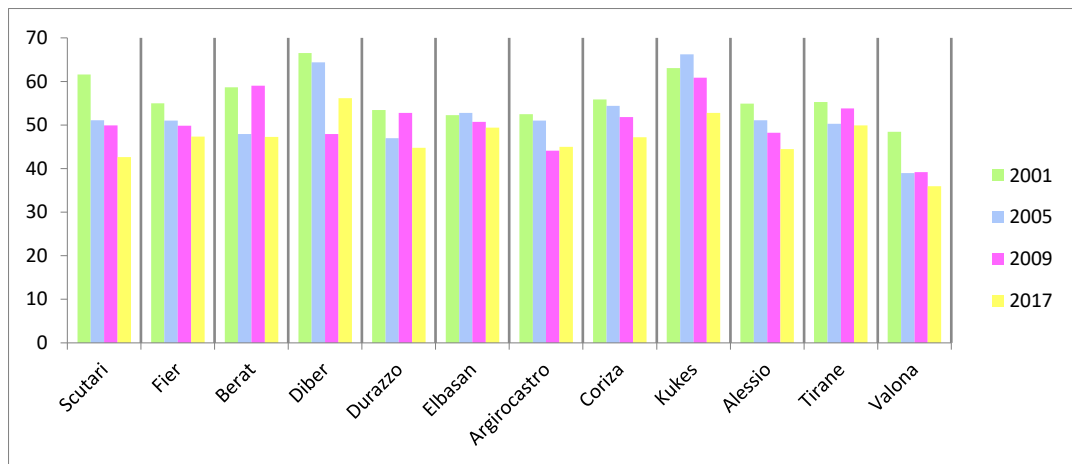
### Introduction

The collapse of the communist regime at 1990 has overwhelmed the political, institutional and productive system of Albania, and even created a huge emptiness that concerned most of all to the values system. This article aims to evidence the political affluence and the electoral behaviors that have happened in Albania after the fall of the communist regime. This study presents the historical trend of the two main political parties had influenced to the electoral participation, characterized by a long political, social and economic transition. The objective of this paper is the investigation of the electoral behavior till the last elections at 2017, that, according to the international experts operating in Albania, are the real proof of the Albanian democracy (European C. , 2017). The transition toward a democratic system, faced by the Albanian politicians at 1991, has been a multiple process. Therefore, actually has been big changes, political, economic, social and cultural ones. However, the transition has been a success, because, even with intense political struggles, there has been introduced the democratic institutions for the first time in the Albanian history. The greatest obstacle to the creation of these institutions has been the absence of an authentic autonomy from the state and/or from the political parties. The two main parties have had their ups and downs in various elections from 1991 to 2017. The graphics below in this article indicate precisely the historical trend of both these parties taking into consideration the result in percentual from 1991 to 2017.

### The electoral participation of the two main parties in the whole regions

Observing the graphic nr.1, for the historical parliamentary participation 1991-2017, can be highlighted a significant decline in participation, in which there were 1,984,933 registered in 1991, but participated only (valid votes) 1,963,568, or 98,2% (European C. , Albanian Parliamentary Results, 2017). In 1992, there have been registered 2,021,169 voters, but voted 1,826,142, or 90,35% (IPU, Inter Parliamentary Union, 2001). In 1996 there has been participated 1,464,481 (valid votes, or 89% of the national turnout (CSCE, Albanian Parliamentary Elections, 1996).In 1997 the total number of the valid votes were 1,302,051, or 72,96% of the affluence. There is an evidence in numbers, so, at the elections of 1992 there has been 137,426 voters less than 1991, at the elections of 1996 there has been 361,661 voters less than 1992, and in the 1997 elections there were 162,43 voters less than 1996 (IPU, Albanian Inter Parliamentary Union, 2001). According to the official data from KQZ<sup>1</sup> (CEC, Central Elections Commission, 2001), to the national classification of the electoral list of 2001, there were registered 2,499,238 and participated (valid votes) 1,323,900, or 54,92%. Regarding the elections of 2005 there were 2,850,821 registered persons and participated (valid votes) 1,367,347 or 49,23%. At the elections of 2009 there were 3,084,946 registered (CEC, Central Elections Commission, 2005). There were 1,558.374 persons who participated to vote. The participation to the general parliamentary elections of 2009 was 50,52% (CEC, Central Elections Commission, 2009).Furthermore, the region with the major number of citizens who can vote is Tirana with 745 446 names at the electoral lists. The Kukës district has the minor number (72.942). The highest affluence, regarding the districts, is in Tirana, but the highest percentual is in Kukës with 60,85%, even Kukës has the lowest number of absolute participations with 44.387 voters (CEC, Central Elections Commission, 2013). According to the historical graphic nr. 2, there is an apparent decline at the last elections, in 2017. There has been the lowest participation ever in comparison with the previous elections, and some of the reasons are that a considerable number of immigrants can't vote, living abroad, and an increasing dissatisfaction and distrust toward the govern administration and in general to the whole political class in all these years of democracy. According to the graphic nr.1 about the regions, there is an evidence that Vlorë is the region with the lowest number of participations to the elections of 2017 with 35,96%. Meanwhile the region with the highest percentual is Dibra with around 56,13% and Kukës with 52,81% of voters. Tirana, that is also the region with the highest number of voters, remained at 50% of electors, that is almost the same percentual with just the municipality of Tirana.

Graphic 1: Representation of the electoral participation at the 12 regions.

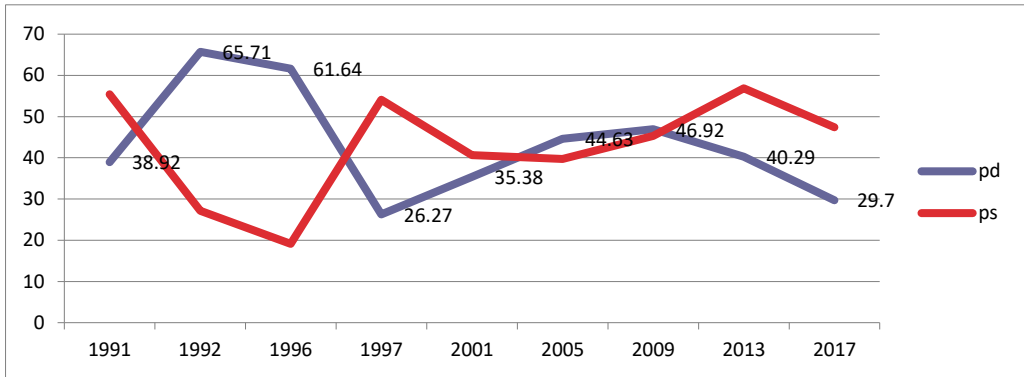


Data source [www.kqz.al](http://www.kqz.al) (elaboration K. Lazebeu)

According to an analytic observation to the results in different regions, there are abnormal trends regarding the total results of the elections. In the graphic nr. 2 there are reported the historical results of the general elections in the whole country.

<sup>1</sup> Central Electoral Commission in Albania

Graphic 2. Representation of DP and SP vote from 1991 to 2017

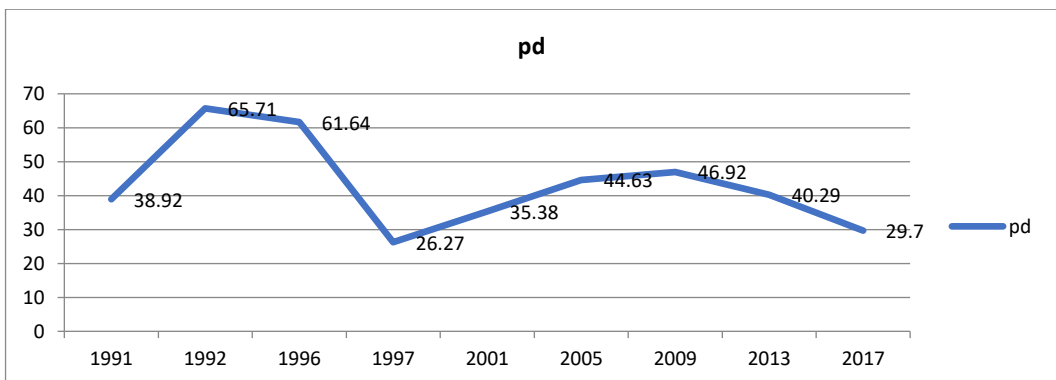


Data source [www.kqz.al](http://www.kqz.al) (elaboration K. Lazebeu)

From the graphic nr. 2 there is an evidence that at the first elections 1991-1996 both the major parties have had ups and downs from one election to another. Nevertheless, there is an anomaly regarding PS<sup>1</sup> in 1997-2017, meanwhile PD<sup>2</sup> have had a gradual growth from 1997-2009. Therefore, in 1997 PD is at 26,27%, in 2001 at 33,38%, in 2005 is at 44,63% and in 2009 is at 46,92% of the total of the votes (Krasniqi, 2006). This gradual growth concerned to multiple political factors, even more, to an increasing of the number of the allies in the coalitions. At the last two elections 2013-2017 there is an evidence of a decreasing in comparison with the previous elections, respectively in 2013 there is at 40,29% and in 2017 it is at 29,7% (CEC, Central Elections Commission, 2017) Furthermore, there can be said that at the last elections, the Democratic Party has participated without coalitions. If the coalition would have been made like in 2013, the percentage would have increased at 38% and the decrease would have been less obvious.

The same trend can be seen in the whole regions one by one. The electors of PD in the whole regions have had almost the same identical behavior, ups and downs at the first elections, an increasing at 97-2009 and a decreasing at the further elections of 2013-2017. An exception of this rule there has been noted as a slight deviation at the regions of Durres, Gjirokastër and Tirana where a merely decreasing could be noted already in 2009.

Graphic 3. Graphical representation of the historical electoral behavior of PD

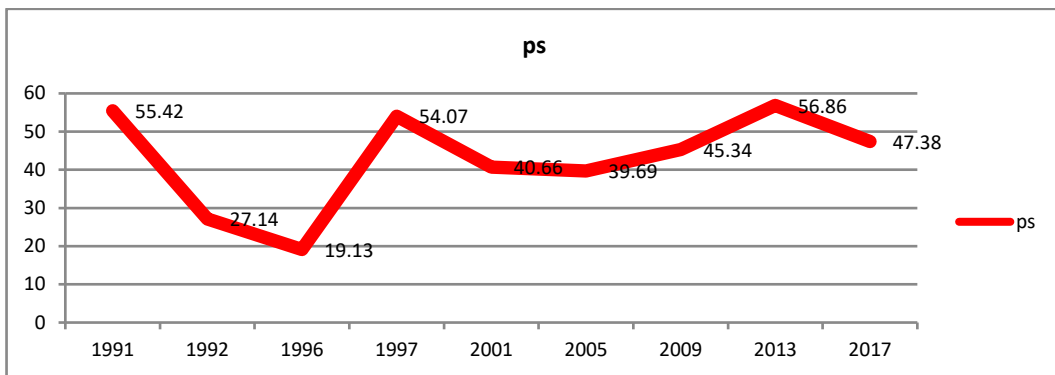


Data source [www.kqz.al](http://www.kqz.al) (elaboration K. Lazebeu)

<sup>1</sup> Socialist Party

<sup>2</sup> Democratic Party

Graphic 4. Graphical representation of the historical electoral behavior of PS



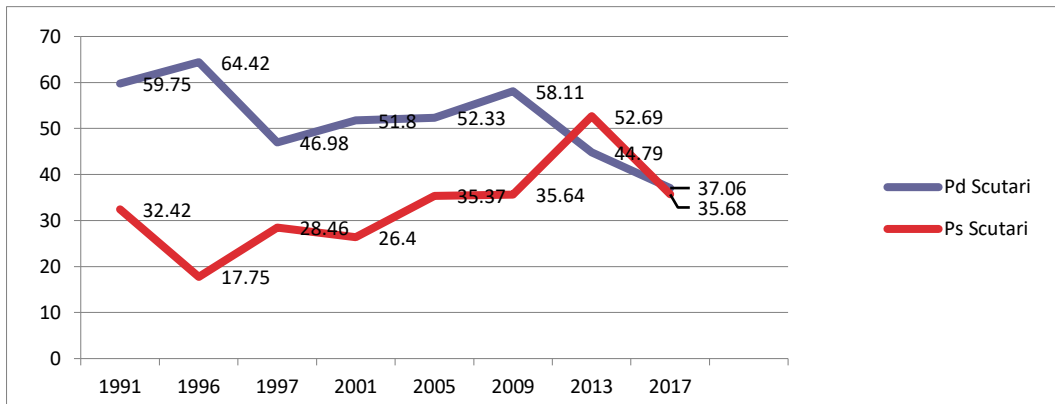
Data source [www.kqz.al](http://www.kqz.al) (elaboration K. Lazebeu)

As can be seen from the graphic nr. 4, the Socialist Party 1991-2017 have had an irregular trend. The only evidence that can be noted from the graphic nr. 5 is that there is a decline when the PS has the administration of the government. With the exception of the elections of 1996, the PS shows an increasing of the votes of the electoral consensus during the years in the opposition, in 1992-1997, therefore has moved from 27,14% of 1992 to 54,07%. The major growth it is during the years in the opposition, 1992-1997, when it goes from 27,14% of 1992 to 54,07% (ODIHR, Albanian Parliamentary Elections, 1997). During the years 2005-2013 the real growth remained more contained. Indeed, if we leave apart 10,44% of LSI/SMI<sup>1</sup>, the coalition goes at 48%, consequently there is a slight growth during the years in the opposition. Certainly, SMI participated to the left coalition only in 2013.

#### The trend at the regions

Regarding the results obtained from SP at the regions there can be noted a kind of difference compared to the DP. The results of the SP are more flexible and show a certain variance even in areas, well-known as ramparts of the DP. This is the case of Shkodër<sup>2</sup>, where the SP showed an increasing number even during the years of government (2001-2005).

Graphic 5. Example of the historical electoral behavior of Ps and Pd in Shkodër



Data source [www.kqz.al](http://www.kqz.al) (elaboration K. Lazebeu)

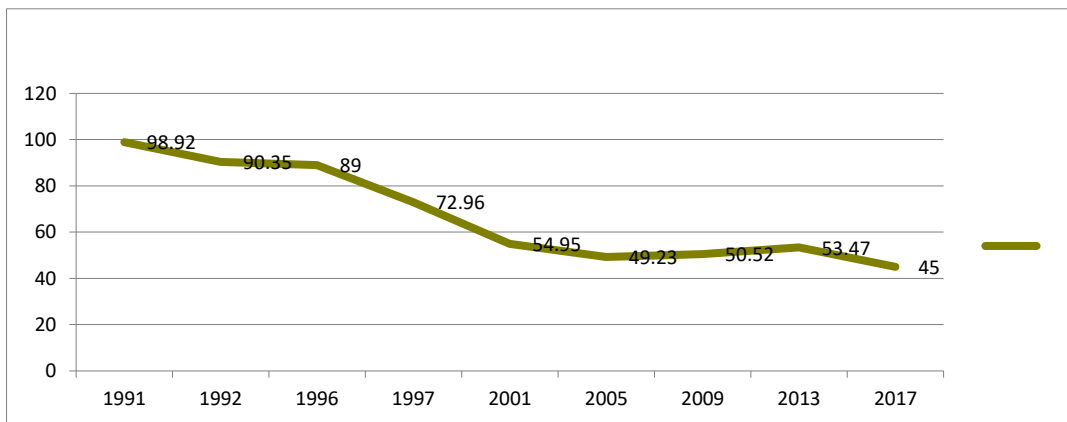
<sup>1</sup> SMI= The Socialist Movement for the Integration

<sup>2</sup> Historical rampart of the DP

With the exceptions of Durrës and Tirana, these regions extend all at the Nord Albania, and Elbasan at Central Albania. In the south, well-known as a bastion of the SP, the trend has been different because of a drop from the SP during these years. Furthermore, there has been noted a decline in consensus of the SP during the years 2005-2009, when this party was in opposition, at the regions of Dibra, Elbasan, Kukës and Lezhë. Besides, in other regions of Albania the SP have had an increase. In a general perspective, only Shkodër and Kukës, well-known as bastions of the DP, have had a trend deeply different. This is due to the fact that the DP lost a lot of its consensus in these regions. Meanwhile the SP managed to defend the proper bastions. Another general lost of consensus, detected at the last elections, was due, mostly, to the exit from the coalition of SMI. The high shares of the SP in these elections were possible thanks to the total annihilation of the little parties of the left-center wing and also to a decline of the affluence, mostly, a decline from the electors of the DP, resulting in the second worst result in their history, after 1997 elections.

During these years, the electoral systems have always rewarded the big coalitions at the expense of the electoral subjects composed by one party or political movement. The electoral system of 2008 made almost impossible a victory of a big party without a coalition. Meanwhile, in the 2017 elections all the parties participated without creating coalitions. Definitely, these elections have been preceded by very long time of political chaos in the months before. Moreover, the demonstrators decided to remain at the boulevard, during their protests for the resignation of the government, till at the completing of their requests. But the situation remained tense for more than 3 years, because none of the parts intended to make concessions. Meanwhile it seemed that the elections would have slipped towards autumn, the two leaders of the major parties found an agreement to the crisis. They agreed to organize the elections only one week after the previous date predetermined. The agreement of 17 of May didn't allow to the parties the necessary time to create coalitions, for the reason that the expiring date was already over. In this way it wasn't possible neither to form coalitions, nor to use pre-election tactics.

**Graphic 6. The participation in the polls**



**Data source [www.kqz.al](http://www.kqz.al) (elaboration K. Lazebeu)**

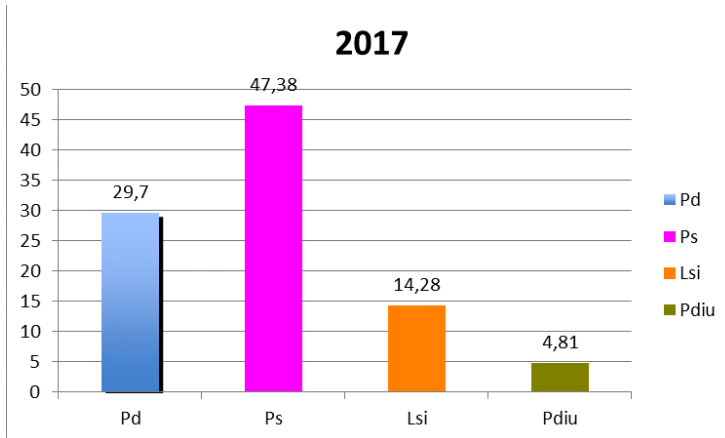
**The case of 2017. The participation at the elections without coalitions.**

The 140 deputies were elected with the regional proportional system. The barrier threshold for the single parties was 3% and 5% for the coalitions.

The demographic changes brought also some modifications to the number of seats at the electoral zones. Tirana obtained two more seats and Durrës one more, meanwhile Korça, Berat and Kukës lost one seat. The participation was 46,80% (1613975) (CEC, Central Elections Commission, 2017). The very tense situation before the elections carried on the practical impossibility to create coalitions. It was the first time since 1991 that a similar situation hasn't been verified. Thanks to this phenomenon the SP managed to have 74 seats, without coalitions, consequently, to form a majority without sharing power

with other parties. Such a result wasn't verified since 2001. In addition, in these elections there were decline of affluence that could explain the serious decline of the DP, who had the second worst result of their history<sup>1</sup>.

Graphic 7. Graphical representation of the main parties at 2017 elections



Data source [www.kqz.al](http://www.kqz.al) (elaboration K. Lazebeu)

### Conclusion

Looking to the promises done, compared to what had happened in the previous years, there is an evidence that a few of these promises has been kept. After all these years, the political parties didn't manage to guaranty standards of intern democracy. Even at the last years there are many people removed from both parties, due to their critical opinion toward the leadership of the party. One of the factors that have affected more the deformation of the democracy within the parties, is connected to the fact that, with the years passing by, the political parties has been transformed from volunteer organizations of people in executive bureaucratic structures, where every reform is carried out without applying the system of meritocracy, but every single appointment depended from the internal knowledge of the leadership or from the help to the party. The other political structures of the parties, like the youth and women, began to play an increasingly less important role, in which their activities and influence were limited by the leadership class.

Through the unification of the power (political-party-state) the political parties have created a pyramidal model that favors the abuse of power and corruption. Rapidly the parties have been identified with their leader. This personification happened also to the little parties. It is interesting the fact that none of the leaders organized a public effort to avoid this identification, but implicitly accepted it.

The slow stability of the electoral system has a negative impact to the juridical system of the country, too. Furthermore, the absence of the juridical infrastructure, the absence of an adequate instruction, consequently, the negative image of the judges, prosecutors and police has been questioned as corrupted.

This kind of distrust in the governmental instances leads to another aspect of the Albanian political culture, that is been expressed in everyday life, giving precedence to the personal interests rather than political and social ones. If the political culture is also a culture of the conflict, then, in the Albanian political culture is evidenced a tendency toward radicalization of the political contradictions that arise due to poor consensus among the leaders.

The responsibility of the political leaders of the two main political forces to this situation is evident, but it is insufficient to understand what is happening in what is called "the political system" of the country, whose central parts are the political parties. There exists an interdependency between the change of the way in which the political forces currently perform their principal functions in a representative democratic system, and the "crisis of the system".

<sup>1</sup> The worst result ever was in 1997

La responsabilità dei leader politici delle due principali forze politiche per questa situazione è evidente, ma ciò è insufficiente per capire cosa sta accadendo in quello che viene chiamato il "sistema politico" del paese, le cui parti centrali sono i partiti politici. Esiste un'interdipendenza tra il cambiamento del modo in cui le forze politiche svolgono attualmente le loro funzioni principali in un sistema democratico rappresentativo e la "crisi del sistema.

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