

Parliamentary Elections in Albania: Edi Rama's Socialist Party clinches the fourth governing mandate with a turbocharged majority

Executive Summary:

- The ruling Socialist Party (SP) succeeded to win a comfortable and indeed surprising majority, paving the way forward for its fourth mandate. The SP will now have 83 MPs in the Parliament out of 140 compared to 74 it had before.
- For the very first time in the thirty-plus years of Albania's democratic transition, Albanian citizens residing abroad were given the right and the infrastructure to vote. More than 190,000 of them exercised this constitutional right via mailed ballots, after preregistering in an electronic platform. The majority of the diaspora vote went to the Socialist Party.
- The main oppositional bloc, the Coalition "Alliance for a Magnificent Albania" (ASHM) led by the Democratic Party, has suffered a major loss retaining only 50 MPs out of 59 they had in the previous legislature. The Freedom Party (former LSI), once a kingmaker of two coalitions, is now politically dead.
- New political parties managed to enter the Parliament: 'Mundesia' with 2 seats, and 'Levizja Bashke' and 'Nisma-ShB' with 1 delegate each. Tom Doshi's Social Democratic Party (SDP) currently stands as the third-largest force with 3 seats.
- The elections took place just days before Tirana welcomed the European Political Community Summit (EPC) consolidating Albania's rising profile as host of major international events. Albania is set to host the NATO Summit in 2027.

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The Socialist Party (SP) and its head, Prime Minister Edi Rama, again succeeded to come out of the 2025 parliamentary elections on May 11 as the primary force in Albanian politics, surpassing a series of last stretch difficulties and overcoming the big experiment of the first time ever diaspora vote with much success. The SP outperformed itself reaching very close to a supermajority of 3/5 in the Parliament. The opposition almost immediately claimed the elections were stolen and manipulated. Edi Rama had a chance to celebrate his victory among all his international peers as the host of the European Political Community (EPC) Summit.

As Albania will now experience an unprecedented fourth mandate of a government since the fall of communism with a turbo-charged presence of the SP in the Parliament, questions multiply about the future of the country's democracy.

The Novelties of the 2025 Elections

Diaspora vote

On May 11, 2025, for the first time in its democratic history, Albania allowed its diaspora to participate in the national elections through postal voting. This marked a significant milestone for the country, extending the right to vote to hundreds of thousands of citizens living abroad who were previously excluded due to logistical and legal barriers. Around 250,000 Albanians across 85 countries registered and cast their ballots by mail.¹ The inclusion of the diaspora was widely seen as a move to enhance political representation and acknowledge the role of Albanians abroad in the country's development. Estimates about the size of the Albanian diaspora vary widely. According to IOM, nearly 1.7 million Albanians live outside the country, mostly in Europe, but also with significant presence in North America (USA and Canada) as well as other regions.² However, comparing the last two census processes, experts estimate that at least 2.2 million people live outside of Albania as compared to 2.4 million who live in the country.³ This does not take into account earlier migration waves, therefore experts say that diaspora share compared to total population can be even larger.

This historic development followed a series of legal and institutional reforms. On July 26, 2024, after pressure from

civil society, the diaspora community, and through a Constitutional Court ruling,⁴ the Albanian Parliament amended the Electoral Code to allow for absentee voting. Key changes included extending deadlines for the submission of candidate lists and enabling the use of expired biometric documents issued by Albanian authorities for voter identification. These adjustments were crucial to accommodate the logistics of international ballot distribution and returning votes within the required timeframe.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) played a central role in managing the diaspora vote, launching a digital platform for voter registration⁵ and overseeing the production and distribution of nearly 246,000 ballots. Despite some concerns about delivery delays and procedural transparency, the process was largely seen as smooth and well-coordinated. In the months leading up to the vote, political parties intensified their outreach abroad. Major parties such as the Socialist Party, the Democratic Party, and emerging movements like "Shqipëria Bëhet" organized large-scale campaign events in diaspora hubs such as Milan, London, New York, and Athens. These gatherings drew thousands of participants and highlighted the growing political engagement of Albanians living outside the country.

The impact of the diaspora vote added a new dimension to Albania's political landscape. While traditional parties benefited from well-organized outreach campaigns, newer civic-oriented movements gained momentum, especially among younger and first-time diaspora voters. Analysts noted that although the overall balance of power did not shift dramatically, the diaspora vote contributed to closer races in several constituencies and symbolized a broader democratization process.

Candidate lists – The Illusion of voter influence?

The changes to the Electoral Code in July of 2024 also resulted in a transition from a fully closed candidate list system to a hybrid model incorporating both closed and open lists. Under the new framework, one-third of parliamentary seats are filled through closed lists, where party leaders pre-select candidates, ensuring their placement in parliament regardless of individual voter preference. The remaining two-thirds of seats are allocated via open lists, allowing voters to express preferences for specific candidates within a party's list. This change theoretically

1 Albanian Central Elections Commission, <https://kqz.al/stats/>

2 IOM (2025), <https://albania.iom.int/migration-and-development-diaspora> (Accessed on 16.05.2025)

3 INSTAT, reporter.al "A reflektim vota e diasporës merrim e emigrantëve?", <https://www.reporter.al/2025/05/18/a-reflektim-vota-e-diaspores-merrim-e-emigrantëve/> (Accessed on 18.05.2025)

4 Decision of the Constitutional Court, nr. 38 date 09.12.2022 (V-38/22) https://faktoje.al/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Gjykata-Kushtetuese-vendimi-nr38_22.pdf

5 Albanian Central Elections Commission, <https://kqz.al/stats/>

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would balance party leadership control with increased voter influence over candidate selection.⁶ While the hybrid system offers voters greater agency, it has faced criticism for preserving significant power for party leaders and potentially complicating the electoral process.

The Competing Players

The Electoral Code in Albania does not allow for pre-election coalitions. The only way parties can cooperate is to create common amalgamated lists with their candidates. This time the traditional opposition parties for example have gathered around the label “Magnificent Albania”, led by the Democratic Party, which accommodated several candidates from its allies in its own lists. This de-facto sacrifices MP seats of the party itself in order to leverage more voters from outside the party ranks. There is a 1 percent national threshold for new parties to enter the Parliament and the electoral system is regionally proportional. The proportional system calls for multiple electoral candidates across jurisdictions, varying from a minimum of three mandates in Kukes to a maximum 37 in Tirana.⁷

Table 1: Overview Competing Parties/Movements

Year	Party Name / List	%	Seats in Parliament
2021	Socialist Party	48,67	74
2025	Socialist Party	53,26	83
2021	Democratic Party	39,43	59
2025	Democratic Party-ASHM Coalition	32,93	50
2021	Social-democratic Party	2,25	3
2025	Social-democratic Party	3,1	3
2021	Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI)	6,81	4
2025	Freedom Party-joined ASHM		
2021			
2025	Mundesia (The opportunity)	3,05	2
2021			
2025	Albania can succeed (Nisma-SHB)	4	1
2021			
2025	Together Movement	1,53	1

Source: *kqz.al*

The Socialist Party (SP) – The SP has been in power since 2013 with Edi Rama serving unchallenged as both party leader and Prime Minister. These years have been marked by several high profile corruption and abuse cases investigated and prosecuted by the Special Prosecution against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK). Several MPs, ministers and deputy ministers have been convicted, and Rama’s former deputy prime minister is a fugitive,⁸ reportedly living in Switzerland. For the 2025 elections, the SP struggled to land a compelling campaign message, eventually settling on the promise of completing Albania’s EU integration. Rama has anchored his pitch on the bold claim that, under his leadership, Albanians will hold EU passports by 2030 – a promise that has raised eyebrows, considering that even if all reform obligations were fulfilled by that time, the decision on granting membership ultimately lies with EU member states, not Tirana.

“Alliance for a Magnificent Albania” (ASHM) – Former Prime Minister and President Sali Berisha, who is not only under investigation and pending trial for corruption but also under sanctions from the US and UK governments,⁹ is leading the traditional opposition gathering several parties under the Democratic Party (DP) umbrella. Berisha was released from a one-year period of house arrest in November 2024,¹⁰ however he remained an MP throughout that time. The DP hired Chris LaCivita, one of the co-chairs of Donald Trump’s campaign to consult their electoral efforts,¹¹ a controversial move that generated a lot of international press interest but nothing else.

The Social-Democratic Party (SPD) – The SPD is led by Tom Doshi, a very wealthy business person also under US sanctions.¹² Its performance in the last elections, both parliamentary and local, has been quite successful by standards of a small party. The SPD has been an ally of the SP and always voted accordingly.

Newcomers: Another novelty in this electoral cycle was the considerable number of new parties entering the race, including some led by experienced politicians which tried to bring new narratives and new faces to Albanian politics. They ultimately pried the Parliament

6 *Albanian Times* (2025), Electoral lists divide power between party leaders and voters in Albania’s upcoming elections <https://albaniantimes.al/electoral-lists-divide-power-between-party-leaders-and-voters-in-albanias-upcoming-elections>

7 For more technical information on the Electoral Code please refer to <https://www.ifes.org/tools-resources/election-snapshots/elections-albania>

8 *Tirana Times* (2023), Albania’s former deputy premier faces international warrant on corruption charges <https://www.tiranatimes.com/former-deputy-prime-minister-arben-ahmetaj-leaves-albania-ahead-of-approval-of-arrest-request-on-corruption-charges/>

9 *Reuters* (2024), <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/albanias-former-pm-berisha-loses-appeal-against-ban-uk-2024-06-17/>

10 *Reuters* (2024), <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/albanian-opposition-leader-berisha-released-house-arrest-court-says-2024-11-27/>

11 *Balkan Insight* (2025), <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/02/10/albania-opposition-leader-hires-trump-campaign-manager/>

12 *US Department of State* (2018), <https://2017-2021.state.gov/public-designation-of-tom-doshi-under-section-7031c-of-the-fy-2017-consolidated-appropriations-act/>

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door open but failed to mount a significant challenge to the established politics.

The former leader of the DP, Lulzim Basha, whose power struggle with his predecessor Berisha ultimately led to Basha splitting from the DP, formed a new party called **“The Euro-Atlantic Democrats” – KEA**. Basha’s main political position was in support of the new justice institutions. He also launched an unusual and widely talked-about social media campaign, engaging in rap battles and “dissing” exchanges with Prime Minister Rama—an approach that grabbed headlines but didn’t translate into votes at the ballot box after all.

The traditional LZHK conservative party led by veteran MP Dashamir Shehi teamed up with a new party created by former DP member Enkelejd Alibeaj “Djathas 1912” (*Rightward 1912*) to form the alliance **“Rightward for Development.”**

The entirely new parties included: **“Levizja Bashke”** (Together Movement), former activist organization with a strong leftist ideological profile; the coalition **“Shqiperia behet”** (Albania can succeed Initiative) – born from a fusion of two civic groups, “Thurje” (Hash-tag) and “Shqiperia behet”, as well as **“Mundesia”** (The opportunity) led by former DP member and well known entrepreneur Agron Shehaj.¹³

Strong divisions between these movements and media quarrels weakened these movements’ public profile, diminishing their credibility among undecided voters.

The Electoral Campaign – Key Events and Topics

The most significant event prior to the electoral campaign was the arrest of Tirana mayor Erion Veliaj from the Socialist Party under charges of corruption and money laundering.¹⁴ Veliaj was always discussed as the most likely successor to the SP leadership allegedly generating internal controversies for the party. Veliaj’s wife is also being investigated for corruption alongside a number of businessmen primarily from the construction sector. Veliaj was accused of having profited large sums of money by either providing public funds directly

to non-for-profit associations of his family members or by handing out favors to specific business owners who would then reciprocate.

Veliaj, a real powerful electoral machine for the SP due to his popularity especially in Tirana, rejected all claims and challenged the decision, however, he remained in pre-detention after the appeals court ruled in favor of the prosecution. Rama mounted an initial strong reaction which was then gradually diluted. In the first reaction days Rama called for re-examining the new justice institutions’ ways and methods expressing discontent of having provided them with what he called “a powerful sword”.¹⁵

However, Rama would not risk his reforms’ crown jewel, as SPAK has earned precious points in the eyes and assessment reports of the international community and stands as the core reason of the relative progress in the milestones of the EU integration. Eventually, he called for the SP protesters to back off from gathering around SPAK premises and continued with the campaign without dwelling on the Veliaj issue.

The Socialist Party made the European integration the core of its electoral campaign. In all electoral posters and bylines, Rama promised Albanians that his fourth mandate would be giving them EU passports. The process of EU integration was indeed interwoven with the electoral campaign very closely. In April 2025 the second cluster of accession negotiations was opened, this time focusing on the internal market.¹⁶ This follows the opening of the first cluster on ‘Fundamentals’ and of the sixth cluster on ‘External relations’ at the Accession Conferences with Albania held on 15 October and 17 December 2024. Just days before the election itself the EC also announced the upcoming 5th Accession Conference with Albania to be held on May 22, 2025 to open another round of chapters pertaining to Cluster 3.¹⁷

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas also visited Albania as part of a trip to several Western Balkans countries in April 2024, where she confirmed that Albania’s path towards the Union was feasible at ambitious timing such as 2030 as long as the reforms’ progress was satisfactory.¹⁸

13 www.levizjabashke.al; www.shqiperiabehet.al; www.mundesia.al

14 *Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project-OCCRP* (2025), Tirana Mayor Arrested in €1M Corruption, Fraud Scandal <https://www.occrp.org/en/news/tirana-mayor-arrested-in-eur1m-corruption-fraud-scandal>

15 *Euronews Albania* (2025),

<https://euronews.al/en/rama-investigations-against-veliaj-resemble-state-security-methods-his-private-life-was-probed/>

16 *Council of the European Union* (14.04.2025), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/04/14/accession-conference-with-albania-eu-opens-negotiations-on-the-internal-market-cluster/>

17 *SEENews*, Albania to advance EU accession talks with inclusive growth cluster (May 9, 2025),

<https://seenews.com/news/albania-to-advance-eu-accession-talks-with-inclusive-growth-cluster-1275011>

18 *European Western Balkans* (09.04.2025),

<https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2025/04/09/kallas-visits-western-balkans-there-are-no-shortcuts-to-eu-membership/>

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These developments were highly politicized during the campaign, with the ruling majority presenting them as its own successes and the opposition downplaying them. However, the effect of these developments should not be overestimated. First, Albanians are generally in favor of EU integration and no Albanian political party is Euro-skeptic or even against the EU. Second, the long-time stagnation of the process has taken away the initial

enthusiasm that went with specific milestones or visits in the beginning of the process.

Evaluations of the factors of the electoral outcome are still very premature but in all likelihood it was less a result of campaign issues than of organizing and mobilizing factors associated with the party which prevailed and its electoral strategy.

Election Results

Table 2: **Number of MP Mandates and Vote Shares (2025 and 2021)**

	2025		2021	
	Number of seats	% of votes	Number of seats	% of votes
Socialist Party (SP)	83	53.27	74	48.67
Democratic Party – Alliance for a Magnificent Albania (ASHM)	50	32.93	59	39.34
Freedom Party (former SMI)	/	–	4	6.81
Social Democratic Party (SDP)	3	3.10	3	2.25
<i>New parties:</i>				
“The Opportunity” (Mundësia’)	2	3.05	–	–
“Albania can succeed” (Nisma- Shqipëria Bëhet ShB)	1	4.00	–	–
“Together Movement” (Lëvizja Bashkë)	1	1.53	–	–
TOTAL SEATS	140		140	

Source: kqz.al

The overall voter turnout of 42.21 percent was significantly lower than the previous elections turnout which was at almost 45 percent.¹⁹ The participation rate might have fallen through demographic factors or rising political discontent and indifference or most likely a combination of these factors.

The Socialist Party (SP) not only retained its governing majority but significantly expanded it, from 74 to 83 MPs – just one seat short of a so-called ‘qualified majority’ (three-fifths of Parliament). This threshold would allow for specific appointments and changes to major legislation that require more than a simple majority. The opposition coalition ‘Alliance for a Magnificent Albania’ (ASHM) led by the Democratic Party suffered a debilitating loss which sees its parliamentary group fall from 59 to 50 MPs. The Social Democratic Party (SDP), led by Tom Doshi, managed to retain all three of its parliamentary seats: two in Shkodra and one in Tirana. This result places the SDP in a favorable position whenever the SP needs to form the aforementioned three-fifths majority in Parliament.

New parties managed to pry open the doors of Parliament only in the Tirana region. ‘Mundësia’ secured two mandates, while ‘Lëvizja Bashkë’ and ‘Nisma Shqipëria Bëhet’ won one seat each. Albania’s Electoral Code is particularly punitive for new parties whose support is distributed nationally rather than concentrated regionally, as the system tends to reward the latter. None of the DP splinter parties such as KEA or “Rightwards 1912”, managed to get any mandates and are now left outside of the parliament.

The Diaspora Vote

Contrary to many predictions, the Socialist Party secured an even larger share among the diaspora vote than it did domestically. More than 61 percent of mailed ballots went to the SP, while the DP failed to garner even a full quarter. New parties – especially ‘Albania Can Succeed’ (Nisma-ShB) – performed relatively well, but expectations that voters abroad would favor new movements, being outside the traditional two-party pressure, did not fully materialize.

19 Central Election Commission, kqz.al (Accessed on 19.05.2025)

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Table 3: **Diaspora Vote Share as Percentage of Total Valid Mail Ballots**

Party	% of votes
Socialist Party	61.1 %
Democratic Party	23.5 %
Social Democratic Party	1.16 %
<i>New parties:</i>	
"The Opportunity" (Mundësia)	2.9 %
"Albania can succeed"-(Nisma- Shqipëria Bëhet ShB)	7.4 %
"Together Movement" (Lëvizja Bashkë)	2.1 %

Source: *kqz.al***Opposition reaction**

The opposition was quick to denounce the elections as stolen and manipulated, signaling a lack of recognition of the results, though stopping short of calling for a boycott. DP Chair Sali Berisha called for a protest on May 16, coinciding with the European Political Community (EPC) Summit, to allegedly raise international awareness of what he described as "electoral crimes" committed by the government.²⁰ He emphasized that the demonstration would not interfere with the summit, scheduled to take place in Tirana on the same day. Berisha claimed that the electoral process was heavily influenced by criminal groups affiliated with what he said was the regime led by Prime Minister Edi Rama, both domestically and in the diaspora. This position was also shared by other party members and opposition allies.

The preliminary report from the OSCE/ODIHR characterized the elections as generally well-managed and calm, but also highlighted a climate of polarization, the misuse of state resources, and a lack of media freedom – factors that gave the incumbent party a clear advantage and made the playing field uneven.²¹

Looking ahead

It is too early to say what the impact of the outstretched parliamentary majority of the SP as well as the fourth mandate of Rama will mean for domestic reforms. Some critics have alleged that the newly invigorating majority might go after the new institutions of the justice reform, trying to reign in their independent power. The establishment of the special anti-corruption parliamentary commission led by SP veteran Fatmir Xhafaj was a signal

in that direction.²² However, given its self-proclaimed obsession with a fast pace of EU integration, the SP and Rama will have to balance this objective with their EU-accession aspirations. When it comes to regional relations and foreign policy, in general not much change is to be expected as Albania's compass towards compliance with Euro-Atlantic policies has been quite reliable.

For the Socialist Party, the aftertaste of victory is likely to linger. From the EPC's choreographed displays aimed at impressing international guests – a well-known specialty of PM Rama – to the next EU accession conference on May 22, a whirlwind of celebratory events awaits, all likely to receive positive coverage. However, many are soberly reflecting on the implications such a supermajority might have for the already weakened state of parliamentary life, democratic vibrancy, and the increasingly polarized national climate. A diminished opposition and a fragile media landscape are troubling signs for the health of democracy. The SP may be having an all-night party – but the guest list is invite-only.

20 *Politiko* (13.05.2025), Berisha calls for protest on May 16: Elections were dictated by criminal gangs, <https://politiko.al/english/ditari-i-opozites/berisha-therret-proteste-me-16-maj-zgjedhjet-u-diktuan-nga-ban-i531791>

21 OSCE (12.05.2025), "Albania's parliamentary elections competitive and well run but lacked level playing field, international observers say", <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/590610>.

22 *A2CNN* (19.02.2025), "PS ready to intervene in justice, 'Xhafaj' commission proposes an independent anti-corruption authority", <https://a2news.com/english/shqiperia/politike/ps-gati-nderhyrjet-ne-drejtisi-komisioni-xhafaj-propozon-nje-i1140834> (Accessed on 20.05.2025)