

FINAL REPORT

ALBANIA

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

11 May 2025

AGORA ELECTION OBSERVATION



Agora Election Observation Mission to Albania

Final Report on Parliamentary Elections

11 May 2025



Agora Election Observation's methodology is rooted in the principles of non-formal education and learning by doing, providing young people with hands-on experience in professional election observation. The mission programme also includes visits to democratic institutions at the heart of the electoral process, helping observers understand how electoral theory, law, and procedure translate into practice, just as in the photo above, where the mission team is visiting the Albanian Parliament.

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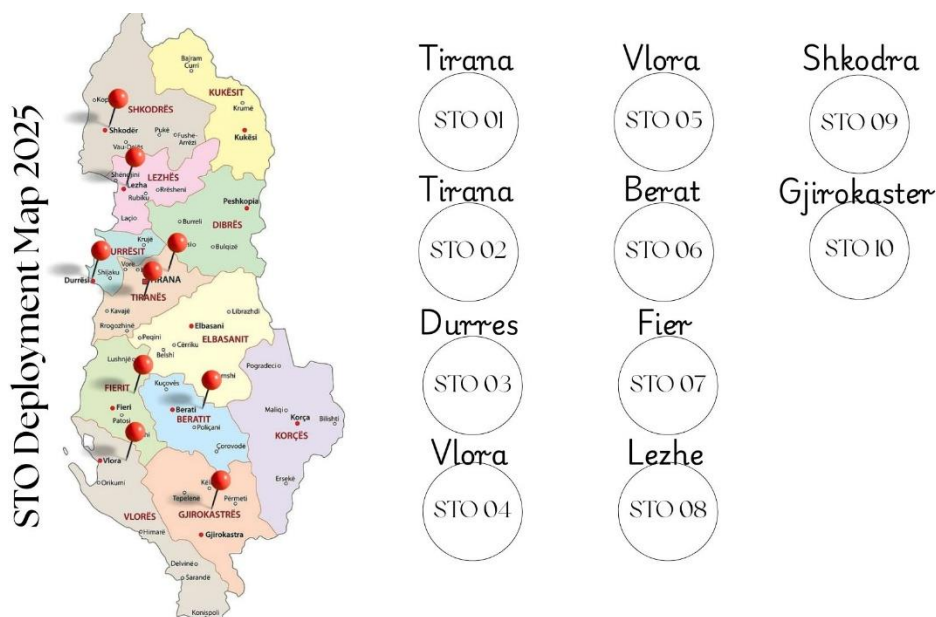
INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Agora Election Observation (AEO) is an independent, non-governmental, and non-profit organisation committed to promoting democracy and human rights in Europe. AEO places particular emphasis on incorporating a youth perspective into its work by training young people to serve as international election observers. Through this engagement, the organisation aims to build youth capacity and assess youth participation in electoral processes, as voters, candidates, and civil society actors.

The AEO mission to Albania, for the 11 May 2025 parliamentary elections, consisted of 28 observers of 14 nationalities who were deployed across the country. Prior to deployment, all mission members completed the OSCE/ODIHR e-learning course on election observation and conducted preparatory research on youth political participation in Albania.

Observers arrived in Albania on 7 May and departed on 13 May. In the course of the mission, AEO observers met with a range of stakeholders, including election administration bodies, political parties, youth organisations, and civil society representatives.

The AEO mission would like to express its sincere appreciation to the election administration authorities, political parties, youth organisations, and civil society representatives of Albania, as well as other international observers, local coordinators, and interpreters, who contributed to the completion of this Mission. Special thanks are extended to our partner organisation, Commit Global, for providing Vote Monitor, a digital tool that enabled real-time data collection and reporting from polling stations, as well as to Balkan Sunrise for providing a meeting space for the mission’s operations. The AEO Mission to Albania is independent in its findings and conclusions.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agora Election Observation (AEO) deployed an independent international election observation mission to Albania for the 11 May 2025 parliamentary elections. The mission consisted of 28 observers from 14 nationalities, deployed across the country. Prior to deployment, all observers completed the OSCE/ODIHR e-learning course and conducted preparatory research on youth political participation. Observers were in Albania from 7 to 13 May 2025 and met a wide range of stakeholders, including election administration bodies, political parties, youth organisations, and civil society groups. AEO collected election-day observation data using Vote Monitor, a digital tool that enables real-time reporting from polling stations.

The elections took place in a polarised political environment, with low trust across political parties and recurring debates over the fairness of the rules and the neutrality of institutions. A major development was the first-time introduction of out-of-country voting by post, widely seen as an important inclusion measure but operationally demanding, especially in terms of ballot delivery and handling of documentation. Stakeholders also raised concerns about the use of public resources in campaigning and alleged pressure on voters. Traditional media was perceived as dominated, while online campaigning raised questions about transparency, sponsored content, and accountability.

Election administration followed a structured, multi-level model led by the Central Election Commission (CEC) and supported by local bodies responsible for voting and counting. Overall, the administration delivered core tasks, but effectiveness depended heavily on staffing and training at the local level. Late

replacements of commission members in some areas increased the risk of inconsistent practice. Youth-focused civic and electoral education initiatives were also noted, including programme for first-time voters.

Voter registration for residents is passive and based on civil status records, whereas citizens abroad must register actively and provide documentation. On candidate registration, parties and coalitions submitted lists combining a fixed-order element with preference voting. In practice, party leadership retained strong influence over “safer” positions, while preference voting created some room for candidate-based competition.

Election observation was permitted for domestic and international groups. For AEO, the accreditation process with the CEC was smooth and efficient.

On Election Day, AEO teams visited 110 polling stations and submitted 142 observation forms covering opening, voting, closing, and counting. Election Day was generally well administered, with procedures largely followed and polling staff demonstrating professionalism. Some organisational challenges were noted at opening. Voting was calm and orderly, although family or group voting was observed in ten cases. Accessibility remained a concern: only about half of the polling stations observed were independently accessible to voters with physical impairments. Counting took place in designated centres and sometimes started later than expected, but, where observed, it was found to be transparent and professionally conducted.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

Parliamentary elections in Albania were held on 11 May 2025 in a climate that often felt tense and divided. In many conversations

before election day, people described low trust between the political sides and frequent arguments over whether the rules were applied fairly and whether institutions remained neutral.

A key change in 2025 was that Albanians living abroad could vote for the first time, using postal voting. Many stakeholders considered this a meaningful step to include citizens outside the country. At the same time, the organisation was demanding in practice, especially concerning the logistics of ballot delivery and the handling of envelopes and documents.

During the campaign period, there were allegations that public resources were used for campaigning and that pressure was placed on voters, especially public-sector employees.

The information space was another constant topic. Traditional media was often described as crowded by the biggest political actors, leaving limited space for smaller parties and new candidates. Online platforms were widely used to speak to voters more directly, but many stakeholders also raised concerns about the lack of clarity and transparency in online campaigning, especially around sponsored content and accountability for messaging. One topic during the campaign was the TikTok ban introduced on 6 March 2025. Some interlocutors argued it reduced campaign opportunities, particularly for smaller or newer actors, while others defended the measure.

On youth participation, it is not always easy to find complete official turnout data broken down by age. Still, we observed visible efforts aimed at young and first-time voters through

voter information and civic initiatives. Figures presented in a post-election setting linked to a first-time voters programme reported that 47% of first-time voters participated, and that 4,356 first-time voters from the diaspora voted for the first time.¹

Overall, the 2025 elections brought important new elements, especially diaspora voting, but questions about campaign fairness, pressure on voters, and the quality of the information environment remained central in the political context.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Elections in Albania are managed through several levels of election bodies. At the national level, the Central Election Commission (CEC) sets the main procedures and deadlines and oversees the process. On the ground, local commissions (CEAZs) coordinate the work in their areas, while Voting Centre Commissions (VCCs) run voting in each voting centre on election day. Ballots are counted in ballot counting centres (BCCs) by ballot counting teams (BCTs), including a separate set-up for ballots coming from abroad.

In our observation, the system is clearly structured, but it relies heavily on having enough trained staff at the local level. In a number of places, we heard about late changes in commission members and replacements close to election day. When this happens, training time becomes shorter and the risk of inconsistent practice increases.

Voter information and training were available during the period, including messages aimed at

¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/electoral-assistance/-/enhancing-civic-participation-of-youth-i-vote-too-education-of-first-time-voters-in-albania-2025->

different voter groups. At the same time, several interlocutors felt that simpler, more practical guidance was needed on the voting process and on how to correctly mark the ballot, especially for voters less familiar with recent changes.

On youth engagement and training, we noticed several concrete initiatives linked to electoral education. In the months before election day, youth-focused programmes were promoted through schools and civic education partners, with activities designed for first-time voters. These included structured electoral education modules and practical exercises (such as simulated voting) to explain how elections work and why participation matters. Beyond general voter information, these initiatives aimed to build election literacy among students who were about to vote for the first time by making procedures more understandable and less abstract.

Overall, the election administration delivered the core tasks at all levels, including managing new procedures for out-of-country voting. However, last-minute staffing changes and uneven training remained key challenges that affected on-the-ground consistency.

VOTER REGISTRATION

Voter registration in Albania is mostly automatic for people living in the country. Voter lists are generated from the national civil status database, and each voter is assigned to a specific voting centre based on their registered address. In practice, most stakeholders we met described the system as generally inclusive, and voters could check their voting centre and personal details through online services. There is also a formal way to request corrections.

A key new element in 2025 was voting from abroad. Citizens living outside Albania had to

register actively during a fixed period and submit documents (ID plus proof of residence abroad). We heard that many applications were rejected because people could not provide the required proof of address. Voting from abroad was organised through postal voting, and the electoral district for these voters was linked to their last registered address in Albania. Ballots had to arrive by the legal deadline to be counted.

The total voter list was around 3.71 million, including about 245,935 registered for out-of-country voting.

CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Albania elects a 140-seat Parliament for a four-year term. The country is divided into 12 electoral districts, and parties, coalitions, and citizen groups can put forward candidates.

In these elections, parties and coalitions presented candidate lists that combine two elements. Part of the list is determined in a fixed order by the party, while another part allows voters to express preferences for specific candidates. In practice, this means party leadership still has strong control over who gets the “safer” positions, while preference voting creates some space for candidate-based competition, especially for those who can run an active campaign on the ground and online.

Independent runs are possible, but the procedure is demanding. A candidate can be proposed by a group of voters, which must form a small initiating committee and collect a significant number of supporting signatures in the relevant district. For newcomers, including young candidates without established networks, this kind of requirement can be a real barrier because it takes time, organisation, and

local reach well before the campaign fully starts.

Some new movements and smaller groups tried to bring in fresher profiles (including younger faces), but overall, the “centre of gravity” of Albanian politics remained with established structures.

YOUTH IN ALBANIA

Young people (roughly 18–35) are a big part of Albanian society and the electorate. On paper, the rules are clear: young citizens can vote, run as candidates, and join parties like everyone else. But in practice, many young people feel that politics is still “closed” and largely controlled by the same networks and familiar names.

Many young adults focus first on work, salaries, and the cost of living, and only after that on politics. Official labour statistics show that youth unemployment (age 15–29) was 19.1% in 2024,² which helps explain why job insecurity is such a constant topic. In addition, the FES Youth Study Albania 2024 highlights how frequently young people connect with employment opportunities through informal networks. Leaving the country is not a distant dream for many young people but it has become a real plan and when people see their future elsewhere, it’s harder to believe that participating in domestic politics is worth the effort. Interest and trust are another weak point. The same FES study found that 54% of interviewed young Albanians said they are not interested in politics.³ At the same time, this does not mean young people are “inactive.” Many engage in a more informal way around

specific issues (corruption, local services, the environment), through NGOs, small initiatives, and online mobilising, rather than through party membership or formal structures. For many young voters, politics comes mainly through social media: short videos, fast reactions, and emotional “viral” moments. This can make it easier to get involved quickly, but it can also reduce serious debate and increase polarisation or misinformation. In that sense, online visibility does not automatically translate into real influence inside institutions.

When we look specifically at elections, “youth participation” is not only about turnout. It also depends on whether young people get practical chances to learn how elections work and to take part as observers, civic educators, or polling staff. A concrete Albania example is the “I Vote Too!” programme on electoral education for first-time voters that reached around 20,000 high school graduates, and 47% of first-time voters voted in the May 2025 parliamentary elections (with 4,356 first-time diaspora voters casting ballots from abroad). In parallel, election authorities also used more “youth-friendly” formats (short public information videos shared via social media and local broadcasters, developed with civil society partners).⁴

Finally, it helps to look at Albania in a wider comparison. In the Global Youth Political Participation Index (GYPI), Albania’s overall score is 65 (rank 56), with stronger results in the “political participation” dimension than in the “enabling environment” and “youth participation” dimensions.⁵ This broadly matches what we have observed: young people

² www.instat.gov.al

³ <https://youthstudies.fes.de/country-pages/albania.html>

⁴ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/electoral-assistance/-/enhancing-civic-participation-of-youth-i-vote-too-education-of-first-time-voters-in-albania-2025->

⁵ <https://youthdemocracycohort.com/global-youth-participation-index/>

do participate and care about certain issues, but they often feel the system does not consistently open the door to meaningful participation.

ELECTION OBSERVATION

In Albania, election observation is allowed for both local citizen groups and international missions. Accreditation is managed by the Central Election Commission (CEC), and political contestants may also appoint their own observers to follow various stages of the process. Overall, observer access was generally reported as sufficient across the process.

For the Agora team, the accreditation procedure with the CEC was smooth and fast: the requirements were clear, communication was responsive, and badges were issued without major delays. One practical issue we noticed is that there was no clear distinction on the accreditation badges between observers and interpreters. In addition, the accreditation framework does not clearly differentiate between professional international election observation missions and other accredited entities (such as diplomatic missions or foreign election management bodies) that may follow different methodologies or serve different purposes (e.g., study visits or job shadowing).

ELECTION DAY

On Election Day, observers were deployed in Tiranë, Durrës, Vlorë, Fier, Berat, Lezhë, Shkodër and Gjirokastër, and visited a total of 110 polling stations, submitting 142 observation forms for the opening, voting, closing, and counting procedures.

Overall, Election Day was well administered; procedures were generally followed, and the election administration demonstrated a high

level of professionalism. Election officials received training that included both theoretical and practical components, including role-playing exercises. The AEO Mission conducted a more limited observation of the opening, closing, and counting procedures, which, to some extent, appeared less efficient than the voting stage.

Out of 12 teams that observed the opening procedures, seven assessed them positively, while five noted some organisational challenges or a certain level of tension among commissioners. Polling stations opened on time in seven of the observed cases. Additionally, in three instances, issues were reported with the electronic voter identification system during the opening process.

The voting process was generally conducted in a well-organised manner, and the atmosphere at polling stations observed by the AEO observers was calm and orderly. The AEO observers did not report any incidents on Election Day. However, ten cases of family or group voting were observed. Election material was either not present or not displayed correctly in seven of the polling stations visited.

Accessibility of polling stations emerged as a recurring issue, as only half of the polling stations visited by AEO observers were independently accessible to voters with physical impairments. Moreover, AEO observers noted that voters with disabilities often required assistance, as permitted by law. Although the polling station members stated that Braille materials were available for visually impaired voters, in 38 cases they were not shown or accessible to observers.

Closing procedures at the polling stations were generally assessed positively; however, some instances of difficulties in completing the protocols were noted.

In Albania, the counting process takes place in designated counting centres, where polling stations deliver sealed electoral materials and ballot boxes. Counting did not begin shortly after the closing of polling stations and was, in some cases, postponed compared to the estimated time given to observers by officials. Counting commenced only after all materials and ballot boxes had been received from the respective polling stations, which was in line with the provisions of the electoral law. Despite the uncertainty regarding the time between the end of voting and the start of counting, observers reported that the process was transparent, well-organised and

professionally conducted.

AEO observed that young people under the age of 35 were well represented in the administration of the voting centres, constituting approximately one-third of the total number of polling station commissioners.

Youth representation on party candidate lists was notably limited. Interlocutors reported that most young candidates were placed on the open list segment, making their election less likely compared to those positioned on closed lists, typically reserved for party leadership. This reflects a continued reluctance by political parties to prioritise youth inclusion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

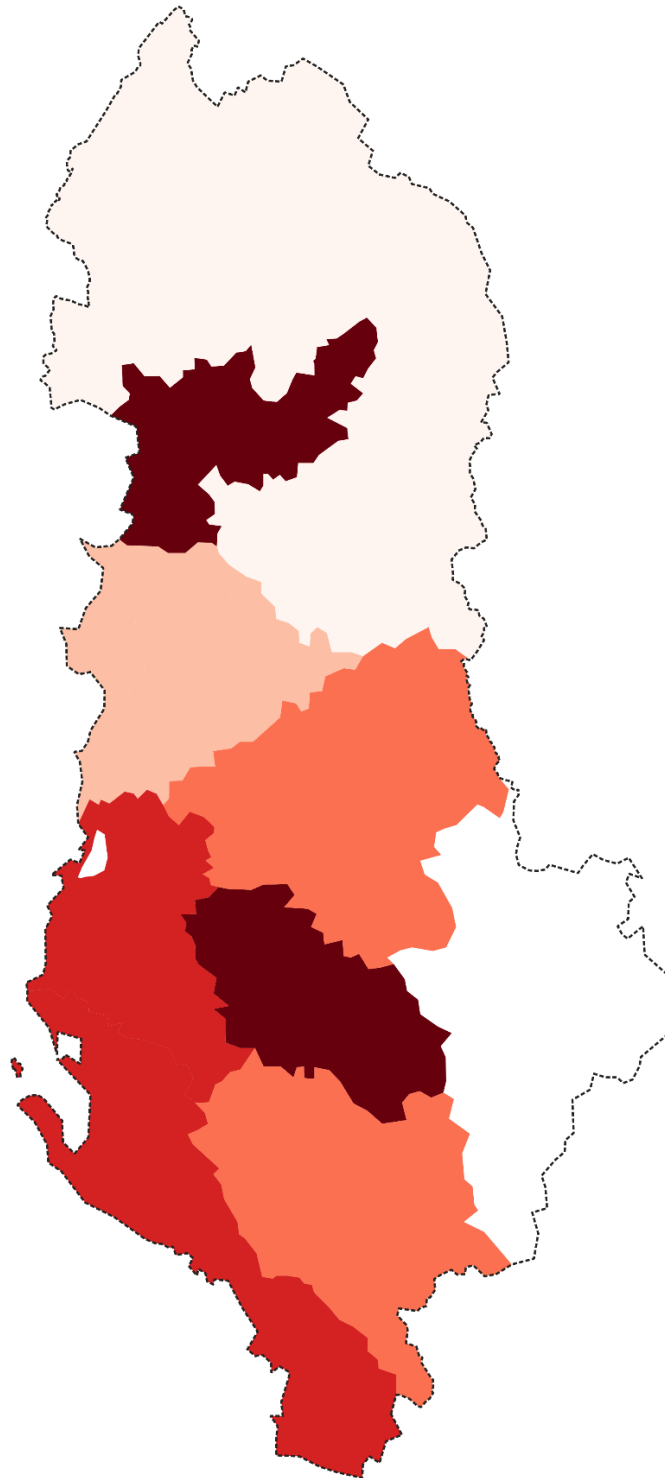
Based on its analysis and observations, the following recommendations are suggested to electoral stakeholders in Albania:

- *Lower barriers for less resourced candidates (including young candidates) and encourage political parties to adopt internal measures that increase youth representation in genuinely electable list positions.*
- *Improve staffing stability in election commissions and strengthen training to support consistent implementation of procedures.*
- *Introduce accreditation categories that distinguish professional election observation missions from other accredited delegations.*
- *Strengthen oversight and transparency of online campaigning, especially on social media platforms.*
- *Ensure full accessibility of polling stations for persons with disabilities (PWDs), including barrier-free entry and practical arrangements to enable independent participation wherever possible.*

Albania Becomes Initiative

the 2025 parliamentary elections

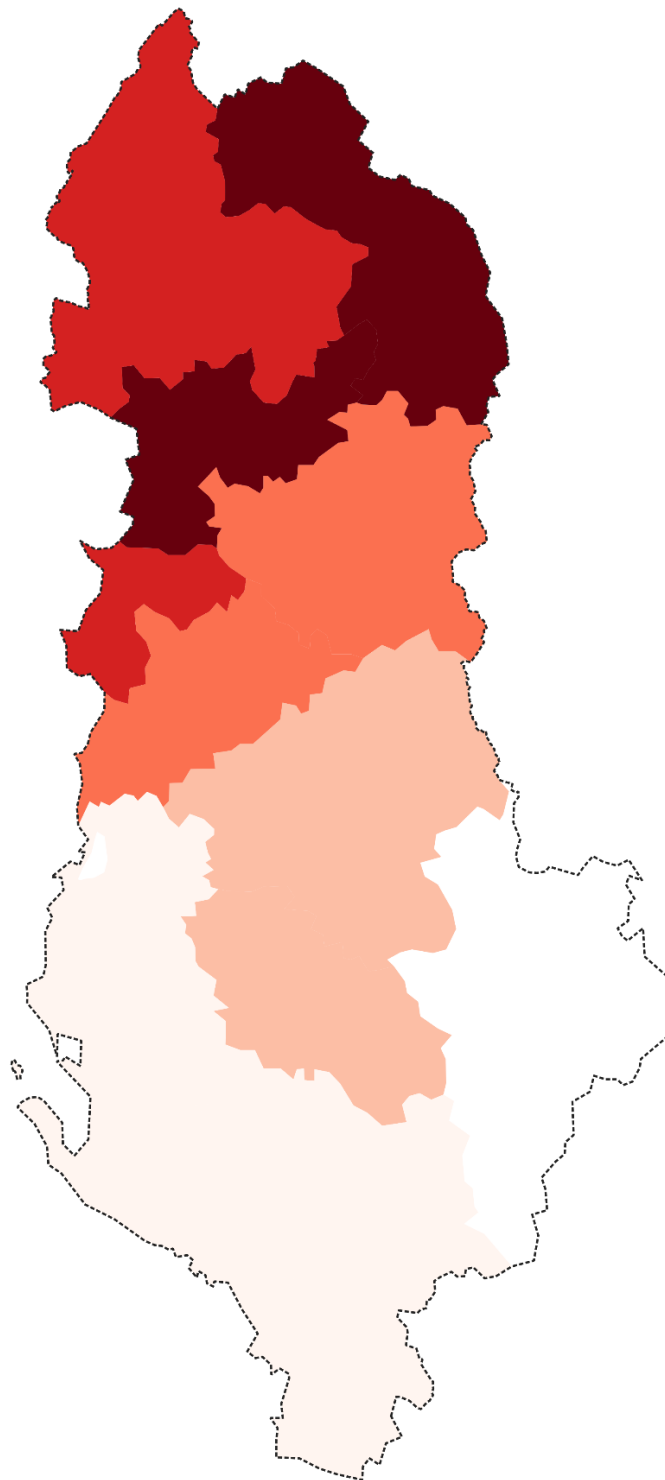
1 - 2 % 2 - 3 % 3 - 4 % 4 - 6 % 6 - 7 %



Alliance for a Greater Albania

the 2025 parliamentary elections

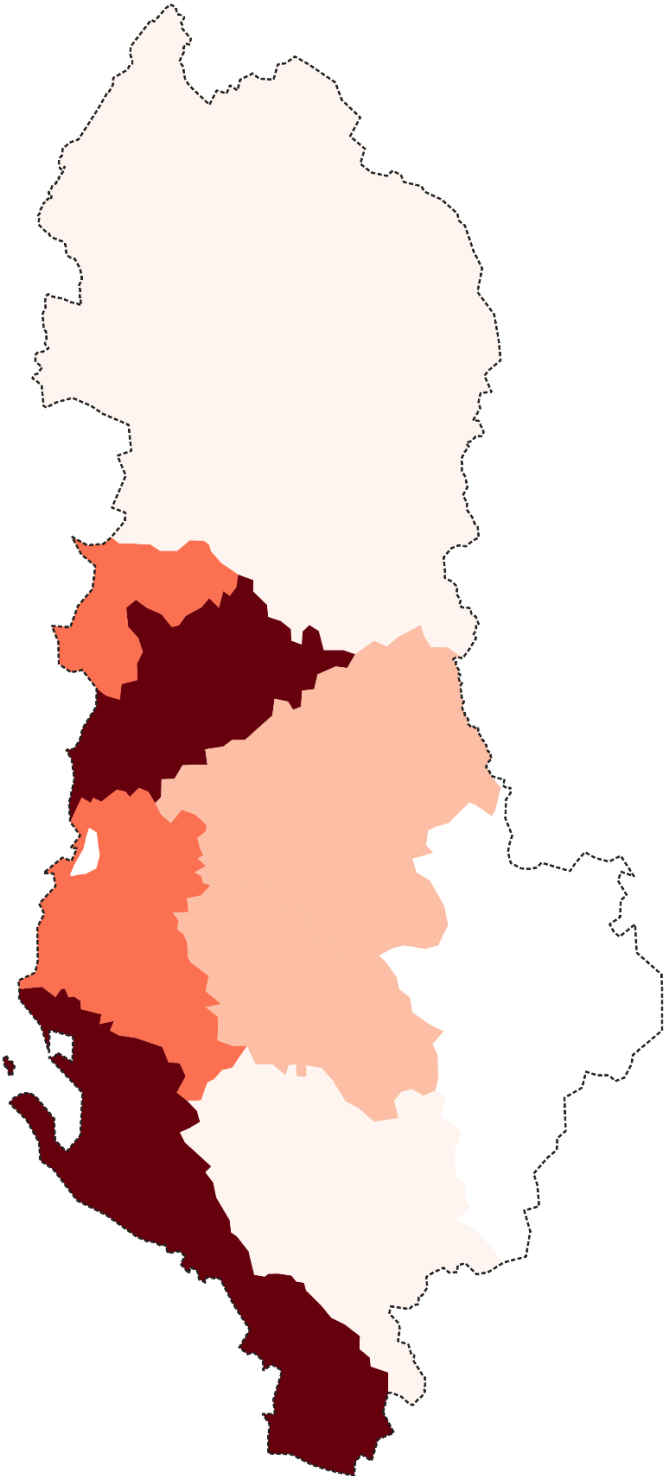
24 - 27 % 27 - 28 % 28 - 37 % 37 - 40 % 40 - 54 %



Opportunity Party

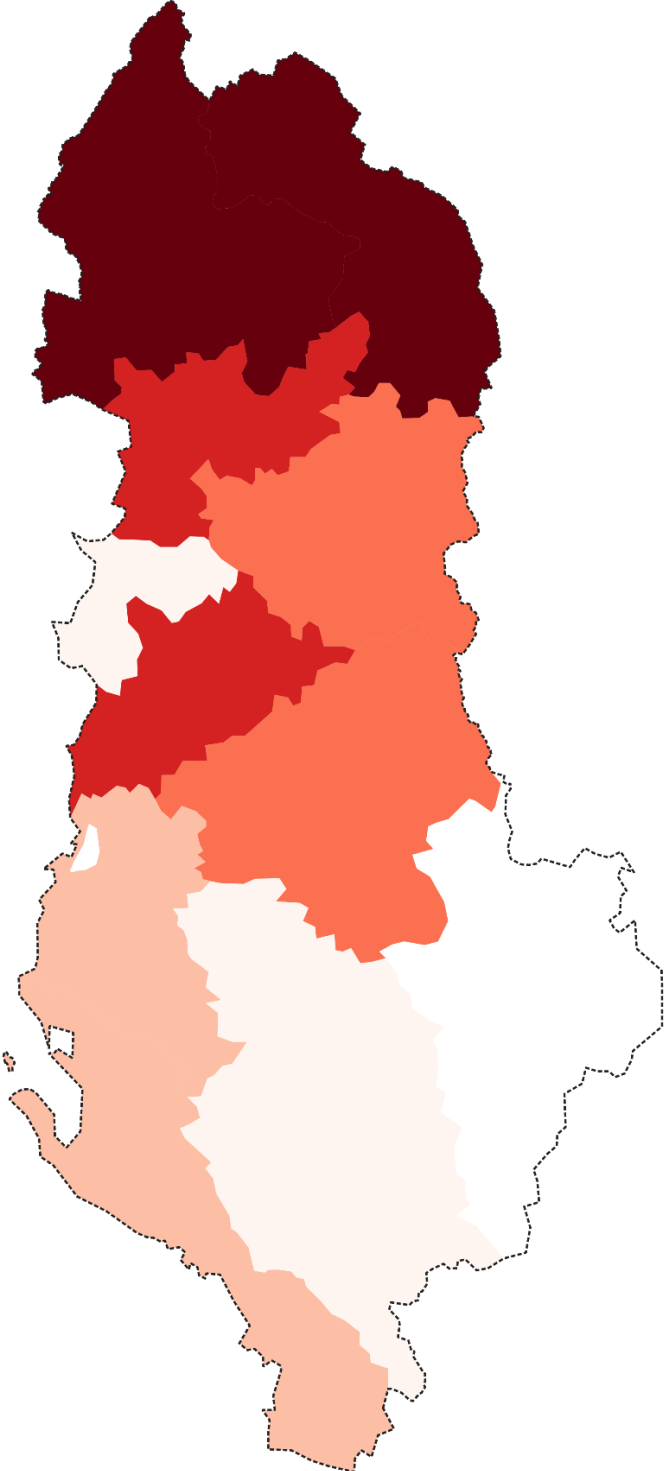
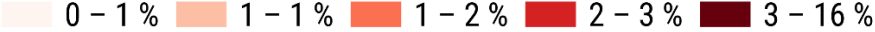
the 2025 parliamentary elections

0.7 – 1.5 % 1.5 – 2.4 % 2.4 – 3.3 % 4.1 – 5 %



Social Democratic Party

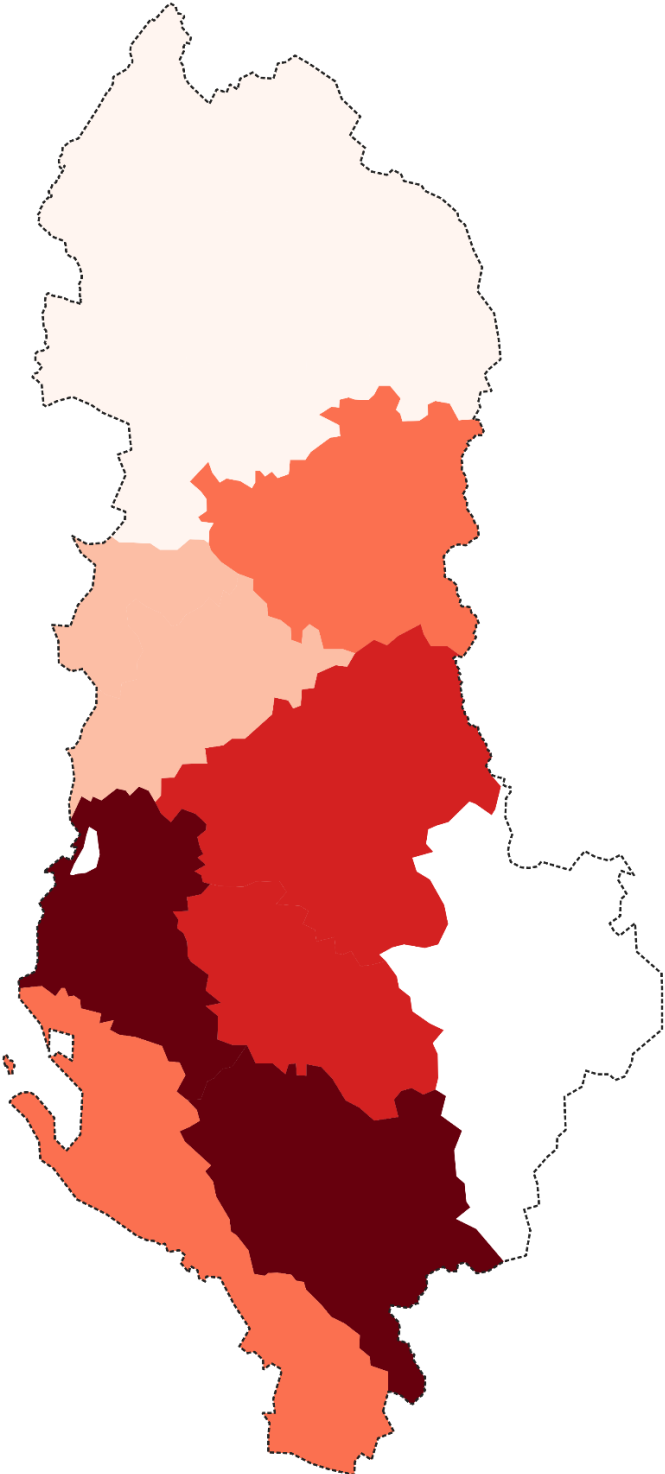
the 2025 parliamentary elections



Socialist Party

the 2025 parliamentary elections

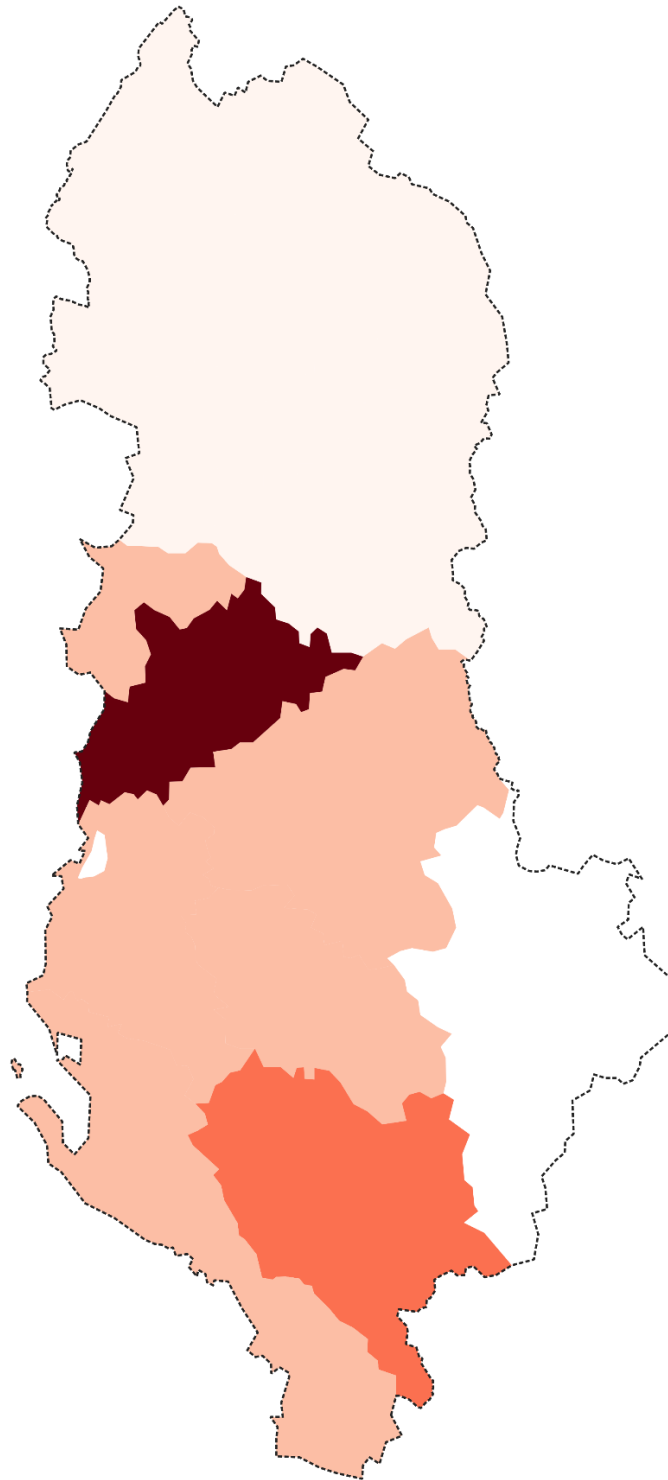
30 - 43 % 43 - 53 % 53 - 60 % 60 - 61 % 61 - 64 %



Together Movement

the 2025 parliamentary elections

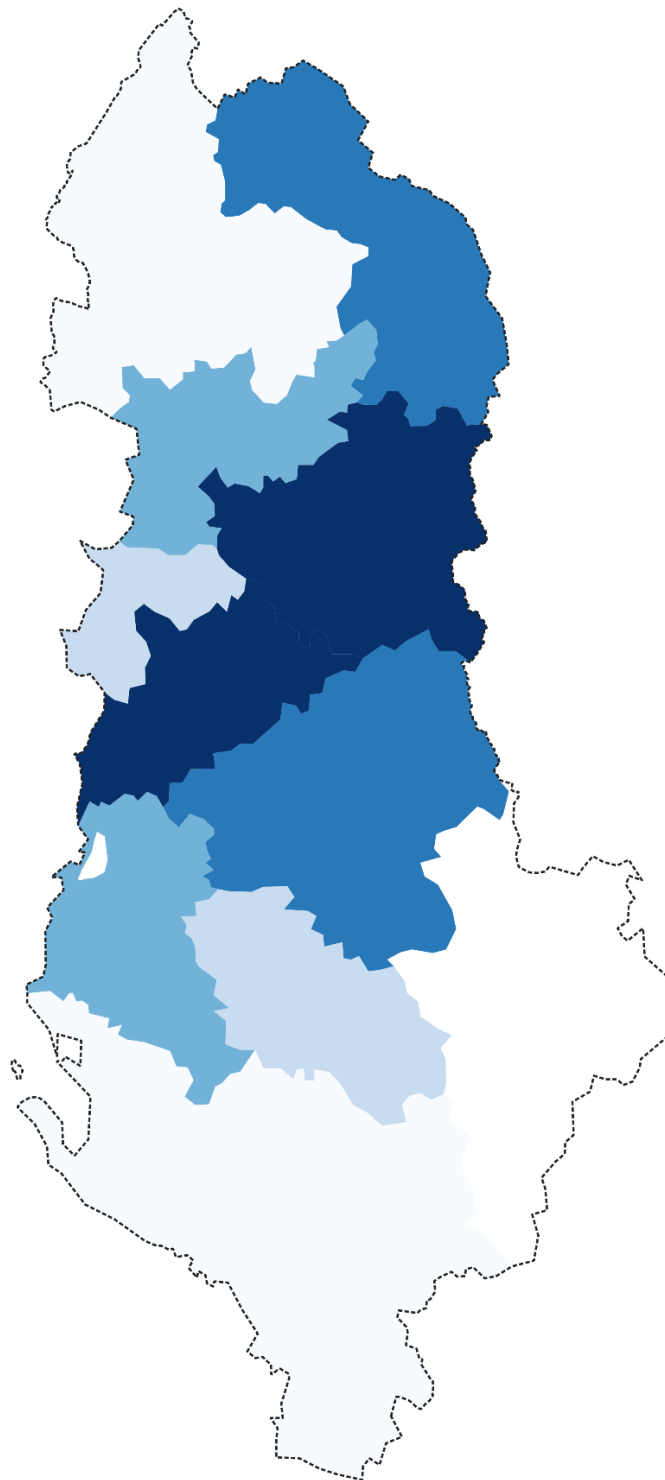
0.4 – 0.9 % 0.9 – 1.4 % 1.4 – 1.8 % 2.3 – 2.8 %



Turnout

the 2025 parliamentary elections

31 - 39 % 39 - 41 % 41 - 42 % 42 - 46 % 46 - 50 %



ANNEX 2. LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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