Political Parties and Electoral Volatility: How (un)stable is the Albanian Electorate?

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers an in-depth analysis of electoral volatility in Albania from 1991 to 2021, a transformative period from a communist regime to a democratic multi-party system. It diverges from Central and Eastern European trends by examining Albania's unique political dynamics and the factors influencing electoral behavior and volatility. Utilizing the Pedersen Index, the study methodically evaluates various determinants impacting party electoral volatility in Albania. The research underscores the significance of high membership rates and robust ground organization within major political parties as key contributors to low volatility levels in Albania's party system, thus providing insight into the intricacies and idiosyncrasies of Albania's political landscape.

Keywords: electoral volatility, party system, cleavage, electoral system, party members.

INTRODUCTION

The political landscape of post-communist Europe has undergone a profound transformation, involving significant changes in polity, society, and the nature of political competition. This period saw the resurgence of multi-party systems, leading to heightened electoral volatility, a stark contrast to the more stable political environments of Western Europe. The focus of this paper is to elucidate the nature of electoral volatility at the party level in Albania from 1991 to 2021. This analysis pays particular attention to political parties that have maintained a consistent presence in the Albanian legislature.

Albania's political journey since the early 1990s mirrors the broader post-communist experience, transitioning from a single-party communist regime to a multi-party democratic system. Key political parties like the Socialist Party of Albania (SP), the Democratic Party of Albania (DP), and the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI) have played pivotal roles in this transformation. The SP, originally the Party of Labor of Albania (PLA), underwent a rebranding in 1991(Biberaj 1999; Bugajsi 2002). Alongside the SP, the DP, established as the first opposition party in the same year (Bugajski 2002; Krasniqi 2009), and the SMI, formed as

splinter party from SP in 2004 (Kajsiu 2014), have all significantly influenced Albania's political dynamics.

The primary contention of this analysis is that the organizational features of political parties significantly impact their ability to achieve stability within the electorate. Specifically, factors such as the size and stability of membership organizations are argued to affect electoral volatility. These elements facilitate effective communication between parties and voters, create expansive social networks, provide continuity in representation, and contribute to the socialization of citizens. Moreover, in the Albanian context, parties with large memberships have leveraged their influence to 'recruit' voters into public administration roles as a form of reward for electoral support.

Contrasting with other post-communist countries, this study finds that typical factors like electoral systems, the degree of democratization, and Intra Party Democracy (IPD) do not significantly influence the level of party-level volatility in Albania. In the final analysis, a distinctive feature of the Albanian political landscape, particularly compared to other post-communist countries, is the notably high membership rates within its major political parties. This paper underscores that these substantial membership numbers are not merely a statistical observation but play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of electoral volatility in Albania. The substantial memberships within parties like the SPA, the DPA, and the SMI have profound implications for the parties' ability to maintain stability and influence within the electorate. These large membership bases facilitate robust communication channels between the parties and their supporters, create extensive social networks that bolster party support, and contribute to the continuity of the parties' representation in the political arena. Furthermore, the sizeable memberships of these parties enable a system of political 'recruitment', where electoral support is often rewarded with opportunities in the public administration. This aspect of party organization in Albania, diverging from trends in other post-communist countries, highlights the unique interplay between party structure and electoral behaviour, shaping the landscape of political volatility in the country.

The paper is organized into three main sections each addressing specific aspects and factors influencing electoral volatility. Initially, the paper explores the broader factors influencing electoral volatility in general. This section provides a foundational understanding of the various determinants that impact electoral dynamics universally, setting the stage for a more focused examination of the Albanian context. Subsequently, the paper narrows its focus to explore the specific factors influencing electoral volatility in Albania. This segment is crucial for understanding the unique political, social, and economic elements that have shaped the Albanian electoral landscape since the fall of the communist regime. The discussion includes an analysis of Albania's distinct political environment and how it diverges from other post-communist countries. The methodology section introduces the Pedersen Index as the primary tool for measuring electoral volatility. This part of the paper outlines the rules and criteria employed in the application of the Pedersen Index, ensuring a rigorous and systematic approach to quantifying volatility.

Finally, the paper presents an in-depth analysis of the collected data, attempting to correlate electoral volatility with various factors such as the Effective Number of Parties (ENP), levels of democracy, party membership levels, and the electoral system. This analysis aims to establish

linkages between these variables and the observed patterns of volatility, offering insights into how each factor contributes or not to the broader electoral dynamics in Albania. By integrating these diverse aspects, the paper provides a holistic view of electoral volatility, enhancing the understanding of this complex phenomenon in the Albanian political sphere.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL MODEL

Factors Influencing Electoral Volatility

In general, post-communist countries are characterized by a profound lack of stability. This instability can be attributed to several factors: firstly, these countries lacked previous political experience, necessitating the creation of a party system from scratch; secondly, they had under-developed civil societies and a low level of voter identification with political parties; thirdly, they experienced high levels of economic mobility, which was paralleled by significant social mobility and consequently, persistent changes in the interests of various social and economic groups (Birch 2001: 5-6).

However, these are not the only factors affecting electoral volatility. Institutional choices also significantly influence the level of electoral stability (Bartolini & Mair 2007). Political party leaders, when adopting an electoral system, are cognizant of its potential consequences and therefore select the system that best serves their interests (Birch 2001:6). Majoritarian systems and proportional systems with high formal and natural thresholds favour larger parties and reduce the chances of smaller parties entering parliament. This situation often results in voters, even those preferring smaller parties, avoiding 'wasting' their vote (due to the psychological effect) (Duverger 1954) and continuing to vote for the same, larger parties, thereby maintaining the status quo. In such scenarios, electoral volatility tends to be minimal (Birch 2001: 6). According to Bartolini and Mair, changes in the electoral system also influence volatility levels (Bartolini & Mair 2007: 160). Therefore, any alteration in the electoral system typically leads to increased volatility. Another factor impacting volatility is voter turnout: an increase in turnout is generally accompanied by an increase in volatility, and vice versa.

Sarah Birch notes that the size of the party system indirectly influences the level of volatility: the larger the party system, the higher the volatility. She observes that post-communist countries experienced significant changes in the size of their party systems between their first and second elections, as anti-communist front organizations split and tested the electoral waters. Between the second and third elections, the constraints of the electoral system began to manifest, and a process of consolidation took place. Generally, there is an increase in contenders between the first and second elections, followed by a decline between the second and third electoral events (Birch 2001:10). Consequently, since an increase in the number of parties correlates with increased volatility (and vice versa), it is logical to expect lower levels of volatility in the third elections compared to the second.

However, while scholars universally agree that volatility was high during the first decade of post-communist transition, it diminished in the second decade as social and economic cleavages stabilized, leading to a more stable party system. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate whether Albania followed a similar trajectory and to identify the factors that influenced the level of electoral volatility in the country.

Analytical Model: Factors Influencing Electoral Volatility in Albania

The academic analysis of party system volatility has traditionally revolved around four core determinants: the electoral system's architecture, democratization's breadth, the party system's structure, and the ideological polarization of political parties. For Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, these factors present a tapestry of impacts, where theoretical expectations often clash with reality. For instance, the anticipated impact of electoral thresholds on volatility, as posited by Bartolini and Mair (2007: 160), is challenged by empirical findings which suggest an absence of consistent influence in the CEE landscape (Gherghina 2014). Neither electoral threshold, nor the type of electoral system (e.g. majority systems are presumed to engender higher volatility) seem to influence the electoral volatility in CEE countries. The electoral system in Albania has changed frequently. It is difficult to find to consecutive elections being organized with the same electoral system. While the strategies of the parties have changed from one set of election to the other (Xhaferaj 2018a) the winning parties have been always the same. The final results have been contingent of the strategies pursued by political parties and not of the electoral system per se (Xhaferaj 2018b; Çeka 2012). Therefore, electoral system is not a determinant of electoral volatility in Albania.

The democratization process, often heralded as a stabilizing force for party systems, does not seem to follow a straightforward path. In CEE, the degree of democratization's effect on volatility remains inconclusive and a clear correlation between democratization levels and party system volatility remains elusive (Gherghina 2014). The democratization process in Albania is far from being consolidated. Political clientelism is a constant phenomenon which undermines the democratic fabric. The phenomenon of vote-buying and political patronage (Kajsiu 2014: 119) underscores the persistence of entrenched political practices despite the formal structures of democracy. In this situation the expectation is to have volatile and fragmented party system in Albania. However, the party system in Albania is dominated by the two main political parties (SP and DP) leaving little room (if any) for small parties. The main political parties (SP and DP) have maintained high membership rates and stability in terms of membership figures and party encapsulation over time in comparison to other post-communist states (Xhaferaj 2018b), due to the political employment opportunities they offer in a nation grappling with high unemployment rates (Kajsiu 2014; Gjoksi 2015).

The ENP demonstrate that since its first elections in 1991 the Albanian party system has been either a two-party system or a two and half, with the same two main political parties and small parties which are relevant in a set of elections but become irrelevant in the subsequent ones (Xhaferaj 2014). Indeed, if we refer to the levels of party membership mentioned above, high membership rates allow parties to have a deep penetration in society and consequently increase their chances to win and/or stay relevant in the party system (Xhaferaj 2018a). Scholars (Coppedge 1998; Mainwaring 1998; Bielasiak 2002) have hypothesized that high levels of competition and fragmentation in the party system correlate with increased level of volatility. While proliferation of external parties into the party system should theoretically augment volatility, and a reduction should diminish it, CEE experiences contradict this, with the number of parties decreasing and level of volatility fluctuating without a specific pattern (Gherghina 2014). In line with previous research, I do not expect to find a correlation between the number of parties and the level of volatility in the Albanian political parties, especially because the number of effective parties in the Albanian party system has been almost always the same.

Policy positions is another potential determinant which could impact volatility, since voters tend to support parties closest to them on salient issues (Enelow & Hinich 1984). However, according to Gherghina (2014) accurately mapping the political space in CEE proves challenging due to the ambiguous cleavage structure and the subjective placement of parties on ideological axes, rendering policy positions less explanatory for volatility of the party system in the CEE context. CEE's electoral landscape is marked by a notable lack of clearly defined social cleavages (van Biezen 2003)—a stark contrast to the well-established democratic systems of the West. This absence is evident in Albania as well, where the legacies of egalitarian communist policies have blurred the social distinctions that typically inform party allegiances. Instead of policy position, Albania is characterized by a deep polarization (Stojarova 2013) or bipolarization which has 'subsumed other possible cleavages' (Kajsiu 2016). The political sphere is characterized by a bipolar division between the dominant political parties, thus overshadowing other potential political divisions. Policy positions do not influence voter behaviour.

According to Gherghina (Gherghina 2014) the decentralization of decision-making is an important determinant of electoral volatility. According to Xhaferaj (2022) the members of the main political parties are not sufficiently involved in the process of decision-making such as candidate nominations for MPs, election of the National Executive and Executive Committee and in the election of the Party President. In the section of analysis I will compare the level of volatility with the index of decentralization (Xhaferaj 2022) to find if there is a correlation between the two variables.

In conclusion, while the number of parties, cleavage structure, level of democratization and policy position are recognized determinants of volatility, their explanatory power in Albania is fraught with empirical evidence.

METHODOLOGY

Since when Pedersen introduced the Index of Volatility, it became one of the main tools to measure the level of the party support. Mogens Pedersen defines volatility as 'the net change within the electoral party system resulting from individual vote transfers' (1979: 3). According to him, the volatility is measured as follows:

$$\text{Volatility } (V_t) = 1/2 \text{ x TNC}_t$$

$$0 \le V_t \le 100$$

Where TNC_t is the Total Net Change of votes in percentage between one election and the previous one. As Pedersen states 'V_t is simply the cumulated gains for all winning parties in the party system, or--if the symmetrical interpretation is preferred--the numerical value of the cumulated losses for all losing parties' (Pedersen 1979: 3). Therefore, the level of volatility shows how much voters have changed their preferences for political parties from one set of elections to the next.

However, calculating the level of volatility is not straightforward. It would be simpler if the same set of parties participated in each election, but in reality, the scenario is quite different. While some 'old' parties continue their electoral 'battle', others have vanished, diminished, merged with other parties, or new parties have emerged. In Western Europe, this has reflected

the decreased level of partisanship as well as the emergence of new issues. In post-communist countries, the high level of changes in the party system is a result of high levels of social and economic mobility, the lack of previous multi-party system experience, disillusionment with the transition to democracy, and high levels of splits and mergers among political parties. Therefore, to apply the Pedersen Index to measure the electoral volatility of Albanian voters, it is important to equip it with a set of rules.

According to Crewe (1985: 8) electoral results from a combination of three factors: 1) changes in a political party's support from voters who participated in two consecutive elections; 2) changes in the composition of the electorate and 3) alterations in the parties' offerings, stemming from the emergence of new parties, the exit of 'old' parties, and changes in coalition patterns. The first factor is relatively straightforward to measure, as it is directly linked to the number of votes a party receives in elections. The second factor, as previously mentioned, does not influence the Albanian context, since policy positions and cleavages do not notably affect voter behaviour on election day. The third factor becomes relevant only if the new entrants significantly alter the party system's structure and affect the number of relevant parties. Coalitions are also important, as illustrated in the calculation of electoral volatility. In two consecutive elections, 2001 and 2005 (OSCE 2001; OSCE 2005), the opposition party (DP) has competed as part of a coalition. Therefore, the volatility calculations for these elections are conducted at coalition level, rather than at the individual party level.

The concept of institutional continuity is instrumental in calculating the level of electoral volatility, particularly when mergers and splits occur. Institutional continuity refers to the persistence of organizational resources and the degree of party identification, which involves the voter's awareness and acceptance of a party's identity change, if any, while continuing to support it despite such change (Birch 2001). In this context, the guidelines set forth by Bartolini and Mair (Bartolini & Mair 2007) are useful for applying the concept of institutional continuity (Annex 1). To calculate the level of volatility in 1992, one must consider the difference between the vote percentage received by the SP and that received by the PLA. This approach is necessary because SP is the successor party of PLA and as such it inherited its organizational structure, membership and offices. Furthermore, the author has calculated what Bartolini and Mair refer to as 'volatility without others' (Bartolini & Mair 2007: 286) considering only parties that have received 1% or more of the electoral vote.1. In the Albanian context, there are instances where parties receiving less than 1% of the vote are also included in calculations to enhance accuracy, especially in cases where a party has garnered more than 1% in one election and less in the subsequent/s one/s. However, as a general rule, parties that have received significantly less than 1% of the vote have not been included in these calculations. This approach aims to provide a more precise measure of electoral volatility, accommodating the nuances of the Albanian political landscape.

Another important rule applied in calculating electoral volatility is that proposed by Birch (2001:19). According to Birch's approach, in scenarios where political parties, while maintaining their individual identities, participate independently in the first elections and then

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[1]Bartolini & Mair have set the threshold at 2% but this would have meant that the greatest part of the parties were to be left outside, and since Democratic Party and Socialist Party in general do not take more than 80% of the total vote, the calculation of total volatility would have been far from being real.

as partners in a coalition in subsequent elections (or vice versa), the level of volatility is determined by subtracting the sum of each party's individual support percentage (from the first elections) from the coalition's total support percentage (in the succeeding elections). In the Albanian context this rule is applied for the 2001 and 2005 elections where DP competed in Elections as part of a coalition.

In terms of blocks identification and block's party affiliation, the author of this paper is based on the following criteria:

1. Coalitions created by parties themselves are considered as blocks. Therefore, if the parties have positioned themselves in the same wing of the ideological line, and occasionally have created coalitions with the Democratic Party or the Socialist Party, then they are considered as being in the same block with one of the parties.
2. In the cases when the parties have not made the coalition official but have conducted their electoral strategy based on alliances with specific parties, then in this case it is considered a coalition. In the Albanian case, this is the case of DPA being in coalition with Republican Party (RP), National Front Party (NFP), Legality Movement (LP) and Liberal Union Party (LUP).

The number of electoral cycles is also important to take into consideration. Scholars calculating electoral volatility have typically done so over extended time periods. For instance, Bartolini & Mair analysed electoral volatility from 1885 to 1985, while Dassonneville & Hoghe (2011) focused on the post-war era. Such extensive spans allow for a comprehensive understanding of electoral cycles and enable researchers to exclude periods of crises from their analyses. These crises, by their very nature, are not the norm and could potentially skew final conclusions. Since the fall of communist regime, ten free or quasi-free elections have taken place in Albania. At first glance this number might look sufficient for drawing conclusions. But applying Bartolini & Mair's (2007) criterion, which suggests excluding periods with less than four consecutive elections in cased of an interruption in the democratic process, would mean omitting the elections held during and prior to 1997, the year of the collapse of Albania's pyramid schemes. Similarly, Dassonneville & Hooghe (2011) exclude the first elections after World War II to avoid comparing elections held during times of crises. If these criteria are applied to the Albanian context, the scope for analysis narrows significantly, leaving only the elections of 2001 and onward. This range is arguably insufficient for reaching comprehensive conclusions. Therefore, in this paper, all elections held in Albania from 1991 to the most recent ones in 2021are analysed to provide a broader perspective on electoral volatility.

Primary sources for this paper are the Parliamentary Elections of the Central Election Commission in Albania (CEC), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Final Reports, and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) election reports.

DATA ANALYSIS: ELECTORAL VOLATILITY IN ALBANIA

With the collapse of the communist system in December 1990, Albania has experienced a dramatic shift in its political landscape, transitioning from a communist regime to a burgeoning democracy through a series of pivotal elections. The journey began in 1991, with the country's first multi-party elections since World War II. This marked a significant moment in Albania's history, as it moved away from decades of communist rule. However, the elections were not

without controversy, mired by allegations of irregularities. These tensions led to early elections in 1992, which brought the DP to power and saw the rise of Sali Berisha as President.

The mid-1990s were a turbulent period in Albanian politics, with the 1996 elections, again won by the DP, criticized for electoral fraud and sparking social unrest. The situation escalated with the collapse of pyramid schemes in 1997, plunging the country into chaos and necessitating another round of elections. This time, the SP emerged victorious, signalling a significant shift in the political tide. The subsequent elections in 2001 and 2005 were characterized by claims of corruption and irregularities. The DP, under Sali Berisha, made a comeback in 2005, retaining power in the 2009 elections despite ongoing allegations of fraud. A major turning point came in 2013, with the SP, led by Edi Rama, winning the elections and marking a peaceful transition of power. Rama's SP continued its hold on power in the 2017 and 2021 elections, securing a majority in Parliament. Throughout these decades, Albania's path to democracy has been marked by significant political shifts, allegations of electoral misconduct, and a gradual, albeit challenging, march towards democratic consolidation2. The distribution of seat in parliament are shown at Annex 2.

Having examined the evolving landscape of Albania's electoral history since 1991, marked by significant shifts in political power and challenges in democratic consolidation, we now turn our attention to a more quantitative aspect of these changes. The following section delves into the calculations of electoral volatility, providing a numerical perspective on the fluctuating political preferences and party dynamics that have characterized the Albanian political arena during this period. In the following table (Table 1) are given the results of volatility levels for the post-communist democratic elections:

Table 1: Electoral Volatility 1991-2021[3]

Party/ Year	Electoral Volatility								
	SP	DP	RP	LMP	NFP	LU	JIUP	SDP	SMI
1992	-30.4	23.42	-1.06	NA	NA	NA	NA	5	NA
1996	-5.36	-6.56	5.04	2.07	4.97	1.97	NA	-3.48	NA
1997	32.38	-29.84	-3.33	1.21	-2.63	-1.17	NA	0.97	NA
2001	-11.24	2.27					NA	1.15	NA
2005	-32.62	-2.92					1.17	9.1	8.4
2009	31.96	32.51	-17.85	-2.8	-1.34	-1.06	-0.22	-10.98	-3.55
2013	0.51	-9.59	0.91				1.66	-1.17	5.61
2017	6.98	-1.78					2.2	0.36	3.82
2021	0.33	10.58					-4.16	1.3	-7.47

The provided table on Albania's electoral volatility across various elections offers a detailed perspective on the shifting political landscape of the country. This analysis requires an understanding of electoral volatility as a measure of the change in a political party's vote share

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[2] For more details on the electoral processes in Albania please consult OSCE Final Election Reports. Available at: https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/albania

[3] Annex 3 in the end show in more details how the calculation is done. The table shows the percentage that parties has taken during elections and the electoral volatility for each party, calculated according to the Pedersen Index formula.

from one election to another. Positive values indicate an increase in support, while negative values suggest a decrease. The table encompasses data for key parties such as the SP, DP, RP, Liberal Democratic Union of Albania (LDU), Justice, Integration and Unity Party (JIUP), Social Democratic Party of Albania (SDP), and SMI, among others.

The major parties have witnessed significant levels of electoral volatility, particularly pronounced in the first decade following the communist regime's collapse. This trend aligns with observations in other post-communist countries (Iyshima 1999). Successor parties initially perform well due to their ability to penetrate society, but often lose electoral support in subsequent elections. Conversely, opposition parties gain support as they become more adept at the electoral process. The first decade is marked by high fluctuation for both groups of parties as the electorate adjusts its preferences.

At a first glance it looks that the second decade also appears to be characterized by high levels of electoral volatility. However, this is not actually the case. As shown in the table in Annex 2, the distribution of seat in the Albanian parliament primarily oscillates between the two main parties, indicating strong electoral support for both. The seemingly high volatility results are primarily due to manipulation of the electoral system by both parties to maximize their gains.4 Thus even though it appears that volatility levels are high, empirical evidence shows that indeed they are low and the main political parties, both SP and DP have a very good organizational structure to the extend they could manage the voting process by orienting the electorate vote and even succeed in this endeavour. According to Bocshler (Bochsler 2012: 413) 79% of voter's party followed the scheme which shows a strong organizational on the ground which can guide the electorate in the voting process. This strategy as diminished extensively the role of the small parties as the table on the distribution of seats shows and increased the power of both SP and DP, which then is manifested in the electoral volatility which has radically decreased in the third decade.

Bartolini & Mair (2007: 160) comments that changes in the electoral system can lead to increased volatility. However, Albania has frequently changed f its electoral system. The 1991 elections were majoritarian (Krasniqi 2009: 31); the 1992 have been a mix of double-ballot

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4 Please see OSCE Parliamentary Elections 2001 and OSCE Parliamentary Elections 5 July 2005 which describes in details the manipulation of the electoral system. The Electoral System applied in 2001 and 2005 was Mix Member Proportional with the following rules: Article 64 of the Constitution (1998) establishes the following election system:
• A fixed number of parliamentary mandates (140), with 100 deputies (71%) elected in single mandate election zones (hereafter 'single-seat' mandates) and 40 (29%) elected from party or coalition lists (hereafter 'supplemental' mandates);
• That "the total number of deputies of a party […] shall be, to the closest possible extent, proportional to valid votes won by them on the national scale […]" (Art. 64.2); and,
• That parties must obtain at least 2.5% of valid votes and coalitions must obtain at least 4% of valid votes, to participate in the allocation of the 40 supplemental mandates.
However, both DP and SP and their allies followed an "electoral strategy that challenged the limits of the law, blurred distinctions between political parties and had the potential to circumvent the objective of proportionality "to the closest possible extent"" (OSCE, 2005: 13). The small parties encouraged their supporters to vote for their main allies (SP and DP) in the majority component (the small parties didn't fill the constituencies with MP candidates, increasing thus the chances of the candidates from SP and DP to get elected) and on the other hand, both DP and SP encouraged their supporters to vote form their small allies in the proportional component, increasing thus the chances that their allies will get the seats from the 40 seats allocated from the proportional component.

majoritarian with proportional, with the proportional part aiming to correct the final results of the elections so that the result could be as proportional as possible (Edgeworth and Soares 1992). Those of 1996 and 1997 were a mix of double-ballot majoritarian with proportional, but this time without its proportional aspect (De Gregorio et al. 1996) The system changed again in 2001 and in 2005. It was again a mix of majoritarian and proportional, but in 2001 it remained a double-ballot majoritarian re-taking the compensatory aspect of the proportional and in 2005 it became simpler by making the majoritarian part a single-ballot and keeping un-changed the compensatory aspect of the proportional (OSCE 2001, 2005). The system changed again in 2008 to closed lists regional proportional (OSCE 2009) and then in 2020 to open list regional proportional. As one may observe the system has been subject of changes and therefore rather than framing the party system it was framed by the political parties. It has reflected indeed the observation of Diamond and Plattner that 'among the many structural and historical variables that affect democracy, few are more open to rapid and intentionally designed change than the electoral system' (Diamond & Plattner 2006). Table 2 shows the electoral system, the level of electoral volatility and the fragmentation of the party system.

Table 2: Electoral System and Electoral Volatility at Party Level and ENP

Party/ Year	Electoral Volatility									ENP	Electoral System
	SP	DP	RP	LMP	NFP	LU	JIUP	SDP	SMI		
1991											First Past the Post
1992	-30.4	23.42	-1.06	NA	NA	NA	NA	5	NA	1.97	Mixed Member District/Two Round
1996	-5.36	-6.56	5.04	2.07	4.97	1.97	NA	-3.48	NA	1.31	Parallel/ Two Round
1997	32.38	-29.84	-3.33	1.21	-2.63	-1.17	NA	0.97	NA	2.14	Mixed Member District/Two Round
2001	-11.24	2.27					NA	3.64	NA	2.99	Mixed Member District/Two Round
2005	-32.62	-2.92					1.17	9.1	8.4	3.68	Mix Member District/Single round
2009	31.96	32.51	-17.85	-2.8	-1.34	-1.06	-0.22	-10.98	-3.55	2.21	Closed List/Regional Proportional
2013	0.51	-9.59	0.91				1.66	-1.17	5.61	2.8	Closed List/Regional Proportional
2017	6.98	-1.78					2.2	0.36	3.82	2.55	Closed List/Regional Proportional
2021	0.33	10.58					-4.16	1.3	-7.47	2.18	Open List/Regional Proportional

As one may notice, it is difficult to find a pattern and link the level of volatility with a particular electoral system. Thus, the electoral system is not a determinant of party volatility. According to Gherghina (2014) a good organization on the ground is important because it acts as a channel

for communicating party messages to voters and as a mobilizing force that enhance voter loyalty. In difference from the CEE evidence (Kopecky 1995; Lewis 2000; Szczerbiak 2001; van Biezen 2003), which shows that political parties have weak organizations and are generally underdeveloped due to factors such as elite-driven formation, low societal grounding, financial state dependence, and a focus on central party figures over grassroots structures, the political parties in Albania show to have strong organizations and very good penetration on the ground as the results of the 2001 and 2005 parliamentary elections showed. While all factors that influence party organizational capacity in CEE countries are relevant, they have not weakened the organizational structures of the parties. This is linked with parties being mass clientelistic parties (Xhaferaj 2018a; Kajsiu 2014), which maintain strong links with society due to their clientelistic nature by rewarding people that supported in elections times with jobs in the state administration and vote buying.

According to Gherghina 'parties which select candidates for the national elections at the local level are less volatile than the rest' (Gherghina 2014: 42) and political parties with decentralized candidate selection have lower levels of electoral volatility than centralized political parties (Gherghina 2014: 44). However, this is not the case for the Albanian political parties. The level of IPD is low for the three main political parties in Albania (Xhaferaj 2022), with the component of decision-making scoring worse than the other two components of IPD (members' right and organizational structure). Therefore, IPD is not a determinant of party electoral volatility in Albania.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has endeavoured to unravel the intricacies of electoral behaviour in Albania, focusing on the period from 1991 to 2021. Utilizing the concept of electoral volatility as a pivotal analytical tool, the study aimed to decipher the changing voter preferences across different electoral cycles. Electoral volatility serves as a critical indicator of how voter allegiances shift from one election to another, providing insights into the dynamic political landscape of Albania.

The analysis navigated through various challenges inherent in the post-communist transition of Albania. These challenges included the absence of well-defined social and economic cleavages, high societal mobility, and the nascent nature of the party system. Additionally, the manipulation of the electoral system presented obstacles in identifying consistent patterns of electoral behaviour. Despite these hurdles, the study unveiled that factors such as robust organizational infrastructure on the ground, extensive party membership, and deep territorial penetration significantly influence the level of party electoral volatility in Albania. Contrary to expectations, elements like the electoral system formula, thresholds, constituency sizes, and intra-party democracy were found to have minimal impact on electoral volatility.

Moreover, this study posits that analysing electoral volatility alone may not fully capture the stability of the party system. The Effective Number of Parties (ENP), coupled with the distribution of parliamentary seats, emerges as a vital metric. A comprehensive analysis must consider both these variables to accurately assess the political equilibrium in Albania.

The recent split within the Democratic Party following the 2021 elections introduces a new variable into the equation. It necessitates a close observation of how this organizational change

at the ground level will affect party electoral volatility. This event marks a pivotal moment in Albania's political narrative, potentially signalling shifts in party dynamics and voter alignment. Understanding these changes will be crucial in predicting future trends and the evolving nature of Albania's political parties and electoral landscape. This paper, therefore, underscores the need for ongoing research to adapt to the fluid political context of Albania, ensuring a nuanced and updated understanding of its electoral volatility.

List of Abbreviations

AEP	Agrarian and Environmental Party
DAP	Democratic Alliance Party
DCP	Demo Christian Party
DP	Democratic Party
DLU	Democratic Liberal Union
DUP	Democratic Union Party
G99	G99
IPD	Intra Party Democracy
LMV	Legality Movement Party
LUP	Liberal Union Party
NDFP	National Democratic Front Party
NDP	New Democratic Party
NFP	National Front Party
OSCE	Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe
PJIU	Party for Justice, Integration and Unity
RP	Republican Party
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SDY	Party of Social Democracy
SMI	Socialist Movement for Integration
SP	Socialist Party
SPL	Small Parties on the Left
SPR	Small Parties on the Right
UHRP	Unity and Human Rights Party

Annex 1

Rules for calculation of volatility (Bartolini & Mair, 2007: 283-286):

Volatility figures are always rounded up from the second decimal point;

1. When two or more parties merge to form a new party, or when one or more parties merge with an existing party, the relevant electoral volatility is computed by subtracting the vote of the new party from the combined vote of the merging parties in the election immediately preceding the merger.
2. When a party splits into two or more parties, the relevant electoral volatility is computed by subtracting the combined vote of the new parties from that of the original party in the election immediately preceding the split.
3. When the name of the party changes, volatility is computed as if it were the same party.

Annex 2: Distribution of Seat in the Albanian Parliament 1991-2021[5]

Party	Seats in Parliament									
	1991	**1992**	**1996**	**1997**	**2001**	**2005**	**2009**	**2013**	**2017**	**2021**
DP	75	92	122	26	32	56	68	50	43	59
SP	170	38	10	102	73	42	65	65	74	74
HRUP	5	2	3	4	3	2	1	1		
SMI						5	4	16	19	4
SDP		7	3	9	4	7			1	3
JIUP							1	4	3	
RP		1		1	5	18	1	3		
DCP				1				1		
NDP					6					
EAP				1	3	4				
DAP				2	3	3				
SDY						2				
SPR			2	8	9					
SPL				1						
Indep.					2	1				
Total	250	140	140	155	140	140	140	140	140	140

Annex 3: Electoral Volatility Calculation 1991-2021[6]

Election Year /Party's vote %	PD	PR	PLL	PBK	BL	PDK	PDIU	PS	PSD	LSI
1991	38.68	1.76						56.13		NA
1992	62.1	0.7				0.35		25.73	5	NA
PI	**23.42**	**-1.06**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0.35**	**0**	**-30.4**	**5**	
1992	62.1	0.7				0.35		25.73	5	NA
1996	55.54	5.74	2.07	4.97	1.97	1.28		20.37	1.52	NA
PI	**-6.56**	**5.04**	**2.07**	**4.97**	**1.97**	**0.93**	**0**	**-5.36**	**-3.48**	
1996	55.54	5.74	2.07	4.97	1.97	1.28		20.37	1.52	NA
1997	25.7	2.41	3.28	2.34	0.8	0.98		52.75	2.49	NA
PI	**-29.84**	**-3.33**	**1.21**	**-2.63**	**-1.17**	**-0.3**	**0**	**32.38**	**0.97**	
1997	25.7	2.41	3.28	2.34	0.8	0.98		52.75	2.49	NA
2001	36.8					1.03		41.51	3.64	NA
PI	**2.27**					**0.05**	**0.00**	**-11.24**	**1.15**	
2001	36.8					1.03		41.51	3.64	NA
2005	7.67	19.96	3.51	1.68	1.06	3.26	1.17	8.89	12.74	8.4
PI	**-2.92**					**2.23**	**1.17**	**-32.62**	**13.35**	**8.4**
2005	7.67	19.96	3.51	1.68	1.06	3.26	1.17	8.89	12.74	8.4
2009	40.18	2.11	0.71	0.34	0	0.88	0.95	40.85	1.76	4.85
PI	**32.51**	**-17.85**	**-2.8**	**-1.34**	**-1.06**	**-2.38**	**-0.22**	**31.96**	**-10.98**	**-3.55**
2009	40.18	2.11					0.95	40.85	1.76	4.85
2013	30.63	3.02					2.61	41.36	0.59	10.46

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[5] Source of Data are: For the Elections 1991-2001: Afrim Krasniqi (2009); Elections 2005: OSCE (2005); Elections 2009: OSCE (2009); 2017 and 2021: Central Election Commission

[6] Source of Data are: For the Elections 1991-2001: Afrim Krasniqi (2009); Elections 2005: OSCE (2005); Elections 2009: OSCE (2009); 2017 and 2021: Central Election Commission

PI	-9.55	0.91					1.66	0.51	-1.17	5.61
2013	30.63						2.61	41.36	0.59	10.46
2017	28.85						4.81	48.34	0.95	14.28
PI	-1.78						2.2	6.98	0.36	3.82
2017	28.85						4.81	48.34	0.95	14.28
2021	39.43						0.65	48.67	2.25	6.81
PI	10.58						-4.16	0.33	1.3	-7.47

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