

Jordan JORGJI¹

WHAT CONSTITUTES THE LEFT IN ALBANIA? DEFINING COMMUNIST SUCCESSOR AND OTHER LEFT-WING PARTIES

Abstract. The Left in Albania has long been synonymous with the communist successor, most notably represented by the Socialist Party of Albania (SPA). Emerging from the Cold War era, the SPA inherited not only the ideological framework, but also the political dominance that had been characteristic of communist rule. Over the past three decades, the SPA has remained one of Albania's two dominant political parties, blending elements of socialist ideology with certain authoritarian tendencies. This legacy has contributed to an ideological and democratic void that other parties, particularly extra-parliamentary ones, have sought to fill. Among these, the Movement Together (MT) and the Hashtag Initiative (HI) have emerged as significant actors. Given the scarcity of comprehensive scholarship on Albania's political landscape, this paper presents Albania as a case study to define and classify communist successor and other left-wing parties, drawing on frameworks applied in Central and Eastern Europe. The paper compares the platforms and political rhetoric of the SPA, MT, and HI, with a particular focus on the SPA's conduct while in government. Moreover, the internal characteristics of these parties is examined to provide a nuanced understanding of Albania's domestic political environment and what defines the Left in Albania.

Keywords: Left-wing parties, etatist socialism, centrist-left gap, progressive parties, nationalism, populism

¹ Jordan Jorgji is a Lecturer of International, European and Area Studies, at Fan S. Noli University, Korçë, Albania (jjorgji@unkorce.edu.al). ORCID: 0000-0001-5630-401X.

Introduction

Scholarship on post-communist and left-wing parties is extensive. John T. Ishiyama's typology of post-communist parties in Central and Eastern Europe classifies them based on their transition to multiparty democracy.² Similarly, Herbert Kitschelt distinguishes these parties according to their internal organization and political structure.³ Michalis Spourdalakis builds on these analyses, emphasizing how traditional mass parties have evolved into state-centric entities.⁴

In contrast, academic literature on Albania's political parties remains limited, with most studies focusing on the transitional period of the early 1990s. Elez Biberaj has described the traits and challenges that Albanian political parties faced during this period.⁵ More comprehensive studies on left-wing parties are scarce. Notable exceptions include Artan Fuga's sociological exploration of the Socialist Party of Albania (SPA), tracing its evolution toward liberal socialism, and Luljeta Progni's analysis of the transformation of the Labor Party of Albania (LPA) into the SPA. Servet Pëllumbi has also contributed to this discussion by focusing on ideological shifts.⁶

² John T. Ishiyama, "A Typology of Communist Successor Parties," in *The Communist Successor Parties of Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. András Bozóki and John T. Ishiyama (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002), 281; John T. Ishiyama, "The Communist Successor Parties and Party Organizational Development in Post-Communist Politics," *Political Research Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (March 1999): 98.

³ Herbert Kitschelt, "Constraints and Opportunities in the Strategic Conduct of Post-Communist Successor Parties," in *The Communist Successor Parties of Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. András Bozóki and John T. Ishiyama (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002), 27-34; Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslav Markowski and Gábor Tóka, *Post-Communist Party System* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35-41.

⁴ Michalis Spourdalakis, "Το κομματικό φαινόμενο: Εξέλιξη και συγκυρία," [The party phenomenon: Evolution and Context] in *Το μέλλον των πολιτικών κομμάτων* [The Future of Political Parties], eds. Dimitris Tsatsos and Ksenophon Kontiades (Athens: Papazisi, 2003), 39-63.

⁵ Elez Biberaj, *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy* (Colorado, USA: Westview Press, 1998), 275-306.

⁶ Artan Fuga, *Majtas jo djathtas* [Left no Right] (Tiranë: Ora, 2003), 99-108; Artan Fuga, *Media, politika e shoqëria, 1990-2000* [Media, politics and society, 1990-2000] (Tiranë: Dudaj, 2008), 148-156; Luljeta Progni, *Trashëgimtarët* [The Heirs] (Tiranë: UET Press, 2010), 89-106; Servet

Following decades of political monism, the division between center-left and center-right emerged. The Communist Party of Albania was renamed the Labor Party of Albania in 1948, retaining that identity until the collapse of the Iron Curtain in the early 1990s. While Albania now has over 130 registered political parties, since the introduction of political pluralism in 1990, only two, namely the Socialist Party of Albania (SPA) and the Democratic Party of Albania (DPA), have held power.

The LPA officially became the SPA during its 10th Congress in June, 1991. The SPA has since governed for over two decades, albeit non-consecutively, from 1997 to 2005 and from 2013 to the present. The DPA, representing the center-right, governed from 1992 to 1997 and from 2005 to 2013. Most other parties have remained marginal and politically inactive.

Left-wing parties are generally associated with support for labor rights and the welfare state, with a critical stance toward capitalism. However, during the Cold War, some liberal parties, such as Germany's Christian Democratic Party after 1949, embraced social market economies that supported social policies.⁷ These distinctions are not fixed, and in modern politics, the ideological divide between left and right has become increasingly blurred, with parties adopting more pragmatic, flexible platforms.⁸

This paper seeks to answer a central question: *What constitutes a left-wing party in Albania?* Several sub-questions follow: What kind of left is present in Albania? What are the shared and distinctive features of Albanian left-wing parties? How do these compare with leftist movements in Germany, the UK, Greece, and the US? Are there national peculiarities that distinguish Albania's left from its international counterparts?

This study explores the relatively understudied Albanian left, with a focus on the communist successor party, the SPA, and the broader constellation of minor left-wing organizations surrounding it. It analyzes six active left-leaning parties: the mainstream Socialist Party of Albania

Pëllumbi, *Dështimi i etatizmit socialist. Alternativa të së ardhmes* [The Failure of Socialist Etatism. Alternatives for the Future] (Tiranë: Fan Noli, 2003), 123-31; Servet Pëllumbi, *Pluralizmi i dytë* [The second pluralism] (Tiranë: Morava, 2015), 113-18.

⁷ Norberto Bobbio, *E djathta dhe e majta* [The right and the left], transl. Ardian Vehbiu (Tiranë: Arbri, 1997), 87-98.

⁸ Bobbio, *E djathta*, 29.

(SPA); three smaller parties: the Social Democratic Party of Albania (SDPA), the Party of Social Democracy (PSD), and the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI); and two extra-parliamentary movements: the Movement Together (MT) and the Hashtag Initiative (HI). Prior to 1990, social-democratic structures were virtually nonexistent in Albania, aside from isolated initiatives during World War II.⁹

The study is grounded in two political science theories. First, the theory of political transition in post-communist parties is used to identify defining features of the SPA. Second, party evolution theory helps explain the space that extra-parliamentary parties seek to occupy within the broader left-wing spectrum. Methodologically, this is a descriptive case study of Albania's left-wing parties from a political science perspective. It draws on theories of political parties and leftist ideology to offer a comprehensive analysis of the Albanian case.

The first section provides the historical context of Albanian party politics, with particular emphasis on party system transformations. The second section analyzes the platforms and the general characteristics of Albanian left-wing parties, with a focus on the evolution of the Socialist Party of Albania. The third section examines national particularities and situates Albania's left within the broader context of international leftist agendas. Electoral performance is beyond the scope of this study and is proposed as a direction for future research.

The Evolution of Political Parties

Albanian left-wing parties can be better understood by examining the broader evolution of political parties. While the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century witnessed the transition from cadre parties to mass parties, driven by the expansion of state authority and political rights, the second half of the 20th century, following the introduction of universal suffrage, marked the decline of the mass party model.¹⁰

⁹ Alina Wagner, *Musine Kokalari dhe Social-demokracia në Shqipëri* (Tiranë: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2016), 9-17.

¹⁰ Spourdalakis, "The party," 46.

Drawing on Otto Kirchheimer's concept of the catch-all party, Michalis Spourdalakis highlights how the 1960s saw the emergence of parties that abandoned strong ideological foundations in favor of broader electoral appeal. Emerging as a product of post-war economic prosperity in Western democracies, catch-all parties adopted new forms of political mobilization. They prioritized immediate electoral success over ideological consistency, shifting away from representing specific social classes or ideological groups. Politicians became more focused on securing and maintaining state authority than addressing underlying social divisions. Furthermore, political discourse became increasingly technical and depoliticized, prioritizing bureaucratic management over ideological commitment.¹¹

Another type of political party emerged after the 1980s, described by Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair as "cartel parties." These parties exploit their position within the state apparatus to secure advantages in the political system, thereby restricting genuine political competition.¹² Moreover, political parties were compelled to adapt to the rise of a mass media society driven by technological advancements in the post-communist era. According to Spourdalakis, the dominant form of political organization in contemporary party systems is the party of the globalized state.¹³

Political strategy became subordinate to market dynamics and economic rationality, dictated by the neoliberal logic of globalization. This shift gave rise to the state-led party model, characterized by a technocratic and bureaucratic political culture aligned with the demands of transnational economic structures. While these new parties retained some structural features of mass parties and catch-all parties, such as centralized party structures and professionalized campaigns, they moved away from ideological mobilization. Electoral success remained the primary goal but was increasingly pursued through the engagement of technocrats and marketing professionals. Party leaders became more independent and less accountable to their constituents.¹⁴

¹¹ Spourdalakis, "The party," 50-2.

¹² Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, "The Cartel Party Thesis: A Restatement," *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 4 (December 2009): 756.

¹³ Spourdalakis, "The party," 61.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 58-9.

In other words, contemporary political parties no longer reflected the classic model of the left. The transformation of party structures has been paralleled by changes in the global economy, shifting from industrial capitalism to financial capitalism. According to Norberto Bobbio, this structural transition contributed to the decline of both the welfare state and social democracy, while Giovanni Sartori considers Marxism to be the only dead ideology.¹⁵ Moreover, Yanis Varoufakis believes that the downfall of social democracy began with the collapse of the Bretton Woods system and the rise of identity politics over labor rights. We are now living in an era of political technocratization and de-ideologization, where operational logic based on market efficiency and short-term electoral success has replaced ideological consistency.¹⁶

The left's shift has been further accelerated by the accommodation of the ex-communist parties to the market economy. Many of those parties, fearing identification with the communist and totalitarian past, adopted liberal oriented reforms, such as public expenditure saving and the privatization of the public sector.¹⁷ Indeed, their leaders benefited from this new reality to gain broader grassroots support, appearing to be more pragmatic than ideological.¹⁸

This ideological flexibility is complemented by the democratic deficit that defines certain countries and political groups, including the left parties. For Attila Ágh, countries that joined the European Union (EU) after the Cold War, such as Hungary and Poland, are now facing substantial democratic difficulties because they adopted the Western model of establishing democratic institutions, while ignoring domestic circumstances and the influence of informal institutions. In terms of the decline of democracy, competition has been restricted to political party elites in parliamentary and local elections, while citizens' participation in these processes remains weak.¹⁹

¹⁵ Bobbio, *E djathta*, 17-8; Giovanni Sartori, *Ç'është demokracia*, transl. Kujtim Ymeri (Tiranë: Ditura, 1998), 218-20.

¹⁶ Yanis Varoufakis, *Technofeudalism: what killed kapitalism?* (London: Vintage, 2024), 181-5.

¹⁷ Fuga, *Majtas*, 28.

¹⁸ Margit Tavits & Natalia Letki, "When Left is Right: Party Ideology and Policy in Post-Communist Europe," *The American Political Sciences Review* 103, no. 4 (November 2009): 556.

¹⁹ Attila Ágh, "The Rocky Road of Europeanization in the New Member States: From the Democracy Capture to the Second Try of Democratization," *Polish Sociological Review* 1, no. 193 (2016): 77-81.

Such developments have led some extra-parliamentary parties to regard the Albanian SPA with distrust, considering it a mainstream party that has distanced itself from both the leftist ideology and democratic traditions. However, how has the SPA changed, and what specific characteristics does it have compared to similar parties in Europe?

The Communist Successor: The Socialist Party of Albania (SPA)

The Socialist Party of Albania (SPA) is a post-communist party that not only survived Albania's political transition, but has also remained the most influential, if not the dominant, political force in the country. It is surrounded by a constellation of minor left-wing organizations that, together with the SPA, constitute the core of Albania's historical left-wing political landscape.

According to Artan Fuga, the transformation of the SPA occurred in five main stages beginning in 1990. The first stage, from 1990 to 1991, involved reformist factions still heavily influenced by the Labor Party of Albania (LPA) and Marxist-Leninist doctrine. The second stage, from 1991 to 1992, took a more critical stance toward the past but continued to uphold key tenets such as opposition to economic privatization. During the third stage, from 1992 to 1997, liberal economic principles gained traction, and Albania's path toward European integration was framed as irreversible. The fourth stage, from 1997 to 2005, saw the consolidation of economic and social liberalism alongside democratic reforms.²⁰ Finally, a fifth stage, from 2005 to the present, marks the SPA's broader detachment from its communist roots, in order to expand its electoral base under new leadership.

The urgency with which leaders like Fatos Nano and Edi Rama pushed for reform must be understood within this broader transformation. In Huntington's and Ishiyama's typologies, the SPA's early evolution reflects a struggle between "standpatters" and "liberal reformers," while the fifth stage marks competition between liberals and "democratic reformers."²¹

²⁰ Fuga, *Majtas*, 99-108.

²¹ Samuel P. Huntington, "How Countries Democratize," *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no. 4 (Winter 1991-1992): 588.

Communist Albania was a one-party state with totalitarian characteristics. Similar to Romania and North Korea, it evolved into a personal dictatorship under Enver Hoxha.²² Unlike in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and East Germany, where the ruling party's constitutional dominance had been removed, the LPA's role was central to public life, both in practice and in the constitution.²³ Following Hoxha's death in April 1985, Albania's one-party system entered a phase of democratic transition that, while difficult, proved more linear than in some other post-communist states.²⁴

Unlike Hungary and Bulgaria, where reformers ousted long-standing leaders such as János Kádár and Todor Zhivkov, Albania's transition was orchestrated from within. Ramiz Alia, Hoxha's successor and the LPA's Secretary General, began laying the groundwork for political reform.²⁵ He positioned himself as a liberal reformer, opposing calls from pro-Hoxha hardliners for a continuation of communist orthodoxy. Alia's tenure was brief, exemplifying Samuel Huntington's view of liberal reformers as transitional figures who do not remain in power long.²⁶

At Alia's initiative, a coalition government of liberal communists and anti-communists was formed in 1991. It was referred to as the Government of Stability and was in power from June 11 to December 6. This experiment in political inclusion supports Huntington's argument that successful transitions from communist rule require liberal and democratic reformers to marginalize hardline elements.²⁷

Drawing on Huntington's typology, John Ishiyama examines how conservatives, liberals, and democratic reformers shaped the transition of ex-communist parties. He identifies both internal and external factors that determine whether these reformers can effectively adapt parties to post-communist political realities.²⁸ Among the external factors are electoral rules and opportunities available for party adaptation.

²² Huntington, "How Countries," 582.

²³ *Ibid.*, 585.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 587-8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 595.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 600-1.

²⁸ John T. Ishiyama, "Communist Parties in Transition: Structures, Leaders, and Processes of Democratization in Eastern Europe," *Comparative Politics* 27, no. 2 (January 1995): 147-8.

According to Ishiyama, presidential systems tend to soften ideological rigidity, whereas proportional electoral systems tend to reinforce it.²⁹ Albania has never been a presidential system and has maintained ideological inflexibility. In 1991, the country employed a pure majoritarian electoral system. From 1992 to 2008, it adopted a mixed model, with 100 of 140 MPs elected by majority vote and 40 through enhanced proportional representation. Since 2008, elections have been held under a regional proportional system.³⁰ Like many other countries, Albania revised its electoral rules following its initial transition.

In terms of economic and political conditions, Albania shares features with countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria. Reformers in all of these countries, including Albania, embraced the principles of a market economy.³¹ Yet, during its years in opposition, from 1992 to 1997, the SPA preserved strong connections to the past, particularly in terms of collective memory and social protections, at a time when neoliberal reforms had brought about unemployment, poverty, and mass migration. This dynamic fostered the dominance of liberal reformers, who, in Ishiyama's view, tend to accept liberal reforms without outright repudiating the past.³² The SPA's return to power in 1997, with Fatos Nano as chairman, marked its first electoral victory since its defeat in 1992 and reinforced the influence of this reformist faction.

On the issue of ethnic division, the SPA followed a markedly different trajectory from its counterparts in Serbia and Bulgaria, where former communist parties often championed the interests of specific ethnic groups.³³ In contrast, building on the legacy of the LPA, the SPA helped consolidate an inclusive Albanian national identity. It refrained from nationalist rhetoric, particularly toward the Greek minority, which has long been represented by the Union for Human Rights Party. Socialist prime ministers, including Nano, appointed members of the

²⁹ Ishiyama, "Communist Parties," 150.

³⁰ Eltion Meka & Ilir Kalemaj, *Gracka e votuesit* [The Voter Trap] (Tiranë: UET Press, 2018), 51-98.

³¹ Ishiyama, "Communist Parties," 152.

³² *Ibid.*, 149.

³³ *Ibid.*, 153.

Greek minority to cabinet positions. Albania's ethnic homogeneity—with approximately 90% of the population identifying as Albanian—further insulated the country from ethnic fragmentation.³⁴

Ishiyama identifies two internal factors influencing party transition: the legacy of the past and the nature of transition dynamics. Regarding the first, Albania differed from Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic states, where communist parties often clashed with nationalist movements. In Albania, the LPA fused communism with nationalism, making the regime more tolerable to the population.³⁵ As a result, the SPA did not sever its ties with the communist past immediately, but instead leveraged those connections for electoral and nostalgic appeal.

In terms of transition dynamics, Albania mirrors the experiences of Bulgaria and Romania, where liberal reformers gained dominance over conservatives and democratic reformers. By contrast, in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Lithuania, democratic reformers prevailed, while the Czech Republic experienced difficulties due to the persistence of hardline factions.³⁶

The Labor Party of Albania (LPA) changed its name six months after the founding of the Democratic Party of Albania (DPA), the country's first pluralist political party, and three months after the creation of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which emerged from the communist left.³⁷ However, as Helga A. Welsh notes, the transformation of the LPA and similar parties began prior to the advent of pluralist elections.³⁸

In line with developments in Bulgaria, liberals outnumbered hardliners in the LPA's leadership by the time Ramiz Alia succeeded Enver Hoxha in 1985. Following the 1981 suicide of hardline Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu, Alia initiated modest reforms aimed at easing Albania's isolation, such as improving relations with neighboring countries and West Germany. As the Cold War ended and Albania's position became untenable, Alia paved the way for succession by another liberal, the Deputy Prime Minister and economist Fatos Nano.

³⁴ Ishiyama, "Communist Parties," 153.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁷ Aleksandër Meksi, *Dhjetor '90* [December '90] (Tiranë: UET Press, 2010), 111.

³⁸ Helga A. Welsh, "Political Transition Processes in Central and Eastern Europe," *Comparative Politics* 26, no. 4 (July 1994): 380.

Both the SPA and the SDP were founded by mid-level LPA cadres who saw center-left politics as the only viable future path.³⁹ Younger liberal figures replaced more conservative elements in the leadership, while the Politburo and Central Committee were dissolved and replaced by new institutions. Alia soon withdrew from politics, and Fatos Nano emerged as the new leader of the SPA.

Under Nano's leadership, the SPA rebranded itself as a center-left party, embracing social democracy and progressive values. Nevertheless, its voter base remained rooted in former LPA supporters, including workers, peasants, and ex-military personnel.⁴⁰ The party's link to Albania's communist past remained strong throughout its years in opposition, from 1992 to 1997.

His main internal rival, Servet Pëllumbi, who was also the party's vice-president, defended those Marxist foundations. The conflict culminated in Pëllumbi's resignation in 1996, following a prolonged ideological standoff with Nano, who was pushing increasingly hard for reformist policies.⁴¹

Nano's eventual triumph, even while behind bars, marked the SPA's final break from its LPA origins, although emotional and historical ties among party members lingered.⁴² In the 1997 elections, Nano became Prime Minister, and the SPA returned to power for the first time since its transformation. The party played a central role in stabilizing the country after the 1997 financial and political crisis.⁴³ In 2003, the SPA became a full member of the Socialist International and affiliated with the Party of European Socialists (PES) within the EU.

Although Nano retained de facto control of the SPA until 2005, his leadership was periodically contested by younger figures such as Pandeli Majko and Ilir Meta, who alternated with him as Prime Minister. Despite their prominence, Nano marginalized these democratic reformers. Eventually, in 2005, he was ousted, and the party leadership passed to another rising figure, Edi Rama, the then Mayor of Tirana.

³⁹ Progni, *Trashëgimtarët*, 86-9.

⁴⁰ Fuga, *Media*, 113.

⁴¹ Progni, *Trashëgimtarët*, 263-75.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 280-1.

⁴³ Fuga, *Majtas*, 104-7.

Nano and Rama remain the only individuals to have chaired the SPA since 1991, a situation resembling that of Bulgaria, where, as Ishiyama observes, ex-communist parties often lacked strong traditions of internal pluralism.⁴⁴ Under Nano, the SPA maintained a degree of ideological rigidity. Like its Bulgarian counterpart, and unlike the more adaptive ex-communist parties of Poland or the Czech Republic, it faced no credible competition from other left-wing forces.⁴⁵

According to Ziblatt and Bizziouras, Albania's experience parallels that of Bulgaria and Romania in other ways as well: all of the three countries shared agrarian pre-communist economies and underwent top-down, non-negotiated transitions to multiparty democracy.⁴⁶ These features contributed to an already weak internal competition and a highly centralized party structure. As a result, the SPA, much like the DPA, has long struggled with internal democracy, with leaders enjoying significant autonomy from party membership.

Drawing on the typology developed by Kitschelt, Mansfeldová, Markowski, and Tóka, post-communist parties are categorized into three types based on their historical power structures: patrimonial, national-accommodative, and bureaucratic-authoritarian.⁴⁷ Albania falls into the patrimonial category, in which political and administrative relations under communism were based more on personal loyalty to the leadership than on ideological alignment.⁴⁸ In such cases, the abruptness of transitions like Albania's tends to produce post-communist parties with weaker institutional foundations and less stable internal structures.⁴⁹

The fifth stage of the SPA's transformation began with Edi Rama's election as chairman in 2005. Rama reoriented the party's focus toward a more market-oriented agenda, successfully attracting younger members

⁴⁴ Ishiyama, "Communist Parties," 162.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴⁶ Daniel F. Ziblatt and Nick Bizziouras, "Doomed to be Radicals?" in *The Communist Successor Parties of Central and Eastern Europe*, eds. András Bozóki and John T. Ishiyama (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002), 289.

⁴⁷ Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowskia and Gabor Toka, *Post-communist party system* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 23-8.

⁴⁸ Kitschelt et al., *Post-communist*, 23.

⁴⁹ Ishiyama, "A typology," 277.

and laying the groundwork for the SPA's return to power in the 2013 elections.⁵⁰ He branded this new phase as *Renewal* (*Rilindje*), promoting a political vision that balanced historical legacy with a modernizing ethos.

In the 2009 elections, which the SPA narrowly lost, Rama introduced the slogan "Beyond Left and Right," drawing inspiration from Tony Blair's repositioning of the British Labor Party. This phrase became a hallmark of Rama's strategy to modernize the SPA, though it was met with controversy. Critics argued that the slogan signaled a drift to the right, potentially undermining the party's leftist identity.

Servet Pëllumbi voiced concerns about the undemocratic tendencies of contemporary political parties – including the SPA – highlighting the risks of excessive presidential-style leadership and inter-party compromises.⁵¹ Similarly, party ideologue Moikom Zeqo criticized Western center-left parties for prioritizing electoral performance over ideological coherence. He opposed Rama's slogan as populist and anti-democratic, warning that detaching the party from its ideological roots could create a leadership vacuum and undermine long-term stability.⁵²

Nonetheless, Rama continued to promote the "Beyond Left and Right" narrative in subsequent campaigns, framing it as an inclusive and pragmatic approach. Two years earlier, he had publicly declared that the era of ideologies had ended in the previous century.⁵³ Rama thus stands as the SPA's most prominent democratic reformer—one who has not only distanced the party from its communist past, but also challenged its ideological rigidity in an effort to broaden its voter base and secure electoral victories.

⁵⁰ Progni, *Trashëgimtarët*, 305.

⁵¹ Pëllumbi, *Pluralizmi*, 121-46; Pëllumbi, *Dështimi*, 143-44.

⁵² "Moikom Zeqo: Refleksion në 25-vjetorin e themelimit të PS" [Moikom Zeqo: Reflection on the 25th anniversary of SPA's establishment], *Gazeta Dita*, June 14, 2016, accessed January 30, 2025, <https://arkiva.gazetadita.al/refleksion-ne-25-vjetorin-e-themelimit-te-ps-qendrestaret-dhe-te-klonuarit-e-se-majtes/>.

⁵³ Progni, *Trashëgimtarët*, 306-7.

Overall Characteristics: Examining the Platforms

SPA's Priorities

The SPA defines itself as a social democratic party, grounded in principles of equality, freedom, solidarity, social justice, and equal opportunities for women and youth. These values are presented as the foundation of democratic socialism, with equity and liberty portrayed as cornerstones of a fair and prosperous society.⁵⁴

Economically, the SPA promotes a hybrid model of market growth, social solidarity, and a stable public sector. This vision is reflected in the SPA's policy response to economic crises. Unlike the center-right's austerity-driven approach, marked by wage and pension cuts, the SPA has prioritized fiscal consolidation paired with social protections. To support the middle class and vulnerable groups, the SPA introduced progressive taxation and raised the minimum taxable income threshold. The SPA also abolished profit tax for small businesses employing roughly 150,000 people, generating about €200 million in savings for this sector.⁵⁵

Healthcare policy reflects the SPA's commitment to ensuring universal access as a fundamental right. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government implemented redistributive measures amounting to €80 million (5% of GDP) to support civil servants, the unemployed, disadvantaged communities, and pensioners.

In terms of social issues, the SPA has taken a conservative stance on same-sex rights. Although the party charter mentions support for "all forms of companionship," it does not explicitly reference LGBTQ+ rights. Conversely, environmental protection is more clearly featured in SPA policy. The government has enacted a moratorium on deforestation and hunting, planted 20 million trees, and initiated waste reforms, including

⁵⁴ "Statuti dhe Rregulloret e Partisë Socialiste [Statute and Regulations of the Socialist Party]," *ISSUU*, accessed February 20, 2024, https://issuu.com/partiasocialiste/docs/1._statuti_dhe_rregulloret..._e_p_.

⁵⁵ "Programi Qeverisës 2021-2025" [The Governmental Agenda 2021-2025], Këshilli i Ministrave i Republikës së Shqipërisë [Cabinet of the Republic of Albania], accessed February 22, 2025, https://kryeministria.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Programi_Qeverises_2021-2025.pdf.

restrictions on single-use plastic bags. The SPA's investment in social housing further underscores its social democratic orientation. From 2013 to 2021, approximately €30 million was allocated to housing programs, benefiting 12,750 families, including 8,000 low-income households.

Education and pension-related expenditures continue to be among the core priorities of SPA. The 2025 budget reaffirms the SPA's social commitment, with allocations including 3.3% of GDP for education, 2.9% for healthcare, €12.6 million for reimbursed medications, and 9.5% for social protection.⁵⁶

While embracing market-oriented policies, the SPA aligns with European social democratic models through its emphasis on taxation, welfare, and public services. However, unlike left-wing parties in Greece during the 2009–2015 crisis, the SPA has not adopted anti-austerity or anti-globalization rhetoric. Finally, the SPA has prioritized gender equality, significantly increasing the number of women in both central and local government.

Smaller Social Democratic Parties

The Social Democratic Party of Albania (SDPA)

The SDPA has maintained a left-wing orientation since its founding, largely due to its origins in the Labor Party of Albania (LPA). Despite its leftist credentials, the SDPA's political activity has been primarily defined by its alliances with the Socialist Party of Albania (SPA).

Beyond these coalitions, the SDPA has not engaged in public discourse centered on left-wing principles. Like most Albanian political parties, the SDPA has often functioned as a sectarian party, defined more by its opposition to the DPA, than by a distinct ideological platform.

The SDPA's economic agenda emphasizes raising wages and pensions, creating new jobs, and expanding social housing. However, the party

⁵⁶ "Projektbuxheti 2025" [The 2025 Draft budget], Republika e Shqipërisë, Ministria e Financave [Republic of Albania, The Ministry of Finances], accessed February 27, 2025, <https://financa.gov.al/en/projektbuxheti-2025/>.

frames its policy proposals more as technocratic measures than ideological commitments. Healthcare policies focus on expanding the range of state-funded medical treatments, improving the working conditions of medical professionals, and increasing investment in medical research.⁵⁷

In education, the SDPA advocates equal access to preschool programs, improving public education quality, supporting vocational training, and providing free textbooks adapted for children with disabilities. Environmental issues are also part of the SDPA platform, which calls for strengthening environmental legislation, introducing separate waste collection, reducing vehicle numbers in urban areas, increasing green spaces, revising construction standards to prioritize green spaces, building wastewater treatment plants, and strengthening air pollution controls.

The Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI)

The SMI was founded by Ilir Meta in 2004 following his split from the SPA, a move that contributed to the SPA's defeat in the 2005 elections. The newly established party did not introduce substantive innovations to the SPA's left-wing agenda, apart from a stronger emphasis on European integration as a strategic priority for Albania. The SMI framed its political actions as part of a broader effort to consolidate Albania's European trajectory, using this rationale to justify its participation in governing coalitions.

In 2009, the SMI entered a coalition with the center-right DPA. It realigned with the SPA in 2013, only to switch back to the DPA after 2017, following Ilir Meta's election as President of Albania with SPA support. Meta completed his presidential term in 2022 amid escalating tensions with the SPA, which led him to rename the party the Freedom Party (FP). The FP now appeals to populism and national sovereignty, effectively cutting ties with left-wing politics.

In 2013, the SMI promoted economic growth while avoiding the ideological framing of tax policy. When Meta was asked about the socialist

⁵⁷ "Misioni & Vizioni ynë" [Our Mission & Vission], Partia Socialdemokrate e Shqipërisë [The Social-democratic Party of Albania], accessed February 27, 2025, <https://psd.al/>.

character of the SMI's agenda, which included certain neoliberal elements, Meta responded that the state had a duty to adopt a broad range of policies to address social problems instead of relying solely on market forces. He cited job creation as the most important social element of the party's platform while encouraging women's participation in business rather than politics.⁵⁸ Another key policy was the introduction of a subsidized energy tariff for low-income consumers. In the 2009 coalition government with Berisha, the SMI also advocated for progressive taxation on energy tariffs for vulnerable groups.

The Party of Social Democracy (PSD)

The PSD was founded in 2003 following a split within the Social Democratic Party. Paskal Milo, a prominent professor and former foreign minister in Nano's cabinet from 1997 to 2001, positioned the PSD as a center-left political party. The party's core values, as outlined in its Charter, include freedom, justice, social solidarity, and equality before the law. The PSD's mission is to promote democratic representation, particularly for vulnerable groups, and to oppose all forms of discrimination. The party also emphasizes human rights and poverty reduction as central goals.⁵⁹

Although the PSD maintains a leftist identity, its political activity has been limited. Unlike the SDPA and the SMI, the PSD has avoided direct involvement in any major governing coalitions. Its influence has remained modest, and its platform, which has been focused on broad social and economic principles, has not translated into significant political breakthroughs.

The Emergence of Extra-Parliamentary Parties

The transformation of political parties since the 1960s, especially under the pressures of globalization, has weakened ideological clarity and

⁵⁸ "LSI PROGRAMI" [SMI's Platform], Tv Klan, June 12, 2013, <https://tvklan.al/lsi-programi>

⁵⁹ "Statuti i partisë" [The Party's Charter], Partia Demokracia Sociale [Party of Social Democracy], accessed March 1, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090524151641/http://www.pds.al/?fq=mesi&gj=gjl&kid=4>.

reduced political polarization. These broader shifts also shaped Albania's internal developments. The country's post-communist left was largely defined by the economic hardships of the late communist period and of the neoliberal reforms introduced by right-wing governments in the early 1990s, resulting in a left which has been shaped by social liberalism.

Although the idea of moving "beyond left and right" mirrors global trends, Albania's political class has not fully embraced it. The SPA government has implemented neoliberal policies, regarded as necessary for economic development, which in turn included Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and the allocation of public land to strategic investors. However, critics interpret these moves as rightward shifts. In response, new political movements have emerged, capitalizing on widespread dissatisfaction with corruption and the undemocratic nature of established parties.

The leadership structures of Albania's dominant parties, the SPA and the DPA, have shown remarkable stability since 1991. The SPA has had only two leaders, Nano and Rama, while the DPA has had four, with Sali Berisha maintaining long-term influence. The SMI, too, has remained under the control of Ilir Meta and Monika Kryemadhi, a husband-wife duo. Most smaller parties have also experienced minimal leadership turnover. This stagnation reflects what Katz and Mair define as "cartel parties," political entities that leverage their control of state institutions to restrict competition.⁶⁰

Despite its 2021 electoral victory and a third consecutive term in office, the SPA has yet to introduce a National Minimum Wage, a core component of welfare reform. This absence, coupled with PPP-driven governance, has created a democratic and ideological vacuum within Albania's left-wing political landscape. Given the left's traditional role in defending democracy and social justice, the lack of a coherent progressive alternative is particularly notable.

Two extra-parliamentary parties have emerged to fill this gap: the Movement Together (MT) and the Hashtag Initiative (HI). Both have been formed in response to elite entrenchment, low civic participation, and widespread corruption. They gained national attention through the

⁶⁰ Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair, "The Cartel Party Thesis: A Restatement," *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 4 (December 2009): 756.

2018 student protests and the 2020 opposition to the demolition of the National Theatre in Tirana. Influenced by nationalist movements, such as Red and Black Alliance in the case of HI and Kosovo's Vetëvendosje in the case of MT, their populist rhetoric reflected broader regional dynamics. Previous movements like "Enough" and G-99 were eventually absorbed by the SPA.

The Movement Together (MT)

Founded in 2022, MT quickly gained prominence after performing well in local elections in Tirana. It is the only Albanian party with an explicitly left-wing platform, clearly articulated in its founding charter.⁶¹ MT positions itself as a party of the democratic left, long marginalized in Albanian politics. Its central aim is to combat extreme economic inequality, which it views, through a Marxist lens, as the root cause of exploitation, poverty, democratic deficits, and cultural erosion. It frames solidarity as a transformative social force. MT emphasizes labor rights and considers the working class to be the catalyst for progressive change. It is also the only party to openly support same-sex rights:

"We believe that every individual, regardless of their ethnic, linguistic, religious, sexual, regional, or other categorization, orientation, and self-definition of identity, should be treated with respect and equality, and not be subjected to discrimination by the state or society."⁶²

MT champions traditional leftist causes: participatory democracy, environmental protection, national self-determination, and an inclusive form of patriotism. It celebrates the welfare state as one of history's greatest achievements and calls for universal healthcare, education, housing, income support, and social inclusion. Its platform includes key goals such as introducing a National Minimum Wage, raising wages and pensions, improving workers' vacation rights, promoting gender equality,

⁶¹ "Manifesti i Lëvizjes Bashkë" [The Platform of the Movement Together], Lëvizja Bashkë [The Movement Together], accessed March 2, 2025, <https://levizjabashke.al/manifesti/>.

⁶² "Manifesti i Lëvizjes."

and expanding free public services.⁶³ MT also supports trade union organization and collective bargaining. This positioning distinguishes it from other Albanian parties. Notably, it has actively supported workers' protests, especially those of mine workers.

The Hashtag Initiative (HI)

The Hashtag Initiative (HI) presents itself as a rational, reformist, and democratic alternative.⁶⁴ Similar to the Movement Together (MT), HI it is an anti-establishment party that challenges the dominance of the SPA and DPA. HI accuses both parties of corruption and authoritarianism. HI also criticizes Albania's economic elites, portraying them as oligarchs colluding with political power.

The main difference between HI and MT is HI's emphasis on judicial reform as the foundation of democratization. While MT blames Albania's social and economic failures on capitalist exploitation, HI argues that poor governance stems from a broken legal system. Aligned more closely with social liberalism, HI supports the coexistence of private and public capital markets: *"Capital markets need to open up to large companies and businesses to accelerate the penetration of cheap capital into the economy."*⁶⁵

HI's social agenda includes moderate but socially responsive policies. It supports National Minimum Wage, reimbursement of electricity and water costs for low-income families, and the creation of a basic income drawn from public resource revenues. The party also advocates tax relief for small businesses and start-ups to address unemployment. Draft legislation proposed by HI includes targeted support for enterprises led by people with disabilities and disadvantaged communities, along with proposals to designate public beaches as free-access spaces.⁶⁶ Social housing and healthcare access for marginalized families are also core priorities.

⁶³ "Kauzat" [Causes], Lëvizja Bashkë [The Movement Together], accessed March 2, 2025, <https://levizjabashke.al/kauzat/punetore/>

⁶⁴ "Karta 2020" [The 2020 Charter Card], Nima Thurrje [The Hashtag Initiative], accessed March 4, 2025, <https://nisma.al/karta-2020/>.

⁶⁵ "Karta 2020."

⁶⁶ "Kauzat tona" [Our Causes], Nima Thurrje [The Hashtag Initiative], accessed March 4, 2025, <https://nisma.al/kauzat/>.

HI's political identity is defined by its anti-corruption platform. Unlike MT's labor-oriented activism, HI has focused on filing formal legal complaints with Albania's Special Prosecution Office against senior political figures. This legalistic strategy underscores its belief in institutional reform as the path to democratization, setting it apart from movements grounded in labor advocacy.

Specific Characteristics and the Left Agenda

In addition to outlining the characteristics of the SPA as Albania's ex-communist party and analyzing the platforms of six left-wing parties, it is also important to explore their specific attributes. Defining leftist ideology remains challenging, especially due to its fluidity and to the influence of broader political and economic contexts. However, Albania's left-wing parties do share certain common positions on economic and social issues that align with the broader leftist agenda in Europe and the United States. This raises a central question: What criteria must mainstream political forces meet to be classified as left-wing parties?

Identification with the Communist Past

The SPA has been more closely tied to Albania's communist past than any other party, largely because it is the direct successor of the Labor Party of Albania (LPA). After June 1991, many former LPA members, including approximately 50,000 World War II (WWII) veterans, joined the SPA. These veterans played a significant role in reinforcing the SPA's electoral strength during the early 1990s, when the party was in opposition.⁶⁷

Today, a substantial segment of SPA voters consists of individuals whose families include former communists or veterans. This reflects the significant influence of family ties in Albanian politics, which often outweighs the role of ideology.⁶⁸ These voters often express nostalgia for

⁶⁷ Fuga, *Media*, 119-20.

⁶⁸ Artan Fuga, *Brirët e dhisë* [Goat's horns] (Tiranë: Ora, 2008), 349-57.

Albania's communist past, particularly for the perceived benefits of free education and healthcare, low crime rates, and stable social norms.⁶⁹ For many senior citizens and former communists, the repressive nature of the communist regime has been overshadowed by these perceived benefits.⁷⁰

The MT reflects a similar connection to Albania's communist past. Although it lacks a stable voter base of former communists and older citizens, the MT openly expresses pride in the country's history of social emancipation. In contrast, the other parties are less connected to the communist past. This is partly because they were founded more recently, as with the HI, or because their leadership is composed of individuals not directly linked to the communist era. This applies to the SDPA and the PSD, where only former SDPA chairman Skënder Gjinushi served as a minister in the late 1980s. Similarly, the SMI was founded as a power-sharing party in Albanian politics, and only a few of its members have roots in the LPA.

This identification with the past has created a symbolic divide – one of the three major cleavages examined in this study – between left-wing and non-left-wing parties. Left-wing parties view Albania's communist past as a shared national legacy rather than the exclusive history of a single party. As a result, they embrace the symbolic significance of certain historical anniversaries. For example, November 28 commemorates Albania's liberation from Nazi occupation during WWII, while November 29 commemorates the establishment of the communist state in 1944. Left-wing parties continue to recognize both dates as national holidays, whereas right-wing parties have sought to delegitimize November 29 due to its association with the communist regime and the former Yugoslavia's national day.

Democratization of the Economy: Equality as Opportunity

Economic equality has long been a core tenet of leftist ideology. In modern leftist discourse, however, this concept has shifted toward promoting

⁶⁹ Fuga, *Media*, 112-13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

equal opportunities rather than absolute economic equality.⁷¹ All six left-wing parties in Albania have incorporated social welfare measures into their platforms, focusing on protecting vulnerable groups and improving the integration of marginalized communities.

The SPA has consistently advocated progressive taxation as a mechanism for democratizing the economy and promoting a fairer society in the context of globalization. Beyond rhetorical commitments, the SPA has implemented progressive taxation during its time in government from 1997 to 2005 and from 2013 to the present. Similar measures have also been supported by other left-wing coalition partners, such as the SDPA, the PSD, and the SMI. When the SMI entered a coalition with the center-right DPA from 2009 to 2013, it insisted on including progressive taxation on electricity tariffs as part of the governing agenda.

SPA's social policies have focused on providing equal opportunities despite Albania's economic challenges. In 2013, the government established the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, although subsequent administrations, from 2017 to 2025 transferred social welfare responsibilities to the Ministry of Health. The SPA government tripled the budget for social allowances in 2013 and pledged to combat abuse by wealthy individuals. It also increased financial support for people with disabilities and their caregivers.

In the pension sector, the SPA government introduced reforms in 2014, removing the upper limit for those with high national insurance contributions and gradually increasing pension payments. In 2017, the government introduced a Social Policy Pact designed to modernize the welfare state. Another reform announced at the end of 2024 aimed to improve pension efficiency by combating the informal economy. The SPA faces the difficult task of balancing its social agenda with the constraints of Albania's economic reality. By contrast, non-parliamentary parties such as the HI and the MT have greater flexibility in presenting ambitious welfare proposals.

The HI adopts a social liberal stance, aiming to combine the inflow of foreign capital with social policies, including the introduction of a national minimum wage. It is notable that the SPA, despite its general focus on social issues, has yet to establish a national minimum wage.

⁷¹ Fuga, *Media*, 112-13.

The MT, on the other hand, promotes a more explicitly leftist economic agenda. The party's platform includes Marxist critiques of capitalism and calls for the nationalization of key resources such as oil and chromium. The MT's leader has voiced strong criticisms of capitalism, warning that its failures could give rise to authoritarianism and social instability. This perspective underscores the MT's ideological commitment to addressing economic inequality and protecting social justice through systemic reforms. The MT's approach represents a sharper ideological contrast with the social liberalism of the HI and the more pragmatic stance of the SPA.

Democratization of Political Authority: Equality as Social Justice

A core value of the left, according to the SPA, is the deepening of political democracy, complemented by elements of economic democracy. However, one of the most significant violations of Albania's constitutional principle of equality is the bias within the judicial system.⁷² This bias has been the country's primary challenge in consolidating political authority in the post-communist era and has posed the greatest obstacle to Albania's democratization and its progress toward EU accession. In other words, the democratization of public affairs in Albania is closely tied to combating corruption and its pervasive influence on politics.

The SPA has been the dominant political party supporting comprehensive judicial reform, which was unanimously approved by the Albanian parliament in 2016. The SPA's political backing for these reforms has remained consistent, even as the newly established judicial bodies have prosecuted high-ranking SPA officials, including members of parliament, cabinet ministers, mayors, and even a former Deputy Prime Minister. The Special Structure against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK), which has recommended legal action against key figures from both the SPA and the center-right opposition, now enjoys high levels of public trust among Albanian citizens. HI has also openly supported SPAK, even though it has never been in a position to govern the country. The party views SPAK's success in holding corrupt political figures accountable as a key step toward Albania's democratization.

⁷² Fuga, *Media*, 218.

MT, as previously noted, places greater emphasis on economic equality than on judicial reform. By contrast, the SMI has taken a more inconsistent position. The party turned against SPAK after 2017, when its leader, Ilir Meta, was serving as the President of Albania. Meta was arrested for corruption in October 2024. Another political figure under SPAK investigation is Tom Doshi, the head of the SDPA. No other major party has taken a clear public stance on the rule of law.

Notably, the SMI – now rebranded as the Freedom Party (FP) – is the only party that has embraced Trumpism and right-wing populism in its political rhetoric. This shift aligns with the position of the DPA. All other parties have distanced themselves from such rhetoric, including conspiracy theories that portray George Soros and other social emancipation initiatives as threats to democracy. This has been an aggressively promoted narrative by the DPA and the FP. In fact, DPA's chairman, Sali Berisha, called for the "de-Sorosization" of Albanian politics in 2025, advocating for the removal of political influences linked to George Soros.

Relations with Trade Unions

The relationship between Albania's left-wing parties and trade unions remains weak, largely due to the closure of state-owned factories following the collapse of communism. As Moikom Zeqo explains in his book, although the regime deprived them of private property, the number of workers increased significantly under communist rule, but many emigrated to Greece and Italy after the fall of the communist system.⁷³ Since then, the influence of organized labor on Albanian politics has diminished as governance has become increasingly centered on the media and televised politics.⁷⁴ Consequently, workers' rights and their representation have gradually faded from political discourse. Other contributing factors include rising unemployment in the early 1990s, underpayment of workers, and the politicization of trade unions, which aligned with pro-left and pro-government factions under the DPA administration.⁷⁵

⁷³ Moikom Zeqo, *Purgatori shqiptar* [Albanian Purgatory], (Tiranë: Progresi, 1995), 254-56.

⁷⁴ Zeqo, *Purgatori*, 255.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 258.

Although left-wing parties continue to present themselves as defenders of underprivileged groups, Zeqo warns that workers are often manipulated for political gain. Indeed, early labor legislation in the 1990s offered no legal protection for workers engaged in strike actions.⁷⁶ The primary framework for labor rights was established under the DPA administration, including the Labor Code of 1995. Subsequent socialist governments introduced several improvements, including Law 136 of 2015, which amended the Labor Code; the 2018 Ministerial Decision on the minimum wage; and Law 29 of 2019, which provided supplementary payments for mine workers. Despite these measures, the term "labor force" appears only once in the SPA Government Program for 2021-2025.

In its four-year manifesto (2017-2021), the SPA primarily refers to the protection of labor rights primarily in terms of combating informal and illegal work and creating new jobs. In contrast, the MT and HI have been more vocal about labor issues, particularly in their support for mine workers in the city of Bulqizë. However, while the term "worker" appears only once in HI's 2020 Charter, it appears thirteen times in MT's manifesto, reflecting the party's explicit identification with labor rights.

The MT's commitment to labor issues was further demonstrated during the 2021 parliamentary elections, one year before the party's official formation, when Arlind Qori publicly supported the candidacy of Elton Debreshi, a trade unionist from the Bulqiza mine. MT has consistently raised workers' issues not only in Bulqiza but also in other key sectors, including the oil industry, the textile and footwear industries, and call centers.

On the other hand, HI has focused more on judicial reform and broader economic issues rather than on labor rights. Its approach reflects an underlying social liberal framework that seeks to balance market-driven growth with social protection. However, MT's explicit commitment to labor rights distinguishes it as the most ideologically consistent left-wing party within Albania's contemporary political landscape.

⁷⁶ Zeqo, *Purgatori*, 257-58.

Relations with Fraternal Parties and the Left-Wing Agenda

All the parties have established ties with center-left and left-wing parties at the international level. The SPA has been a member of the Socialist International since 2002 and is also an associate member of the Party of European Socialists (PES).⁷⁷ Additionally, the SDPA and PSD, alongside the SMI until 2022, have maintained cooperative relations with the Socialist International and are regularly invited to its meetings. The SPA has developed particularly strong ties with other center-left parties, such as the Greek PASOK and the British Labor Party.⁷⁸ MT, by contrast, has cultivated ties with the left-wing party MeRA25, led by former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, and, together with HI have established relations with Kosovo's Vetëvendosje.⁷⁹

Albanian left-wing parties have focused primarily on domestic issues, such as economic development, strengthening the rule of law, and fighting corruption. While they adhere to certain traditional leftist values, they have largely avoided promoting aspects of the contemporary left-wing agenda pursued by social democratic parties in the United Kingdom, Germany, Greece, and the United States, such as equal rights for the LGBTQ+ community and a more open stance toward immigration. Albanian left-wing parties appear to have calculated that Albanian society is not yet prepared to accept such progressive social policies, prompting them to maintain a more traditional social outlook.

Environmental protection has also been a low priority for Albanian parties, as economic growth remains the dominant political focus. The SPA's manifesto does include commitments to forest and environmental

⁷⁷ Progni, *Trashëgimtarët*, 263-75.

⁷⁸ "Fatos Nano dhe Pandeli Majko në Kongresin e PASOK" [Fatos Nano and Pandeli Majko at the PASOK Congress], *TV Klan*, accessed February 27, 2025, <https://tvklan.al/fatos-nano-dhe-pandeli-majko-ne-kongresin-e-pasok-22-mars-1999>; "Statuti i ri i PS-së, Xhafaj: Sipas modelit të Partisë Laburiste" [The New SPA Charter, Xhafaj: According to the Labor Party mode], *Gazeta Shqip*, February 28, 2016, accessed February 27, 2025, <https://gazeta-shqip.com/kryesoret/statuti-i-ri-i-ps-se-xhafaj-sipas-modelit-te-partise-laburiste/>.

⁷⁹ "Varoufakis supports Arlind Qori in running for Tirana Municipality" [Varoufakis supports Arlind Qori in running for Tirana Municipality], *Hashtag.al*, April 20, 2023, accessed February 27, 2025, <https://www.hashtag.al/en/index.php/2023/04/20/varufakis-mbeshtet-arlind-qorin-ne-kandidimin-per-bashkine-tirane/>.

protection, such as a moratorium on hunting and deforestation, but broader environmental initiatives remain limited.⁸⁰

National Peculiarities

Two additional features that define Albania's left-wing parties, beyond their connection to the communist past, are regional and generational divides. The SPA's electoral stronghold has historically been situated in the area of southern Albania, whereas the DPA has consistently dominated the northern part of the country. This geographic split has persisted since 1992, with Albania's electoral map reliably shaded in purple in the south (for the SPA) and blue in the north (for the DPA).⁸¹ The two new extra-parliamentary parties, MT and HI, have yet to contest parliamentary elections, while the SDPA, under the leadership of Tom Doshi, has built a strong political base in the northern city of Shkodër, where Doshi enjoys significant local support.

Generational divides are also notable. The SPA's voter base has historically consisted of older voters, particularly retirees. This pattern reflects the party's absorption of the LPA's membership after 1991, when most of its members were middle-aged or young adults. However, this generational divide is not absolute.⁸² Other left-wing parties, which are not directly tied to the LPA, have sought to appeal to younger voters. MT and HI, in particular, have positioned themselves as vehicles for political renewal, focusing on issues like corruption and economic inequality – issues that resonate more strongly with Albania's younger population.

Conclusions

This study has examined the largely overlooked case of Albania's communist successor party and the broader Albanian left through an in-depth case study

⁸⁰ "Programi Qeverises 2017-2021" [The 2017-2021 Government Program], accessed April 2, 2025, <https://kryeministria.al/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PROGRAMI.pdf>.

⁸¹ "Rezultate zgjedhore" [Electoral results], Komisioni Qendror i Zgjedhjeve [The Central Elections Commission], accessed April 3, 2025, <https://kqz.gov.al/rezultate-zgjedhore>.

⁸² Fuga, *Media*, 119-20.

of the Socialist Party of Albania (SPA) and its surrounding constellation of minor left-wing organizations. A comparative analysis of the SPA's transformation and the manifestos of six left-wing parties reveals a shared commitment to core leftist values such as equal opportunity, civic participation, and solidarity, although these values are shaped by distinct national political cleavages. The enduring influence of the communist legacy, regional strongholds, and political identification patterns remain central to these divisions. The SPA's continuity with the former Labor Party of Albania (LPA) enabled a gradual ideological evolution marked by pragmatic adaptation and centralized leadership.

Albania's left-wing politics is shaped by broader trends, including the de-ideologization of discourse, the fusion of party and state institutions, and the embrace of liberal economic policies. These trends contribute to an ideological void. Nonetheless, the six leftist parties analyzed here share overlapping policy priorities, with the most coherent articulation of leftist principles found in the platforms of the two extra-parliamentary parties, particularly the Movement Together (MT).

Domestic political and social dynamics are equally critical in defining Albania's left. While the SPA preserves strong institutional continuity with the LPA, parties such as the SDPA and PSD have inherited only leadership structures, and the SMI has severed ties with its communist roots. Regional and generational cleavages remain defining features, with the SPA drawing significant support from retirees and southern voters.

Overall, Albanian left-wing parties reflect national specificities more than the progressive agendas of their Western counterparts, especially regarding LGBTQ+ rights, immigration, and environmentalism. While MT aligns with European social democratic movements, the SPA and HI are more closely associated with liberal socialism. Future research could further situate these parties in comparative international contexts.