



The state of Albanian Democracy at the eve of 2013 General elections

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Editor: **Albert Rakipi, PhD**

Writing: **Alba Çela, Joana Kosho**

Translation: **Andi Balla, Dhimiter Gjodede**

English Editing: **Elena Shomos**

Albanian Editing: **Emira Kokobobo**

Design: **Daniel Prifti**



Instituti i Studimeve Ndërkombëtare

Rr. Andon Zako Çajupi, No. 20/5

Tirana, Albania

Tel: +355 4 4400084 Fax: +355 4 4400085

e-mail: aiis@aiis-albania.org

url: www.aiis-albania.org



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INTRODUCTION

The upcoming round of Albanian general elections, expected on June 23rd of 2013, will be the ultimate test for Albanian democracy, in a context of high polarization and volatile stability. The elections come after a series of previous electoral processes highly contested and which have produced political crisis, boycott and grave incidents. Should Albania fail once again to carry out democratic elections' process with standards verified by international observers and outcomes accepted by domestic political actors, the consequences shall be all too weighty for a country that is a member of NATO and aspires to get to EU candidate status.

First and foremost the elections will be crucial for the political stability which is a precondition for the development of Albania.

The elections will also have a special and extraordinary importance attached to them, in the context of Albania's attempt to finalize its transition and in the context of European integration, deeply and negatively affected by the political friction so far. "Meeting the standards of "free and fair" in these elections" has been described as a pre-condition for both status and the opening of the negotiations.¹

¹ See: Catherine Ashton "Elections are a test for EU Progress", www.tiranatimes.com

The elections will take place in a context where various factors overlap.

First, politically the scene in Albania is being occupied by new issues and new actors.²

The public discourse in Albania is witnessing an unprecedented rise of nationalism, nationalistic issues and approaches and actors claiming to have in the top agenda matters pertaining to ‘the national issue’ whatever its definition is. There is almost a rat-race among actors to grab as much nationalistic headlines as possible. This is largely affecting the agenda of the media. Issues of state presence and consolidation, democracy and governance are being pushed aside to make space for strong reaction inducing proposals and their follow-up by diverse actors. This is also affecting Albania’s traditional role on the region and the way it have been perceived by the international community so far as well as it relations with the neighbors.

On a more positive note about issues, this upcoming run of elections see to have brought for the first time, even if only partially, a discussion of ideology and concrete different development alternatives especially on the economic realm with fiscal alternatives being at the forefront of debate. Tax systems, employment incentives and different development models are being talked and debated now more than before offering at least partial grounds for ideological profilization of different parties.

Despite the prevailing importance of the main two parties, the Socialist Party (SP) and the democratic one (DP), the electoral system has been proven to yield results which seek the role of a kingmaker in trying to establish a ruling majority.

(19-24/04/2013). *The EU Enlargement Commissioner, Stefan Fule, among others has insisted many times that the general elections meet a high standard in order to advance the country's EU goals. See <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/eu-reminds-albania-on-the-need-for-free-elections>*

² *This survey was conducted in the months of February-March of 2013, well before the announcement of the alliance between the Socialist Party (SP) and the Socialist Movement (SMI) for Integration hence the public effect produced by this important political development is not reflected in the data collected.*

Hence the pre-election and post-election coalitions become way too important in political calculations. This year the emergence of new political parties has to be factored in the expectations of who can serve as the king maker.

New actors, becoming more and more influential at least judging from the media coverage they get, include the Red and Black Alliance (*Alenca Kuq e Zi*), a political force with a nationalistic platform and the FRD (*Fryma e Re Demokratike*) a right wing group with primarily ex-members of the Democratic Party led by the former President Bamir Topi. However in the context of the electoral system even existing small parties take a new importance about them. These include the Party of Union for Human Rights (which represents mostly the Greek minority) and the party of the Greek minority) and the Party for Justice Integration and Unity (PDIU- popularly referred to as the party of *the Chams*), both playing in antagonism considering their stance on nationalism agendas as well as some other small parties which however have had a more stable relationship with either the SP or the DP.³

On the economic plane, the economic crisis still present at large in Europe has not spared Albania. According to the National Statistics Institute, economic growth for last year has been the lowest since the financial collapse in 1997.⁴ The effect of the crisis in neighboring Italy and Greece have had their toll on falling remittances and exports and unemployment remains a difficult challenge for Albania.

Keeping in mind this context, AIIS evaluated it necessary to conduct a thorough measuring of the public pulse in order

³ For a more comprehensive pictures of Albanian political parties and their programs see [Executive Briefing: Elections and political parties in Albania since 1991](#) a report of Tirana Center for Journalistic Excellence www.TCJE.ORG

⁴ "The Albanian government has been forced to revise downward its overoptimistic GDP growth rates [...] The latest review was made last January in the 2013-2015 economic and fiscal programme where the GDP growth forecast for 2012 was cut to 1.5 percent down from an overoptimistic 4.3 percent targeted in the initial 2012 budget." See www.tiranatimes.com (05/02/2013). Also, GDP growth for 2012 has been 1.6 % according to INSTAT.

to determine, with the limits set by the science of statistics, the real agenda of the Albanian public in the eve of these elections. This study based on a national polling serves precisely the objective of exposing the real concerns, expectations and worries of Albanian citizens on the eve of these elections, their evaluation of the health of democracy, economy and their hopes regarding the next parliament and the next government whichever side that may belong to.

This project which goes beyond an academic curiosity has two important objectives. First it strives to show the degree of correspondence between political and media rhetoric and the real citizen agenda mapped in this survey as a constellation of concerns, expectations, beliefs and desires. Second it attempts to make political parties and political actors aware of the degree of this correspondence or rather as this study will show discrepancy. AIIS believes that instigating public discourse over the real citizen agenda will have a positive effect on a better linkage between citizen interests and political platforms contributing to democracy and to future better governance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Against the complex backdrop of political canvassing, programming, nationalism rhetoric and eventual coalition calculations, the citizens' agenda seems simple yet quite dramatic: worry about economy and employment, growing anxiety about democratic standards as well as eroding trust in many institutions championed by the judiciary.

IT'S THE ECONOMY ALWAYS

Economic issues are at the forefront of citizens concerns with majority of all respondents mentioning that the biggest problem that Albanians now face together is the economic crisis. Even more so at the personal level citizens are largely worried about their insufficient incomes, the overall lack of jobs and the poverty in their lives.

It comes as no surprise that economic issues occupy the central space in the citizens' agenda in Albania. What makes economic worries and considerations about welfare, unemployment and future economic outlook more imperative in the current times are the effects of the European economic crisis which are increasingly being felt in Albania.

Two thirds of the Albanian citizens asked described the economic situation in Albania as either bad or very bad followed by 22 percent which said it was average and a small group of 7 percent that said it was good. Virtually nobody described the economic situation as very good. As for future expectations the majority, 32 percent, expects no change in the economic outlook, 29 percent say that it will improve and 21 percent expect deterioration.

Against this grim economic reality and picture of concerns, 61 percent of Albanians would leave their country if they had an opportunity to do so. This fact should not be interpreted as a potential problem of Albanians abusing their visa free travel opportunity. In fact Albanians have been largely respecting visa free travel since 2011 with only limited problems with asylum seekers. The large figure indicating the desire to leave is mostly connected to a desire to improve their economic status and give the younger generation (their children) better opportunities in life.

BASIC PUBLIC SERVICES FAIL TO DELIVER

Citizens are not happy with the quality offered in the basic services such as education and healthcare but the nuances are present when one differentiates between public and private options. Whereas a majority of citizens describe both public and private education as of average quality, more citizens believe that the private education quality is low, with 49 percent or about half of the sample, than those who say the same about public education, with 39 percent.

The reverse picture is presented in the evaluation of public and private healthcare with a majority of citizens saying that private healthcare offers indeed a good quality (42 percent) whereas again the majority judges the quality of public

healthcare as low or very low (65 percent). Roughly a third of the sample assigns average scores to both services when it comes to their quality.

Scathing evaluations are in store for the judicial system which seems to be despised by many citizens as they conclude in large numbers, indeed a full three quarters of the respondents, that this system does not deliver justice in Albania. 67 percent of citizens believe that in order to get justice one must have the right connections either personal or political. 75 percent of citizens believe that a bribe is needed in order to get justice from the current Albanian judicial system.

The tendency to distrust the justice system is becoming a worrying constant feature of the public opinion and is not bulging even after several attempts of reforming this sector.

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE NEW PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT

Just as their main concerns lie on the economic plane, the main priorities of Albanian citizens for the future governance also reflect the same nature of economic centrality.

Albanians believe that the top priorities for the next Albanian parliament should be the “proper functioning of the state” with the largest score of 26.3 of the answers given; “guaranteeing possibilities for new job places and fighting poverty” with 21.2 percent of all answers as well as the traditional classic function of the parliament “to approve legislation and promote its implementation” with 13.1 percent of the answers.

Only 3.8 percent of respondents expect the parliament to have as a priority the unification of all Albanians in one state while 2.2 percent mention unification with Kosovo and 1.8 percent resolving the Cam issue as a priority.

When asked about the priorities of the new government, Albanians lean heavily on the economic side and focus on services. The top three priorities for the new government according to the respondents should be “economic development and the creation of new jobs” which consists in 28.8 percent of all answers given, “raising of standards in public services such as education and healthcare” with 17.8 percent of the answers and a tie between youth employment and fight against poverty at 16.5 and 16.4 percent for each.

Nationalistic agenda issues are being mentioned by only 2.2 percent who pick unifying Albania with Kosovo as a priority while 1.8 percent speak about protecting the right of Albanians living outside the formal borders of Albania.

THE NATIONALISTIC AGENDA IGNORED

Even though the majority of political parties, if not all of them, have included to different degrees issues of the nationalistic nature it seems it has not succeeded in giving these issues an important place in the citizens’ agenda. Even though all politicians go through efforts to seem patriotically correct debates that deal with the future of Albanians in the region or the unresolved problems between Albania and Greece have a peripheral nature to the citizens concerns. It might seem contradictory at first sight that even though only around 2 percent of Albanians expect the new parliament or the new government to unify Albania with Kosovo when it comes to voting in an actual referendum over approval of such a unification the support rate jumps over 50 percent. However this fact can be largely explained by a high degree of conformism and desire to appear patriotically correct on the side of Albanian citizens.

Both these questions' answers underline the fact that Albanians have pragmatic rather than high-cause nationalistic priorities and focus their interests in measures for economic development, fight against poverty and new job openings. Very few citizens seem to want the next legislative and executive undertaking nationalistic endeavors of any kind.

DEMOCRACY AND ELECTIONS

Voter turnout is expected to be high in the upcoming elections as 71 percent of those asked said that they will be going to vote on June 23 and 76 percent said they had actively voted in the last local elections. Out of the small group that respondents that they were unlikely to go vote the majority explained this by saying that they either didn't believe the elections were going to be free or they believed their vote didn't matter and wouldn't change things.

Indeed 42 percent of Albanians do not expect these elections do be free and fair against 30 percent that expect these standards indeed to be met. Many citizens remain confused over what to expect as a quarter of the sample does not field an answer.

Citizens are justified in their doubts about the elections standards. First the experiences in the past have always revealed a series of problems with election administration. Second, the discourse of the international community has focused many times on the importance of the free and fair elections and the issues that have been raised continuously by ambassadors and representatives of foreign diplomacy have created an atmosphere where trouble seems to be expected and urges are made to avoid it.

The most important actors in the conducting of a free and fair elections process according to citizens were: the

Central Elections Commission (CEC), the local counting commissioners and the foreign observers, with roughly 70 percent of answers attaching them considerable or maximum importance vis a vis the elections process.

There is a tendency to place higher importance with the direct management structure of the elections and with the international community. Local actors such as political parties, opposition, citizens and media are seen as also key in the process even though they rank lower than the aforementioned ones.

According to the majority of Albanians many major things are not on the right track in Albania. 51 percent of the citizens asked believed that the country is generally not moving in the right direction, 55 percent said democracy is on the wrong path and even more people seem very concerned about the economic situation as 65 percent said the Albanian economy is on the wrong path. A tenth of the citizen were undecided in all questions and did not field an answer. 60 percent of Albanians believe that they live in a nondemocratic country, roughly divided between pessimists who say that Albania is outright not a democratic state and moderates who say that there are elements of democracy but overall Albania is rather undemocratic. The evaluation shows deterioration from last year and a growing anxiety about the health of democracy in Albania.

The main challenges that Albanian democracy in order of importance according to citizens are: lack of free and fair elections (picked by a third of the sample); political conflict (according to a quarter of the sample) lack of change in the leadership of political parties and large economic disparities in the population (each of the last two with 13 percent of the answers.)

The three most important factors for Albanian democracy are: the government, the political leadership and the citizens. 14 percent of respondents believe the most important factor for democracy is the international community.

TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS:

Confirming many previous polling, the level of trust that Albanians have in institutions and representative actors is very low. The entities that Albanians distrust the most are political parties, courts and the Prime Minister followed by the Central Election Commission and the government.

High levels of distrust are also present for the office of the President and distrust persists though at lower levels for the opposition the Attorney's General Office and religious institutions.

Those who fare better in the ranking of trust are media, civil society and the police with the first one being that which inspires more significant confidence than all other actors.

Low levels of horizontal trust and trust in institutions is a feature that many polls confirm for Albania and which taken in combination with high dependence on personal and kin relations often undermines the functioning of the state from within.⁵ Citizens reflect negatively on the inability of institutions to perform in a professional, impartial and effective way.

REGIONAL FOREIGN POLICY

Half of the Albanian citizens believe that there has been a country with major influence on Albania and according to the majority of them this has been the United States of America (80 percent of those who identified a influential country.) Only 7 percent of those who see a foreign influence believe this comes from the European Union while 22 percent of citizens do not believe any state has a major influence on Albania.

⁵ For example a national youth poll conducted by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Albania reveals that young people trust only their families and depend on personal relations to find jobs. "The Voice of Albanian Youth" FES, TIRANA: 2011.

A third of the respondents believe that there is a country which is a threat to Albania with more than half of them picking up Greece as a particular threat followed up by 22 percent of them selecting Serbia. 37 percent of citizens do not see any particular country as a direct threat to Albania and a third of the sample does not have an answer to this question.

Most of citizens believe Albania should concentrate its efforts in strengthening cooperation with Kosova and Turkey followed by average groups who see benefits in collaborating with other countries in the region. The two countries to which citizens attach less value of increasing cooperation with are Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

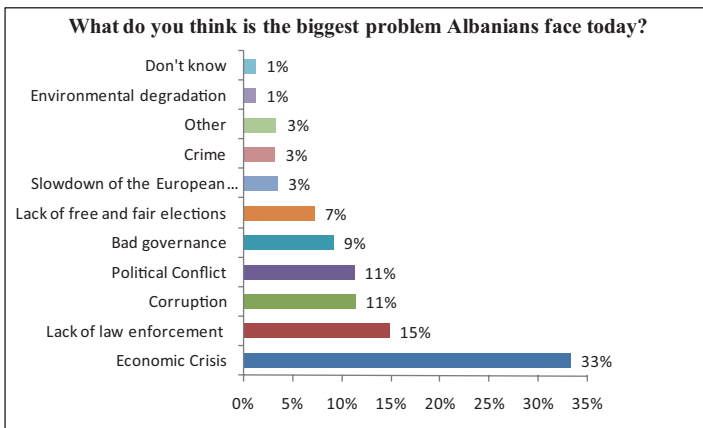
Half of the citizens believe that unification of Albania with Kosovo would be a positive thing followed by 29 percent who say it would be neither positive nor negative and 10 percent who describe it as negative. In a potential referendum 55 percent of citizens would vote in favor of unification, 16 percent would not go to vote and 14 percent would vote against.

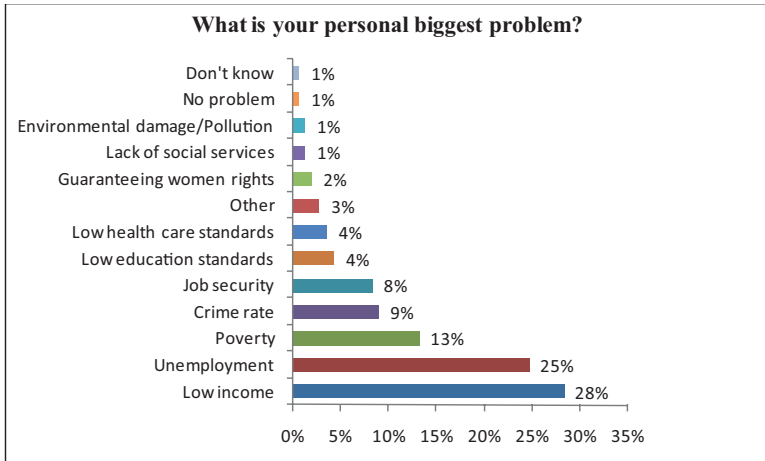
It is interesting to observe that should a moment be reached when the referendum with unification is presented as a reality citizens will vote on patriotic lines. However, for the current moment unification or any other nationalistic issues for that matter seem to rank low in the priority list for Albanians as demonstrated in the previously mentioned results about priorities suggested for the next executive and legislative.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

CONCERNS AT THE EVE OF ELECTIONS

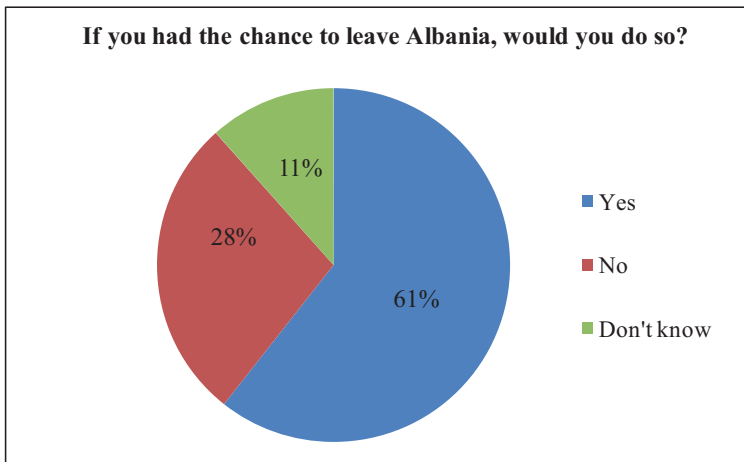
Albanians believe that the biggest problem they are cumulatively facing today is the economic crisis. The perception of the citizens closely matches reality. Economic growth levels have been adjusted downwards even by the government in Albania. The impact that the European economic crisis has had on neighboring countries such as Greece and Italy has directly been reflected in Albania with falling remittances, trade and retuning immigrants especially from the southern neighbor.





A full one third of the respondents' group has placed the crisis as their top concern followed by percent who believe that the biggest problem is lack of rule of law. The three following problems which have gotten roughly one tenth of the respondents' answers each are corruption, political conflict and bad governance. 7 percent of the citizens bring up the problem of lack of free and fair elections, while very small groups of 3 percent each mention the slowdown of integration process and level of crime.

When asked on a more personal level what concerns them in their daily life, most Albanians mention an inadequate level of income. 28 percent say that their biggest problem is insufficient economic revenue followed closely by 25 percent who say that their problem is unemployment. Even a more dramatic result is that of people mentioning their problem as outright poverty, 13 percent, hence more than one tenth of the sample. The rising crime levels are also figured in the citizens' analysis with 9 percent of them mentioning this as their primary personal concern. Job security is a concern for 8 percent of the respondents while smaller groups of 4 percent each are personally concerned by education and healthcare services.



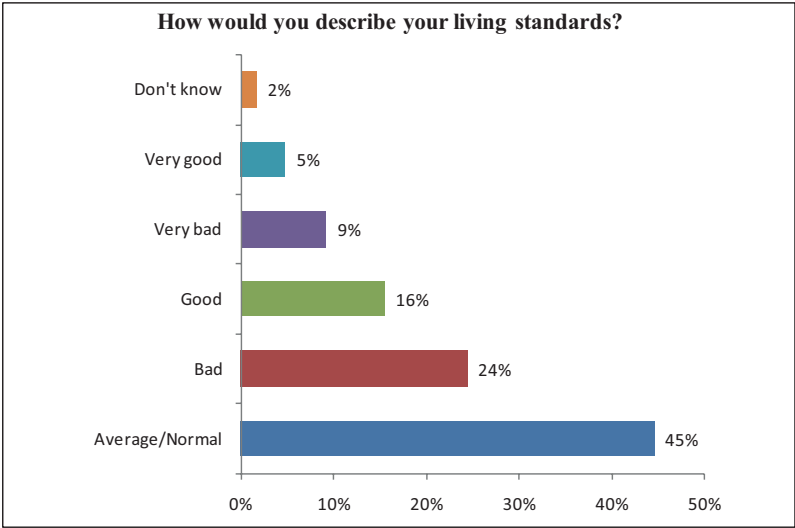
With this in mind, a sounding majority of Albanian citizens, **61 percent would leave their country if they had an opportunity to do so** and only 28 percent said they would leave. 11 percent were undecided on this question. There is a consistency in the desire to leave witnessed also by an AIIS survey last year when 58 percent of citizens confirmed that they would leave if given an opportunity and 35 percent saying that they would indeed choose to stay.⁶

ECONOMIC WORRIES

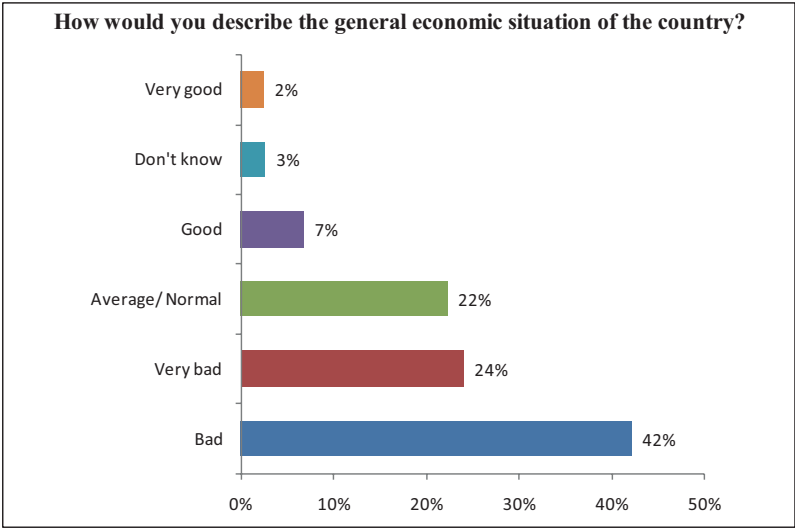
The majority of Albanians, 45 percent of our respondents, describe their current living standards as average followed by 24 percent that say that they live in bad conditions. Smaller groups of 21 report good or very good conditions while another 9 percent says that they live under very bad conditions.

When asked to evaluate the current economic outlook of

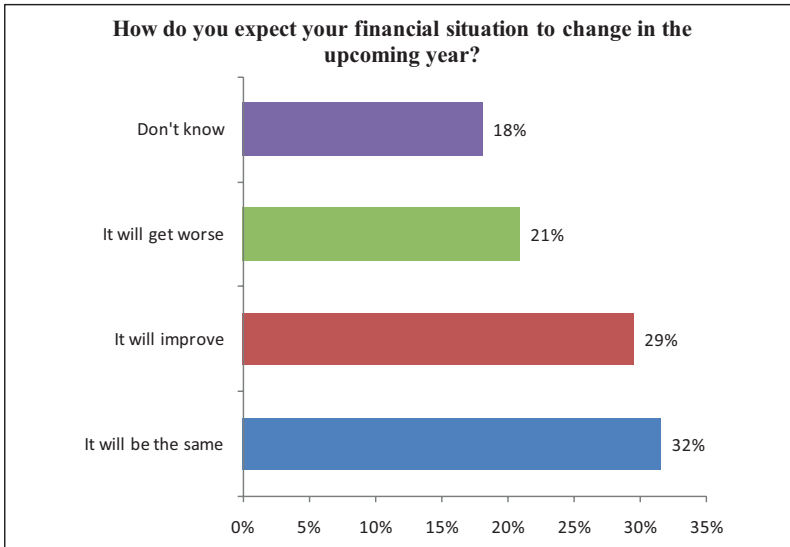
⁶ *Albania in the next ten years: Politics, Economy, Society and Perceptions*, Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIISO: 2012, pg 44.



their country most Albanian are pessimistic with 42 percent saying it is bad followed by 24 percent saying that it is very bad. A meager 22 percent describe the economy as average while the number of those who evaluate it as good is under 10 percent.



Most people, 32 percent expect no changes in their financial situation in the upcoming years. A considerable group of 29 percent is optimistic and has positive expectations that it will improve however another 21 percent expects it to deteriorate. It is important to note that another 18 percent seems insecure of what will happen declining or not having an answer to this question.



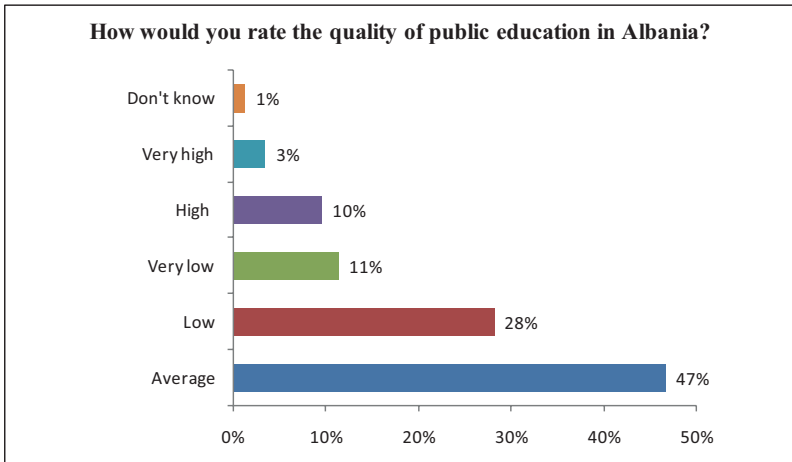
Compared to their short term expectations however Albanians are more optimistic in the long term. Last year more than half of the respondents answered that in the next decade they expect their living conditions (for themselves and their families) to improve.⁷

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SERVICES

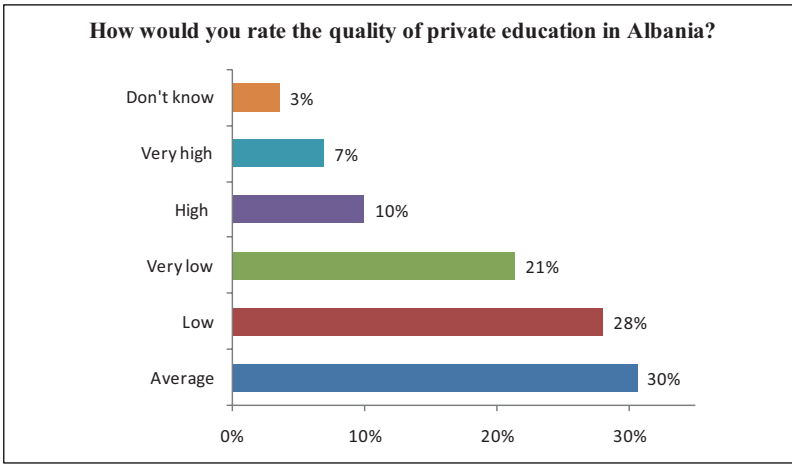
Citizens' answers depict an interesting picture of evaluations

⁷ "Albania in the next ten years: Politics, Economy, Society and Perceptions", AIIS: 2012, pg 24.

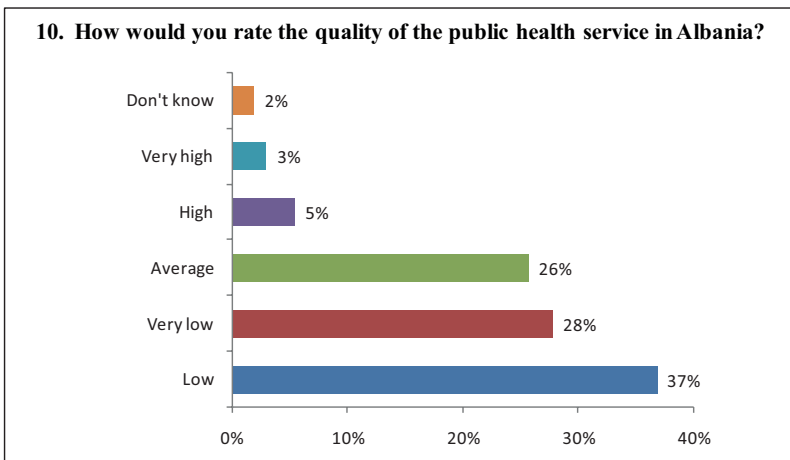
when it comes to the quality of public services versus private ones. Asked about the quality of public education in Albania 47 percent believe that it is average, same as with the quality of private education which is again average for a majority of 30 percent. Similarly 13 percent of citizens believe public education offers a good quality compared to 17 percent of citizens that hold the same regard for private education. However 49 percent of citizens believe that private education offers low or very quality compared to 39 percent of citizens that say the same about public education. Hence in conclusion when it comes to education the pervasive opinion is that what is being offered in Albania is of average quality but that the public sector is still doing a better job than the private one.

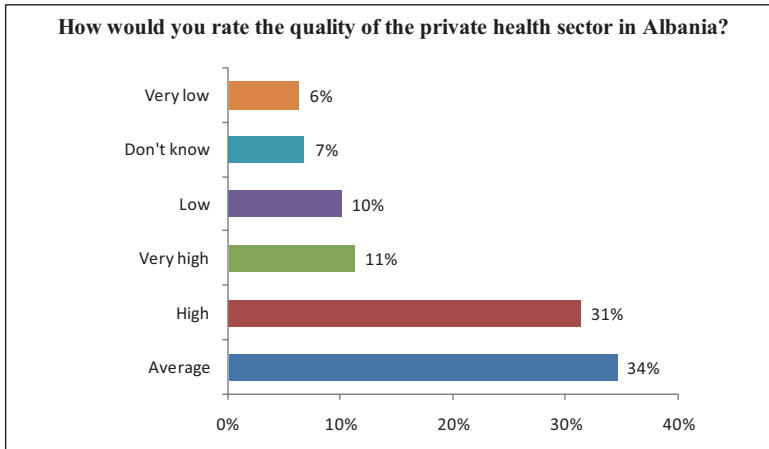


A rather different story is being told by citizens when it comes to health services and where numbers rotate. This time a higher quality is being definitely vested with the private sector than with the public one. A large majority of 65 percent say that public health care is of low or very low quality while only a quarter of the sample grants it an average status. A minority of less than 10 percent assign it good quality. When it comes



to private services in the health care sector however, citizens believe that they offer either good or very good quality in a cumulative of 42 percent followed by a third of the sample that assigns it average quality. Only 16 percent of respondents believe that private health care offers low quality services.

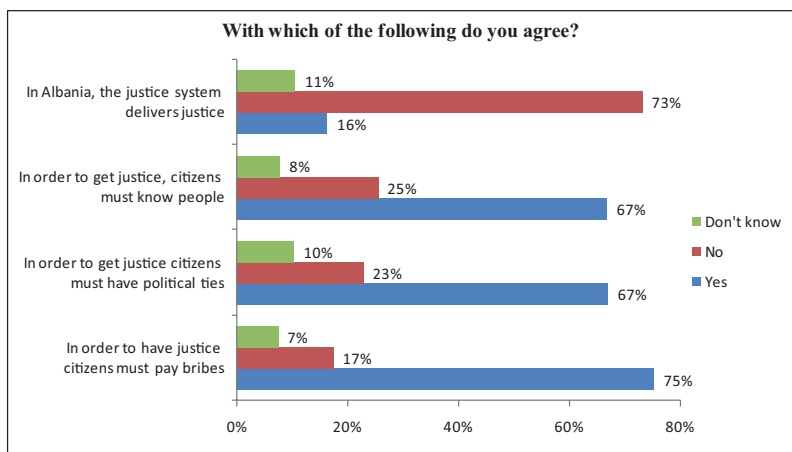




ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Roughly three quarters of Albanians do not believe that their justice system deliver justice. An overwhelming 75 percent believe that in order to get justice citizens must resort to corruption, paying bribes to the actors employed in the courts. Moreover an equal number of 67 percent of citizens say that in order to get justice you need to have either personal ties or political ties so that you can benefit from them. An average of one tenth of the sample declines to give an opinion on this matter.

As a result 73 percent of Albanians come to the conclusion that the justice system in Albania does not perform its main function of delivering justice. The crisis of trust of citizens related to the judiciary is becoming one of the key negative developments in Albania. Despite several attempt to reform the system either legally or structurally and considerable foreign aid given to the sector the courts inspire little more than revulsion in an ordinary Albanian citizen.



PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE

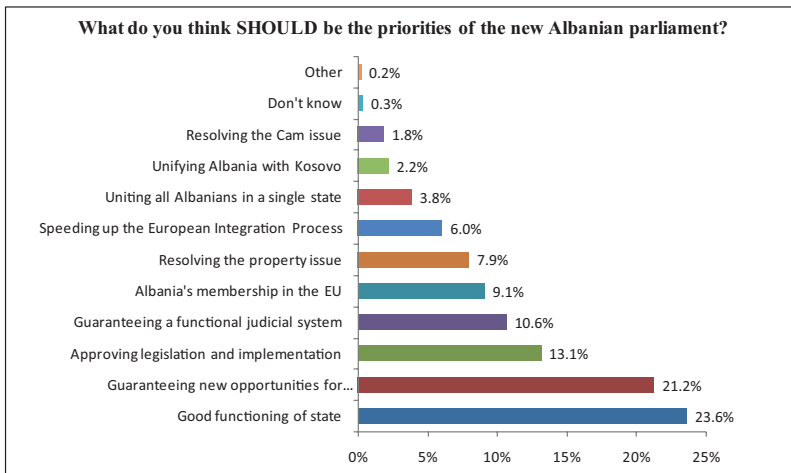
Citizens were asked to set priorities for the parliament and the government that will result after the elections of June 23. These were among the most important questions as they were intended to judge what ranks high in the citizens' agenda.

Albanians believe that the top priorities for the next Albanian parliament should be the "proper functioning of the state" with the largest score of 26.3 of the answers given; "guaranteeing possibilities for new job places and fighting poverty" with 21.2 percent of all answers as well as the traditional classic function of the parliament "to approve legislation and promote its implementation" with 13.1 percent of the answers. These are closely followed by 10.6 percent of the answers that identify the guaranteeing of a functional judicial system, 9.1 percent concerned with Albania membership to the EU and 7.9 percent of the answer identifying the final solution of the property issues as a necessary priority. Speeding up the process of integration makes up 6 percent of the answers.

An interesting result is seen when data taken only from the group of those between 18 and 29 years old is analyzed for

the next parliament priorities. For this age bracket the first priority of the parliament should be opening new job places and fighting poverty followed by the proper functioning of the state. The youth group fits in the general population tendency of placing low importance to the goals of nationalistic causes. Hence 5 percent of youth asked said a priority should be unifying all Albanians in one state and less than 2.5 percent said unification with Kosova should be on the tasks' list.

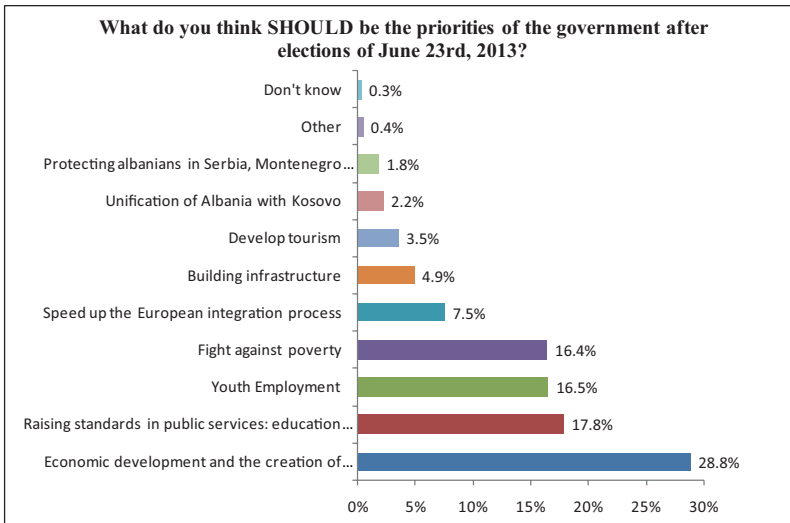
Few citizens expect the parliament to undertake any nationalistic endeavors. Only 3.8 percent of respondents expect the parliament to have as a priority the unification of all Albanians in one state while 2.2 percent mention unification with Kosovo and 1.8 percent resolving the Cam issue as a priority.



When asked about the priorities of the new government, Albanians lean heavily on the economic side and focus on services. The top three priorities for the new government according to the respondents should be “economic development and the creation of new jobs” which consists in 28.8 percent of all answers given, “raising of standards in public services such as education and

healthcare” with 17.8 percent of the answers and a tie between youth employment and fight against poverty at 16.5 and 16.4 percent for each. These are followed by smaller groups of citizens who seek for the government priorities to be: Speeding up European integration (7.5 percent), investing in infrastructure (4.9 percent) and developing tourism (3.5 percent).

Nationalistic agendas once again are being mentioned rarely, by less than 3 percent of respondents in each case. Hence only 2.2 percent mention unifying Albania with Kosovo as a priority while 1.8 percent speak about protecting the right of Albanians living outside the formal borders of Albania in neighboring states.



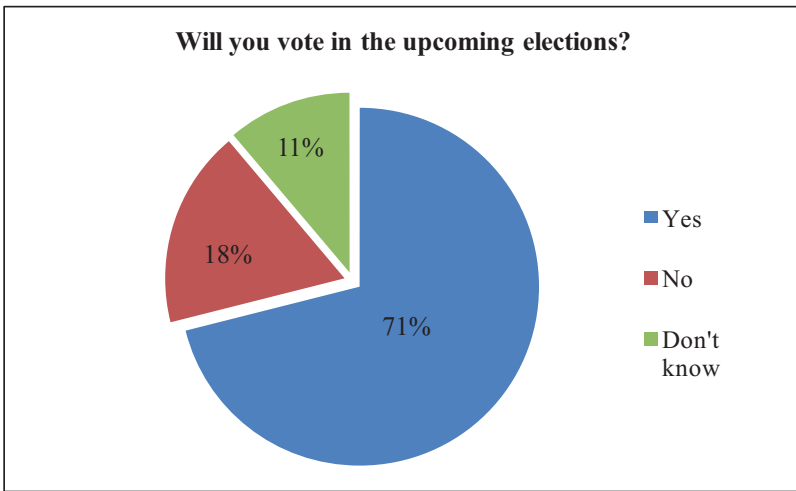
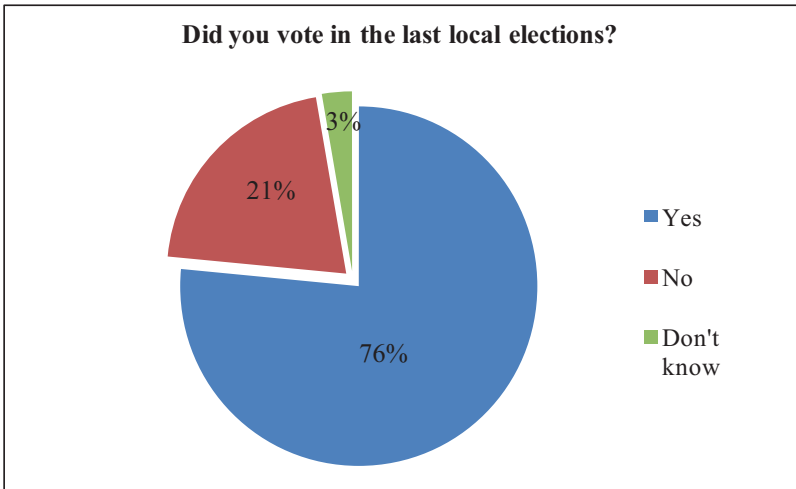
Taking both these questions under consideration, one can observe that Albanians are much more pragmatic, realistic and focused on their well being rather than in causes related to the nationalistic issues. Economic development, employment and fighting poverty are the most common lines mentioned in the answers where a concern for the quality of services is also

present as a desired priority for the next government. State functioning seems to be what most Albanians want the next parliament to secure.

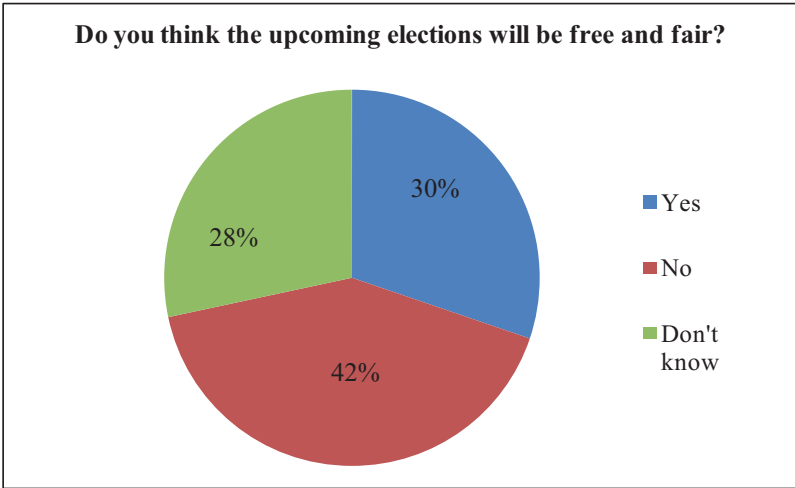
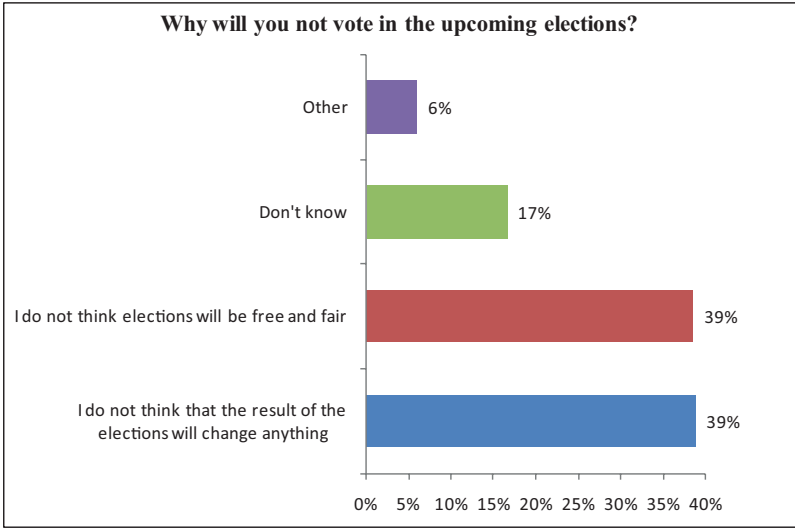
When the subgroup of 18-29 years old is considered we have a shift between priority number 2 and 3 with youth employment coming right next after “economic development” and “raising quality of services” coming up third in the priority list. Otherwise the tendencies in picking and ranking priorities of the young group fit the ones displayed by the larger sample with nationalistic causes at the very end of the list.

ELECTIONS

Albanians seem to be likely to yield a satisfactory turnout in these elections. A majority of respondents 77 percent report that they have indeed participated by voting in the last elections and only a minority of 21 percent said that they did not vote. Again when asked if they will actively participate by voting on June 23, a sounding majority of 78 percent confirm this while 18 percents say that they will not vote. A tenth of the sample seem to have not decided yet whether they will vote or not. Out of those who responded that they will not vote the frequently cited reasons were that they don't think their vote will change anything (39 percent of those who will not vote) and that they don't think elections will be free and fair (again 39 percent.)



Albanians remain worried and pessimistic about the standards that the next elections will met. 42 percent say that they don't believe these elections will be free ad fair while only 30 percent seem confident that they will be. A large number of people 28 percent don't know or decline the answer to this question signaling some degree of insecurity.



Rating the importance of different actors and institutions in the conduct of elections in Albania, respondents place a high value with the Central Election Commission and the actual local counting commissioners, followed by the role of the government and that of foreign observers and foreign ambassadors. 70 percent

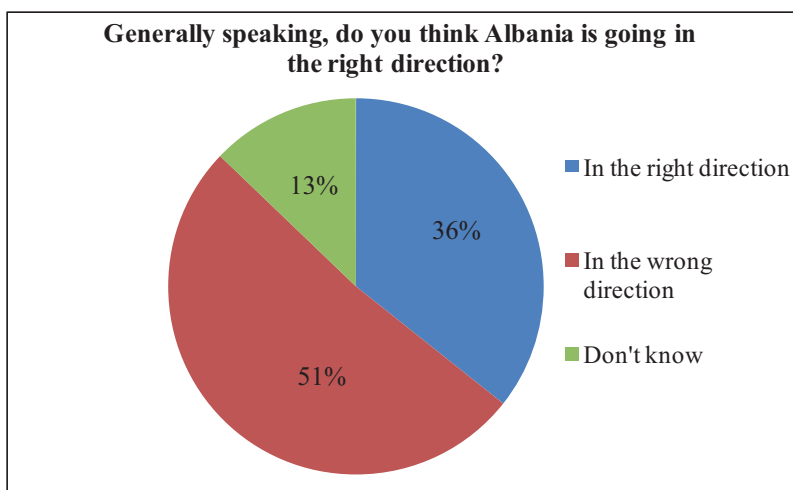
	1-2 Zero or little importance	3 Average importance	4-5 High/ maximum importance
Citizens	24.2%	18.3%	57.5%
Political parties	23.4%	18.9%	57.7 %
CEC	18.2 %	11.9%	69.9%
Local counting commissioners	15.9%	14.7%	69.5%
Civil Society	26.5%	25.9%	47.7%
Media	23.2%	26.1%	50.7%
Local Observers	20.8%	20.4%	58.9%
Foreign Observers (OSBE/ODHIR)	15.4%	15.3%	69.3 %
International community (EU delegation, American Embassy, EU ambassadors)	13.4%	16.0%	60.6%
Opposition	25%	17.8%	57.3
Government	24.4%	13.2%	62.3%

of citizens believe that both the CEC and the local counting commissioners carry a considerable or maximum importunacy for the elections. Almost the same figure, 70 percent associates significant importance for the electoral process to foreign observers, mainly OSCE/ODHIR missions. While 62 percent assign the same importance to the government, a similar figure of 60 percent believe that foreign ambassadors carry also a high importance in connection to the elections process. Domestic actors such as citizens, opposition and local observers are considered very important by 57-59 percent while other domestic actors such as media and civil society are also considered important by roughly half of the respondents.

It is interesting to observe that when asked about citizens, government, opposition and civil society a full quarter of the sample in each case associates low or no importance to them in the electoral process.

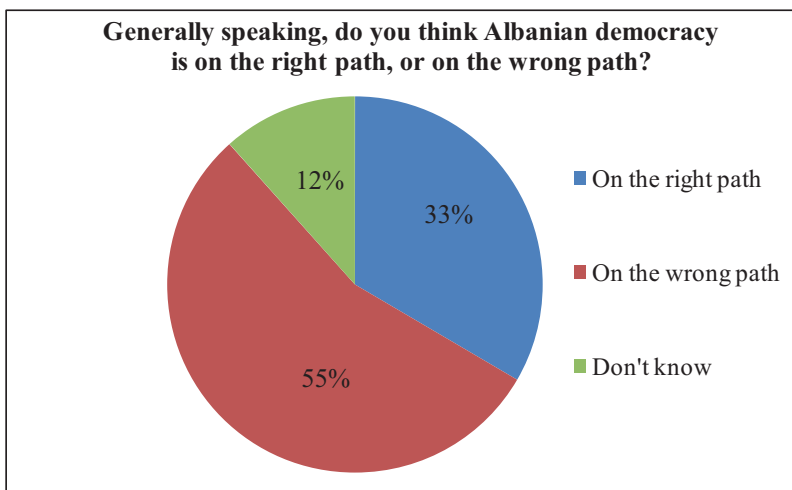
MACRO EVALUATIONS

Albanians have a fairly consistent negative evaluation to the question whether their country is moving on the right direction. A majority of 51 percent answered no while only 36 percent said yes. A considerable 13 percent were undecided or declined to answer this question. The numbers largely reflect the same answers given to the question one year earlier when 56 percent of the citizens said again that the country was moving to the wrong direction compared to 32 percent that said it was on the right track.⁸

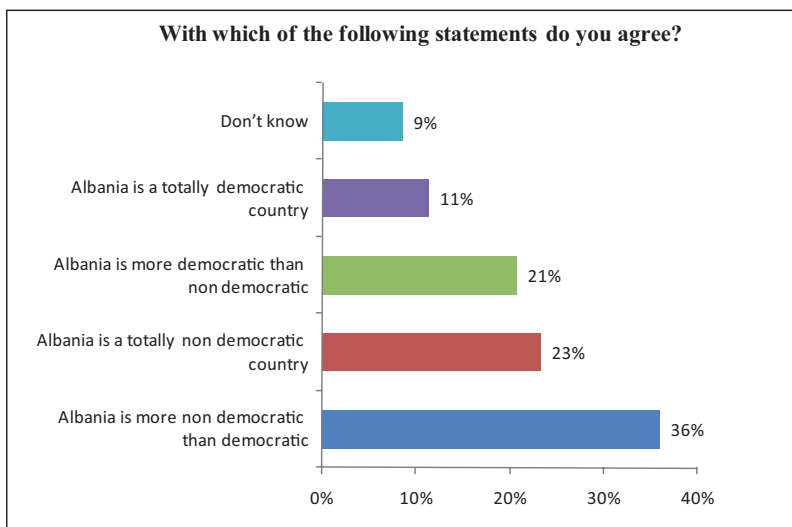


The same attitude is reflected in the evaluation of citizens towards democracy in Albania. 55 percent of respondents believe democracy is on the wrong path while a third of the sample believes it is on the right track. 12 percent of the citizens are undecided or decline to answer.

⁸ *Albania in the next ten years: Politics, Economy, Society and Perceptions*, AIIS: 2012, pg 21.

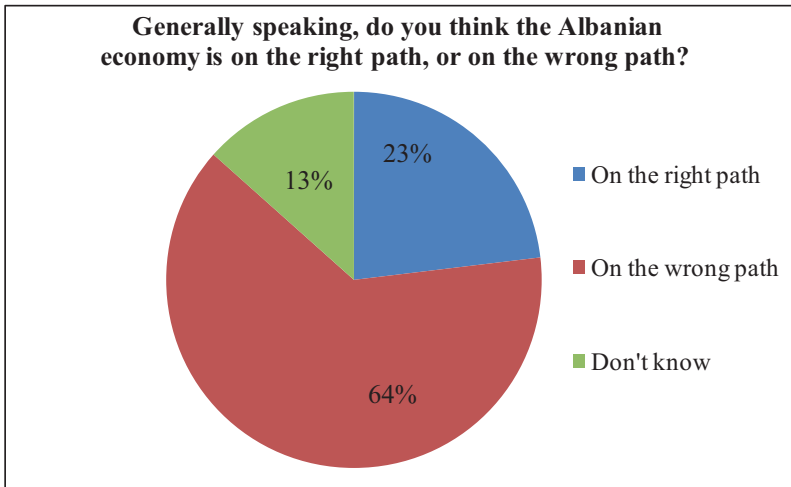


This result should be seen in complement to the answer to another question urging citizens to describe the current democratic condition of Albania.



A majority of citizens, 36 percent believe that the situation in Albania is more undemocratic than democratic and a

considerable 23 percent, a full quarter of the respondents, believes the system in Albania is fully nondemocratic. 21 percent of respondents believe that Albania is more democratic than the opposite while only 11 percent believe their country is a full fledged democracy. Compared to last year the numbers of those claiming that Albania is fully nondemocratic or rather nondemocratic are much higher.⁹ Concluding from both these questions, in the perceptions of citizens, the state of Albanian democracy is unhealthy and its future is uncertain.

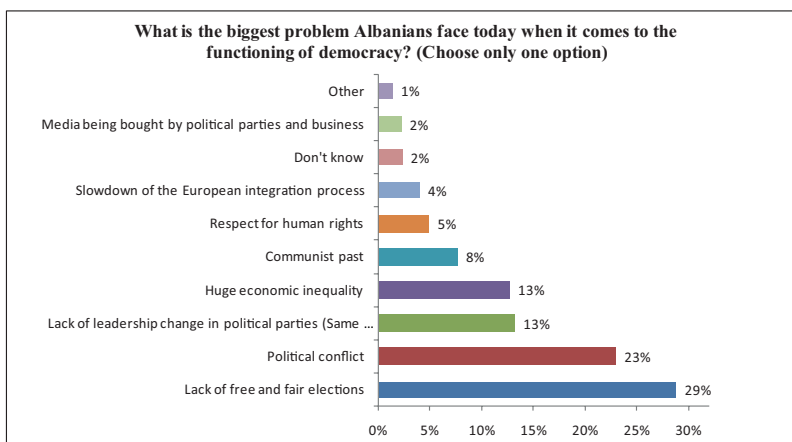


A grimmer picture is presented through the citizens' perception of economy. A large share of them, more than 63 percent, believe Albanian economy is on the wrong track while only 23 percent believe its going in the right direction. Again slightly more than one tenth of the respondents decline to answer.

⁹ Only 16 percent of respondents said last year that Albania was fully undemocratic and the number of those saying that it is more nondemocratic than democratic was roughly the same with those saying the contrary (33 and 32 percent). "Albania in the next ten years: Politics, Economy, Society and Perceptions", AIIS: 2012, pg 37.

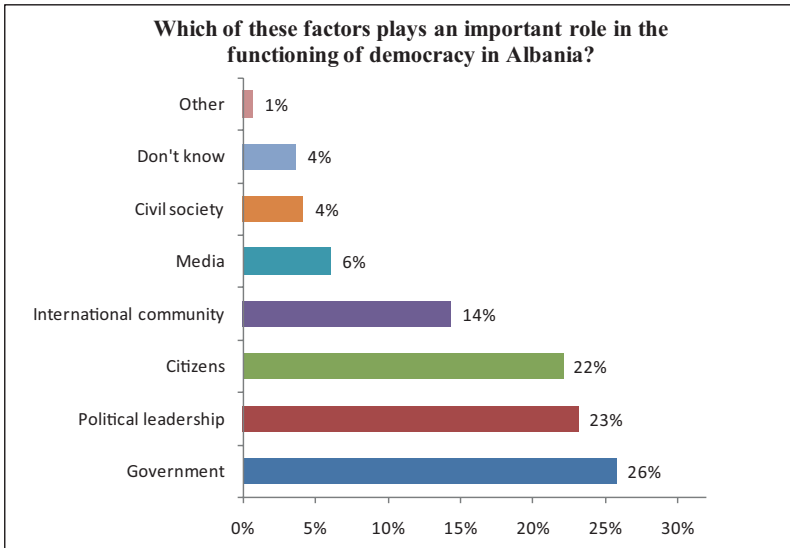
CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY

When asked about the main problems affecting today the functioning of democracy in Albania, most of citizens 29 percent believe that it is the lack of free and fair elections followed by another 23 percent which pinpoint political conflict. Considerable shares of respondents, 13 percent, in each option, mention the lack of change in political leadership as well as large discrepancies in the economic status of citizens (the gap between rich and poor). 8 percent believe that the communist past is still an obstacle to Albanian democracy while very small groups of citizens, around 5 percent each, seem to be concerned about the human rights situation and the slowdown of the European integration pace.



When determining the factors that play the most important role in the functioning of democracy in Albania a slight majority of Albanian citizens, 26 percent, point out the role of the government followed by 23 percent that mention the political leadership and 22 percent that say 'citizens'. International community is seen as a primary actor in making

democracy work by 14 percent of the citizens while media and civil society get modest scores of respectively 6 and 4 percent each. There seems to be a more normal approach to the role of international community vis a vis democracy in Albania as Albanians last year responded in much higher numbers, at around 30 percent, selecting the international community when choosing the most important factor over democracy. On the other hand this year there seems to be more appreciation for the role of government and political leadership.¹⁰



HORIZONTAL TRUST

Again and again surveys and studies prove that Albanians have very low levels of trust in their institutions and representative politicians. Extremely low levels of trust are shown in this survey as well regarding the political parties, the courts in Albania, the government, the Prime Minister and

¹⁰ See results of Table 21 in *Albania in the next ten years: Politics, Economy, Society and Perceptions*, AIIS: 2012, pg 38.

the Central Elections Commission (CEC), with a growing or nascent skepticism even over previously more trusted actors such as the media or religious institutions.

On the eve of elections, 48 percent of Albanians do not trust political parties at all followed by 29 percent who trust them only a little. This result is perplexing when one considers the high number of actual voters and the growing polarization of Albanian society under party lines.

45 percent of respondents say that they fully distrust the courts in Albania reflecting a long standing disappointment with the Albanian judiciary.¹¹ 25 percent of citizens trust the courts little while 20 percent trust them somewhat.

The same figures are also shown for the Prime Minister whom 45 percent of citizens don't trust at all followed by 19 percent who trusts him little. However, cumulatively a third of the citizens trust the PM either somewhat or fully.

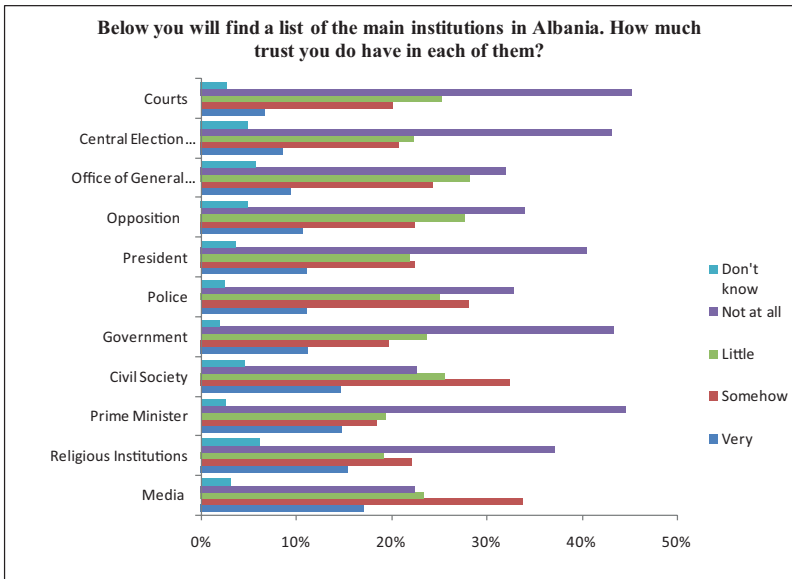
The Central Elections Commission (CEC) also is held in high skepticism by citizens, 43 percent of which do not have any trust in this institution followed by 22 percent who have little trust. Only 30 percent of respondents have some degree of trust in CEC and out of those only 9 percent has full trust. The very structure of CEC members who are exclusive political appointees and display highly polarized behavior as well as the performance of the CEC in past electoral processes have eroded public trust in the CEC to a high degree. Spectators of often tiring tirades of conflict and voting patterns along political lines as well as gridlocks in the work of this institution, Albanians display high level of skepticism on the ability of the CE to conduct its role in a professional way.

The government is distrusted by 43 percent of respondents and trusted little by another 24 percent with only 31 percent of

11 Last year in a survey conducted by AIIS, 64 percent of citizens answered that they had zero or very little trust in the courts system followed by 24 percent that had some trust. "Albania in the next ten years: Politics, Economy, Society and Perceptions", AIIS: 2012, pg.28.

citizens having some or full trust in it.

There seems to be a decrease in the trust of citizens towards the President of the Republic with 41 percent of citizens not believing in the President followed by 22 percent of them who believe little in him. 34 percent of citizens however have trust in the President.¹² The political opposition is also largely distrusted by citizens with 34 percent expressing zero and 28 percent expressing little trust in them.



Although better results are in store for the Albanian police, the office of the Attorney general, media and religious institutions skepticism is present also for them. With 51 percent of citizens being confident in the media, this actor preserves the privileged, yet shakier than before, position in citizens' trust. 23 percent

¹² Only 16 percent of citizens reported last year (before the election of the new President) zero trust in the figure of the president followed by 35 percent who had little trust and a considerable majority 53 percent who had some trust or full trust. "Albania in the next ten years: Politics, Economy, Society and Perceptions", AIIS: 2012, pg 28.

have answered that they don't trust the media at all, witnessing such a large number for the first time and reflecting a growing disappointment with media taking sides and losing some of its impartiality to business and political intertwined interests. Controversial evaluations are given by Albanian citizens for civil society with 49 percent of citizens expressing roughly equally no trust (23 percent) or little trust (26 percent) and another 47 percent saying that this is an actor that they have trust in, either fully (15 percent) or partially (32 percent).

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY

Albanians seem roughly divided in half when considering any country that has had a great influence on Albania. 22 percent think there has not been any influence from any country while 27 percent decline to answer. However 51 percent believe that indeed there has been such a case and out of them an overwhelming majority, 79 percent think that this influential country has been the United States of America. Only 6.8 percent believe that influence has been exerted by the European Union followed by other mentioned cases that are statistically insignificant.

When it comes to evaluating potential countries that are a threat to Albania, respondents this time are divided into there approximately similar categories with one third believing that there is no threat and a third answering that they don't know. Out of the third that point out a threat the majority 55.8 percent believe that this threat is posed by Greece and 24.3 percent think the threat is Serbia. The other mentioned countries are of low or zero statistical relevance.

Regarding what Albania should do to enhance regional cooperation and which countries should it be particularly invested in, the answers also reflect tendencies that have been

observed in the past. Kosovo stands at the top of the priority list according to 63 percent of Albanians which believe that the government should pay outmost attention to strengthening cooperation with this country, followed by Turkey for which 59 percent believe the same. There seems to be a slight decrease as last year however even more citizens were of the opinion that Albania was to strengthen relations and cooperation with Kosovo at around 76 percent.¹³

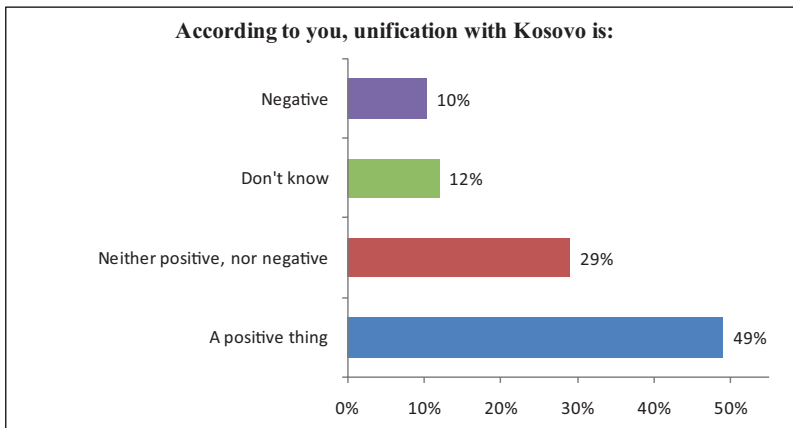
One third of the respondents believe such outmost attention should be given to other relations such a those with Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro and Croatia. Albanians seem less interested in strengthening cooperation with Serbia and Bosnia Herzegovina with respectively the highest percentages of those that say the government should spend no time enhancing cooperation with these countries: 46 percent for Serbia and 33 percent for BiH.

KOSOVA

For half of the Albanian respondents potential unification with Kosovo is a positive thing followed by roughly one third which say that it is neither a positive nor a negative development. Only 10 percent of respondents view this as a negative thing while a similar group of 12 percent does not answer the question. The evaluation of this opportunity seems to be fairly consistent with that given one year ago when 59 of respondents considered it a positive development while 11 percent considered it negative. However this year there seems to be an increase in the ranks of those that describe it as neutral hence neither negative nor positive.¹⁴

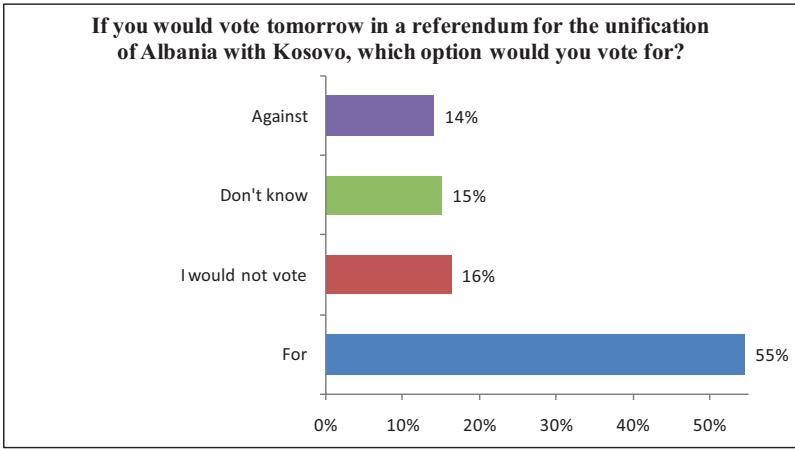
¹³ "European perspective of Albania: Perceptions and Realities 2012." AIIS: 2012, pg 37.

¹⁴ "Albania in the next ten years: Politics, Economy, Society and Perceptions", AIIS: 2012, pg 52.



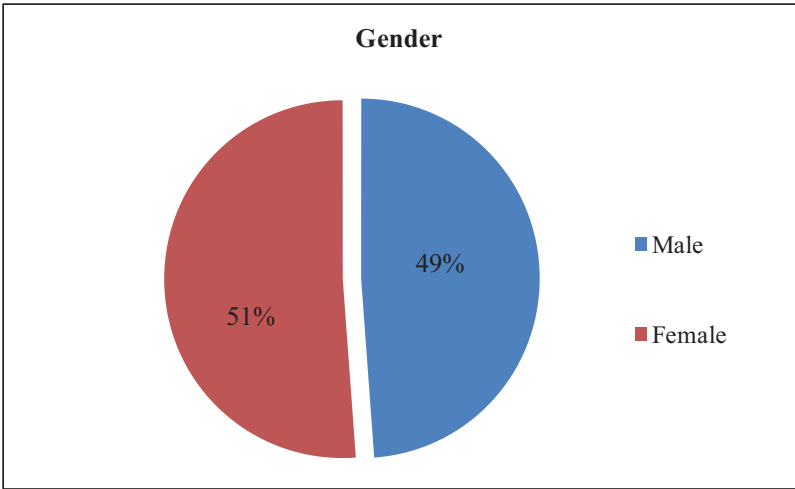
If there was indeed a referendum on Albania and Kosovo becoming one single state, 55 percent of Albanians would vote in favor while 14 percent would vote against it. A group of 16 percent would not participate by not voting at all in this referendum. There has been a small decrease level in the vote in favor which was at 62 percent last year with more people opting for the abstain option this year.¹⁵

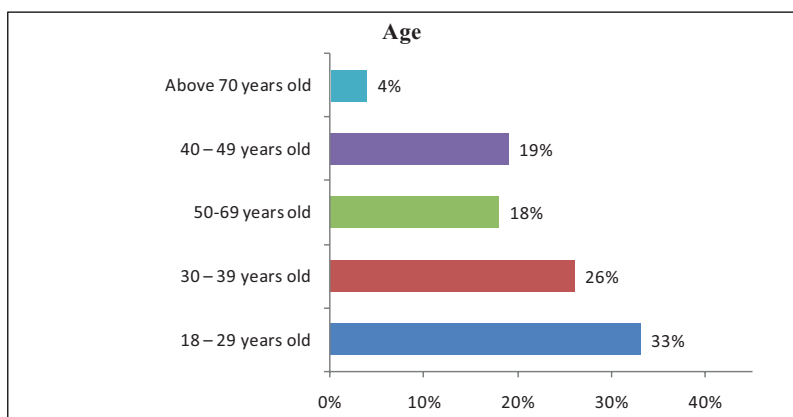
¹⁵ Only 10 percent of respondents said they would abstain in such a referendum when asked last year. *Albania in the next ten years: Politics, Economy, Society and Perceptions*, AIIS: 2012, pg 51.



SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS:

1200 citizens have been interviews for this survey, divided equally between 51 percent of females and 49 percent of male respondents.





Different age groups are represented in the sample with the majority of respondents falling to the 18-39 youth category. A third of the respondents are between 18 and 29 years old followed by a quarter who belong to the 30-39 age bracket. 18 percent are between 50-69 years old while 19 percent are between 40 and 49 years old. Only 4 percent of the sample is made up by people above 70 years old.

In terms of education, 38 percent of the sample is composed by people whose education level is up to high-school while 31 percent are university graduates. 6 percent are in the process or have completed graduate studies while 25 percent have either no formal education or have completed just the first level of primary education.

Considering the employment situation of our respondents, 37 percent of them report to be employed while 23 percent are unemployed. 7 percent of the sample is made of pensioners while 16 percent of students. 16 percent of the respondents are self-employed including in this category housewives.

