

Political Choice in Albania. The 2005 Albanian Parliamentary Election

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The 2005 Albanian Election Study (AES)¹ was organized in collaboration with the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA. CSES is a cross-national collaborative program among election studies in over fifty countries supported by the National Science Foundation of the United States. The AES survey fieldwork took place immediately after the July 3rd, 2005 Albanian parliamentary election.²

The 2005 AES focused on three general themes: the impact of political institutions on citizens' political cognition and behavior (functioning of the parliament, the government, and the presidency; the electoral rules; and political parties); the nature of political, cultural, ethnic and social cleavages; ideological alignments in Albania; and the evaluation of democratic institutions and processes.

The post-election survey was administered through interviews with a representative sample of 1,500 households. Each household interview lasted for about 45 minutes. The final dataset of the study contains 1148 observations. We used a stratified sample selection model whereby the country was divided into two parts: *i*) the six main urban districts counting for 48 percent of the total population of Albania, and *ii*) the rest of the country. In the six main urban districts, we interviewed seven to ten households in each Primary Sample Unit (PSU) selected for every 9,200 households sorted geographically from North to South (7 or 10 interviews x 83 PSUs for every 9,200 households). In the rest of the country, we interviewed seven to ten households in each PSU (90) selected for every 7520 households. A list of all PSUs and the AES questionnaire in Albanian and English languages can be downloaded from the AES website (see endnote). At a confidence level of 95 percent, our survey results have a statistical precision of ± 2.2 percent of what they would be if we had interviewed the entire voting age population currently residing in Albania.

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The 2005 AES questionnaire has over 200 questions. Here, we report only part of the data on campaign issues, voters' evaluation of political leaders, voters' expectations from the new government, as well as a few socio-demographic variables like religious denominations and ethnic self-identification.

The survey data suggest that the Albanian voters share sophisticated and strong perceptions about the political situation and the state of democracy in the country. Thus, while 96 percent of the voters believe in democracy and 63 percent express high levels of internal political efficacy (i.e. the belief that it is important to exercise one's political rights such as the right to vote), over 60 percent of them are either unsatisfied or not satisfied at all with the way democracy functions in Albania. At the same time, about 94 percent believe that individual and human rights are respected only to some degree - with 40 percent saying that there is little or no respect at all for individual and human rights in Albania.

Figure 1. Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government.³

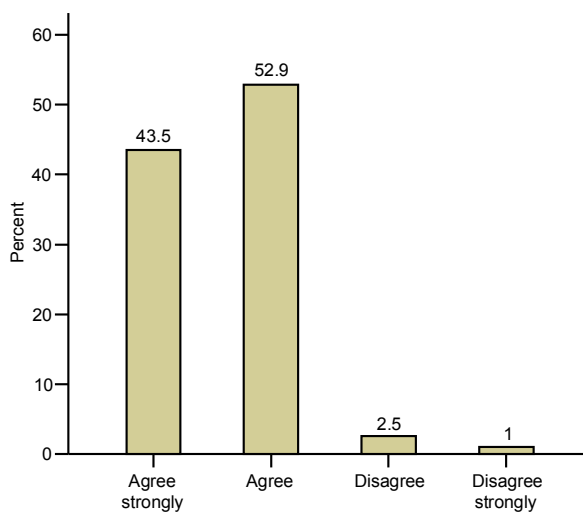
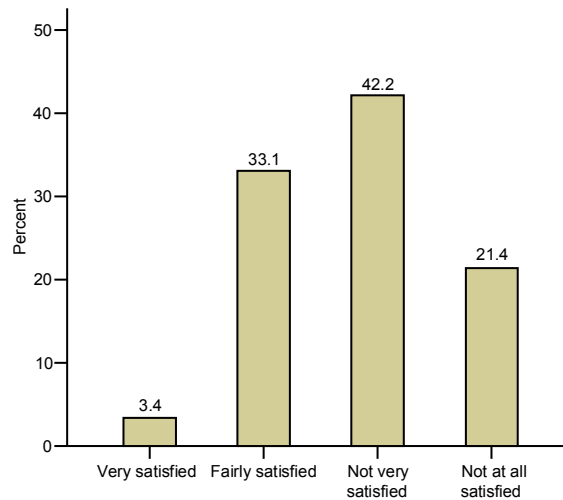


Figure 2. On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Albania?



Study results suggest that the two main political parties, the Democratic Party in power and the Socialist Party, now in opposition, have strong and loyal electoral bases. The survey results hint that it was the voters' attitude toward the party leaders that may have played a pivotal role in their vote choice decision. Thus, 56 percent of the respondents characterized the former Socialist Party leader, Fatos Nano, as not honest; 62 percent believed that he did not really care about people like them; and 53 percent reported that they feel angry toward him. This compares to a rather favorable view toward the Democratic Party leader, Sali Berisha. At least 57 percent characterized Berisha as honest, and most of the people reported that Berisha made them feel hopeful and that they believed he really cares about people like them.

Figure 3. Voters evaluations of the Socialist Party leader, Fatos Nano, and the Democratic Party leader, Sali Berisha.

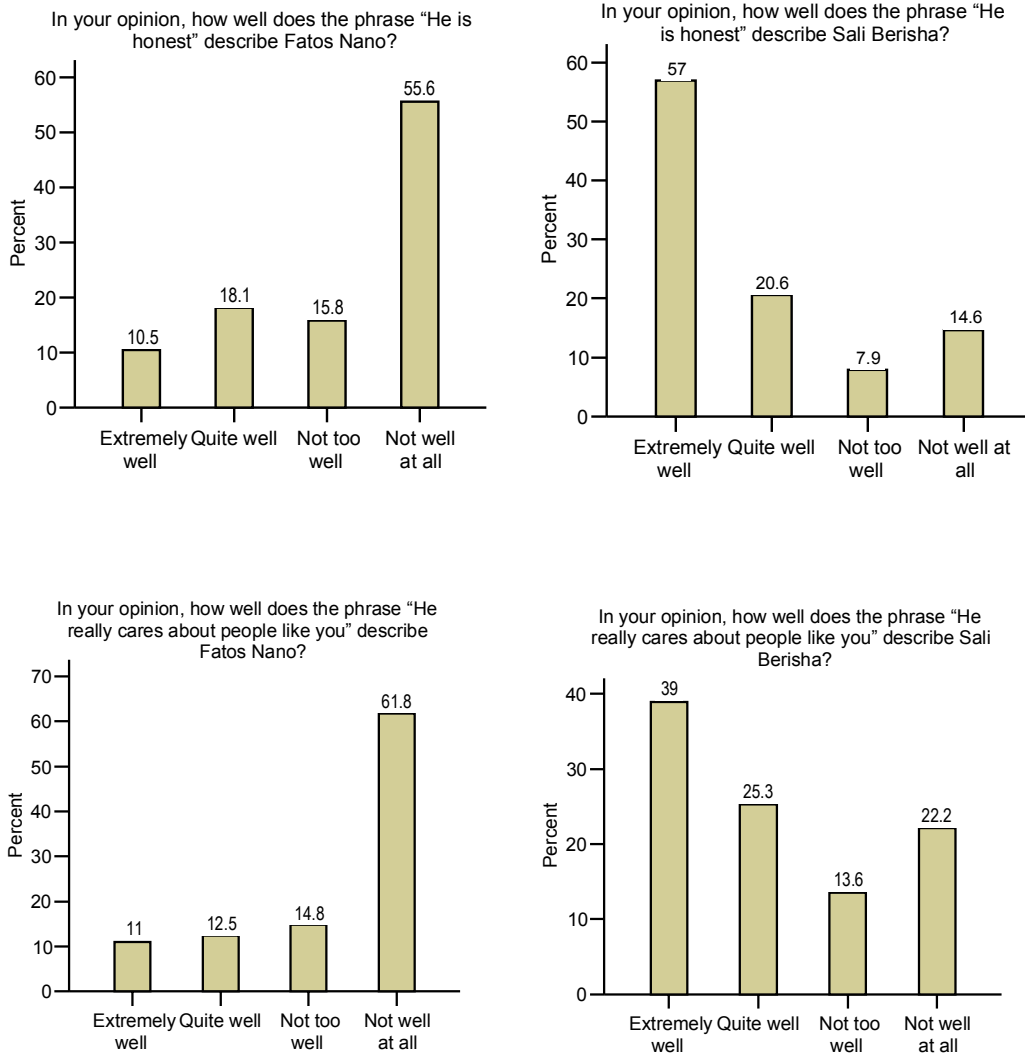
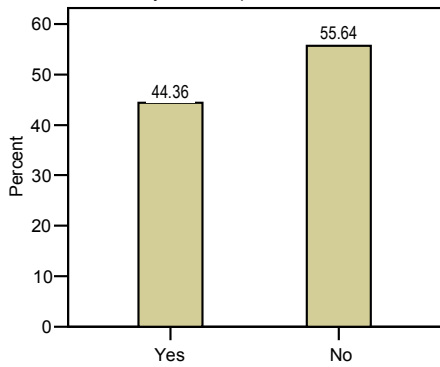
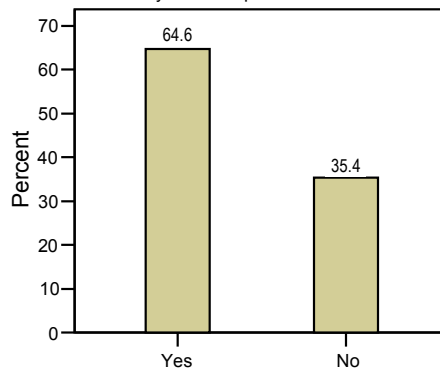


Figure 4. Voters reactions toward the Socialist Party leader, Fatos Nano, and the Democratic Party leader, Sali Berisha.

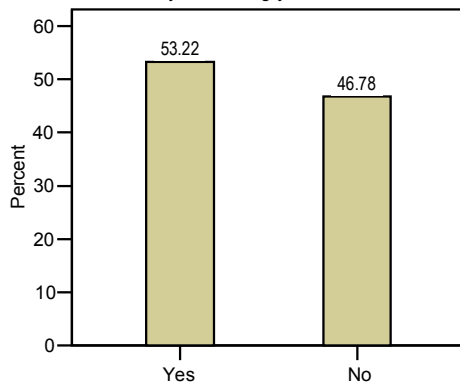
Has Fatos Nano, because of the kind of person he is or because of something he has done, ever made you feel hopeful?



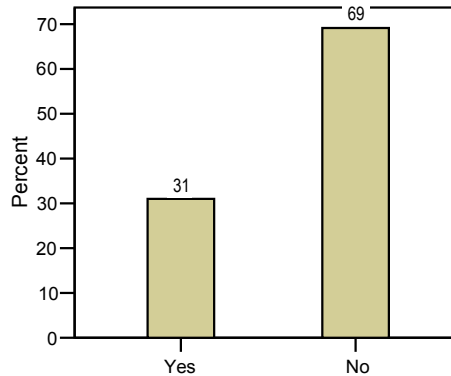
Has Sali Berisha, because of the kind of person he is or because of something he has done, ever made you feel hopeful?



Has Fatos Nano, because of the kind of person he is or because of something he has done, ever made you feel angry?



Has Sali Berisha, because of the kind of person he is or because of something he has done, ever made you feel angry?

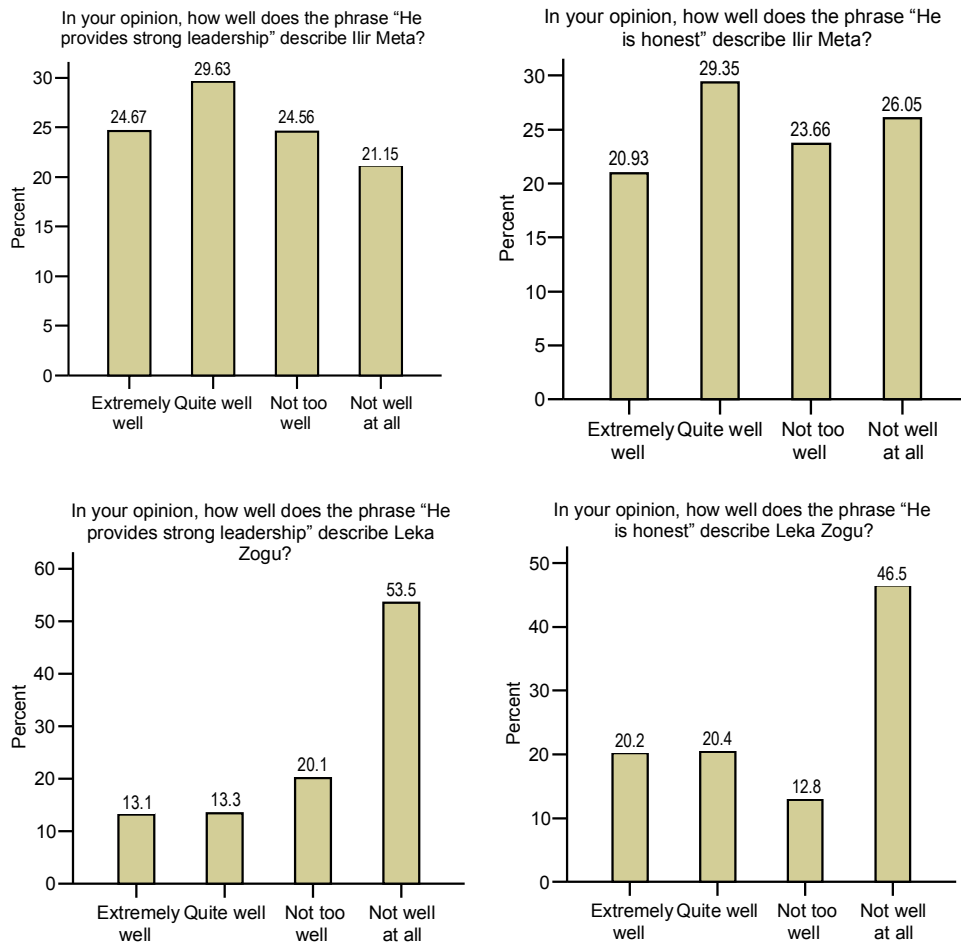


Voters appear to have strong and unfavorable views for Leka Zogu, the heir to the Albanian throne, and his political movement, LZhK. Of those who do share a favorable view about him and LZhK, about 60 percent listed the Democratic Party as their second choice, and 40 percent listed the Socialist Party or the Socialist

Movement for Integration (LSI) as their second choice. These figures are within the margin of statistical error.

Voters' evaluation of the LSI leader, Ilir Meta, is all over the place. Survey results imply that the electorate was not entirely convinced about the honesty and sincerity of his motivations. Additionally, they do not appear to perceive him as a very strong and capable leader, qualities that were at the center of the LSI electoral strategy.

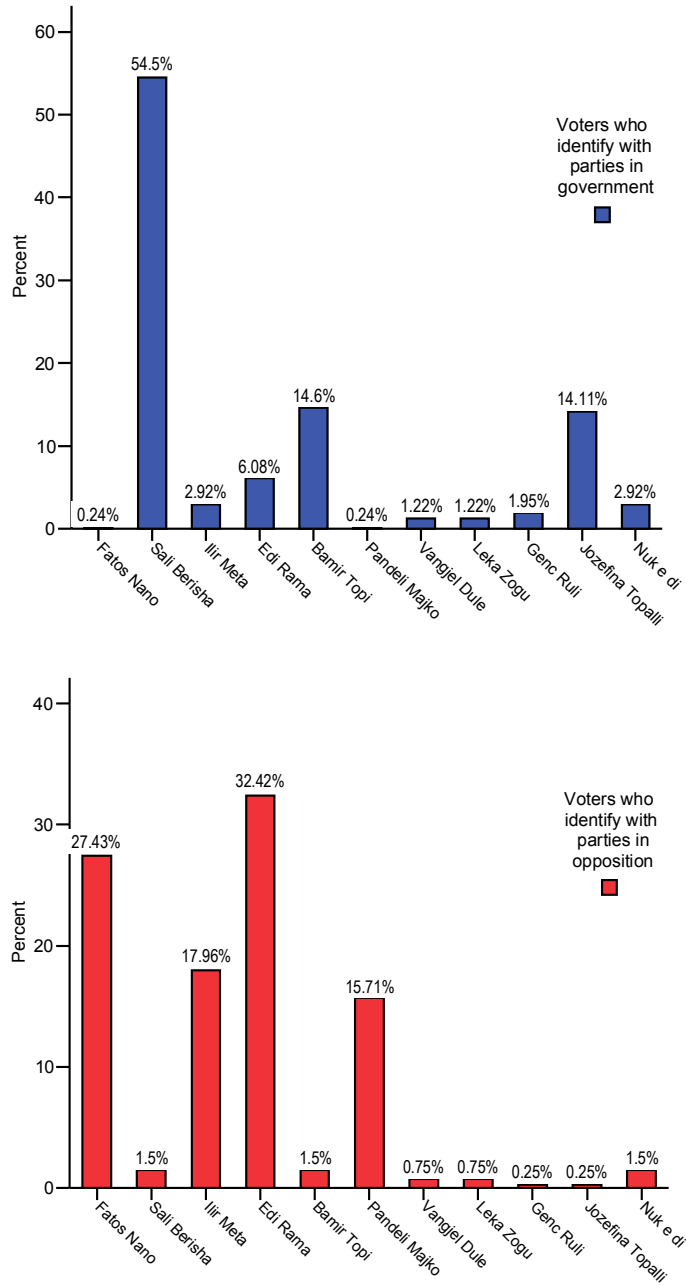
Figure 5. Voters evaluations of the Socialist Movement for Integration leader, Ilir Meta, and of Leka Zogu, the heir to the Albanian throne.



At the end, this appears to have been an electoral campaign shaped by the negative perceptions about the Socialist Party leadership and the populist campaign promises of the Democratic Party. About 40 percent of the respondents stated that the number one problem they would like the new government to deal with is unemployment and poverty reduction, followed by the fight against corruption. At the same time, they listed corruption as the number one problem that Albania has faced in the last four years (in another question, 78 percent reported that they believe corruption is very widespread among politicians). In addition, voters appear to be weary of political instability and weak governance in the country. Asked about the main problem that Albania has faced in the last four years, voters ranked political instability (most commonly expressed as “bickering among politicians”) and weak governance at the same level with water and electricity shortages, the latter being constant problems in Albania. By blaming corruption as the universal diagnosis of all the ills of the Albanian economy and society, the Democratic Party has successfully copied a page from the “clean-hands” populist electoral campaigns that we have seen in other countries before. It seems that once corruption and poverty were established as the defining issues of the electoral campaign, the public perception of Sali Berisha was also cast in that context, i.e., as a honest leader who cares about the poor rather than as a former authoritarian president. The Socialist Party’s electoral strategy of invoking the events of 1997 may have been too late and out of the sync with the voters.

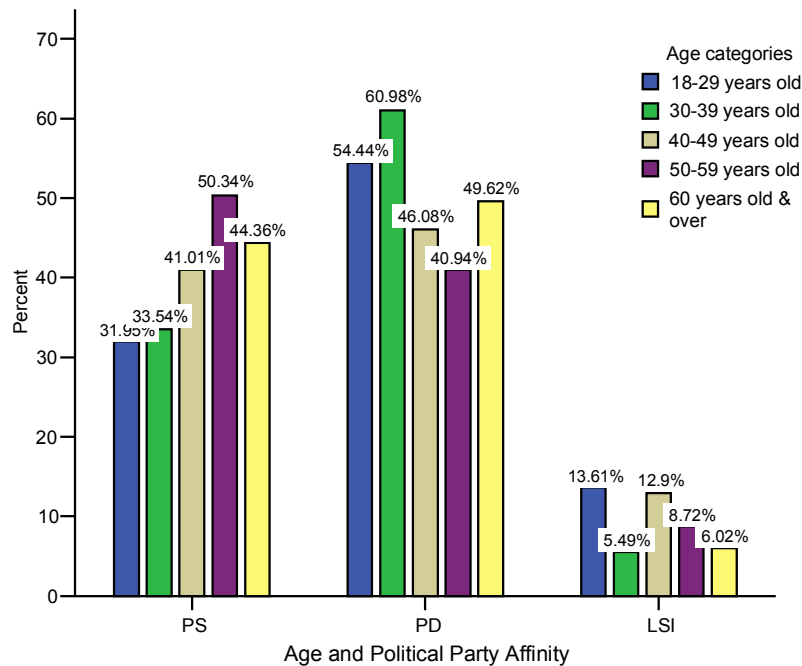
Asked about who they most wanted to be the next Prime Minister, 26 percent of the respondents mentioned Sali Berisha as their choice; Edi Rama was the second choice with 21 percent. In addition, Sali Berisha had the support of 55 percent of the democratic (or blue) voters. Edi Rama was the PM choice of 32 percent of the respondents who self-identified with the Socialist Party, its allies or LSI. It is interesting that Edi Rama was the PM choice of about 6 percent of the blue voters and 18 percent of the LSI voters in our survey.

Figure 6. On election day, on July 3rd, of all politicians in Albania, who did you most want to be the next Prime Minister?



As concerns age and political party identification, about 70 percent of the Democratic Party (DP) supporters are in the age group 18 – 49 years old. About 68 percent of the Socialist Party (SP) supporters are 40 years old and above. DP had the support of 61 percent of the respondents in the 30-39 years old category, and 54 percent of respondents in the 18-29 years old category. One explanation could be that the 30-39 years old category is the generation of the anti-communist “revolution”, those who were in their twenties in the early 1990s and have stayed loyal to DP. The 18-29 year olds have become adults in the post-communist period when the SP was in power for the last eight years. They seem to have more of a “protest against Socialist Party” kind of affiliation with the DP as shown by the fact that LSI and Edi Rama also draw sizeable support from this age group. LSI draws most of its supporters from the 18-29 and 40-49 age categories. As concerns educational levels and party identification, we notice that the Socialist Party and LSI, combined, have an advantage over Democratic Party among respondents with a university degree or higher.

Figure 7. Age and Political Party Affinity in Albania.



Perhaps, one should be cautious about how much to read into our estimations of religious denomination and ethnicity as the 2005 AES sample captures only the voting age population that currently resides in Albania. Our data say nothing about Albanian emigrants in other countries (by some estimates up to 30 percent of the population). Further surveys are needed to study political and socio-demographic characteristics of the Albanian emigrants. 70 percent of the respondents in our survey stated Islam as their religion but only 7.5 percent knew if they were Sunni or Bektashi Muslims. In addition, over 46 percent stated that they never practice their religion, and 14 percent go to church or mosque very rarely. This could mean that religious denominations are, for the most part, only nominal labels. About 15 percent of the respondents said they were Orthodox, and 13 percent Catholics. On ethnicity, 96 percent identified themselves as Albanians. Among them, only 16 percent identified themselves as either Ghegs or Tosks. Ghegs were twice as likely to self-identify as compared to Tosks, this probably being a consequence of the alienation of Ghegs by the former communist regime.

Figure 8. Which religion do you belong to?

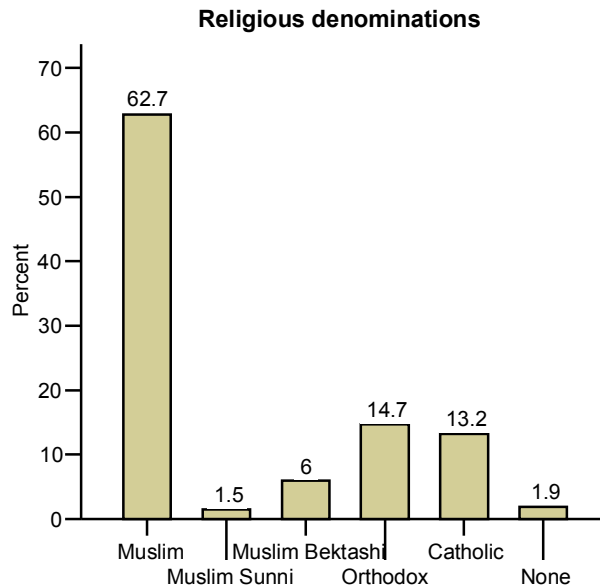
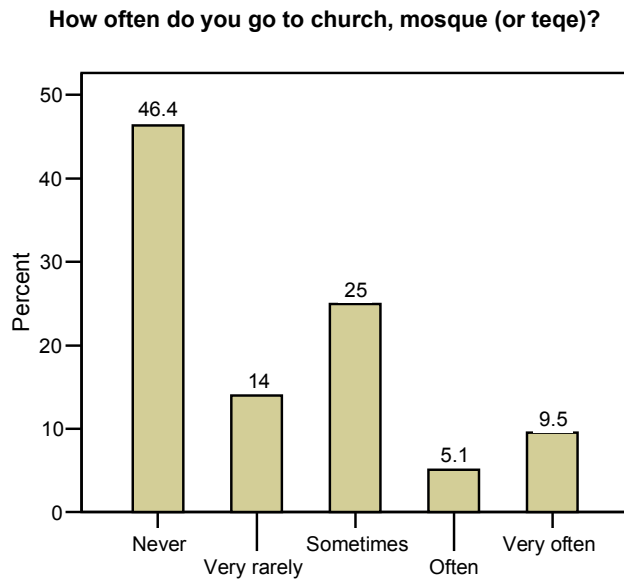


Figure 9. Religious practice: How often do you go to church or mosque?



AES is primarily an academic study and its main product is the dataset that will be deposited with the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor in the coming months. The 2005 AES has produced the first comprehensive dataset on electoral behavior in Albania. We are already planning the 2009 Albanian Election Study in the framework of the CSES Module 3. The focus of the 2009 AES will shift to the study of political parties and the Albanian party system. It will investigate the extent to which political parties in Albania offer meaningful choices to voters through candidate party recruitment and public policy alternatives.

Endnotes

The 2005 Albanian Election Study work was funded by the Open Society Foundation for Albania –Soros Foundation (website: <http://www.soros.al/>), and the Netherlands Embassy in Tirana (website: <http://www.netherlandsembassytirana.com/>).

¹ Readers can find additional information about the 2005 Albanian Election Study on internet at (<http://www.alpsa.org/aes/>); information on the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) is available from the website (<http://www.cses.org/>).

² Official results of the July 3rd, 2005 Albanian Parliamentary Election are as below:

Political Party	Single member district seats	Proportional seats	Total seats
Democratic Party	56		56
Socialist Party	42		42
Republican Party		11	11
Social Democratic Party		7	7
Socialist Movement for Integration	1	4	5
New Democratic Party		4	4
Agrarian Party		4	4
Democratic Alliance		3	3
Human Rights Union Party		2	2
Christian Democratic Party		2	2
Social Democracy Party		2	2
Liberal Democratic Union		1	1
Independent	1		1
TOTAL	100	40	140

³ The original wording of this question is “Please, tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government." Do you agree strongly, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly with this statement?”

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