

Albania

**Period of democratic transition: 1990–1991**

**Pro-democracy civic movement: present**

Since World War II, Albania was the most isolated country in Europe under the Communist leadership of Enver Hoxha. Freedom of expression was denied, religion was outlawed, and torture and execution were commonplace. However, Ramiz Alia, the Communist leader since 1985, slowly started to relax long-held restrictions and responded gradually to social pressures.

Albania's mass democratic ferment was launched by student strikes in 1989, culminating in a protest at the University of Tirana that erupted in December 1990 and grew to include over 3,000 people. At first focused on better living conditions but later developing a political nature, the protests transformed into a broader civic movement that pressed the government to agree to a multiparty system. Civic activists quickly gravitated to a broad-based coalition Democratic Party that initially became the main standard-bearer of ideas of democratic reform. The protests led to the government's legalization of the opposition Democratic Party and to the emergence of a number of free media outlets. About 300 miners participated in strikes in early 1991, which were also part of the atmosphere of civic ferment and mass protest. The widespread protest movement forced further concessions from the Communist Party of Labor's authorities, who agreed to elections that were eventually held in March 1991. Contested, though not fully free, parliamentary elections in 1991 resulted in a majority for the ruling Party of Labor (which had renamed itself as "Socialist"). However, nationwide worker strikes in early 1992 quickly led to new elections in April 1992, in which the anti-Communist and reformist Democratic Party triumphed.

Poverty and corruption weakened the government after the 1992 elections, as did political infighting. National elections occurred in 1997 and in 2001, while elections in 2005, despite flaws, were praised for bringing Albania's first nonviolent change of power since the collapse of communism.