

Marsela Dauti and Geldona Metaj

The appropriation of the 50/50 gender quota in local councils: Political parties' back-room strategies

Following the 2023 local elections, the Albanian media reported that many women candidates resigned one after another—quietly.¹ Many withdrew without taking office. Women resigned and were replaced by men. These types of replacements have been a persistent problem in Albanian politics.² However, the changes to the Electoral Code were supposed to have put an end to the political parties' tactics. But this does not seem to be the case. The problem persists; however, its prevalence and the entire process—from the inclusion of women in political party lists to their replacement with men—are not clear. The study focuses exactly on this process, paying particular attention to resignations given before candidates took office.

1 Methodology

The study relies on combined data obtained from official and unofficial sources. This approach was necessary due to the secrecy in which the process takes place. A request for information was sent to the Central Election Commission (CEC) and was succeeded by numerous steps: collecting information from the Central Election Commission official website, searching the municipalities' and municipal councils' official websites, sending official requests for information to 10 municipal councils³

and 11 political parties⁴ via the postal service and e-mail, establishing a local team and conducting interviews with candidates who ran for seats on municipal councils. The data collected from various sources not only complemented each other, but were also used to contrast them, for example, to compare the reasons for resignations reported in the municipal councils against those reported during the interviews.

¹See Barjamemaj, A. (2024, November 8). Në hijen e kuotave gjinore: Si gratë e zgjedhura zëvendësohen nga burra në këshillat bashkiake [Under the gender quotas disguise: How elected women are replaced by men in municipal councils]. Reporter.al. <https://www.reporter.al/2024/11/08/ne-hijen-e-kuotave-gjinore-si-grate-e-zgjedhura-zevendesohen-nga-burra-ne-keshillat-bashkiake/>. Konomi, E. (2023, October 9). Kush po i frikëson gratë [Who is scaring women away]? Dosja.al. <https://dosja.al/art-arget-im/kush-po-i-frikeson-grate-i330775>

²See Krasniqi, A. (2017). Zgjedhjet 2015: Risitë dhe problematikat e përfaqësimit gjinor [Elections 2015: Advances and challenges in gender representation]. Institute of Political Studies.

³Belsh, Has, Kruja, Kukës, Kurbin, Lezha, Mirdita, Puka, Saranda and Selenica.

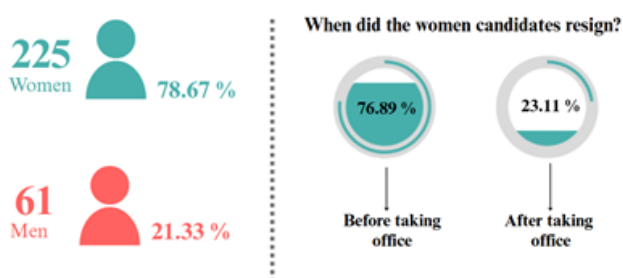
⁴Socialist Party of Albania, Progressive Alliance Party LZHK, Albanian Future, Hashtag Initiative, Democratic Conviction, Albanian Republican Party, Green Party, Social Democratic Party, Democratic Alliance Party of Albania, National Albanian Alliance Party, and Agrarian Environmentalist Party of Albania.

2 Findings

Resignations between May 2023 and December 2024

According to data reported directly by the CEC, as well as searches conducted on the CEC's official website and the official websites of municipalities/councils, 286 resignations were submitted between May 2023 and December 2024. Specifically, 78.67% of resignations (n = 225) were submitted by women, and 21.33% of resignations (n = 61) were submitted by men.

Figure 1: Resignations between May 2023 and December 2024

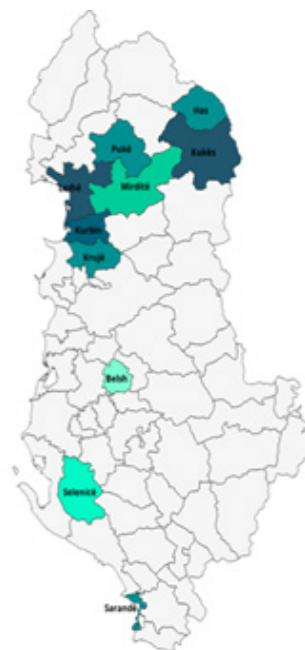


Resignations were recorded in 41 councils. Women's resignations, compared to those of men, were concentrated in a smaller number of councils: 225 women resigned in 27 councils, while 61 men resigned in 32 councils. Of the 225 women candidates who resigned between May 2023 and December 2024, 76.89% (n = 173) did so without taking office, and the resignations were submitted en bloc. In other words, several women candidates resigned at the same time. We will focus on this group below.

Resignations before taking office

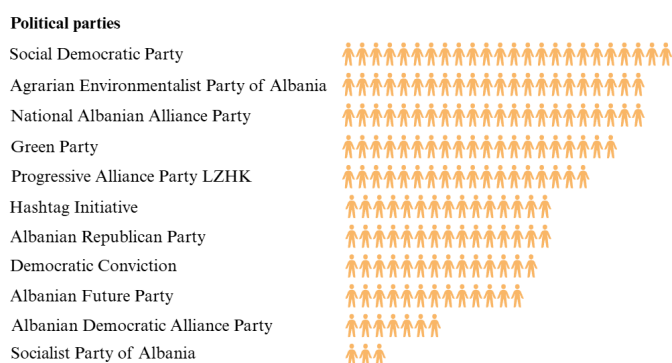
Mass resignations of women candidates—before taking office—were recorded in 10 municipal councils. Figure 1 shows the municipal councils where resignations were recorded before taking office. The darker color corresponds to the highest number of resignations. The councils with the highest number of resignations by women are those of Kukës (43), Lezha (35), and Kurbin (22), followed by the councils of Saranda (15), Puka (14), Kruja (13), Has (11), Mirdita (9), Selenica (8), and Belsh (3).

Figure 2: Municipal councils where women resigned before taking office



Resignations were recorded in 11 political parties, including: the Social Democratic Party (24), the Agrarian Environmentalist Party of Albania (22), the National Albanian Alliance Party (22), the Green Party (20), the Progressive Alliance Party LZHK (18), the Hashtag Initiative (15), the Albanian Republican Party (15), the Democratic Conviction (14), the Albanian Future Party (13), the Albanian Democratic Alliance Party (7), and the Socialist Party of Albania (3).

Figure 3: Political parties ranked by number of resignations before taking office



The data suggest that political leaders or organizers recruit women candidates whom they can easily control: usually, women candidates have no previous experience in politics, they share family ties with or are relatives of men who intend to occupy their seats, and some of them are looking for a job, which is used to attract them to the municipal council. The women deem their running as an economic opportunity to find work, to keep their job, or to get promoted; as a favor to the men of the immediate or extended family, or people connected to them. Moreover, in some cases, running is also the result of psychological and economic pressure, where employers in women-dominant-hiring businesses use their names to fill the lists. Refusal can lead to a layoff.

Municipal councils reported data on 128 women candidates, of whom 36% shared the same surname within the same list. Kukës is at the top of mobilizing family ties, where half of the cases were situated, followed by Kurbini, Puka, Hasi, and Mirdita. The practice of mobilizing family ties was recorded in the Hashtag Initiative, the Agrarian Environmentalist Party of Albania, the Progressive Alliance Party LZHK, the Albanian Republican Party, the Democratic Conviction, the National Arbër Alliance Party, the Albanian Democratic Alliance Party, and the Social Democratic Party.

The candidates' requests or statements usually mention "personal reasons" or "family reasons" as reasons for resignations to cover up the truth: the attempt to help men become municipal council members. While the gender ratio was equal in the lists submitted to the Central Election Commission, it changed after the women's resignations. At the beginning of 2025, out of the 45 seats that parties had secured in the 10 municipal councils, 40 seats (89%) were held by men and 5 seats (11%) were held by women. At the end of the process, nine out of 11 political parties had no women in the municipal councils. The tactics served men, who ousted women to occupy their municipal council seats.

Recommendations from women candidates to the Central Election Commission

- Discuss the phenomenon publicly and express willingness to prevent it.
- Communicate the official position directly to all political parties where mass resignations have been identified.
- Establish a special verification mechanism to monitor and investigate cases of mass resignations of candidates, especially when there are reasonable suspicions of gender quota violations.
- Prepare an informational material on the procedure for the resignation of candidates and municipal council members. The information should be publicly accessible and addressed to candidates, political parties, and municipal councils.

Other recommendations

- There should be clear legal regulations on resignation from municipal councils. Currently, the Electoral Code only provides for the resignation procedure for Members of Parliament (Article 164, paragraph 1).
- Women's political forums should be engaged through public statements and direct actions within the party.
- Civil society organizations and international organizations present in the country should exert greater pressure on political

parties and expand training programs for new women candidates, especially in the 10 municipal councils where mass resignations were recorded.

- The alliances of women councilors, the National Alliance of Councilors, and the Alliance of Women MPs should engage in preventing the issue in the next local elections.
- The media is also one of the key stakeholders in uncovering the parties' back-room strategies and improving transparency in electoral processes.
- Before the next local elections, the CEC should organize a national awareness campaign to introduce the rules and to convey to the political parties the message that they must bring such tactics to an end. Women who receive offers to be included in the lists as mere figures should be encouraged to report such cases.

About the authors

Dr. Marsela Dauti researches local democratization, community participation, and gender equality in policymaking, contributing to reforms advancing women's political representation in Albania.

Geldona Metaj focuses on gender equality and civic participation, combining PhD research at the University of Tirana with experience in education and social development.

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Kutia Postare 1418 Tiranë Shqipëri
info.tirana@fes.de

Publishing department

Department IZ/OE

Contact

Katharina Hofmann, - Resident Representative of FES Tirana
katharina.hofmann@fes.de
Jonida Smaja, - Programme Manager
jonida.smaja@fes.de

Design/Layout

Enea Protopapa, - Office and Communications Coordinator
enea.protopapa@fes.de

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