

# Albania



**Official name:** Republika e Shqipërisë (Republic of Albania)  
**Form of government:** unitary multiparty republic with one legislative house  
**President:** Ilir Meta  
**Prime Minister:** Edi Rama  
**Capital:** Tirana (Tiranë)  
**Official language:** Albanian  
**Official religion:** none  
**Monetary unit:** lek (L)  
**Population:** 2,793,000

**Total area (sq mi):** 11,082  
**Urban-rural population**  
  **Urban:** (2016) 58%  
  **Rural:** (2016) 42%  
**Life expectancy**  
  **Male:** (2014) 75.3 years  
  **Female:** (2014) 80.9 years  
**Literacy**  
  **Male:** (2006) 99.2%  
  **Female:** (2006) 98.3%  
**GNI per capita (U.S.\$):** 4,290

## **Introduction**

The Republic of Albania in eastern Europe is one of the smallest countries on the Balkan Peninsula. During most of its history Albania has been ruled by other countries and empires.



Albania became a communist state in 1946. In succeeding decades it became the poorest country of Europe. In the 1990s, like its Eastern European neighbors, it rejected communism. The Communist party itself was voted out of office in March 1992.

## **Geography**

Albania is bordered by Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo, and Montenegro. Its western border is the Adriatic Sea. Most of Albania is mountainous. The highest mountain is Korab, at 9,026 feet (2,751 meters), which sits on the border with Macedonia, making it the highest point for both countries. The longest river is the Drin.

Albania has warm, dry summers and mild, wet winters. Temperatures are more extreme in the mountain regions than on the coast.

## **Plants and Animals**

Forests once covered much of Albania. After centuries of clearing and livestock grazing, many areas now have only bushes and scrub. The remaining forests have oak, beech, and pine trees.

Hunting has left few wild animals, except in the remote forests. Among them are wolves, jackals, wild hogs, bears, deer, and chamois (goatlike animals). The mild climate attracts many birds, however.

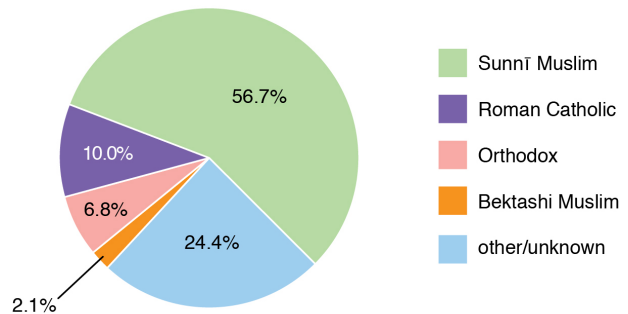
## **People and Culture**

The people of Albania are divided into two major groups: the northern Gëgs and the southern Tosks. Each group speaks its own dialect, or variation, of

the Albanian language. In 1972 a unified literary (written) language was created, incorporating elements of both dialects. Minority groups, including Vlachs and Greeks, make up about 8 percent of its population.

Under the communist regime religion was discouraged and Albania became officially an atheistic nation, but religion-based cultural differences remain among the population. Of those professing a faith the most numerous are Muslim, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholic

Traditional religious groups (2011)<sup>†</sup>



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<sup>†</sup>In actuality, a majority of citizens are secular after decades of rigidly enforced atheism.

Albania has one of the smallest populations of the Balkan countries. Although at the beginning of the 21st century there were about seven million ethnic Albanians in the world, only about 3.2 million of them lived in the country. The largest concentrations of Albanians outside Albania are in the bordering countries. There are also large Albanian communities in Greece, Italy, Turkey, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, and the United States.

As a result of almost five centuries of Turkish rule the Albanians adopted a way of life (including clothing, building styles, and art forms) which was similar to that of western Asia. This was especially true of the Muslim population. By the early 21st century, however, the way of life had become increasingly Western in style.

### **Economy**

The Albanian economy is one of the poorest in Europe. More than half of the workers are farmers. When the communists took control after World War II, they abolished private land ownership. About 80 percent of agricultural land was put into cooperatives and the rest was farmed directly by the state.

Albania's chief crops are vegetables, grains, melons, and potatoes. Sheep,

goats, cattle, and poultry are the major livestock.

Albania manufactures textiles, glass products, leather, iron, steel, and office machinery. Its mines provide chromium and copper. The southwestern part of the country is rich in petroleum and natural gas.



## History

The Illyrians, ancient ancestors of the Albanians, were likely the first people to live in what is now Albania. The Romans invaded in the 100s bc. In ad 395 the Roman Empire split into two halves. Albania fell in the eastern part, the Byzantine Empire. Bulgaria and Serbia later controlled the area.

In the late 1300s Albania became part of the Islamic Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Turks ruled the country for almost 500 years. Albania gained its independence in 1912.

In 1928 Albania's president declared himself King Zog I. After Italy invaded Albania in April 1939, Zog fled the country. Germany took over from 1943 to 1944.

In 1944 Communist leader Enver Hoxha took over the Albanian government. Hoxha led Albania for four decades. During this period the Communist country was cut off from the rest of the world. After Hoxha's death in 1985, Albania reopened relations with many countries.



In December 1990 the Democratic party was established, and in March 1991 the first multiparty elections in 68 years were held. A noncommunist multiparty regime took control in June 1991, but amid nationwide food shortages and general inefficiency this regime fell in December 1991. Thousands of Albanian refugees fled to Italy in August 1991, but only a handful were allowed to remain there. In April 1992 Sali Berisha, a heart surgeon, was elected Albania's first noncommunist president since World War II.

In 1998 and 1999 fighting broke out between Serbs and Albanians living in Kosovo, a province of Serbia that bordered Albania. Many ethnic Albanians crossed into Albania from Kosovo. Most of the refugees returned to Kosovo after the fighting ended, but some stayed in Albania. In 2008 Albanians rejoiced when Kosovo declared independence from Serbia.

**FUN FACT:** Albanian is its own language branch (Thaco-Illyrian) in the Indo-European language group - unrelated to any other.

**FUN FACT:** Mother Teresa (Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu.) Is the only Albanian to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

**FUN FACT:** More ethnic Albanians live outside Albania than inside the country.