

Brief n. 25/January 2026

From Deadlock to Dominance: How Vetëvendosje Reshaped Kosovo's Political Landscape

Donika Emini

With the support of



Fondazione
Compagnia
di San Paolo

Abstract

Kosovo's December 2025 snap elections ended a year of political paralysis and produced the most decisive electoral outcome since independence. Vetëvendosje's majority was not merely a function of popularity but the result of a strategic reconfiguration of domestic politics during a prolonged institutional vacuum, combined with the collapse of the opposition and a shifting international environment. This policy brief analyses how the contrast between the February and December 2025 elections reveals a structural realignment of Kosovo's political system, how Vetëvendosje converted deadlock into dominance, why the opposition imploded, and how global geopolitical shifts now constrain Kosovo's strategic options.

A year of political crisis: February Elections vs. December Snap Elections 2025

The contrast between Kosovo's February 2025 elections and the December 2025 snap vote reveals more than just a swing in electoral fortunes. It exposes a structural transformation in how power is organized in Kosovo's political system.

In the February 9th elections, Lëvizja Vetëvendosje Party¹ (VV) emerged as the largest party but lacked the numbers to govern alone.² This followed a full mandate of VV's leader, Albin Kurti government, the first in post-independence Kosovo in which a government lasted its entire term. The February elections sent a different signal: they returned Kosovo to its political pluralism foundations, in which no party could govern alone without forming coalitions.

Vetëvendosje secured 48 seats in the 120-member Assembly but fell short of the 61 seats needed for a majority. Despite remaining the largest party, VV experienced a decline in its electoral performance compared to its previous result, weakening its ability to govern alone. The Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) followed with 24 seats, reaffirming its position as the main opposition force, while the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) won 20 seats, consolidating its recovery but still lagging the two largest parties. The Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), running together with NISMA, obtained 8 seats, maintaining a smaller yet potentially pivotal role in coalition arithmetic.³

According to these results, the opposition, primarily PDK and LDK, retained enough seats to prevent Kurti from forming a stable government. The outcome was clear: no single party was strong enough to rule, and no coalition was politically coherent enough to function. This reproduced a pattern seen repeatedly since independence, in which elections redistributed seats but not governing capacity.

By December, that equilibrium had collapsed. VV crossed the psychological and political threshold of 50 percent, converting pluralism into dominance and surpassing the success of 2021, a result few had anticipated.

In the 28 December 2025 snap parliamentary elections, VV, led by Albin Kurti, strengthened its position as the dominant political force, winning around 51 % of the vote and 57 seats in the 120-member Assembly, marking its strongest result to date. The Democratic Party of Kosovo

¹ Lëvizja Vetëvendosje! is a political party in Kosovo founded in 2005 and based in Pristina. It is a centre-left, nationalist party that supports Kosovo's accession to NATO.

² *Peaceful and vibrant election process despite harsh rhetoric reflecting deep divisions*. European Union Election Observation Mission. (2025, February 11). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/297555/Kosovo_-_Parliamentary_Elections,_9_February_2025,_EU_EOM_Preliminary_Statement.pdf

³ *Parliamentary Elections Results - February 2025*. Central Election Commission. (2025, February). <https://kqz-ks.org/zgjedhjet-e-pergjithshme/zgjedhjet-per-kuvend-te-kosoves-2025/>

(PDK) came in second with approximately 20 % of the vote and 22 seats, retaining its role as the main opposition, while the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) secured about 13 % of the vote and 15 seats, reflecting a more modest presence compared to earlier in the year. The Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) captured roughly 5.5 % of the vote and 6 seats, remaining a smaller party within the legislature.⁴

Table 1. Comparison of Election Results (February and December 2025). Personal elaboration.

Political Party	9 Feb 2025	28 Dec 2025
Vetëvendosje (VV / LVV)	42.30 %	51.11 %
Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)	20.95 %	20.19 %
Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)	18.27 %	13.23 %
Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) (AAK–NISMA coalition in Feb)	7.06 %	5.50 %

What changed was not simply voter sentiment but the meaning of opposition itself. In February, PDK and LDK still appeared to many voters as viable alternative governing forces. By December, they had come to be seen as obstacles to governance itself. The February election created a hung parliament. The December election produced a plebiscitary verdict on who was responsible for the ensuing paralysis.⁵ Kurti did not just win votes; he won the narrative of responsibility. The December results, therefore, did not simply overturn February; they resolved it. Voters effectively retroactively adjudicated the year of deadlock, delivering a verdict that the opposition, not Vetëvendosje, had blocked the country throughout 2025.

This transformation matters because Kosovo’s political system was designed to prevent majoritarian rule. Coalition governance was embedded into the post-independence settlement as a safeguard for pluralism and minority rights. The December election did not abolish that architecture, but it overrode it politically. Once again, Kosovo has a government that does not need to negotiate its survival daily. What makes this shift particularly significant is that it did not arise from a change in Kosovo’s constitutional framework, but from a transformation in voter behaviour. The system still formally rewards coalition politics and minority inclusion, yet voters chose to override this logic by granting VV a majority. In effect, citizens suspended the culture of negotiated governance in favour of decisive rule.

This suggests a deeper psychological rupture with Kosovo’s post-war political era. For two decades, power was fragmented among former resistance elites, technocratic centrists, and minority parties, producing stability but also chronic inefficiency. February 2025 still reflected that legacy. December 2025 did not. The electorate made clear that it no longer trusted the old mechanisms to produce a functioning government. The majority for Vetëvendosje was therefore not simply electoral; it was systemic. It signalled that Kosovo’s political centre of gravity had shifted from bargaining to governing.

⁴ Preliminary Parliamentary Elections December 2025 Results. Central Election Commission. (2025b, December). <https://kqz-ks.org/kjo-eshte-platforma-elektronike-per-rezultatet-preliminare-https-resultslocal2025-kqz-ks-org/>

⁵ Delauney, G. (2025, December 29). Kosovo’s ruling party wins election after months of political deadlock. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ce3z3w4wy0go>

How Kurti Turned Deadlock into Dominance

The year between February and December was not a vacuum; it was a political campaign conducted through institutions rather than ballots. Following the inconclusive February elections, VV was constitutionally obliged to attempt to form a government. Kurti did so formally, yet strategically he had little incentive to accept a coalition that would dilute his authority or create a weak government constrained until March 2026, when the presidential elections would challenge him numerically in the parliament and necessitate power-sharing. The opposition, meanwhile, refused to enter any arrangement that would leave Kurti in power but was also too weak to build a political force capable of challenging him and forming the government. What followed was a series of failed parliamentary sessions, procedural deadlocks, and legal ambiguities that froze Kosovo's institutions.

In practice, Kosovo functioned under a caretaker government with limited formal authority but significant informal control. Kurti used this period to demonstrate continuity and to leverage his position to introduce targeted measures for the most vulnerable groups in society, rolling out targeted, ad hoc aid for pensioners, families, and maternity recipients, alongside promises of wage and public-sector bonuses. These measures shored up popularity and reinforced Vetëvendosje leftist appeal. At the same time, Kurti succeeded in reframing the deadlock. Rather than appearing as a prime minister unable to build coalitions, he positioned himself as the victim of an obstructionist political class. Each failed parliamentary session, each veto, and each walkout by the opposition became evidence of their unwillingness to let the electorate's choice take effect.

The decision to push elections to December 28 was part of this strategy. Delaying the vote extended the period in which the opposition was associated with paralysis, while allowing Kurti to govern de facto. It also allowed diaspora voters, who disproportionately support VV, to participate at higher levels. Moreover, holding the vote in December enabled Kurti to factor in the presidential election, strategically reproducing a scenario akin to 2021, in which the winner takes it all.

By December, the electorate was not choosing between parties; it was choosing between continuity and blockage. Kurti won because he convinced voters that only a one-party government could end the cycle of institutional hostage-taking that had defined Kosovo politics for more than a decade. The opposition, in effect, made this strategy work swiftly and effortlessly.

Media, Narrative, and the Failure of Opposition Politics

The opposition did not merely lose votes; it lost credibility. PDK and LDK structured their entire political strategy around delegitimizing Kurti rather than presenting an alternative government. Corruption allegations, personal attacks, and televised confrontations dominated their campaigns. Yet these tactics misfired for two reasons.

First, they failed to account for the asymmetry of attention. Kurti did not engage in media spectacle. His absence forced the opposition to talk about him constantly, turning him into the central figure of every debate without allowing him to be questioned directly. This made him omnipresent but uncontaminated by day-to-day political theatre. Secondly, the opposition offered no counter-narrative. They did not explain how they would govern differently, what economic reforms they would pursue, or how they would restore Kosovo's international standing. Their message was simply that Kurti was flawed. In a political environment defined

by paralysis, that was insufficient. Voters were not looking for a better critic; they were looking for a government.⁶

PKD, historically associated with the former KLA leadership, entered the campaign amid leadership changes and midstream reforms, followed by deep internal divisions. Being in a phase of leadership restructuring, it remained anchored to the past, defining itself through its ties to the Kosovo Liberation Army, clinging to the hope of Hashim Thaçi's return from The Hague, treating current leaders as merely transitional, and limiting their capacity to rebuild the party.

LDK's crisis was more existential. Once the party of state-building and international legitimacy, it has struggled to redefine itself in a post-independence Kosovo. Under Lumir Abdixhiku, LDK attempted to project a technocratic image, but it failed to articulate why it deserved to lead the country. By refusing to engage in coalition-building while also failing to mobilize a mass electorate, LDK placed itself in political limbo, scoring a historic low in the elections. Meanwhile, AAK is clearly a party in decline, and if the trajectory continues at the same pace, it risks losing parliamentary representation in the next elections.

The opposition's inability to reform internally meant that voters increasingly saw VV as the only coherent political actor. This was not a vote of ideological enthusiasm, but a vote against dysfunction.

What's Next for Kosovo: A New International Environment, Fewer Guarantees

Kosovo's domestic political reset is occurring in an increasingly hostile global environment. The European Union, once Kosovo's main external anchor, has re-prioritized enlargement in the Western Balkans. Its focus has shifted toward Albania and Montenegro, while Kosovo remains stalled due to unresolved disputes with Serbia and internal political instability. The EU's punitive measures against Kosovo during the 2023 crisis in the north were lifted in 2025 after the local elections⁷, which brought the return of Serbian mayors in four municipalities in the north (Leposavić, Zvečan, North Mitrovica, and Zubin Potok⁸). But significant progress on EU integration remains distant. Kosovo's application has been on hold since December 2022. Similarly, although the EU Growth Plan has been given the green light, it has been stalled due to the lack of a legitimate parliament to adopt it as an international agreement, keeping the reform agenda on hold⁹. The United States is no longer a reliable strategic constant, especially after suspending the strategic dialogue with Kosovo¹⁰. Under a Trump-style foreign policy,

⁶ Isufi, A. (2025, December). *Fitorja e madhe dhe humbja e thellë- Çka ndodhi me partitë?*. Kallxo.com. <https://kallxo.com/gjate/fitorja-e-madhe-dhe-humbja-e-thelle-cka-ndodhi-me-partite/>

⁷ Reuters. (2025, December 18). *EU to lift sanctions on Kosovo, release financial aid, von der Leyen says*. Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-lift-sanctions-kosovo-release-financial-aid-von-der-leyen-says-2025-12-18/>

⁸ Balkan Insight. (2025, December 5). *Serb mayors 'retake' power in north Kosovo*. Balkan Insight. Retrieved from <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/12/05/serb-mayors-retake-power-in-north-kosovo/>

⁹ Palokaj, A. (2025, November 20). *No payments from the EU Growth Plan without ratification of the agreement in Parliament*. Koha.net. Retrieved from <https://www.koha.net/en/lajmet-e-mbremjes-ktv/ska-pagesa-nga-plani-i-rritjes-i-be-se-pa-ratifikim-te-marreshes-ne-kuvend>

¹⁰ U.S. Embassy Pristina. (2025, September 12). Statement announcing the indefinite suspension of the planned Strategic Dialogue with Kosovo. U.S. Embassy in Kosovo. Retrieved from https://xk.usembassy.gov/st_9122025/

Kosovo's value is measured transactionally rather than normatively. Support is conditional, unpredictable, and increasingly linked to regional bargains that may not favour Kosovo.

This shift is particularly dangerous because Kosovo's statehood has always depended on international legitimacy. Unlike other countries, Kosovo cannot rely solely on internal sovereignty. Its independence, borders, and diplomatic reach remain partially guaranteed by Western political will. When that becomes conditional, Kosovo is strategically exposed.

The stalled dialogue with Serbia illustrates this clearly. Without a government for most of 2025, Kosovo was unable to advance proposals, implement agreements, or demand reciprocity. The EU, lacking urgency and political capital, allowed the process to drift. Serbia, facing its own domestic unrest, had no incentive to move.¹¹ Kosovo was left frozen.

Economic consequences followed. Delays in EU disbursements under the Growth Agenda affected infrastructure projects, energy investments, and public sector modernization. For a small economy like Kosovo's, these delays are not abstract—they translate into lost jobs, eroded confidence, and rising social frustration. Political paralysis became economic vulnerability.

This leaves Kosovo in a precarious position. Its path to international organizations is blocked due to the crisis of multilateralism. Its traditional allies are distracted. The costs of the 2025 deadlock, lost EU funds, delayed reforms, and diplomatic stagnation are still being paid.

While Kurti has succeeded in restoring governmental stability, his reconfirmation will not automatically bring substantive change in Kosovo's foreign policy; long criticized by European institutions for sustaining political paralysis through limited openness in the EU facilitated dialogue with Serbia, his renewed mandate effectively reaffirms this strategic ambiguity. However, Kurti has the political power to make tables turn. Vetëvendosje's majority now gives Kosovo a chance to re-engage, but the window is narrow. Without rapid adoption of the Growth Agenda, serious diplomacy in Brussels and European capitals, and a credible strategy toward Serbia, Kosovo risks being sidelined in a fragmented international order.

Way Forward: Power, Risk, and Responsibility

The December 2025 elections closed one chapter of crisis but opened another of concentrated power. Kosovo now has something it has rarely had: a government that can act without being held accountable by its opposition. This power brings with it a historic responsibility. Kosovo's institutions were designed for coalition governance, not dominance. A one-party government can be efficient, but it can also sideline voices that are essential in a deeply plural society. How VV treats minorities, critics, and independent institutions will determine whether this new phase strengthens democracy or hollow it out.

The international dimension makes this even more consequential. Kosovo will soon face pressure on issues ranging from the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities to energy integration and regional security arrangements. A strong government can negotiate from a position of clarity; a defensive or ideologically rigid government, however, may provoke costly confrontations that Kosovo is ill-equipped to win.

In this sense, December 2025 was not an endpoint; it was a beginning. Kosovo now has power, but it must still earn legitimacy, both abroad and at home.

¹¹ European Parliamentary Research Service. (2025). *Belgrade-Pristina dialogue: The rocky road towards a comprehensive normalisation agreement* (EPRS_BRI(2025)779231). European Parliament. Retrieved from [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/mt/document/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)779231](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/mt/document/EPRS_BRI(2025)779231)

Whether this becomes a foundation for reform or a source of new instability will depend on how Vetëvendosje governs, treats institutions, manages the opposition, and navigates an unforgiving international system.

Donika Emini, Research Fellow at the Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz and Member of the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG)