

Albanian Leadership Styles: The Pyramid of Power

Ishmael Kardryni, Ph.D.

Henry Cejudo, Ph.D.

January 2024

Abstract

This paper presents a novel postmodern leadership theory, applying political science power analysis to Albanian political leaders. The theory conceptualizes leadership as a four-dimensional pyramid comprising soft power (cooptive power and charisma) and hard power (ruthlessness and resourcefulness). It explores the theoretical foundations of each dimension, drawing on established concepts from political science and sociology, including Joseph Nye's soft power, Max Weber's charismatic authority, Resource Mobilization Theory, and Bruce Bueno de Mesquita's Rational Choice. The framework provides a rigorous lens for understanding the multifaceted nature of power in contemporary political leadership, particularly in navigating complex political landscapes.

Paper presented at the University of Tirana on January 2024.

Bar-Kafe "Ekonomiku"

Festschrift for "Dhori Kule - The Eternal Rector of the University of Tirana."

1 Introduction: Postmodern Leadership and the Dynamics of Power

Leadership studies have long explored how individuals exert influence within social and political structures. Traditional theories often emphasize singular, heroic figures or fixed hierarchies. However, contemporary political environments demand a framework that accounts for fluidity, multiplicity, and subjective interpretations. This paper introduces a postmodern leadership theory that deconstructs conventional authority, proposing a four-dimensional power pyramid to analyze political leadership styles.

Postmodern leadership challenges the notion of a singular, objective reality, embracing "multiple subjective truths defined by experience" and the "loss of absolute authority" (PostmodernLeadership). This perspective posits that situations are open to diverse interpretations, prioritizing localized understanding and diversity (PostmodernLeadership).

The focus shifts from a leader’s overarching vision to the collective voice of cultural meanings, emphasizing individual interpretations (PostmodernLeadership). This framework allows for a pragmatic analysis of power acquisition and maintenance, particularly when universal moral judgments are less salient. In such contexts, the ethics of a leader’s actions—such as corruption or disproportionate force—become context-dependent, enabling a focus on strategic effectiveness within subjective political landscapes.

The proposed theory conceptualizes political leadership through a four-dimensional power pyramid, divided into soft power (cooptive power and charisma) and hard power (ruthlessness and resourcefulness). This framework offers a comprehensive lens for analyzing how politicians exert influence and achieve objectives in multifaceted political environments.

Power, in political science, is defined as the "capacity to influence, lead, dominate, or otherwise impact others’ actions" (PowerBritannica). Max Weber defines power as the ability to "carry through one’s will, even against resistance" (PowerBritannica). This broad definition encompasses persuasion and coercion, forming the basis for understanding leadership dynamics. Power concepts have evolved from associations with divine authority to modern debates on distribution, such as elitist versus pluralistic theories (PowerEvolution). Scholars like Robert Dahl and Michel Foucault further refine power as agenda-setting, desire-shaping, and intertwined with knowledge (PowerBritannica). Applying these concepts to political leadership enables a granular examination of influence beyond formal authority.

2 Conceptualizing Power in Leadership: A Four-Dimensional Pyramid

This postmodern leadership theory proposes a four-dimensional power pyramid for political leaders, structured around soft power and hard power. This hierarchical model illustrates the diverse mechanisms leaders employ to achieve objectives and maintain influence.

2.1 The Four Dimensions of Postmodern Leadership Power

Category	Dimension	Definition
Soft Power	Cooptive Power	The ability to network and strategically include adversaries, discerning when and how to do so.

Hard Power	Charisma	The capacity to inspire and influence through personal qualities and perceived extraordinary abilities (WeberCharisma).
	Ruthlessness	The use of disproportionate force to eliminate or weaken adversaries when cooptation fails.
	Resourcefulness	The ability to generate and distribute resources, regardless of ethical considerations (e.g., corruption, lobbying), per Rational Choice Theory (MesquitaRCT).

Table 1: The Four Dimensions of Postmodern Leadership
Power

2.2 Soft Power: Influence Through Attraction and Cooptation

Soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye, is the "ability to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion" (NyeSoftPower). Unlike hard power, which relies on threats or inducements, soft power shapes preferences through cultural appeal, political values, and policies (SoftPowerWiki). Nye emphasizes its cost-effectiveness and alignment with liberal traditions (NyeSoftPower). Combining soft and hard power yields "smart power" (NyeSmartPower).

In domestic politics, politicians cultivate soft power by projecting resonant values and policies, fostering goodwill (SoftPowerCFR). This involves rational persuasion, inspirational appeals, or personal likability (PowerSaylor). Soft power's "free" nature—requiring minimal resources and carrying low consequences for failure—aligns with Rational Choice Theory, which posits actors maximize utility through cost-benefit analysis (RCTWiki). Politicians prioritize soft power for its low political and financial costs, reserving hard power for when persuasion fails (NyeSoftPower).

2.2.1 Cooptive Power: Strategic Inclusion and Network Building

Cooptive power involves networking and strategically including adversaries to neutralize threats. Cooptation is a "pre-emptive absorption strategy" where incumbents integrate challengers into the system, ensuring stability (CooptationPolitics). Benefits must out-

weigh costs for both parties (CooptationTaylor). Factors like challenger organizational capacity or group size influence cooptation offers (CooptationTaylor).

Cooptation undermines challengers' credibility by granting access without substantial policy changes, preserving hierarchies (CooptationTaylor). It can create divisions among opposition groups and is a pillar of autocratic longevity (CooptationTaylor). For a politician, cooptive power is a rational strategy to mitigate conflict, aligning with Selectorate Theory's focus on maintaining supporter loyalty (SelectorateWiki).

2.2.2 Charisma: The Weberian Lens on Inspirational Leadership

Max Weber's charismatic authority is based on perceived "exceptional attributes," often divine or exemplary (WeberCharisma). Charismatic leaders exhibit visionary qualities and personal magnetism, forming an emotional community (*Vergemeinschaftung*) (WeberCharisma). They emerge during crises, promising transformative change (WeberCharisma). Historical examples include Barack Obama and Fidel Castro (WeberCharisma).

Charisma is a revolutionary force, challenging norms but inherently unstable (WeberCharisma). Its success depends on followers' recognition and tangible results (CharismaFiveable). Failure to deliver erodes charisma, and its personal nature complicates succession (WeberCharisma). In postmodern contexts, charisma's reliance on subjective truths makes it fragile, as diverse interpretations can undermine perceived extraordinary qualities (PostmodernLeadership).

Characteristic	Description	Source
Perceived Extraordinary Qualities	Leaders are seen as having exceptional, often divine, attributes.	(WeberCharisma)
Follower Attribution	Charisma depends on followers' belief and recognition.	(WeberCharisma)
Emotional Community	Followers form a <i>Vergemeinschaftung</i> through emotional ties.	(WeberCharisma)
Revolutionary Force	Charisma drives change by altering values and attitudes.	(WeberCharisma)
Instability	Charisma deteriorates without sustained success.	(WeberCharisma)
Routinization Challenge	Transferring charisma is difficult due to its personal nature.	(WeberCharisma)

Potential Dangers	Risks include follower dependency and suppressed critical thinking. (CharismaFiveable)
--------------------------	--

Table 2: Key Characteristics of Weberian Charisma

2.3 Hard Power: Coercion and Resource Control

Hard power compels action through coercion, using threats or inducements like military or economic leverage (NyeSoftPower). It achieves immediate results but risks backlash and high costs (NyeSmartPower). In domestic politics, hard power involves legislative pressure, economic sanctions, or legal repercussions (WarResponsibility). Its "loss responsibility costs" expose leaders to political fallout if actions fail (WarResponsibility). Rational Choice Theory suggests leaders use hard power only when soft power is insufficient, due to its higher risks (RCTWiki).

2.3.1 Ruthlessness: The Application of Disproportionate Force

Ruthlessness involves using disproportionate force to eliminate or weaken adversaries when cooptation fails. This includes "autocratic legalism" (e.g., rewriting constitutions, court packing) (AutocraticLegalism), political purges (PurgeWiki), and strategic weakening through smear campaigns or demonization (WedgeStrategy; DemonizingOpponents). The "madman theory" cultivates irrationality to deter adversaries (MadmanTheory). Ruthlessness escalates rationally after cooptation fails, reflecting a strategic hierarchy driven by survival (SelectorateWiki).

2.3.2 Resourcefulness: Strategic Resource Acquisition and Distribution

Resourcefulness entails generating and distributing resources, regardless of ethical considerations (e.g., corruption, lobbying), per Rational Choice Theory (MesquitaRCT). Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) emphasizes acquiring resources like financial capital, skills, and networks for political success (ResourceMobilization). Selectorate Theory highlights distributing private and public goods to maintain loyalty (SelectorateWiki). Resources amplify all power dimensions, making resourcefulness a meta-dimension enabling cooptation, charisma, and ruthlessness (ResourceMobilization).

Resource Category	Definition / Examples	Source
MMaterial	Financial capital, office space, equipment.	(ResourceMobilization)

Human	Labor, skills, expertise (e.g., volunteers, professionals).	(ResourceMobilization)
Social-Organizational	Networks and alliances (e.g., email lists, partnerships).	(ResourceThoughtCo)
Cultural	Knowledge for lobbying, policy drafting, or organizing.	(ResourceMobilization)
Moral	Solidarity, legitimacy, sympathetic support.	(ResourceMobilization)

Table 3: Resource Categories in Resource Mobilization Theory

3 Synthesis and Interplay of Power Dimensions

The power pyramid integrates soft and hard power, reflecting Nye's "smart power" (NyeSmartPower). Politicians prioritize soft power for its low costs, escalating to hard power when necessary (NyeSoftPower). Cooptive power precedes ruthlessness, with charisma and resourcefulness enabling all dimensions. This framework suggests a strategic decision-making process, where leaders assess threats, resources, and costs to maximize survival (SelectorateWiki). Postmodernism's "multiple realities" allow leaders to justify ethically ambiguous actions, emphasizing pragmatic outcomes over universal ethics (PostmodernLeadership).

4 Individual Case Snapshots: Albanian Leadership Power Dynamics

This section provides qualitative insights into Albanian leaders' power profiles, illustrating the pyramid's dimensions:

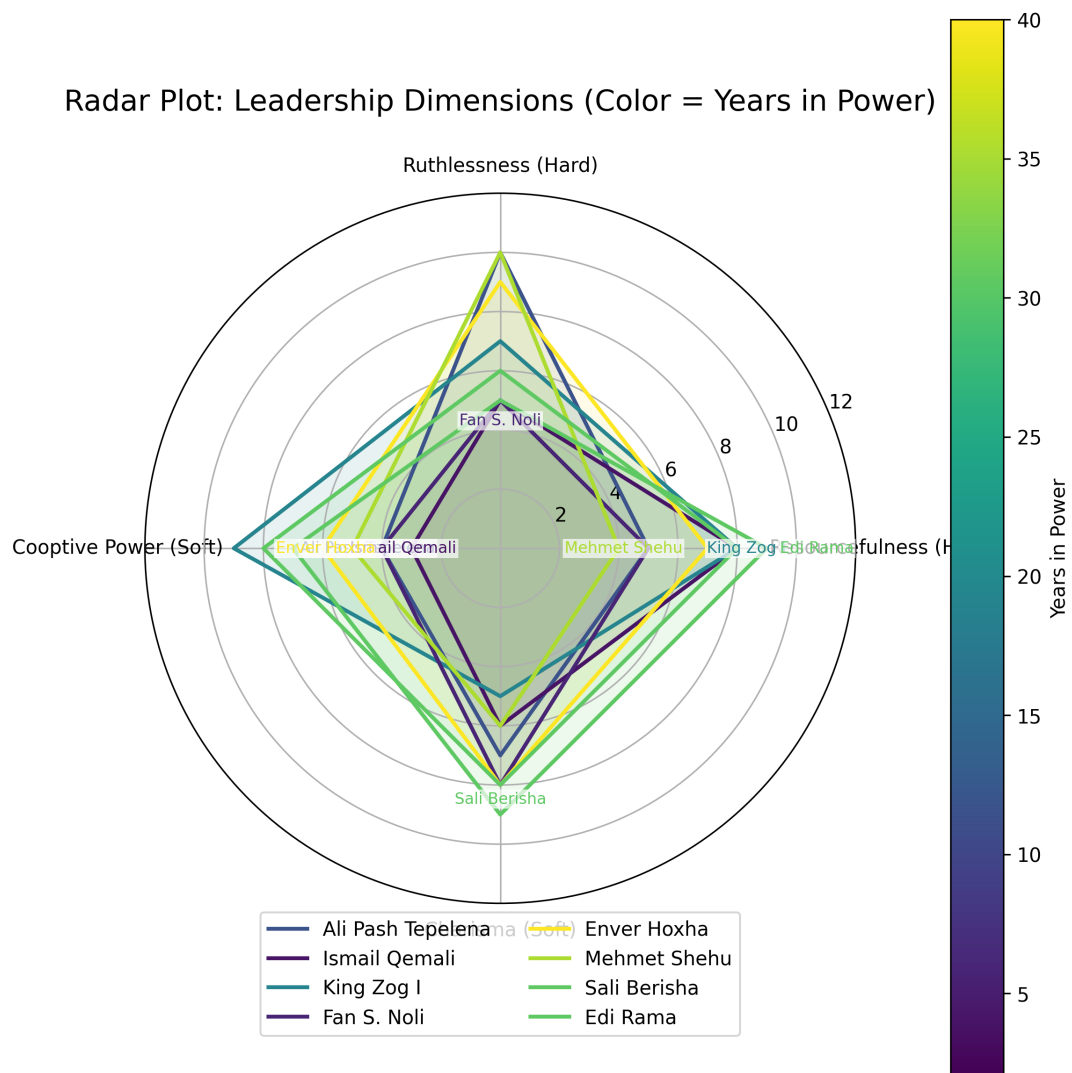
- **Ali Pash Tepelena:** Relied heavily on ruthlessness and corrupt resourcefulness, lacking soft power (Godo).
- **Ismail Qemali:** Lacked ruthlessness, with resourcefulness marked by corruption and foreign cooptation (Clayer2013).
- **King Zog I:** Balanced cooptive power and resourcefulness with moderate ruthlessness, enabling long tenure.
- **Fan S. Noli:** Ineffective across all dimensions, explaining his short influence (Qesari).

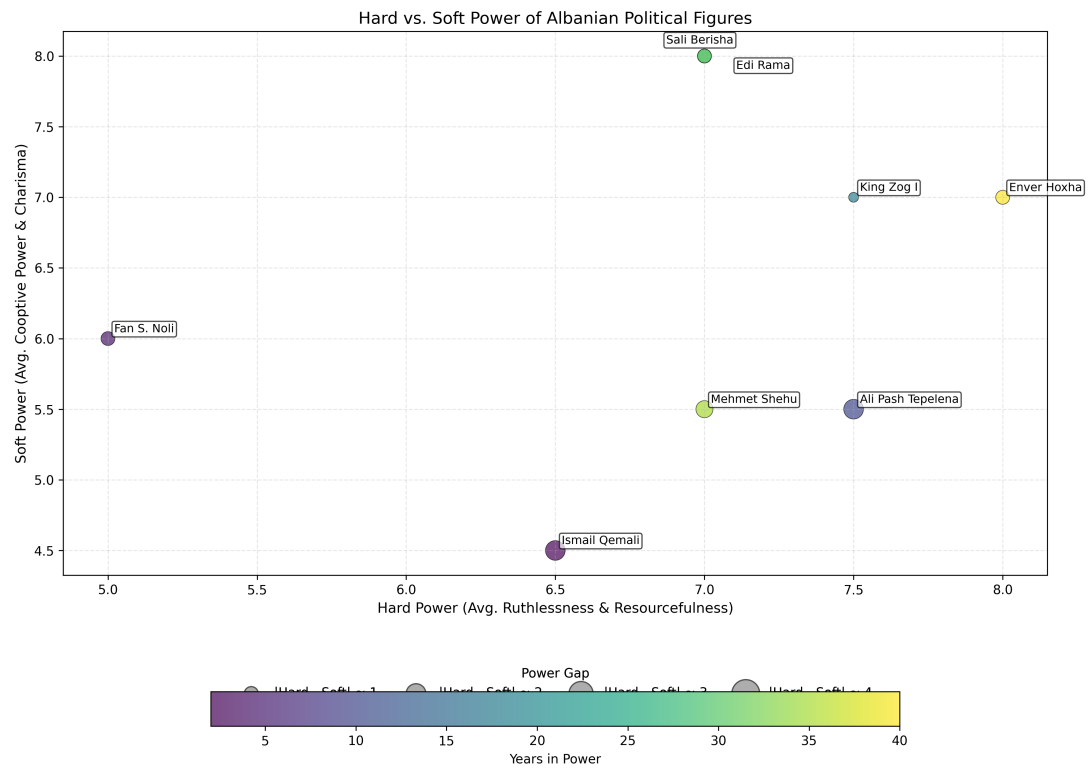
- **Enver Hoxha:** Combined ruthlessness and cooptive power effectively, ensuring authoritarian longevity (Fevziu).
- **Mehmet Shehu:** Defined by ruthlessness, limited by weak soft power (Shehu).
- **Sali Berisha:** Strong cooptive power and corrupt resourcefulness, akin to Zog and Rama (Baze).
- **Edi Rama:** Effective in soft power and corrupt resourcefulness, blending modern influence with ethical ambiguity.

5 Empirical Analysis: Quantitative Exploration of Leadership Power Dynamics

A bubble plot visualizes the relationship between hard power (ruthlessness, resourcefulness) and soft power (cooptive power, charisma) for Albanian leaders, with bubble size representing the power gap and color indicating tenure.

Radar Plot: Leadership Dimensions (Color = Years in Power)





5.1 Interpretation of the Bubble Plot

- **Axes:** X-axis (Hard Power: ruthlessness, resourcefulness); Y-axis (Soft Power: cooptive power, charisma).
- **Bubble Size:** Larger bubbles indicate a greater power gap, suggesting imbalanced power reliance.
- **Bubble Color:** Gradient from purple (short tenure) to yellow (long tenure).

Key Observations:

1. **Longevity and Power Balance:** Leaders with long tenures (e.g., Hoxha, Shehu, Berisha, Rama, Zog I) show balanced power or small gaps, suggesting smart power enhances longevity (NyeSmartPower).
2. **Autocratic vs. Modern Leadership:** Autocratic leaders (e.g., Tepelena, Hoxha) emphasize ruthlessness, but charisma or cooptation aids longevity. Modern leaders (e.g., Berisha, Rama) lean toward soft power (NyeSoftPower).
3. **Power Gap and Stability:** Smaller gaps (e.g., Zog I, Hoxha) indicate stable leadership; larger gaps (e.g., Tepelena) suggest volatility.
4. **Short-Term Leadership:** Leaders like Qemali and Noli show no consistent power profile, suggesting external or adaptive failures.

6 Conclusion: Implications for Postmodern Political Leadership

This paper presents a postmodern leadership theory, conceptualizing power through a four-dimensional pyramid. Integrating Nye, Weber, RMT, and Mesquita's theories, it offers a dynamic lens for analyzing political leadership. The postmodern context re-evaluates ethical boundaries, prioritizing pragmatic survival (PostmodernLeadership).

Empirical Research:

- Case studies of contemporary leaders to assess power dimensions.
- Comparative analysis of soft vs. hard power reliance.
- Public perception of ruthlessness and resourcefulness in diverse realities.

Theoretical Development:

- Metrics for "disproportionate force" across contexts.

- Ethical implications of postmodernism and instrumental rationality.
- Institutional impacts on power balance.
- Long-term sustainability of ruthless or unethical strategies.

References

References

- [PostmodernLeadership] Postmodern Leadership, Open Textbooks for Hong Kong, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://www.opentextbooks.org.hk/ditatopic/17935>
- [PowerBritannica] Power, Definition, Social Dynamics, Authority, Weber, Foucault, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/power-political-and-social-science>
- [PowerEvolution] Concept of Power: The Essence and Theories, Political Science, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://politicalsciencesolution.com/concept-of-power-the-essence-theories/>
- [NyeSoftPower] Joseph Nye on Soft Power, E-iR.info, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/03/08/joseph-nye-on-soft-power/>
- [SoftPowerWiki] Soft power, Wikipedia, accessed July 9, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_power
- [NyeSmartPower] Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power, Ernest J. Wilson, III, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://www.ernestjwilson.com/uploads/Hard%20Power,%20Soft%20Power,%20Smart%20Power.pdf>
- [SoftPowerCFR] What Is Soft Power?, CFR Education, Council on Foreign Relations, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/what-soft-power>
- [PowerSaylor] Power and Politics: The Power to Influence, Saylor Academy, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://learn.saylor.org/mod/book/view.php?id=51606&chapterid=31663>
- [RCTWiki] Rational choice model, Wikipedia, accessed July 9, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational_choice_model
- [MesquitaRCT] The Rationality of Rational Choice Theory, ResearchGate, accessed July 9, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228845015_The_Rationality_of_Rational_Choice_Theory

- [WarResponsibility] War and Responsibility: Why the U.S. Doesn't Have an Imperial Presidency, Lawfare, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/war-and-responsibility--why-the-u.s.-doesn-t-have-an-imperial-presidency>
- [CooptationPolitics] The Politics of Co-optation, ResearchGate, accessed July 9, 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222550536_The_Politics_of_Co-optation
- [CooptationTaylor] Full article: Cooptation and non-cooptation: elite strategies in response to social protest, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14742837.2019.1577133>
- [SelectorateWiki] Selectorate theory, Wikipedia, accessed July 9, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selectorate_theory
- [WeberCharisma] SOCY 151 - Lecture 19 - Weber on Charismatic Authority, Open Yale Courses, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://oyc.yale.edu/sociology/socy-151/lecture-19>
- [CharismaFiveable] Charismatic leadership, Sociology of Religion Class Notes, Fiveable, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://library.fiveable.me/sociology-of-religion/unit-10/charismatic-leadership/study-guide/jslgNf0yhGBsPpZR>
- [UseOfForce] Use of Force in Foreign Policy, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-497>
- [MadmanTheory] Madman theory, Wikipedia, accessed July 9, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madman_theory
- [AutocraticLegalism] Autocratic Legalism, The University of Chicago Law Review, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://lawreview.uchicago.edu/print-archive/autocratic-legalism>
- [PurgeWiki] Purge, Wikipedia, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purge>
- [WedgeStrategy] Wedge strategy (diplomacy), Wikipedia, accessed July 9, 2025, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wedge_strategy_\(diplomacy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wedge_strategy_(diplomacy))
- [DemonizingOpponents] Demonizing Our Opponents, Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, Santa Clara University, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://www.scu.edu/government-ethics/resources/demonizing-our-opponents/>

- [ResourceMobilization] Resource mobilization, Wikipedia, accessed July 9, 2025, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resource_mobilization
- [ResourceThoughtCo] What Is the Resource Mobilization Theory?, ThoughtCo, accessed July 9, 2025, <https://www.thoughtco.com/resource-mobilization-theory-3026523>
- [Clayer2013] Clayer, Nathalie (Spring–Fall 2013). “Të rimendosh nacionalizmat ballkanike: Rasti i figurës së Ismail bej Qemalit dhe i nacionalizmit shqiptar”. *Përpyekja*, 30–31: 5–14.
- [Godo] Godo, Sabri. "Ali Pashe Tepelena." Shtepia Botuese 8-Nendori, 1978.
- [Qesari] Qesari, Edon. "Fan S. Noli. Ndermjet artit dhe politikës, suksesit e deshtimit." Pika Pa Siperfaqe. 2025.
- [Fevziu] Fevziu, Blendi. "Enver Hoxha, Jeta." Klan. 1999.
- [Shehu] Shehu, Bashkim. "I panjohuri." Botimet Peizazhe. 2023.
- [Baze] Baze, Mero. "Sali Berisha. Ngritja dhe Renimi i nje figure politike", Tema. 2022.