



Freedom in the World 2017 - Albania

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Freedom Status: Partly Free

Aggregate Score: 68 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 3.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 3 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 3 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 2,900,000

Capital: Tirana

GDP/capita: \$3,945

Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

OVERVIEW

Albania has built a record of competitive elections, though political parties are highly polarized and often focused on leading personalities. Civil liberties such as religious freedom and freedom of assembly are respected. Corruption and organized crime remain serious problems despite recent government efforts to address them, and the intermingling of powerful business, political, and media interests inhibits the development of truly independent news outlets. The Romany minority continues to face discrimination in education, health care, employment, and housing.

Key Developments in 2016:

- Beginning in July, the parliament passed a series of laws and constitutional amendments designed to reform the judicial system. The most controversial law, under which judges and prosecutors will be vetted for possible corruption and links to organized crime, was upheld by the Constitutional Court in December after a challenge by the opposition Democratic Party (PD).
- In November, the European Commission recommended that the European Union (EU) formally open accession negotiations with Albania once it has made tangible progress in implementing the judicial reforms, particularly the vetting process. The European Council accepted the recommendation in December.

Executive Summary:

In July, Albania's parliament passed the first in a series of laws and constitutional amendments aimed at overhauling the courts and justice system. The ruling Socialist Party (PD) pressed ahead with the reforms through the end of the year, as the effort was a key condition set by the EU for the opening of membership talks with Albania. However, the opposition PD sought to block many of the changes, arguing that they were unconstitutional. The most controversial law called for the evaluation of current and prospective judges and prosecutors based on their professionalism, moral integrity, and independence from the influences of organized crime, corruption, and politics. The PD and the union of judges challenged the so-called vetting law before the Constitutional Court, but the court upheld it in December, citing in part an endorsement from the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.

The current government has taken some steps to improve politicians' accountability for corruption and other abuses. A law passed in December 2015 banned individuals with criminal records from holding office, and officials submitted self-declaration forms in 2016. The Central Electoral Commission voted in December to dismiss two members of parliament and one mayor for hiding their past criminal convictions. Another lawmaker had been removed by the Constitutional Court in May due to a conflict of interest, and a whistle-blower protection law was adopted in June. According to a 2016 survey on corruption, while the general perception of corruption in state institutions remains high, the share of those reporting an actual experience with corruption – being asked to pay a bribe – decreased from 57 percent in 2010 to 44 percent in 2015.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Albania, see [Freedom in the World 2016](#).

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