

Albania

PARTLY FREE

67
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	28 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	39 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

66 /100 Partly Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale.



Overview

Albania has a record of competitive elections, though political parties are highly polarized and often organized around leading personalities. Religious freedom and freedom of assembly are generally respected. Corruption and organized crime remain serious problems, and the intermingling of powerful business, political, and media interests inhibits the development of truly independent news outlets.

Key Developments in 2021

- General elections were held in April with a voter turnout of 46.3 percent, and saw the ruling Socialist Party (PS) maintain its parliamentary majority after taking 49 percent of the vote; incumbent prime minister Edi Rama retained his position for a third term following the election. International election monitors reported numerous electoral irregularities, including allegations of widespread vote buying and the improper use of state resources by the PS.
- In June, the Assembly voted to impeach President Ilir Meta for allegedly violating the constitution during the April elections. Meta, who denied the charges, remained in office at year's end, pending a Constitutional Court ruling on the legality of the impeachment.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

3/4

The president is the head of state and is elected by the parliament for a maximum of two five-year terms; the office does not hold executive power, though the president has some authority over the judiciary and the armed forces. The prime minister is the head of government and is designated by the majority party or coalition. Because both the president and prime minister are selected by lawmakers, their legitimacy is generally dependent on the conduct of parliamentary elections.

In April 2017, Ilir Meta, the head of the Socialist Movement of Integration (LSI), was selected as president. In June 2021, 104 of the 140 members of the parliament voted to impeach Meta for allegedly violating the constitution, including by “inciting violence against” the PS during the April elections. Meta denied the charges and condemned the impeachment vote as illegal. He remained in office at year’s end, pending a Constitutional Court ruling on the legality of the impeachment.

PS leader Edi Rama retained his position as prime minister for a third term following the April 2021 parliamentary elections, in which the PS won 49 percent of the vote. The elections were considered competitive by international observers, but featured a number of irregularities, including the misuse of administrative resources by the incumbent PS.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

3/4

Albania is a parliamentary republic. The unicameral, 140-member Kuvendi (Assembly) is elected through proportional representation in 12 regional districts of varying size corresponding to administrative regions. All members serve four-year terms.

Parliamentary elections were held in April 2021 with a voter turnout of 46.3 percent. The ruling PS maintained its parliamentary majority, winning 49 percent of the vote to take 74 of the 140 seats in the Assembly. The opposition Democratic Party (PD) won 39 percent of the vote, taking 59 seats, while the LSI took just 4 seats.

The 2021 parliamentary elections were administered under electoral reforms that had been adopted the previous year, ensuring the participation of opposition parties, including the PD, which had boycotted previous elections. International election observers reported that the elections were well-organized and competitive. However, the elections were also marked by numerous irregularities, including allegations of widespread vote buying and media bias that allowed the PS to “derive significant advantage from its incumbency.” Despite such flaws, the election results were widely accepted by stakeholders.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?	3/4
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Elections are administered by the Central Election Commission (CEC). In January 2020, the parliament established the Political Council, comprised of representatives of the three largest parties, to create a plan to address needed electoral reforms recommended by the OSCE. The parliament adopted several provisions of the Council's plan throughout 2020 to gradually depoliticize election administration, introduce electronic identification of voters where technically possible, and restructure the CEC, among other changes.

The April 2021 elections were administered by the newly restructured CEC, and were the first polls affected by the numerous electoral reforms adopted the previous year, which required the launch of several new processes, such as electronic voting and counting, creating additional responsibilities for the CEC. Despite concerns about the ability of the CEC to manage the 2021 polls after the parliament's "extremely hasty" adoption of the electoral amendments the previous year, international observers reported that the April elections proceeded smoothly, and were competently and transparently administered by the commission.

Score Change: The score improved from 2 to 3 because reforms to the electoral process from the previous year resulted in general elections that observers deemed well organized and that stakeholders accepted.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?	3/4
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Albanian citizens generally have the right to organize in political parties. The two main parties, the PS and the PD, are sharply polarized and given to personality-driven rivalry. Candidates for legislative elections who do not belong to a party currently seated in the parliament must collect a set number of signatures in order to run.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

3/4

Albania's multiparty system provides ample opportunity for opposition parties to participate in the political process, and elections have resulted in the rotation of power among parties. The PD and LSI boycotted the June 2019 local contests, leaving fewer options for Albanians who voted.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

3/4

While individuals are generally free to make their own political choices, powerful economic actors can also shape the political sphere through their media holdings and influence on electoral campaigns. Criminal organizations are also known to influence Albanian politics.

In the runup to the April 2021 general elections, an independent online news outlet reported that the PS had created a database listing the personal information of more than 900,000 voters, including their voting history and "likely voting preferences." Critics, including members of the opposition, have accused the PS of stealing the data from official government websites and using it to "intimidate" voters. The party has repeatedly denied that the database was created or used illegally.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

3/4

Albanian law guarantees political rights for citizens regardless of their ethnic, racial, lingual, or religious identity.

Roma and other marginalized people remain vulnerable to political exploitation. OSCE monitors noted that Romany individuals faced difficulty registering to vote in 2021 due to a lack of a permanent address.

Though women are underrepresented in the Assembly, a record 12 women were appointed to the 17-member Cabinet in September 2021.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

3/4

Since coming to power in 2017, the PS government has largely been able to formulate and implement policy, though its ability to do so was somewhat impacted by the February 2019 opposition boycott.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

2/4

Corruption is pervasive, and the EU has repeatedly called for rigorous implementation of antigraft measures, particularly for corruption within the judiciary. In 2016, constitutional reforms established Albania's Special Anticorruption Structure (SPAK), which is tasked with investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption. In a process monitored by EU and US experts, the government has been vetting judges and prosecutors since 2018, so as to identify and prevent corruption in the justice system. An October 2021 European Commission report praised Albania's anticorruption efforts, specifically noting the success of the vetting mechanisms in reducing judicial corruption.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	2/4
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A robust law on access to information is not well implemented. Public procurement processes and public finances are frequently opaque, though parliamentary procedures are more open.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	2/4
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While the constitution guarantees freedom of expression, the intermingling of powerful business, political, and media interests inhibits the development of independent news outlets; most are seen as biased toward either the PS or the PD. Reporters have little job security and remain subject to lawsuits, intimidation, and occasional physical attacks by those facing media scrutiny. Print media has continued to experience declining revenue, which has driven down journalists' salaries.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?	4/4
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The constitution provides for freedom of religion, which is generally upheld in practice.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from	3/4
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extensive political indoctrination?	
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The government typically does not limit academic freedom, though teachers in several districts have faced pressure ahead of elections to participate in political rallies. Access to higher education is affected by corruption.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?	4/4
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There are no significant restrictions on free and open private discussion, including for online blogs and social media.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	3/4
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Freedom of assembly is generally respected. Demonstrations by opposition parties and civic groups are common.

In 2020, the government banned public gatherings as a part of the COVID-19-related state of emergency. Despite the ban, several large demonstrations were held throughout the year, and sometimes turned violent.

Several demonstrations against gender-based violence took place during 2021, with thousands of protesters demanding that the government increase official efforts to combat domestic violence in the country. Other protests were also held throughout the year, including some political rallies that turned violent. In January, demonstrators throwing stones and attempting to storm the headquarters of the PD were forcibly dispersed by police using tear gas and water cannons, leading to several injuries.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?

3/4

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally function without restriction but have limited funding due to dependence on foreign donors and policy influence.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?

2/4

The constitution guarantees workers the rights to organize and bargain collectively, and most have the right to strike. However, effective collective bargaining remains limited, and union members have little protection against discrimination by employers.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?

2/4

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but the underfunded courts are subject to political pressure and influence, and public trust in judicial institutions is low. Corruption in the judiciary remains a serious problem, and convictions of high-ranking judges for corruption and abuse of power are historically rare.

In March 2021, the Assembly adopted amendments to 10 laws in an effort to strengthen the efficiency of the judiciary. The reevaluation of all judges and prosecutors, in line with the new judicial vetting mechanisms introduced in recent years, continued throughout 2021, and received praise from several international governance bodies for its effectiveness. All priority cases had been reviewed by September; more than 60 percent of all cases reviewed have resulted in dismissals “due to unexplained assets.”

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?

2/4

Constitutional guarantees of due process are upheld inconsistently. Trial procedures can be affected by corruption within the judicial system and are sometimes closed to the public. Legal counsel is not always provided to those that cannot afford their own; however, a number of local NGOs offer free legal aid to those unable to access legal services through the state.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?

2/4

Reports of police abuse of detainees continues. Prison inmates suffer from poor living conditions and a lack of adequate medical treatment. Drug-related crime remains a problem, as Albania is a transit country for heroin smugglers.

Tribal law is practiced in parts of northern Albania, and sometimes involves revenge killings.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

3/4

Roma face significant discrimination in education, health care, employment, and housing. A 2010 law bars discrimination based on race and several other categories, including sexual orientation and gender identity, and a 2013 reform of the criminal code introduced protections against hate crimes and hate speech based on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, bias against LGBT+ people is strong in practice. Women are underrepresented in the workforce. Women living in rural areas have fewer opportunities for employment and education.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

3/4

Albanians generally enjoy freedom of movement, though criminal activity and practices related to historically predominant honor codes limit these rights in some areas. People are generally free to change their place of residence or employment.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

2/4

Numerous property-restitution cases related to confiscations during the communist era remain unresolved. Illegal construction is a major problem, as is bribery linked to government approval of development projects.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

2/4

The government generally does not place explicit restrictions on social freedoms. No progress has been made to recognize same-sex marriages.

Domestic violence is widespread. Police are poorly equipped to handle cases of domestic violence or spousal rape, which is often not understood to be a crime. According to UN Women, 52.9 percent of Albanian women have experienced domestic violence in their lives. In the first nine months of 2021, 16 women were killed by their partners.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

2/4

Albania has relatively robust labor laws but lacks the capacity to enforce workplace safety and other protections. Conditions in the manufacturing, construction, and mining sectors are often substandard and put workers at risk.

While Albania continues to struggle with human trafficking, authorities are becoming more proactive in addressing the issue. In recent years, the government has cooperated with civil society leaders, creating the Advisory Board of Victims of Trafficking and increasing victim assistance in criminal proceedings with a new Development Center for Criminal Justice for Minors.



On Albania

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

67/100 **Partly Free**

Other Years

2023

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