

Albania

68

/100

PARTLY FREE

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

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

67/100 **Partly Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.

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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 bribery remain major problems, though the government is working to address corruption in the judiciary.

Key Developments in 2023

- The ruling Socialist Party securing a landslide victory in May’s local elections, winning 53 of 61 contested municipalities. The opposition Democratic Party saw major setbacks, having entered the race beleaguered and divided as a result of infighting between party leaders Sali Berisha and Lulzim Basha. International election monitors said the polls were generally well administered.
- A new judicial vetting process, enabled by internationally endorsed legal reforms, continued, resulting in the removal of scores of judges for suspected corruption in recent years.

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
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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.

A2 0-4 pts

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

3/4

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.

The ruling PS maintained its parliamentary majority in the April 2021 polls, winning 49 percent of the vote and 74 seats. The PD won 39 percent of the vote and 59 seats, while the Freedom Party (then known as the Socialist Movement of Integration) took 4 seats. Turnout stood at 46.3 percent. International observers called the elections well-organized and competitive, notwithstanding some reports of vote buying, as well as and misuse of administrative resources and media bias, both benefitting the PS.

Local elections for mayors and councilors in 61 municipalities took place in May 2023. The ruling Socialist Party secured a landslide victory, winning 53 municipalities. The opposition Democratic Party saw major setbacks, having entered the race beleaguered and divided as a result of infighting between Sali Berisha and Lulzim Basha. The elections were held against the backdrop of deep social and political polarization, coupled with a number of claims of vote buying and pressure on civil servant voters. An Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) mission called them well-administered, inclusive, and competitive, but noted “continued polarization between the main political parties and deep division within the opposition.”

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

3/4

The Central Election Commission (CEC) administers polls. Reforms adopted in 2021 improved voter identification processes and reduced avenues for politicization of CEC operations, among other modifications recommended by the OSCE. The May 2023 local elections were broadly well managed by the CEC.

Observers noted some minor technical delays, but also increased transparency and efficiency of the commission's work.

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

Albanian citizens generally have the right to organize in political parties. The two main parties, PS and PD, are sharply polarized and given to personality-driven rivalry. Candidates who do not belong to a party currently seated in the Assembly must collect a set number of signatures 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

In Albania's multiparty system, opposition parties have the opportunity to participate in the political process and take power via the ballot box. However, the opposition parties, particularly the main opposition party, PD, are deeply divided, making the prospects of an opposition victory in the near future relatively bleak.

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 shape Albanian politics through their media holdings and

influence on electoral campaigns. Criminal organizations and corrupt actors are also known to exert influence.

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. However, Roma and other marginalized communities remain vulnerable to political exploitation and have difficulty exerting genuine influence in political life.

Women are underrepresented in the Assembly, holding 35.7 percent of its seats. However, 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 has largely been able to formulate and implement policy, though its ability to do so was somewhat impacted by a February 2019 opposition boycott. The potential for boycotts in the Assembly can weaken legislative oversight of the government. The May 2023 local elections resulted in an even more beleaguered opposition, which has come to strengthen decision-making capacity of the ruling party.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

2/4

Corruption is pervasive, and the European Union (EU) has repeatedly called for rigorous implementation of antigraft measures, particularly for corruption within the judiciary. The Special Anticorruption Structure is tasked with investigating and prosecuting high-level corruption and has levied serious charges against political leaders. However, political parties remain reluctant to address corruption in their own ranks.

An ongoing corruption case against Sali Berisha, led by the Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure (SPAK), resulted in his house arrest at the end of December 2023 after parliament voted to remove his parliamentary immunity.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	2/4
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A robust access-to-information law is not well implemented. Public procurement processes and public finances are frequently opaque, though parliamentary procedures are more open. The 2024 budget was approved in November 2023 amidst scenes of unrest in the parliament staged by the opposition, including instances where smoke bombs were released and the speaker's podium was obstructed with furniture.

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, low salaries, and remain subject to lawsuits, intimidation, and occasional physical attack by those facing media scrutiny.

In November 2022, Council of Europe (CoE) fact finders warned that the Albanian media environment was worsening due in part to media-sector concentration. The CoE mission also voiced concerns over the independence of the country's media regulator, the Audiovisual Media Authority.

State prosecutors have restricted reporting on sensitive court cases, including state witnesses' testimony from an organized-crime investigation, and publication of material that was revealed via a cyberattack. The government has reduced interactions with media in recent years, opting instead to refer journalists to social media posts or other materials.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

4/4

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 extensive political indoctrination?

3/4

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

There are no significant restrictions on private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?

3/4

Freedom of assembly is generally respected, though attacks against participants have taken place, as have clashes between protesters and police. In January 2022, supporters of Sali Berisha attempted to storm PD headquarters; they were forcibly dispersed by police using tear gas and water cannons, leading to several injuries.

Several civic protests took place in Albania during 2023. PD-organized protests against the government in February prompted the fortification of the prime minister's office building to prevent the potential escalation of violence.

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. Legal requirements that the government consult with civil society on certain policy changes are poorly adhered to.

E3 0-4 pts

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

2/4

Workers are constitutionally allowed 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?

3/4

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but corruption remains a serious problem, underfunded courts are subject to political pressure and influence, and public trust in judicial institutions is low.

The Assembly adopted a number of amendments in 2021 to strengthen judicial efficiency, winning praise from international governance bodies for new judicial vetting mechanisms. Although there have been setbacks such as administrative and other delays, the vetting process has continued to win praise as contributing to the fight against corruption in the judiciary. According to Albania's Independent Qualification Commission, 245 judges and prosecutors were dismissed as a result of the vetting process between 2018 and the end of 2023.

Score Change: The score improved from 2 to 3 because an ongoing judicial vetting process, enabled by internationally endorsed legal reforms, has resulted in the removal of scores of judges for suspected corruption in recent years.

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 and are sometimes closed to the public. Although the state is supposed to offer free legal aid, legal counsel is not always provided to those who cannot afford their own. A number of local NGOs offer free legal aid for those affected.

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 continue. Prison inmates suffer from poor living conditions and inadequate medical treatment. Drug-related crime remains a problem, as Albania is a transit country for heroin smugglers.

Customary law is practiced in parts of northern Albania, and sometimes involve revenge killings.

F4 0-4 pts

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

3/4

The Roma community faces 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. A May 2023 pride parade in Tirana attracted significant support. However, anti-LGBT+ bias persists.

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 communist-era confiscations remain unresolved. Illegal construction is a major problem, as is bribery linked to government approval of development projects. Women continue to face serious challenges to fair and equal property inheritance from parents as well as when divorcing their husbands.

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, though same-sex marriages are not recognized.

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.

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 proactive in addressing the issue. In recent years, the government has cooperated with civil society leaders, creating an advisory board on trafficking and increasing victim assistance in criminal proceedings.



On Albania

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Country Facts

Population

2,778,000

Global Freedom Score

68/100 **Partly Free**

Other Years

2023

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