



NATIONS IN TRANSIT 2020

Albania

47
/100

TRANSITIONAL OR HYBRID REGIME

Democracy Percentage	47.02 /100
Democracy Score	3.82 /7

LAST YEAR'S DEMOCRACY PERCENTAGE & STATUS

48 /100 **Transitional or Hybrid Regime**

The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The Democracy Percentage, introduced in 2020, is a translation of the Democracy Score to the 0-100 scale, where 0 equals least democratic and 100 equals most democratic.



Score changes in 2020

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- **National Democratic Governance rating declined from 3.50 to 3.25** due a series of crises affecting Albania's governing institutions,

including the *en bloc* resignation of the parliamentary opposition, an impeachment procedure against the president, and clashes between the courts and the parliament.

- **Electoral Process rating declined from 4.50 to 4.25** due to stalled electoral reform and political conflict around snap local elections that led to a lack of meaningful choice.
- **As a result, Albania's Democracy Score declined from 3.89 to 3.82.**

Executive Summary

By Gjergji Vurmo

Democracy in Albania deteriorated in 2019, thus materializing longstanding fears of rising authoritarianism and a dysfunctional system of mechanisms to check and balance government powers. Recurring political crises reared up once again as a result of the 2008 constitutional amendments that provided for powerful executive and party leaders, decaying integrity of political representation, and a weakened Parliament. During the year, Albania witnessed not only the “next” political crisis but also the emergence of institutional conflicts and the revelation that the current system of checks and balances is ineffective in preventing them. In this heightened political climate, worrying trends were observed in the areas of national democratic governance, electoral processes, media independence, and corruption.

Following a year marked by citizen protests, parliamentary boycotts, and a contentious political climate, in February 2019, the opposition parties undertook the unprecedented move of resigning *en bloc* from Parliament. The opposition accused the ruling majority of widespread corruption and use of criminal networks to manipulate elections, ¹ thus calling for early elections under a technical government. ² As the ruling majority ignored the political crisis, with no serious efforts made by the government and ~~top~~ opposition to overcome the deadlock, the first half of 2019 was marked by opposition rallies, some of which turned violent. ³

This radicalized political climate further deteriorated with the opposition's boycott of the June 30 local elections. The situation initiated institutional conflicts between the president, Parliament, and the Central Election Commission (CEC). As the opposition repeatedly threatened to block the local elections, ⁴ President Ilir Meta issued a questionable decree postponing the elections till October, which was subsequently ignored by the CEC without a legal basis to do so. ⁵ The president's decree to postpone local elections prompted the ruling majority to launch an impeachment procedure, which is still in process in Parliament.

Local elections were ultimately held on June 30 amidst an opposition boycott, which allowed the ruling majority to extend absolute control over nearly all of Albania's 61 municipalities. The ODIHR election observation mission's statement of preliminary findings and conclusions stated that "voters did not have a meaningful choice between political options." ⁶ As a result, electoral processes in Albania noted a setback in 2019 due to stalled electoral reform and the opposition boycott, while the election results raise fears over the accountability and integrity of local governance bodies that will lack opposition voices for the next four years.

The second half of 2019 was dominated by disagreements between the president and the Socialist Party (SP) parliamentary majority, which further intensified in November over the election of Constitutional Court judges. ⁷ Conflicting readings of constitutional provisions for the election and appointment of members of the Constitutional Court by President Meta, the chair of the Justice Appointment Council (JAC), Ardian Dvorani, and the SP parliamentary majority triggered an institutional conflict over the president's court nominee, Marsida Xhaferllari, and the JAC's first-ranked candidate, Arta Vorpsi. While the Constitutional Court indirectly recognized President Meta's candidate, the conflict escalated with accusations leveled at the JAC chair, Prime Minister Edi Rama, and also at foreign ambassadors who advised Albanian institutions to bring the case to the Venice Commission. ⁸

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Justice reform progressed incrementally in 2019 with the election of new members to the Constitutional Court by the president and Parliament, the election of a General Prosecutor by Parliament, ⁹ appointment of eight

prosecutors to the Special Prosecution Against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK), ¹⁰ preparations for the establishment of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), and the continuing evaluation of judges and prosecutors by vetting commissions. However, the Constitutional and High Courts remained dysfunctional as a result of unfilled judgeships and absence of a quorum. ¹¹ This precluded opportunities for accountability, as several laws and government actions could not be challenged in the Constitutional Court. Hence, public hopes to end the impunity of high-level corruption received yet another blow from the worrying and unchallengeable legislative practice of shielding government concessions and public-private partnerships (PPPs), thus disregarding public interests, expert feedback, and warnings from independent institutions.

Corruption also remained troubling in 2019, as modest achievements in fighting petty corruption were overshadowed by serious concerns of impunity and state capture threatening the legislative process. ¹² Parliament approved several suspicious concession and PPP contracts via special laws. The government and Tirana municipality moved forward with a bidding procedure ¹³ for the national theater. ¹⁴ While protests by the artistic community ¹⁵ opposing the project continued daily, the government failed to disclose information on the bidding companies or the contract winner even after the 30-day deadline had expired. ¹⁶

At the same time, impunity of high-level officials remained unchallenged in 2019. The prosecution failed to swiftly investigate allegations voiced by the Democratic Party (DP) and media over the role of organized crime in vote buying during the 2016 early mayoral elections in Dibrë and 2017 general elections in Durrës county. ¹⁷

The year was also challenging for independent media, which were under threat from both an anti-defamation legislative package adopted by Parliament and ongoing government crackdowns on online media. ¹⁸ The legislative package was adopted in December ¹⁹ (though not yet in force by year's end) despite concerns from Albanian media and international ^{TOP} organizations. ²⁰ The government, as well as businesses and criminal groups, attempted to gain outside influence over the media, while media owners regularly used their outlets to favor their business or political

interests. ²¹ PM Rama and other SP representatives continued to criticize the Albanian media as a “trash bin” and threatened journalists with defamation charges. ²²

Civil sector responses to key developments in the country in 2019 were either weak—especially regarding the political crisis and corruption allegations over concession and PPP projects—or completely ignored by political actors, including on issues related to the anti-defamation legislative package and improving public consultation in draft laws and policies. However, civil society organizations (CSOs) proved highly organized and efficient in engaging volunteers and offering relief to citizens affected by the devastating earthquake that hit the counties of Durrës, Tirana, and Lezhë on November 26. ²³

The European Union twice postponed a decision to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, thus undermining its credibility and seriously jeopardizing reform achievements in both countries.

National Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the democratic character of the governmental system; and the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of the legislative and executive branches.	3.25 / 7.00
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- The year 2019 in Albania marked the tipping point of a governance system deprived of robust check and balance mechanisms. The 2008 constitutional amendments provided for a powerful executive, and an even stronger prime minister and ruling majorities, and while these changes to the system have produced crisis after crisis ever since, the entwined elements of political crisis and institutional conflict were even more starkly apparent during the year. Additionally, the executive and parliamentary majority could not be challenged before the Constitutional and Supreme courts due to the absence of a quorum of judges. ¹
- In February, the political opposition parties resigned from Parliament and engaged in protests, ² with 57 out of 65 opposition members of

Parliament (MPs) abandoning their seats. ³ Ten rallies were organized between February and July, some of them turbulent, ⁴ prompting calls from internationals to refrain from violence. ⁵ The Democratic Party (DP)-led opposition demanded a technical government, early elections, and investigations into wiretapping allegations by the German tabloid *Bild* ⁶ and other accusations of cooperation between government officials and MPs with local criminal groups during the 2017 parliamentary elections. ⁷ Opposition MPs who relinquished their mandates were swiftly replaced by candidates who rejected their parties' decision to resign from Parliament. ⁸ Depleting the party lists, the 140-seat Parliament only consisted of 122 MPs by mid-2019.

- This polarized situation escalated with opposition calls for the blocking and boycott of the June 30 local elections. ⁹ President Ilir Meta rescheduled the local elections through a legally questionable decree, while the Central Election Commission (CEC) ignored ¹⁰ the decree without challenging it in court. In response, the ruling Socialist Party (SP) majority launched an impeachment procedure against the president that was still in process at year's end. ¹¹ However, the Venice Commission provided an opinion suggesting that the president's alleged violations do not necessarily warrant an impeachment. ¹²
- In the second half of 2019, a new institutional conflict emerged between President Meta, on the one hand, and the ruling majority and the Justice Appointment Council (JAC), on the other, over the appointment of new Constitutional Court members. On September 22, the JAC published four candidate lists for court vacancies. ¹³ On October 8, JAC sent two vacancy lists to be filled in by the president and, five days later, another two lists to Parliament. President Meta appointed Besnik Muci to the court on October 15 but refused to appoint the second nominee before Parliament had its opportunity, claiming that the constitution prescribes a sequence in the appointment procedure. ¹⁴ On November 11, Parliament elected two candidates (Elsa Toska and Fiona Papajorgji) to the court, arguing that the president's inactivity meant that the first candidate on his list (Arta Vorpsi) had been automatically appointed. This argument was

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rejected by the president, who accused the ruling majority of attempting to capture the court, and on November 13, he appointed Marsida Xhaferllari to the court. The president then invited his four nominees to take the oath of office and disregarded Vorpsi, who took an oath in front of a notary. ¹⁵ The Constitutional Court published on its website only the names of nominees who took an oath at the president's office. ¹⁶ However, on November 21, Besnik Muci was dismissed from the justice system by the vetting Appeal Chamber. ¹⁷

- Due to its lack of a quorum, the dysfunctional Constitutional Court seriously affected the accountability of national governance and integrity of legislative processes during the year. The court's lack of a quorum meant that 13 requests for assessing the constitutional compliance of laws and 2 requests to review the constitutionality of government decisions were left undecided by year's end.
- Although the Council of the European Union in June 2018 had set out to open accession negotiations with Albania in June 2019, it twice postponed the decision in June and October. ¹⁸

Electoral Process 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines national executive and legislative elections, the electoral framework, the functioning of multiparty systems, and popular participation in the political process.	4.25 / 7.00
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- On June 30, 2019, Albania held local elections amid a political crisis, including, most acutely, threats by the opposition to block the elections. ¹ As the rhetoric between the opposition and the ruling majority escalated, ² on June 10, President Meta revoked the decree on the date of the local elections. ³ He subsequently rescheduled local elections for October 13. ⁴ The CEC ignored the president's decree and moved forward with local elections on the original date. ⁵ A Venice Commission opinion found that “in the absence of a statutory provision on the issue, the President can only cancel elections for local government bodies in a situation which meets the criteria for taking emergency measures. Even then the

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President needs a specific—ad hoc—legal basis to postpone elections.”⁶ Despite the president lacking such a legal basis, the CEC, itself, had no legal basis upon which to ignore the president’s decree nor any court ruling that would have authorized it to do so.

- The local elections were thus held on June 30 in a generally peaceful atmosphere, though with record-low voter turnout of less than 23 percent.⁷ As a result of the opposition’s boycott, the ruling “Alliance for European Albania” coalition, led by SP, won 60 out of the 61 mayoral seats. “Alliance” also obtained nearly 95 percent of votes for local councilors, winning 1,555 out of the total 1,619 available seats; 5.5 percent of votes for mayors and 6 percent for municipal councilors were found invalid.⁸
- The ODIHR election observation mission (EOM) statement of preliminary findings noted that Albania’s local elections were held with little regard for the interests of the electorate. Due to the opposition parties’ boycott of the elections, voters lacked a meaningful choice between political options.⁹
- The ODIHR final report found that its previous recommendations (that is, to depoliticize election administration, increase campaign finance transparency, and improve effectiveness in election dispute resolutions) were not addressed. The CEC interpreted the law inconsistently and in an overly broad manner, thus reducing legal certainty. While 44 percent of local councilor seats were won by women, only 8 women (13 percent) were elected as mayors.¹⁰
- Despite the European Commission’s repeated concerns and recommendations,¹¹ political party financing remains a central issue in the country, especially in light of the serious allegations of vote buying that have surfaced over the last two years. A recent study on the “Cost of Politics in Albania” revealed mayoral candidates claiming to have spent up to €200,000 for their election campaigns, while amounts contributed by businessmen to political party campaigns in exchange for MP seats have gone even higher.¹² TOP
These contributions and the real costs of campaigning largely contradict the minimal costs of electoral campaigns reported by political parties.

- Civil society organizations (CSOs) have advocated for substantial changes in the legislation on political parties and the electoral code to enhance the integrity of elections and accountability of political actors. Nisma Thurje, an online civic movement, initiated a public campaign to gather 50,000 signatures from citizens supporting open candidate lists and changes to the electoral code. ¹³ Yet, governing and opposition political parties have ignored civil sector proposals that would actually tackle the root causes of the recent political crises—that is, restoring constitutional checks and balances, integrity of political parties, internal democracy and transparency, and integrity of the electoral process and players. ¹⁴

Civil Society 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses the organizational capacity and financial sustainability of the civic sector; the legal and political environment in which it operates; the functioning of trade unions; interest group participation in the policy process; and the threat posed by antidemocratic extremist groups.	5.00 / 7.00
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- The state of Albania’s civil sector remained essentially unchanged in 2019. The country’s political crises and institutional conflicts effectively neutered civil society’s lobbying power in such areas as improving law-making processes, media freedom, electoral integrity, and public consultation related to draft laws and policies. Yet, CSOs proved to be efficient assets for engaging volunteers and offering relief to citizens affected by the devastating earthquake that hit the counties of Durrës, Tirana, and Lezhë in late 2019. ¹
- A total of 4,503 CSOs were registered with tax authorities at the end of 2018, although only 2,146 groups had an “active” status, according to the General Tax Directorate of Albania. ² The country’s legal framework on civil society is generally in line with international standards. However, the government has not **TOP** decentralized CSO registration procedures, and concerns persist over the VAT, fiscal issues, and the creation of a more supportive environment for domestic philanthropy. ³

- The European Commission's 2019 report for Albania underlines concerns with the government's approach to citizen participation in decision-making and public consultations, such as the need for more meaningful cooperation with civil society, comprehensive feedback, and follow-up mechanisms. The report also highlighted the government's limited use of the public consultation portal and ineffective consultations with the private sector. ⁴
- The government pursued implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in cooperation with CSOs, religious authorities, and international partners. ⁵ Violent extremism in the country is reported at low levels but remains potentially threatening. A recent study found that despite significant progress in preventing religious extremism, stakeholders overlooked the potential for nonreligious extremism. ⁶
- The government adopted an updated "Roadmap for the Government policy towards a more enabling environment for civil society development, 2019–2023." ⁷ The Roadmap envisages three strategic objectives: institutionalized civil society–government cooperation in policymaking and European integration; an enabling legal environment and data governance; and an enabling fiscal and financial environment. This updated roadmap follows on the heels of the poor implementation of the 2015–2018 Roadmap for an enabling environment for civil society, ⁸ which did not significantly change civil society sustainability in 2019 despite some minor improvements in 2018, as reported by USAID's CSO sustainability index. ⁹
- A National Resource Center for Civil Society in Albania was launched in April ¹⁰ aimed at strengthening the capacities and roles of CSOs, as well as fostering an open environment for the country's civil sector. The resource center, managed by PARTNERS Albania, established three regional offices in Tirana, Shkodër, and Vlorë in 2019 and conducted several capacity-building activities, including a national debate on a CSO code of standards. ¹¹
- The National Council for Civil Society (NCCS) held one meeting to discuss the monitoring of the new Roadmap 2019–2023. ¹² The National Council for European Integration (NCEI)—a consultative body under Parliament composed of state institutions, civil society,

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businesses, and so forth—met more frequently in 2019. ¹³ Meetings of NCEI have focused on preparations for the EU accession negotiations and the role of civil society in this process.

- The Civil Society Support Agency launched a call for projects in the areas of youth, European integration, social services, environment, tourism, and sustainable development; ¹⁴ 53 projects were approved with a total budget of nearly ALL 115.6 million (\$1.04 million). ¹⁵

Independent Media 1.00-7.00 pts

Examines the current state of press freedom, including libel laws, harassment of journalists, and editorial independence; the operation of a financially viable and independent private press; and the functioning of the public media.	3.75 / 7.00
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- Media independence continued to be seriously threatened in 2019, culminating with an anti-defamation legislative package adopted by Parliament in December, as well as government censorship of online media. ¹
- The Union of Albanian Journalists reported a total of 2,737 journalists in 2019, with nearly two-thirds working in traditional media (TV, print) and the remaining one-third working in online media. Nearly 1,050 journalists are employed by the country's main three private TV channels—TV Klan, Top Channel TV, and Vizion Plus—owned by the Frangaj, Hoxha, and Dulaku families, respectively. ²
- The Albanian media market comprises 6 national and 56 local TV channels, 5 national and 60 regional radio broadcasters, and an estimated 200 print media outlets. ³ The chair of the Union of Albanian Journalists reported 800 online portals, over half of them unregistered. ⁴
- According to the 2019 “Media Panorama in Albania” report by the Institute for Development, Research and Alternatives (IDRA), ^{TOP} more than one-third of journalists face serious concerns of self-censorship due to pressure from the government, political parties, and media owners, in addition to verbal or physical attacks also experienced by

a third of reporters. ⁵ Threats and intimidating language against journalists have increased, according to the EC's 2019 report for Albania. ⁶

- The Media Ownership Monitor for Albania, produced by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), revealed worrying threats to media pluralism in the country. Seven indicators pose a high risk (namely, audience, market, regulatory safeguards for media ownership, cross-media ownership, regulatory safeguards for cross-media ownership, political control of media outlets, and news agencies). The Albanian media landscape is dominated by a few family-owned outlets ⁷ (most notably, the Hoxha and Frangaj families, who own Top media and Klan groups) controlling the largest audience share and revenues. ⁸
- Serious attacks ⁹ against journalists and general concerns over shrinking media freedoms ¹⁰ further escalated in 2019, with smear campaigns, ¹¹ chronic attacks on reporters, ¹² and the shutting down of critical TV programs. ¹³ In November, amid a state of emergency due to the devastating earthquake, the government blocked several online portals, while police arrested 25-year-old Xhuliana Aliaj for “spreading panic” on her Facebook page in posts related to the earthquake’s aftermath. ¹⁴
- Several media associations, journalists, civil society, and international observers raised concerns over the so-called anti-defamation legislative package, which was proposed by the government as an instrument to fight fake news. ¹⁵ CSOs ¹⁶ and representatives of the EU, UN, CoE, and OSCE called on the government to withdraw the package and seek more appropriate solutions through media self-regulation. ¹⁷ Against this criticism, the legislative package (Law no. 91/2019 amending the law no. 97/2013 on Audiovisual media; and Law no. 92/2019 amending the law no. 9918 on electronic communications) was adopted in December. However, the bill had not yet come into force by year’s end.
- The government, businesses, and criminal groups sought to influence the media in concerning ways, while media owners regularly used their outlets to favor their business or political interests. ¹⁸ Threats of defamation charges to journalists continued

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in 2019. Prime Minister Rama filed a defamation suit against journalist Ylli Rakipi ¹⁹ and threatened *Bild* reporter Peter Tiede with legal actions. ²⁰

Local Democratic Governance 1.00-7.00 pts

Considers the decentralization of power; the responsibilities, election, and capacity of local governmental bodies; and the transparency and accountability of local authorities.	4.50 / 7.00
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- In 2019, minor positive developments in local democratic governance in Albania were overshadowed by single-party control of nearly all municipalities following the June 30 local elections. This unprecedented situation raised serious concerns over good governance due to the absence of opposition voices in the current four-year mandate.
- In its fourth year of implementation, the territorial and administrative reform (TAR) process is showing the need for consolidation. The report titled “Functioning of municipalities in the framework of TAR,” carried out by the Albanian Supreme State Audit Institution (ALSAI) in 2018, found serious concerns in relation to local finances, fiscal autonomy, alignment of other laws with Law no. 139/2015 on Local self-governance, and legal ambiguities that may be misused to breach local government autonomy. ¹
- The EC’s 2019 report for Albania echoes similar challenges and also points to concerns over the civil service at the local level. National transfers still constitute 73 percent of the budgets of local government units (LGUs), which remain largely ineffective at collecting revenues and delivering quality public services. ²
- LGUs made progress in improving their transparency, ³ public participation, and participatory budgeting. A transparency program model for LGUs developed by UNDP’s STAR II project and the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), and adopted by the Commissioner on the Right to Information and Protection of Personal Data, is under implementation in all 61 municipalities. ⁴ STAR II project support has also enabled all municipalities to regularly

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publish decisions taken by their municipal councils online at Vendime.al, a portal developed by INFOCIP. ⁵ A one-stop-shop model for service delivery at the local level progressed smoothly in 2019 to fully meet its objective of functional offices in 49 municipalities nationwide. ⁶

- However, the performance of municipalities and their capacity to comply with public consultation provisions did not improve in 2019. Several infrastructure and public works projects in various municipalities continued despite yearlong protests by affected communities, such as artists' concerns over the building of a new national theater, families impacted by the construction of Tirana's Outer Ring Road, and objections to incinerators in Fier. ⁷
- Following the June local elections, the prospects for good governance and accountability at the local level were at risk in nearly all municipalities now controlled by a single party—that is, 98 percent of mayors and nearly 95 percent of municipal councilors. ⁸ Additionally, opposition denunciations of elected mayors for past criminal behavior led to the resignation of Valdrin Pjetri, SP mayor of Shkodër, ⁹ and dismissal of Agim Kajmaku, SP mayor of Vorë, by the CEC. ¹⁰ While legal proceedings against Pjetri are still in progress, the prosecution issued an arrest warrant for Kajmaku in November, although on unrelated charges. ¹¹

Judicial Framework and Independence 1.00-7.00 pts

Assesses constitutional and human rights protections, judicial independence, the status of ethnic minority rights, guarantees of equality before the law, treatment of suspects and prisoners, and compliance with judicial decisions.	3.25 / 7.00
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- The implementation of justice reform in Albania made some progress in 2019. Key bodies of judicial self-governance—namely, the High Council of Justice (HCJ), High Prosecutorial Council (HCP), and Justice Appointment Council (JAC)—were established and held their first meetings between December 2018 and January 2019. ¹

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- In January, the HCP launched the procedure for electing prosecutors serving in the Special Prosecution Against Corruption and Organized Crime, or SPAK. ² In July, the HCP announced a list of 15 candidates who fulfilled criteria for serving in the SPAK, and by October, 8 candidates had passed the vetting process. ³ With evaluation of the remaining candidates still pending, HCP appointed the eight SPAK candidates who had completed both phases of the vetting process on November 25. ⁴
- In September, the HCP launched the procedure for establishing the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI); its establishment is conditioned on the establishment of the SPAK, which requires at least 10 prosecutors. ⁵ At the end of 2018, the HCJ launched the procedure for the temporary appointment of judges in the Special Courts on corruption and serious crimes. ⁶ In May 2019, the HCJ reported to Parliament that a total of 22 judges from the First Instance and Appeal Courts for Serious Crimes had given their consent to be temporarily appointed in the Special Courts. ⁷ The government adopted a decision on the special procedure for the security of SPAK prosecutors and judges of the Special Courts on corruption and serious crimes. ⁸
- The Constitutional Court and the High Court remained inoperative during 2019 due to the absence of a quorum. The JAC launched the procedure to appoint eight vacant Constitutional Court judges ⁹ and the High Justice Inspector. ¹⁰ Amid institutional disagreements over procedures for appointing and electing members of the Constitutional Court, four vacancies were filled between October and November. However, one of President Meta's appointed members of the Constitutional Court, Besnik Muci, was later dismissed by the vetting Appeal Chamber. ¹¹ In September, the HJC launched a call for filling one vacant position at the High Court from prominent jurists. ¹² The HCP made progress towards electing a General Prosecutor, submitting a list of three candidates to Parliament in November. ¹³ On December 5, Parliament elected the HCP's first-ranked candidate, Olsian Çela, as General Prosecutor with a seven-year mandate. ¹⁴ On the same day, the president organized the draw for electing new JAC members beginning their mandate in 2020. ¹⁵

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- A monitoring report of the justice reform implementation acknowledges progress but also points out several deficiencies. The main concerns relate to the transparency of institutions in charge of proposing members to the new judicial bodies ¹⁶ and implementation of transition provisions by the General Prosecutor's office. ¹⁷
- Nearly 53 percent of Albanians believe that justice reform will have a positive impact, according to IDM's "2019 Public Trust in Governance" annual survey. However, only 31.5 percent feel the reform is being implemented properly. Furthermore, according to the same study, the prosecution and courts are seen as highly or extremely influenced by political interests, according to nearly 60 percent of Albanians. ¹⁸
- Since the start of the process for reevaluating judges and prosecutors, more than 140 dossiers have been processed, leading to 88 dismissals/resignations and 53 confirmations in office. ¹⁹ By August, the total number of vetting cases reached 189, according to an Institute of Political Studies monitoring report. ²⁰ This high rate of dismissals is already creating issues in the judiciary, which has a low number of judges (12 per 100,000 inhabitants) as opposed to the European average (21 per 100,000 inhabitants). ²¹
- Investigations of electoral fraud involving high-level officials and MPs were published in the media over the past year, but of these, half did not progress. ²² One such case was transferred from the serious crime prosecution to the Dibër prosecution office due to a lack of evidence supporting serious charges involving structured criminal groups. ²³

Corruption 1.00-7.00 pts

Looks at public perceptions of corruption, the business interests of top policymakers, laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest, and the efficacy of anticorruption initiatives.	2.75 / 7.00 TOP
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- In 2019, the progress made in fighting petty corruption through digitalization of services and expansion of one-stop-shops was

overshadowed by concerns over impunity, suspicious public-private partnerships (PPPs) and concessions, and ineffective investigations into suspected grand corruption. Two important cases of vote buying involving senior political figures of the ruling SP government, denounced by the opposition and various media investigations, were not brought to court. ¹ In September, the Court of Serious Crimes cleared former minister of interior Saimir Tahiri of drug trafficking charges, but found him guilty of abuse of office and sentenced him to a three-year probation. ²

- IDM's 2019 "Public Trust in Governance" survey found that Albanians are skeptical about the prosecution of corruption cases—6 in 10 respondents have no confidence in the prosecution of petty corruption, and 7 in 10 have no confidence in the prosecution of grand corruption cases. Additionally, a majority of Albanians believe that petty corruption (87.5 percent) and grand corruption (85.2 percent) are widespread or very widespread in Albania. ³
- Concerns over grand corruption and state capture increased in 2019. Particularly worrying developments were noted in the legislative process and the implementation of the law on concessions and PPPs. Parliament adopted several laws for specific PPP and concession projects despite warnings by international bodies, ⁴ ALSAI, ⁵ and local experts. ⁶ Such laws were adopted for concessions, such as the Milot-Balldren highway, Orikum-Dukat road, and other contracts, despite warnings from President Meta ⁷ and ALSAI ⁸ over their lawfulness and corruption allegations. With over two hundred PPPs and concessions under implementation, in July, Parliament amended the law on concessions and PPPs by removing the "up to 10 percent bonus" provisions for unsolicited proposals in a number of sectors. ⁹ Amendments were approved at the same plenary session that adopted new concession projects totaling over €300 million, which were initiated earlier through unsolicited proposals. ¹⁰
- The government pursued several PPP and concession projects despite concerns over their lawfulness, corruption allegations, and resistance from affected communities. It moved forward with the bidding procedure for the national theater based on the much

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debated *lex specialis* no. 37/2018, ¹¹ despite daily protests by the related community of artists. ¹² In July, President Meta addressed the law to the Constitutional Court to decide on its constitutionality.

¹³ While the Constitutional Court is unable to function due to the lack of a quorum, Tirana municipality launched a call for bids ¹⁴ for the national theater based on a Council of Ministers decision in April. The government and Tirana municipality failed to disclose the bid applicants or the winner even after the 30-day deadline expired. ¹⁵

- The EC's 2019 report for Albania notes that frequent investigations have yet to produce a substantial number of final convictions of high-ranking state officials, and thus foster a culture of impunity. ¹⁶

Former minister Tahiri's cleared drug trafficking charges and sentencing to a three-year probation for abuse of office received mixed reactions from international representatives. While the EU refrained from commenting on the first instance verdict of the Special Court of Serious Crimes, the U.S. and UK embassies in Tirana found the verdict to be an important step forward but the sentencing as discouraging. ¹⁷ In July, the U.S. Department of State publicly designated former mayor of Durrës, Vangjush Dako, and his family members under Section 7031(c) of the FY2019 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, due to his involvement in significant corruption. ¹⁸

- Albania's implementation of whistleblower legislation has produced modest results. ¹⁹ A Council of Europe report notes the challenge posed by low levels of societal support for whistleblowing in Albania.

²⁰ In June, the Ministry of Justice launched public consultations on the anticorruption Action Plan 2019–2023 ²¹ to reinvigorate the country's performance in this area.

- In April, the Ministry of Justice reported that 12 out of 18 objectives of the anticorruption Strategy and 53 out of the 97 measures were fully implemented during 2018. ²² However, an ALSAI Performance Audit Report on "The implementation of the anticorruption strategy" found several loopholes in the Strategy and its Action Plan related to the relevance of the objectives, incoherence between the Strategy and Action Plans, lack of involvement of nonstate actors in the

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implementation, and lack of institutional memory in the implementation. **23**

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NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author(s). The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 1 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year. The Democracy Percentage, introduced in 2020, is a translation of the Democracy Score to the 0–100 scale, where 0 equals least democratic and 100 equals most democratic.



On Albania

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

67 / 100 **Partly Free*****In Other Reports***[Freedom in the World 2020](#)***Other Years***

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