

Document #2048566

Freedom House

Freedom in the World 2021 - Albania

PARTLY FREE

66

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 27 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 39 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

67 / 100 Partly Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

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 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.

Key Developments in 2020

- In January, the parliament established the Political Council, tasked with creating a plan to address electoral reforms recommended by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). By October, the parliament had adopted most of the Council's plan, including policies to gradually depoliticize election administration, introduce electronic identification of voters where technically possible, and restructure the Central Election Commission (CEC), among other changes.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government passed a state of emergency that, among other restrictions, banned public gatherings. However, in December, several hundred protesters clashed with police for several days after a police officer killed an unarmed civilian who had violated a coronavirus-related curfew. Demonstrators threw stones, flares, and firecrackers at officers who used tear gas and water cannon to disperse them.

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 chosen by the parliament for a maximum of two five-year terms; the office does not hold executive power, though the president heads the military and plays a key role in selecting senior judges. 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. Socialist Party (PS) leader Edi Rama retained his position as prime minister following the June 2017 parliamentary election.

In July 2020, the parliament initiated an impeachment procedure against President Meta. The committee that conducted the impeachment inquiry concluded in October that, though Meta had overstepped his constitutional authority by postponing a series of local elections in June 2019, his impeachment was not justified.

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. All members serve four-year terms.

Events preceding the 2017 legislative election reflected ongoing distrust between the opposition Democratic Party (PD) and the ruling PS. In late 2016, the president called the parliamentary election for the following June. The PD boycotted the election in February 2017, claiming the PS would commit massive electoral fraud. A standoff ensued, with tensions escalating that May, when the PD held a large protest in Tirana. Mediators from the United States and European Union (EU) facilitated an agreement between the parties later that month; the PD was guaranteed several ministerial positions, the chair of the Central Election Commission (CEC), and directorships of several public agencies.

The election was held in June 2017, a week later than initially scheduled. The PS won 74 seats, enough to govern alone, on voter turnout of 46.8 percent. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) election monitors praised the contest's conduct, but noted that the mediated agreement resulted in the "selective and inconsistent application" of electoral law. The mission also noted vote-buying and voter intimidation allegations.

Municipal elections held in June 2019 were also marred by vote-buying allegations. PD and LSI lawmakers resigned their seats in February and threatened to boycott the coming local elections. After months of opposition-led protests, President Meta attempted to delay the contests in June, just before the elections, but the parliament reversed his decree and censured him for his actions. The contests proceeded as scheduled, but opposition parties boycotted local races; PS candidates won most mayoral contests and local council seats on a turnout of 23 percent.

While OSCE monitors said the contests were generally orderly, they also reported significant irregularities; parties tracked voter participation, impinging on voters' rights to participate without fear of retribution. Some voters also reported that they were threatened with loss of employment or the withdrawal of social service support depending on their vote. The PD denounced the contest, claiming that turnout figures had been inflated.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant 2 / election management bodies? 4

After the 2017 election, the OSCE voiced concerns that the CEC was not operating transparently and sometimes failed to sanction parties that committed electoral violations, such as failing to adhere to gender quota requirements. 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. In July, the parliament partially adopted provisions of the Council's plan to gradually depoliticize election administration, introduce electronic identification of voters where technically possible, and restructure the CEC, among other changes. In October, some reforms that required more thorough legislative changes were enacted by the parliament.

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 3 / groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these 4 competing parties or groupings?

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 3 / elections? 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 3 / sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 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.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other 3 / relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 4

Albanian law guarantees political rights for citizens regardless of their ethnic, racial, lingual, or religious identity. Electoral officials provided voter education materials in minority languages for the 2017 parliamentary poll, though not for the June 2019 local elections.

Roma and other marginalized people remain vulnerable to political exploitation. OSCE monitors noted that Romany individuals faced difficulty registering to vote in 2019 due to a lack of a permanent address.

Women are underrepresented both in politics and election administration roles; 36 women held parliamentary seats in 2019.

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

In 2017, elections, and thus the timely formation of a new government, were threatened by an impasse between the PD and PS that persisted until international mediators facilitated a political agreement. Once installed, the government was largely 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. The Special Prosecutor Service was established as part of 2016 reforms, and is tasked with 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. A March 2020 European Commission report praised Albania's anticorruption efforts.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 2 / 4

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

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.

In December 2019, the parliament passed two laws allowing government agencies to hear complaints from individuals alleging defamation from television stations and news sites. Under the legislation, these agencies will have the power to fine journalists or restrict the activities of outlets found to have engaged in defamation. The Council of Europe criticized the law for its vague parameters and its potential to deter online reporting.

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 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

Freedom of assembly is generally respected. Demonstrations by opposition parties and civic groups are common. Opposition protests were frequently held between April and June 2019, ahead of June's local elections, and sometimes turned violent.

In 2020, the government banned public gatherings as a part of the state of emergency declared due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, in May, protestors confronted police after the unpopular demolition of the national theatre in Tirana. In December, also in Tirana, several hundred protesters clashed with police for several days after a police

officer killed an unarmed civilian who had violated a coronavirus-related curfew. Demonstrators threw stones, flares, and firecrackers at officers who used tear gas and water cannon to disperse them. Witnesses saw police chasing protesters through city squares. During the first two days, over 62 people were arrested, and 116 people were charged for holding an illegal protest, arson, or breaching public order.

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 due to increased violence between demonstrators and police at separate protests during the year.

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 2016, the parliament approved a variety of reforms designed to boost the judiciary's independence and capacity, including the evaluation of current and prospective judges and prosecutors based on their professionalism, moral integrity, and independence by an international team of career judges and prosecutors, called the Independent Qualification Commission (IQC). Vetting processes are ongoing and were praised by the European Commission in a March 2020 report; in 2020, judges were dismissed or resigned due to their 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.

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 remains strong in practice. Women are underrepresented in the workforce. Women living in rural areas, in particular, have fewer opportunities for employment and education than do men.

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, 2 / protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4

The government generally does not place explicit restrictions on social freedoms. Authorities in the past have indicating a willingness to recognize same-sex marriages, but no policy developments have followed.

Domestic violence is widespread, and while the parliament has adopted some measures to combat the problem in recent years, few cases are prosecuted. Police are poorly equipped to handle cases of domestic violence or spousal rape, which is often not understood to be a crime. According to a UN Women survey released in May 2019, 47 percent of female Albanian respondents experienced domestic violence from intimate partners in their lifetime.

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, according to the US State Department's 2020 *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Though the government continued to delay funding for shelters managed by NGOs, the government cooperated with civil society leaders to create the Advisory Board of Victims of Trafficking and increased victim assistance in criminal proceedings with a new Development Center for Criminal Justice for Minors.

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