

Freedom of the Press 2014 - Albania

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2014 Scores

Press Status: Partly Free

Press Freedom Score: (0 = best, 100 = worst) 49

Legal Environment: (0 = best, 30 = worst) 15

Political Environment: (0 = best, 40 = worst) 17

Economic Environment: (0 = best, 30 = worst) 17

The constitution guarantees freedom of the press, and the media are vigorous and fairly diverse. However, outlets often display a strong political bias, and their reporting is influenced by the economic or political interests of their owners.

Defamation remains a criminal offense, though legal reforms enacted in 2012 eliminated prison terms as a punishment, leaving only fines. Civil defamation suits remain common. A 2012 amendment to the civil code set limits on financial penalties for defamation in order to protect the survival of media outlets. The government of Prime Minister Sali Berisha, which stepped down in September 2013 after the ruling Democratic Party (PD) lost the June parliamentary elections to the opposition Socialist Party (PS), used administrative mechanisms, including tax investigations and arbitrary evictions from state-owned buildings, to disrupt the operations of media outlets it perceived as hostile. Freedom of information legislation is poorly implemented. A report released by a nongovernmental watchdog group in September found that the parliament responded positively to only six out of 50 requests for documents. In late December, new prime minister Edi Rama pledged to end a months-long lapse in the online publication of government decisions and draft legislation. The country's main media regulator is seen as highly politicized.

The partisan bent of many news outlets was visible during the 2013 election campaign, with the main television stations favoring either the PD or the PS in the amount or tone of their coverage. Smaller parties received little airtime. The election commission's media rules were weakly enforced, and a decision by the panel in early June appeared to require broadcasters to air party-prepared footage during newscasts, disregarding a 2011 court ruling.

The media play an important role in exposing political malfeasance, though few outlets engage in investigative reporting, and the implicated officials are rarely punished by the courts. Journalists are sometimes physically obstructed from covering specific events or assaulted during the course of their work. A cameraman affiliated with the television station Top Channel was detained and beaten by police in April 2013 while filming a confrontation between officers and soccer fans. On election day in June, a Top Channel crew was assaulted by unidentified attackers in northern Albania.

The public broadcaster, RTSh, is financially dependent on the state and typically shows a strong progovernment bias. Two private television stations – Top Channel and the pro-PD TV Klan – have national reach, and dozens of smaller television and radio outlets also operate in a poorly regulated environment. There is a variety of daily and weekly newspapers, but circulation is low, and distribution networks do not reach some rural districts. Albanians have access to satellite television, foreign radio content, and television broadcasts from neighboring Greece and Italy.

There are no government restrictions on the internet, which was accessed by 60 percent of the population in 2013. Penetration has been increasing in recent years, but access in rural areas remains limited.

Media ownership is reportedly obscured by the use of proxies, which circumvents legal barriers to concentration. There is little foreign investment in the Albanian media market. Most media outlets rely on financial support from owners and a few major advertisers, and self-censorship to suit their business or political interests is common. Journalists, outlets, and advertisers can face repercussions for negative coverage about the authorities, including tax inspections and loss of state business. The Berisha government allegedly directed the bulk of state advertising purchases to politically friendly outlets, regardless of market share; its former defense minister was charged in December 2013 with violating regulations on the purchase of television ads for his ministry. Journalists typically work without contracts, increasing their dependence on managers and owners. The Union of Albanian Journalists has reported that employees at most print and broadcast outlets routinely experience delays in their pay for weeks or months at a time.

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