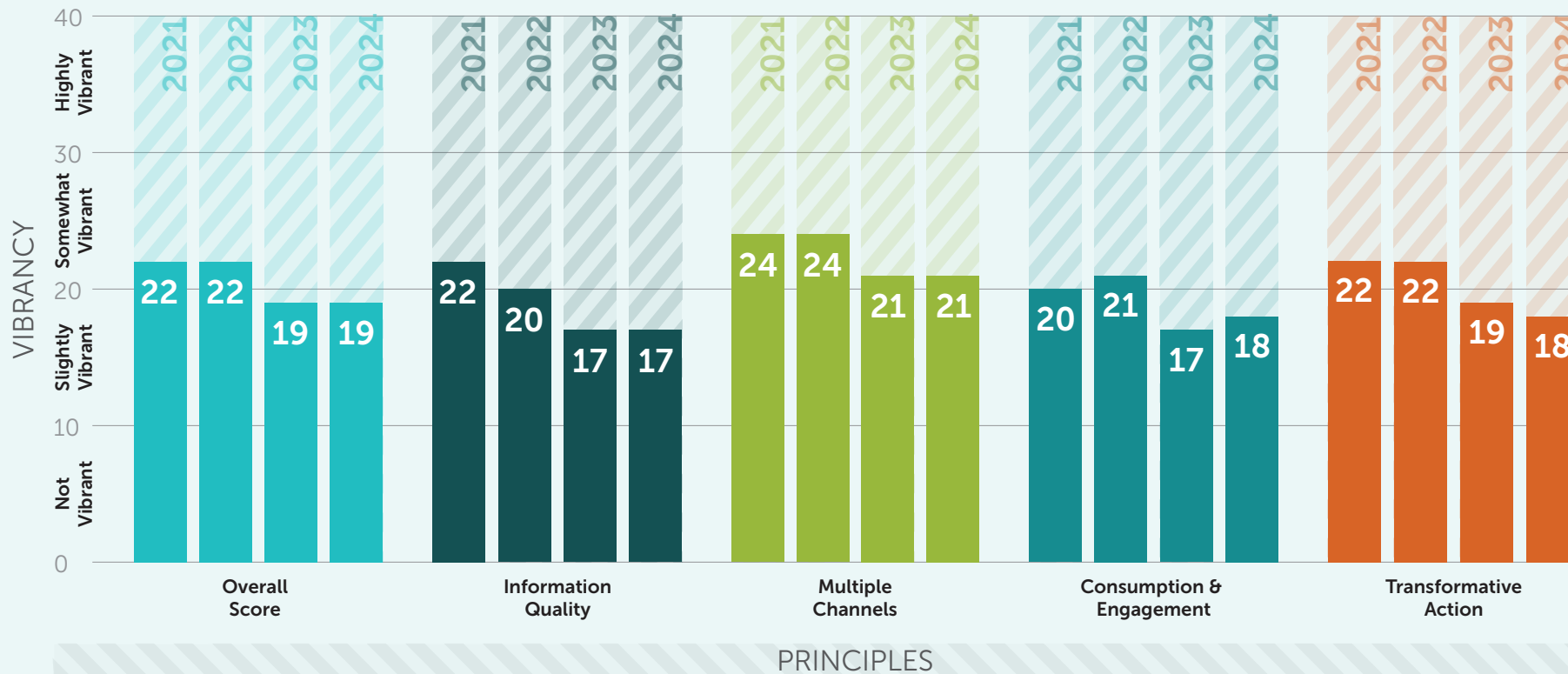


# ALBANIA

# Vibrant Information Barometer

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**Not Vibrant (0-10):** Quality information is extremely limited in this country. The vast majority of it is not editorially independent, not based on facts, or it is intended to harm. People do not have the rights, means, or capacity to access a wide range of information; they do not recognize or reject misinformation; and they cannot or do not make choices on what types of information they want to engage with.

**Slightly Vibrant (11-20):** Quality information is available on a few topics or geographies in this country, but not all. While some information is editorially independent, there is still a significant amount of misinformation, malinformation, and hate speech in circulation, and it does influence public discourse. Most people do not recognize or reject misinformation.

**Somewhat Vibrant (21-30):** Quality information is available in this country and most of it is editorially independent, based on facts, and not intended to harm. Most people have the rights, means, and capacity to access a wide range of information, although some do not. Most people recognize and reject misinformation, although some do not.

**Highly Vibrant (31-40):** Quality information is widely available in this country. People have the rights, means, and capacity to access a wide range of information; they recognize and reject misinformation.

Highly Vibrant

Somewhat Vibrant

Slightly Vibrant

Not Vibrant

OVERALL  
SCORE**19**

Albania held important local elections in 2023, in which the opposition participated after a boycott in 2019. The voting took place without incident, but observers raised concerns about the misuse of state resources, pressure on public-sector workers and voters, and allegations of vote buying. At the same time, the country wrapped up an initial review of its body of law in preparation for starting the years-long process to join the European Union.

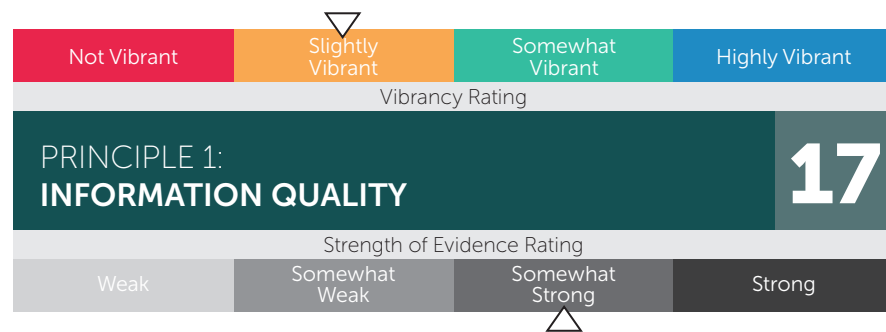
Conflict within the opposition Democratic Party continued in 2023, with its two factions fighting each other instead of exercising any type of watchdog function over the government.

The civic space saw further deterioration, as did the media environment, with cases of physical and verbal attacks on journalists throughout the year. A wave of cyberattacks on public infrastructure continued in 2023, with the parliament and a key anti-corruption agency hit with denial-of-service attacks. Data from public institutions, such as the government of Tirana and the Foreign Ministry, were leaked during the first half of the year.

In this context, Albania's overall VIBE score stayed at 19, the same as in the 2023 VIBE study. Principle 1 (Information Quality) received the same score it did last year. Highest marks went to the public broadcaster's efforts to reach diverse audiences (in Indicator 4), while Indicator 5, on resources for content production, scored the lowest, as sources of financing continue to compromise the independence of Albania's media. The

overall score for Principle 2 (Multiple Channels) also remained unchanged. Indicator 7, on access to channels of information, scored the highest, buoyed by the country's strong communication technology infrastructure; the low score for Indicator 10, on media channels' independence, reflected the panel's view of the malign influence of self-interested media owners.

Principle 3 (Information Consumption and Engagement) gained a point over the 2023 study. The indicator on community media ranked highest, for their responsiveness to their local communities, while the panelists gave low marks to measures to improve media and information literacy. Principle 4 (Transformative Action) lost a point from last year. Civil society's dissemination of quality information got the highest marks, while panelists lamented Albanians' limited civic engagement and decision-making processes tainted by political motives and opacity.



The media landscape in Albania faces significant challenges. The infrastructure to produce diverse content exists but is unevenly distributed, as local broadcast media struggle with digitalization and print media decline. Training for media professionals depends on unreliable donor funding. The broadcast market is controlled by a few families with strong political ties, undermining editorial independence and promoting government propaganda. The wider information ecosystem lacks critical journalism and information manipulation is common, especially online. Media content rarely intends to harm but often serves as propaganda and supports nationalistic narratives. Content is not sufficiently inclusive, often ignoring various viewpoints and rarely presenting women and minorities. Media are financially strapped, with most outlets depending heavily on advertising or owner funding, which further compromises their independence and ability to produce quality content. The result is a media environment where financial and editorial pressures lead to a skewed public discourse, lacking in diversity and depth.

Panelists awarded the highest score to Indicator 4 (inclusivity and diversity), driven by the public broadcaster providing information for diverse audiences, in languages and formats that are suitable to

them, such as newscasts in minorities' languages and in sign language. Indicator 5 scored the lowest, as financial struggles persist in the media ecosystem and ultimately compromise editorial independence.

### Indicator 1: There is quality information on a variety of topics available.

Panelists agreed that Albanian media generally have the infrastructure to produce varied content, although local broadcast media lag behind, especially in the digitalization process. Print media have significantly shrunk, and their distribution system is highly flawed.

Formal university training for journalists is adequate. International and Albanian nonprofits offer continuous training and capacity-building on various topics, but changing donor priorities make the trainings less than sustainable.

“**The broadcast market is concentrated in the hands of four families who reach most of the audience and are under clear political influence, as their fortunes depend heavily on the government.**”

The broadcast market is concentrated in the hands of four families who reach most of the audience and are under clear political influence, as their fortunes depend heavily on the government. Panelists agreed that editorial decisions at most media outlets are dictated by the owners' political and financial interests. Many outlets churn out government propaganda while their owners benefit from public

tenders in infrastructure, public property, or various licenses. A lack of ethics in reporting is widespread. Self-regulating mechanisms, such as the Ethical Media Alliance, call out breaches of ethics, usually to no avail.

The panelists noticed a slight uptick in journalists holding government representatives accountable. With a nod to law enforcement agencies launching corruption investigations and bringing charges against politicians, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) Albania's Kristina Voko said the “institutions of justice have started working,” giving the country's journalists a sense of empowerment.

### **Indicator 2: The norm for information is that it is based on facts.**

Panelists agreed that content is not fact-based, well-sourced, or objective. Rather, it is essentially reprinted press releases without further analysis or verification. Often, audiences are presented with packaged news or opinion ready-made by the government or political parties. Panelists said politicians disseminate false information about one another, coarsening public discourse and manipulating public opinion.

The government disseminates propaganda, at times larded with manipulated information, with little journalistic pushback. Some panelists took particular aim at online portals, which traffic in false or compromising information, sometimes at the behest of powerful people.

Fact-checking platforms exist, but their impact is limited. Content moderation remains limited, although a fact-checking outlet collaborates with Facebook in flagging disinformation.

### **Indicator 3: The norm for information is that it is not intended to harm.**

Panelists said foreign governments do not spread information in Albania with an intent to harm. Rather, they push propaganda or manipulate information, curate their own national narratives, and promote historical ties. A [2022 analysis](#) concluded that “disinformation narratives spread through state-funded media or even through the social media channels of the Russian Embassy in Tirana, did not target Albania.”

The government rarely disseminates manipulated information or hate speech, though it faces no consequences for doing so. Traditional media rarely spread manipulated information, while some internet platforms represent themselves as online media with that express intent.

“Nonprofessional content is mostly responsible for hate speech, and there are no ramifications for them,” said Lutfi Dervishi, a media

specialist and journalism lecturer. Indeed, in [2023 data](#) from the Office of the Commissioner for the Protection Against Discrimination identified two instances of hate speech, out of six investigated, involving gender and homosexuality.

### **Financial instability severely undermines media independence, and ultimately the reliability of the information they provide.**

### **Indicator 4: The body of content overall is inclusive and diverse.**

Prepackaged content that serves the interests of influential groups, passed off as information for the general public, dominates Albania’s information space, especially during political campaigns.

The public broadcaster provides information for diverse audiences, in languages and formats that are suitable to them, such as newscasts in minorities’ languages, with sign-language interpreters. The public broadcaster also covers minorities, who remain underrepresented in other outlets.

The lack of women’s and girls’ representation in the media is glaring. Their views are rarely considered, and they are scarce on panel discussions on prime-time television. Panelist Valbona Sulce, a media researcher, said that this absence of women in televised programming constitutes sexism, which is a violation of amendments to the country’s broadcasting law passed in 2023 that requires balanced gender representation. The problem extends to the makeup of media leadership, owners, boards, or other executive positions within outlets.

Lastly, panelists agreed that the prevailing ideologies and points of view in Albanian media are not representative of the society but rather reflect the interests of the outlets’ owners.

### **Indicator 5: Content production is sufficiently resourced.**

The lowest-scoring indicator in Principle 1, financing remains a key challenge for the country’s media, with dire implications for editorial independence. Professional content producers cannot afford to produce

quality information. They face grueling work conditions, including long, stressful days, and are not always paid on time.

Large media attract most of the advertising market in Albania, while local outlets rely on funding from their owners and civil-society media depend on donor support.

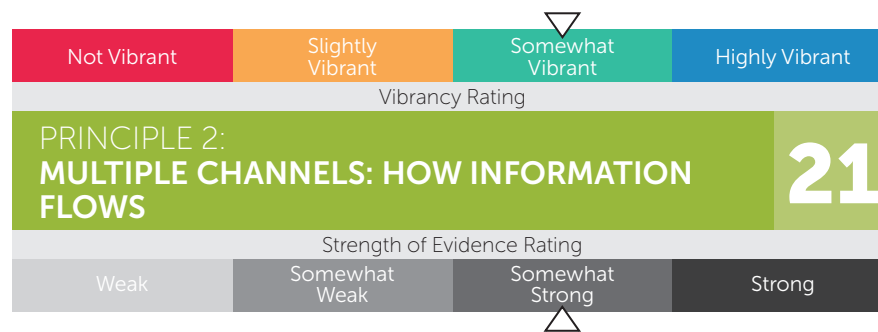
While a small slice of Albania’s overall media revenue, panelists said government agencies’ process for allocating advertising is opaque. Further, the government does not provide media subsidies, although panelists said it provides indirect support in ways that distort the market, such as renting space to friendly media for token amounts.

Four families control 72 to 84 percent of Albania’s [TV market](#), depending on how it is defined, and two owners hold 71 percent of the country’s print media.

Most media have not diversified their income streams and continue to rely on advertising as a source of revenue. However, local media, in particular, have limited access to advertising revenue and rely on financing from their owner to continue operation.

Financial instability severely undermines media independence, and ultimately the reliability of the information they provide. Struggling to cover their expenses, some outlets resort to blackmailing public figures, taking payments for quashing unfavorable stories, even on matters of great public interest.

Finally, media owned by the country’s non-governmental organizations do quality work, but their dependence on grants from international donors means they also struggle for financial stability.



While Albanian law protects the freedoms of speech and the press, defamation remains a criminal offense, and there is no specific law on assaults of journalists in connection with their work. Media face covert censorship and self-censorship, with instances of harassment and attacks on journalists underreported to law enforcement. People have good technical access to information channels, but marginalized groups face barriers, and digital literacy remains low outside the cities and among marginalized groups. Although the country’s freedom-of-information regulations meet international standards, they are poorly enforced, limiting access to vital public information.

Additionally, media ownership is highly concentrated. Most media are controlled by entities with political and business interests, with little appetite for diversity or editorial independence. Public service media are improving, but they are scrutinized for potential biases due to their leadership’s ties to the governing party.

Indicator 7 received the highest scores from panelists, with the information and communication technology infrastructure meeting the needs of most people. Indicator 10, which examines the independence of information channels, scored the lowest, reflecting panelists’ view that media owners’ political and business interests dictate their outlets’ editorial lines.

### Indicator 6: People have rights to create, share, and consume information.

Panelists said Albania's legal protections for freedom of speech and press should be strengthened to match those in the European Union. Particularly, they emphasized the need for a specific law against assaults on journalists due to their work. The country's treatment of defamation as a criminal offense, instead of civil, is another chilling factor for free speech.

The government does not overtly censor media, but panelists agreed that journalists are harassed, covertly censored, and driven to self-censorship. Klevin Muka, a journalist and news anchor, said officials censor media covertly by limiting access to information or refusing to appear in reports or otherwise cooperate with news organizations.

Some who freely speak their mind have become the targets of hate speech, smears, or retaliatory lawsuits. One panelist said public employees can risk their jobs for expressing their views publicly.

Albania's media and journalists repeatedly came under [attack](#) in 2023, either by officials or private individuals. In March, a security guard died in an armed attack on the Top Channel TV station that remains unsolved. Panelists also cited the detention of journalist Elton Qyno by the special anti-corruption prosecutor, who also seized his laptop and phones in an effort to identify the sources of leaks from the office, in breach of the law on the protection of sources. The [mayor of Tirana launched an attack](#) on journalist Ola Xama, who had covered an investigation by the anti-corruption prosecutor into a waste-management contract in which the mayor played a role.

Blerjana Bino, an expert for the SafeJournalists regional network in Albania, said her group registered 24 attacks on journalists in 2023,

mostly intimidation and threats. By contrast, she said, the state police and public prosecutor's office registered only seven cases, suggesting that journalists are afraid to report cases and ultimately face their attackers in court.

### Indicator 7: People have adequate access to channels of information.

**“ The Commissioner on Access to Information and Personal Data Protection received 956 complaints in 2023 about government institutions not providing access to public information, 41 percent of which came from journalists, 38 percent from citizens, and 18 percent from civil society groups, with the rest from attorneys.**

Panelists said people in Albania have adequate access to channels of information. The country's information and communication technology infrastructure ensures access for most people, but it does not necessarily foster inclusivity. In poorer, remote areas, people might face financial and physical barriers, while some marginalized groups lack the money or know-how to access such infrastructure.

Panelists said social norms do not hinder access to information, but they said some groups' low digital and media-literacy skills hamper their ability to properly access information channels. Panelists also said people with disabilities need more help getting access to the country's ITC infrastructure.

### Indicator 8: There are appropriate channels for government information.

Panelists said Albania's freedom of information law is in line with international standards, but it is poorly enforced.

The Commissioner on Access to Information and Personal Data Protection received [956](#) complaints in 2023 about government institutions not providing access to public information, 41 percent of which came from journalists, 38 percent from citizens, and 18 percent from civil society groups, with the rest from attorneys, marking a slight decrease from the previous year.

In 2023, lawmakers stiffened penalties for officials who flout the law, but panelists said compliance remains poor.

Officials continue to resist journalists' calls to close the gap between laws on access to public information and how they are implemented, noting that there was further deterioration in implementation in 2023. Decisions by the commissioner on access to information and personal data protection, to whom they can appeal when their information requests are ignored or denied, take some time. Journalists can also turn to the administrative court, but either way, the appeals process takes time and is not always successful, leading many to give up or lose interest.

Panelists expressed particular concern about the unresponsiveness of Albania's institutions of justice to requests for information.

Spokespeople for government institutions are widely considered unreliable, serving more as government mouthpieces than providers of public information. Panelists said they are selective in responding to information requests, particularly ignoring matters of great public interest.

#### **Indicator 9: There are diverse channels for information flow.**

Albanian audiovisual media ownership law seeks to limit what percentage of a broadcast entity can be owned by a single person or company by further restricting an investor's stake in multiple broadcasters and [to some extent limiting the share of the broadcast media advertising market that a media company might occupy](#). The law also requires public disclosure of ownership, although some owners sidestep that requirement by using a series of holding companies. As a result, media ownership remains highly concentrated in Albania. BIRN's 2023 edition of its [Media Ownership Monitor](#) for Albania noted that “the

free to air TV market has a high audience concentration risk, with four major owners reaching an audience share of 86.94 percent” as of May 2023 and controlling 72 percent of revenues.

Panelists noted that the ownership, transparency, and financing of online media remain unregulated. The spectrum allocation process wrapped up in 2018, with little to no disruption since.

Panelists said the public typically does not know who owns the media they consume, whether because of owners' efforts to remain anonymous or because most people do not know how to use national public databases, such as the Commercial Register and the Beneficial Ownership Register, which provide information on media ownership.

Public service media serves all members of the public. Panelists said in recent years it has become more independent, offering better-quality, educational content. Still, its leadership by a former functionary of the governing Socialist Party of Albania raises concern about its editorial stances, one panelist said. Albanian and European journalists' associations [cried foul](#) in July over what they called new director Alfred Peza's “arbitrary” dismissals of 10 members of the public broadcaster's editorial staff.

Internet service providers neither throttle nor give priority to any particular clients or traffic. Some telecommunications companies, however, use zero-rating programs, which provide priority access to certain types of traffic or applications.

#### **Indicator 10: Information channels are independent.**

Far from being independent, panelists strongly agreed that media organizations blatantly further the political and financial interests

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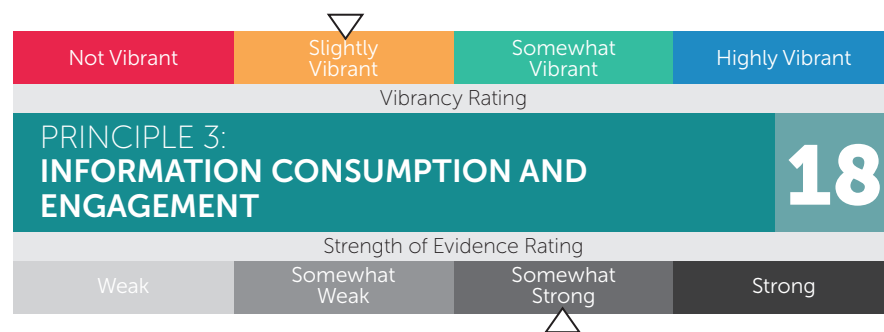


of their owners, who also operate in various industries, such as construction, real estate, or banking, or in public-private partnerships.

The European Commission concurs. It lamented in its [2023 evaluation](#) of Albania's progress toward EU membership that "the intersection of business and political interests, the lack of transparency of sources of finance, the concentration of media ownership, intimidation, and precarious working conditions continued to hamper media independence, pluralism, and the quality of journalism."

The choice in 2023 of Peza, a former lawmaker and top official from the Socialist Party of Albania, to lead the public Albanian Radio and Television was hotly contested. "In the context of Albania's media landscape, where the struggle for media freedom is ongoing, the impartiality of the public broadcasting service carries significant weight, as in principle it plays a crucial role in strengthening democratic processes," the [Safe Journalist Network](#) wrote in an open letter to the leader of a parliamentary committee. The network also questioned the integrity of the process and Peza's eligibility for the job.

Finally, while panelists acknowledged that members of the media-regulatory body are politically appointed, they were split on how neutral and effective it is. Some accused it of foot-dragging, while others said its decisions are not marred by the politicization that pervades most of the country's public life.



Albania has adequate regulations on privacy protections and cybersecurity, but implementation lags. The law on personal data

protection aligns with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation but is not yet in force. Incidents of cybercrime spiked in 2023, while the media are poorly protected and practice poor digital hygiene.

Although the country has taken steps to become more media literate, efforts should be better coordinated and institutionalized to counter a worsening trend. Generally, Albanians can exercise their freedom of speech and right to access information, especially since digital tools allow for the free expression of opinions, independent from structured dialogues.

Media engagement with the audience is lacking, with a focus on metrics rather than a deep dive into the nature and needs of the audience. In this media landscape, sensationalism prevails over substantive, educational content. Community media, while vital for local engagement, struggle to stay afloat and rely primarily on inconsistent donor support.

Panelists gave Indicator 15, on community media, the highest score in Principle 3. They said that, although few, community media serve the needs of locals by producing local content, addressing specific issues pertinent to their audiences. Indicator 12 on media literacy, on the other hand, took the lowest score in Principle 3, with most of the panel saying that measures to address media and information literacy remain poor. They noted the country's dropping down a spot from its already-low ranking in the Open Society Institute's [European Media Literacy Index](#) for 2023.

### Indicator 11: People can safely use the internet due to privacy protections and security tools.

Panelists agreed that existing regulations are adequate, but implementation remains an issue. The law on personal data protection aligns with the GDPR, but it has yet to enter into force.

Incidents of cybercrime rose by 40 percent over 2022, according to the [Ministry of Interior](#), which recorded 764 offenses. Investigators could identify the culprits in 54 percent of cases. More than two-thirds of cases involved forgery or computer-tampering, with the others involving fraud

or child pornography. Those numbers are likely an undercount, as most panelists said much cybercrime, particularly targeting the media, goes unreported.

In 2023 banks were a prime target. In addition, a telecommunications operator suffered a major cyberattack and the websites of public institutions, including the parliament and the High Inspectorate of Declaration and Control of Assets and Conflict of Interest, were hit with distributed-denial-of-service attacks.

Panelists said that while some larger media have dedicated IT staff and have taken steps to secure their digital assets, many smaller outlets lack the resources and infrastructure to adequately protect against digital threats.

Still, Bino Blerjana, of SCiDEV and the SafeJournalists Network, said both large and small media organizations need better “cybersecurity cultures,” and panelists noted that all types of outlets suffered distributed-denial-of-service attacks in 2023.

“Digital security is the Achille’s heel of the new media in Albania,” said Lufti Dervishi, the journalism lecturer. “There’s a strong need for digital literacy and a growing need for journalists to be trained in digital security.”

### **Indicator 12: People have the necessary skills and tools to be media literate.**

Panelists were divided over the state of media literacy in Albania. Some noted the government’s introduction of elective courses on media and information literacy at the university and pre-university levels, although they acknowledge these efforts leave out older Albanians.

Other panelists deemed the government’s efforts inadequate and said it had focused more on digital literacy. “The biggest effort in addressing

media and information literacy is being made by civil society,” Besar Likmeta, editor-in-chief of Reporter.al, said.

Panelists said there is no data on the use of fact-checking websites in the country, but they believe that most people do not take advantage of those types of digital tools for media literacy. Albania fell back a place on the 2023 [European Media Literacy Index](#), to 38th among 41 countries.

### **Indicator 13: People engage productively with the information that is available to them.**

Panelists agreed that journalists and activists exercise their freedom of speech and their right to access information. Some also said the general public exercises those same rights, especially as digital tools allow them to freely express opinions, independent of structured dialogues.

There are repercussions for those who exercise their right of speech, who become targeted by hate speech, or end up being subject to strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs).

Television shows that host topical discussions give the misleading impression of an open debate, but participants invariably represent certain groups driven by financial or political interests.

Finally, one panelist complained that academia stays out of the discussion even on issues of great public interest.

### **Indicator 14: Media and information producers engage with their audience’s needs.**

Panelists agreed that Albanian media do a poor job of trying to understand their audiences. Qualitative research is rare, with outlets focusing rather on the size of their audiences, while quantitative research is overshadowed by numbers rather than content quality.

“Digital security is the Achille’s heel of the new media in Albania,” said Lufti Dervishi, the journalism lecturer. “There’s a strong need for digital literacy and a growing need for journalists to be trained in digital security.”

Major broadcast media have the tools to measure viewership, especially of certain prime-time shows. Smart TVs and other integrated devices have helped, said Geri Emiri, founder of Amfora.al, a website focusing on Albanian culture and history.

Online media use analytics tools, which “allow us to measure audience engagement with certain articles, which in turn allows us to adapt our strategies to reach wider audiences and increase the time they spend on our page,” said Sami Curri, a freelance journalist and founder of BI Media, which covers a region in the northeast.

Albanian media’s main shortcoming, a panelist said, is that they focus on clicks, rather than on educating the public, and are less selective about their content. They are full of daily news updates, entertainment, or political coverage, ignoring the needs of the audiences.

Local news gets little to no coverage in national media.

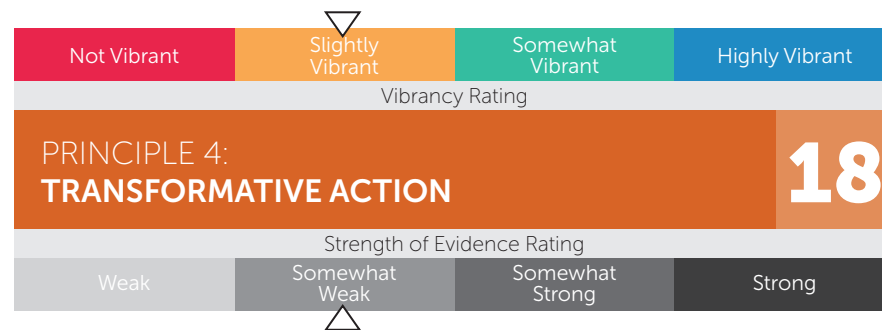
### Indicator 15: Community media provides information relevant for community engagement.

Panelists said Albania has community media, but they disagreed about what that meant. Some pointed to the definition of the term in Albanian law to mean the media of religious communities, which have their own radio stations. Others said the country has community media, even under the definition used by VIBE. They pointed to online media that serve specific audiences and cover topics neglected by mainstream media.

Though few, community media serve local needs by producing local content, addressing issues pertinent to their audiences, and serving as watchdogs and advocates for community interests. They rarely disseminate information intended to harm.

Community media’s main challenge is funding, as local donations are negligible, and they must rely on donor support.

Qualitative research is rare, with outlets focusing rather on the size of their audiences, while quantitative research is overshadowed by numbers rather than content quality.



Albania’s few nonpartisan news sources are easily swamped by media outlets serving their owners’ financial and political interests. As a result, the public’s views on political and social issues are rarely shaped by quality information. Mainly, people are confined within information bubbles or echo chambers on digital platforms, relying heavily on television and government or party sources for news, particularly during elections.

Civil society organizations in Albania strive to use and distribute quality information to advance their missions and combat information-manipulation. There’s little civic engagement in Albania, and groups with a stake in decisions usually have little chance to provide input. Most activism happens in major cities, despite some active grassroots initiatives.

The government rarely uses quality information in making policy, which is typically done behind closed doors. Exposés of corruption or rights violations get a tepid reaction from officials, except when heads of agencies respond by attacking the press.

Panelists gave Indicator 18 (civil society’s use of information) the highest score in Principle 4, for civil society’s dissemination of quality information to the public. Indicator 19 (government’s use of information) received the lowest score in Principle 4, for decision-making processes based on political interests and marked by a lack of transparency.

### **Indicator 16: Information producers and distribution channels enable or encourage information sharing across ideological lines.**

Panelists agreed that the influence and political affiliations of mainstream media owners largely determine the quality and variety of information that gets disseminated in Albania. In effect, most people consume a media diet made up largely of propaganda. Only social media offers space for more freewheeling discussions.

While panelists agreed that a small number of nonpartisan media exist, they said there is no data on audience size or engagement for these outlets country's few nonpartisan media. "Our society is a polarized one, where debate is limited and opinions are standard, while facts remain subject to interpretation," Dervishi said.

Panelists said there is a need for research on media consumption habits in the country.

### **Indicator 17: Individuals use quality information to inform their actions.**

Panelists said people's views on political or social issues are not shaped by quality information. In digital platforms, people have segregated into information bubbles or echo chambers.

For most people, television remains the main source of information, while the main sources of news are the government or political parties. Even during elections, people rely on what is disseminated by parties, although, one panelist said, there is a lack of research on what, exactly, sways voting behavior. Notably, some media use live campaign broadcasts, which fall outside regulations for either advertising or news coverage, to showcase their favored candidates, one panelist said.

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The lack of media literacy and scarcity of quality information extends to some of the choices people make for their health. Albania has a robust market, propped up by infomercials, for supplements and other substances that fall outside drug regulations. While these products do not necessarily pose a threat to public health, they do pose a threat to people's pocketbooks.

### **Indicator 18: Civil society uses quality information to improve communities.**

Panelists agreed that civil society groups use quality news and information to explain their mission or objectives. They share reliable information with the public and do not pass on bad information. Nevertheless, a panelist pointed out that while ordinary people might work with local grassroots groups, they are less aware of the work of larger civil society organizations in Tirana.

A panelist said civil society organizations generally give sound advice and recommendations. Still, their effectiveness

is limited by government agencies' lack of cooperation and resistance to calls for transparency. The [European Commission](#) has repeatedly nudged Albanian officials to give civil society more support and more input in policy discussions.

Collaboration is also limited between media and civil society, although research is lacking on the subject, panelists said. Some panelists said advocacy organizations tend to work with the media on issues such as the environment and human rights, often as a condition of donor grants, but another said few civil society activists are vocal about violations of certain groups' rights or about corruption cases.

Civic engagement in Albania is absent in many key government decisions. This, too, is an area where the European Commission has urged the country to do better, calling the landscape for activism

“fragmented, dependent on donors, and concentrated in the main cities, although grassroots initiatives are active on some community-based issues.”

### **Indicator 19: Government uses quality information to make public policy decisions.**

Indicator 19 is the lowest ranked of Principle 4, with overall agreement that the government does not use quality information in making policy. Rather, political interests typically drive decision-making, which is done out of the public eye. A recent example was Albania’s controversial [agreement](#) with Italy to host asylum seekers arriving in Italy while their cases are adjudicated, of which the government released only sections rather than the entire text.

The government uses press conferences to communicate decisions and points of view while reining in journalists to frustrate their attempts to hold officials accountable. Reporters are often limited to [asking about predetermined topics](#) rather than about topics of public interest. The prime minister himself often restricts journalists by giving non-answers or refusing to address certain topics. Although government agencies started holding more press conferences in 2023, they are no more enlightening than ever.

Opinions and rumor, rather than facts and evidence, dominate Albania’s public discourse. The government uses its own data, interpreted in its own interest, to justify its actions, regardless of the facts. “Government actors rely more on propaganda than on evidence or facts,” a panelist said.

The government’s interactions with civil society organizations amount to window-dressing rather than sincere attempts at reform or to seek advice or information.

### **Indicator 20: Information supports good governance and democratic rights**

Panelists agreed that the government makes little to no effort to respond to media exposés of corruption or rights violations, resulting in a persistent gap between the issues that are surfaced and subsequent governmental accountability. For example, Geri Emiri, the Amfora.al founder, noted, “When corruption cases are made public, we don’t see any public procurement cases suspended.”

Panelists said that instead of calling for reform, officials target journalists who uncover wrongdoing, such as when the mayor of Tirana verbally [attacked journalist Ola Xama](#) (see Indicator 6) or [revealed the identities](#) of the owners of two prominent social media accounts, infringing personal data protection. “There is an antimedia rhetoric in Albania, where each actor tries to legitimize their position,” said panelist Valbona Sulce, a media researcher and freelance journalist, “The government has

persistently delegitimized any information coming from investigations by attacking journalists, owners, etc.”

While panelists did not give much consideration to the question of whether quality information affects election results in Albania, one panelist said election coverage is essentially framed by politicians and parties, in the form of prepackaged reports and press releases, rather than reporters. Emiri added that although there is some serious reporting during elections, it is dwarfed by new online media, boosterish coverage of good news,

and reports from campaign events. Civil society groups and independent media provide unbiased content during elections, albeit within the conditions set by their donors.

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