

Violence Against Women during Elections & Gender Bias in Media Coverage of April 2021 General Elections in Albania



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Violence against women during elections (VAWE) and gender bias in media coverage of the 2021 elections in Albania

MEDIA MONITORING REPORT

November, 2021

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMA	Audiovisual Media Authority
AWEN	Albanian Women Empowerment Network
CEC	Central Electoral Commission
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPD	Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination
Observatory	Observatory for Children and Youth Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SMI	Socialist Movement for Integration
VAW	Violence against women
VAWE	Violence against women in elections
VAWP	Violence against women in politics

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 25 April 2021, Albania held its general parliamentary elections, followed by the establishment of a cabinet of ministers in September 2021. The new cabinet consisting of 12 women out of its 17 members, changed the history of men-dominated governments in Albania. Although this signifies a major achievement for gender equality in the country, the electoral process, including women participation as candidates was not without challenges. Reporting on electoral activities in a balanced way, utilizing a gender-sensitive language and providing space to women candidates remain key challenges related to media-reporting during electoral processes.

This study, conducted by Observatory for Children and Youth Rights, with the support of UN Women in Albania, tries to explore the role of media, in promoting gender equality in a context marked by the decline of paper-based journalism and COVID-19 limitations on reporting. It further seeks to identify whether and how media (particularly online and digital media) facilitates violence against women in political processes and during elections.

Violence against women in elections (VAWE) is a form of violence against women in politics (VAWP). VAWE impacts the realization of women's political rights as candidates, voters, activists, party supporters, observers, election workers, or public officials. VAWP and VAWE – which are manifested through psychological, physical and sexual violence – appear to be increasing globally, along with hate speech and an overall backlash against women's rights.

This media monitoring aimed to: (i) identify the main forms of VAWE that are facilitated or amplified by broadcast, print, online, and social media in Albania and (ii) provide information on gender bias in media coverage during the elections.

The findings are based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a sample of relevant television broadcasts and articles published in the Albanian print media and in online news portals, as well as social media posts from the official social media pages of political parties and individual politicians. The monitored outlets included: 12 News TV channels, 20 newspapers and magazines, 20 online portals, and 14 official Facebook pages and was realized during the following periods:

- The month leading up to the elections (25

March – 24 April 2021)

- Election day & post-election period (25 April – 31 August 2021)
- The period during the formation of the new Cabinet of Ministers (1 – 25 September 2021).

The quantitative analysis of TV, print, online, and social media monitored over the three periods for this study **did not reveal serious incidents of VAWE** perpetrated or amplified by the media during the 2021 parliamentary elections, but **did reveal significant gender bias** in the election coverage.

Men candidates were interviewed or quoted more often on substantive policy issues than women candidates in all three periods of media monitoring. Media used descriptive tones and style in reporting on women's personal achievements in politics and social life and the tone of reporting became negative and degrading when reporting on opposition women political candidates as well as the members of the new government's cabinet.

News items were based on direct quotes especially from men candidates. They did not contain gendered hate speech. On the other hand, there was little media engagement on women's rights and gender equality with about 2% of articles reviewed dealing with this topic. Media coverage of the elections did not overall portray women or men electoral candidates in overtly gender-stereotyped ways. The intensity of the use of gender-stereotyped language took a different turn in the post-election and new cabinet formation periods. News items appearing in the media and selected for the analysis were quite ironic and had sexual overtones when describing the women membership of the cabinet.

Qualitative analysis, however, revealed that the electoral campaign was characterized by verbal bullying and mobbing, and this was reflected by the media in bombastic titles and tabloid style newspaper writing, as well as in social media posts by political figures attacking other candidates, and on the social media accounts of online media. These posts generated often hostile, derogatory and sexist language in comments left by users.

VAWE often takes place on social media, where women standing for election – or even just expressing political opinions – are subject to sexism¹ and different forms of violence, including

1. Sexism in the media – electronic, print, visual and audio – contributes to an environment that tolerates and trivializes “everyday” sexism. It is manifested through: sexual, sexualized and racialized depictions and objectification of women, men, girls and boys, including in advertising, films, television, video games and pornographic material; derogatory or trivializing reporting about women's appearance, dress and behavior rather than balanced and informed discussion of their

cyberbullying.² In Albania, posts made on the social media accounts of media outlets and other public pages (mainly Facebook) about women candidates contained provocative articles and titles. Although, the analysis of such posts was not at the central focus of this media monitoring process, it was noted that such provocative posts/articles generated many comments from users, using hostile, negative or derogatory language against women candidates, including sexually explicit language or accusations of profiting from their government posts, of having supported criminal organizations, or simply of not caring about the people. Such a high volume of social media posts and comments are produced each day and analysing the full scope of social media output around the elections would require time and resources not available for this study, including the use of computer analytics to identify and record instances of VAWE.³

In general, verbal threats, accusations, and intimidation, spread widely in social media, were intended to cause harm to both women and men candidates. Other categories of VAWE - including physical, sexual, and economic - were not prevalent in the electoral campaign, or at least were not reported or amplified by media.

The findings of this study were also presented and validated in a meeting with key representatives of the Albanian Parliament, People's Advocate, Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA), Central Electoral Commission (CEC), Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD), media, civil society and others.

Women in politics or holding management positions in state institutions, participating in this meeting, confirmed once more that their experience with the media, especially with online and social media, has not been overall positive. These women feel pressure and a greater psychological weight due to the post that they hold. Although, as main perpetrator of sexist and gender-hate speech are mentioned political actors, whereas media makes news from these speeches aiming to increase their audience.

Regarding gender bias, the validation meeting confirmed once more that a very small number of media outlets respect gender representation. This is mainly due to the fact that high-level positions are held more by men rather than women. Women in politics also believe that political parties do not prefer women to represent them in political debates because these events are expected to demand more aggressive language and it is believed that it

is difficult for a woman to withstand in a debate on important issues. Also, the media tends to invite a woman to discuss on soft issues, such as: her family or her career rather than important political issues, such as: unemployment, leadership, etc.

The study closes with a set of recommendations that include:

- More work to be done with the media to enhance understanding of the importance of eliminating gender bias in media coverage of elections.
- Support for self-regulation efforts by the media to address issues of sexism and gendered negative reporting, including ethical use of social media accounts, and of the responsibility to identify and remove sexist and misogynistic content.
- Implement legislative measures that define and criminalise incidents of sexist hate speech and are applicable to all media, as well as reporting procedures and appropriate sanctions (Council of Europe recommendation).
- Include the "Code of Ethics" compiled by the Alliance Against Hate Speech in the Law No. 8580 "For political parties" aiming to make it an integral part of the political parties functioning.
- Usage of the opportunity presented by the upcoming local elections of 2023 to develop activities and programmes targeting reporters and journalists for ethically gendered reporting of the campaign.
- Introduction of stringent provisions into the Electoral Code to prevent and curb all forms of VAWE across media platforms, including social media and ensuring stringent enforcement of the Electoral Code related to gendered balance coverage of elections.
- Development of a database of women political experts and engage with media outlets to encourage them to draw on this database when selecting commentators.
- Development of a database recording and monitoring sexism in media reporting, in online and traditional media.
- Full implementation of the recommendations included in Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec (2019) on "Preventing and Combating Sexism" relating to media, internet and social media.

1. views and opinions; reporting and imaging women and men in stereotypical roles within the family and community; reproducing and perpetuating gender stereotypes with respect to victims of gender-based violence; unbalanced representation and the lack of meaningful participation of women in diverse professional and informative roles (experts, commentators), especially with respect to minority women

2. Cyberbullying involves the sending of intimidating or threatening messages.

3. International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 'Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool', 12.

1.BACKGROUND

VAWE is violence directed primarily at women because they are women seeking political office, engaged in political activities, or simply exercising their right to vote.

1.1 Violence against women in elections (VAWE)

Violence against women in elections (VAWE) is a form of violence against women in politics (VAWP). VAWP impacts the realization of women's political rights as candidates, voters, activists, party supporters, observers, election workers, or public officials. VAWP – which is manifested through psychological, physical and sexual violence – appears to be increasing globally, along with hate speech and an overall backlash against women's rights. Individual women and organizations representing women active in the political sphere are targeted for intimidation, harassment and violence.⁴

Based on the definition of VAWP, VAWE is considered a specific form of violence against women intended to impact the realization of women's political rights in an electoral context. This includes women's participation as candidates, voters, activists, party supporters, observers, election workers, or public officials. VAWE must be examined in its own right because it features: distinct victims who are targeted for their electoral participation on the basis of their sex and/or gender; distinct perpetrators with specific motivations for their attacks; distinct forms and

methods of violence; specific locations, both public and private, and specific consequences.⁵ VAWE is violence directed primarily at women because they are women seeking political office, engaged in political activities, or simply exercising their right to vote. VAWE is also a distinct form of election-related violence, defined by UN Women and UNDP as “acts or threats of coercion or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process, or that arise in the context of electoral competition”.⁶

As summarized in Figure 1 below, VAWE can be perpetrated by different actors operating in public, in private and (increasingly) online, and can take the form of physical or psychological attacks, sexual assault or harassment, threats or acts of coercion, and economic violence (such as limiting the access of women candidates or would-be candidates to financial resources).⁷ However, the most common forms of VAWE are psychological abuse and threats – often sexualized and targeting a woman's morality – designed to intimidate, humiliate, and demean women, to instil fear and cause emotional harm.⁸ Women standing as candidates for political office are particularly at risk of VAWE, including from within their own parties, and from partners and family members.⁹

4. Commission on the Status of Women, 'Women's Full and Effective Participation and Decision-Making in Public Life, as Well as the Elimination of Violence, for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls Agreed Conclusions' (UN ECOSOC, 30 March 2021), <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/CN.6/2021/L.3>.

5. UNDP and UN Women, *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide* (New York: UNDP : UN Women, 2017), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/11/preventing-violence-against-women-in-elections>.

6. UNDP and UN Women, 21.

7. Caroline Hubbard and Claire DeSoi, 'Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections' (Washington, D.C.: National Democratic Institute, 2016), 41, <https://www.voteswithoutviolence.org/files/Votes-Without-Violence-Toolkit.pdf>; UNDP and UN Women, *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, 23.

8. UNDP and UN Women, *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, 24–25; Mirela Arqimandriti and Megi Llubani, 'Women's Participation in Politics and Decision Making in the Western Balkans' (London: UK Conservatives / Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2019), 24, <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Women%E2%80%99s-Participation-in-Politics-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf>; Gabrielle Bardall, 'Gender-Specific Election Violence: The Role of Information and Communication Technologies', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2, no. 3 (22 November 2013): 3, <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.cs>.

9. UNDP and UN Women, *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*; Shannon O'Connell and Graeme Ramshaw, 'Violence Against Women in Politics: Global Perspectives of a Global Issue' (London: Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2018), <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Violence-Against->

Figure 1: Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE)¹⁰



While all women are potentially at risk of VAWE, younger women under 40 and women from minority groups are particularly vulnerable, due to the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization that they already experience.¹¹

As well as resulting in harm to women who are directly affected by VAWE, VAWE acts as a barrier to the participation of women in electoral processes and in politics more generally.¹² In this way, VAWE negatively impacts on the inclusivity and integrity of elections and ultimately on “the health and success of democracy”,¹³ by denying women the right to full, equal, effective and meaningful participation and decision-making in public life and contributing to

women’s underrepresentation in politics.¹⁴ “Gender norms shape how and why women are subject to electoral violence, as well as what types of acts are carried out to curtail or influence their participation”,¹⁵ and VAWE also functions as a tool to uphold gender norms and punish women seen as challenging traditional women roles in society by speaking out and / or standing for political office.¹⁶

While research in recent years indicates that around the world, VAWE tends to increase around election times,¹⁷ data on VAWE have not been systematically collected in most countries.¹⁸ In addition, VAWE and VAWP go underreported. This is partly because women political candidates and elected officials

Women-in-Politics-Global-Perspectives-of-a-Global-Issue.pdf.

10. Adapted from: International Foundation for Electoral Systems, ‘Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool’ (Arlington, VA: International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2019), https://bibliotecadigital.tse.jus.br/xmlui/bitstream/handle/bdtse/8268/2019_violence_against_women.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y; Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’.

11. Commission on the Status of Women, ‘Women’s Full and Effective Participation and Decision-Making in Public Life, as Well as the Elimination of Violence, for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls Agreed Conclusions’, para. 35; Inter-parliamentary Union, ‘Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians’ (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016), <https://www.ipu.org/file/5472/download?token=PjtucdkS>; O’Connell and Ramshaw, ‘Violence Against Women in Politics: Global Perspectives of a Global Issue’; Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’.

12. Bardall, ‘Gender-Specific Election Violence’, 1; Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’, 13, 40; Arqimandriti and Llubani, ‘Women’s Participation in Politics and Decision Making in the Western Balkans’, 23; International Foundation for Electoral Systems, ‘Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool’, 8.

13. Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’, 13.

14. Commission on the Status of Women, ‘Women’s Full and Effective Participation and Decision-Making in Public Life, as Well as the Elimination of Violence, for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls Agreed Conclusions’, para. 9. See also Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’; O’Connell and Ramshaw, ‘Violence Against Women in Politics: Global Perspectives of a Global Issue’; Arqimandriti and Llubani, ‘Women’s Participation in Politics and Decision Making in the Western Balkans’.

15. International Foundation for Electoral Systems, ‘Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool’, 3.

16. Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’, 41.

17. Arqimandriti and Llubani, ‘Women’s Participation in Politics and Decision Making in the Western Balkans’, 23.

18. Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’, 44.

fear political backlash, or accusations that they are “weak” and not up to the job.¹⁹ At the same time, women themselves may not recognize that they are victims of VAWE or VAWP, given that harassment and attacks towards women leaders are often so normalized within institutional culture. As the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women (VAW) has noted, the lack of data on VAWE and VAWP and of standard indicators to measure incidence is a significant impediment to addressing these forms of gender-based violence, and of recognizing that they are the result of structural and widespread discrimination against women in public life.²⁰

1.2 VAWE and the media

Traditional print, online, and broadcast media can all play a role in perpetuating VAWE and in creating an environment where VAWE is normalized. Sexist media portrayals of women political candidates and / or elected officials can be negative or misrepresentative, or may degrade and humiliate women based on the way they dress and their appearance: these constitute attacks that are in and of themselves a form of VAWE, as well as contributing to ongoing violence or even triggering attacks.²¹ The media can also disseminate and amplify violent statements made by other actors against women candidates or other women involved in elections, further contributing to VAWE.²²

Gender stereotyping in election coverage also plays a significant role in creating an enabling environment for VAWE.²³ For instance, media portrayals of women candidates or elected officials that focus on their private lives, dress and physical appearance, which portray women politicians as “exceptional”, or which do not invite them to engage on “hard” political issues all help “to create and support a political culture that excludes [women], undermining their actual political participation and representation in decision-making bodies”.²⁴ Gender bias in the media is further evidenced in election coverage that gives more time or words to men – as candidates, political experts, and voters, as well as journalists – than to women, and which gives little attention to women’s rights and gender equality issues.²⁵ Men candidates generally receive more coverage with the number of stories and headlines explicitly covering them higher than the number of stories and headlines explicitly covering women candidates.²⁶

Media rarely report on VAWE, particularly when perpetuated online, focusing instead on physical electoral violence generally affecting men political actors and men voters. This remains the case even though the use of the internet to launch attacks on women provides ample evidence of VAWE that is easy to verify. The lack of coverage of VAWE in the media also helps to create a culture of impunity, and to support the perception that VAWE is not a pervasive issue. Gender-based stereotypes perpetuated in the media also limit public awareness of VAWE and limit the effectiveness of measures taken to mitigate VAWE.²⁷

19. UN Women and OHCHR, ‘Violence Against Women in Politics: Expert Group Meeting Report & Recommendations’ (New York / Geneva: United Nations, March 2018), 9, 15, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/egm-report-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4036>.

20. Dubravka Šimonović, ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences on Violence against Women in Politics’ (New York / Geneva: United Nations General Assembly, 6 August 2018), <http://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/73/301>. See also: Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’, 14.

21. UNDP and UN Women, *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, 25; Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’, 29–30, 87; Caroline Hubbard and Claire DeSoi, ‘Votes without Violence: Monitoring Media’ (Washington, D.C.: National Democratic Institute, 2016), https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Guidance_on_Monitoring_Media.pdf.

22. Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer’s Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections’, 86.

23. Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes without Violence: Monitoring Media’.

24. Pamela Morinière, Maja Zarić, and Pierre-François Docquir, ‘Media, Elections and Gender - Study on Media Coverage of Elections with a Specific Focus on Gender Quality’ (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2017), 17–19, <https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/7612-media-elections-and-gender-study-on-media-coverage-of-elections-with-a-specific-focus-on-gender-quality.html>; ACE - The Electoral Knowledge Network, ‘Gender, Media and Elections: Gender Censorship and Gender-Based Stereotypes –’, accessed 11 May 2021, <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ge/ge8/ge82/mapping-and-measuring-vawe>.

25. Morinière, Zarić, and Docquir, ‘Media, Elections and Gender - Study on Media Coverage of Elections with a Specific Focus on Gender Quality’, 8, 14; Beatriz Llanos and Juana Nina, *Election Coverage from a Gender Perspective: A Media Monitoring Manual* (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2011), 11, http://www.idea.int/publications/election_coverage_gender_perspective/index.cfm; Hubbard and DeSoi, ‘Votes without Violence: Monitoring Media’, 29.

26. Vidal-Correa, F. (2020). *Media Coverage of Campaigns: A multilevel study of Mexican women running for office*. *Communication & Society*, 33(3), 167–186.

27. UNDP and UN Women, *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, 19, 38–39.

1.2.1 Online VAW

Online media and social media are opening up new spaces for political engagement and activism, including to groups that have historically had little opportunity to take part in political processes, such as young people.²⁸ At the same time, social media platforms in particular have become spaces where women are subject to VAW, including dissemination of derogatory and abusive language, hate speech,²⁹ degrading or sexualized images and videos, and rape and death threats.³⁰ Women are far more likely than men to be targeted for online abuse; in addition,

online abuse directed at politically active men is seldom specifically gender-based violence.³¹ Online VAW results in fear, shame, and intimidation.³² As with other forms of VAW, online VAW is also an attack on women's visibility and right to participate in public and political life, and undermines democratic processes.³³

The anonymity of perpetrators of online VAW and the speed at which attacks can be disseminated and magnified heightens the fear of violence, as well as making it very difficult to stop and / or to prosecute.³⁴ This high degree of "legal and moral impunity" encourages and sustains further VAW.³⁵

28. Morinière, Zarić, and Docquir, 'Media, Elections and Gender - Study on Media Coverage of Elections with a Specific Focus on Gender Quality', 19; Hubbard and DeSoi, 'Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections', 86.

29. The UN defines hate speech as "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor". United Nations, 'United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech: Detailed Guidance on Implementation for United Nations Field Presences' (New York: United Nations, September 2020), 8, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20PoA%20on%20Hate%20Speech_Guidance%20on%20Addressing%20in%20field.pdf. Article 3 of the Law of the Republic of Albania on Protection from Discrimination defines hate speech as "any form of public expression, through any means, of the promotion, incitement of denigration, hatred or vilification, any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat against a person or group of persons, as well as any justification of all forms of expression" on the basis of a non-exhaustive list of grounds, which includes gender and gender identity.

30. Hubbard and DeSoi, 'Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections', 86; UNDP and UN Women, *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, 24; Dubravka Šimonović, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences on Online Violence against Women and Girls from a Human Rights Perspective' (New York / Geneva: United Nations General Assembly, 18 June 2018), <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/HRC/38/47>; International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 'Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool', 6, 9.

31. International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 'Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool', 2; UNDP and UN Women, *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, 38-39. For discussion of online gender-based violence against women in general, see: Šimonović, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences on Online Violence against Women and Girls from a Human Rights Perspective'.

32. Bardall, 'Gender-Specific Election Violence', 3.

33. Šimonović, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences on Online Violence against Women and Girls from a Human Rights Perspective'.

34. Šimonović; Commission on the Status of Women, 'Women's Full and Effective Participation and Decision-Making in Public Life, as Well as the Elimination of Violence, for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls Agreed Conclusions', 27; International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 'Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool', 10; Bardall, 'Gender-Specific Election Violence', 4.

35. Bardall, 'Gender-Specific Election Violence', 3, 5.

2. WOMEN, ELECTIONS, AND POLITICAL LIFE IN ALBANIA

In Albania, women's labour force participation rate is low, at 53% of the adult women population in 2019 (compared to 68% of the adult men population who are in employment); this, along with poverty and gender-based migration help to strengthen gender inequality.

Despite progress in ensuring equal rights between women and men in Albania, challenges remain. Social acceptance of VAW is deeply entrenched and is rooted in patriarchal customs and traditions, such as strict gender roles and identities, patriarchal authority including within the family, and respect for the code of honour and shame.³⁶ In Albania, women's labour force participation rate is low, at 53% of the adult women population in 2019³⁷ (compared to 68% of the adult men population who are in employment³⁸); this, along with poverty and gender-based migration help to strengthen gender inequality.³⁹ Stereotypical attitudes regarding the role of women in society are very strong, with many people still believing that women should be mothers and caregivers first. As a result, women who become public figures can face harassment and attacks for challenging accepted gender roles.⁴⁰

2.1 National legal framework

Albania has developed a solid legislative framework that protects gender equality, and includes binding commitments to ensuring women's participation in public life. Article 18/2 of the Constitution upholds

the principle of equality and non-discrimination, including on the basis of gender. The Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Protection from Discrimination provide comprehensive protection from discrimination on the basis of gender, including establishment of a complaints procedure.⁴¹ The Law on Protection from Discrimination makes specific reference to participation in politics by prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of gender (or other factors) in relation to the right to vote, be elected, and be appointed to public duty, among others.⁴² The Law on Gender Equality in Society includes provision for the equal representation of women in public life, in different positions of decision-making power, to be achieved through quotas guaranteeing at least 30% representation of the under-represented gender. Overall, however, the Law on Gender Equality and the gender machinery that was established require revision to accelerate the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) in the country.⁴³

Following amendments made in 2012, Article 67.6 of the electoral code imposes two types of quotas, one for parliamentary elections and one for local

36. UN Women, 'Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020' (Tirana: UN Women, 2020), https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20albania/attachments/publications/2020/12/cgeb%20albania_report_1.pdf?la=en&vs=4248.

37. World Bank, 'Labor Force Participation Rate, Femen (% of Femen Population Ages 15+) (National Estimate) - Albania | Data', accessed 24 May 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TL.F.CACT.FE.NE.ZS?locations=AL>.

38. World Bank, 'Labor Force Participation Rate, Men (% of Men Population Ages 15+) (National Estimate) - Albania | Data', accessed 24 May 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TL.F.CACT.MA.NE.ZS?locations=AL>.

39. UN Women, 'Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020', 35.

40. Arqimandriti and Llubani, 'Women's Participation in Politics and Decision Making in the Western Balkans', 26.

41. Law No.9970 dated 24.07.2008 On Gender Equality, article 4.3. Law No. 10 221 dated 4.2.2010 on Protection from Discrimination.

42. Law No. 10 221 dated 4.2.2010 On Protection from Discrimination (As amended by Law No.124/2020), article 9.

43. UN Women, 'Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020', 26.

elections.⁴⁴ For parliamentary elections, at least 30% of candidates on a party's list must belong to each gender, and one of the first three names on the multi-name list must belong to both genders.⁴⁵ The Central Election Commission (CEC) has interpreted this as a requirement that starting from the first name on the list, at least one in every three candidates should be a woman.⁴⁶ In local elections, representation on party lists should be 50/50, with women and men candidates alternating throughout the list (known as the “zipped” system), following amendments to the Electoral Code in 2015.⁴⁷ Revisions to the Electoral Code made in June 2020 removed fines for parties failing to implement these quotas; this was a positive development as fines had proved to be an ineffective sanction, as many political parties simply chose to pay them, rather than implement the quotas. Instead, the CEC will now refuse to register party candidate lists if these do not comply with the quota. Changes to the Electoral Code did not include raising the quota to 50% for parliamentary elections, however; this had been a recommendation of the Working Group on Gender and Equality in Decision-Making.⁴⁸

The Criminal Code now includes a special chapter on criminal offences affecting free elections, following amendments made in 2012, 2015, and 2017, which could be used to address different forms of VAWE. These include article 325 on “Obstructing electoral subjects”, Article 329 on “Intimidation or abuse against participants in elections”, and Article 330 on “Obstructing voters”. At present, however, these articles do not include any gender-specific provisions.⁴⁹ The Law on Political Parties⁵⁰ could be an important tool in addressing violence and harassment affecting women activists and candidates from within their own parties, as well as address other forms of gender-based discrimination within political parties. At present, however, it does not include any provisions relating to VAWE or VAWP, or gender equality.⁵¹

Amendments made in 2018 to the Law on “Measures against Violence in Family Relations”⁵² significantly improved the legal protections available to victims of VAW, including bringing the definition of domestic violence in Albania in line with the Istanbul Convention.⁵³ Under other legislation, victims of domestic violence and other forms of VAW are entitled to a number of benefits, such as specialized services and shelter, free legal aid, priority for social housing, and economic assistance.⁵⁴ As VAWE can also be perpetrated by partners or family members, these legislative amendments have the potential to protect against VAWE. Amendments made in 2012-2013 to the Criminal Code included new criminal offences and improved definitions related to gender-based violence, in accordance with the Istanbul Convention. The Criminal Code was also amended in 2020 to recognize psychological violence as well as intimate partner violence as forms of family violence, and to increase prison sentences for perpetrators of domestic violence. However, there is no legislation in Albania to provide protection measures (protection orders) and services to victims of other forms of VAW, such as stalking, harassment, or sexual assaults as it is the case with victims of domestic violence based on the Law on Domestic Violence.⁵⁵ However, these forms of violence are criminal offences. Article 50 of the Criminal Code states that motives related to gender (along with other social characteristics) are an aggravating factor in a criminal offence, leading to harsher punishment.⁵⁶ VAWE as a specific form of VAW has yet to be specifically addressed in legislation or policy in Albania, leaving it “silent, unidentified and unreported”.⁵⁷ In 2020, the Working Group in Gender and Equality in Decision-Making recommended that changes to the Electoral Code should include specific provisions to identify, prevent and address VAWE.⁵⁸

44. UN Women, 44.

45. UN Women, 44.

46. International Election Observation Mission, ‘Republic of Albania - Parliamentary Elections, 25 April 2021. Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions’ (Tirana: OSCE/ODIHR, 26 April 2021), 8–9, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/7/484688.pdf>.

47. UN Women, ‘Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020’, 45.

48. UN Women, 45–46.

49. UN Women, ‘Analysis of the Albanian Legislation on Protection from Violence Against Women in Elections’ (Tirana: UN Women, 2020), 22–25, https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20albania/attachments/publications/2021/05/web_analysis%20of%20the%20albanian%20legislation%20on%20protection%20from%20violence%20against%20women%20in%20elections.pdf?la=en&vs=2228.

50. Law No. 8580, dated 17.02.2000 On Political Parties.

51. UN Women, ‘Analysis of the Albanian Legislation on Protection from Violence Against Women in Elections’, 21.

52. Law No. 9669, dated 18 December 2006, On Measures Against Violence in Family Relations (Amended by Law no. 47/2018)

53. UN Women, ‘Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020’, 33.

54. Law on Social Care Services (2016), Law on Legal Aid (2017), Law on Social Housing (2018), Law on Social Assistance (2019). See: UN Women, 34–35.

55. UN Women, 35.

56. Law No. 7895, dated 27 January 1995, Criminal Code of the Republic Of Albania (Amended by law no. 36/2017) (Amended by law no.89/2017)

57. UN Women, ‘Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020’, 35.

58. UN Women, 45. See also: UN Women, ‘Analysis of the Albanian Legislation on Protection from Violence Against Women in Elections’, 19.

Election campaign coverage in audio-visual media is regulated by the Electoral Code, to ensure a minimum visibility for all electoral contestants. The CEC requires all media outlets to provide “gender-balanced coverage” during election campaigns, but no legal measures are provided to address the issue⁵⁹

2.2 Women’s participation in electoral processes

In the previous composition of the parliament, 36 out of 122 members were women – 29.5% – placing Albania in 54th place (out of 187) in the global ranking of women in national parliaments.⁶⁰ The Deputy Speaker of the Parliament was also a woman. The introduction of the 50% quota for candidate lists for local elections has resulted in a significant increase in the number of women elected at local level; this stood at 35.9% as of 2020.⁶¹ As of 2020, women also occupied 45.4% of ministerial posts, above the average for EU countries.⁶² After the 2021 elections, the percentage of women MPs rose to 33.6%,⁶³ the speaker of the National Assembly is a woman, and 70% of ministers are women. These data represent significant achievements that have the potential to further enhance women leadership, agency and participation in public life. That said, women continue to face barriers to equal participation in electoral processes, as voters and election officials as well as candidates, including VAWE. For instance, women may be pressured or coerced by other family members to vote for a candidate not of their choosing, while women candidates face threats, do not receive equal treatment when they complain, and have less access to the resources needed for their campaigning.⁶⁴

Negative gender stereotypes of women as fragile and confined to the domestic sphere mean that when women are elected, their legitimacy and presence in legislative making bodies is often questioned by their colleagues and the public in general, fuelling attacks and harassment.⁶⁵ A stereotype of the “strongman” in Albanian politics is a significant obstacle to women’s participation as candidates, as women are stereotyped as not being “tough enough” to succeed in politics. Women are put off from standing by this “strongman” stereotype, and political parties are reluctant to field women candidates.⁶⁶ The political environment overall is characterized as “rough”, due to the language used and intertwining of political and criminal elites; this is also a deterrent to women’s active participation in political life.⁶⁷ That said, the increase in women parliamentarians following the 2021 elections and the fact that the cabinet of ministers is now predominantly women may indicate that the “strongman” stereotype is being eroded in Albanian politics.

While VAWE and VAWP have received little attention in Albania – due to lack of statistics and information, as well as policy and legislative provisions to address the issue – examples of both have been recorded in the past.⁶⁸

The three main political parties – The Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, and the Socialist Movement for Integration – all have internal quotas of between 30% and 50% in place to ensure the equal representation of women in their party structures; however, these quotas are not met. In addition, the role and influence of women’s forums within the main parties remains largely symbolic, and none has managed to mainstream gender equality into their political programmes effectively.⁶⁹

59. International Election Observation Mission, ‘Republic of Albania - Parliamentary Elections, 25 April 2021. Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions’, 13-14.

60. Inter Parliamentary Union, ‘Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments (as of 1st April 2021)’, Parline: the IPU’s Open Data Platform, accessed 14 May 2021, <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>.

61. Arqimandriti and Llubani, ‘Women’s Participation in Politics and Decision Making in the Western Balkans’, 10; UN Women, ‘Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020’, 45.

62. UN Women, ‘Albania Country Gender Equality Brief 2020’, 45.

63. Inter Parliamentary Union, ‘Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments (as of 1st October 2021)’, Parline: the IPU’s Open Data Platform, accessed 12 November 2021, <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>.

64. Stephen Whitefield and Endrit Shabani, ‘Obstacles to Women’s Participation in Elections in Albania: A National Index of Women’s Electoral Participation, Including across 12 Regions’ (Tirana: UN Women, 2017), https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20albania/attachments/publications/2018/06/pope_raport_eng_al.pdf?la=en&vs=648. See also: UN Women, ‘Analysis of the Albanian Legislation on Protection from Violence Against Women in Elections’.

65. Arqimandriti and Llubani, ‘Women’s Participation in Politics and Decision Making in the Western Balkans’, 6, 26.

66. Arqimandriti and Llubani, 26.

67. UN Women, ‘Analysis of the Albanian Legislation on Protection from Violence Against Women in Elections’, 15.

68. UN Women, 15.

69. Albanian Women Empowerment Network, ‘Women in Political Programmes during the Parliamentary Elections 2021: Monitoring Report March-April 2021 - Key Findings’ (AWEN, 2021); Arqimandriti and Llubani, ‘Women’s Participation in Politics and Decision Making in the Western Balkans’, 13-14, 25.

2.3 Media environment

While there are many media outlets operating in Albania, media owners usually exert control over content, limiting editorial independence and encouraging self-censorship among journalists, many of whom are precariously employed.⁷⁰

In the past, the media have reported on instances of VAWE and VAWP; for instance, cases where women candidates have faced pressure to resign rather than take their place as MPs, and of physical attacks on women candidates during election rallies.⁷¹ On the whole, however, the media often fuels the delegitimization of women as viable political actors by portraying women in public life in a sexualized way, reporting unfounded (and irrelevant) allegations regarding their personal lives, or focusing on their dress and appearance, instead of their substantive work and contributions to society.⁷²

Most people receive information about politics from television.⁷³ On TV, as with print and online news outlets, women political actors are subject to attacks on their private lives or on their appearance. Social media platforms also facilitate attacks on women in public life resulting in psychological violence and physical threats.⁷⁴ While the development of information communication technologies brought McLuhan's "global village" online, the social media created new vehicles for VAWE due to the anonymity and scale that they provide.

2.4 2021 elections

The election campaign began unofficially in early 2020, and was focused on COVID-19 vaccination, land-related issues, and legal reform. In its preliminary report on the parliamentary elections held on 25 April 2021, the OSCE stated that "voters had a choice of candidates, who were able to campaign freely, under a legal framework which respects fundamental freedoms" and that the "parliamentary elections were generally well organized by the election administration".⁷⁵ Ten political parties fielded candidates, and five independent candidates also stood. Of 1871 candidates registered, 732 were women (40%). Women were underrepresented in the election administration.⁷⁶

Gender quotas for party lists were respected. In its final report, the OSCE noted that "The main parties all attempted to increase the visibility of women as candidates in the campaign, and the mandatory quota for women was exceeded in most candidate lists".⁷⁷ Forty-eight seats in the new parliament are now occupied by women, who make up 33.6% of parliamentarians. This is an improvement on the last parliament, where 27.9% of elected deputies were women.⁷⁸ Both the Socialist Party and the Movement for Integration placed women candidates at the head of their party lists in the majority of electoral districts. Despite that, an analysis by the Albanian Women Empowerment Network (AWEN) found that with the exception of the Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI), which is headed by a woman, the main political

70. OSCE ODHIR, 'Republic of Albania Parliamentary Elections 25 April 2021: ODDIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report' (Warsaw: OSCE, 26 July 2021), 18-19, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/1/493687.pdf>.

71. UN Women, 'Analysis of the Albanian Legislation on Protection from Violence Against Women in Elections', 16.

72. Arqimandriti and Llubani, 'Women's Participation in Politics and Decision Making in the Western Balkans', 26; UN Women, 'Analysis of the Albanian Legislation on Protection from Violence Against Women in Elections', 16.

73. OSCE ODHIR, 'Republic of Albania Parliamentary Elections 25 April 2021: ODDIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report', 19.

74. Arqimandriti and Llubani, 'Women's Participation in Politics and Decision Making in the Western Balkans', 27, 35.

75. International Election Observation Mission, 'Republic of Albania - Parliamentary Elections, 25 April 2021. Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions', 1.

76. OSCE ODHIR, 'Republic of Albania Parliamentary Elections 25 April 2021: ODDIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report', 2, 7.

77. OSCE ODHIR, 'Republic of Albania Parliamentary Elections 25 April 2021: ODDIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report' (Warsaw: OSCE, 26 July 2021), 2, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/1/493687.pdf>; Inter Parliamentary Union, 'Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments (as of 1st October 2021)', Parline: the IPU's Open Data Platform, accessed 12 November 2021, <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>.

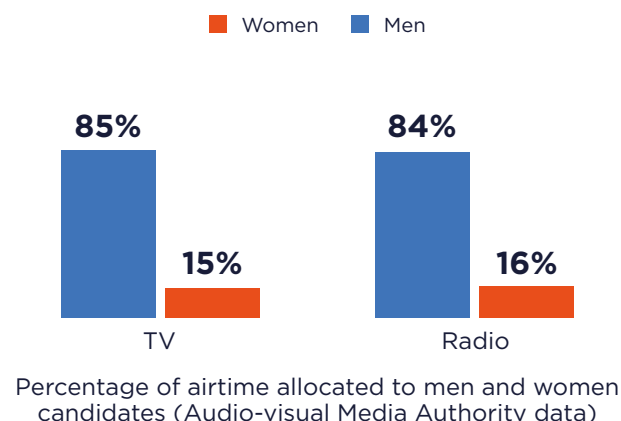
78. Parliamentary elections 25 June 2017 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report

parties did not integrate a gender approach into their electoral programmes, and women or gender issues were not significantly addressed during the campaign.⁷⁹ Instead, issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recovery dominated. Political parties made sure to have women involved both in the management of the pandemic, and used examples of female-headed families to showcase either the success or failure of measures taken.

In its assessment, the OSCE found that the ruling party received more positive coverage than other parties, although overall coverage of the two main parties was more or less equal. Online media, however, dedicated more space to opposition parties and covered these in neutral or positive tones.⁸⁰ Broadcasters did not offer in-depth and analytical coverage of all contests, and did not organize any televised debates between political leaders, meaning that voters had limited opportunity to make informed choices.⁸¹

The OSCE also noted gender bias in election coverage, as well as “a few standout instances during the campaign of sexist language used against women”.⁸² Media monitoring by the OSCE revealed that women candidates and other women actors received just 19.3% of coverage in political and election-related coverage in (prime time) broadcast and online media.⁸³ This was, however, a slight improvement on the OSCE mission’s findings from the monitoring of the 2017 parliamentary elections, which found that only 13% of campaign coverage was devoted to women.⁸⁴ Monitoring undertaken by the Audio-visual Media Authority (AMA) of election coverage between 12 and 19 April 2021 found that only 8 TV channels out of 26 monitored respected the CEC’s requirement for gender balance in coverage of candidates.⁸⁵ Other audio-visual media outlets covering more than 48% of the population did not comply with this requirement to “reflect the commitment and contribution of women in Albanian society, in the dynamics of democratization processes and integration”. AMA monitored the number of minutes of airtime on TV and radio given to women and men candidates from all of the political parties during the campaign and found that for both, men candidates received more than 80% of airtime.⁸⁶

Figure 2: Gender imbalance in airtime



Restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in limitations on gatherings, as well as requirements for social distancing and mask wearing, all of which functioned to stifle the campaign for all contestants. In response, much campaigning moved online, with a significant role for social media and messaging platforms. In its final report, the OSCE noted that aggressive language was used in the comments sections on social networks.⁸⁷

Prior to the election, the Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination set up a “No Hate Alliance” and a Code of Conduct for Political Parties promoting tolerance and discouraging discrimination and hate speech. Nevertheless, the OSCE found that in addition to the use of sexist language during the campaign, some political campaigners used offensive terms for persons with disabilities towards rival candidates.⁸⁸

79. Albanian Women Empowerment Network, ‘Women in Political Programmes during the Parliamentary Elections 2021: Monitoring Report March-April 2021 - Key Findings’.

80. OSCE ODHIR, ‘Republic of Albania Parliamentary Elections, 25 April 2021: ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Media Monitoring Results’ (Warsaw: OSCE, 2021); OSCE ODHIR, ‘Republic of Albania Parliamentary Elections 25 April 2021: ODDIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report’, 20–21.

81. OSCE ODHIR, ‘Republic of Albania Parliamentary Elections 25 April 2021: ODDIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report’, 20.

82. OSCE ODHIR, 14.

83. OSCE ODHIR, ‘Republic of Albania Parliamentary Elections, 25 April 2021: ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Media Monitoring Results’, 7.

84. OSCE ODHIR, ‘Republic of Albania, Parliamentary Elections 25 June 2017: OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report’ (Warsaw: OSCE, 2017), 12, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/d/346661.pdf>.

85. These TV channels were: Klan +, Top Channel, TV Scan, A2, MCN TV, TV Lobi, TV RE.AL and TV Channel 1.

86. Audio-visual Media Authority of the Republic of Albania, ‘Election media monitoring report’ (Tirana: AMA, 2021. <http://kqz.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Raporti-javor-i-monitorimit-te-medias-12-19.04.2021.pdf>

87. OSCE ODHIR, ‘Republic of Albania Parliamentary Elections 25 April 2021: ODDIHR Limited Election Observation Mission Final Report’, 14–15.

88. OSCE ODHIR, 14.

3. METHODOLOGY

Media monitoring can provide information about what kinds of violence are being instigated by the media, and by which media outlets in particular, across the country

3.1 Aim and scope of the study

By monitoring election-related content published in traditional media (newspapers and magazines), online news portals, and social media,⁸⁹ the study investigated the incidence and main forms of VAWE that were facilitated or incited by the media in Albania, as well as of gender bias in media coverage during the elections.

The media sources monitored were published or broadcast during three distinct periods:

- The month leading up to the elections (25 March – 24 April 2021)
- Election day and the post-election period (25 April – 31 August 2021)
- The period during the formation of the new cabinet of ministers (1 – 25 September 2021).

Additionally, a small sample of articles and broadcasts were selected from the period during which candidates were being selected for party lists for qualitative analysis, in order to capture VAWE towards women would-be candidates in this period.

Media monitoring is recognized as playing an important role in election monitoring, and in monitoring VAWE.⁹⁰ As discussed above, the media can play a role in perpetuating, facilitating, and amplifying VAWE, as well as creating an enabling

environment for VAWE to take place or be justified, so media monitoring can provide information about what kinds of violence are being instigated by the media, and by which media outlets in particular, across the country. Monitoring media for VAWE can also help to create a fuller picture of the elections, and whether they are free and fair.⁹¹

3.2 Study design

For this study, traditional, online, and social media focusing on news and current affairs were monitored. The outlets monitored are the 12 main TV channels, 20 newspapers and magazines, 20 online news portals, and 14 official Facebook pages belonging to political parties, main politicians, as well as a very popular Facebook page (a list of the media outlets that were monitored is included in Annex A). These media outlets were selected because they have the widest reach in Albania, with media reach measured as the average number of monthly visits.

A list of key words agreed between the Observatory and UN Women was used to capture relevant articles and social media posts. This list included the names of all candidates, and the words: candidate, election, vote, party, commission, deputy, minister, campaign, parliament, politics, mandate, government.

Analysis of the material monitored focused on addressing the following issues:

⁸⁹ Social media monitored included 14 Facebook pages

⁹⁰ UNDP and UN Women, *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, 54; Hubbard and DeSoi, 'Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections'. For some examples of methods for monitoring other forms of VAWE, see: ACE - The Electoral Knowledge Network, 'Mapping and Measuring VAWE —', accessed 11 May 2021, <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ge/ge8/ge82/mapping-and-measuring-vawe>; Hubbard and DeSoi, 'Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections'.

⁹¹ Hubbard and DeSoi, 'Votes Without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence Against Women in Elections', 86.

- Whether media coverage of women versus men candidates before, during and after the elections was fair, objective, balanced, accurate and comprehensive;
- Media reports providing biased information against women candidates, voters, election officials, elected women, or women appointed as members of the Cabinet after the elections;
- Use of gender stereotypes or sexist language when describing or discussing women candidates, voters, election officials, elected women, or women assigned government roles after elections;
- Instances of hate speech, threats or derogatory language on social media when talking about women candidates, voters, election officials, elected women, or women appointed as members of the Cabinet after elections;
- Incidents of social media being used to threaten or incite violence against women candidates, voters or election officials, elected women, or women assigned government roles after elections;
- Incidents of cyber/digital harassment of women candidates, voters or election officials, elected women, or women assigned government roles after elections;

As discussed above, VAWE often takes place on social media, where women standing for election – or even just expressing political opinions – are subject to different forms of psychological violence. Often,

“cyberbullying” takes place in the comments posted in response to a post made on social media. Such a high volume of social media posts and comments are produced each day, and analysing the full scope of social media output around the elections would require time and resources not available for this study, including the use of computer analytics to identify and record instances of VAWE.⁹² As a result, it is unlikely that this study provides a fully accurate picture of the level of VAWE on social media around the time of the 2021 parliamentary elections.

For a full account of how data were captured, processed, and analysed for this study, see Annex B.

The findings of this study were also presented and validated in a meeting with key representatives of the Albanian Parliament, People’s Advocate, AMA, CEC, CPD, media, civil society and others.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Media monitoring for this study has not involved any interviews or contact with research participants, as the study focuses on analysis of media output to assess the way the media portrayed and depicted the election campaign from a gendered perspective. In the qualitative analysis of the data collected, the research team have strived to the extent possible to anonymise all references to sources and subjects within the articles and broadcasts analysed, in order to avoid retraumatizing women affected by VAWE.

92. International Foundation for Electoral Systems, ‘Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media Analysis Tool’, 12.

4. FINDINGS

Despite the fact that women made up 40% of parliamentary candidates, in articles or broadcasts where candidates were mentioned or discussed, during the pre-election period, only 22% were women, and the remaining 78% were men.

Prior to going deeper in the analysis, it is important to consider the context in which the media organizations were working in Albania during the elections in April 2021. The electoral campaign for the parliamentary elections of 25 April 2021 in Albania was unusual, given the fact that Albania was trying to cope with the effects and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and earthquakes in 2019. These two major events not only shaped the way politics and the economy were managed in the period leading up to the elections, but also became the cornerstones on which the political campaigns for the parliamentary elections were built. The government of the Socialist Party of Albania, in power since 2017, used the progress in rebuilding the earthquake-hit areas and the COVID-19 vaccination campaign as examples of their success in running the economy and the country. The Socialist Party asked voters to trust them for a third term based on these achievements.

The Democratic Party of Albania and the Socialist Movement for Integration, which represented the biggest opposition coalition in the April elections, focused on the failures of the government to both rebuild the earthquake-hit areas and manage the COVID-19 pandemic. Corruption, fund embezzlement, and cooperation with oligarchs stripping the country of its resources were the major themes on which the electoral campaign of the opposition was grounded. These topics were coupled with those of electoral corruption during earlier elections that had gone unpunished, despite international pressure.

The pre-electoral media landscape reflected a relatively calm political situation following agreements between the government and the opposition

regarding the organization of the electoral process and unilateral changes to the constitution to address the changes that the majority in government wanted to implement before the elections of 25 April 2021. Media, both online and print, had been quite active in addressing and describing what was happening, including negotiations facilitated by ambassadors and emissaries from the EU and the USA.

In this context, marked by a major pandemic that limited and still limits human interaction, the challenge was to address VAWE as an obstruction to the free and equal political participation of women and to conduct inclusive elections through the media lenses reporting on the electoral and post-electoral processes. The concepts presented earlier in this study were operational and data collected allowed further analysis. Gender inequality was also considered as one of the route causes of VAWE in setting the stage for the qualitative and quantitative analysis. Considering past experiences of analysing VAWE in Albanian elections as reported through media, the issue of tone and visibility of news items related to VAWE was also addressed. The election campaigns during the parliamentary elections of 25 April 2021 in Albania were quite dynamic and with a noticeable increase in the number of women MP candidates. However, these figures did not translate into higher representation of women or of issues relating to gender equality and women's rights in media content.

The following subsections integrate findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of media monitored over the three periods (pre-election, election and post-election, and during the formation

of the new cabinet of ministers), considering first online, TV and print media, before moving on to social media. Overall, the findings of the quantitative analysis did not reveal serious incidents of VAWE perpetrated or amplified by the media during the 2021 parliamentary elections, but did reveal significant gender bias in election media coverage, particularly on TV. As discussed above, gender bias in election coverage can help perpetuate or create an enabling environment for VAWE by undermining the legitimacy of women running for office, and by strengthening negative perceptions about women's political participation.

Specific examples and incidents of VAWE in these parliamentary elections identified through qualitative analysis of media sources primarily took three forms: psychological abuse, threats, and coercion towards women standing as electoral candidates. Psychological violence in the form of defamation, slander, character attacks, and harassment affected the capacity of women candidates to campaign successfully. The news items considered in this category and captured through the qualitative media review did not contain gendered hate speech. Instead, and only during the electoral campaign, they included derogatory language towards men identified in the discussions, relating to the public positions that they hold. The tone of the news reporting varied from neutral to negative. In the articles reviewed from the post-election period, ageism is evident as well as sardonic language, regarding the resignation of a particular women candidate so she could continue with her professional career. In the articles analysed that related to the creation of the new cabinet, the tone is neutral and free of comments.

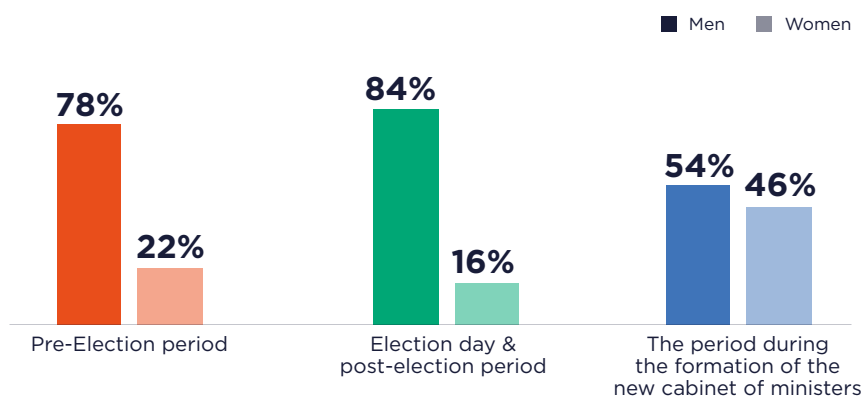
4.1 TV, print, and online media

4.1.1 More men voices than women voices

Throughout the three periods covered in this study, monitoring against quantitative indicators revealed that media outlets overwhelmingly favoured men candidates, as well as men voters and election officials, as subjects for interviews relating to the elections. Women were only 22% of those interviewed about issues relating to the elections in broadcast, print, and online media in the pre-election period, 27% of those interviewed on election day and during the post-election period, and 35% of those interviewed in the period of the formation of the new cabinet of ministers. Despite the fact that women made up 40% of parliamentary candidates, in articles or broadcasts where candidates were mentioned or discussed, during the pre-election period, only 22% were women, and the remaining 78% were men. For the election and post-election period, those figures are even lower, with 16% of women candidates receiving media coverage. For the period covering the formation of the new cabinet of ministers, the number of articles or broadcasts mentioning or discussing women candidates or elected officials went up to 46%. It is likely that this is linked to the very high number of women appointed as ministers

Figure 3: Women and men election candidates vs. proportion of media coverage

Percentage of men vs women candidates mentioned in media



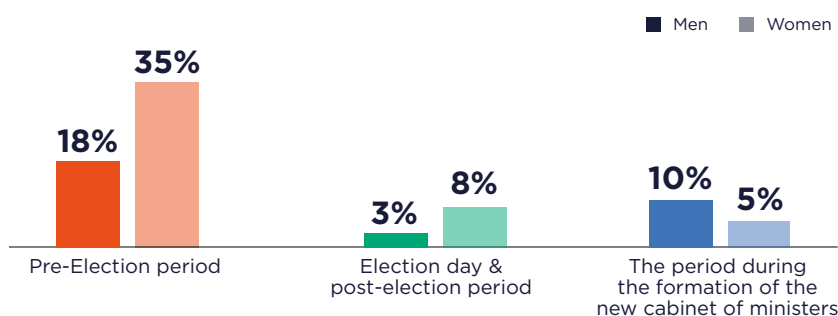
60% of candidates participating in the election were men and **40% were women**

4.1.2 Content and tone of articles quoting women and men candidates and politicians.

In the pre-election period, quantitative analysis revealed that only 22% of candidates overall who were interviewed or quoted in the media spoke on substantive policy issues, confirming the lack of critical and analytical engagement in the media identified in the OSCE's election monitoring report.⁹³ In the second and third periods monitored, this figure was much lower – just 4% (25 April – 31 August) and 8% (1 – 25 September).

Men candidates were interviewed or quoted more often on substantive policy issues than women candidates in all three periods: during the first two periods, 73% of sources included comments on substantive policy issues from men candidates, while 27% included such comments from women candidates; during the period covering the formation of the new cabinet of ministers 71% of sources included comments on substantive policy issues from men candidates or elected officials, while 27% included such comments from women candidates or elected officials.

Figure 4: Percentage of candidates interviewed or quoted in the media who spoke on substantive policy issues



Candidates interviewed/quoted on substantive policy issues

Qualitative analysis found that when news items did report and quote women candidates talking in the first-person point of view, they captured discussions that varied in tone from descriptive to degrading.⁹⁴ When women candidates talked about women and personal achievements in politics and social life, their discussion was descriptive.⁹⁵ The tone of the discussion and of the direct speech recorded became negative and degrading when women candidates from the opposition political forces analysed the current leadership⁹⁶ or considered the actions of the current government and the prime minister, particularly regarding hiring of a cheap labour force.⁹⁷ Women candidates running for opposition parties were concerned with the high level of government embezzlement, and they also spoke out against those considering electoral fraud.⁹⁸

In the post-election period, the news was dominated by the resignation of a woman parliamentarian who had run for the winning party, who decided to relinquish her legislative responsibilities in order to run one of the COVID-19 hospitals in Tirana.⁹⁹ The media coverage of this situation portrayed the candidate as a “stooge” who had served the interests of the prime minister. This was juxtaposed with statements made by another woman member of the parliament heading the list of the Socialist party for Tirana. She proclaimed her intention not to give up her parliamentary seat any time soon, but to continue with her legislative duties, including running the opening session of the new Parliament.¹⁰⁰

93. International Election Observation Mission, 'Republic of Albania - Parliamentary Elections, 25 April 2021. Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions'.

94. 17 articles were monitored qualitatively regarding the discussions' topics from women candidates: 5 articles during the pre-election period, 9 during the election and post-election period, and 3 articles in the third period.

95. For an example of descriptive tone with which a woman candidate talks about her path to becoming a candidate please see: <https://www.gazetatema.net/2021/03/26/fotot-ori-nebijaj-shpiegon-deklaraten-per-nje-sterkembesh-femer-ge-e-largoi-ate-nga-pd-dhe-rikthimin-si-kandidate-per-deputete/>

96. Panorama newspaper 27 March 2021 and see also this link: <http://www.panorama.com.al/monika-kryemadhi-prezanton-kandidatet-ne-shkoder-fat-i-madh-ge-nuk-keni-kryetar-bashkie-te-nilindjes-edhe-teatrin-miqjeni-do-e-kishin-prishur/>

97. See for example: <http://www.panorama.com.al/deklaratat-e-kryeministrit-per-punetoret-nga-bangladeshi-kryemadhi-rama-ka-urrejtje-per-shqiptaret-jo-per-ceshtje-racizmi-por-si-mund/>

98. See for example: <https://www.gazetatema.net/2021/03/26/dy-duar-per-nje-koke-jane-kryemadhi-kercenon-si-meta-hesapet-do-i-lajne-me-mua-ska-burre-nene-ge-na-afrohet/>

99. *Prapaskenat/Pse u dorëhoq nga deputete Najada C - Syri | Lajmi i fundit*

100. *Largimi i Comos, reagon Bozo: S'kam ndërmend të jap dorëheqjen, të filloj njëherë punë, pastaj shohim (pamfleti.net)*

During the period when the cabinet of ministers was being formed, the dominant news was that most of the members of the cabinet are women (12 out of 17).¹⁰¹ This prompted the woman leader of one of the smaller opposition parties quoted in a media article to speak against “puppets in the government either in the shape of men or women”.¹⁰² Two other articles were conciliatory in tone, with one promising the opening of a new main opposition party and that they were ready to face the current Prime Minister in electoral battles.¹⁰³ The other quotes the new speaker of the parliament on her dedication to do a good job in this position.¹⁰⁴

Turning to men candidates and politicians, 31 articles featuring personalized discussions and direct quotes from men politicians were included in the qualitative analysis: 7 articles from the election campaign period, 16 from the post-election period, and 9 from the period coinciding with the formation of the new cabinet of ministers.

News items that included direct quotes from men candidates who ran in these elections did not contain gendered hate speech. Instead, they show that the men candidates made use of sarcasm, negative portrayals of the political positions of opposing candidates, and bullying speech against political opponents. In the post-election period, most of the quotes used by TV, online, and print media were lifted from personal Facebook pages and were critical of how the elections were handled and how the winners were behaving.

In the period when the cabinet of ministers was being formed, the quotes used by the media were lifted

from different articles and direct interviews in which views of the government cabinet members and of those holding key parliamentary positions were shared. Resignations from parliamentary positions of major candidates pushed online commenters to consider the devaluation of resignation as a political act or statement.¹⁰⁵ The analysis noted the return or reinstatement of political figures accused of corruption and the representation of women ministers as puppets and men ministers as dull tools.¹⁰⁶

Before, during, and immediately after the election, most media mentions of women candidates and elected representatives were neutral: 72% in the pre-election period, and 87% in the election and post-election period. It is interesting to note that during these periods, men candidates were more likely to be portrayed negatively (32% before the election and 36% during and after the election) than were women candidates (12% before the election, 9% during and after). Overall, few candidates or elected representatives were described in positive terms: 16% for women candidates and elected representatives before the election, and 4% during and after, and 7% for men candidates and elected representatives before the election, and 3% during and after.

By contrast, the picture in the period covering the formation of the new cabinet of ministers is very different. In media stories monitored 1 – 25 September, women candidates and elected representatives were more likely to be portrayed negatively (42%) than men candidates and elected representatives (39%). This may reflect the amount of attention being given in the media to the women politicians selected to join the new cabinet of ministers.

101. *Albanian government's new cabinet has 12 women out of 17 members - CGTN*

102. For more details see: <https://www.oranews.tv/vendi/kryemadhi-sot-shqiperia-nuk-ka-nevoje-per-kukulla-qofshin-gra-apo-burra-i1009001>

103. For more details see: *Grida Duma: Unë do hap PD-në, e bëj ndryshe. Jo bojkot, as ulje në tryezë, vetëm përballje me "Rama 3" - (javanews.al)*

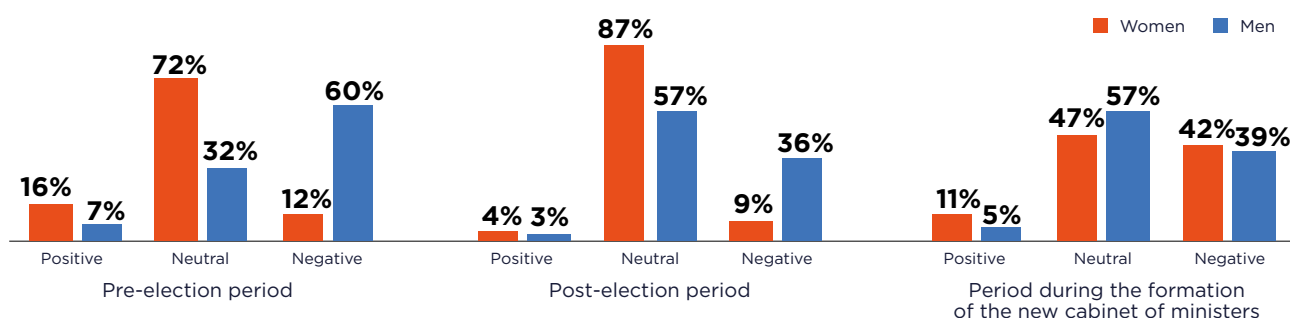
104. For more details see: *Kryetarja e re e parlamentit shqiptar Lindita Nikolla: Do punoj me përkushtim! | RTSH Lajme*

105. For more details see: *Ironia virale e mjekes së njohur: U zhvlerësua e - Syri | Lajmi i fundit*

106. For more details see: *'Rroftë Rilindja e k***' / Maliqi: Rama e trodhi PS-në, i keqpërdori e i flaku socialistët | BoldNews.al*

Figure 5: Media portrayal of women and men candidates and elected representatives

Percentage of men vs women candidates mentioned in a positive, neutral, or negative way



Turning to the qualitative analysis, 11 news items were selected and reviewed that dealt with the negative portrayal of women candidates, with 9 from the post electoral period, one from the electoral campaign period, and one from the period when the cabinet of ministers was under formation. Only one item picked up during the electoral campaign for qualitative analysis portrayed a woman candidate in an overtly derogatory way, when the women leader of an opposition party was portrayed wearing a dog leash held by the men leader of the largest party in opposition. Furthermore, that news item did not deal specifically with the woman candidate; rather it was critical of the way the opposition was engaging in the political campaign.¹⁰⁷ The rest of the news items mainly dealt with irregularities observed during the elections that were blamed on women candidates. As earlier, the tone of the articles was critical and ironic, rather than violent or sexualized. The topic of corruption, especially among women ministers and deputy ministers, dominated in this category.¹⁰⁸

Thirty-five articles news items dealing with negative portrayals of men candidates were included in the qualitative review. In the pre-election period, the language used by men candidates to describe their opponents as described earlier was loaded with degrading comments and name calling. The language used was very explicit and included sex-related comparisons on a couple of occasions.¹⁰⁹

In the post-election period, in the articles that included first-person points of view and direct quotes, dominated figurative language to describe the futility of election results.¹¹⁰ The media also picked up on the negative description of a parliament member¹¹¹ who swore in his Facebook account. Despite the colourful epithets used to describe members of the new government, their gaffes and slips of tongue while speaking in public, or comparisons with sexual overtones, there are no indications that the reporting incited violence either against women candidates or men candidates.

4.1.3 Little media engagement on women's rights and gender equality

Quantitative monitoring revealed very low engagement from the media on issues relating to women's rights and gender equality. Just 2% of articles or broadcasts relating to the elections in the pre-election period, 1% in the election and post-election period, and 2% in the period covering the formation of the new cabinet of ministers included some discussion of sexual and reproductive rights, violence against women, women's economic, cultural or social rights, or women's political participation.

107. See: <https://iqo-albania.com/artikull/850988.html>

108. <http://shekulli.com.al/rovena-voda-manuali-perfekt-i-spak-ut-per-koka-turku/>

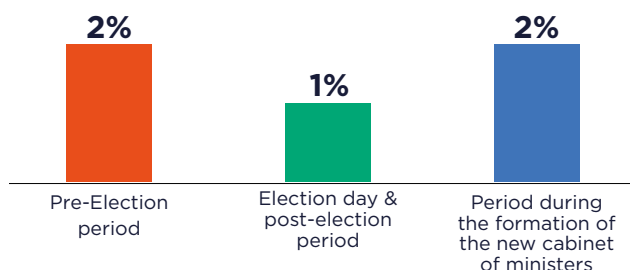
109. See: <https://iqo-albania.com/artikull/851494.html>

110. <https://top-channel.tv/2021/05/16/basha-fitore-me-bre-neper-kembe-ristani-beteja-brenda-vetes-eshte-me-e-veshtira/>

111. Please see: "Nuk durohet më". *Lefter Maliqi nuk përmbahet për Qeverinë e re: Rroftë Rilindja e k... Ramziu e trodhi PS-në (newsbomb.al)*

Figure 6: Percentage of articles or broadcasts featuring issues relating to women's rights

Articles or broadcasts featuring issues relating to women's right



Out of the articles and broadcasts analysed for the pre-election period, 2% included statements by candidates on women's rights and gender equality issues; in just over half of cases (51%), these statements were made by a woman candidate or elected representative. During the period covering the formation of the new cabinet of ministers, 3% of outputs analysed included statements on women's rights or gender equality issues, and in 56% of cases, these statements were made by a woman candidate or elected representative. By contrast, in the election and post-election period, while only 1% of articles and broadcasts included statements on women's rights and gender equality issues, only 19% of these were made by women candidates or elected officials. This may indicate that outside of election periods or the period when a new government is being formed (particularly if the new cabinet of ministers includes a lot of women), the views of women politicians are given even less weight, particularly as these relate to gender equality issues.

In the qualitative analysis, most of the articles and news items analysed dealt with men-related issues, proving once more that coverage and discussions in political campaigns are men-dominated. Altogether,

17 articles were included in the qualitative analysis that dealt with gender equality and women's rights issues. In stark contrast with the rest of the news items analysed, the tone of these news items was mainly neutral to positive, depicting the positive roles of women in political life¹¹² and the importance of pushing forward gender equality.¹¹³

During the post-election period, two of the online articles monitored qualitatively considered the issue of violence against women as a characteristic feature of Albanian society under transition, voicing the concerns expressed by politicians of all sides.¹¹⁴ These articles also picked up on the critical coverage related to the campaign. The audio-visual media during the parliamentary elections continued to have gaps in the coverage of issues and topics related to women and girls.¹¹⁵ Another analytical article considered the elections as sexist and unbalanced,¹¹⁶.

The cabinet formation period was characterized by articles that were neutral to critical in tone regarding the women majority (12 to 5) of the new cabinet, and the higher percentage of women elected to the parliament, and the election of a woman as Speaker.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the media reported that while women made up the majority in the government, it was the men who sealed the laws. This women-majority government was also considered as "equality washing" in the face of the problems Albanian women faced as a result of COVID-19, unpaid work, sex-selective abortions, and the fact that the women politicians elected are not representative of ordinary Albanian women because they are rich, educated abroad or sent their children to study abroad, did not belong to minorities (including LGBTQI), and are separated from the harsh reality of life as a woman in Albania.¹¹⁸ In a third stance, the loss of women denominations in titles and avoidance of grammar rules regarding women gender in official titles as in "women ministers" being referred to as "men ministers" (in Albanian the word "minister" has its men and women form) were also taken into consideration. This is not merely a linguistic abnormality but more importantly a sign of lack of equality on the part of a women majority cabinet.¹¹⁹

112. Klajda Gjoshja, Gruaja influente e politikes. The "Standard" newspaper of March 26, 2021.

113. See: <https://www.syri.net/politike/413809/kryemadhi-ne-takimin-me-grate-lsi-do-dale-force-e-pare-ne-fier/>

114. The Prime Minister Rama discusses new features on how to report family based crime digitally following the murder of a woman by her husband in here: [Dhuna në familje dhe krimi mjedisor. Komisaratiit Dixhital i shtohen 2 rubrika të reja! Rama: Do mund të shihni reagimin e Policisë ndaj ankesës suaj me një klik - Shqiptarja.com](#) while the head of the opposition considered family based violence a deep wound in here: <https://www.syri.net/politike/439939/i-vuri-flaken-gruas-reagon-basha-dhuna-ndaj-grave-eshte-nje-plage-e-madhe/>

115. Please see: [Women and media coverage in the Albanian 2021 election campaigns - Westminster Foundation for Democracy \(WFD\)](#)

116. Please see the analysis by BIRN in: [Seksiste dhe të zhbalecuara, mediat 'online' u fokusuan tek liderët burra - reporter.al](#)

117. [Përbërja e parlamentit, qeveria është e grave, por ligjet i vulosin burrat - Abc News](#)

118. For a full analysis consider the comment by Alice Taylor in: [Comment: A Majority Femen Cabinet Equality Washes the Plight of Society's Most Vulnerable - Exit - Explaining Albania](#)

119. See the comment by Luan Rama, former politician and linguist: [Luan Rama: Mashkullorizimi gjuhësor i zonjave ministre të qeverisë "Rama 3". Iajthitje logjike | CNA.AL](#)

4.1.4 Gender stereotyping

Table 1: Gender stereotyping in media outputs

	PRE-ELECTION PERIOD				ELECTION AND POST-ELECTION PERIOD				PERIOD DURING THE FORMATION OF NEW CABINET OF MINISTERS			
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women	
Number of articles where candidates / elected representatives are described in gender stereotyped ways, e.g.	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. As sexual objects	0	0%	82	2%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
2. With reference to domestic roles	48	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
3. With reference to their private lives	218	1%	3	0%	126	0%	29	0%	0	0%	0	0%
4. With reference to dress and appearance	30	0%	64	1%	42	0%	164	2%	283	2%	179	3%
5. For having undeclared wealth	319	2%	32	1%	133	0%	0	0%	110	1%	56	1%
6. For having a criminal past / relations	320	2%	4	0%	124	0%	0	0%	47	0%	0	0%
Total number of articles mentioning candidates	19,364	5%	5464	3%	47,110	1%	10,452	2%	16,700	3%	6,726	3%

Media coverage of the election did not on the whole portray women or men electoral candidates and elected representatives in overtly gender-stereotyped ways (see table 1), with very few articles and broadcasts including descriptions of candidates that referenced stereotypes during any of the periods covered by the monitoring project. As a proportion of the whole, very few articles or broadcasts referred to women or men candidates or elected representatives using gender stereotypes – as sexual objects, or in describing domestic roles, private lives, or dress and appearance, as having undeclared wealth, a criminal past or relations, or as users of drugs or alcohol. Women candidates and elected representatives were most likely to be described as sexual objects (2% in the pre-election period, although not at all during the other two periods), while men were most likely to be described as having a criminal past or links to criminality, or as having undeclared wealth (2% for each during the pre-election period). Profiles of women candidates were more likely to include discussion of their dress and appearance (1% in the pre-election and 2% in the election and post-election period and in the period covering the formation of the new government).

Moving to the qualitative analysis, the largest selection of articles relevant to this category relate to outputs detailing women candidates' and politicians' personal appearance and personal lives. In total, 21

articles from 17 different sources from the election campaign period were analysed, as were 15 articles from 10 sources for the post-election period, and 13 news items from 10 sources during the period covering the formation of the cabinet of ministers.

The analysis of these sources revealed that when dealing with the personal lives of women candidates, media outlets were not the direct sources of degrading, gendered speech. Instead, they tried to maintain a neutral tone in their reporting when this was based on other sources. The news items in this category were based on:

- Direct quotes taken from the speeches of the men and women candidates during the electoral campaign and during the post electoral and post government formation periods, especially speeches of members of the government.
- Personal Facebook comments that were published as news items.
- TV talk shows.
- Earlier interviews of personal nature.
- Direct quotes from media campaigns and speeches.

Descriptions of women candidates' personal appearance in most articles included in the qualitative analysis dealt with hair colour and style, and the way

women candidates dressed to attend parliamentary sessions or other important political events. There were critical stances regarding how women dressed and how they styled themselves, in terms of the accessories that they used.¹²⁰ Articles also considered hair colour and changes in the appearance of women candidates.

Qualitative analysis also showed the use of illustrative images for presenting and comparing candidates during a televised meeting of the ruling party, which sparked reactions and criticism across the political spectrum and from civil society organizations, and led to increased derogatory exchanges in the following days¹²¹ This particular instance at the beginning of the electoral campaign was reported in two major ways. On one side there was strong criticism of the electoral campaign speech and the inappropriate use of illustrative images, especially from civil society organizations and key women political figures involved in the campaign. This immediate reaction reduced the impact of the event. On the other hand, the critical stances from women politicians in opposition generated negative comments, derogatory speech, and offensive language, increasing the negative tone of the coverage overall.¹²²

The intensity of the use of gender-stereotyped language took a different turn in the post-election and new cabinet formation periods. News items appearing in the media and selected for the analysis were quite ironic and had sexual overtones, describing women ministers as concubines or harem wives.¹²³ Apart from a news item depicting threats made by a woman who represented the winning party in the vote counting stations,¹²⁴ the rest of the articles dealt with the outer appearance of women parliamentarians or members of the government, the colour of their hair, and the fashion statements made through their dress.¹²⁵ Gaffes and speech related slips were also central to the ironic and negative media coverage that accompanied the formation of the new government, accompanied by video footage and photos.¹²⁶

In total, 42 news items dealing with the personal lives

of men candidates were included in the qualitative analysis, making it one of two categories with the highest number of news items reviewed (the other was negative portrayals of men candidates). There were some neutral news items dealing with the personal lives of men candidates, reporting on TV talk shows where the candidates discussed their personal lives outside politics.¹²⁷ However, personalized, negative portrayals of men candidates were loaded with curses and accusations relating to crimes, suppression of protests, slander, drug dealing and opening of the labour market to foreign workers. The news items in this category also lifted information from candidates' pasts, and the tone of the reporting was rather negative.

The period during which the cabinet of ministers was being formed was dominated by news items commenting upon the luxurious lifestyles of men in politics and running the country, including discussions on the new armoured vehicle used by the Prime Minister¹²⁸ or the chic appearances of cabinet ministers and parliamentarians in public events, indicating an unjustified level of wealth and disconnection from their electorates following the elections.¹²⁹

4.1.5 Use of derogatory language

Qualitative analysis found that derogatory, degrading and explicitly offensive and loaded language was recorded during debates, from women and men candidates (and targeting both women and men candidates), and was reported in the media. In criticizing opponents, candidates resorted to a highly charged language with allegories and figures of speech arising from communist period cinematography. Sarcastic name calling insinuating comedic stances was very common as well. The analysis also identified reporting in which the title of the news item or the headline did not correspond with the content of the rest of the article.¹³⁰ In an effort to increase ratings and readership and gain more advertising revenue, media outlets reverted to these methods of reporting.

120. <https://www.syri.net/politike/446070/nuk-e-ke-fajin-ti-ogerte-fajin-e-kane-profesoret-e-partise/>

121. Please see here for more details: "Gridare, gridare...ohoo", Meta për Grida Dumën: Rama t'i kërkoië ndjesë për sulmin ordiner - Gazeta Si

122. See: <https://gazetamapo.al/nuk-pritej-po-i-oleza-tejkalon-dhjetra-shqiponja-obeze-te-shoqerise-civile/>

123. Please see: [Kastriot Islami "shthur" gojë: Qeveria e re një harem konkubinash dhe dylberësh, ata janë meshkuj por jo burra! Rama ka një frustrim që nga rinia \(newsbomb.al\)](https://newsbomb.al/) - It is rather surprising for a former speaker of the Parliament of Albania to address his colleagues in the parliament and government with this kind of language.

124. <https://rd.al/2021/05/21/do-ta-presim-gjuhen-vezhguesja-e-ps-kercenon-me-jete-vezhguesin-e-pd-brenda-salles-se-kas-reagon-juristi-marash-loqu/>

125. Please see: [Parakalimi në Kuvend/ Cfarë ngjyrash mbizotëruan dhe cilat nga deputetet guxuan me veshjet \(Fotot\) - Top Channel \(top-channel.tv\)](https://www.topchannel.tv/)

126. Please see: [VIDEO/ Gafat e ministres Muzhaqi bëhen virale: F - Syri | Lajmi i fundit](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

127. See: <https://tvklan.al/u-dashuruan-qe-te-vegjel-ne-gjimmaz-gruaja-e-politikanit-kur-e-pashe-per-here-te-pare-mu/>

128. Please see: [Dyshimet/ Sa kushuron 'Bisha' e Edi Ramës dhe çfarë e lidh kryeministrin me 'pronaren' e makinës | BoldNews.al](https://www.boldnews.al/)

129. [FOTOLAJM/ Pse Arben Ahmetaj është më i lumturi - Syri | Lajmi i fundit](https://www.fotolajm.com/)

130. The "Dita" newspaper in its print edition of March 12, 2021 describes the reaction of the head of the state against the use of degrading speech loaded with sexual overtones by initially stating in the headline the degrading wording. Thus, instead of giving attention to the statement of the head of the state, attention goes to the negative and sexually inclined photos that accompany the news item.

Of particular note is the fact that men candidates and politicians made use of highly derogatory language when attacking other men. The tone of men candidates' direct speech reported in the media became threatening and indicative of personalized profiling, when leaks related to the use of personal data for the electoral campaign of the political party were described.¹³¹ The personalized tone of derogatory speeches was evident when describing men candidates of the opposing forces, and was aimed at dehumanizing these candidates and lowering support for them.¹³² Men candidates used degrading and derogatory language against other men candidates from the opposing camp, to the point that civil society organizations representing persons with disabilities had to address the misuse of their status and the use of derogatory language towards them in a public statement.¹³³ There was also an issue in regard to the way the media outlets chose to use and report on campaign speeches. In the articles selected, it became evident that the choice of news items strengthened or weakened a political position, political force, or particular men candidates. As a result, the tone of the news reporting varied from neutral to negative. In the period of the formation of the new cabinet of ministers, the tone of the speeches and statements was ironic and with sexual hints, but with no intention or inclination towards violence.

Quantitative analysis of social media posts by men and women politicians and political parties revealed that men politicians used social media for campaigning purposes far more than women politicians (see Table 2). In the pre-election period, posts by men received far more "likes" (4020 on average) and comments (603 on average) than posts by women (1182 "likes" and 119 comments, on average) or by political parties (202 "likes" and 24 comments). Similar trends were observed in the election and post-election period. This may be due to the higher profile of men politicians and the likelihood that they have more access to campaign funding and communications staff, and / or to women politicians fear of being attacked on social media and subject to sexist and derogatory comments, although without further contextual information, it is hard to draw firm conclusions. Men political actors were also more likely to be mentioned in social media posts (68% before the election, 76% during and after) than women political actors (32% before the election, 24% during and after).

4.2 Social media

Table 2: Social media posts by men and women politicians and political parties

Social media posts by:	PRE-ELECTION AND ELECTION PERIOD		POST-ELECTION PERIOD	
	No.	%	No.	%
Men	2218	62%	2185	59%
Women	384	11%	462	12%
Political parties	955	27%	802	22%
Other pages	N/A	N/A	249	7%
Total	2340	100%	3698	100%

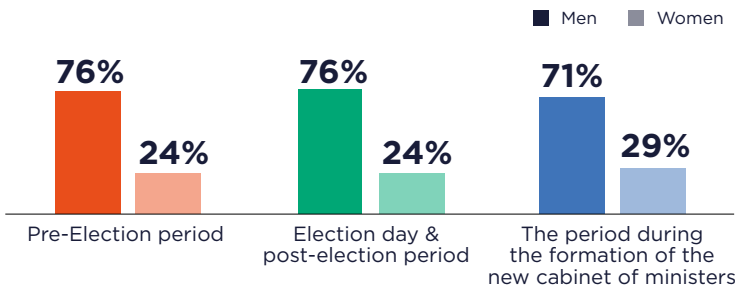
¹³¹. For more details see: <https://www.oranews.tv/skandali-me-te-dhenat-rama-prezanton-patronazhistet-dhe-kerconon-mbeshitetesit-e-bashes-ju-njohim-meta-do-dale-i-truar-dhe-qethur/>

¹³². For more details see: <http://www.panorama.com.al/lulin-ta-puthesh-ne-balle-dash-shehin-ne-buze-rama-ironizon-opoziten-ne-25-prill-keta-do-te-marrin-jo-pushtetin-po-ndoc-rrokun/>

¹³³. The statement can be found in this link: <http://www.panorama.com.al/gjuha-e-perdorur-nga-rama-ne-fushate-shogata-e-te-verbere-i-drejtohet-me-kerkese-krvekomisionrit-shteteror/>

Figure 7: Mentions of men & women in social media posts

Percentage of men vs women candidates mentioned in social media posts



4349 men & women candidates were mentioned in social media posts

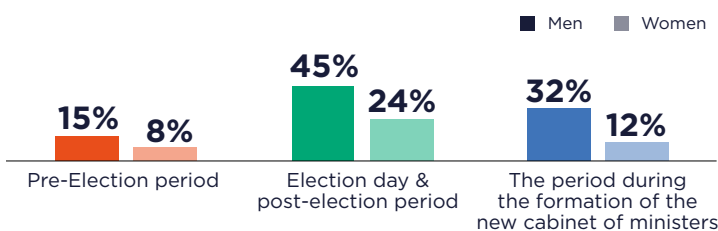
The quantitative analysis found that more men politicians than women politicians made comments that were derogatory or sexist: monitoring found 50 posts by men before the election and 143 during and after, and just 2 posts by women for both periods. At the same time, men politicians were more likely to be described in negative terms on social media: 62 posts describing a man politician negatively were recorded before the election and 245 during and after, compared to 12 posts about a woman politician before the election and 42 during or after.

No posts threatening physical or sexual violence towards a woman political actor and / or her children or family were recorded at all.

The monitoring team also selected a number of social media posts made by politicians or candidates dating from the pre-election and election and post-election period, conducting qualitative analysis of the content of the posts as well as comments made in response to them. Reflecting the quantitative findings above, most of the original posts were made by men candidates. In total, 6 posts made during the pre-election period and 17 posts made during the election and post-election period were selected for analysis.

Figure 8: Negative mentions of men & women in social media posts

Percentage of men vs women candidates mentioned negatively in social media posts



24% of men & women candidates mentioned in social media were mentioned negatively.

The findings of the qualitative analysis of posts made by candidates echo those of the quantitative analysis. In the pre-election period, posts were negative about both men and women, and included derogatory nicknames, ironic photos and videos, or accusations of being involved in crimes and not caring about ordinary people. Comments on these posts were usually in support of the original post, although this was likely due to the fact that commenters are mostly followers of the page / politician that publishes these posts. On several occasions, the commenters also quarrel with one another, expressing support for one party or the other. There are many comments where people use negative or derogatory language against women and men candidates, including accusations of being drug addicts, of profiting from their government posts, of having supported criminal organizations, or simply of not caring about the people. Qualitative analysis of posts from the election and post-election period found that negative posts targeted women and men, although women were more often the target: 8 out of 17 posts included accusations against women of being involved in alleged abusive public tenders, or corruption in general. Men were only accused of such acts in 3 posts. These posts were often harshly worded, and included graphic titles and pictures. Two of the posts mention women elected representatives as “puppets” that only do what their leader orders. One post about a women elected representative who had successfully asked the prime minister to allow football fans into stadiums included a picture of the prime minister winking, insinuating that she had achieved her goal by questionable means. Another post about a man elected representative made fun of his outfit; the comments on the post also made fun of his outfit and stated that he was unworthy of representing the people. On the whole, comments on these posts were supportive, but also used negative language and included cursing and swearing.

In the period covering the formation of the new cabinet of ministers, qualitative analysis turned to posts that were not made by candidates or politicians. In total, the content of 13 social media posts was analysed, 5 of which related to the formation of the new cabinet of ministers, where the majority of ministers are now women. The women selected for cabinet positions were portrayed in these posts as having a close personal relationship with the prime minister, and used sexualized language, such as referring to them as the Prime Minister’s “harem”. Posts insinuated that their proximity to the Prime Minister indicated a wish to be close to him physically. Comments responding to the posts were also hostile, and included sexually explicit language. Three other posts commented on expensive outfits worn by women politicians and the cars that they drove, questioning where they got the money for these. Comments on these posts included accusations of using the people’s money for their own profit. Two posts made fun of slip-ups made by women politicians during public speeches. Of the posts attacking men politicians, two made fun of their appearance (the colour of their tans and their haircuts), while another accused a minister of having an affair and appointing his mistress to a public position.

This qualitative analysis indicates that the social media landscape in Albania is hostile for women political actors and a site of VAWE. As mentioned above, however, the social media posts included in both the quantitative and qualitative analysis are only a small fraction of the total social media output around the elections in April 2021. As such, they are unlikely to capture the full extent of VAWE on social media in Albania.

5. SOME FURTHER IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

Media in its reporting role also throws light on VAWE perpetrators including institutions – namely political parties and the government – and the online society using social media to achieve their goal of deterring women candidates from running successfully through psychological violence and threats.

The overall analysis indicates that the tone used by media sources in reporting, describing, and analysing instances of VAWE and gender-related discrimination and inequality is determined by the type of media in use (print, audio-visual, online) and the time when the news was published. For this reason, it becomes a dominant factor in deciding on VAWE in situations of political campaigns limited by external factors like a pandemic. The limitations resulting from these situations make the analysis of tone used in the online media together with the accompanying images and placement of news items important in evaluating the character of the campaign and instances of VAWE.

The analysis tried to consider the four elements of VAWE related to targets including political, institutional, professional and private elements. The qualitative review above shows that political and private targeting of women candidates and politicians dominated the electoral campaign and the subsequent periods. Media in its reporting role also throws light on VAWE perpetrators including institutions – namely political parties and the government – and the online society using social media to achieve their goal of deterring women candidates from running successfully through psychological violence and threats. The new territory, as already mentioned, has moved from the printed to the online and social media that are more loosely regulated.

In this new hybrid environment in which the electoral campaign in Albania in 2021 took place, the sexist portrayal of women candidates and political actors based on clothes, appearance, and sexual appeal was normalized. Online media outlets disseminated and, in some cases, amplified sexist, derogatory, ill-intended statements made by other actors against women candidates or women involved in election processes. The secondary goal of the analysis was to take on gender as an independent variable vis-à-vis electoral violence to understand the gaps leading to patterns of perpetration, victimization and harm experienced as a result of online psychological VAWE. There is indeed more research required to better understand how gender interacts with violence to condition outcomes that undermine inclusive electoral practices, and thus electoral integrity in a country like Albania.

The qualitative analysis is also indicative of the effects on voting that VAWE has because of the tone that the media use to report on it. The analysis tried to understand the effects of direct exposure to specific news content, highly personalized and distributed online, but it was not able to study the effects of cumulative information environment created by the media and impacting voting behaviour. The study demonstrates that the more visible and the more positive the tone toward a given party is, the more voters are inclined to vote for this party.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ David Nicolas Hopmann, Rens Vliegthart, Claes De Vreese & Erik Albæk (2010) *Effects of Election News Coverage: How Visibility and Tone Influence Party Choice*, *Political Communication*, 27:4, 389-405, DOI: [10.1080/10584609.2010.516798](https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2010.516798)

6. CONCLUSIONS

The quantitative analysis of TV, online, and print media monitored over the three periods for this study did not reveal serious incidents of VAWE perpetrated or amplified by the media during the 2021 parliamentary elections, but did reveal significant gender bias in the election coverage.

As noted above, the quantitative analysis of TV, online, and print media monitored over the three periods for this study did not reveal serious incidents of VAWE perpetrated or amplified by the media during the 2021 parliamentary elections, but did reveal significant gender bias in the election coverage. The same was true of the quantitative analysis of social media posts included in the monitoring. On the other side, abuse towards women candidates was amplified mainly in the form of online comments by readers following specific news items or media articles related to them, and which were aimed at reducing the chances of these women candidates being elected.

Women in politics or holding management positions in state institutions, participating in this consultative meeting where the preliminary findings of the report were shared, confirmed once more that their experience with the media, especially with online and social media, has not been overall positive. These women feel pressure and a greater psychological weight due to the post that they hold. Although, as main perpetrator of sexist and gender-hate speech are mentioned political actors, whereas media makes news from these speeches aiming to increase their audience.

Women candidates and elected officials did receive more coverage during the period covering the formation of the new government, but this did not translate into opportunities to discuss substantive policy issues, or issues relating to women's rights and gender equality. In addition, in this period media coverage switched from being mainly positive or

neutral in its portrayal of women candidates and other women political actors, to being mainly negative. Gender bias in election coverage can help to create an enabling environment for VAWE by undermining the legitimacy of women standing for election, and by strengthening negative perceptions about women's leadership and participation in public life.

During the consultative table it was confirmed once more that a very small number of media outlets have respected gender representation. This is mainly due to the fact that managing positions are held more by men rather than women. Women in politics also believe that political parties do not send women to participate in political confrontations because these events are expected to demand more aggressive language and it is believed that it is impossible for a woman to withstand in a debate on important issues. Also, the media tends to invite a woman to discuss on soft issues, such as: her family or her career rather than important political issues, such as: unemployment, leadership, etc.

Qualitative analysis of media sources, however, revealed a more complex picture. The electoral campaign was characterized by verbal bullying and mobbing, and this was reflected by the media in bombastic titles and tabloid style newspaper writing, as well as in social media posts by political figures attacking other candidates. Our analysis does not indicate intentional gendered hate speech or the common use of sexually explicit language, however. Degrading and derogatory language when addressing

the opponents made use of the political identity or persona. Personal information was used sarcastically and in combination with name calling, resulting in negative news reporting. Negative campaigning addressed towards women candidates was met with criticism, especially by women journalists and women's organizations.

Women candidates in these elections populating and heading the lists of the major parties especially in the districts of Tirana, Durrësi and Korça were public figures known for their professional achievements including highly ranked academic titles for their lecturing and research work. Some of the violence women candidates experienced is related to the fact that they decided to run for office after they had already achieved the status of "public figure", because of the record of success in their professional lives.

Verbal threats, accusations, and intimidation, spread widely in social media, were intended to cause harm to both women and men candidates. Other categories of violence - including physical, sexual, and economic - were not prevalent in the electoral campaign, or at least did not openly target women running for office. None of the candidates present in this campaign were affiliated or promoted issues related to LGBTI rights and there was no clear targeted violence towards LGBTI people as a result. The detailed review of 203 news items indicates that psychological violence occurred in the public sphere and in the virtual public sphere in the form of degrading, derogatory and negative personalized

speech. It occurred on platforms open to public audiences including campaign events, televised debate shows, online news, and social media (mainly Facebook).

Women candidates faced negative comments targeting their age and looks. Ageism and harsh criticism of the appearance of women candidates were common in this campaign. Positive references to Albania's dictatorial communist past made by women candidates of the Socialist Party resulted in VAWE towards women candidates. At the same time, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the presence of social distancing rules led the ruling party to run a predominantly virtual campaign that was visually very engaging and of a much more moderate tone than previous campaigns. Electoral activities were also constrained by short time limits imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, which probably contributed to a less confrontational campaign.

Qualitative (and quantitative) analysis of media sources found that violent incidents were present in coverage of the campaign in TV, online, and print media, but they were limited, targeted and verbal in nature. Most of the incidents were responses to declarations and statements made by high-profile women candidates who suffered verbal aggression, such as slander, defamation, character attacks, harassment in the national media and social media. This abuse was more prominent during the candidate-nomination process (i.e. before the election campaign officially began), than during the campaign itself.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work with the media to enhance understanding of the importance of eliminating gender bias in media coverage of elections.
- Support self-regulation efforts by the media to address issues of sexism and gendered negative reporting, including ethical use of social media accounts, and of the responsibility to identify and remove sexist and misogynistic content.
- Use the opportunity presented by the upcoming local elections of 2023 to develop activities and programmes targeting reporters and journalists for ethical gendered reporting of the campaign.
- Explore the use of computer analytics and software programs and develop standards to identify, report and remove content pertaining to VAWE on social media.
- Introduce more stringent provisions into the Electoral Code to prevent and curb all forms of VAWE across media platforms, including social media.
- Include the “Code of Ethics” compiled by the Alliance Against Hate Speech in the Law No. 8580 “For political parties” aiming to make it an integral part of the political parties functioning.
- Introduce changes to the Electoral Code, Criminal Code, and Law on Political Parties to identify, prevent and address VAWE as a specific form of both electoral violence and violence against women, in line with recommendations made by the Working Group in Gender and Equality in Decision-Making.
- Ensure more stringent enforcement of the Electoral Code related to gendered balance coverage of elections.
- Establish, maintain, and promote a database of women political experts and engage with media outlets to encourage them to draw on this database when selecting commentators.
- Establish, maintain and report on a database to record and monitor sexism in media reporting, in online and traditional media.
- Implement the recommendations included in Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)1 on “Preventing and Combatting Sexism” relating to media, internet and social media, in particular:
 - II.B.2 Implement legislative measures that define and criminalise incidents of sexist hate speech and are applicable to all media, as well as reporting procedures and appropriate sanctions.
 - II.B.3 Develop information and campaigns to raise awareness about sexist misuse of social media, threats in the internet environment.
 - II.B.5 Establish online resources providing expert advice on how to deal with online sexism, including procedures for swiftly reporting/removing harmful or unwanted material.
 - II.B.6. Undertake regular studies and gather sex- and age-disaggregated data on cybersexism and cyberviolence and share outcomes as appropriate.
 - II.C.1. Introduce legislation banning sexism in media and advertising and encourage the monitoring and enforcement of such measures.
 - II.C.5. Encourage the establishment of an institution that is competent to receive, analyse and review complaints in relation to sexism in the media and in advertising, and has the authority to require that sexist content or advertisements be withdrawn or modified.
 - II.C.7. Support research on the prevalence and impact of sexist portrayals of women and girls in the media.
 - II.C.10. Encourage the promotion of positive images of women as active participants in social, economic and political life, and of positive images of men in non-traditional roles such as carers.

ANNEX A: MONITORED MEDIA OUTLETS

TV		WEB		Print		Facebook	
1	ABC News	1	panorama.com.al	1	Albanian Daily News	1	faqja zyrtare e PS
2	A2 News	2	gazetatema.net	2	Dita	2	faqja zyrtare e PD
3	News 24	3	top-channel.tv	3	Gazeta Fjala	3	faqja zyrtare e LSI
4	Ora News	4	balkanweb.com	4	Gazeta Liberale	4	Belinda Balluku
5	Report Tv	5	shqiptarja.com	5	Gazeta Mapo	5	Edi Rama
6	SCAN	6	tvklan.al	6	Gazeta Nacionale (weekly)	6	Elisa Spiropali
7	Top Channel	7	oranews.tv	7	Gazeta Shqiptare	7	Erion Brace
8	Syri TV	8	lapsi.al	8	Panorama	8	Erion Veliaj
9	TV Klan	9	abcnews.al	9	Panorama Sport	9	Ervin Salianji
10	Euro News	10	newsbomb.al	10	Revista Bordo	10	Lulzim Basha
11	RTSH	11	shekulli.com.al	11	Revista Eleganca	11	Monika Kryemadhi
12	Vizion Plus	12	rtsh.al	12	Revista Living	12	Sali Berisha
		13	boldnews.al	13	Revista Mapo	13	Taulant Balla
		14	opinion.al	14	Revista Monitor	14	JOQ Albania
		15	vizionplus.tv	15	Revista Psikologji		
		16	javanews.al	16	Sot		
		17	rd.al	17	Standard		
		18	joqalbania.com	18	Telegraf		
		19	syri.net	19	Tema		
		20	reporter.al	20	Tirana Times (weekly)		

ANNEX B: DATA CAPTURE, PROCESSING, AND ANALYSIS

Quantitative data

The media monitoring process began with monitoring of the prime-time news editions at 19:30 every day on all the TV channels monitored by the team. A tailor-made software programme called Media Watch was used for broadcast monitoring of the 12 TV channels selected by the project. Media Watch provides recordings of all local major radio and television news and public affairs programmes, business and economic broadcasts, interviews with Albanian politicians and public figures, and topical round-table discussions and debates, around the clock and across the Albanian broadcast media sphere.

Regarding monitoring of printed media, the selected newspapers and magazines were scanned on a daily basis or whenever a new edition was published, in the case of publications that do not come out every day. The articles identified as being of interest were then saved in the MC Monitoring portal and accessed online. The web search engine that checks web sites

for relevant keywords worked continuously and the findings related to elections in text content and page layout were retrieved.

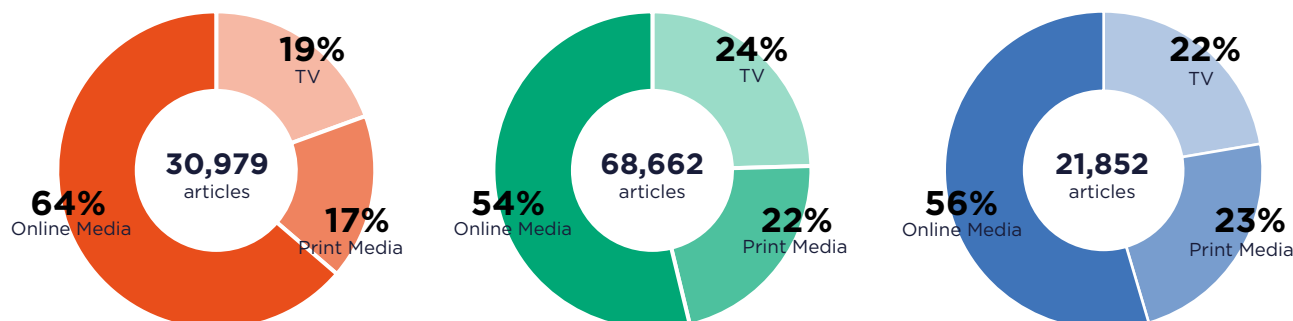
The online monitoring was undertaken using MC Monitoring web-spider software, which crawls Albanian news portals 24/7 and retrieves articles based on keywords of interest. MC Monitoring monitored public social media sites, capturing all posts on the selected pages and selecting posts according to the key words identified above.

Over the course of the whole media monitoring project, MC Monitoring captured a total of 99,641 articles and broadcasts, and 7,255 social media posts, which were then passed on to the research team at the Observatory. For the final study, a total of 8,235 social media posts made on the official social media pages of political parties and individual politicians across all three periods were analysed.

Figure 9: Breakdown of media sources

■ Pre-Election period ■ Election day & post-election period ■ The period during the formation of the new cabinet of ministers

121,493 articles in TV, print, & online media

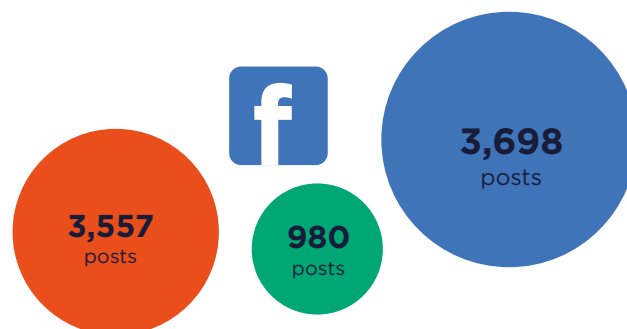


203 articles in TV, print, and online media & 37 social media posts were analyzed qualitatively

As illustrated in Figure 9, the majority of articles across all three periods were published in online news portals (56%). The preliminary findings for the pre-election period (25 March – 24 April) were based on a sample of 30,979 articles and broadcasts that was more weighted towards online news sources, which made up 64% of the media sources covered. By contrast, 54% of the 68,662 articles and broadcasts analysed during the election and post-election period (25 April – 31 August) were online, as were 55% of the 21,852 outputs analysed for the period during which the new cabinet of ministers was being formed (1 – 25 September). Once duplications had been removed (a lot of content is reused / republished by different media outlets), the research team were left with 1,828 stories from the pre-election, 5,343 stories from the election and post-election period, and 1,212 stories from the period of cabinet formation. For the pre-election period, 1,181 (65%) related directly to the elections, for the election and post-election period, 3,998 (75%) related directly to the elections, while for the final period, 1,048 (86%) related directly to the formation of the new cabinet of ministers.

The articles, broadcasts, and social media posts were then coded against a set of quantitative indicators drawn up to capture information on the issues identified above, with data entered onto a specially designed database. During the coding, particular articles were identified for separate qualitative analysis against agreed qualitative indicators, and this qualitative analysis of selected media output is also included in this report. The indicators are included in Annex C.

8,235 posts in Facebook pages



Qualitative data

Qualitative analysis during the electoral campaign took into consideration indicators (listed in Annex C) that tracked use of gendered hate speech, derogatory and sexually explicit language towards women candidates and elected representatives who were running again. It also considered these elements in relation to social identity,¹³⁵ in order to analyse the tone of news reporting and media coverage, as well as in relation to a range of topics that both men and women candidates were asked to discuss.

The qualitative analysis considered four major categories related to the way the media report on gender and violence, suggested by UN-Women as fitting the context of the 25 April 2021 parliamentary

¹³⁵ An individual's social identity indicates who they are in terms of the groups to which they belong. Social identity groups are usually defined by some physical, social, and psychological characteristics of individuals. Examples of social identities are race/ethnicity, gender, social class/socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, (dis)abilities, and religion/religious beliefs. See: 'Social Identities', Searle Center for Advancing Learning & Teaching, accessed 30 September 2021, <https://www.northwestern.edu/searle/initiatives/diversity-equity-inclusion/social-identities.html>.

electoral campaign and the post-election period.

1. Topics and issues discussed by women and men candidates, with analysis of direct quotes from men and women candidates.
2. News items and articles that dwell upon the personal life of women and men candidates, bringing attention to the ways and the nuances media sources choose to portray candidates or report on personal issues.
3. News items and articles that negatively describe the political life of women and men candidates, delving even further into the personal sphere and using projected “negative traits” to muster support or demobilize.
4. News items and interviews in which the candidates discuss gender equality and women’s empowerment in the political life of Albania.

Over the three periods of media monitoring (the electoral campaign period; the election day and the post-election period; and the period covering formation of the new cabinet of ministers), 203 news items were selected for the qualitative analysis. These appeared in 39 different sources of news, 33 of which were digital and the rest print media.

The highest intensity of documents reviewed was during the post-election period, when there were 110 news items reviewed collected through 36 different sources. The news incidents related to VAWE were the highest during the electoral campaign. In the two following periods the number of news items appearing in the media both online and in print subsided and other topics related to the government formation, EU accession, and energy crisis became dominant. In the third phase of review coinciding with the formation of the cabinet of ministers no news items related to gender issues were captured in the print media.

The media monitoring exercise for qualitative purposes considered 7 categories or groups in which the news items were grouped. The two first categories considered discussions of women and men running for office depicted directly from their speeches and interactions with their electorate or in political tv shows. The second category considered news items related to their personal life and exchanges focusing on how the media reported on them, how the political candidates (both men and women) described themselves, and how the media covered personal aspects of the candidates’ lives. Gender and equality elements were also considered in the review.

ANNEX C: LIST OF INDICATORS

Quantitative

1. Number of women vs. men candidates / voters / election officials / elected representatives quoted or interviewed
2. Percentage of coverage of political candidates given to women candidates
3. Number of shows where men are invited vs where women are invited (Opinionist, journalist, candidate)
4. Number of times women vs. men candidates / elected representatives are interviewed on substantive policy issues
5. Coverage of women's rights and gender equality issues as percentage of election coverage:
 - o Sexual and reproductive rights
 - o Violence against women
 - o Women's economic, social and cultural rights
 - o Women's political participation
 - o Other
6. Number of times women vs. men candidates / elected representatives are interviewed or make statements on women's rights and gender equality issues
7. Number of times women vs. men candidates / elected representatives are described in gender stereotypical ways, e.g.
 - o As sexual objects
 - o With reference to domestic roles
 - o With references to their private lives
 - o With reference to dress and appearance
8. Number of social media posts / comments responding to posts by or about women candidates / voters / election officials / elected representatives that are sexist, negative or derogatory
9. Percentage of social media posts by or about women vs. men candidates / voters / election officials / elected representatives that are sexist, negative or derogatory
10. Number of social media posts by or about women candidates / voters / election officials / elected representatives that threaten physical or sexual violence towards the woman concerned and / or her children, family

Qualitative

1. Use of gendered hate speech, derogatory, or sexually explicit language or images to describe women candidates / voters / election officials / elected representatives
2. Use of hate speech or derogatory language or images referencing other aspects of social identity (e.g. disability, race / ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, geographical location) to describe women candidates / voters / election officials / elected representatives
3. Tone of news reporting on women candidates / voters / election officials / elected representatives: positive, neutral, or negative
4. Tone of media coverage of VAWE (if there is any)
5. Range of topics that women vs. men candidates / elected representatives are invited to speak on
6. Range of women's rights and gender equality issues discussed during election coverage
7. Placement of stories relating to women's rights or gender equality in newspaper / programme (e.g. in main news section, in "lifestyle" section)
8. Placement of interviews / profiles of women candidates / voters / election officials / elected representatives in articles or broadcasts
9. [If the project will include interviews] Impact of VAWE on women candidates / voters / election officials / elected representatives: mental and physical health, willingness to participate in elections, willingness to engage with the media / use social media
10. Does the media coverage throw election results into question for women candidates?
11. Does media coverage make it more difficult for women to assume the positions to which they were elected?

