



ELECTIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
BODIES ON MAY 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023

# STUDY: VOTERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THIRD PARTY INFLUENCE ON ELECTIONS

Albanian Helsinki Committee

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## INTRODUCTION

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‘The President of the Republic of Albania, by Decree No. 13864 dated October 24, 2022, has designated May 14, 2023, as the date for the Elections for Local Government Bodies.’

In accordance with its mission, to contribute to free and fair elections, the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) has been engaged since 1996 in monitoring parliamentary and local government elections. This monitoring was also carried out for the local government elections of May 14, 2023. The final report of the monitoring of these elections can be accessed at this link: [Final Report on the Findings and Conclusions of the Monitoring of Elections for Local Government Bodies – 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 2023](#).

Alongside monitoring the electoral process for the May 14, 2023 elections, observers and correspondents from the AHC were also involved in surveying voters regarding the influence of third parties in these elections. The influences by third parties considered in this report are those that contravene constitutional standards of voting, which require independence, equality, freedom, and secrecy. These influences may stem from external or internal factors unfairly or dishonestly favoring certain electoral entities or their candidates.

External influences may arise from states known for dictatorial or autocratic regimes, causing destabilizing effects on democracy and the rule of law. Conversely, internal influences may stem from actors within the country, including political parties, public officials, and individuals suspected of or involved in organized crime. Such influences can lead to pressure being exerted on citizens through various means to vote for a particular electoral entity. This pressure may manifest through illegal actions such as the misuse of public assets, threats, or the buying and selling of votes."

In order to measure the perception of the voters regarding the influences in the local elections of May 14, 2023, observers and correspondents of the AHC (surveyors) were engaged in 14 municipalities of the country, interviewing a certain sample of voters, during the period May-June 2023.

This survey was conducted as part of the initiative *'Building Electoral Integrity and Political Party Stability: Enhancing Oversight and Citizen Demands through Support from Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Media, and Academia,'* financially supported by the British Embassy in Tirana. This initiative is being implemented through a partnership of local organizations: the Albanian Helsinki Committee, the Institute of Political Studies, Civic Resistance, and BIRN Albania.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily reflect the opinions and thoughts of other partner organizations and the British Embassy in Tirana.

## EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

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This survey presents both qualitative and quantitative data collected through interviews conducted by observers and correspondents of the AHC with a sample of 1087 voters across the municipalities of Malësi e Madhe, Shkodër, Kukës, Lezhë, Dibër, Durrës, Tirana, Elbasan, Fier, Berat, Korçë, Pogradec, Vlorë, and Gjirokastrë, thereby encompassing the 12 constituent counties of the country.

### *Voters' knowledge of legislation*

Despite the frequent alterations, a significant portion of voters (approximately 58.69%) assert being well-informed about legal provisions, rating their knowledge as good, very good, or excellent.

Examining internal influences during the local elections on May 14, 2023, surveyed voters indicated political parties as the foremost factor (36.48%), followed by organized crime (29.58%). A notable 19.7% of respondents cited the influence of public officials within state institutions, who apply pressure on public administration and their families, as the third internal factor.

Concerning external influences and the perceived unfair intervention of foreign nations in Albania's electoral processes, nearly half of the respondents (49.8%) believe such interference exists. Among the nations evidently influencing Albania's electoral processes are Russia (25.38%), Turkey (19.13%), China (10.86%), and Iran (10.39%), which are internationally criticized for their authoritarian regimes or autocratic governance.

### *Vote buying*

Vote buying, also known as active and passive corruption in electoral processes, constitutes a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment ranging from 1 to 5 years, as stipulated in articles 328 and 328/b of the Criminal Code. Disturbingly, data reveals that approximately 19.2% of respondents, totaling 209 individuals, admit to receiving offers such as money, food, or promises in exchange for votes, while 74.5% deny having been exposed to such actions.

Recognizing the potential reluctance or fear among citizens to report instances of being offered different sorts of benefits for their votes, pollsters inquired whether respondents were aware of similar offers made to their family members or within their social circles. In contrast to personal admissions mentioned above, 44.71% of respondents, comprising 486 individuals, admitted to having knowledge of different sorts of offers made in exchange for votes within their familial and social spheres, while 46.55% denied any such occurrence.

Among voters who engage in vote buying and selling, the primary incentive offered in exchange for a vote is monetary compensation, accounting for 39.03% of cases. Another common tactic is the promise of employment for oneself or family members, comprising 25.31% of reported instances. Additionally, 16.76% of respondents cited experiencing pressure to retain their jobs or abstain from participating in elections as a method of coercion. A smaller proportion, 16.54%, indicated being offered food and material assistance, while a minority, 2.36%, reported facing threats from individuals suspected or involved in criminal activities.

Regarding the 19.2% of voters who acknowledge being offered material goods or promises in exchange for their votes, findings reveal that 'patronageists' were identified as the primary influencers in 42.75% of cases. Public officials ranked second, cited by 27.45% of respondents admitting to this practice. Other influencers include mayoral or municipal council candidates (12.67%), businessmen (10.72%), and individuals known for their ties to criminal activities (6.41%).

The act of photographing one's vote represents a violation of the principle of voting secrecy. The majority of respondents stated that they were not asked to take a photograph of their vote. However, 6.7% reported being requested to do so, while 4% declined to provide an answer.

### ***Election Campaign and Misuse of Public Assets***

The pollsters asked voters whether they had participated in electoral campaign meetings before April 13, which coincides with the official start of the electoral campaign. The data reveals that it appears that 1 in 4 respondents (25.5%) claimed to have attended electoral meetings during the electoral campaign, while 63.5% of respondents denied participating in these activities.

The pollsters questioned voters who are employed in the public administration whether they were obliged to participate in the electoral campaign for the elections on May 14, 2023. The majority of respondents (57.5%) denied such an obligation, while 9.5% of respondents claimed they were required to participate in the campaign for these local elections during working hours in violation of Article 91, paragraph 2 of the Electoral Code. Approximately 17.8% claimed they were required to participate but outside of working hours.

During the electoral campaign, hiring, firing, dismissal, transfer, and assignment to duties in public institutions or entities is also prohibited, except in exceptional cases. The data reveals that it appears that more than half of the respondents, or 57%, admitted to being unaware of such cases. Meanwhile, about 35.2% of respondents admitted to being aware of employments during the one-month period or several months before the elections on May 14, 2023.

One of the forms of using public assets for electoral purposes is related to the execution of various investments in public services before the election date. From the survey data, it emerges that more than half of the respondents, or 57.9% of them, have noticed improvements made in road infrastructure (road paving, creation of bike lanes, street lighting, white lines, etc.), investments in building facades, public spaces, or various reconstructions, creation of green spaces, etc. Additionally, some of these voters reported an acceleration in the completion of investment projects to have them finished before the elections. In a comparative analysis of municipalities

where the presence of investments and public improvements is most noticeable, it appears that the municipality of Kukës leads with 89.19% of respondents confirming such a trend, followed by Shkodra (84.09%), Kamza (80%), and Lezha (79.59%). Conversely, among the municipalities where the majority of voters deny such a phenomenon are Gjirokastrë (72.73%), Fier (65.6%), Vlora (61.19%), and Pogradec (55%).

### ***Complaints lodged with institutions responsible for investigating and penalizing breaches of electoral laws***

Despite significant awareness of electoral violations, survey data indicate that only a minority of voters report the detected violations. Specifically, 49.5% of respondents stated they did not report violations due to a lack of awareness of any violation. This finding contradicts other responses within the questionnaire regarding their perception of violations. Alarming, approximately 43.7% of respondents who acknowledged being aware of violations did not file any complaints. Only 4.57% of respondents reported electoral violations to the Central Election Commission, police institutions, or the prosecutor's office.

Various reasons contribute to citizens' hesitation in reporting violations, including lack of trust, indifference, fear of repercussions, and unfamiliarity with reporting procedures.

Pollsters also sought voters' opinions on the performance of the Prosecutor's Office. The data reveals that half of the respondents, or 50.23%, believe that the Prosecutor's Office does not promptly and impartially investigate electoral crimes. Skepticism regarding the Prosecutor's Office's investigation of electoral crimes is particularly prevalent in cities such as Shkodra (79.55%), Berat (76.09%), Lezha (73.49%), and Durrës (65.45%).

### ***Dubious funding of electoral entities for their election campaigns***

The pollsters queried voters on their perceptions of the expenditures made by political parties for the local elections of May 14, 2023. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents, approximately 55.1%, regard the campaign expenses as excessive or highly excessive, while 28.89% of respondents view the expenses as normal.



Pollsters surveyed voters regarding the dubious financing of political parties or their candidates. The majority, approximately 71.30% of respondents, claim to be unaware of illegal financing, while 26.77% claim awareness. Among those voluntarily disclosing awareness of questionable funding sources, 82% identified corruption and organized crime as the primary sources of illegal financing, followed by 9.89% implicating businesses as donors, and a smaller proportion, nearly 7%, attributing the funding to Russia. When questioned about the basis of their knowledge, respondents cited media reports as the primary source, followed by other channels such as information from individuals engaged in political activities, social media platforms, input from family members or friends, and in some cases, their own direct involvement in election campaigns where exposure to such information is heightened.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

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With the collaboration of field experts and a statistician, a comprehensive questionnaire consisting of 25 questions was formulated. This questionnaire was designed to address the observed issues related to electoral influences in Albania in recent years. Subsequently, a specialized training session was organized for the network of observers and correspondents of AHC (Albanian Helsinki Committee), who were tasked with conducting voter surveys in the field.

### *Selection of survey participants*

A total of 1,087 respondents participated in the survey, selected randomly to ensure a comprehensive representation across various demographic characteristics such as gender, age (18 years and above), and geographical region. Prior to the survey, meticulous planning was conducted by AHC to establish methodology and quotas for each geographical region, based on population data from municipalities targeted by the questionnaire.

Data collection occurred in the field, employing the electronic platform Google Form to uphold data accuracy during analysis. Pollsters obtained consent from participants, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation. They assured respondents that, in accordance with Albanian legislation, no personally identifiable information would be disseminated, and that all data provided during the interview would solely be used for the purpose of analysis in this study.

### *Determination of the sample*

The survey targeted individuals aged 18 and above, aligning with the purpose of assessing voter sentiments related to elections and adhering to Albania's minimum voting age requirement. AHC conducted a preliminary analysis based on the percentage distribution of the population within this age category across the Republic of Albania's territory. According to data from INSTAT, approximately 80% of the country's total population falls within the 18 years and older age bracket.<sup>1</sup> The data collection reveals that the district of Tirana exhibits the highest concentration of respondents, mirroring the region's significant population density. Conversely, the district of Gjirokastra exhibits the lowest concentration of respondents.<sup>2</sup>

District	Gjirokastrë	Dibër	Berat	Korçë	Fier	Vlorë	Shkodër	Lezhë	Durrës	Elbasan	Tiranë	Kukës	Total
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<sup>1</sup> Table 1 from the annex of the reference document provided by INSTAT for the year 2023.

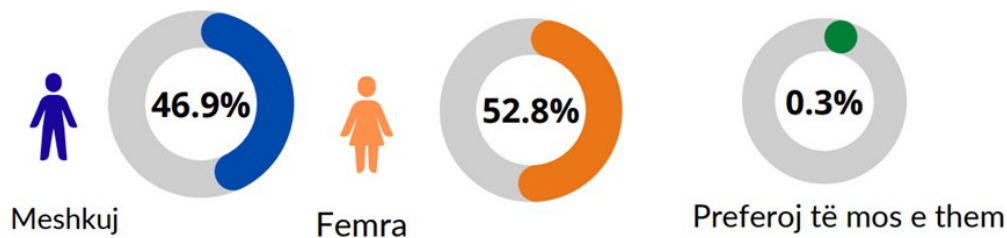
<sup>2</sup> Note: In the survey data, certain municipalities such as Kavajë, Librazhd, Lushnjë, Mat, and Përmet each had 1 respondent; Peqin, Poliçan, and Përrenjas each had 2 respondents, while Tepelena had 3 respondents. These municipalities are not included in some summary tables due to their low representation, which doesn't provide a statistically significant sample size. This limited survey scope was intentional, as the questionnaire focused primarily on the 14 municipalities under monitoring.

<b>Target</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1000</b>
<b>Minimal no.</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>600</b>
<b>Realization</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>1087</b>

## 1. GENERAL INFORMATION FOR RESPONDENTS

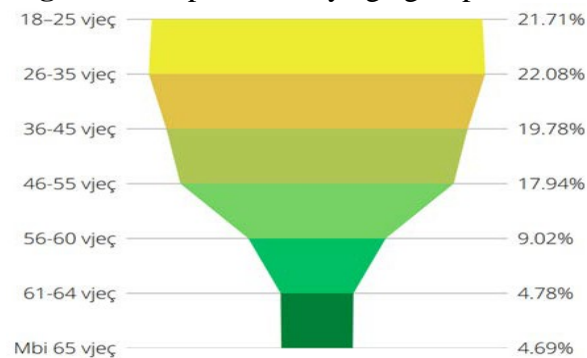
A total of 1,087 eligible voters participated in the questionnaire, comprising of 52.8% females and 46.9% males. Additionally, 0.3% of respondents (3 people) chose not to disclose this information.

**Figure 1.** Gender representation of respondents

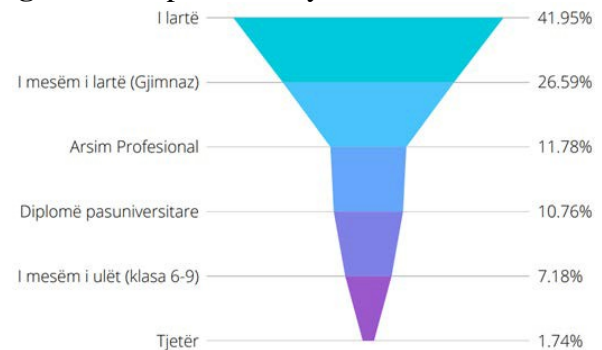


During field data collection, efforts were made to ensure inclusivity across all age groups (see Figure 2). As a result, the majority of respondents fall within the age range of 26-35 years (22.08%), followed closely by those aged 18-25 years (21.71%) and 36-45 years (19.78%), collectively constituting nearly 64% of the interviewees. Individuals aged over 60 comprise approximately 9.47% of the surveyed population.

**Figure 2.** Respondents by age group



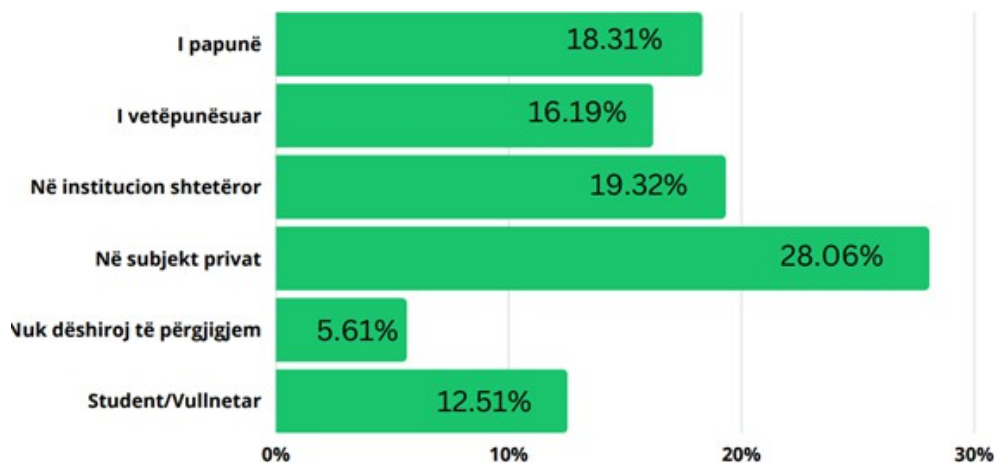
**Figure 3.** Respondents by Educational Level



In terms of respondents' educational backgrounds, a significant portion, 52.71%, possess higher education qualifications. Among them, 41.95% hold university degrees, while 10.76% have postgraduate degrees. Following are individuals with higher secondary education (high school) who represent 26.59% of the respondents. The smallest proportion of participants in the survey, 7.18%, holds lower secondary education qualifications (grades 6-9).

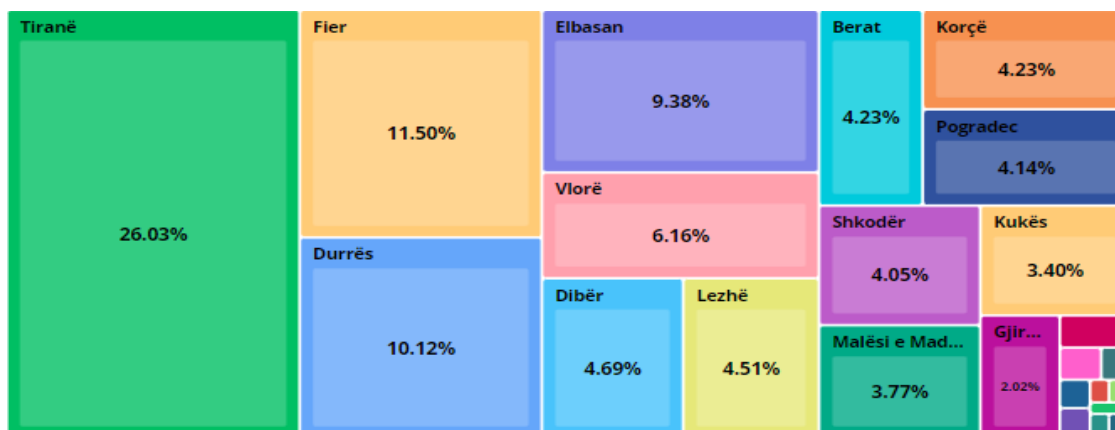
Regarding respondents' employment status during the survey period, the majority, constituting 28.06%, are employed in the private sector, with 19.32% working in the public sector. Additionally, 136 respondents (12.51%) identify as students, while 199 individuals (18.31%) are unemployed. Approximately 16.19% of respondents declare themselves as self-employed.

**Figure 4.** Employment representation of respondents



In alignment with the survey's objective of assessing third-party influence in elections, the AHC also analyzed the distribution of respondents across municipalities where they are registered voters. This data mirrors the population distribution across the country's municipalities. Notably, the Municipality of Tirana hosts the highest percentage of respondents (26.03%) registered as voters, followed by Fier with 11.50%, Durrës with 10.12%, and Elbasan with 9.38% of the surveyed voters. Conversely, the smallest proportion of surveyed voters is concentrated in Gjirokastrë.

**Figure 5.** Representation of the respondents in the Municipalities where they are registered as voters:



*Data analysis*

The data collected from the questionnaire underwent a comprehensive analysis, initially at the national level, and subsequently, with a focus on specific demographics such as region, age group, and level of education. This analysis aimed to discern variations among different population groups concerning the specific topics addressed by the survey.

## 2. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

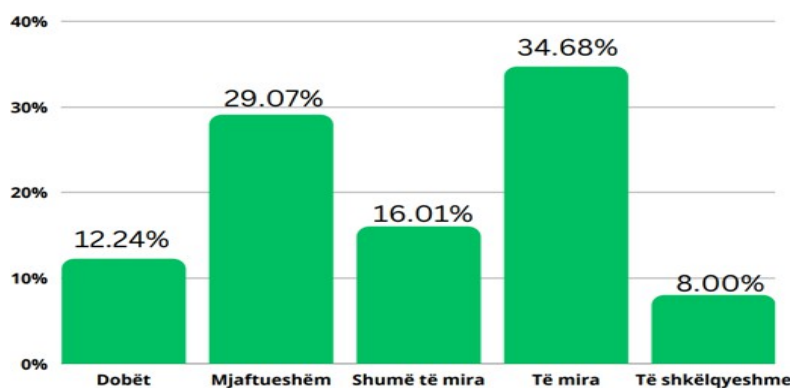
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Understanding the legislation of our country, particularly electoral law, is vital for fostering a healthy democracy and encouraging citizens' active participation in political processes. This knowledge empowers citizens to comprehend and responsibly partake in free and fair elections. Familiarity with electoral legislation enables citizens to make informed decisions not only regarding candidate election and relevant criteria, such as those derived from decriminalization laws but also about other aspects such as:

- Identification of election violations: Citizen awareness of legal provisions enables them to readily recognize potential violations of election rules and report them accordingly.
- Oversight of the electoral process: Citizens well-versed in electoral legislation can actively participate in monitoring the electoral process, thereby contributing to its transparency and integrity. Their involvement, whether through organized efforts or individual initiatives, plays a crucial role in upholding the integrity of elections.

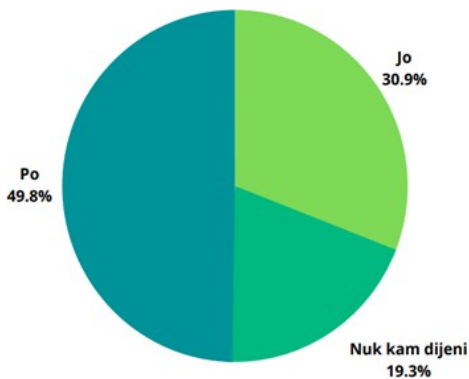
Continuous education of citizens about the legal provisions of electoral legislation is essential. Article 19 of the Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania assigns the State Election Commissioner with this responsibility. Despite notable improvements observed in recent elections regarding voter education, it remains inadequate compared to the actual needs. Past election practices indicate that this process still falls short of meeting the required standards.

**Figure 6.1** How do you rate your knowledge of electoral legislation?



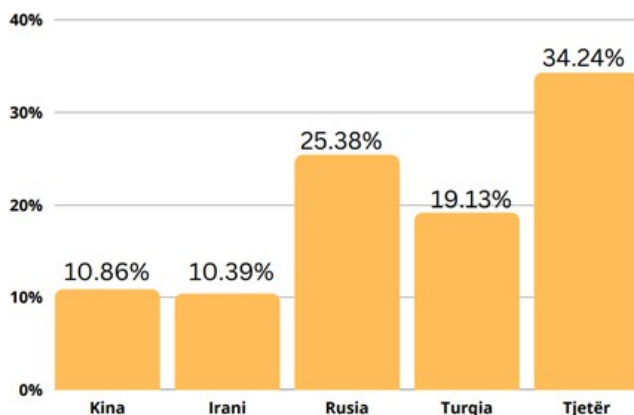
The electoral legislation in Albania, including the Electoral Code and associated by-laws, has undergone continuous changes over the last three decades. This frequent alteration of the legal framework, a common occurrence in the Albanian state, directly impacts citizens' understanding of the legal provisions, often leading to confusion. However, despite these frequent changes, survey data reveals that Albanian citizens perceive themselves as well-informed about the legal provisions. Approximately 58.69% of respondents believe they possess good, very good, or excellent knowledge of the legal provisions, while 12.24% acknowledge having poor knowledge, and 29.07% claim to have sufficient knowledge. Based on data credibility principle, it is important to note that these results reflect citizens' self-assessment of their knowledge and may contain subjective biases regardless of positive or negative values.

**Figure 7.1.** Do you think that foreign countries unfairly interfere in the election processes in the Republic of Albania?



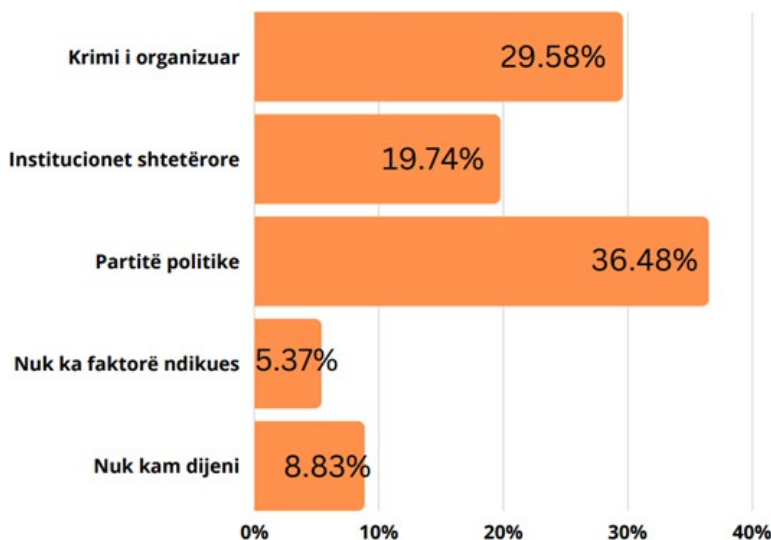
According to the survey conducted by AHC, the majority of respondents, accounting for 49.8%, believe that there is unfair interference by foreign countries in the election processes in the Republic of Albania. Conversely, 30.9% of respondents believe that there is no such interference. Additionally, a significant portion of respondents, 210 persons (19.3%), stated that they do not have knowledge about foreign interference in electoral processes. These findings reflect the perceptions and impressions of the surveyed individuals regarding the role of foreign countries in Albanian elections.

**Figure 7.2.** If so, which of these states do you think unfairly influence elections in Albania?



Of the 541 respondents who believe there is unfair interference by foreign countries in Albania's election processes, 25.38% attribute the interference to Russia, making it the top-ranked country. Following closely, 19.13% of respondents list Turkey as the second country with the highest perceived interference. China and Iran are also identified, with 10.86% and 10.39% of respondents attributing interference to each, respectively. Notably, the majority of respondents (34.24%) believe that other countries, apart from China, Iran, Russia, and Turkey, are involved in this process.

**Figure 8.** Which of the following factors do you think unfairly affect the result of the local elections on May 14, 2023?



According to the AHC pollsters, respondents were asked about factors that could unfairly influence the outcome of the local elections of May 14, 2023. Through a closed question with predefined options, 36.48% of respondents identified political parties as the most influential factor in local election outcomes, followed by 29.58% who identify the organized crime as the most influential. Additionally, 19.74% of respondents indicated that state institutions also exert unfair influence on



election outcomes, while only 5.37% stated that there are no influencing factors. These findings reflect citizens' perceptions of unfair influences on local election results, raising serious concerns for democracy in the country, which is built upon the will of voters expressed through their right to vote.

### 3. VOTE BUYING

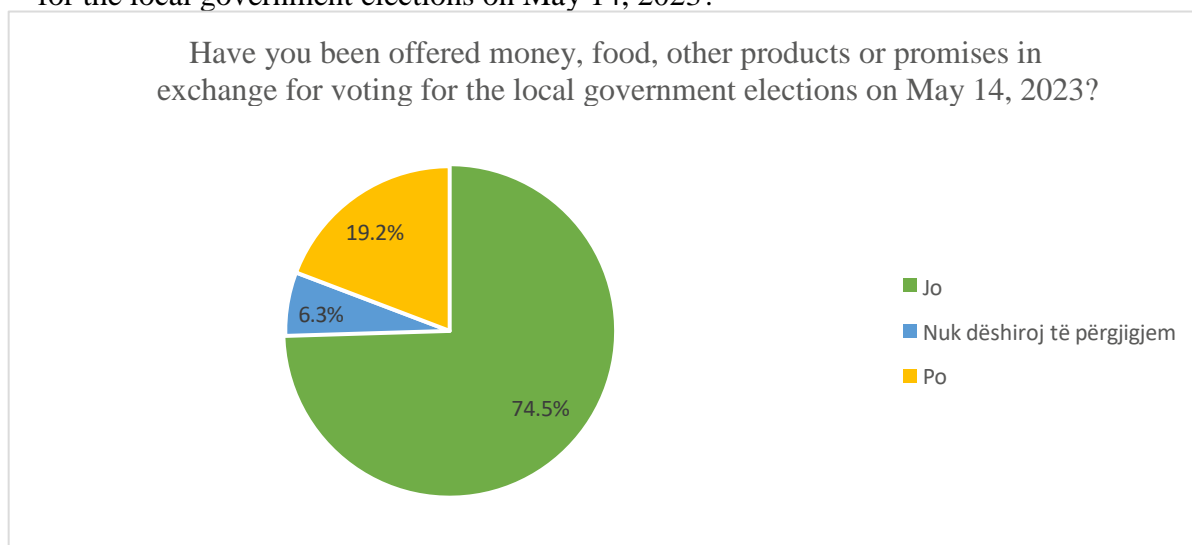
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Vote buying is a concerning phenomenon that has persisted in the majority of election processes in Albania. This issue is closely linked to various Albanian societal problems such as corruption, poverty, lack of electoral education, and pressures or threats exerted by various influential factors.

The act of buying and selling votes, also known as active corruption and passive corruption in elections, is recognized a criminal offense in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania. It is punishable by one to five years in prison, as outlined in Articles 328 and 328/b of the Criminal Code.

Vote buying has been criticized by political parties, journalists, civil society organizations, and the international community, including representatives of various embassies and international organizations in the country. Recognizing the significance of this issue, AHC has conducted surveys to gauge citizens' perspectives on various aspects related to vote buying and selling.

**Figure 9.** Have you been offered money, food, other products or promises in exchange for voting for the local government elections on May 14, 2023?



The AHC first inquired with respondents regarding whether they had received offers of money, food, or other inducements in exchange for their vote. The data reveals a concerning trend, with approximately 209 respondents, constituting 19.2% of the total, reporting receipt of such offers. Conversely, 74.5% confirmed that they had not been approached with offers of money, food, goods, or promises in exchange for influencing their voting behavior. Notably, approximately 6.3% of respondents opted to neither confirm nor deny such occurrences, casting reasonable doubt on the prevalence of the phenomenon and suggesting a reluctance to report instances of unfair vote solicitation.

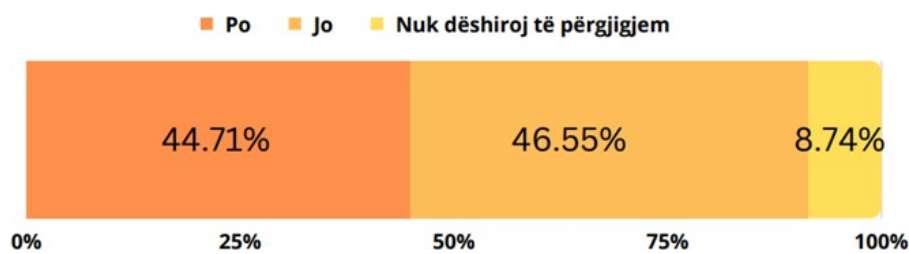
**Table 1:** Responses to Offers of Incentives for Voting in Local Government Elections on May 14, 2023 (Data by Municipality)

Municipality	No	Not willing to respond	Yes
Berat	45.65%	2.17%	52.17%
Dibër	66.67%	23.53%	9.80%
Durrës	70.91%	3.64%	25.45%
Elbasan	90.20%	3.92%	5.88%
Fier	88.00%	4.80%	7.20%
Gjirokastrë	90.91%	0.00%	9.09%
Kamzë	60.00%	0.00%	40.00%
Korçë	95.65%	0.00%	4.35%
Kukës	75.68%	2.70%	21.62%
Lezhë	75.51%	6.12%	18.37%
Malësi e Madhe	70.73%	7.32%	21.95%
Pogradec	51.11%	20.00%	28.89%
Shkodër	54.55%	2.27%	43.18%

Tiranë	80.57%	6.71%	12.72%
Vlorë	44.78%	7.46%	47.76%
<b>Total</b>	<b>74.52%</b>	<b>6.26%</b>	<b>19.23%</b>

In a comparative view between the municipalities where this phenomenon is most evident among the citizens, it turns out that Berat ranks first with 52.7% of the respondents having affirmed such a phenomenon, followed by Vlora (47.7%) and Shkodra (43.18 %).

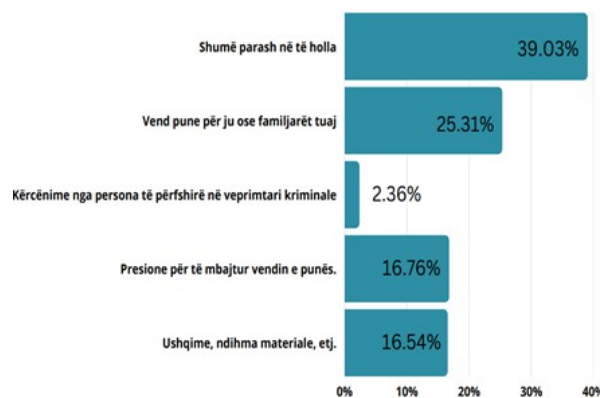
**Figure 10.1** Are you aware of any instances where individuals within your family or social circle have been offered money, food, goods, or promises in exchange for voting in the local government elections on May 14th??



Acknowledging the potential hesitation of citizens to admit to being offered benefits in exchange for votes, the AHC queried respondents about their awareness of individuals within their family or social circle who were offered such incentives, including money, goods, or promises. In contrast to responses regarding personal experiences, 44.71% of respondents, totaling 486 individuals, claimed awareness of such offers. Slightly edging this, 46.55% of respondents refuted knowledge of such occurrences, while a smaller margin of 8.74%, comprising 85 respondents, chose not to provide an answer whatsoever.

The methods and tactics employed by interested parties to procure citizens' votes vary in nature. Among respondents who acknowledged being offered inducements in exchange for their votes, 19.2% were queried about the specific tools proffered to them. It emerged that for 39.03% of them, money constituted the primary inducement. Another tactic observed was offering employment opportunities for oneself or family members, with 25.31% confirming this occurrence. Additionally, 16.76% reported experiencing pressure to retain their employment, which, although not classified as direct vote-buying, falls under the purview of Article 328/a, paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code, concerning 'Use of public office for political or electoral activity.' A further 16.54% indicated they were offered food and material assistance, while a smaller fraction (2.36%) mentioned facing threats from individuals involved in criminal activities if they refused to offer their votes.

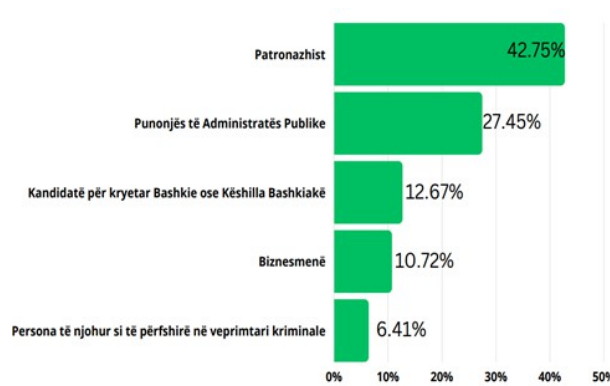
**Figure 10.4.** What are the tools or forms that are used the most for buying and selling votes for the local government elections on May 14?



AHC also inquired about the individuals who attempted to buy votes from the respondents. The final data indicates that 42.75% of respondents identified these individuals as "patronageists." Broadly defined, patronageists are described in the questionnaire as '*individuals associated with political parties tasked with providing information about the areas they represent, conveying the political tendencies of individuals, and lobbying on behalf of the party to which they belong.*'

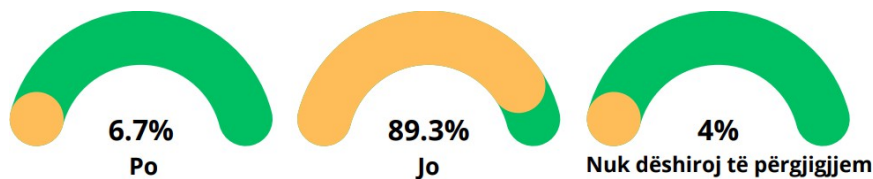
Meanwhile, concerning the entities engaging citizens in vote-buying schemes, 27.45% of respondents pointed to public administration employees as a significant group involved in the buying and selling of votes. This raises concerns about the integrity of public administration within the country. This observation is pertinent to Law No. 90/2012, 'On the organization and functioning of the state administration.' *The state administration constitutes the organizational and professional machinery designed to serve the public interest impartially. It is responsible for implementing existing legislation, delivering public services, and formulating and executing overarching state policies.* The involvement of state administration employees in such activities undermines the institutional image in the eyes of the public and casts doubt on its impartiality, thereby impacting the perception of politicization within the state's administration.

**Figure 10.5** In which of the following subcategories are people who have contacted you to buy your vote?



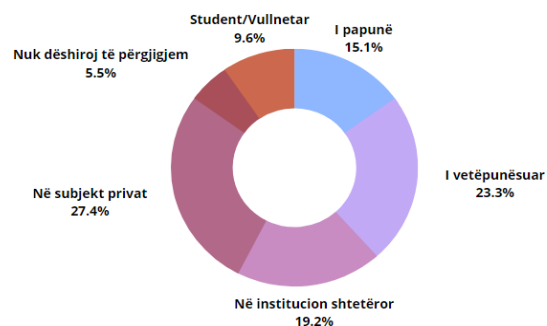
Among the categories of individuals implicated in vote buying, candidates for mayoral or municipal council positions represent 12.67% of respondents' responses. Additionally, businessmen account for 10.72% of such instances, alongside individuals known for their involvement in criminal activities. (6.41%).

**Figure 11.1** Have you been asked to take a photo of your vote in the secret room for the May 14 local elections?



AHC also surveyed respondents regarding whether they were requested to take a photo of their vote in the private voting booth during the elections on May 14, 2023. It is essential to emphasize that violating the secrecy of voting by voters constitutes a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment ranging from three months to three years. Furthermore, inciting or coercing a voter to violate the rules guaranteeing the secrecy of voting is also a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment for one to four years (Article 327 of the Criminal Code, paragraphs 1 and 3). According to the survey findings, the majority of respondents (89.3%) stated that they were not asked to take a photo of their vote. 6.7% of respondents reported being asked to take a photo of their vote, while 4% chose not to provide an answer.

**Figure 11.2.** If you have been asked to photograph your ballot in the secret voting booth for the local elections on 14 May - what is your employment status?



AHC conducted a comparative analysis of the responses from 74 respondents, comprising 6.7% of the total, who reported being asked to photograph their vote in the secret voting booth, in relation to their employment status. The data indicates that 27.4% of these respondents are employed in the private sector, while 19.2% are employed in state institutions. Additionally, approximately 23.3% of the respondents who were asked to photograph their vote are self-employed, while 15.1% of them are unemployed.

**Table 2.** Have you been asked to take a photo of your vote in the secret voting booth, for the May 14 local elections - by municipality.

Municipality	No	Not willing to answer	Yes
Berat	97.83%	2.17%	0.00%
Dibër	70.59%	15.69%	13.73%
Durrës	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Elbasan	96.08%	0.98%	2.94%
Fier	95.20%	3.20%	1.60%
Gjirokastrë	95.45%	4.55%	0.00%
Kamzë	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Korçë	97.83%	0.00%	2.17%
Kukës	83.78%	2.70%	13.51%

Lezhë	91.84%	2.04%	6.12%
Malësi e Madhe	80.49%	4.88%	14.63%
Pogradec	60.00%	20.00%	20.00%
Shkodër	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Tiranë	90.46%	3.53%	6.01%
Vlorë	64.18%	7.46%	28.36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>89.24%</b>	<b>4.05%</b>	<b>6.72%</b>

Meanwhile, a comparative analysis reveals that among the municipalities included in the survey, Vlora tops the list with 28.36% of respondents reporting the phenomenon of photographing their vote, followed by Pogradec with 20% of respondents indicating this occurrence.

#### 4. MISUSE OF PUBLIC ASSETS

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The use of public resources during the election period is regulated to minimize disparities between government and opposition parties. Article 91 of the Electoral Code outlines permissible and prohibited activities for public bodies. According to the first paragraph of this article, *‘Except as provided by law, resources of public bodies or entities at the local or central level cannot be used to support candidates, political parties, or coalitions in local elections, or any other entities where the state holds capital or shares, or appoints the majority of the supervisory or administrative body, irrespective of the source of capital or ownership.’*

Throughout the current and previous election processes, both local and international organizations, alongside monitors appointed by the Central Election Commission (CEC), have consistently reported instances of misuse of public resources. In response to these reports, the CEC has taken and also not taken specific measures to penalize heads of institutions and/or individuals responsible for such actions, identified as supporting various election campaigns with public resources. However, in the latest report on monitoring the local government elections dated May 14, 2023, the AHC has found that these measures lack proportionality and have not effectively deterred such activities.

The Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania further delineates what constitutes a ‘public resource.’ Paragraph 2 of Article 91 of the Electoral Code specifies that ‘resources’ encompass movable and immovable assets as outlined in Article 142 of the Civil Code<sup>3</sup>, *in addition to any human resources affiliated with the institution.* The utilization of ‘human resources’ entails *the coerced deployment of state administration staff during working hours for election campaign activities, as well as the compelled and organized involvement of pre-university school students during instructional hours in the election campaign. Furthermore, employing human resources includes pledging or providing incentives to public servants or students to engage in election-related activities outside of their official duties or school hours, as well as exerting pressure on them for this purpose.*

The utilization of public office for political or electoral purposes constitutes a criminal offense under Article 328/a of the Criminal Code and is punishable by imprisonment ranging from 6 months to 3 years. This offense primarily pertains to specific individuals fulfilling state duties or functions within the state administration who engage in election activities contrary to the law. This includes coercing students or others to partake in such activities or exerting pressure on them to vote in favor of a particular electoral subject or candidate. Additionally, it encompasses the misuse of public goods, state functions, activities, or financial and human resources to favor a political party or candidate in elections, among other forms of misconduct.

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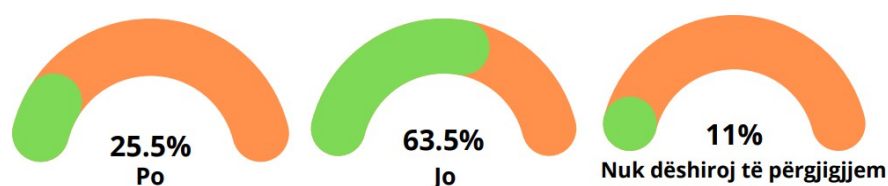
<sup>3</sup> Immovable property encompasses land, water sources, streams, trees, buildings, and other afloat structures permanently affixed to the land. It also includes any fixtures or objects continuously integrated with the land or buildings. All other items, including natural resources such as energy, are classified as movable property.



In order to understand the perceptions regarding the use of public resources in the local elections of May 14, AHC, as a start, asked the respondents if they had participated in meetings of an electoral campaign nature before April 13, which coincides with the initial deadline for the start of the electoral campaign<sup>4</sup>.

According to the survey data, one in four respondents (25.5%) reported participating in meetings during the electoral campaign, while the majority of respondents, comprising 63.5%, denied involvement in such activities. Notably, approximately 11% of respondents, totaling about 119 individuals, opted not to provide an answer.

**Figure 12.1.** Have you participated in meetings of an electoral campaign nature for these local elections (e.g. meetings with political parties and their candidates, etc.), before April 13?



In Table 3 below, which compares the participation in electoral meetings with the employment status of the respondents, among the 278 respondents who claimed to have participated in electoral meetings, nearly one-third of them (35.97%) were employed in governmental institutions.

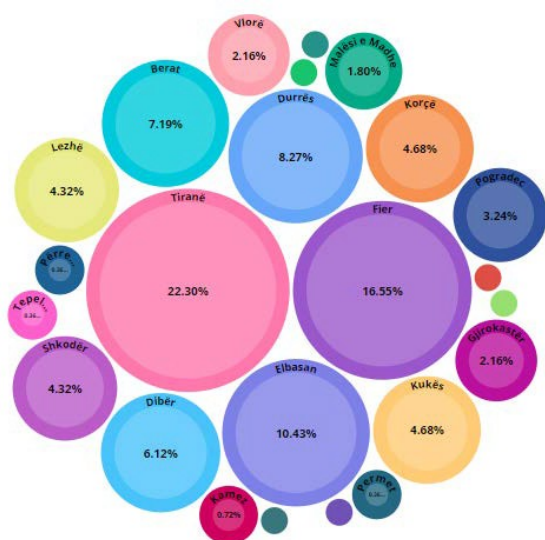
**Table 3.** "Have you participated in meetings of an electoral campaign nature for these local elections (e.g., meetings with political parties and their candidates, etc.), before April 13, based on your employment?"

Employment	Yes
Unemployed	15.11%
Self employed	13.67%
In a state-run institution	35.97%
In a private entity	23.74%

<sup>4</sup> Article 77 of the Electoral Code states: 'Election Campaign and Silence Period': The election campaign commences 30 days before the election date and concludes 24 hours prior to the election date.

Not willing to answer	2.88%
Student/Volunteer	8.63%

**Figure 12.2.** If respondents have attended meetings related to electoral campaigns for the upcoming local elections (such as gatherings with political parties and their candidates) prior to April 13th, which municipality do they belong to.



Moreover, AHC evidenced that of the respondents who affirmed participation in meetings of an electoral nature, 22.3% of them are citizens of the municipality of Tirana, followed by 16.55% who belong to the municipality of Fier, followed by the municipality of Elbasan with 10.43% of the respondents, and Durrës municipality where 8.27% claimed to have participated in electoral activities.

**Figure 13.** Are public administration employees required to engage in the election campaign for the upcoming local elections?



AHC, mindful of the prohibitions outlined in the legislation regarding the utilization of human resources for electoral purposes by public bodies, inquired of respondents employed in the state administration whether they were compelled to participate in the election campaign for the May 14, 2023 elections. Approximately 57.5% of the respondents affirmed that they were not coerced into such actions. Meanwhile, 27.3% of the respondents claimed they were forced to participate in the election campaign, of which:

- i. 9.5% of respondents affirmed such occurrences during working hours, in violation of Article 91, point 2;
- ii. 17.8% of them affirmed that this happened outside of working hours, falling within the scope of Article 328/a, paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code. The Electoral Code prohibits the participation of public administration employees even in electoral meetings outside working hours when participation is guaranteed due to a promise or offer of benefits to public employees, or as a result of pressure exerted on them for this purpose.

About 15.2% of respondents declined answering this question.

**Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to municipalities where public administration employees were forced or not to participate in the election campaign.**

Municipality	I have not been forced to	Not willing to answer	Yes, I was forced to during working hours	Yes, I was forced however not during working hours
Berat	53.85%	7.69%	0.00%	38.46%
Dibër	60.71%	7.14%	7.14%	25.00%

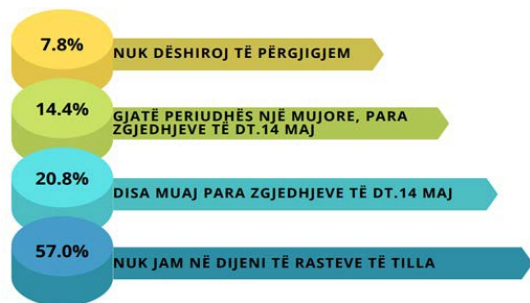
Durrës	46.51%	11.63%	0.00%	41.86%
Elbasan	60.87%	30.43%	0.00%	8.70%
Fier	64.20%	27.16%	2.47%	6.17%
Gjirokastrë	66.67%	6.67%	0.00%	26.67%
Kamzë	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Korçë	86.67%	6.67%	3.33%	3.33%
Kukës	80.00%	6.67%	0.00%	13.33%
Lezhë	58.82%	17.65%	11.76%	11.76%
Malësi e Madhe	50.00%	8.33%	33.33%	8.33%
Pogradec	26.32%	21.05%	26.32%	26.32%
Shkodër	18.18%	18.18%	18.18%	45.45%
Tiranë	70.59%	11.76%	7.84%	9.80%
Vlorë	26.19%	2.38%	42.86%	28.57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>57.48%</b>	<b>15.19%</b>	<b>9.58%</b>	<b>17.76%</b>

In the municipality of Vlora, individuals employed in public administration who admitted to being compelled to participate in the election campaign during working hours represent almost 42.86% of the respondents in this municipality. Following closely is the municipality of Malësi e Madhe, with 33.33% of respondents. Pogradec accounts for 26.32%, and Shkodra 18.18%. Meanwhile, concerning respondents forced to participate in the election campaign outside of working hours, the highest percentages are recorded in Shkodër Municipality (45.45%), followed by Durrës Municipality (41.86%), Berat (38.46%), Gjirokastrë (26.67%), Pogradec (26.32%), and Dibër (25%).

According to the prohibitive provisions of the Electoral Code, during the election campaign, actions such as hiring, dismissal, release, movement, and transfer to office in public institutions or entities are prohibited, except in legitimate cases. From piloting this questionnaire in the field before its official launch, it was found that employment in public institutions is perceived as one

of the methods used to secure votes for parties. Subsequently, after the initial question, the AHC asked respondents if they were aware of employment in the public administration being utilized as a means to influence the outcome of the May 14 local elections.

**Figure 14.** If you are aware of the employments carried out in the state or municipality where you live, to influence the outcome of these elections, when did they take place:



As indicated in Figure 14, over half of the respondents, approximately 57%, stated that they were not aware of such occurrences. However, it is concerning that about 35.2% of the respondents claimed awareness of such employments during the period of one month or several months before the elections on May 14, 2023. Additionally, 7.8% of the respondents, equivalent to 85 individuals, declined to provide an answer to this question.

In a comparative analysis of respondents claiming awareness of employment in state or local public institutions across different periods and municipalities surveyed, the following observations are noted: In Tirana, 24.36% of respondents claimed awareness of employment occurring during the one-month period before the elections on May 14, during the election campaign. This is followed by Durrës municipality, with 22.44% of respondents. Regarding knowledge of employment a few months before the May 2023 elections, Tirana again ranks first with 19.47% of respondents affirming such occurrences. Following Tirana, 13.27% of respondents in Elbasan and 10.62% of respondents in Fier claimed awareness. Korça municipality has the lowest number of respondents affirming such occurrences, with only 1.77% claiming knowledge of employment a few months before the elections and merely 1.28% aware of employment during the one-month election period.

**Table 5.** If you are aware of the employments carried out in the state or in the Municipality where you live, to influence the outcome of these elections, when they took place - According to the municipalities.

Municipality	Several months prior to elections of May 14	During a month period before elections of May 14
Berat	7.96%	4.49%
Dibër	1.33%	4.49%

Durrës	7.52%	22.44%
Elbasan	13.27%	7.69%
Fier	10.62%	3.85%
Gjirokastrë	2.21%	0.00%
Kamzë	0.44%	0.00%
Korçë	1.77%	1.28%
Kukës	3.10%	1.28%
Lezhë	3.10%	5.13%
Malësi e Madhe	5.31%	5.13%
Pogradec	6.19%	3.85%
Shkodër	6.64%	8.33%
Tiranë	19.47%	24.36%
Vlorë	9.73%	6.41%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

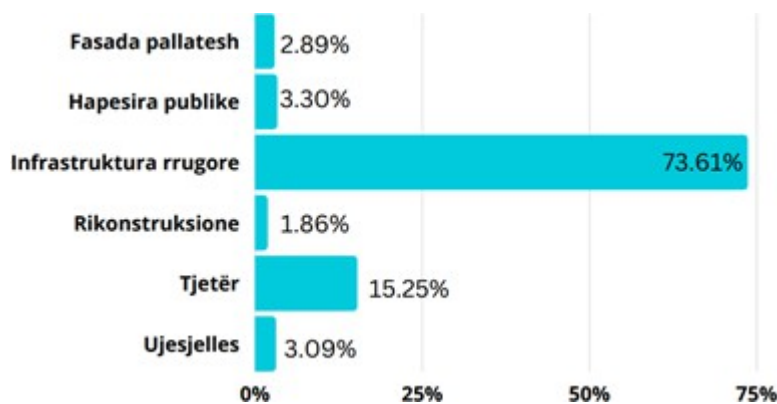
A phenomenon frequently observed in past election processes is the implementation of various investments in public services in the period leading up to the election date. Typically, such investments are undertaken to shape public perception regarding improvements in public services, with the aim of directly or indirectly influencing the election outcome. In local elections, this phenomenon holds even greater significance, as these investments directly impact citizens and their perceptions, influencing their choice of mayoral candidates in their municipalities. Therefore, AHC asked respondents whether they had noticed or were aware of improvements in public services occurring from January until just before the elections on May 14 of this year.

**Figure 15.1.** ‘Are you aware of any improvements made in road infrastructure, water supply, public green spaces, pedestrian areas, or in institutions where public services are provided (such as hospitals, schools, etc.), from January of this year until just before the elections on May 14th?’



Based on the survey data, over half of the respondents, or 57.9%, assert that there have been enhancements in road infrastructure, water supply, public green spaces, pedestrian facilities, or in the delivery of public services (such as hospitals, schools, etc.), from January up to the elections on May 14. This is in contrast to 42.1% of respondents who claimed to be unaware of such improvements.

**Figure 15.2.** If the answer to the above question is yes, specify in what direction the improvements were made:



AHC was also interested as to in which direction voters have noticed improvements in public services. Investments in road infrastructure, facades of buildings, reconstructions of public buildings, etc. are more visible and more tangible by citizens, so a tendency of public bodies to make such investments in order to influence the voters in the exercise of this their right is noticed.

Among the respondents who indicated awareness of the improvements, a significant majority, comprising 73.61%, highlighted that the enhanced services and investments primarily revolve around the road infrastructure. According to their responses, these improvements entail activities such as road paving, the establishment of bicycle lanes, installation of street lighting, marking white lines, and more. Furthermore, approximately 8% of respondents also noted investments in the renovation of building facades, enhancement of public spaces, and various reconstruction projects.

The respondents made references to reconstructions of public edifices, such as local theaters or cinemas, the establishment of green areas, thermal insulation upgrades for buildings,

enhancements to exterior facades, painting, and refurbishment of schools, as well as investments in school heating systems, among others. Regarding other service improvements, affirmed by 15.25% of respondents, investments were noted in city cleanliness initiatives or the initiation of new projects that were ceased after the elections.<sup>5</sup> 3% of the respondents also affirmed improvement in water supply and sewerage, evidencing new investments in this direction before the elections.

During the pre-election period, citizens have observed a phenomenon involving the suspension and subsequent acceleration of investment projects' completion. Many citizens have remarked that these projects could have been finished earlier than the pre-election period. For instance, some residents have highlighted the sudden acceleration in completing the sidewalk construction in the Astir neighborhood of Tirana, which had been ongoing for over a year before the pre-election period.

Although Article 91, point 4 of the Electoral Code has been interpreted as a restriction applicable to parliamentary elections rather than local government elections, voters perceive an influence stemming from salary increases or promises thereof for various employee categories or retirement pensions.

Concerning the timeline of improvements in public services, citizens assert that such investments began following the announcement of the election date in 2022, with a noticeable increase from January 2023. This trend peaked in the period between April and May, persisting until a few days before the May 14, 2023, election day.

**Table 6:** Awareness of Improvements in Road Infrastructure, Water Supply, Public Green Spaces, Pedestrian Facilities, or Public Service Institutions (e.g., hospitals, schools, etc.) from January of the current year until just prior to the May 14 elections, categorized by municipalities.

Municipality	No	Yes
Berat	30.43%	69.57%
Dibër	45.10%	54.90%

<sup>5</sup> For example, the opening of sewers for the improvement of infrastructure and the stoppage of works after the announcement of the election results.

<sup>6</sup> From four months prior to the election date until the **formation of the new government after the elections**, it is prohibited to propose, approve, or enact legal or sub-legal acts that grant benefits to specific population groups. These measures include actions such as salary increases, pension adjustments, economic or social support programs, tax reductions or abolitions, the introduction of fiscal amnesties, privatization or allocation of assets, rewards, etc. However, exceptions can be made in cases where the proposal is necessitated by a state of natural disaster.



Durrës	45.45%	54.55%
Elbasan	39.22%	60.78%
Fier	65.60%	34.40%
Gjirokastrë	72.73%	27.27%
Kamzë	20.00%	80.00%
Korçë	43.48%	56.52%
Kukës	10.81%	89.19%
Lezhë	20.41%	79.59%
Malësi e Madhe	41.46%	58.54%
Pogradec	55.56%	44.44%
Shkodër	15.91%	84.09%
Tiranë	36.04%	63.96%
Vlorë	61.19%	38.81%
<b>Total</b>	<b>42.13%</b>	<b>57.87%</b>

In a comparative analysis across municipalities, it becomes apparent that the majority of respondents in certain cities affirm awareness of new investments during the period preceding the elections. Leading in this regard is the municipality of Kukës, where 89.19% of respondents acknowledge such a phenomenon. Following closely are the municipalities of Shkodër (84.09%), Kamza (80%), and Lezha (79.59%). Conversely, among the municipalities where this phenomenon is less pronounced, the municipality of Gjirokastrë stands out, with 72.73% of respondents indicating a lack of knowledge regarding such investments. This is followed by the municipalities of Fier (65.6%), Vlora (61.19%), and Pogradec (55%).

**Figure 16.** Are you aware of the influence of educational administration staff (Local Education Office employees, teachers, lecturers, etc.) on young people (pupils/students) to vote for a certain political subject, or to influence parents / their relatives, within the local government elections of May 14?



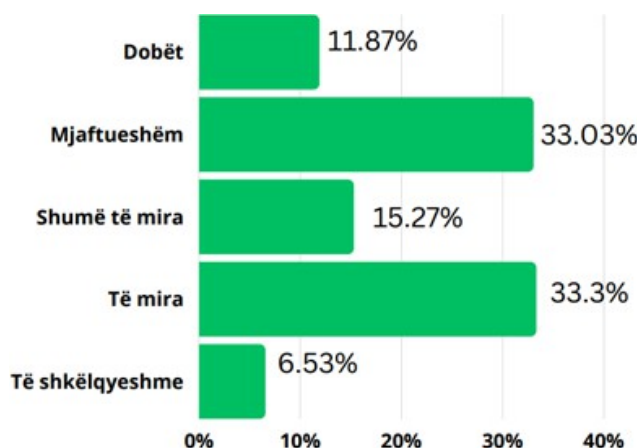
Our Electoral Code also includes provisions for safeguarding students and preventing their exploitation during election campaigns, penalizing coercion and organization during school hours, promising or providing benefits, and exerting pressure on them. The Central Election Commission (CEC) asked respondents if they were aware of potential influences exerted by educational administration staff on students or their parents to vote for a particular candidate in the May 14, 2023 elections. The data reveals that approximately 79.3% of respondents denied such influence. However, statistics indicate that nearly 20.7% of them, or a surprising 1 in 5 respondents, admitted to being aware of such occurrences.

## 5. DENUNCIATIONS AND VOTERS' TRUST IN STATE INSTITUTIONS

Denunciation by citizens is provided for in Article 123/3 of the Electoral Code, which provides that *'Any person who becomes aware of facts or circumstances, which may constitute a violation of legal provisions of an administrative or criminal nature in the field of elections, has the right to inform the CEC directly.'* Paragraph no. 2 of Article 123/3 of the Electoral Code stipulates that *'The rights and interests of persons who report under point 1 of this article are automatically protected in a reliable, effective and appropriate manner according to the standards provided for in the legislation in force for reporting and protection of whistleblowers.'*

The CEC, as the governing body in charge of approving the whistleblower reporting model, aims to streamline the information submission process. Drawing on the survey data, the AHC assesses that the CEC should embark on initiatives to enhance public awareness regarding the prohibitions stipulated in electoral legislation and the CEC's responsibilities in enforcing them. This effort would likely lead to an uptick in whistleblower reports and subsequent sanctions by the CEC, contingent upon impartial and thorough administrative investigations into violators. To achieve this, it is imperative for the CEC to regularly disseminate both qualitative and quantitative information to the public. This includes details about the number of reports received, their nature, outcomes of administrative investigations, and resultant decisions. Such transparency will bolster public trust in the reporting mechanism.

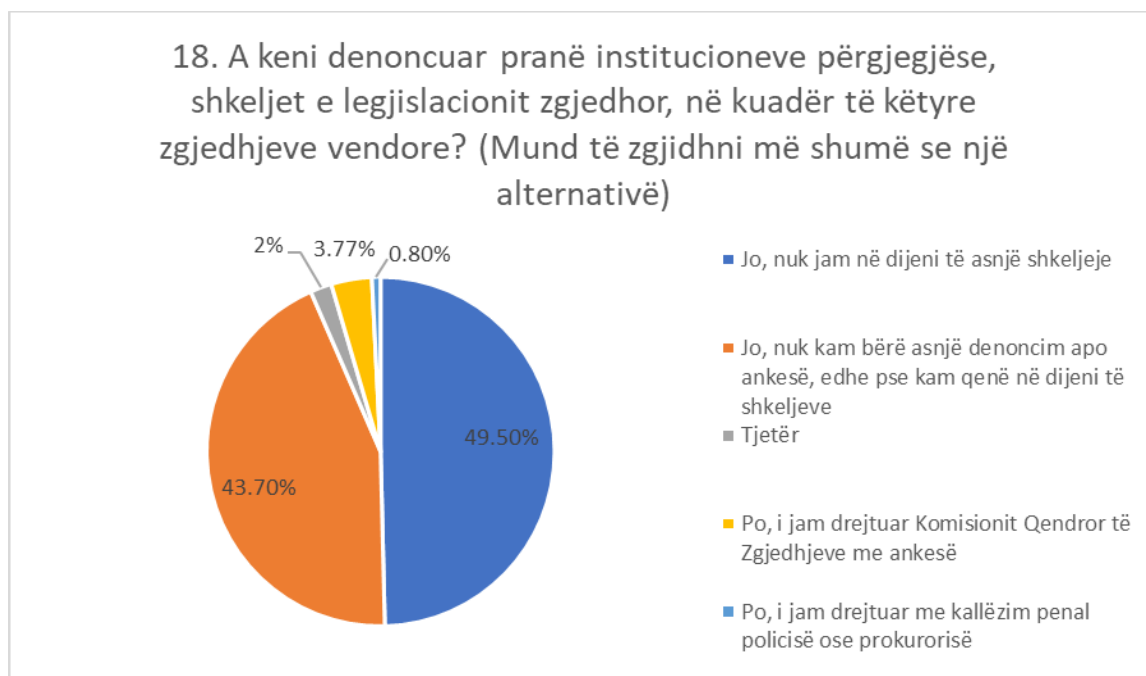
**Figure 17.** How would you rate your knowledge of the violations provided for by the Electoral Code and electoral legislation?



AHC inquired about respondents' familiarity with violations outlined in electoral legislation. The findings from this inquiry align with those previously obtained by AHC, which assessed respondents' awareness of electoral legislation provisions. Consequently, it appears that a majority of respondents possess knowledge regarding election-related violations. Approximately 33.3% of respondents believe they have a strong understanding of such violations, followed by 33.03% who consider their understanding to be sufficient, and 21.8% who claim to have very good or excellent knowledge. Only 11.87% of respondents admit to having poor knowledge of electoral legislation violations. It is important to note that these results are based on subjective self-assessment and may be influenced by respondents' biases.

Despite the generally positive self-assessment of its effectiveness, AHC assesses that citizens' familiarity with legislation remains relatively low. This assertion is partially supported by the analysis of cross-sectional survey data, which reveals that only a small fraction of citizens report observed violations. Figure 18 illustrates that 49.5% of respondents stated they did not report violations because they were unaware of any infractions. However, a significant portion, approximately 43.7% of respondents, admitted that even though they were aware of violations, they chose not to report them, a trend deemed deeply concerning by the AHC. The data indicates that merely 4.57% of respondents reported electoral violations either to the Central Election Commission through a complaint or to law enforcement through a criminal report.

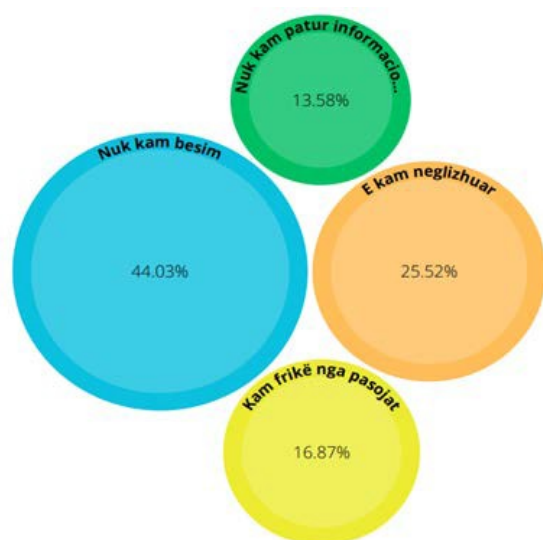
**Figure 18.** Have you reported any violations of electoral legislation to the relevant authorities during these local elections??



AHC interviewed respondents<sup>7</sup> regarding the factors hindering or constraining them from lodging complaints or denunciations with the appropriate institutions. In the analysis of the data obtained from the question below, the graph in figure no. 19 reveals that the primary reasons preventing citizens from reporting are lack of trust, neglect of the situation, fear of consequences, and lack of information.

**Figure 19.** If you witnessed a crime related to these local elections and did not complain to the institutions, why is this happening?

<sup>7</sup> The category that had not filed a report even though they were aware of the violations.



Among these reasons, 44.03% of the respondents express a lack of sufficient trust in institutions to handle their complaints or denunciations regarding electoral violations or crimes fairly and take appropriate measures against the perpetrators. Nearly one in four respondents admits to being indifferent to such events, leading them to neglect reporting them. Meanwhile, approximately 16.87% of respondents fear potential consequences or retaliation, either directed towards them or their family members, from entities such as employers, public institutions, or criminal organizations, etc. AHC regards citizen education on the culture of denunciation as crucial, along with the implementation of effective measures by incumbent institutions to punish lawbreakers, aiming to enhance public trust in these institutions.

**Table 7. Distribution of respondents by employment and responses above.**

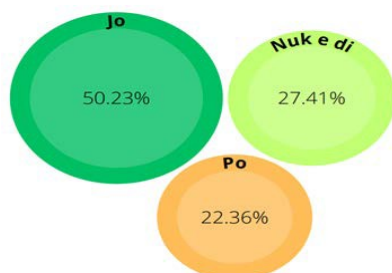
Employment	I neglected it	I am afraid of the resulting repercussions (I or my family members may get fired, I may be pressured by political parties or people involved in crime, etc.)	I do not believe that the institutions will take appropriate actions, in accordance with the law	I had no information where to turn
Unemployed	31.03%	10.34%	41.38%	17.24%
Self employed	21.62%	18.02%	45.05%	15.32%
In a state institution	23.97%	25.62%	38.02%	12.40%

In a private entity	22.22%	14.98%	52.17%	10.63%
I do not wish to answer	25.58%	13.95%	46.51%	13.95%
Student/Volunteer	34.72%	18.06%	31.94%	15.28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25.52%</b>	<b>16.87%</b>	<b>44.03%</b>	<b>13.58%</b>

In a comparative analysis of respondents' employment status and the reasons for not reporting election violations or crimes, it emerges that lack of trust in institutions is the primary reason across all categories of employment. Of particular concern is the observation that among various employment sectors, individuals employed in state institutions exhibit the highest percentage of fear regarding potential consequences from denunciation. This statistic underscores a prevalent perception of arbitrary actions by state entities and a perceived lack of effective protection for individuals reporting in accordance with the law.

AHC also inquired about the respondents' evaluation of the Prosecution body's performance. According to the survey data depicted in the figure below, 50.23% of respondents, or one in two people, believe that the Prosecutor's Office does not promptly and impartially investigate election crimes. This finding echoes the previous observations regarding citizens' lack of confidence in institutions fulfilling their legal duties. Additionally, 27.41% of respondents state that they are unsure whether the Prosecution investigates electoral crimes fairly, contrasting with 22.36% who positively assess the Prosecution body's activity in promptly and impartially investigating crimes. AHC interprets these statistics as concerning, indicating a significant portion of the electorate's lack of trust in the prosecution system, (despite its division of competence between ordinary jurisdiction and SPAK for investigating election crimes).

**Figure 20.** Do you think that the Prosecutor's Office investigates electoral crimes promptly and impartially?



**Table 8. The approach of the respondents pertaining the activity of the Prosecutor's Office according to the municipalities where they vote.**

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>I do not know</b>
Berat	76.09%	6.52%	17.39%
Dibër	29.41%	15.69%	54.90%
Durrës	65.45%	16.36%	18.18%
Elbasan	58.82%	20.59%	20.59%
Fier	36.00%	43.20%	20.80%
Gjirokastër	54.55%	4.55%	40.91%
Kamzë	40.00%	40.00%	20.00%
Korçë	17.39%	34.78%	47.83%
Kukës	35.14%	45.95%	18.92%
Lezhë	73.47%	12.24%	14.29%
Malësi e Madhe	48.78%	21.95%	29.27%
Pogradec	53.33%	13.33%	33.33%
Shkodër	79.55%	0.00%	20.45%
Tiranë	46.29%	21.91%	31.80%
Vlorë	46.27%	22.39%	31.34%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50.23%</b>	<b>22.36%</b>	<b>27.41%</b>

From the data in Table No. 8, it is evident that individuals who lack confidence in the prompt and impartial investigation of election crimes are predominantly concentrated in the cities of Shkodra (79.55%), Berat (76.09%), Lezha (73.49%), Durrës (65.45%), Gjirokastra (54.55%), and Pogradec (53.33%). Conversely, the majority of respondents who express trust in the Prosecutor's Office's investigative capabilities are located in Kukës (45.95%), Fier (43.20%), and Kamza (40%).

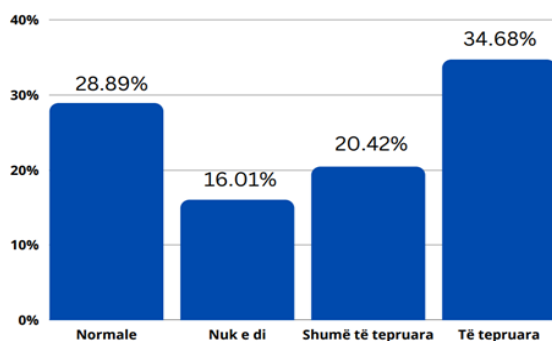
## 6. SUSPICIOUS FINANCING OF ELECTION SUBJECTS FOR THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN (POLITICAL PARTIES)

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The financing sources of electoral entities for their campaigns have frequently been a subject of public scrutiny, primarily due to concerns over the perceived unjustifiable high expenditures of political parties during campaigns and the opacity or potential illegality of their funding sources. The Electoral Code delineates several categories of funding sources for political parties. Article 86 of the Electoral Code specifies the following as sources of campaign financing for electoral entities: a) *Funds allocated in advance from the State Budget to political parties registered as electoral entities*; b) *Legitimate income generated by the electoral entity in accordance with the law*; c) *Contributions to the electoral entity and its candidates, whether in monetary form, goods, or services, as stipulated in Article 92/1 of this law*; d) *Loans or credits obtained by political parties or their candidates in compliance with legal provisions*.

AHC first asked the respondents how they considered the expenses that the political parties have made for the election campaign for the local elections of May 14, 2023.

**Figure 21.** How will you evaluate the expenses that the political parties have made for the local elections on May 14, 2023?

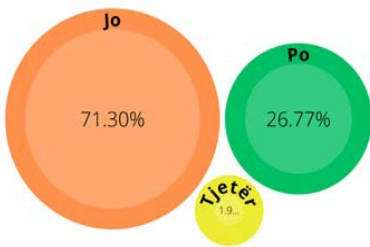


According to the survey data, a significant majority of respondents, approximately 55.1%, perceive campaign expenditures as excessive or even very excessive. About 28.89% of respondents regard these expenses as normal, while 16.01% of respondents admitted to lacking knowledge on the matter.

Moreover, AHC surveyed respondents to gauge their awareness of potentially questionable financing of political parties or their candidates. The majority, approximately 71.3% of respondents, indicated that they were unaware of any illegal financing practices. However, 26.77% or 291 respondents stated that they were indeed aware of the existence of illegal or suspicious financing in political campaigns. Additionally, around 1.9% of respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the legality of campaign financing. They cited doubts arising from the high costs of campaign materials and a perceived lack of transparency on the part of political parties.

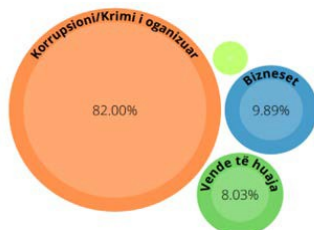


**Figure 22.1.** Are you aware of any illegal (suspicious) financing of political parties and their candidates for the local government elections on May 14?



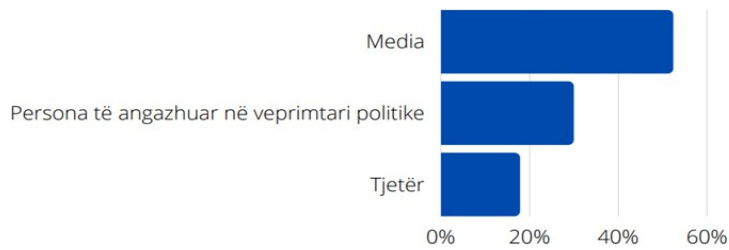
The 291 respondents who indicated awareness of illegal or suspicious financing, were further questioned about the sources of such financing for political parties. The results show that a significant majority, comprising 82% of respondents, identified corruption and organized crime as the primary sources of illegal financing. Following this, 9.89% of respondents pointed to businesses as the source of financing, while a smaller percentage, approximately 7%, expressed concerns about particularly citing Russia financing certain electoral subjects to manipulate elections.

**Figure 22.2.** Should your response to the preceding question be affirmative, kindly elucidate the rationale behind your suspicion regarding these financial transactions, including their origins such as foreign entities, businesses, organized crime, corruption, etc.



The respondents have provided various reasons for deeming the financing suspicious or opaque, along with their respective sources. These reasons include: undeclared funds, surpassing allocated budgets, lack of transparency from electoral entities, unjustifiably high amounts relative to the national standard of living generated by potential involvement in vote-buying schemes, and media reports linking political parties or candidates to criminal entities.

**Figure 22.3.** If you are aware of these dubious/illegal funding, where did you obtain this information from?



Based on the public's perception of questionable or illicit financing of election campaigns, AHC asked respondents regarding the origin of the information shaping this perception. Data indicates that a majority of respondents cite media reports as their primary source. In an open-ended question allowing respondents to list various sources, respondents also mentioned sources associated with individuals involved in political activities, such as party members or sympathizers. Additionally, surveyed voters aware of such information identified their social networks, family or friends, and in rare instances, direct involvement in election campaigns where they are more likely exposed to such information, as additional sources.

## **APPENDIX A: Questionnaire format**

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### **Questionnaire**

#### **To gather voters' perceptions regarding undue influences in the May 14, 2023 elections for local government bodies.**

Introduction of the Questionnaire (to inform citizens about the nature of unfair influences)

Unfair influences or actions can manifest both externally and internally, with the aim of distorting the outcomes of the electoral process, undermining the freedom and equality of the vote, and unfairly or dishonestly favoring certain political entities or their candidates.

External influences may stem from states characterized by dictatorial or autocratic regimes, which seek to destabilize democratic processes in the target state.

Internal influences may arise from organized crime seeking political support, often linked to activities such as impunity, money laundering, tender rigging, and procurement irregularities. This influence can result in citizens feeling pressured to vote for a particular political party, with material goods or money offered in exchange for votes, a practice commonly referred to as vote-buying.

For the pursuit of financial interests and advantages in both public and private partnerships, tenders, procurements, and the establishment of fiscal facilities, businesses can exert significant influence by providing financial support to candidates or political parties.

Furthermore, another form of exerting unfair influence involves pressuring public administration officials and their family members to engage in political activities and vote for the incumbent political party. Promises may also be made to voters, guaranteeing employment in the public administration if they support a particular political party.

### **SECTION 1: GENERAL KNOWLEDGE**

1. How do you rate your knowledge of electoral legislation?

- a. Excellent
- b. Very good
- c. Good
- d. Sufficient
- e. Poor

2. Do you think that foreign countries unfairly interfere in the electoral processes in the Republic of Albania?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I do not know

3. If so, which of the following states do you think unfairly influence the elections in our country? (You may select more than 1 alternative)

- a. China
- b. Iran
- c. Russia
- d. Other

4. Which of the following factors do you think unfairly affects the result of the local elections on May 14, 2023? (You can select more than 1 alternative)

- a. Albanian organized crime
- b. International organized crime
- c. Political parties
- d. State institutions
- e. International organizations
- f. Civil society organizations
- g. Third-party countries
- h. Other

## **SECTION 2: VOTE BUYING**

5. Have you been offered money, material goods or other promises in exchange for voting for the local government elections on May 14, 2023?

- a. Yes
- b. No

c. I prefer not to answer

6. Are you aware of any instances where money, material goods, or other promises have been offered to individuals in your family or social circle in exchange for their votes in the local government elections on May 14?

a. Yes

b. No

7. If the answer to question 5 or 6 is affirmative, to your knowledge, what were the most commonly used tools or methods for buying and selling votes in the local government elections on May 14? (You may select up to two options)

a. Sums of money in cash

b. Material goods

c. Workplace for you or your family members

d. Threats from persons involved in criminal activity

e. Pressures related to retention of the job.

f. Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

8. If the answer to question 5 or 6 is affirmative, in which of the following subcategories are people who contacted you to buy your vote included (up to two alternatives can be selected):

a. Patronageist (persons appointed by a political party in a given area to identify the political beliefs of voters and to lobby in favor of the political party)

b. Public Administration Employees

c. Candidates for Mayor or Member of Municipal Councils

d. Businesspeople

e. Persons known to be involved in criminal activity

f. Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_)

9. Have you been asked to take a photo of your vote while inside the voting booth during the local elections on May 14, as proof in exchange of receiving material goods or promises for your vote?

a. Yes

b. No

c. I do not wish to answer

### **SECTION 3: MISUSE OF PUBLIC ASSETS**

10. Were you involved in any meetings related to the electoral campaign prior to April 13th? This could include discussions on campaign promises for a second term, presentations of city plans, or similar topics pertinent to the upcoming local government elections on May 14th?

- a. Yes (please specify the electoral entity that conducted the meetings, the location where it took place, and the approximate period during which it occurred)
- b. No, I did not take part in any
- c. I do not wish to answer

11. If you work in public administration, were you required to take part in the electoral campaign for the upcoming local government elections on May 14th?

- a. Yes, I was required during working hours.
- b. Yes, I was required to do so, but outside of working hours.
- c. No, I was not required to.
- d. I am not employed in public administration.
- e. I prefer not to answer.

12. If you are aware of recently filled positions in institutions or public entities of your Municipality, made with the intention to influence the local government elections on May 14th, when did these appointments occur?

- a. Several months before the May 14<sup>th</sup> elections.
- b. Within the one-month period preceding the elections on May 14.
- c. Before January 2023.
- d. I am not aware of any such occurrences.

13. Have you observed any potential improvements made to road infrastructure, water supply systems, public green spaces, pedestrian amenities, or facilities providing public services (such as hospitals, health centers, schools, etc.) before the elections on May 14th?

- a. Yes (specify in which regard and approximately in which month)
- b. No

14. Have you noticed any efforts by educational administration personnel (such as Regional Education Office staff, teachers, lecturers, etc.) to influence young people (students/pupils) to support a particular political party, or to influence their parents or relatives, in the context of the local government elections on May 14th?

- a. Yes
- b. No

#### SECTION 4: COMPLAINTS AND VOTERS' TRUST IN STATE'S INSTITUTIONS

15. How would you rate your knowledge of the Electoral Code?

- a. Excellent
- b. Very good
- c. Good
- d. Sufficient
- e. Poor

16. How would you rate your knowledge of the violations provided for by the Electoral Code and electoral legislation?

- a. Excellent
- b. Very good
- c. Good
- d. Sufficient
- e. Poor

17. Have you reported any violations of electoral laws to the appropriate authorities regarding the local elections on May 14th?

- a. Yes, I lodged a complaint within the Central Election Commission.
- b. Yes, I filed a criminal complaint with the police or prosecutor's office.
- c. No, I did not report or file any complaints, despite being aware of the violations.
- d. No, I am not aware of any violations.

18. If you witnessed a crime related to the local elections on May 14th but chose not to report it to the institutions mentioned earlier, what was your reason for not doing so?

- a. I was unaware of where to report.
- b. I feared potential repercussions, such as termination of employment for myself or my family, or pressure from political parties or individuals involved in criminal activities.
- c. I lack confidence in the institutions to take suitable actions in accordance with the law.
- d. I simply neglected to take action.

19. Do you believe that the Prosecutor's Office actively, promptly, and impartially investigates electoral crimes proactively, without waiting for complaints?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. I do not know

## **SECTION 5: SUSPICIOUS FINANCING OF ELECTORAL SUBJECTS FOR THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN (POLITICAL PARTIES)**

20. Have you observed any instances of illegal or suspicious financing of electoral entities for the local government elections on May 14th?

- a. Yes (specify the reason why you think these financings are suspicious and the source of these financings, e.g. from foreign countries, businesses, organized crime, corruption, etc.)
- b. No

21. If you are aware of these financings, where did you get this information?

- a. Media
- b. Persons engaged in political activity (members, sympathizers, etc.)
- c. Other (specify)

22. How do you think it can be contributed to the improvement of the transparency of the campaign financing of political parties and to the prevention of dubious or illegal financing of their activity (More than one alternative can be selected)?

- a. Sources and amounts of campaign funding to be publicly reported by each political party, periodically, throughout the election campaign period.
- b. The Electoral Code should provide that the entities receive funding only from the state budget and therefore not be financed by private entities.
- c. Citizens should be made aware and encouraged to report to the CEC (even anonymously) cases of questionable financing of electoral subjects.
- d. I don't have any suggestions
- e. Other (specify)

## **SECTION 6: GENERAL INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS**

23. Gender:

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Other

24. Age:



- a. 18–25 years old
- b. 26–35 years old
- c. 36–45 years old
- d. 46–55 years old
- e. 56–60 years old
- f. 61–64 years old
- g. Over 65 years old

25. Completed educational level:

- a. Elementary (grades 1-5)
- b. Lower Intermediate (Grades 6-9)
- c. Upper secondary (High school)
- d. Vocational training
- e. High
- f. Postgraduate degree
- g. Ph.D.

26. Employment

- a. In a state institution
- b. In private entity
- c. Self employed
- d. Unemployed
- e. Student/Volunteer