Audit of Political Engagement in Albania

2016

Opinion poll

TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

IDM

Institute for Democracy and Mediation
Instituti për Demokraci dhe Ndërmjetësim

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NDI NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

NED **National Endowment for Democracy** *Supporting freedom around the world*

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3

ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
IDM	Institute of Democracy and Mediation
MP	Member of the Parliament
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

CONTENTS

LIST OF GRAPHS

LIST OF TABLES

PREFACE

The "Audit of Political Engagement" is a baseline study conducted for the first time in Albania modelled on the Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement series in the United Kingdom. This study was conducted by the Institute of Democracy and Mediation with the support of the National Democratic Institute. It measures the "political pulse" of participants in the study and offers unique baseline findings across Albania related to politics and citizens' engagement in political processes, given that the degree of citizens' participation in democratic processes is an indicator of the health of a society.

The study aims to explore public attitudes towards a range of political engagement indicators that track knowledge of and interest in the political system; the degree of public action and participation in politics; and the public's sense of efficacy and satisfaction with institutions and processes. It provides a snapshot of public perceptions of, and engagement with, politics at a particular moment in time. A number of 'core' questions were asked enabling us to grasp the participants' responses for the relevant indicators. These indicators, as explained by the Hansard Society in the Audit of Political Engagement 12, are:

> "Interlocking areas that we know are vital facets, or 'building blocks' of political engagement. Given its multi-dimensional nature, the indicators we have chosen are not exhaustive. But in capturing aspects of public behavior, knowledge, opinions, attitudes and val-

ues towards politics they help us understand the drivers of political engagement and the relationships between them."[1]

Besides the core indicators of political engagement grouped around the areas of - knowledge and interest, participation, efficacy and satisfaction – a supplementary section of this study focused on perceptions of the Parliament and elected representatives, since a capable and effective national legislature is a foundational pillar of democratic governance. A detailed examination of demographic and sub-group differences in political engagement is employed across the study. The engagement levels of different genders, rural or urban areas, age groups, education backgrounds and employment status are presented and compared.

Chapter one sets the scene for the report and presents the aim and objectives of the study. It also describes briefly the methodology used to obtain the data.

Chapter two refers to the core indicators of political engagement, i.e., knowledge and interest, political action and participation, and efficacy and satisfaction.

- The first section focuses on the knowledge and interest of the participants, concentrating on the real and perceived knowledge, and interest in politics, local and central government, Parliament and MPs and the President. Levels

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1. Hansard Society (2015). Audit of Political Engagement 12: The 2015 report. London, UK: Ruth Fox and Joel Blackwell; p 10. See: http://www.auditofpoliticalengagement.org/assets/media/reports/Audit-of-Political-Engagement-12-2015.pdf, accessed on April 14 2016

of public knowledge and interest are explored, because they are known to be important factors to engagement given the strong correlation between familiarity and favorability. The more people know about an institution, service or process, the more positive they tend to be towards it and the more willing they may be to participate and get involved.

- The second section explores political engagement and participation at local and national level. Political engagement can be measured in terms of what people think, but also in terms of what they do. Therefore, the study looks at levels of public action and participation in the political process, capturing both formal and informal forms of engagement that require varying levels of time and commitment. It focuses on political or NGO/association membership and political party support. It also investigates the willingness to involve in decision making at a local or central level, certainty to vote, and what types of political action citizens might be prepared to undertake if they felt strongly about an issue, and the degree to which, although not yet actively engaged, enabling us to chart the gap between actual and potential engagement. Furthermore, it explores possible paths to improve political engagement.

- Building on the familiarity indicators, the third section looks at the public's favorability towards aspects of the political system through questions related to their sense of efficacy and satisfaction. The study explores the participants' satisfaction with the work of the current government, Parliament and opposition and the power they feel they have to influence decision-making at local and central level.

Chapter three focuses on public perceptions of Parliament as the core institution of our democracy. The study looks at the public's knowledge of Parliament, their perception of its importance and relevance, its effectiveness in performing its representative and oversight functions, and in engaging with and addressing the issues that matter to citizens. It also explores the perceptions of the elected representatives –both at the local and central level– their necessary qualities, and ways to improve their accountability. Thus, the relationship between elected representatives and citizens is also explored as it is the heart of representative democracy.

Chapter four presents the main findings of this baseline study.

Given that a similar Audit of Political Engagement survey has been conducted in Serbia since 2013, throughout the report, we made references to the specific questions for the sake of comparison.

The report concludes with a series of appendices. Appendix A contains background theoretical information on political engagement gathered through a literature review of relevant studies in Albania and beyond. Appendix B describes the methodology used to collect the data for this study. Appendix C refers to the data on the sample distribution according to the areas where the study was conducted. Appendix D contains the questionnaire used for the survey.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a baseline Audit of Political Engagement in Albania. Given that the degree of citizens' engagement in democratic processes is an indicator of the health of a society, the study captures the findings from a poll across Albania on a range of political engagement indicators, serving as a reference for future researches and surveys. It also takes an in-depth look at participants' attitudes and perceptions of the Parliament and elected representatives. What follows is a summary of key findings. The survey was conducted from February 8 to 26, 2016, while the post-survey focus groups were done during mid March.

Knowledge and Interest

- While participants have shown enough knowledge about general politics in Albania, deeper knowledge on the institutions and processes is often perceived as insufficient.

- Participants believe they know more about 'politics' and 'local self-government,' and the least about the role of the President and MPs. Slightly more than half of participants say to know 'a little' or 'nothing at all' about the government. More than half of participants reported to know 'a little' or 'nothing at all' about the parliament; Men and older participants, along with those with higher education, claimed to report they know more.

- The surveyed participants expressed highest interest in the work of local self-government. Participants were almost evenly split

between those who were 'very' or 'fairly interested' in politics and government and those who were 'not very interested' or 'not at all' in these topics. Almost 2 out of 3 of them stated they were little interested in the role of the MPs and that of the President. While younger participants showed less interest, men reported to have a greater interest in all the listed topics. Pairing the perceived knowledge and interest showed that the majority of the participants who reported to know 'a lot' or 'enough' also had greater interest in all issues.

- The three main sources of information on politics for the participants were: TV and radio (33.2%), printed press (20.5%) and friends and connections (17.9%). Younger participants, under 35 years of age, and women coming from urban areas preferred more online portals/sites of printed press as source of information over traditional media.

Political Engagement at National and Local Level

- The majority of the participants claimed they were not a political party member (75.4%) or a member of an NGO/association (89.4%).

- A considerable part of the participants thinks that political engagement is a political party engagement (44.1%); only 1 out of 5 participants believes one can politically engage without being part of a political party (21.9%).

- Two out of three participants claimed not to be supporters of any political party.

- One out of two participants said he/she would be willing to get involved in decision-making at local level and one out of three participants at the national level.

- One out of two participants would certainly vote if elections were to be held during the week the questionnaire was administered, 22.6% would probably or certainly not vote.

- The three most common actions that participants had conducted in the last 12 months included discussions about politics or a certain issue with other people (74.5%), contacting a local councilor or local municipal officer (35.7%) and volunteering in an activity in the local community (32%).

- Participants were readier and more willing to take actions if they felt strongly about an issue, where an increase in engagement is seen, particularly, in formal ways of participation such as 'taking an active part in a civic campaign or protest', 'seeking information from state organs' or 'participating in a meeting of the local council'.

- Most efforts undertaken by participants were at local level (44.6%) in comparison to 10.7% placed at central level.

- Participants who said that they have never taken any action listed the following reasons for their inaction: 'nobody listens to us' (39.2%), followed by 'politicians are just out there for themselves' (38.7%) and 'they don't care about people like us' (22.8%).

- The majority of the participants would be willing to engage for personal interests/benefits (80.9%), to support family and friends (87.5%) and for an interest they shared with other citizens or their community (82.3%).

- Only 65.9% of the participants expressed to be willing to engage for a cause they believe in but which does not relate to them personally.

- Participants stated that activities to contribute to changing the situation with which they were not satisfied included 'to draw media attention to the problem' (53.5%); 'to vote in elections' (50.7%); and 'to take part in organized citizens' pressure activities

on decision makers' (48.1%). Only 19.9% of respondents said they would join a political party as a way to change the current situation.

Efficacy and Satisfaction

- One out of two participants are dissatisfied with the current work of the Parliament (57.5%) and of the government (56.8%); two out of three of them are not satisfied with the work of opposition (69.3%).

- More than 1 out of 2 participants perceived they had no influence at all in decision making at their local area (58.7%) and more than 2 out of 3 at the country as a whole.

Perception about the Parliament and Elected Representatives

- The majority of the participants find that the Albanian Parliament is essential for our democracy (53.2%).

- A number of surveyed participants disagreed with the statements that the Parliament conducts its basic functions, namely: holds government accountable (42%), encourages public participation (45%), and debates and makes decisions about issues that matter to people (47.5%). Every other participant agrees that the Parliament is open to citizens to attend committee and plenary meetings (50%).

- Concerning the composition of the Albanian parliament: almost 2 out of 3 participants disagree that the Albanian Parliament is made up of respected representatives of the society that work in an ethical manner (65.4%) or that it has a fair representation of all groups of society (almost 60%). Every second participant (53%) disagrees that the Albanian Parliament is transparent in the way it works.

- More than 2 out of 3 participants (72.7%) reported that they did not think the elected representatives address either their or their families' interests.

- The most commonly reported desired qualities of an MP was to be honest and respon-

sible (59.7%), followed by 'having a good education' (48.8%) and 'by understanding what being poor means' or 'being close to the people and understanding their problems' (37%).

• Participants believed that providing conditions at local level for direct contact with MPs/Councilors on certain days (through MPs/municipalities' offices) (76.2%), obliging them to provide answers to citizens questions in a reasonable time (68.5%), and communicating with citizens via Facebook (51.3%) would increase accountability of MPs and local councilors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political information, political participation and political trust: these are the three components of the definition of "political engagement" according to Norris (2000).[2] The extent and depth of political and civic engagement of constituencies is considered of paramount importance for the health of democracy. While the existence of a "friendly" legal and institutional framework enabling civic/political engagement channels is a precondition, results largely depend on their active use and public trust.

"Political engagement can be measured in terms of what people think, but also in terms of what they do. Thus, when studying political engagement it is important to know the levels of public action and participation in the political process, capturing both formal and informal forms of engagement that require varying levels of time and commitment. Nevertheless, what people claim to have done in the last year -their actual engagement- is one dimension of political engagement, but hand, what activities they say they would be willing to do in the future if they felt strongly enough about an issue, can be a strong indicator of potential engagement".[3]

This study uses three baseline indicators modeled on Hansard Society's "Audit of political engagement", namely knowledge and interest; political action and participation; and

satisfaction and efficacy.[4] An added section to this study, as in Hansard Society's studies as well, are the perceptions of the Parliament as well as the willingness of participants to be involved nationally or locally. These studies provide a more thorough set of indicators that capture the different facets of political engagement. In their annual reports (of 2004 to 2015), they state that indicators of political engagement are core, interlocking areas that we know are vital facets, or 'building blocks' of political engagement. Given its multi-dimensional nature, the indicators are not exhaustive. But in capturing aspects of public behavior, knowledge, opinions, attitudes and values towards politics they help in understanding the drivers of political engagement and the relationships between them.[5]

The efforts to create a picture and bring evidence on political engagement in Albania are many; however, few of them address the complexity of political engagement and its different facets thoroughly. In order to address this gap, the Institute for Democracy and Mediation with the support of the National Democratic Institute conducted a national survey, building on the Hansard Society experience.

Aim and objectives of the study. The aim of this study is to gauge public opinion in Albania with regard to politics,[6] the political processes

2   Norris, P. (2000). *A virtuous circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press

3   Hansard Society (2015). *Audit of Political Engagement 12: the 2015 Report*. London, UK: Ruth Fox and Joel Blackwell

4   For detailed information see the Hansard Society website at: http://www.auditofpoliticalengagement.org/reports

5   Hansard Society (2015). Audit of political engagement: the 12th report. Retrieved from http://www. auditofpoliticalengagement.org/media/reports/Audit-of-Political-Engagement-12-2015.pdf accessed on April 2016

6   It should be noted that in the Albanian context politics are

and institutions, and, more broadly, health of democracy.

In pursuing its aim, this study provides a snap-shot of the public perceptions of politics as well as its engagement at a particular moment in time. Furthermore, it tries to develop a base-line to measure political engagement, focus-ing on a range of indicators modelled on the Hansard Society's Political Engagement Audit series (2004-2016) that have been chosen as key measures of political engagement. Finally, the study's objectives are:

- To present the participants' real and per-ceived knowledge of politics and interest in politics and political engagement;
- To determine the participants' political par-ticipation at a local and central level;
- To portray perceptions of efficacy and satisfaction, and the extent to which study's participants feel they have influence on decision making;
- To assess participants' perceptions of the Parliament and elected representatives;
- To provide a platform for discussion on what might be done in order to enhance citizens' engagement in politics in the future.

1.1 Methodology

The report is based on the survey conducted by IDM involving interviews with 1,538 partic-ipants over 18 years of age. Semi-structured interviews with actors from politics and civil society preceded the designing of the ques-tionnaire. Additionally, four focus groups with participants from rural and urban areas of diverse educational background, gender, and employment status served to explore the more relevant issues and validate the data. The study is designed around a set of indicators divided in four key categories: knowledge and interest, political engagement at national and local level, efficacy and satisfaction, and an additional category gauging participants' perception of Parliament and elected officials.

A quota sampling was used for the survey. Rural and urban areas and men/women were the two groups that had an equal share of participants in the survey. While the survey was conducted at 12 different regions across Albania, the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population. Indeed, they refer to the participants of the study.

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many times used interchangeably to understand only political party politics or politician related. However, in this study the term was explained to the interviewers and also it was explored more through some questions at the questionnaire.

2015: Year in Review

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
In Paris, at the biggest march of world solidarity against terrorism religious intolerance Albania gave a good example of religious harmony, with the presence of 4 different Albanian heads of different religions An increased number of citizens were arrested, after the government's "campaigns" against the stealing of lights (illegal connections and not paying), against violation of traffic rules or fiscal evasion. Albanian citizens started massive migration in searching for a place with a better employment to ensure a safer life.	Civil society activists and citizens protested against the construction of a 17-storeyed building at the Lake of Tirana The Albanian Parliament approved the establishment of the first ad hoc commission for justice. Civil society representatives protested against expired food products. In a roundtable on local government autonomy, local associations demanded a joint resolute and the adoption of the decentralization strategy to serve the citizens' interests and to improve service delivery.	International Conference on "Islam and Global Peace" was held with attendees including representatives of Muslim community, scholars, researchers, and officials. Residents of Marinze (Fier) protested against Bankers. As a symbol of protest, they poured their produced milk in front of the company's offices. They said Bankers caused contamination of all their agricultural products.	Two days after the adoption of the budget for year 2016, civil society reacted on grounds the budget was not consulted with them in advance. Education union asked the Central Government to sign the collective work contract so as to secure the job for 38,000 teachers. The Confederation of Education was partially against the testing of teachers planned to be conducted in May.	The ad hoc Commission for the Reform on Justice resumed consultations with all relevant stakeholders. On the occasion of the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia, a bike ride was organized by LGBTI community to raise awareness of citizens against homophobia in Tirana.	Local elections were held following the new territorial division. The total numbers of CSOs that involved in monitoring and observing the elections was higher than before. Second Pride March was held in Tirana with members of the LGBTI community and its supporters.

JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
In collaboration with the European Commission, the Ministry of Education and Sports conducted a roundtable to discuss about the new Law on Higher Education and Scientific Research. "For University" Movement organized protests against the Reform on Higher Education. Pension reform and its perception were topic of discussions in a conference held in Durres with various stakeholders and politicians.	Asylum seekers' organized return from Germany started.	A protest was organized against layoff of 200 people in "Kurum" Company. Students reacted against the Reform on Higher Education by shooting eggs to the MoES Secretary.	Roundtable organized on "Civil Society Actors and European Integration" Agricultural dealers from Korça and Devoll marched in front of the Parliament throwing rotten apples in protest of lack of policies to protect domestic products For the first time in its history, the Albanian National Football Team qualified for the 2016 UEFA European Championship.	The new law on taxes increased penalty fines by 10 times for businesses that do not issue tax receipt, triggering protests of small business owners and opposition parties. Some 198,625 Albanian submitted applications for US Green Card Lottery, the largest number to date, according to US State Department. "16 Days of Activism against Domestic Violence" started.	A 4-hour protest of the opposition coalition against the government concluded with burning down a bunker erected at the Ministry of Interior yard amid violent and tense reaction.

2. CORE INDICATORS

2.1 Knowledge and Interest

Whether people participate in politics or not may depend on their attitudes towards the institutions and/or processes and their knowledge of the system. For this reason, the study emphasized the importance of measuring the degree of participants' interest in politics and levels of self-reported knowledge.

2.1.1. Real Knowledge

Real knowledge was assessed through a set of six general questions about politics and different institutions, which also included recent information (i.e. who is the Minister of Justice, - at the time of the survey was being conducted, the Minister got replaced). The majority of the participants answered correctly to the questions on knowledge about different institutions, with the exception of the question on the number of municipalities. (Graph. 1)

Graph 1. Participants' information and knowledge

Right **Wrong**

	Local elections winning party	Parlamentary elections winning party	President	Minister of Justice	Number of municipalities	Head of the parlament
Right	94.4%	71.5%	79.6%	69.6%	23.1%	92.7%
Wrong	5.6%	28.5%	20.4%	30.4%	76.9%	7.3%
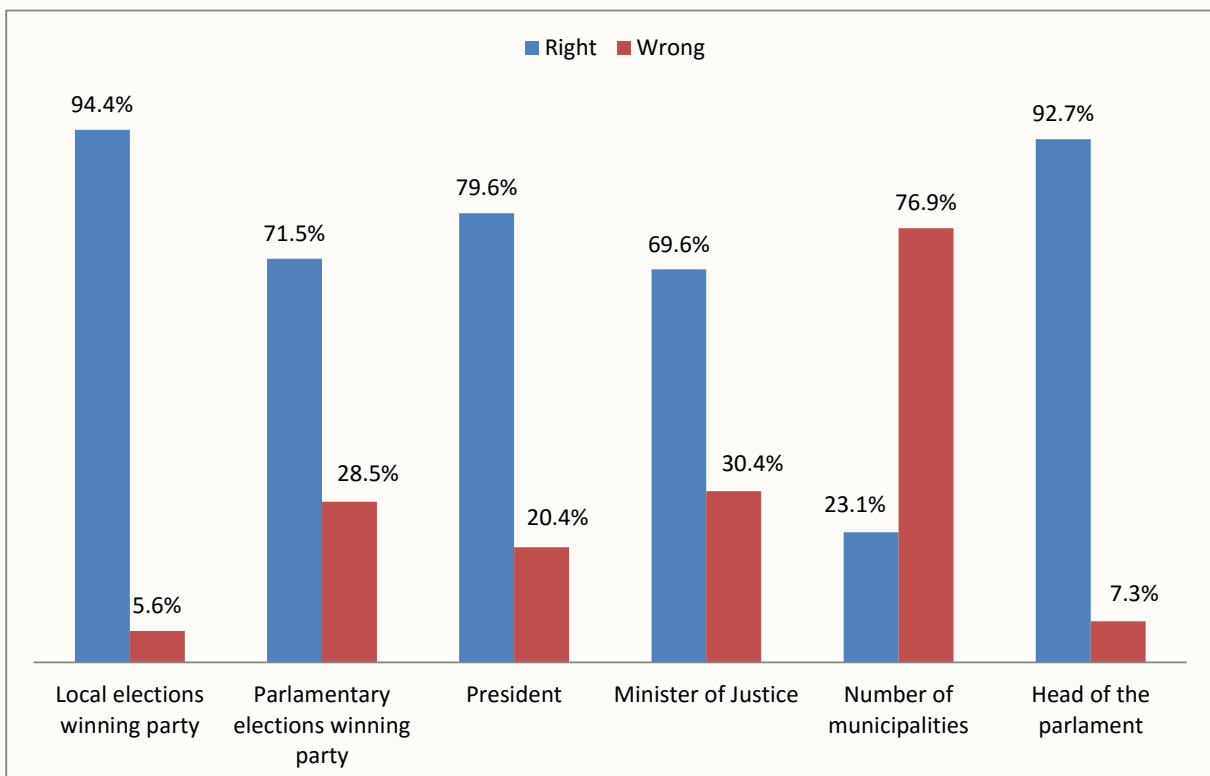
2.1.2. Perceived Knowledge

Besides "testing" the objective knowledge, participants were also invited to report how much they believed they knew about specific issues including: the role of the MPs, the role of the President, government, parliament, politics and local self-government. In terms of politics and local self-government, participants were split evenly between those who said to know 'a lot' or 'fairly enough' and those who said to know 'a little' or 'not at all'. One out of two participants stated that they knew 'a little' or 'nothing at all' regarding government and parliament. Two out of three participants reported they knew 'a little' or 'nothing at all' about the role of the MPs and the role of the President (Graph 2). Men and older participants, along with those with higher education, claimed to report they knew more.

2.1.3. Interest

When it comes to participants' interest in topics related to politics, local self-government, government, Parliament and the role of the MPs or President, almost half of them reported to be 'very' or 'fairly interested' in politics and the work of the government. Again, a shift is evident related to the role of the Parliament, the MPs and that of the President with more than half of the participants stating to be interested 'a little' or 'not at all ' in these topics. Expectedly, local self-government had the highest score of interested participants (60%), which indicates the immediate need of the citizens to understand how it functions, particularly after the territorial reform in Albania.[7] Men reported to have a greater interest in all the issues. In some cases, urban area participants and those with higher education also expressed greater interest, particularly in relation to the role of the MPs and that of the President. Younger participants reported to show less interest in all the listed topics. (Graph No. 3).

Graph 2. Knowledge

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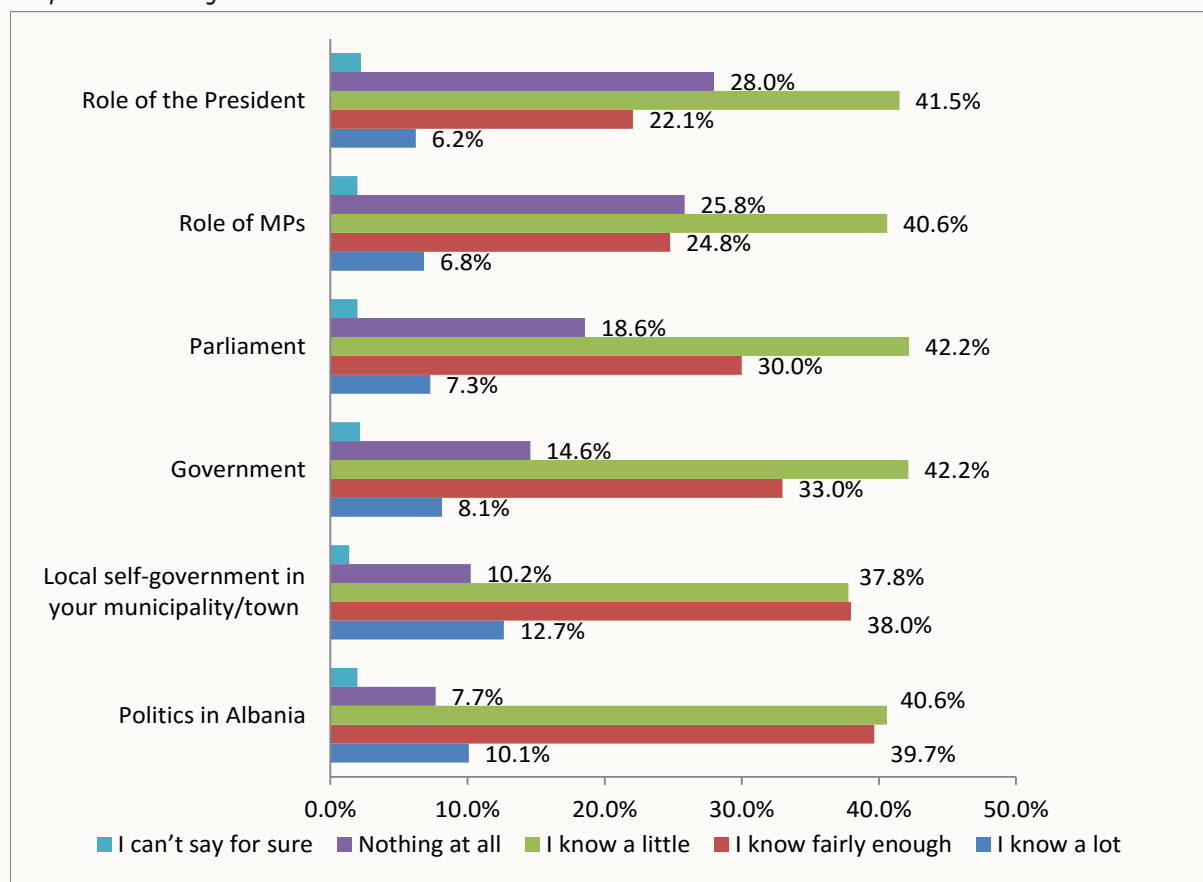
7   The administrative-territorial reform in Albania was adopted in year 2014.

Graph 3. Interest
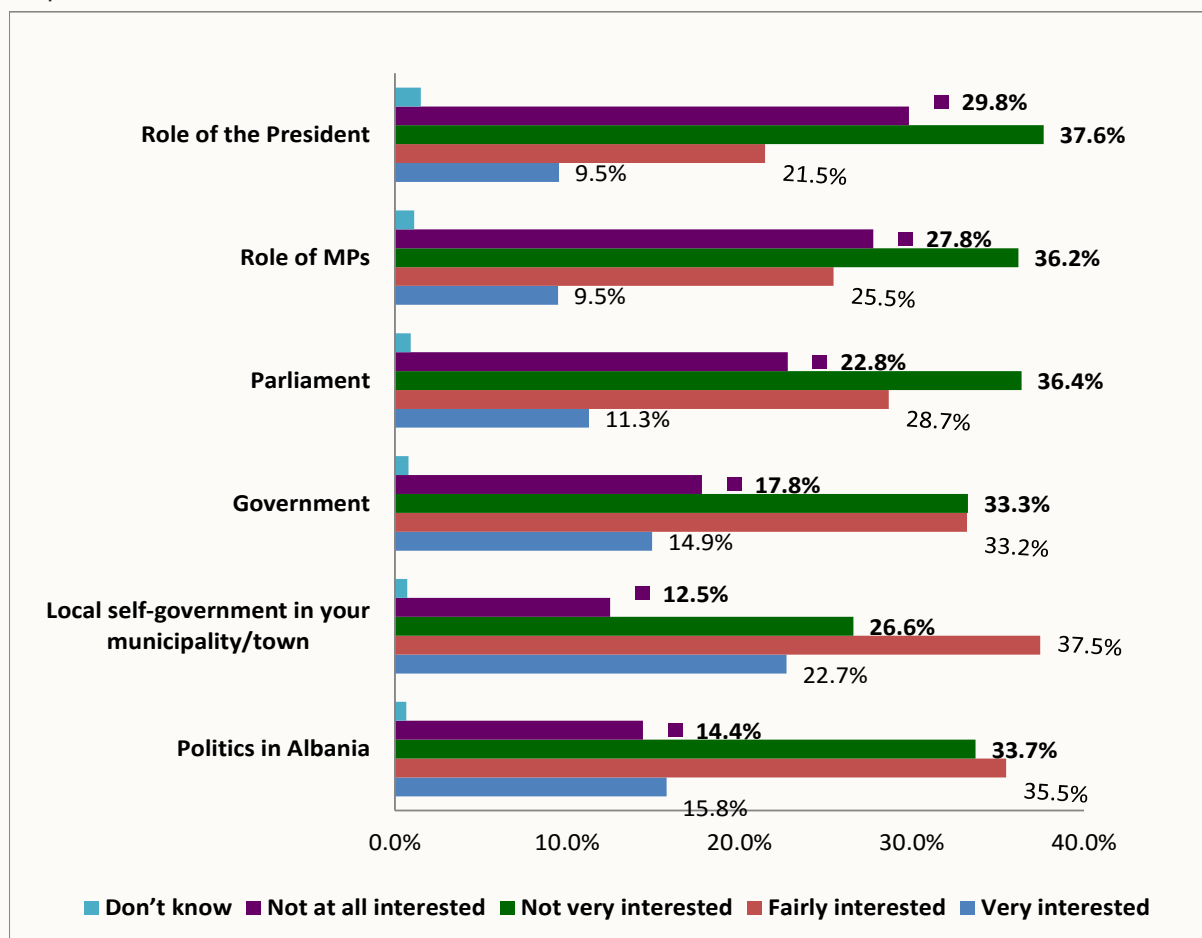
Pairing the perceived knowledge and interest showed that the majority of the participants who reported to know 'a lot' or 'enough' also had greater interest in all issues.

Although these numbers are considered low for Albania, compared to Serbia, where similar research was conducted, they are quite high.[8] During 2014, the Serbian citizens' level of interest was approximately 23% regarding the government. This interest was even lower in the work and organization of the Parliament or provincial government.[9] These results are also comparable to Great Britain and their Audit of Political Engagement for 2015, in which the interest in politics was 50%. Recent studies in Albania indicate that the public does not see the Parliament as an open institution, and shows little interest in accessing parliamen-

tary information.[10] Others also suggest that Albanians do not think public institutions are transparent in general (47%).[11] Additionally, there is a low level of interest in following parliamentary discussions due to lack of debate culture among Members of Parliament (MPs) and an overall sense of disappointment with politics and politicians.[12]

The three main sources of information for the participants were TV and radio (33.2%), printed press (20.5%), and friends and connections (17.9%). Again, media seems to play an important role in informing citizens; hence influencing their attitudes and opinion. A range of media outlets operate throughout Albania with TV and radio serving as the primary sources of political information. However, very often TV stations are blamed as being politicized and

8   In Serbia, the Audit of Political Engagement has already been conducted four times.

9   Otvoreni Parlament (2015). Audit of Political Engagement 2015: Public Opinion Poll on Citizen Participation in Democratic Processes in Serbia. Retrieved from http://www.otvoreniparlament.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Audit-of-political-engagment-in-Serbia-2015.pdf, accessed on April 2016.

10 National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2015). *Focus Group Research Report: Findings from Public Opinion Research in Albania.* Tirana, Albania

11 IDM (2015). *Trust in government.* Lame and Papa: p. 22

12 National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2015). *Focus Group Research Report: Findings from Public Opinion Research in Albania.* Tirana, Albania

censuring or providing biased information in order to favor a certain political party. This is why trusting the media for informing citizens can be hazardous, which was also validated at all four focus group discussions (FGDs). The same concern is reflected in the 2015 election observation final report conducted by OSCE/ODIHR[13] regarding media coverage of the local elections in Albania . Finally, younger participants, under 35 years of age, and women coming from urban areas preferred more online portals/sites of printed press as source of information than traditional media.

2.2. Political Engagement and Participation at Local and National Level

2.2.1. Political Engagement

The majority of the surveyed participants were neither a political party (75.4%) nor an NGO/association member (89.4%) (as shown in Graph 5). Participants coming from rural areas were much less likely to be part of an NGO (33.6%) than the ones from urban areas (66.4%). However, when it comes to the political party membership this ratio was closer (48% rural vs 52% urban). It seems that civil society organizations are more present in urban areas.

Graph 4. Sources of information
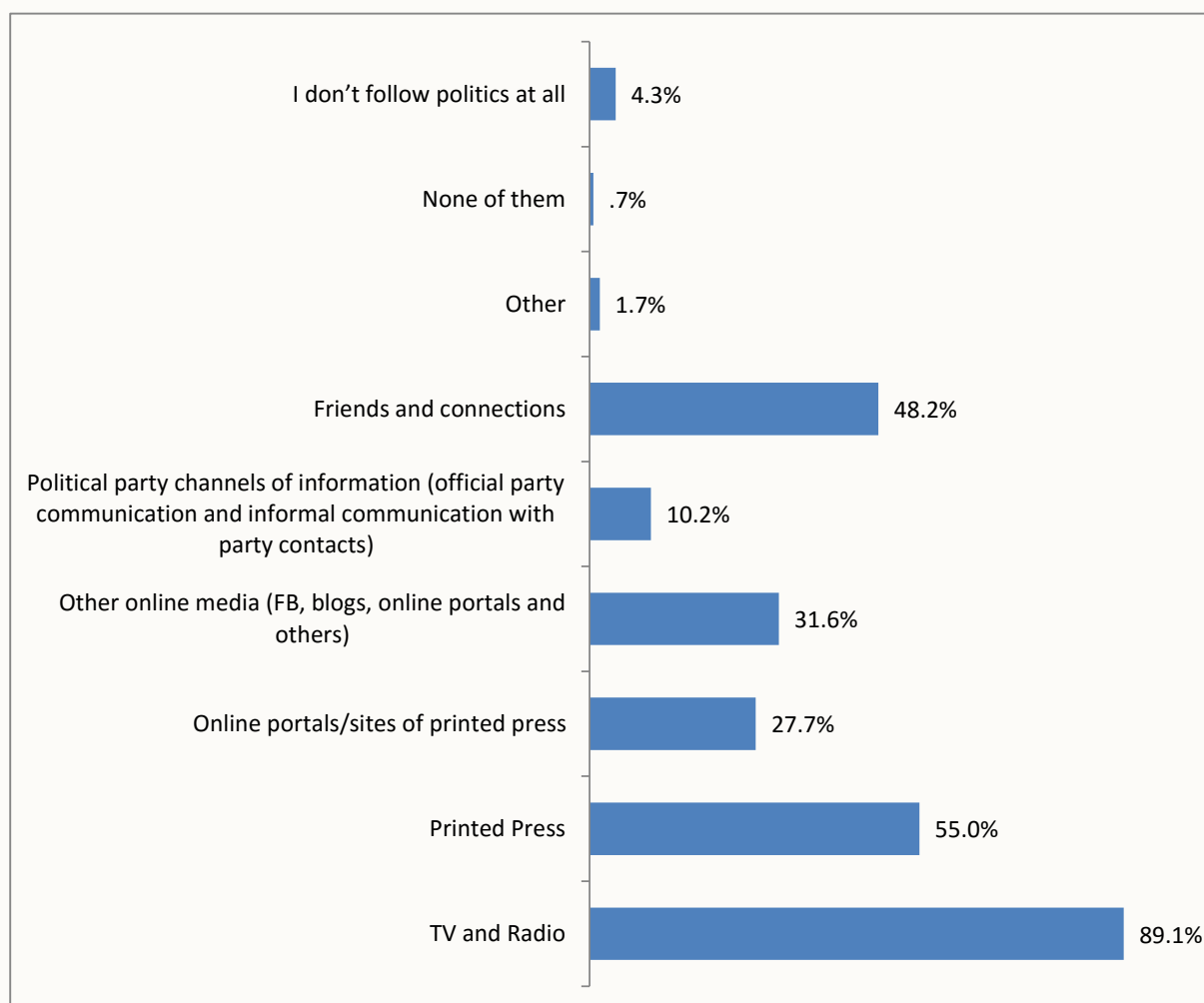
13 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission (2015). *Final Report on 2015 Local Elections*. Retrieved from http://www.osce.org/albania accessed on April 2016

Graph 5. Political party or NGO/association membership

Nevertheless, their presence is very important for the rural areas also.[14] On the other hand, considering that the Law on NGOs[15] allows only associations to have a membership-based function, the percentage of the participants being part of an NGO/association can be considered high. However, a self-reporting questionnaire, it means that respondents were actively engaged in an organization and perceived themselves as members which is even more important than an official membership.

Members of a political party were mostly men (63.7%) versus women (36.3%). In Albania, as well as in other countries, there is a tradition that politics is a "man's" job. Interestingly, participants with lower education levels (8/9 years of education), unemployed or students were less likely to report being a part of a political party.

In contrast with political party membership, younger participants were more likely to be engaged with NGOs/other associations. Gender, on the other hand, did not bring any difference. Educational levels showed an interesting difference: Those with high school education tended to be more engaged with political parties, while those with higher education with NGOs. Unemployed participants were also less likely to be members of NGOs/associa-

14 Law No. 8788, dated 7.05.2001, "On Non-Profit Organizations", allows associations to have a membership-based function.

15 Law No. 8788, dated 7.05.2001, "On Non-Profit Organizations"

tions. It seems that civil society organizations (CSOs) and other associations are attractive to individuals from the public with higher levels of education. Nonetheless, the rest of the participants (as presented from the data) was not that aware of their existence or mission whatsoever. (Table 1)

Table 1. Political party vs NGOs/associations membership: demographic differences

Political party membership					
	Rural/ urban	Gender	Age	Education	Employment
More likely	Urban	Men	No differences	All other levels	Public sector employment
Less likely	Rural	Women	No differences	8/9 years (lower secondary)	Unemployed/ Students
NGO/associations membership					
	Rural/ urban	Gender	Age	Education	Employment
More likely	Urban	No differences	Under 35 years	Higher education	No differences among the other groups
Less likely	Rural	No differences	Above 65 years	Elementary	Unemployed

When people hear the term "political", they somehow relate it to "political party engagement", according to the experts' focus group discussion. This belief was confirmed by the study, according to which a considerable part of participants thought that political engagement was a political party engagement (44.1%). However, there was another part of the participants stating that it meant both political party and non-political party engagement (24.8%), whereas only 1 out of 5 participants believed people could be politically engaged without being part of a political party (21.9%) (Graph 6). Individuals from urban areas, public sector employees or pensioners featured more in the group of participants that believed it was strictly a political party engagement. In contrast, younger participants were less likely to state that political engagement was a political party engagement.

Graph 6. Political engagement is...

satisfied. In this direction, if political engagement would only be related to political parties the spectrum of actions, interests and information as well as the nature of participation is conditioned by this membership. Participants of FGDs mentioned that taking part in a protest organized by civil society to address an issue of concern might result in political pressure for the individuals who were political party members.

Almost **half** of the participants were not supporters of any party (45.5%) and 1 out of 4 was not a very strong supporter (24.9%). A small percentage of respondents were very strong (11.3%) and fairly strong (15.6%) supporters of a party. Overall, **2 out of 3 participants** were not supporters of any party (Graph 7). Of the ones who said that they were not party supporters, 49.2% were from urban areas and 41.3% from rural areas. A small number of young participants reported to be supporters

As explained at the beginning of the report, political engagement goes beyond only political party engagement. Norris (2000) argues that political engagement includes political information, political participation and political trust.[16] Thus, an individual interested in public affairs stays informed and takes actions to change a state/situation with which s/he is not

16 Norris, P. (2000). *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies.* New York: Cambridge University Press

of a political party (21.4%). It is interesting to note that participants with higher education are more represented among supporters, which is in line with the following results on education and levels of satisfaction, personal influence and engagement. Women were more likely than men to say that they were not supporters of political parties. Data cross-tabulations show that political party supporters

tended to be more active in contacting local officials or MPs, in taking part in campaigns or demonstrations organized by political parties and in municipal meetings and public consultations.

to understand affairs and potentially greater influence of the citizens in decision-making are surely part of the explanation.[17] Participants of this study were also less willing to be involved at national level (33%) than at local level (51.6%). (Graph 8). Young participants with higher education were more likely to want

Graph 7. Supporter of a party

Would you call yourself a very strong, fairly strong, not very strong or not a supporter at all of any political party ?

11.3 15.6 24.9 **45.5** 2.7
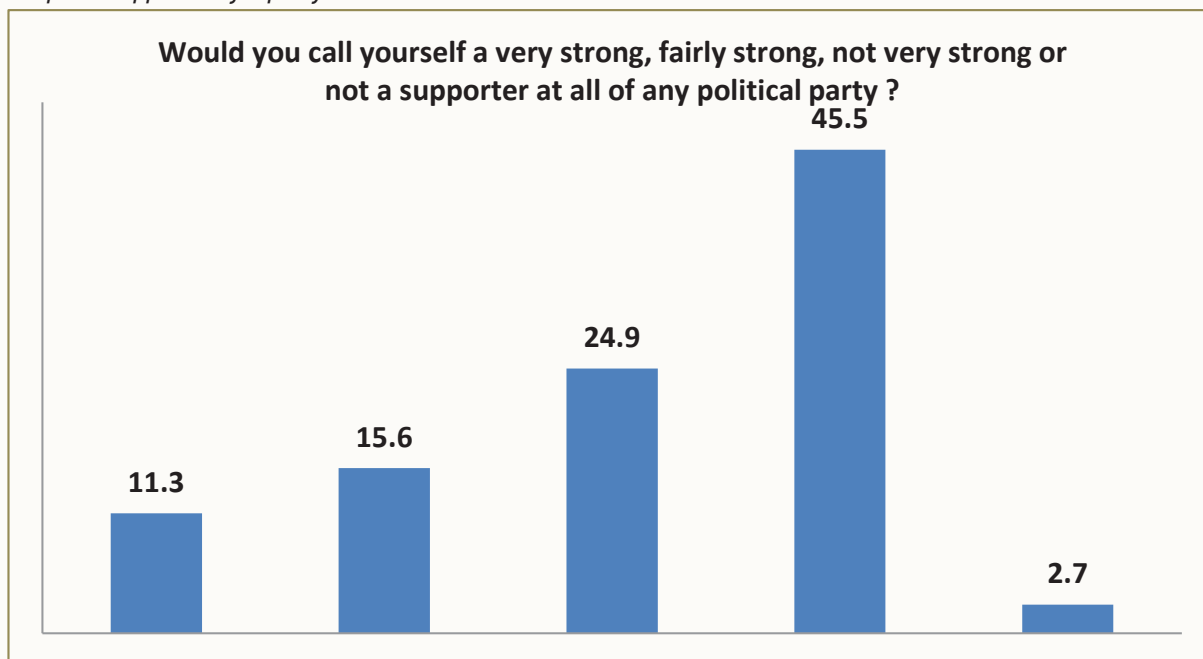
Graph 8. Involvement at local and central level

How much would you say that the following statement describes your attitude?

- "I want to be involved in decisions of authorities at national level"
- "I want to be involved in decisions of authorities at local level, where I live"

	Completely	Mainly yes	Yes and No	Mainly no	Not at all
national	14.7%	18.3%	20.5%	32.9%	13.7%
local	27.4%	24.2%	19.3%	19.2%	9.9%
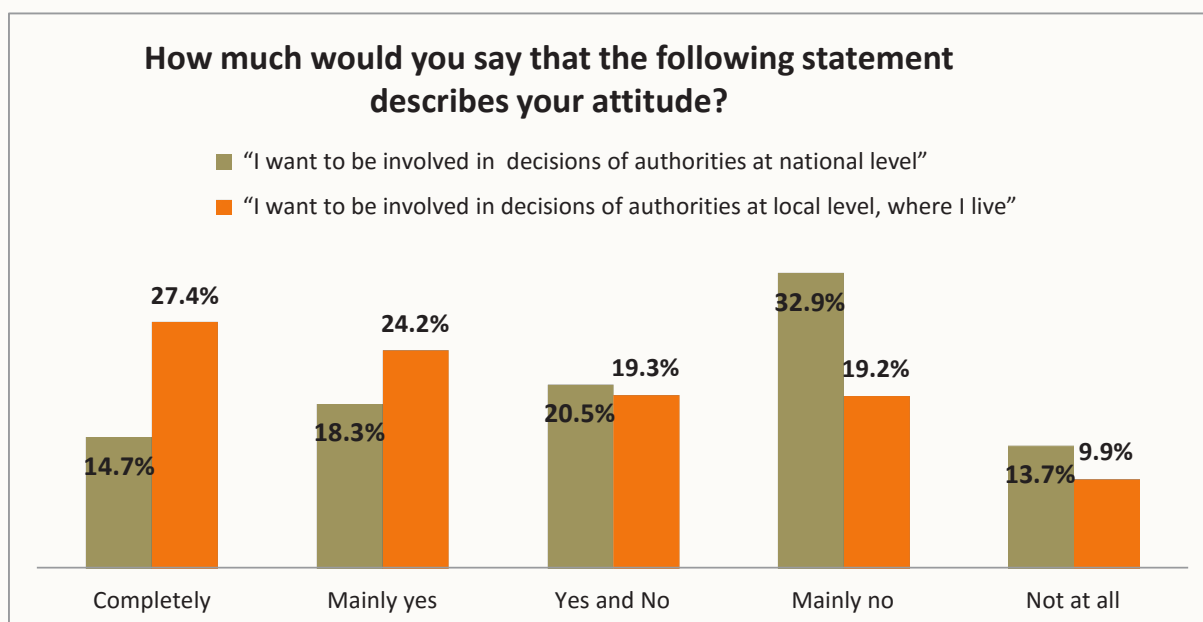
2.2.2. Political Participation at Local or National Level

Studies show that the local and regional level has a greater affinity for direct citizens' involvement than higher levels. Proximity, easier

to be involved at local level. NGO/association members were generally more willing to be involved at local level than other participants

17 Fraenkel-Haeberle, C., Kropp, S., Palermo, F. and Sommermann, K. P. (2015). *Citizen Participation in Multi-level Democracies*. Boston: Brill – Nijhoff, pp. 11.

in the study. Participants who were less likely to be involved at a national level came from rural areas, with low educational levels and were not employed in the public sector. Of the political party members, half of them would like to be involved at central level too, which was twice as much in comparison to the total sample. This was also true for NGO or other organizations' members.

Willingness to be involved in public affairs and decision making is a very important first step towards political engagement. Participants in the study were generally reluctant to be involved in decision making, feeling they did not have a voice in this process, as stated at the focus groups discussions.

Graph 9. Urban rural differences in involvement in decision making

changes that the territorial reform brought at the local level may have a two-fold impact: citizens could be more interested in knowing more about the way the administrative units function, but they could also be confused and discouraged from the changes and the fact that they do not have enough information. Having political leaders visibly involved in the engagement process helps dispel the common perception that politicians may withhold information and allows for engagement to be more sincere, open and transparent. Local officials are also able to set clear objectives and goals to help guide public participation and engagement that is aligned with other activities.[18] Participants of the focus group discussions also suggested similar changes and gave examples of more active and transparent MPs or local officials.

Willingness to involve in decision - making urban/rural differences
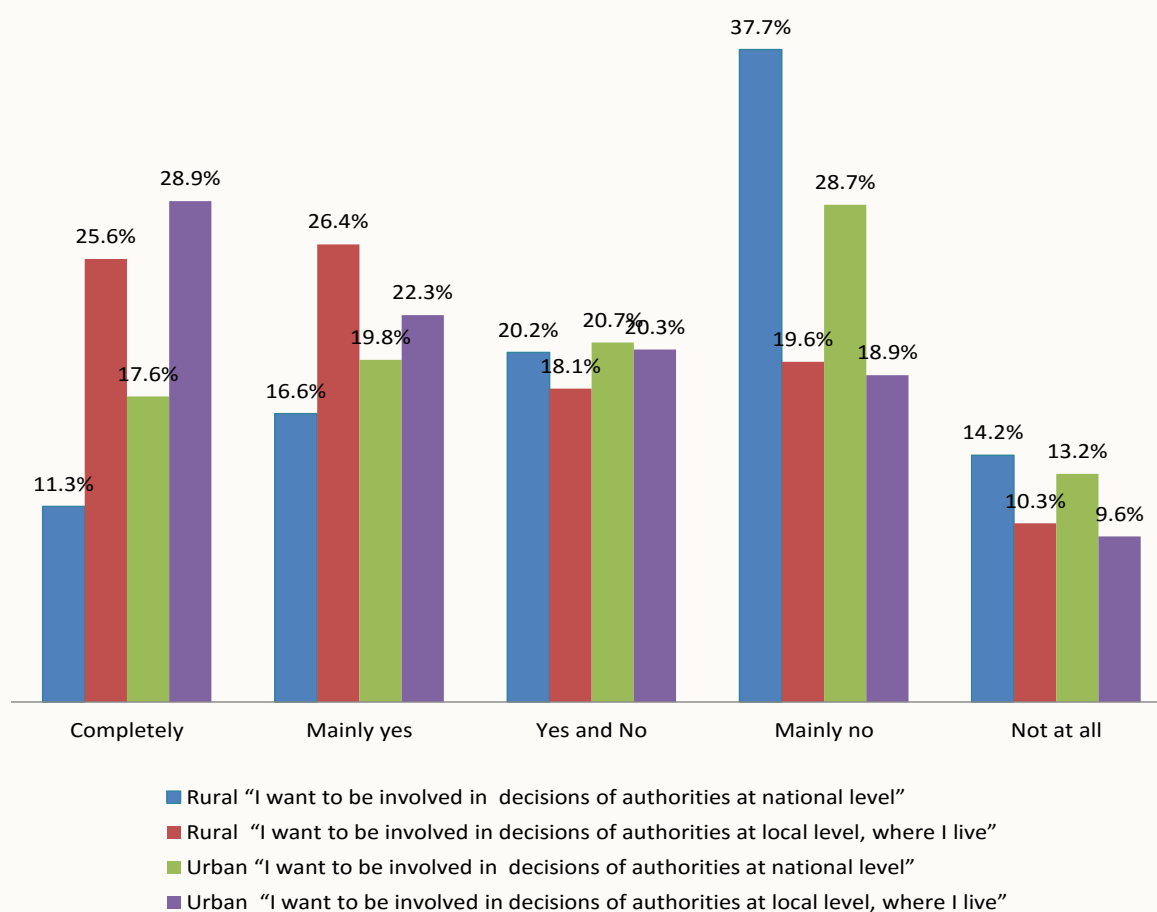
Emphasizing urban and rural differences, the below graph (Graph 9) clearly indicates the tendency of rural participants to be closer to the local level. On the other hand, the

18 Lipcsei, R., Bruce, B. & Vinodrai,T. (2015). *Evolving the Competitive Edge: Rural Community Engagement.* Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO). Retrieved from http://events.tamarackcommunity.org/latest/community-engagement-in-rural-areas accessed on 28 March 2016

2.2.3. Political Action and Participation

According to the Hansard Society,[19] political engagement can be measured in terms of what people think, but also in what they do, and moreover what they will be willing to do in the future if they feel strongly enough about an issue.

Political participation can refer to a wide range of activities through which people seek to influence the decision-making processes that shape their lives.[20] It can aim to influence public, private, and third sector organizations.[21] It includes:

- Formal participation in official forums and processes. This includes the election of representatives as well as direct involvement, for example in referendums, political parties and attending public meetings.

- Informal participation sits outside official settings and includes a range of 'bottom-up' activities. For example, online activism, such as signing a petition, purchasing or boycotting products for political reasons, and discussing politics with friends and family.[22]

2.2.4 Certainty to Vote

One out of two participants would certainly vote if elections were to be held during the week the questionnaire was conducted and only 22.6% would probably or certainly not vote. Focus group discussions revealed that a number of participants considered voting as the only power they had, while a number of participants claimed to have lost hope that voting would bring a desired change. They also revealed the participants' disappointment with the current candidates, stating many times that they needed new faces/people in politics. It

is worth noticing that NGOs members, public sector employees and even more political party members were the most likely to vote, even though the percentage of them in the study was low. The least likely to vote were the ones with elementary education. This trend is in line with results that came out from other questions, i.e., participants of this study with the lowest educational levels were less likely to be involved in decision-making at either local or central level. Similarly, they also were more likely to feel "helpless" and they reported to have taken fewer actions to change a situation they did not like.

Graph 11 (on next page) shows the trends in formal and informal ways of participation as well as the difference among what actions citizens have taken and the ones they were prepared to undertake, if they felt strongly enough about an issue. The most common action the participants had conducted in the last 12 months was discussing about politics or about a certain issue with other people (74.5%). Contacting a local councilor or local municipal officer was the second most common action (35.7%) followed by volunteering in an activity in the local community as the third (32%). In general, men and participants from urban areas had a tendency to act more than women. As also shown in the graph, about 10.9% of the participants reported they had not taken any actions at all, although this can be seen as a very high percentage taking into consideration that there are many actions in the list (e.g. many people just discuss politics at least once). However, in the similar Audit of Political Engagement in Serbia,[23] the results were even lower, where Serbian citizens circled the "none of the above" alternative quite more.

In general, an increase in the participants' readiness to take action if they felt strongly enough about an issue is evident, putting more emphasis to active and formal means of participation than informal and more passive ones. Again, men and participants from urban areas were more prepared to act compared to other groups.

19 Hansard Society Audit of Political Engagement Reports 1-12. See: http://www.auditofpoliticalengagement.org/reports, last accessed on April 13 2016

20 Fox, S. (2014). Is it Time to Update the Definition of Political Participation? Review of "Political Participation in Britain: The Decline and Review of Civil Culture. Parliamentary Affairs. 67, pp. 495-505

21 Flinders, M. (2012). Debating Demonization: In Defence of Politics, Politicians and Political Science. Contemporary Politics. 18 (3), pp. 355-366.

22 Cunningham, M. Flinders, M. (2015). *Participatory Arts and Political Engagement.* Arts and Humanities Research Council.

23 Otvoreni Parliament (2015). Audit of Political Engagement 2015: Public Opinion Poll on Citizen Participation in Democratic Processes in Serbia. Retrieved from http://www.otvoreniparlament.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Audit-of-political-engagment-in-Serbia-2015.pdf, accessed on April 2016.

Graph 10. Certainty to vote in different groups

If general/parliamentary election were to be held this week, how likely it is that you would vote?

Legend:
- Total
- 18-25 years
- Women
- Public sector employment
- NGO membership
- Political party membership
- Elementary education
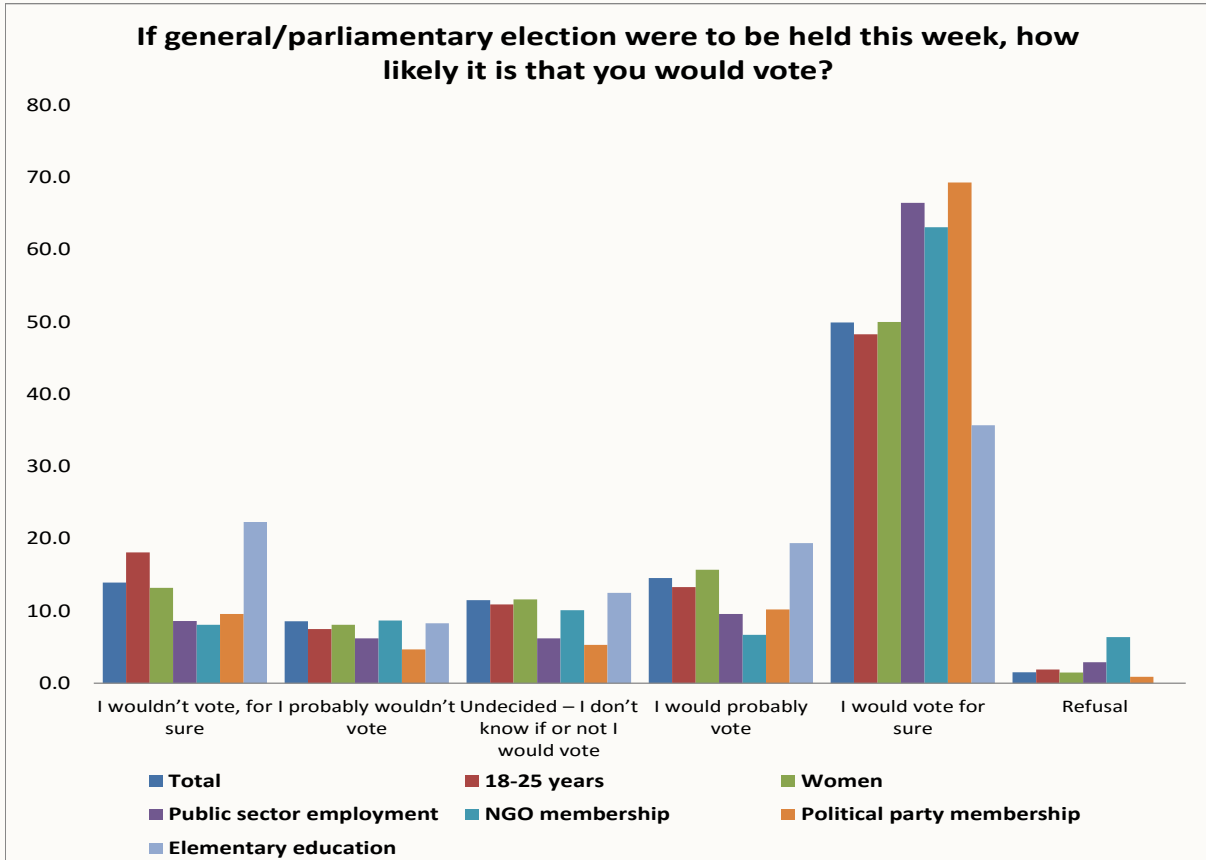
Graph 11. Actions conducted vs readiness to engage

Actions citizens have done in the last 12 months vs actions would be prepared to do if felt strongly enough about an issue..

Action	what actions have you done	what would you be prepared to do if you felt strongly enough about an issue
Contacted an MP, a Minister or other high level public official, a high level political party member	26.4%	57.7%
Contacted a local councilor or local municipal officer	35.7%	63.3%
Participated in a meeting of the municipality council, taken part in a public consultation	22.9%	50.7%
Participated, as a volunteer, in an activity in your local community	32.0%	53.5%
Discussed politics/the issue with other people.	74.5%	62.9%
Expressed opinion or discussed politics on the Internet and/or social networks (facebook etc.)	22.8%	31.1%
Sought information from state organs (in an official way, e.g. letter)	17.7%	47.6%
Taken an active part in a campaign, demonstration or march organized by political parties	25.4%	28.7%
Taken an active part in a civil campaign, demonstration or march (not organized by a political...	16.7%	45.9%
Created or signed a petition online or offline	12.3%	42.8%
Alerted the media (newspaper, radio or TV) about the existence of a problem	11.7%	58.2%
Other, please specify	.4%	.9%
Don't know	.6%	1.1%
None of the above	10.9%	9.0%

24

Studies show that there is concern that disengagement from formal politics affects some sections of society more than others. However, it is unclear whether this means that some people are becoming politically 'disconnected' overall, or whether they are instead engaging in informal forms of participation.[24] Democratic institutions may be able to harness interest in informal political participation as a way of increasing engagement in formal processes.

is because participants believed that nobody listened to them (39.2%) and that politicians were just out there for themselves (38.7%) or they did not care about people like them (22.8%). Participants from urban areas tended to report more that politicians were only for themselves or that the system did not allow them to have influence and, in general, the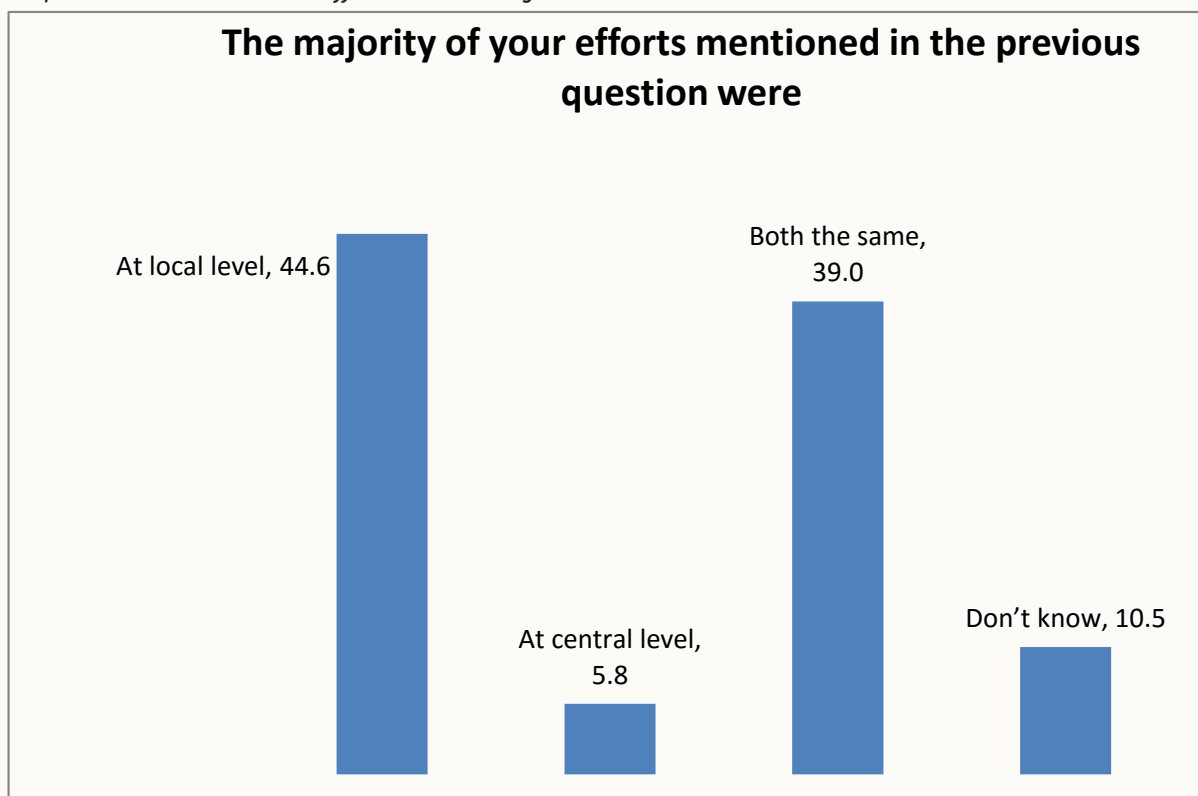ir tendency was to blame the system. Participants of focus group discussions stated that the electoral system did not even allow them

Graph 12. Local central level differences in acting

The majority of your efforts mentioned in the previous question were

At local level, 44.6

Both the same, 39.0

At central level, 5.8

Don't know, 10.5

Challenges remain around how to engage people who are not involved in any formal or informal political process.

The majority of the efforts participants have undertaken were at the local level (44.6%) or at both local and central (39%). A small percentage was at the central level (5.7%) (Graph 12). Again, participants from rural areas were more likely to act at the local level.

2.2.5. Factors Influencing Political Participation and Engagement

The most common reason for not taking action

to elect their own representative, as (s)he was elected by the party leader. Rural area participants believed more that politicians did not care about people like them, indicating this was a latent belief quite common in Albania. Rural areas are forgotten by politicians and are only remembered prior to elections. Women were more likely to choose the option of not having enough information, although it was not one of the most reported alternatives. This inherent belief, in a way, portrays the stereotype that "politics are for men". In Albania, men largely dominate the political arena and essentially formulate the rules of the political game. However, equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential to building and sustaining democracy.

24 Flinders, M. (2015). Political Fall-Out. Fewer People than Ever Are Planning to Vote in the Forthcoming General Election. What Is Turning Off the Electorate? Society Now – ESRC Research Making an Impact. 21, pp. 12-13.

The study showed another distinction, i.e. between highest and lowest educational levels. The higher the educational level, the less likely participants were to feel "helplessness" captured in options like: 'politicians don't care about people like me'; 'the electoral system means that my vote does not matter', 'nobody listens to what I have to say', 'my opinion does not matter', and others. Most studies of political behavior find that individuals with higher education participate to a larger extent in political activities than individuals with lower education. According to conventional wisdom, education is supposed to increase civic skills and political knowledge that function as the causal mechanisms triggering participation.[25]

2.2.6. Paths to Improving Political Engagement

The following questions constitute an effort to gain insight on the factors/reasons that would make the participants engage more. According to Graph 13, the majority of the participants would be willing to engage for personal interests/benefits (80.9%), to support family

and friends (87.5%) and for an interest they share with other citizens or their community (82.3%). Willingness to engage is much lower when it came to a cause they believed in but that did not relate personally to them (65.9%), even though almost 2 out of 3 participants would also do this. It is worth mentioning that political party members were more inclined in engaging for each of the reasons above, in line with the general trend, compared to non-members. The same goes for members of NGOs/associations vs. non-members. A remarkable difference was observed in relation to engaging for an interest they share together with other citizens or community, where NGO/association members were ready to do so to a considerably great extent (91%) and more than non-members (81%). The same difference was also evident with regard to a cause they believed but did not relate to them personally. Some 80% of members of NGOs/associations were ready to do so, while only 65% of non-members reported the same. Therefore, it is worth emphasizing that participants' engagement for greater causes that goes beyond their own personal interests is influenced by NGO or association membership.

Graph 13. Reasons to engage
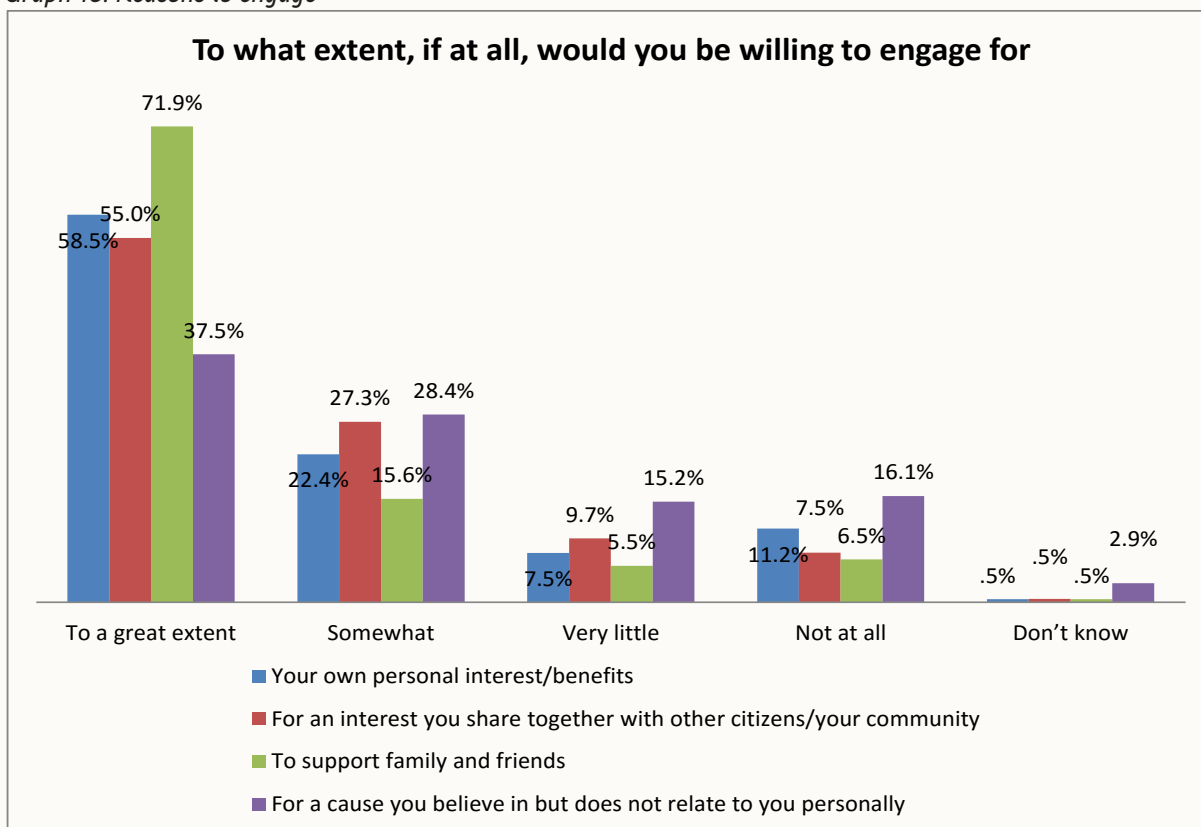
25 Persson, M. (2015). *Education and Political Participation.*
British Journal of Political Science. 45 (3), pp: 689 - 703

General agreement exists within the social science disciplines that the media play an influential role in shaping political and civic engagement. The media are a transmitter of information, a source of information, and a public space within which participation can take place (Delli Carpini 2004).[26] On the other hand, media in Albania play a role in addressing issues of concern for citizens, particularly through certain television shows, like "Fiks Fare" or "Stop", which use investigative journalism to publicly denounce wrongdoings. Politicians often react promptly to these types of TV shows rather than to direct complaints coming from citizens. Therefore, unsurprisingly participants believed the first route to change a situation with which they are not satisfied was to draw media attention to the problem (53.5%) and the second was voting in elections (50.7%), followed by taking part in organized citizens' pressure on decision makers (48.1%). Joining a political party was the least reported (19.9%). The same trends are evident in the 2015 Audit of Political Engagement conducted in Serbia.[27] On the other hand, it is interesting that joining a political party was also considered in Serbia (32%),[28] while in Albania it was the least preferred route.

Trust in MPs or local councilors to change a situation with which participants were not satisfied is at very low levels. Less than **1 out 4 participants** believed that contacting an MP or local councilor would bring a change. Civil society organizations also have low percentages of trust, which is a call to CSOs to reach out more to the communities in order to build the constituency support for their issues and thus build/restore the trust. FGDs shed light on the reasons why participants thought this way.

They frequently mention that CSOs were only concentrated in Tirana, they did not always have the financial means to conduct their work, and they sometimes collaborated with political parties. Likewise, joining a political party, as a formal way of political participation and engagement, received the lowest support. These results confirm previous studies in Albania, according to which the level of interest in getting involved in politics is low for both genders, pointing at a perception that it is "dirty business" and the fear that people can lose their jobs if they do so.[29]

Participants have chosen as the "last resort" choices in this question drawing media attention and voting in election. Although voting in elections is a positive indicator, it usually happens once in two or four years. Focus groups discussions shed light to the reasons why. Participants mentioned that they feel this was the only power that they had, as all the other efforts they tried in recent years had failed. These results are in compliance with the last national public opinion poll on trust in government, whereby, Parliament and the political parties were two of the least trusted institutions, with declining figures. International organizations and religious institutions are the most trusted. Media is one of the trusted institutions with no decline in years (34%).[30] Despite their low trust, participants in the focus groups reported that if their efforts to change a situation were successful, they would be more willing to engage.

Another positive indicator, mentioned by 1 out of 2 participants, was taking part in organized citizens' pressure activities. Focus group participants make reference to several examples to support this, including recent organized efforts to put pressure on local government to stop intervening in public spaces without prior consultation with citizens. Participants also recalled a successful experience in the time of the protest against "chemical weapons" in Albania. To many of them, this was the only successful massive activity, which proved that citizens can bring change. Participants with higher education from urban areas were the ones who were more likely to take specific

26 Delli Carpini, M. X. (2004). Mediating Democratic Engagement The Impact of Communications on Citizens' Involvement in Political and Civic Life. In Handbook of Political Communication Research, ed. Lynda Lee Kaid. Mahwah, NJ: LEA Publishers Involvement in Political and Civic Life. In Handbook of Political Communication Research, ed. Lynda Lee Kaid. Mahwah, NJ: LEA Publishers

27 Serbian citizens also believe that drawing media attention is a way to change things (40%) and then voting in local (39%) or parliamentary elections (37%).

28 Otvoreni Parliament (2015). Audit of Political Engagement 2015: Public Opinion Poll on Citizen Participation in Democratic Processes in Serbia. Retrieved from http://www.otvoreniparlament.rs/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Audit-of-political-engagment-in-Serbia-2015.pdf accessed on April 2016

29 National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2015). *Focus Group Research Report: Findings from Public Opinion Research in Albania*. Tirana, Albania

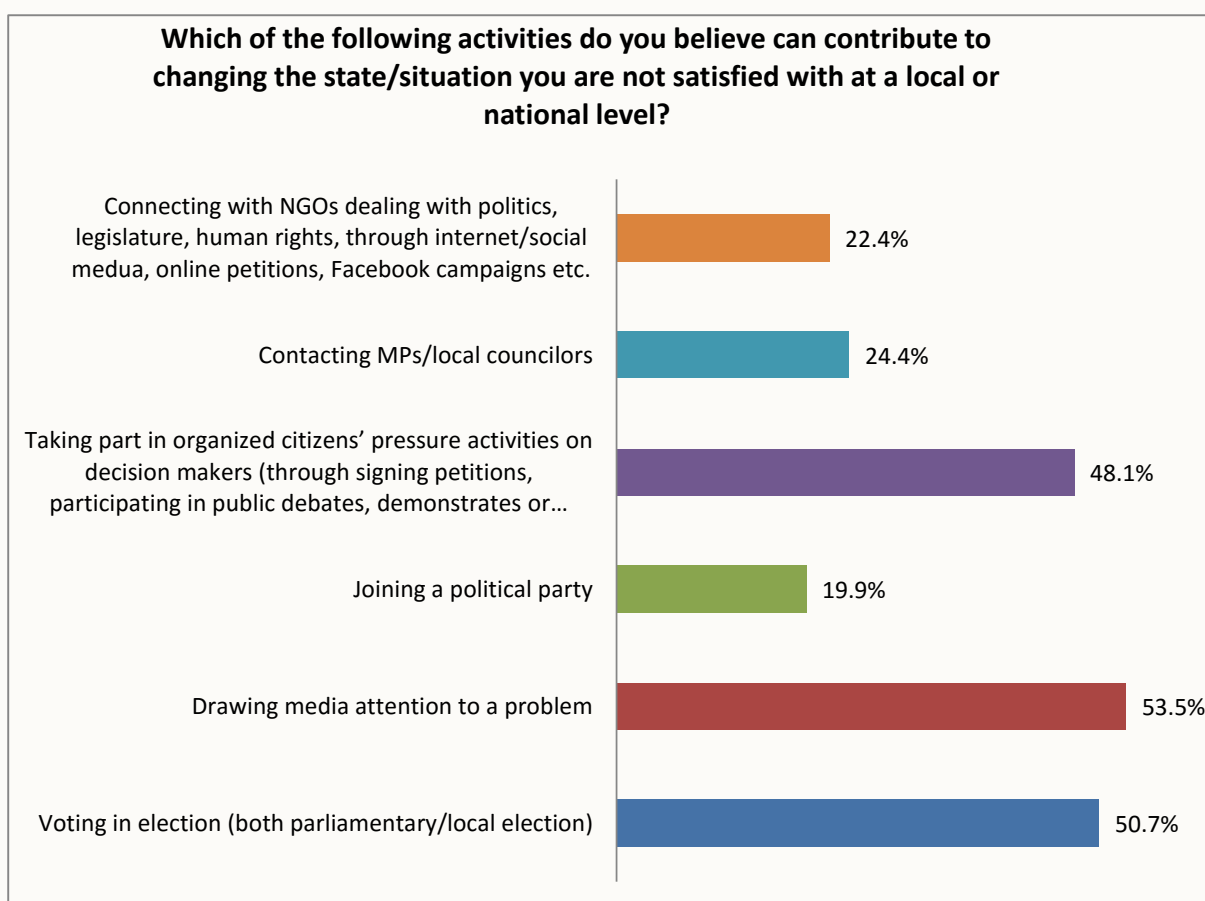30 IDM (2015). *Trust in Government*. Tirana: Lame and Papa, p. 5

actions in general, compared to those from rural and with lower education. 'Education enhances participation more or less directly by developing skills that are relevant to politics – the ability to speak and write, the knowledge of how to cope in an organizational setting'.[31] And Lewis-Beck et al. point out that: 'With more formal education comes a stronger interest in politics, a greater concern with elections, greater confidence in playing one's role as a citizen, and a deeper commitment to the norm of being a good citizen'.[32] Hence, education increases skills and knowledge but might also affect political interest and efficacy, which are factors that trigger participation.[33]

Graph 14. Activities to contribute to changing a situation

2.2.7. Increasing voter participation in elections

High voter turnout is often considered to be desirable, though among political scientists and economists specializing in public choice, the issue is still debatable.[34] A high turnout is generally seen as evidence of the legitimacy of the current system, although some political scientists question the view that high turnout is an implicit endorsement of the system.[35]

Participants of the study suggested what they considered most important changes to increase voter turnout. The most common change that would improve participation in elections was for emigrants to vote at their current residence (82.4%). Men and partici-

Which of the following activities do you believe can contribute to changing the state/situation you are not satisfied with at a local or national level?

Activity	Percentage
Connecting with NGOs dealing with politics, legislature, human rights, through internet/social medua, online petitions, Facebook campaigns etc.	22.4%
Contacting MPs/local councilors	24.4%
Taking part in organized citizens' pressure activities on decision makers (through signing petitions, participating in public debates, demonstrates or…	48.1%
Joining a political party	19.9%
Drawing media attention to a problem	53.5%
Voting in election (both parliamentary/local election)	50.7%

pants from rural areas with elementary education believed more in this suggestion. Urban area participants and highly educated have probably become more skeptic and suspicious

31 Verba, S. , Schlozman, K.L. and Brady, H. (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press

32 Lewis-Beck, M.S., Jacoby, W., Norpoth, H. and Weisberg, H. F. (2008). *The American Voter Revisited*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press

33 Persson, M. (2015). *Education and Political Participation*. British Journal of Political Science. 45 (3), pp: 689 - 703

34 See Mark N. Franklin. (1999). *Electoral Engineering and Cross National Turnout Differences.* British Journal of Political Science, 29 (1), pp. 205-216 Who Attempts to Challenge Some of This Consensus
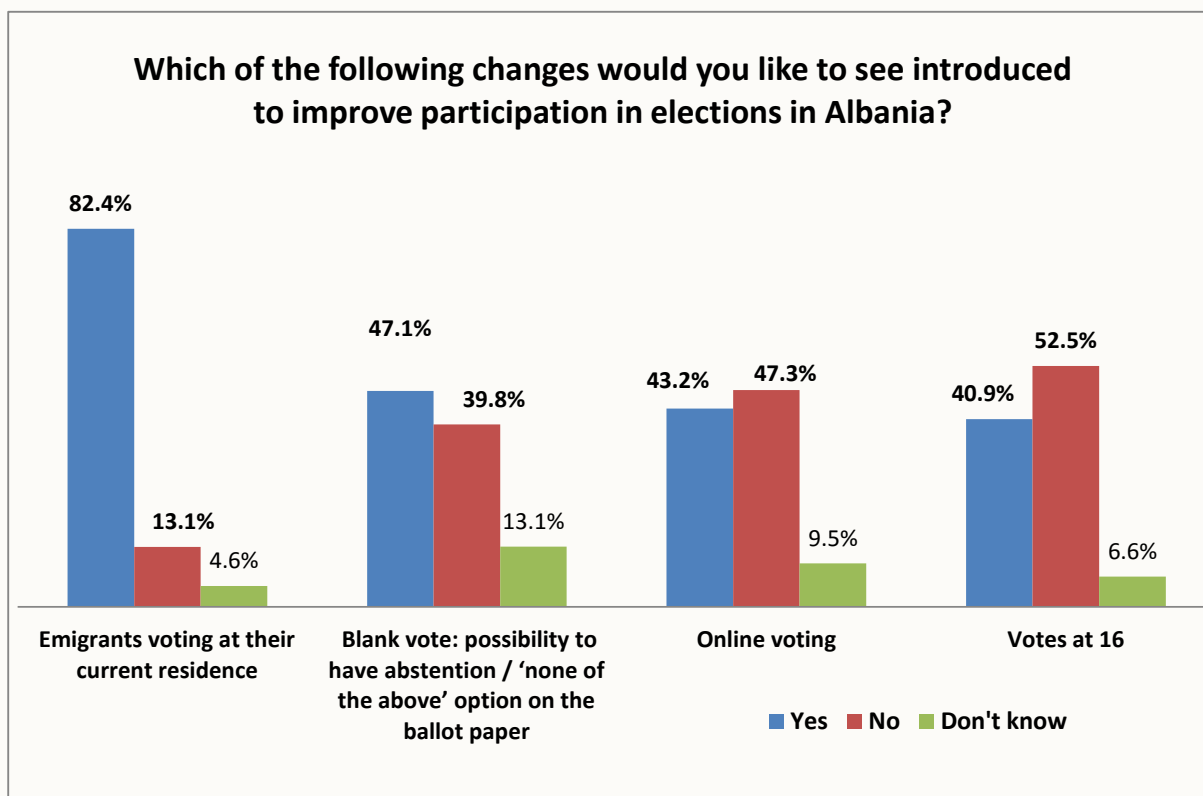
35 Ibid.

about the potential of abusing with this option.[36] The majority of the Albanian families have a migrant relative and they probably identify them as more autonomous than residents are, because they do not live in Albania.

Online voting as a way to increase the participation in election proved to be a divisive issue among participants, as it is in the reality. **Forty three percent** (43.2%) of the sample was in favor and forty seven percent (47.3%) against. Older participants and participants with lower

and Switzerland use internet voting. However, other countries express their security concerns for this option. For example, the US Department of Defense looked into making internet voting secure, but cancelled the effort.[38] The idea would be that voter turnout would increase because people could cast their vote from the comfort of their own homes, although the few experiments with Internet voting have produced mixed results.

Graph 15. Improving participation in elections

Which of the following changes would you like to see introduced to improve participation in elections in Albania?

Emigrants voting at their current residence: Yes 82.4%, No 13.1%, Don't know 4.6%

Blank vote: possibility to have abstention / 'none of the above' option on the ballot paper: Yes 47.1%, No 39.8%, Don't know 13.1%

Online voting: Yes 43.2%, No 47.3%, Don't know 9.5%

Votes at 16: Yes 40.9%, No 52.5%, Don't know 6.6%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

education were less likely to support this option. Both these suggestions are based on the so-called "easiness to vote". Many people and political scientists believe that if the public had easier ways to vote they would probably do so.[37] This is the case of migrants and online voting. However, migrants' voting in their residence is always an issue of controversy prior to elections, mainly because it is thought that this would increase the possibility for corruption. Many countries have looked into online voting as a possible solution for low voter turnout. Some countries like Estonia, France

A blank vote[39] was suggested by almost half of the participants; however, a considerable part of them believed it would not increase participation in voting (39.8%). Older participants tended to disagree with this, whereas participants with higher education had a higher approval rate. This option could help in clarifying the reasons behind the current levels of voters' turnout. Assuming that low turnout is a reflection of disenchantment or indifference, a low turnout may not be an accurate reflection of

36 This explanation was supported during the experts' focus group meeting.

37 Blais, A., Dobrzynska, A. & Loewen, P. (2007). *Potential Impacts of Extended Advance Voting on Voter Turnout*. Working paper series.

38 "Internet Voting Is Just Too Hackable, Say Security Experts". USA TODAY. Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/news/2016/01/28/internet-voting-not-ready-prime-time-security-risks/79456776/, accessed on 28 March 2016.

39 A blank vote is a vote cast in an election to demonstrate the caster's dissatisfaction with the choice of candidates or refusal of the current political system. The most common form of the blank vote is adding "none of the above" checkbox in the ballot.
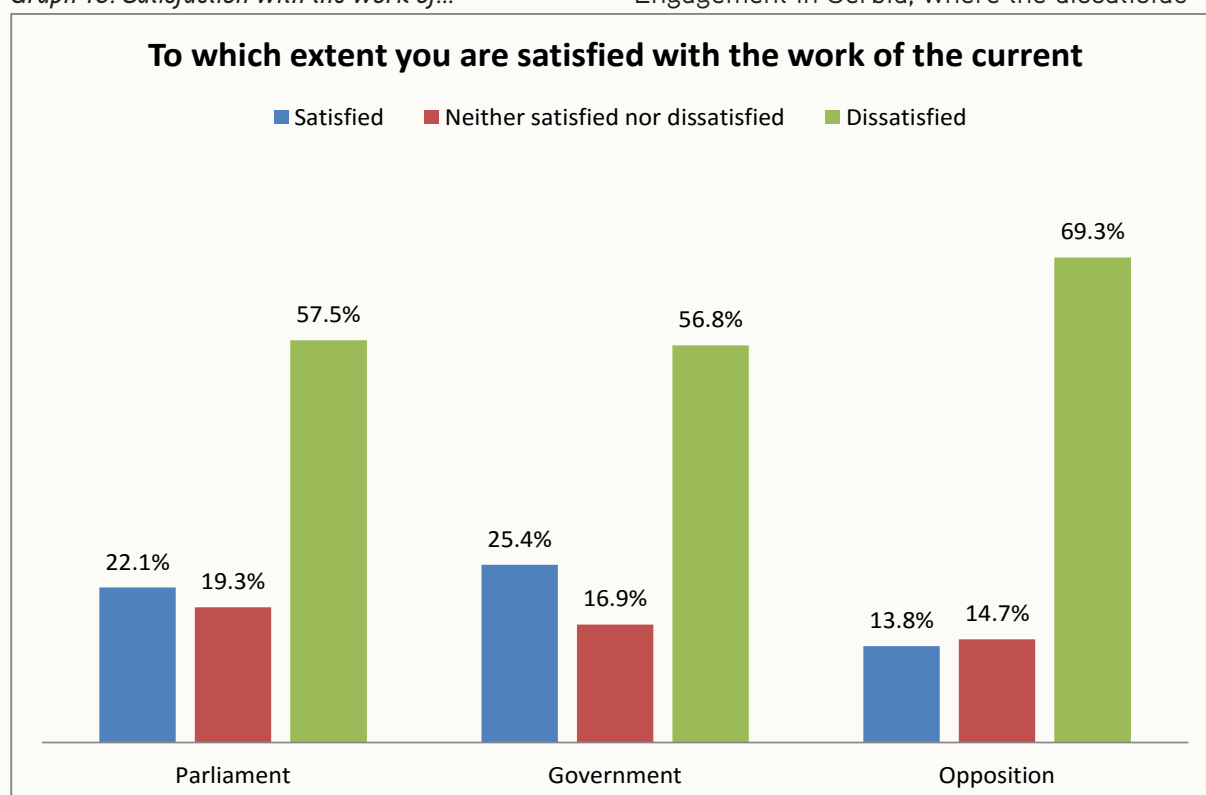
the will of the people. If a "none of the above" option existed in the vote then low turnout would indeed be a reflection of the citizens' apathy towards voting.

The situation was similar for voting at 16 years of age. Urban area participants, either younger or older, were less likely to choose this option, which can be attributed to the greater skepticism of this group, particularly the highly educated, as argued in experts' meeting. This trend reflects the international debate on lowering the age for voting as a means to increase voter turnout. The main argument made against lowering the voting age is that young people under 18 lack the ability and motivation to participate effectively in the electoral process.[40] Supporters of such a reform argue that lowering the voting age would have a positive impact on electoral participation. This is because young people under 18 are likely to still be in school and live with their families, two factors that have been shown to encourage turnout through a variety of socialization mechanisms.[41]

2.3. Efficacy and Satisfaction

The final section of the research aimed to grasp participants' satisfaction with the work of the current government, Parliament and opposition. More than **1 out of 2 participants** are dissatisfied with the current work of the parliament (57.5%) and of the government (56.8%). **Two out of three are** not satisfied with the work of opposition (69.3%). Trends indicate that the participants felt that both the government and the parliament did not represent or serve the citizens well, while this is even more evident regarding the assessment of the opposition's role. Focus group discussion participants added to the explanation of these results, stating that the government was not working as it should and the opposition was passive. Participants gave examples of their dissatisfaction from the government and opposition as well. Data cross-tabulations indicate that the more satisfied participants knew more and were more interested in politics. Similar trends for the government, but not as high, are reported in the Audit of Political Engagement in Serbia, where the dissatisfac-

Graph 16. Satisfaction with the work of...

To which extent you are satisfied with the work of the current

■ Satisfied   ■ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied   ■ Dissatisfied

Parliament: 22.1% / 19.3% / 57.5%
Government: 25.4% / 16.9% / 56.8%
Opposition: 13.8% / 14.7% / 69.3%

40 Chan, T.W. and Clayton, M. (2006). Should the Voting Age Be Lowered to Sixteen? Normative and Empirical Considerations. Political Studies, 54. pp. 533–558
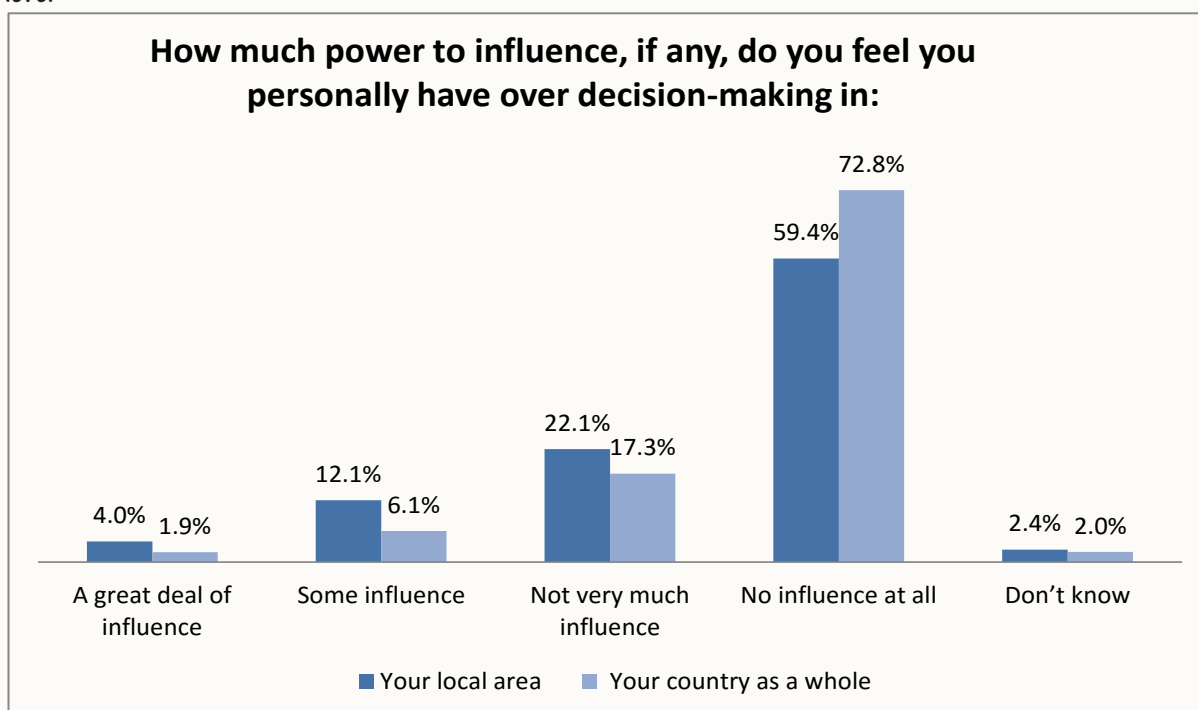
41 Bhatti, Y. and Hansen K.M. (2010). How Turnout Will Decline as the Western Population Grows Older? Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Münster, Germany.

tion also increased. In terms of the Parliament, the results there were almost the same (43% dissatisfied). Participants from the lowest educational levels (elementary), older (above

65 years), coming from rural areas across both genders, tended to be more dissatisfied.

Participants did not believe they had much power to influence decision making either at their local area or in the country as a whole. More than **1 out of 2 participants** perceived (s)he did not have any influence at all (58.7%) at their local area and more than **2 out of 3** at the country as a whole (Graph 17). Women more than men believed that they did not have any power to influence decision making at all. Participants from rural areas also believed they had less power over decision making both at local and national level. The lower the education level, the more participants believed they did not have any influence. These results can be considered worrisome for the health of democracy in Albania. However, similar trends exist in other countries as well, e.g. in Scotland or Serbia.[42] In more developed countries, like Great Britain, the results were higher in terms of the influence on national decision-making. This continuing sense of disempowerment, the perceived lack of influence, and ongoing dissatisfaction with the three main governing institutions may corrode the health of the democracy.

Graph 17. Perception of influence at local and central level

How much power to influence, if any, do you feel you personally have over decision-making in:

- Your local area
- Your country as a whole

	A great deal of influence	Some influence	Not very much influence	No influence at all	Don't know
Your local area	4.0%	12.1%	22.1%	59.4%	2.4%
Your country as a whole	1.9%	6.1%	17.3%	72.8%	2.0%

42 Hansard Society (2015). Audit of Political Engagement 12. Retrieved from http://www.auditofpoliticalengagement.org/media/reports/Audit-of-Political-Engagement-12-2015.pdf, accessed on April 2016

3. PERCEPTIONS OF THE PARLIAMENT AND ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

3.1. Perceptions of the Albanian Parliament

A final thematic section of the study is related to the perceptions of the Parliament and the elected representatives. A positive indicator is that **more than half** of the participants (53.2%) believed that the Parliament is essential to our democracy. Participants mainly disagreed (moderately or strongly) with some of the statements with key functions of the Parliament. When asked if the Albanian Parliament held government to account, 42% of them disagreed. Likewise, they disagreed even more in stating that the Albanian Parliament encouraged public participation (45%) or that it debated and made decisions about issues that mattered to them (47.5%). Similarly, 1 in 2 surveyed participants disagreed with the statement that parliament was open to citizens to attend committee and plenary meetings (50%). It is worth noticing that participants made a clear distinction between the above statements featuring key functions of the Albanian Parliament and the ones linked to its composition.

The two questions related to composition of Parliament had the highest levels of disagreements. When asked if the Albanian Parliament is made up of respected representatives of the society that work in an ethical manner, 2 out of 3 participants (65.4%) did not agree with the statement. Likewise, the vast majority disagrees (almost 60%) with the statement that Parliament represented in a fair manner

all groups of the society (including women, minorities and other vulnerable groups). Women, slightly more than men, disagreed with the statement related to equal representation of all groups of the society.

Today, more than ever, citizens demand greater transparency from their governments. Information on who, why and how relative to decision making is essential to hold government to account and maintain confidence in public institutions. Greater transparency is not only the key to upholding integrity in the parliament. It also contributes to better governance. Indeed, openness and transparency can ultimately improve public services by minimizing the risk of fraud, corruption and mismanagement of public funds.[43] More than half of the participants (56%) stated that parliament was not transparent in the way it was organized and worked. Participants of the FGDs expressed their dissatisfaction with the unfitting language used by MPs, with the fact that MPs did not usually discuss important issues, but only tried to solve their own personal issues and that they felt that all decisions had already been made before they came to Parliament. Respondents maintained that all these could not contribute to accountability.

While the question explores the perceptions of the participants on the functions and composition of the parliament, some might argue

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43 OECD (2015). Better Life Index: Civic Engagement. Retrieved from http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/civic-engagement/, accessed on March 2016.
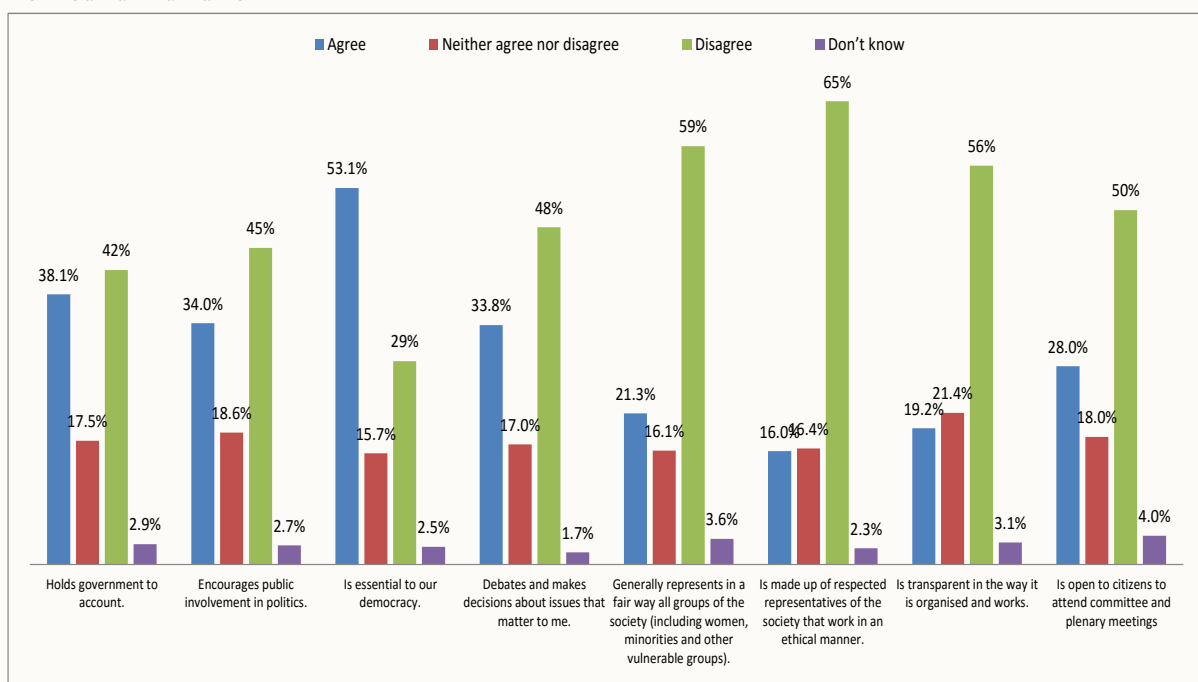
that these perceptions could be influenced by the participant's own beliefs and affiliation to a political party.[44] Cross tabulations of this question with all the statements with levels of satisfaction with the work of government, parliament and opposition partially confirms that:

- Participants satisfied with the work of the Parliament also have positive perceptions concerning the functions and composition of that institution.

- Participants satisfied with the work of opposition do not believe that Parliament holds government to account. These perceptions are the same for the other statements.

- Interestingly, participants satisfied with the work of government have positive perceptions about its functions, but not about its composition.

In conclusion, the above trends show that there is a link between the participants' perceptions on the Parliament and the extent to which they are satisfied with its work. Positive perceptions are related to greater satisfaction, while negative perceptions are related to greater satisfaction from the work of the opposition.

Graph 18. Perceptions on functions and composition of the Albanian Parliament
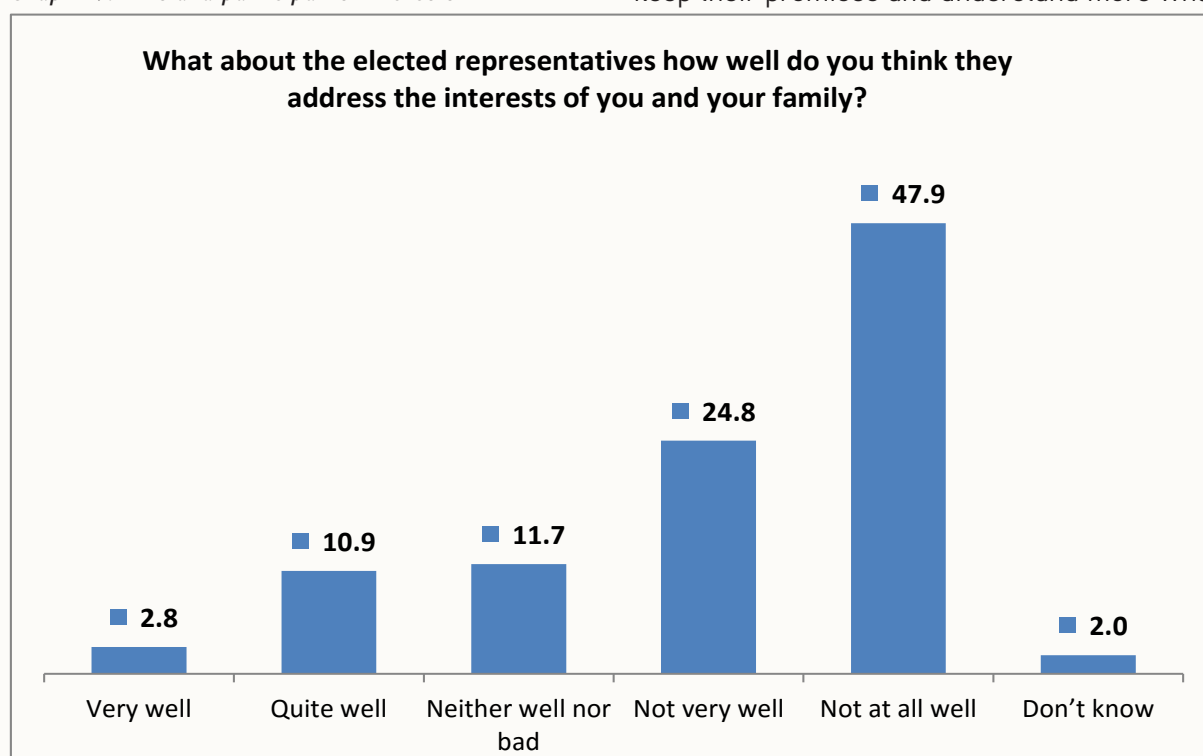
bers of political parties or NGOs/associations.

3.2. Perceptions of MPs and Local Councilors

More than **2 out of 3 participants** (72.7%) reported that they did not think the elected representatives addressed either their or their families' interests, with similar results in rural and urban areas and across both genders. Participants with lower education tended to believe the most that elected representatives did not address any of their interests. Likewise, the older the participant the more this belief was reinforced. Unemployment also played a role here. Unemployed participants were more likely to think that elected representatives did not address well the participants' and their families' interests. In contrast to non-members, political party or NGOs/association members tended to say that they were represented very well or quite well. An earlier study on local government shows that a top-down approach to participation has led to more informed and trustful citizens. Yet, citizens were not empowered so as to be capable of holding local leaders accountable.[45]

Participants that were more likely to disagree with the statements were men and non-mem-

45 Dauti, M (2013). How Institutions Matter for Local Development: Evidence from the Implementation of Decentralization Reform in Albania. *Arts & Sciences Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 273. Retrieved from http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/art_sci_etds/273, accessed on April 2016

44 This suggestion was proposed at the experts' meetings.

Findings from the FGDs reveal that the participants felt disappointed with elected representatives, either MPs or local councilors, for not keeping promises, for not being present in the community they represented, for minding mainly their "own business" and being very distant from the public. Some believed that the MPs were not "elected" representatives, but they were elected by the leader of the political party, making it even more difficult to know, understand, and consequently, address citizens' interests.

reasons why this percentage is considerable. Recent political discourse in which the issue of preventing and removing persons with criminal records from elected and public office dominated, along with significant media coverage of the issue could have influenced participants' perceptions.

It is evident that these data are in line with the results showing that participants believed MPs and local officials did not address well their interests. In the focus groups, participants often emphasized the need for politicians to keep their promises and understand more what

Graph 19. MPs and participants' interests

What about the elected representatives how well do you think they address the interests of you and your family?

When asked to indicate the most important qualities they think an MP should have,[46] the survey participants mentioned many, among which the most commonly reported desired quality of an MP was to be honest and responsible (59.7%), followed by well educated (48.8%) and understanding what being poor means and have good understanding of citizen's problems (37%) (Graph 20). As seen in Graph 20, among the "other" alternative, the most common reported characteristic was "not to be incriminated, not to be involved with illegal activities". The findings from the focus group discussions shed light into the

an average citizen's life was like. They often reported that their area's MPs did not even care to meet the community and while they blamed MPs themselves for this situation, they also blamed the electoral system. According to them, the electoral system did not allow for the citizens to "elect" their zone's MP. Rather, it is the choice of a party leader. According to focus group participants, this deepened the distance between the two parties: citizens and MPs. Furthermore, if qualities are perceived as standards, it is obvious that participants are asking for minimum standards for MPs like being educated, as this has also been part of the recent discourse.

46 It is important to mention that this was an open question, participants were not led to give a certain alternative, the interviewers were trained to circle alternatives as participants reported them.
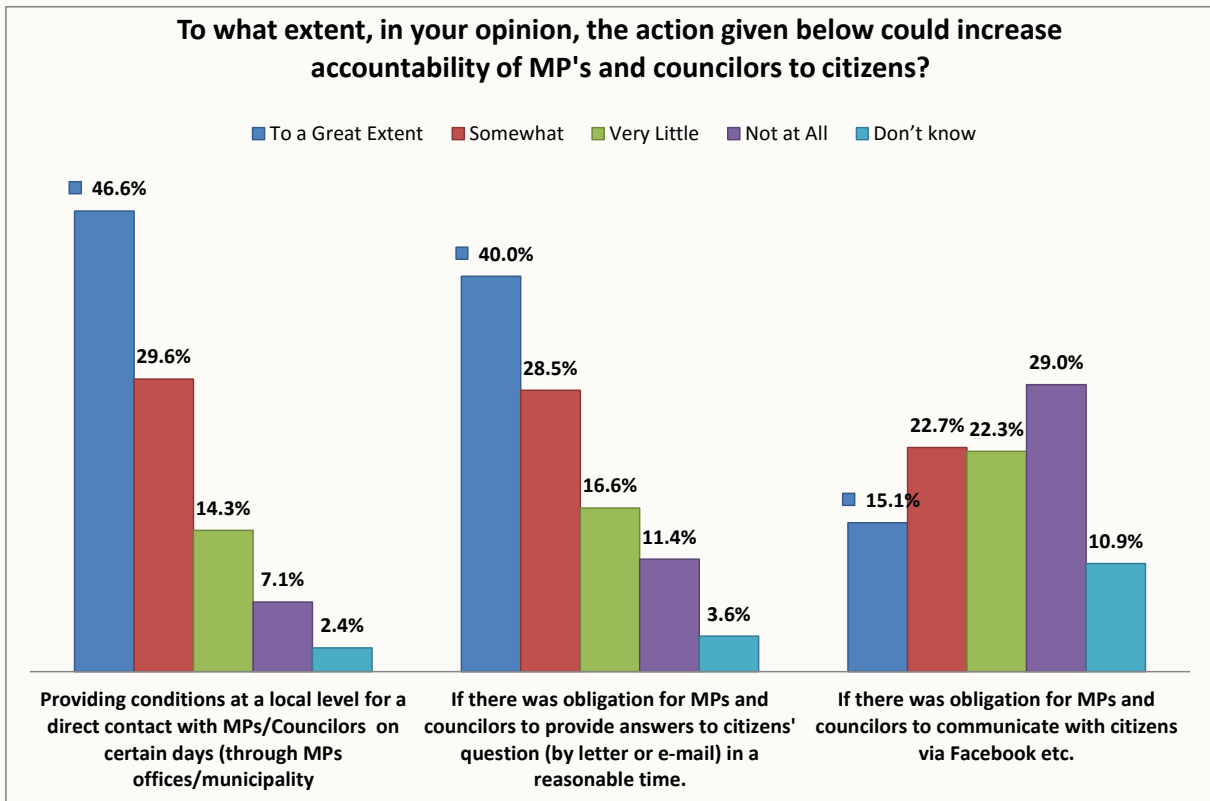
34

Graph 20. Important qualities of an MP
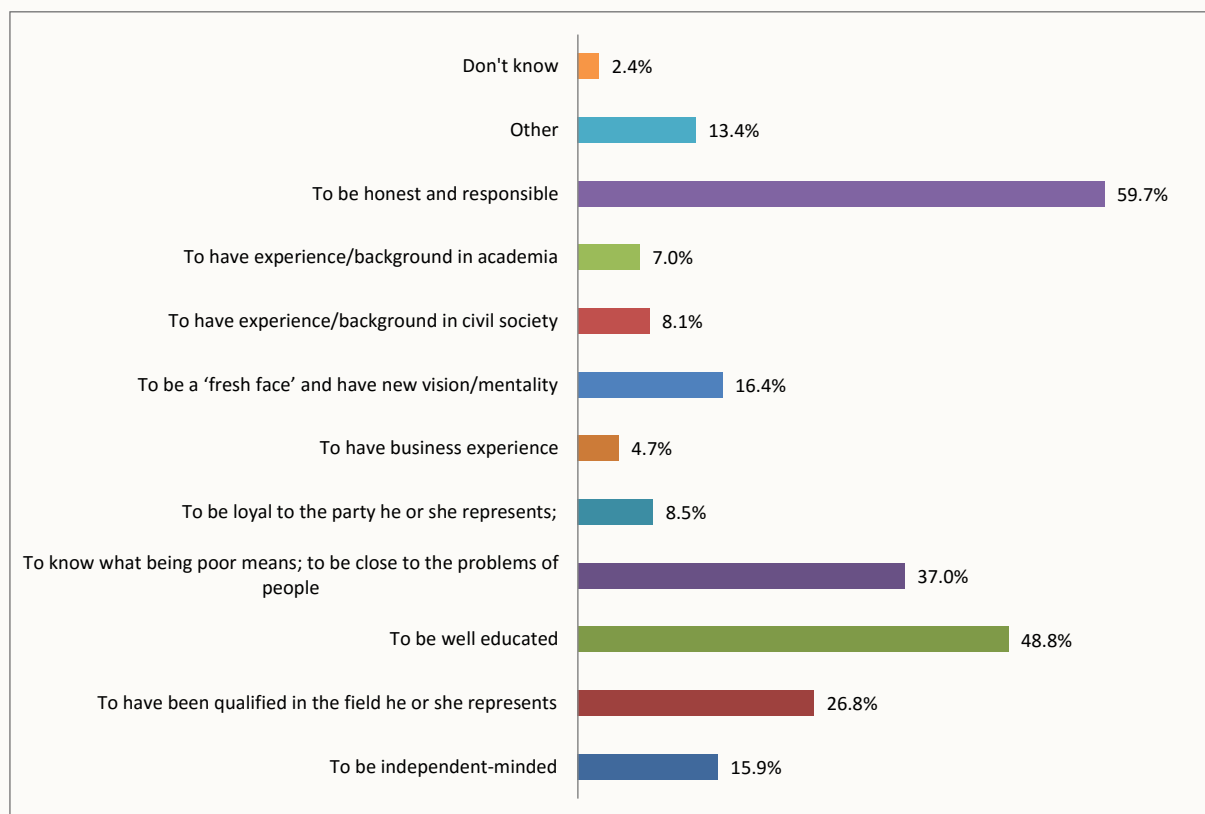
When discussing activities through which they can increase MPs accountability, participants were most likely to choose the following activities: 'providing conditions at a local level for direct contact with MPs/Councilors on certain days -(through MPs offices/municipalities -(76.2%), followed by 'obliging MPs to provide answers to citizens questions in a reasonable time' (68.5). In contrast, the obligation to communicate with citizens via Facebook overall did not have the same results, as half of the participants did not think it could considerably increase the accountability (51.3%) (Graph 21).

Participants in the focus groups found it difficult to contact MPs, because they believed MPs did not have their own offices in the area they represented. FGDs validated and added value to the understanding of these relations. It was said many times that they had tried to make efforts to change a situation by contacting elected officials. With regard to local councilors, although they are considered easier to have contact with, the new territorial division made their roles more confusing. Participants felt that local government in general was more distant from them with the new territorial reform. Participants from rural areas were more likely to suggest that providing the conditions at local level to contact an MP or a local councilor would increase accountability to a great extent. Participants who were political party members were more likely to choose both of these statements in high percentages, whereas participants that were NGO or association members suggested more strongly that these actions would increase accountability. Participants from neither group felt increased social media usage would increase accountability. Overall, people from rural areas, political or NGO/association members, self-employed or public sector employees recommended the first two alternatives to increase accountability. Only half of respondents agreed that obliging MPs/councilors to communicate with citizens via Facebook would increase their accountability suggesting that communicating with citizens via social media only goes hand in hand with direct contact.

Graph 21. Actions to increase accountability

To what extent, in your opinion, the action given below could increase accountability of MP's and councilors to citizens?

■ To a Great Extent   ■ Somewhat   ■ Very Little   ■ Not at All   ■ Don't know

- 46.6%
- 29.6%
- 14.3%
- 7.1%
- 2.4%
- 40.0%
- 28.5%
- 16.6%
- 11.4%
- 3.6%
- 15.1%
- 22.7%
- 22.3%
- 29.0%
- 10.9%

Providing conditions at a local level for a direct contact with MPs/Councilors on certain days (through MPs offices/municipality

If there was obligation for MPs and councilors to provide answers to citizens' question (by letter or e-mail) in a reasonable time.

If there was obligation for MPs and councilors to communicate with citizens via Facebook etc.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Political engagement operates at a number of different levels - local, regional and national. Moreover, general acceptance of the connection between the degree of political engagement and the quality of governance, the depth of public knowledge and understanding, and familiarity and contact with politicians, all play their part in building engagement with politics and the political process. Modelled on a similar research in the United Kingdom, this study aims to provide a comprehensive 'health-check' of a society, both individually and collectively. It is the first contribution to this field in Albania.

- This research confirmed that politics and political processes are an activity for only half of the participants, whom reported to be interested in these issues.

- While participants showed enough knowledge about general politics in Albania, the deeper knowledge of the institutions and processes is often perceived as insufficient.

- Few participants were closely involved in political parties. This is to remind people in political circles that only a small fraction of the population is actually active in politics besides voting.

- With the exception of voting, the study showed that citizens' political engagement is dominated by informal ways of engagement.

- There is a misperception of the concept of political engagement, with almost half of the participants relating it strictly to political party engagement. Therefore, it can contrib-ute to the dropping interest in politics and consequently less engagement, as politics is perceived to be disconnected from ordinary citizens and done by, and for others.

- Of course, politics is much wider than the Parliament alone and, on the evidence of this research, there is some truth in the assertion that 'all politics is local'.[47] Involvement in local decision-making goes hand in hand with propensity to vote. Moreover, majority of actions that participants took to change the situation with which they were not satisfied are of a local character.

- Participants remained interested and ready to get involved in and act for issues that affected them, their families, and communities. They clearly asked for their voice to be heard and for a meaningful involvement, particularly at the local level.

- It is encouraging that half of the participants considered taking part in citizens' pressure activities, organized mainly by civil society groups. However, civil society was expected to be more active in reaching out to citizens, understanding better the needs and offering them concrete platforms. Participants were divided in believing that online voting, blank vote or voting at 16 years would increase participation in voting.

- The study's findings indicate that participants expected from the government, the Parliament and the opposition to be more oriented to the citizens. As in other similar

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47 O'Neill, T. (1994). *All Politics Is Local.* Adams Media Corporation: USA

studies, dissatisfaction of participants with all three institutions was over 50%.

- Perceptions of efficacy and power varied by national and local levels. Participants felt more helpless at the national level, which indicates that central institutions are perceived as more distant by the participants. Yet, they also reported feeling helpless at a local level also and this is discouraging.

- While participants saw it as the core institution of democracy, they expected from

Parliament to conduct its basic functions of representation, oversight and lawmaking.

- Participants' perceptions of MPs were not encouraging. They look forward to MPs' addressing their or their families' interests, to working more in an ethical manner and to being more transparent. They clearly expressed the need for a more direct contact with both local and national elected representatives.

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6. APPENDICES

A. Background Information

Context of Political Engagement in Albania

During the communist regime, Albanians developed passive and neutral attitudes towards public and civic engagement, which carry on to today's emerging democracy. Today, the lowest score of Albanian civil society is in political engagement. Many Albanians have "high level indifference" and "widespread apathy" when it comes to taking action in the public sphere.[48] Generally, in the post-industrial societies citizens have become increasingly disengaged from the traditional channels of political participation (Dalton 2006).[49] A visible sign of the damage of the nerve for civic participation is the decreasing interest and participation in public issues, individualization, caring only for strictly private matters and the neglect for those issues that are of a public nature.[50]

While the 2015 voter turnout was lower in comparison to the 2011 local election, it is still early to say if this is a sign of a decline of participation in elections. However, political engagement in Albania certainly goes beyond voting in elections, as in other countries. For instance, public opinion studies show that

Albanians are very interested in politics.[51] Other studies in this field show that political participation and activism in Albania, regardless of the developments following the fall of communism, have persistently been very low. With very few exceptions, such as the citizen's engagement in pressuring the government in 2013 to say 'no' to chemical weapons' demolition in the country, there are very few positive experiences.[52]

Currently, Albania has an EU candidate status (June 24th, 2014), which was achieved due to the continuous efforts to implement and consolidate EU-related reform measures, in particular those relating to its coveted candidate status. This is a key step for a country that still undergoes corruption and crime issues. Different factors like gender, age, education and even area of residence (urban or rural) influence the level of political engagement in Albania. Recent studies recommend that civil society should be more present in rural areas to support citizens in creating an active community, as it was shown that these areas were the most marginalized and isolated in civil society organizations' agendas (up to 70% of CSOs did not include them in their agenda).[53]

48 Institute for Democracy and Mediation (2011). *CIVICUS: Civil Society Index for Albania in search of citizens and impact.* Albania: Gjergji Vurmo.

49 Ibid.

50 Ashiku, M. (2014). Institutions, Economic Development and Social Capital in Albania. *Journal of Economics and Development Studies,* 2 (2): pp. 469 - 481

51 European Commission (2014). *Public opinion in the European Union. Standard Eurobarometer 82, Autumn 2014*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82_publ_en.pdf accessed on 10 October 2015

52 Dhembo, E., Duci, V. and Ajdini, J. (2016). "Why do I have to trust you?" The perspective from civil society on active citizenship in post–communist Albania. Croatian International Relations Review, 21 (73).

53 IDM (2010). An Action Agenda for Civil Society. Retrieved from https://civilsocietyindex.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/dokument-politikash-indeksi-i-shoqerise-civile-shqiperine.pdf accessed on April 2016

In terms of gender, a series of initiatives were undertaken to increase women's participation in public affairs. However, the actual participation is still low mainly due to the division of labor and community duties along gender lines, as well as the nonetheless strong prejudices that accompany women's activism in the community, especially in remote and rural areas.[54] A recent public opinion study indicated that political participation tends to decline with age.[55] Education is often related to an increase in political information and participation,

Political Information

Literature suggests that levels of political knowledge affect the acceptance of democratic principles and attitudes toward specific public issues and political participation.[56] According to Euro barometer (2014), a major part of the public in Albania (74%) seems to be very interested in political matters at a national, local and European level and almost half of them trust the current government.[57] Since 2011, Albania has officially committed to Open Government Partnership, to promote good and participatory democracy and foster social and economic development, however in practice there is little acceptance and readiness to implement it.[58]

On the other hand, reports on the 2015 local elections show that the public information on the candidates running for the municipal councils was deficient.[59] In line with this, a

UNDP report conducted before the 2015 elections shows that citizens had near universal awareness of only basic facts, like: there is an election on 21 June for local government, voting will be for council and mayor, and there is territorial reorganization of the municipalities. However, there was little knowledge on the candidates for mayor or council and it was reported that the participants doubted if they would ever learn who was standing for the Councils; they felt that citizens rarely had this information prior to election day. There was almost no knowledge of more advanced electoral or civic topics regarding the municipal councils, such as how the Council was to be elected, the numbers elected to the Council, the length of the mandate of the Council, functions of the Municipality etc.[60]

Political Participation

Public participation in governance, achieving good governance practices by exercising various communication, information and consultation forms as well as increasing transparency in the process of drafting policies with social impact are crucial for a country like Albania, which struggles to fulfill what in the actual state theory is considered as democracy's greatest challenge: transition from representative democracy into a participatory one.[61]

The Law No. 8652, dated 31.07.2000, 'On Organization and Functioning of Local Governance", is the piece of legislation that should stipulate the minimal standards of consultation and relevant procedures. However, the law is short of a conceptual separation among consultation, informing, and exchange and of procedures and minimal standards of consultation. The legal amendments foresee no innovation with regard to structures that support citizen participation (liaison structures), which according to the law in effect are the village head and chairmanship in rural areas as well as neighborhood administrators in towns and

54 Dhembo, E., Duci, V. and Ajdini, J. (2016). "Why Do I Have to Trust You?" The Perspective from Civil Society on Active Citizenship in Post–Communist Albania. Croatian International Relations Review, 21 (73).

55 IDM (2015). Trust in Government. Retrieved from http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Raporti-i-plote_-sondazhi_besimi-ne-qeveri_2015.pdf accessed on April 2015

56 Galston, W.A. (2001). Political Knowledge, Political Engagement and Civic Education. Annual Review of Political Sciences, 4: 217 – 234.

57 European Commission (2014). *Public opinion in the European Union. Standard Eurobarometer 82, Autumn 2014*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb82/eb82_publ_en.pdf accessed on 10 October 2015

58 Institute of Democracy and Mediation (2014). *Albanians and the European Social Model, Public Administration in Albania: between politics and citizens.* Tirana: Elona Dhëmbo p.11

59 Coalition for Free And Fair Elections and Sustainable Democracy (2015). *Preliminary Statement on Local Elections 2015.* Retrieved from http://www.kzln.org.al/docs/KZLNDQ_Deklarate_Paraprake_Zgjedhje_Vendore_2015_%2022qershor.pdf, accessed on 6 October 2015

60 United Nations Development Program (2015). *Research on Voter Education and Motivation prior to June 2015 Local Elections in Albania.* Tirana: Partners Albania

61 Kacidhja, E. (2013). Civil Society and Interest Groups Involvement in the Legislative Process. In Institute for Democracy and Mediation (2013). *Parliamentary Challenges in the EU Accession Process.* Tirana, Albania pp: 8-9.

cities.[62] Still, positive steps are taken in regard to the legislation. The relatively new laws on public consultation and freedom of information are steps forward for a more transparent and participative democracy.[63] Civil society organizations played a major role in the amendment of the two laws.

According to the "Trust in government" 2015 opinion poll, even though citizens claim to have enough information to judge a certain decision as being good or bad, they still believe that only the Parliament and MPs should take the responsibility to develop public policies (80%). These findings point at a general apathy of the Albanian society.[64] These trends are also important for the citizens' perceived role, their rights and duties as well. Motivating citizens to monitor the work of the MPs is a key element in holding them and the relevant institutions accountable. The main reasons for this are also explained in other studies and include the perception of politics as 'dirty business', the risk of losing employment upon rotation of political power, mostly women participants mention a lack of time, the burden of numerous family obligations and societal expectations, and the perceived masculine nature of politics of education and skills as obstacles. Civic engagement has the same pattern, remaining at low levels and civil society is not very known to the public.[65]

Regarding participation to elections, women participation generally is perceived as positive. Women in parliament are seen as productive and their performance as slightly more positive than that of their male colleagues. Women politicians are generally perceived as better at promoting cross-party dialogue and more able to have constructive discussions than male colleagues.[66] Yet, only 11% of the candidates for mayors were women or young women in the Local Elections of 21 June 2015. In line with

this were the results of youth participation where only 6% of the candidates for mayor, of the local elections of 21 June 2015, were young people.[67]

Parliament and the Public

Recent studies indicate that the public do not see the parliament as an open institution, and show little interest in accessing parliamentary information.[68] It currently relies on the media as a source of information about the parliament. Additionally, a low level of interest in following parliamentary discussions due to lack of debate culture among members of parliament (MPs) and an overall sense of disappointment with politics and politicians. Similarly, most people claim that it is difficult to reach MPs outside of election campaigns. The lack of constituency offices is one of the problems for accessing MPs. Many do not know how to contact the Member of Parliament representing their district.[69]

Despite the fact that throughout 2015 some progress has been made in the functioning of the Parliament, in particular by improving law-making transparency,[70] it is still worth exploring if the changes had an impact in the citizens' perceptions on the Parliament. EU Progress Report on Albania also states that coordination with the executive branch needs to be enhanced, with other oversight mechanisms, such as question and answer sessions, remaining underused.[71]

62 Institute of Democracy and Mediation (2014). *Challenges of Democracy at Local Level: An Analytical Overview of the Draft Law "On Some Additions and Amendments to Law No. 8652, dated 31.07.2000, 'On Organization and Functioning of Local Governance"*, Policy paper nr 5, November 2014.

63 Law no. 119/2014 "On the right to information" and Law no. 146/2014 "On notification and public consultation"

64 IDM (2015). *Trust in government*. Tirana: Lame and Papa, p.6

65 National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2015). Focus Group Research Report: Findings from Public Opinion Research in Albania. Tirana, Albania

66 Ibid.

67 Albanian Coalition for Promotion of Women and Youth in Politics (29 May 2015). P*ublic Statement: Albania Among the Last Countries in Europe for Women Running for Local Public Office*. Retrieved from http://www.crca.al/news-statements-women-and-youth-politics-women-politics/public-statement-albania-among-last accessed on 5 October 2015.

68 National Democratic Institute (NDI) (2015). *Focus Group Research Report: Findings from Public Opinion Research in Albania.* Tirana, Albania

69 Ibid.

70 EU (2015). *Albania 2015 Progress Report*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_albania.pdf, accessed on April 11 2016

71 Ibid.

B. Detailed Methodology

Study Design

For the purposes of this study, a mixed-method approach was used. For the quantitative part, a stratified quota sampling was employed, using as pre-selected criteria gender and rural/urban area. The study was conducted in 12 different sites in Albania, divided in 24 rural/urban areas (see Appendix C. Study Sites). Although the geographical coverage of the study was national, considering it has not used a probability sampling, the data cannot extrapolate to the entire population; they only show the trends for the study participants.

The qualitative part of the study had a two-fold function:

- Prior to the survey: semi-structured interviews with political party representatives and civil society experts (including academia) was undertaken in order to complete the mapping of "needs and concerns" from a practical perspective; a focus group discussion served to validate identified dimensions and indicators as well as to include more local aspects of political engagement;

- Post-survey validation FGDs and expert meeting: three focus groups were organized to explore insights and perceptions of key stakeholders on the research topic and survey findings. An expert meeting also served the same purpose.

Sampling

For the quantitative part the sampling frame included individuals older than 18 years and able to vote.[72] The final sample consisted in N = 1538 participants. Such sample provided for high level of accuracy of the survey. A non-probability quota representative sample was employed taking into consideration the lack of a precise sample framework in Albania because of the population mobilities; the lack

of a consolidated address system and the fact that the most reliable voters' lists were still inflated with migrants and people not living in Albania. Furthermore, this method was more consolidated and used in other similar studies as well in the country and beyond. The preset criteria for quota were gender and rural/urban area. Specifically, the sample was divided in the 12 major regions in Albania following these steps:[73]

1. The region's center was selected, so one municipality was part of the study.

2. Within the municipality an urban and a rural area was selected (50/50), mainly the larger village[74] (it was a total of 24 units, so there were 64 respondents for each unit).

3. An equal number of men and women was also selected (32/32 per each);[75]

4. Interviewers used an accidental sampling of the individuals and were instructed to pay attention in order to include as much as possible participants of different age groups.

A purposive sample of political party representatives and civil society experts was used for the pre-survey qualitative part. The first focus group discussion included participants with different socio-economic background, age and education. FGDs participants were selected for the post-survey qualitative part taking into consideration the research findings in relation to specific demographic variables, in order to grasp all the different perspectives regarding political engagement. So, FGDs included participants from urban/rural areas, of different educational levels (divided in higher education and lower/upper secondary education), gender, age, and employment status. However, in order to enhance their participation and expression of opinions, in each FGDs a certain typology was employed, for instance:

- participants of the first FDG were from rural areas,

- participants of the second FDG had higher education, and

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72 Although political engagement of younger participants, e.g. of 14 to 18 years old or even younger, is also very important, other more age-appropriate instruments should have been developed to gauge their perceptions, which was not feasible in this study. However, it is highly recommended that future researches include this age-group as well.

73 More detailed information on the study's sample can be found at Appendix C

74 The last Census indicated an equal share of population in urban and rural areas in Albania.

75 Based on the same rationale of Census data that indicate that there is an equal total number of men and women.

- the majority of the participants part of the third FGD had lower or upper secondary education.

In line with the above, an experts' meeting was conducted to serve the data analysis and interpretation as well as to validate the data. Participant experts were representatives of civil society and academia.

Table 2. Sample of the study

Area/ Category	Women	Men
Urban	401	414
Rural	355	367
Total	756	781[*]

[*] Although at the final sample there was a small gender difference, overall this percentage didn't impact the ration and data analysis

Qualitative

In order to inform better the political engagement indicators, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted. A focus group discussion was conducted to validate core indicators and both FGDs and expert meeting were used for data validation.

Table 3. Qualitative sample

	Semi-structured interviews	Pre-survey FGDs	Post-Survey FGDs
Number of participants	8	9	32

Research Tools

The research tools used for this study were developed by the researchers based on the Hansard Society practice and feedback as well as with the collaboration and feedback from NDI in Albania. A close-ended questionnaire was used for the quantitative part, which was separated in 5 different sections, namely: demographics, perceptions of the Parliament and elected representatives, political engagement and participation at local and central level, political knowledge and interest, and efficacy and satisfaction. The questionnaire was

initially based on the Hansard Society "Audit of Political Engagement" Questionnaire, but was adapted to the Albanian context. The initial questionnaire was piloted in urban and rural areas with a total of N= 200 participants and afterwards the relevant changes were made, in terms of language simplification and also content/length of the questionnaire. The final version of the questionnaire was consulted with experts of the field, prior and after the piloting phase.

Three tools were developed for the qualitative part: a semi structure interview for key stakeholders and two FGDs guidelines one for the pre-survey FGD and another for the post-survey FGDs. (See Appendix D: Research questionnaire). The qualitative tools were not related to the original Hansard Society methodology, but served the purposes of adapting and contextualizing the questionnaire (pre-survey) and the deeper understanding of the quantitative data (post-survey).

Quantitative

- Questionnaire "Audit of Political Engagement"

Qualitative

- Interview structure for key stakeholders

- Pre-survey focus group discussion guidelines

- Post-survey focus groups discussion guidelines

Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires were developed initially in English and then translated and validated in Albanian. Part of the whole process was an extended and careful consultation with experts. Data collectors were trained on the administration of the questionnaires. Researchers conducted semi-structures interviews themselves with key experts and FGDs. The fieldwork lasted approximately three weeks, during February 2016.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 20. Data were checked for extreme and missing values and were cleaned. Afterwards, frequencies and cross-tabulations were the main part of tests used for the study.

A thematic data analysis approach was used for qualitative data analysis. The data analyses summary underwent an independent, secondary review, after which research team resolved minor discrepancies during research group meetings.

Ethical Considerations

All the participants of this study were requested to give their informed consent for participation. The participation in the study was voluntary. All data were treated confidentially and used only for the study purposes.

Limitation of the Study

- While it would be suggested of an opportunity to generalize the data for the entire population, probability sampling was not possible due to financial and time constraints.

- Despite the fact that this study tried to capture all the relevant indicators of political engagement as modelled on the Hansard Society Political Engagement Study, other indicators and factors can also influence citizens' political engagement. It is recommended that future studies should address and include these factors as well.

Characteristics of Participants

A total number of N=1538 participants became part of the study. The majority of them were from urban areas (53%) and little less come from rural areas (47%).

Graph 22. Area of the participants
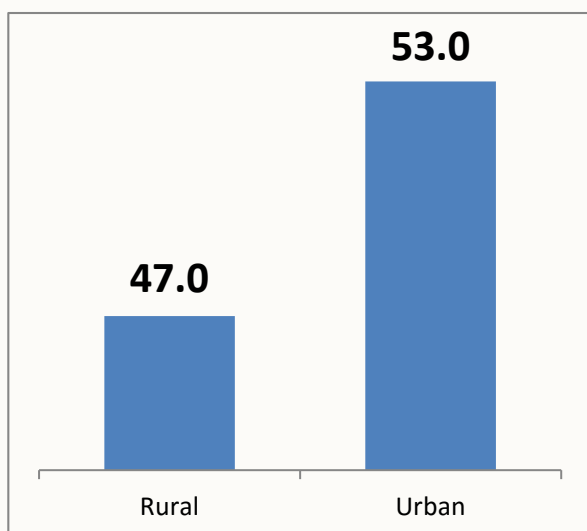
As seen in the graphs below (Graph 23) almost half of the sample were women (49.2%) and the other half men (50.8%). Most participants of the study had an upper secondary (47.1%) or higher education (28.6%) with an average education years of m = 12.46; they were of a mean age of m = 38.7 years. Many of them were unemployed (24.1%), others were employed in the private sector (23.2%) or in the public sector (13.7%). The rest of the participants were either self-employed or unemployed or students and pensioners.

Graph 23. Gender
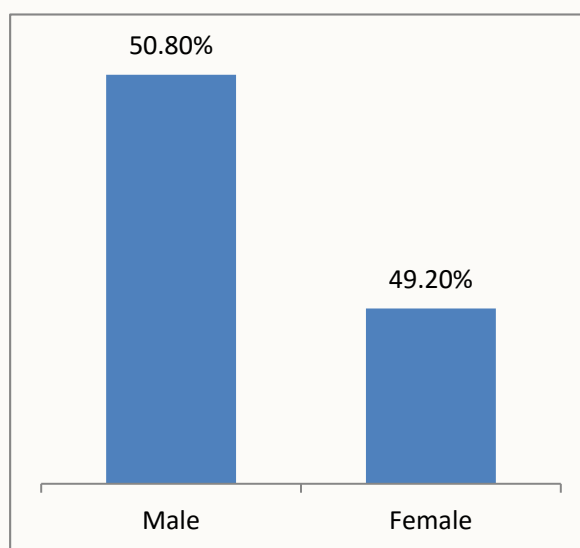
Graph 24. Participants' age groups
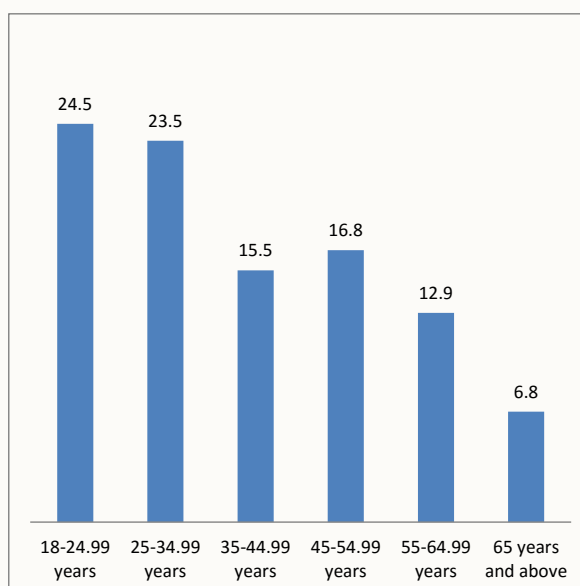
Graph 25. Educational level

C. Study Sites

Table 4. Sites where the study was conducted

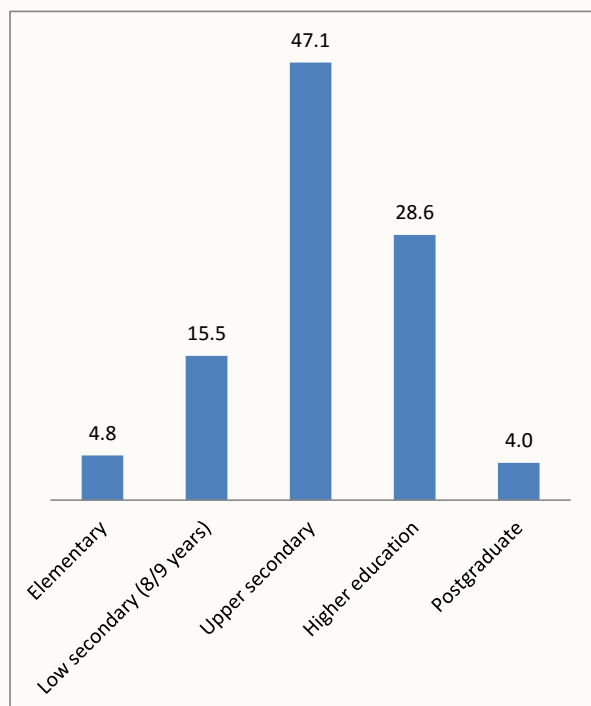| Location	Frequen-cy	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumu-lative Percent
Shkoder	64	4.2	4.2	4.2
Rrethinat	65	4.2	4.2	8.4
Kukes	64	4.2	4.2	12.5
Bicaj	64	4.2	4.2	16.7
Lezhe	64	4.2	4.2	20.9
Shenkoll	64	4.2	4.2	25.0
Peshkopi	64	4.2	4.2	29.2
Maqellare	64	4.2	4.2	33.4
Durres	64	4.2	4.2	37.5
Rashbull	65	4.2	4.2	41.7
Tirane	64	4.2	4.2	45.9
Kashar	64	4.2	4.2	50.1
Elbasan	64	4.2	4.2	54.2
Bra-dashesh	64	4.2	4.2	58.4
Fier	64	4.2	4.2	62.5
Levan	64	4.2	4.2	66.7
Berat	64	4.2	4.2	70.9
Otllak	64	4.2	4.2	75.0
Korca	64	4.2	4.2	79.2
Bulgarec qender	64	4.2	4.2	83.4
Gjiro-kaster	64	4.2	4.2	87.5
Lunxheri	64	4.2	4.2	91.7
Vlore	64	4.2	4.2	95.8
Qender Vlore	64	4.2	4.2	100.0
Total	1,538	100.0	100.0	

Graph 26. Participants' employment status

D. Research Questionnaire

Audit of Political Engagement, Albania 2015. The Questionnaire

Letter of Informed Consent

Good morning/day/afternoon, my name is _____ .I am working as an interviewer for the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), which regularly conducts surveys on different topics. I would appreciate if you answered some questions for me. The survey is anonymous and all obtained data will be presented only in group form, and used solely for the purposes of this project.

Your participation in this project is purely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will not change your future relations with IDM. If you do decide to participate, you may choose not to answer any individual questions for any reason. If you decide to participate, you are also free to completely withdraw your participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact IDM at info@idmalbania.org

Thank you!

Note to the interviewer: Please before conducting the interview, fill out the following information:

Respondent's Qark (region)   _____

Respondent's City/Village   _____

What area is it?   ☐ Rural   ☐ Urban   ☐ Periurban   ☐ Can't classify

SECTION 0: DEMOGRAPHICS

001. Respondent's gender: ☐ Male   ☐ Female

002. Respondents age_____(in years)

003. Respondent's completed years of education (total)_____(in years)

004. Respondent's highest level of education _____

005. Are you currently employed?

No, never been	☐ 1
Not at the moment	☐ 2
Yes, employed in the private sector	☐ 3
Yes, employed in the public sector	☐ 4
Yes, self employed	☐ 5
Student	☐ 6
Pensioner	☐ 7
Other, please specify _____	☐ 8
Refusal	☐ 9

006. Are you a member of a political party in the country?

Yes	☐ 1
No	☐ 2
Refuse to answer	☐ 3
Don't Know/ Not sure	☐ 99

007. Are you a member of any nongovernmental association/organizations the country?

Yes	☐ 1
No	☐ 2
Refuse to answer	☐ 3
Don't Know/ Not sure	☐ 99

SECTION 1: PERCEPTIONS ON THE PARLIAMENT AND ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

101. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Statement	Strongly agree 1	Tend to agree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Tend to disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5	Don't know 99
A. The Albanian Parliament holds government to account.	1	2	3	4	5	99
B. The Albanian Parliament encourages public involvement in politics.	1	2	3	4	5	99
C. The Albanian Parliament is essential to our democracy.	1	2	3	4	5	99
D. The Albanian Parliament debates and makes decisions about issues that matter to me.	1	2	3	4	5	99
E. The Albanian Parliament generally represents in a fair way all groups of the society (including women, minorities and other vulnerable groups).	1	2	3	4	5	99
F. In general, the Albanian Parliament is made up of respected representatives of the society that work in an ethical manner.	1	2	3	4	5	99
G. In general, the Albanian Parliament is transparent in the way it is organized and works.	1	2	3	4	5	99
H. In general, the Albanian Parliament is open to citizens to attend committee and plenary meetings	1	2	3	4	5	99

102. What about the elected representatives how well do you think they address the interests of you and your family?

☐ Very well ☐ Quite well ☐ Not very well ☐ Neither well nor bad ☐ Not at all well
☐ Don't know

103. Which of the following qualities would you say are important for an MP to have? (DO NOT READ THE ANSWERS, CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

    A. To be independent-minded

    B. To have been brought up in the area he or she represents

    C. To be well educated

    D. To know what being poor means; to be close to the problems of people

    E. To be loyal to the party he or she represents

    F. To have business experience

    G. To be a 'fresh face' and have new vision/mentality

    H. To have experience/background in civil society

    I. To have experience/background in academia

    J. To be honest and responsible

    K. Other _____

    L. Don't know

104. To what extent, in your opinion, the action given below could increase accountability of MPs and councilors to citizens?

	To a Great Extent 1	Somewhat 2	A Little 3	Not at All 4	Don't know 5
A. Providing conditions at a local level for a direct contact with MPs/Councilors on certain days (through MPs offices/municipality premises	1	2	3	4	5
B. If there was obligation for MPs and councilors to provide answers to citizens' question (by letter or e-mail) in a reasonable time.	1	2	3	4	5
C. If there was obligation for MPs and councilors to communicate with citizens via Facebook or Twitter	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 2: POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION (LOCAL AND CENTRAL LEVEL)

201. In your opinion, political engagement in the Albanian context is:

    a. Political party engagement.

    b. Political engagement without being part of a political party.

    c. Both

    d. Don't know

202. If general/parliamentary election were to be held this week, how likely it is that you would vote?

    1. I wouldn't vote, for sure

    2. I probably wouldn't vote

    3. Undecided-I don't know if or not I would vote

    4. I would probably vote

    5. I would vote for sure

      6. Refuse to answer

203. How much would you say that the following statement describes your attitude?

	Completely 1	Mainly yes 2	Yes and no 3	Mainly no 4	Not at all 5
A. "I want to be involved in decisions of authorities at national level"	1	2	3	4	5
B. "I want to be involved in decisions of authorities at local level, where I live"	1	2	3	4	5

204. In the last 12 months (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)	Have you done any of the following?	What would you be prepared to do if you felt strongly enough about an issue?
A. Contacted an MP, a Minister or other high level public official, a high level political party member		
B. Contacted a local councilor or local municipal officer		
C. Participated in a meeting of the municipality council, taken part in a public consultation		
D. Participated, as a volunteer, in an activity in your local community		
E. Discussed politics/the issue with other people		
F. Expressed opinion or discussed politics on the Internet and/or social networks		
G. Sought information from state organs according to the Law on Free Access to Information		
H. Taken an active part in a campaign, demonstration or march organized by political parties		
I. Taken an active part in a civil campaign, demonstration or march (not organized by a political party)		
J. Created or signed a petition online or offline		
K. Alerted the media (newspaper, radio or TV) about the existence of a problem		
L. Other, please specify		
M. Don't know		
N. None of the above (Go to Q.206)		

205. The majority of your efforts mentioned in the previous question:

    a. At local level

    b. at central level

    c. both the same

    d. don't know

206. (If not) What is the main reason for you not to participate or take an action:

    A)   Nobody listens to what I have to say

    B)   My opinion isn't important

    C)   Politicians are just out there for themselves

    D)   The system doesn't allow for me to have an influence

    E)   I'm not given the opportunity to have an influence

    F)   I'm not interested in influencing decision making

    G)   I don't have the time to influence decision making

    H)   I don't have enough information

    I)   The electoral system means that my vote does not matter

    J)   Politicians don't care about people like me

    K)   Other, please specify _____

207. To what extent, if at all, would you be willing to engage for:

	To a Great Extent 1	Somewhat 2	A Little 3	Not at All 4	Don't know 5
A. Your own personal interest/benefits	1	2	3	4	99
B. For an interest you share together with other citizens/your community	1	2	3	4	99
C. To support family and friends	1	2	3	4	99
D. For a cause you believe in but does not relate to you personally	1	2	3	4	99

208. Which of the following activities do you believe can contribute to changing the state/situation you are not satisfied with at local or national level? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

A. Voting in election (both parliamentary/local election)

B. Drawing media attention to a problem

C. Joining a political party

D. Taking part in organized citizens' pressure activities on decision makers through signing petitions or participating in public debates

E. Contacting MPs/local councilors

F. Connecting with NGOs dealing with politics, legislature, human rights, through internet/social media, online petitions, Facebook campaigns etc.

209. 'Which of the following changes would you like to see introduced to improve participation in elections in Albania?

	Yes	No	Don't know
A. Emigrants voting at their current residence			
B. Blank vote: possibility to have abstention / 'none of the above' option on the ballot paper			
C. Online voting			
D. Votes at 16 years of age			
E. Other, please specify_____			

SECTION 3. KNOWLEDGE AND INTEREST IN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

3. 1. Knowledge

301. Thinking about the last general elections, can you tell me which party got the majority in the qark you voted/were supposed to vote?

☐PS ☐PD ☐LSI ☐PR ☐PDIU ☐PBDNJ
☐None ☐No, I can't tell ☐Other _____

302. Thinking about the current mayor of your municipality, could you tell which party does he/she belong to?

☐PS ☐PD ☐LSI ☐PR ☐PDIU ☐PBDNJ
☐None ☐No, I can't tell ☐Other _____

303. How is the President of the Republic elected? (DO NOT READ THE ANSWERS)

☐ Directly by the citizens

☐ By Parliament

☐ By the Central Elections Commission

☐ By the High Council of Justice

☐ Don't know

☐ Other, please specify_____

304. How many municipalities are there in the country currently? _____(number)

305. Who is the current Minister of Justice? (DO NOT READ THE ANSWERS)

☐ Fatmir Xhafaj

☐ Ylli Manjani

☐ Nasip Naco

☐ Edmond Haxhinasto

☐ Other, please specify _____

☐ Don't know

306. Who is the Speaker of the Parliament? (DO NOT READ THE ANSWERS)

☐ Ilir Meta

☐ Vangjel Dule

☐ Valentina Leskaj

☐ Jozefina Topalli

☐ Other, please specify _____

☐ Don't know

3.2. Perception of One's Own Knowledge

307. In general, how much, if anything, would you feel you know about:

	I know a lot 1	I know fairly enough 2	I know a little 3	Nothing at all 4	I can't say for sure 99
A. Politics in Albania	1	2	3	4	99
B. Local self-government in your municipality/town	1	2	3	4	99
C. Government	1	2	3	4	99
D. Parliament	1	2	3	4	99
E. Role of MPs	1	2	3	4	99
H. Role of the President	1	2	3	4	99

4.3 Interest in

308. How much are you interested in the following topics?

	Very interested 1	Fairly interested 2	Not very interested 3	Not at all interested 4	Don't know 99
A. Politics in Albania	1	2	3	4	99
B. Local self-government in your municipality/town	1	2	3	4	99
C. Government	1	2	3	4	99
D. Parliament	1	2	3	4	99
E. Role of MPs	1	2	3	4	99
F. Role of the President	1	2	3	4	99

309 . Which are the main three sources from which you get informed on politics in the country? (CIRCLE ONLY THREE)

☐ A. TV and Radio

☐ B. Printed Press

☐ C. Online portals/sites of printed press

☐ D. Other online media (FB, blogs, online portals and others)

☐ E. Political party channels of information (official party communication and informal communication with party contacts)

☐ F. Friends and connections

☐ G. Other _____

☐ H. None of them

☐ I. I don't follow politics at all.

SECTION 4. EFFICACY AND SATISFACTION

Satisfaction

401. To what extent you are satisfied with the work of the current:

	Fully satisfied 1	Somewhat satisfied 2	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied 3	Somewhat dissatisfied 4	Totally dissatisfied 5	Don't know 99
A. Parliament	1	2	3	4		99
B. Government	1	2	3	4		99
C. Opposition	1	2	3	4		99

Efficacy

402. How much power to influence, if any, do you feel you personally have over decision-making in:

	A great deal of influence 1	Some influence 2	Not very much influence 3	No influence at all 4	Don't know 99
A. Your local area	1	2	3	4	99
B. Your country as a whole	1	2	3	4	99

403. Would you call yourself a very strong, fairly strong, not very strong or not a supporter at all of any political party ?

☐ Very strong ☐ Fairly strong ☐ Not very strong

☐ I'm not a supporter ☐ I don't know

Thank you!