



ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL

MEDIA USAGE FROM

ALBANIAN MPs **2023-2024**



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Published by: Balkan Investigative Reporting Network in Albania
Str. Nikolla Jorga, No. 8/8, Tirana, Albania
<http://birn.eu.com/>

Editor: Kristina Voko
Besar Likmeta

Copyeditor: Stephanie Huitson

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This publication was funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of authors and BIRN Albania and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context and Purpose of the Study

Social media has become a central arena for political communication in Albania. High internet penetration, widespread smartphone use, and heavy reliance on social platforms for news consumption have fundamentally re-shaped how citizens encounter political information and how elected officials communicate with the public. Facebook, in particular, has emerged as the dominant platform for political visibility, agenda-setting, and narrative competition.

Against this backdrop, this study examines how Members of Parliament (MPs) in Albania use Facebook outside electoral campaign periods. While political communication during elections has been extensively monitored, less attention has been paid to how MPs communicate during routine parliamentary cycles, when institutional roles, governance practices, and public accountability should theoretically take precedence over mobilisation and campaigning.

Covering the period from 1 June 2023 to 31 May 2024, the report analyses Facebook activity from 110 public pages operated by MPs across all parliamentary groups. It seeks to understand what MPs communicate, how they communicate, which narratives dominate, how audiences respond, and how MPs themselves perceive social media as a political tool. The findings provide insight into the evolving relationship between digital platforms, political power, and democratic practice in Albania.

Methodological Approach

The study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative monitoring, qualitative content analysis, and in-depth interviews.

Quantitative analysis was based on 38,397 Facebook posts, collected using Meta's CrowdTangle platform. The dataset captures posting volume, engagement metrics (interactions and video views), content formats, overperformance indicators, and re-sharing patterns. Posts were analysed across parliamentary groups, gender, political role, and time.

Qualitative analysis involved manual coding of all thematic posts using a bespoke coding framework that classified content by subject, thematic area, purpose (informative, mobilising, consultative), sentiment, and actor visibility. This approach made it possible to move beyond metrics and examine how political narratives are constructed and framed.

To contextualise the data, the research team conducted 10 in-depth interviews with MPs and communication experts. These interviews explored motivations, strategies, pressures, ethical concerns, and perceptions of online political communication, providing critical insight into the human and institutional dynamics behind observed patterns.

Key Findings

Facebook as the Primary Arena of Parliamentary Communication

The findings confirm that Facebook has become indispensable to parliamentary life in Albania. MPs use the platform as a substitute for traditional media, a tool for personal branding, and a mechanism for constant visibility. Interviewed MPs described a strong sense of pressure to post continuously, noting that absence from Facebook is often interpreted as inactivity or disengagement.

During the monitoring period, MPs published more than 38,000 posts, illustrating a political communication environment defined by permanent output rather than episodic engagement. Facebook is not merely a channel through which politics is communicated; it actively shapes the rhythm, style, and incentives of political behaviour.

Structural Dominance of the Executive

One of the most striking findings is the overwhelming dominance of executive actors in Facebook communication. Posts related to government activity account for nearly 60% of all thematic content, but generate over two-thirds of all interactions and almost three-quarters of all video views.

This imbalance reflects both institutional power and algorithmic advantage. Ministers and the Prime Minister have greater access to public events, visual content, and coordinated re-sharing networks. Their posts are systematically amplified through intra-party circulation, multiplying visibility far beyond individual follower bases.

By contrast, legislative activity and parliamentary oversight remain marginal online, in both volume and engagement. Procedural parliamentary work struggles to compete with executive communication that is visually rich, event-driven, and symbolically powerful. As a result, Facebook reinforces offline power asymmetries rather than counterbalancing them.

Facebook as a Broadcast Tool, Not a Participatory Space

Despite frequent references to “engagement”, MPs overwhelmingly use Facebook as a one-way communication channel. The analysis shows that 98.6% of thematic posts are purely informative, focused on announcements, achievements, or political messaging.

Mobilising posts account for just 1.3%, while genuinely consultative posts represent a negligible 0.1%. This pattern is confirmed by interviews, where MPs acknowledged that while social media allows them to reach citizens directly, it is poorly suited to deliberation. Comment sections are often avoided due to hostility, and direct messages are flooded with requests beyond MPs’ mandates.

As a result, Facebook expands the reach of political communication without deepening democratic participation. Visibility increases, but dialogue remains limited.

Emotional and Symbolic Content Drives Engagement

Audience behaviour does not mirror posting behaviour. While most posts are institutional and informational, engagement is driven disproportionately by emotional, symbolic, and personalised content.

Personal posts—accounting for less than one-fifth of all content—generate nearly one-third of all interactions. Among these, emotionally charged or populist posts perform especially well, producing the highest interaction rates and video visibility.

This dynamic reflects the logic of platform algorithms, which reward content that triggers strong emotional responses. MPs adapt to these incentives, consciously or not, by integrating symbolic gestures, live videos, and emotionally resonant narratives into their communication. Over time, this contributes to a political environment that prioritises affect and performance over policy substance.

Persistent Gender Gaps in Visibility

The study identifies a significant gender engagement gap. Women MPs publish content at nearly the same rate as men, yet receive less than half the share of interactions.

Although women MPs generate substantial video views, most of this visibility comes from re-shared content rather than original production. Structural factors—algorithmic bias, audience expectations, and higher exposure to online hostility—limit women’s ability to achieve comparable visibility through direct communication.

These findings align with international research on gendered dynamics in digital politics and raise concerns about equal participation and representation in online political spaces.

Hostility, Hate Speech, and Lack of Institutional Protection

Online hostility is a pervasive feature of MPs’ digital experience. Interviewees reported frequent exposure to abusive comments, defamatory attacks, and coordinated harassment, with women MPs facing particularly severe gendered abuse.

Despite this, no institutional protection mechanisms exist. Parliament provides no guidelines, training, or support; parties offer limited and informal advice. MPs are left to manage hostility individually, relying on blocking, deleting, or reporting content—measures that are largely ineffective against systemic abuse.

This absence of institutional response risks silencing voices, discouraging participation, and reinforcing inequalities within political life.

Ethical Ambiguity and Weak Normative Frameworks

The study reveals a normative vacuum in digital political communication. There are no clear ethical standards governing MPs' online behaviour, no guidance on responsible communication, and no oversight of disinformation, incivility, or amplification practices.

As a result, digital norms are shaped by partisan competition and platform incentives rather than professional standards. While some MPs emphasise personal responsibility, others accept aggressive rhetoric as part of political contestation. This ambiguity contributes to polarisation and undermines trust in the digital public sphere.

Conclusions

Taken together, the findings show that Facebook has transformed political communication in Albania in profoundly ambivalent ways. It enhances visibility, bypasses traditional media gatekeepers, and enables constant contact with citizens. At the same time, it amplifies structural inequalities, rewards emotional and polarising content, marginalises deliberation, and exposes MPs—especially women—to sustained hostility.

Rather than democratising political communication, Facebook largely reproduces and intensifies existing power structures, privileging executive actors, high-profile figures, and emotionally charged narratives.

Recommendations

The report concludes with practical, achievable recommendations, grounded in empirical findings and interview insights:

- For Parliament: Develop basic ethical guidelines for MPs' social media use; provide training on digital communication, harassment response, and platform governance; and establish minimal support mechanisms for MPs facing online abuse.
- For political parties: Promote responsible communication standards; discourage coordinated harassment and disinformation; and support MPs—especially women and younger politicians—in managing digital risks.
- For MPs: Diversify communication beyond broadcasting; experiment with limited, structured forms of consultation; and adopt clearer boundaries between political messaging and personal exposure.

-
- For civil society and researchers: Continue systematic monitoring of political communication beyond election cycles; document gendered and identity-based abuse; and engage platforms and institutions with evidence-based advocacy.
 - For platforms: Improve transparency around amplification, strengthen responses to coordinated harassment, and enhance protections for public officials without shielding misconduct.

This study demonstrates that social media is no longer peripheral to Albanian politics—it is constitutive of how power is exercised, contested, and perceived. Whether Facebook remains a space dominated by visibility, hierarchy, and emotionality, or evolves into a more accountable and participatory arena, depends on choices made by institutions, political actors, and society as a whole.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Facebook page is a public profile specifically created for businesses, organisations, public figures, or any group looking to build a presence on Facebook, distinct from personal profiles. Unlike personal profiles, pages allow public figures and brands to communicate with large audiences. Users can like or follow a page to receive updates and posts in their News Feed. Pages can share content such as text, photos, videos, and events, and they often serve as a key platform for engaging with fans, customers, or supporters. Additionally, Facebook pages provide tools for managing posts, analysing engagement, and promoting content.

Facebook followers are users who choose to receive updates from a particular Facebook profile or page in their News Feed. When someone follows a page or a public figure's profile, they see the posts, updates, and content shared by that page in their feed without needing to be friends with the account (in the case of profiles). Followers can engage with the content through likes, comments, and shares, but they do not have the same level of connection as a friend on a personal profile. For businesses, public figures, and organisations, having a large number of followers is often a measure of their online reach and influence.

A **Facebook post** is any content that a user, page, or group publishes on Facebook to share with their friends, followers, or the public. Posts can include a variety of content types such as:

- Text: Simple status updates, thoughts, announcements, or messages.
- Photos: Single images or albums shared with captions.
- Videos: Uploaded videos, live broadcasts, or shared videos from other sources.
- Links: External links to websites, articles, or other online content.
- Polls: Interactive questions allowing users to vote.
- Events: Invitations to public or private events.
- Check-ins: Geotagged updates that show the user's location.
- Stories: Temporary posts that disappear after 24 hours.

Posts are a primary means of interaction on Facebook, and users can engage with them by liking, commenting, sharing, or reacting. The privacy settings of a post determine who can view and interact with it.

Facebook interaction refers to any form of engagement that a user has with content posted on Facebook. This includes actions such as:

- Likes: Clicking the Like button on a post.
- Reactions: Choosing from a set of emotional responses like Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, Angry, or Care.
- Comments: Writing a response or opinion on a post.
- Shares: Reposting content to one's own profile or to other groups/pages.
- Clicks: Clicking on a link, image, or video to view the content.
- Views: Watching a video or viewing content.
- Messages: Sending a direct message through Facebook Messenger.

Interactions are a key metric used to measure engagement, as they reflect how users are responding to the content and how actively involved they are with a page or profile.

A **native video on Facebook** is a video that is directly uploaded to the Facebook platform, rather than being linked from an external site like YouTube or Vimeo. Native videos play automatically in users' News Feeds as they scroll, encouraging higher engagement due to the immediate visibility and auto-play feature. Native videos typically receive better organic reach, engagement, and interaction compared to externally linked videos. Facebook also provides detailed analytics for native videos, including metrics on views, watch time, audience retention, and interaction, making them a valuable tool for content creators and marketers on the platform.

Facebook **Live video** is a feature that allows users and pages to broadcast real-time video to their followers on Facebook. When someone goes live, their followers receive a notification, and the video appears in their News Feed, often with higher priority. Viewers can interact with the broadcast by reacting, commenting, and sharing the video in real time.

Video owned: A video is considered owned when it is uploaded directly by a user, page, or business to their own Facebook account.

Video shared: A shared video refers to a video that someone has reposted from another user or page. When a video is shared, the original content remains under the control of the person or entity who uploaded it, but it appears on the sharer's timeline or in groups they share it with. Shared videos help amplify the reach of the content without transferring ownership, and the video continues to accrue views and interactions for the original uploader.

Cross-posted video: Cross-posting is when a video is shared across multiple Facebook pages without needing to upload the video again. It is typically used by businesses, organisations, or media outlets that manage multiple pages or collaborate with other pages.

Shares on Facebook refer to the act of reposting or distributing someone else's content (such as a post, video, image, or link) on one's own timeline or within groups, pages, or personal messages. When a user shares content, it allows the original post to reach a broader audience beyond the initial viewers, expanding its reach across different networks.

In-degree shares refers to the number of times a user or an account receives shares from other users within a network. In the context of social media platforms like Facebook, it measures how many times content from a particular user or page is shared by others.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Albania has undergone a rapid digital transformation that has reshaped how citizens access information and how politics is communicated. According to a 2024 survey on the use of information and communication technologies by INSTAT (2024), 86.2% of individuals aged 16–74 use the internet, and 96.4% of them connect several times a day. Mobile devices dominate this landscape: 99.9% of users access the internet via smartphones, while the use of desktop computers (29.2%) and laptops (28.5%) remains much lower. With mobile broadband coverage reaching 99.3% of users, connectivity is now deeply embedded in everyday life.

In this environment, social media has become the primary gateway through which Albanians access news and political information. A 2023 BIRN media consumption survey found that 82% of respondents use social media every day or almost every day, while a further 6% do so at least once a week. Social networks are not only a frequent source of information but also a reference point for verification: one in four respondents said they would turn first to social media to check whether a piece of information is true.

Social Media and Political Communication in Albania

Political communication is commonly defined as the interactive process through which information flows between politicians, the media, and the public. Traditionally, this process relied on legacy media—print, radio, and television—which filtered and structured political messages (Norris, 2001; Chadwick, 2013). Over the last decade, however, social media platforms have fundamentally altered this ecosystem. They allow political actors to bypass journalistic mediation, address citizens directly, and adjust messages in real time.

In Albania, Facebook has emerged as the central platform in this transformation. It is the most widely used social network in the country and has become an essential tool for parties, leaders, and Members of Parliament (MPs). Facebook pages now function as hybrid spaces where policy positions are announced, partisan narratives are promoted, personal branding is cultivated, and conflict with opponents is staged. For many citizens, MPs' posts and live videos on Facebook are the first, or only, window into parliamentary work and political life.

Since 2013, Albanian politicians have been particularly active on social media during election campaigns. Previous BIRN monitoring exercises have documented how candidates and parties rely on Facebook and other platforms to mobilise voters, frame campaign issues, and spread targeted messages. These studies showed that campaign-period communication is highly intensive and strongly oriented toward persuasion and mobilisation, often accompanied by polarised rhetoric and increased use of sponsored content (BIRN Albania, 2023).

What has been less systematically examined is how politicians communicate outside electoral periods—when they are not primarily seeking votes, but are expected to inform the public, explain policies, and represent their constituencies. Understanding this “everyday” communication is crucial for assessing how social media contributes to (or undermines) transparency, accountability, and democratic debate between elections.

From Campaign Monitoring to Parliamentary Monitoring

BIRN Albania has a long-standing practice of monitoring political communication during electoral campaigns, including analysis of social media use by parties and candidates. Those projects have shown that social media is now integral to campaign strategy, particularly for agenda-setting and voter mobilisation.

This study extends that work in two important directions. First, it shifts the focus from short, intense campaign periods to a continuous, year-long observation of MPs' communication. Second, it broadens the lens from a purely electoral logic to a more comprehensive understanding of how social media is used as an everyday tool of parliamentary visibility, policy communication, personal branding, and symbolic politics.

This report focuses on the 2021–2025 legislature of the Albanian Parliament. The current legislature is characterised by: a strong governing majority held by the Socialist Party (Partia Socialiste), a fragmented opposition landscape, and the presence of smaller opposition actors or independent MPs.

Altogether, the legislature comprises 140 MPs. For the purposes of this study, the research team identified 110 MPs with active public Facebook pages that met the inclusion criteria for monitoring. These pages constitute the core of the dataset analysed in this report.

By focusing on the period from 1 June 2023 to 31 May 2024, the study captures a full parliamentary year outside the immediate pressures of a national election campaign. This timeframe makes it possible to observe routine communication, long-term narrative strategies and audience engagement dynamics under “normal” political conditions—while still covering moments of crisis, high-profile debates, and major policy developments.

Aim and Scope of the Study

The primary aim of this research is to examine how Albanian MPs use Facebook as a tool of public communication during a non-electoral year, and what this reveals about the quality and structure of political discourse in the country.

Drawing on theories of political communication such as agenda-setting, deliberative and agonistic democracy, and self-presentation/personal branding, the study investigates:

- the purposes for which MPs use Facebook (informing, mobilising, consulting);
- the narratives and frames they deploy around key themes such as justice reform, corruption, European integration, gender, and minority rights;
- the distribution of visibility across actors and institutions, including the dominance of executive communication and the relative marginalisation of legislative content;
- the patterns of engagement generated by different types of posts and themes; and
- the perceptions, dilemmas, and pressures MPs report when discussing their social media use in in-depth interviews.

Methodologically, the report combines large-scale quantitative monitoring of 110 MPs' public Facebook pages, systematic qualitative coding of more than 38,000 posts, and 10 in-depth interviews with MPs and experts. This mixed approach allows the study to bridge the gap between what is visible in the data (posting frequency, engagement, thematic distribution) and what remains embedded in practice and perception (motivations, constraints, ethical concerns).

The theoretical framework that informs the methodology and analysis, situating the Albanian case within broader debates on social media, democracy, and political communication, can be found in Annex I of this report.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed-methods research design to analyse how Albanian Members of Parliament (MPs) communicate on Facebook, how audiences respond, and how MPs themselves perceive and navigate the digital communication environment. The methodology integrates three complementary components: quantitative monitoring of Facebook activity, systematic qualitative coding of post content, and in-depth interviews with MPs and experts. Together, these layers make it possible to capture not only what MPs publish, but also the narratives, strategies, and political pressures that shape their online behaviour.

Facebook was selected as the primary focus of analysis because it remains the dominant public communication platform in Albania, with the highest user base and the most direct relevance for political discourse. While some MPs are also active on Instagram, TikTok, or X, Facebook is consistently used as their main channel for public visibility, constituency outreach, political messaging, and media amplification.

Quantitative Data Collection and Monitoring

The quantitative component of this study is built on a systematic, year-long monitoring of the Facebook activity of Albanian MPs. The monitoring period covers 1 June 2023 to 31 May 2024, corresponding to a full parliamentary year outside the immediate pressures of an electoral campaign. This timeframe allows for the observation of routine communication patterns, institutional visibility cycles, and audience interaction dynamics in a non-electoral political environment.

From the full list of 140 sitting MPs, the research team identified 110 public Facebook pages that met the criteria for inclusion. Only verified public pages or official public-facing accounts were analysed; private accounts and personal profiles were excluded in line with data-protection requirements.

Because of the internal fragmentation of the Democratic Party during the monitoring period, particular attention was paid to mapping MPs to their respective factions—Vula (Lulzim Basha) and Rithemelimi (Sali Berisha). By June 2023, parliamentary group affiliations had sufficiently stabilised, allowing MPs to be categorised accurately for analytical purposes.

All quantitative data was gathered through CrowdTangle, Meta’s analytics tool for public Facebook pages. For each post published during the monitoring period, CrowdTangle automatically retrieved information on post type, interactions, video views, overperformance scores, message text, and timestamps. These standardised indicators form the backbone of all quantitative analyses presented in the report. A detailed technical description of these fields and the analysis performed is provided in Annex II, while the full list of pages monitored can be found in Annex III of this report.

After extraction, all posts were consolidated into a unified database. Cleaning procedures included

standardising MP names, harmonising post-type labels, removing duplicates, distinguishing between original posts and re-shared content, and tagging each MP by gender, party, and parliamentary role.

Analytical techniques included:

- descriptive statistics to establish overall posting volume and engagement levels;
- time-series analysis to capture fluctuations over the year;
- engagement-per-post calculations to account for differences in posting frequency;
- cross-sectional comparisons across parties, factions, gender, and political roles;
- format-specific analysis (photo, native video, live video, link posts); and
- network-level assessment of amplification patterns through re-sharing.

These tools collectively enabled a multi-level understanding of posting behaviour, audience responsiveness, and the structural factors that shape political visibility online.

Qualitative Coding of Facebook Content

Quantitative indicators alone cannot explain the narratives, priorities, and political dynamics embedded in social media communication. To capture these dimensions, the study applied a systematic qualitative coding framework to the entire universe of posts published by MPs during the monitoring period.

The coding framework—as detailed in Annex IV—was developed specifically for this study and refined through iterative testing. It distinguishes between two major post types:

- thematic posts, encompassing institutional, political, or policy-related communication; and
- personal posts, centred on symbolic, emotional, or identity-driven content.

For thematic posts, coders assigned values across multiple dimensions, including thematic field, purpose (informative, mobilising, consultative), subject (which actor the post highlights), sentiment, specific sub-themes, repost/original content, and actor type.

For personal posts, coders classified content into categories such as commemorative messages, community events, media appearances, or populist/emotional appeals.

All posts were reviewed manually by trained coders. Ambiguous cases were discussed in regular review sessions, and a sample of posts underwent double-coding to ensure consistency and mitigate individual coder bias. After coding, the data was exported for structured analysis through pivot tables, enabling cross-tabulation of thematic fields, communication goals, actor visibility, sentiment, and engagement.

This qualitative layer provides the interpretive foundation needed to understand how MPs construct political narratives, which actors they prioritise, how they balance political and personal communication, and how their messaging interacts with audience behaviour.

In-Depth Interviews with MPs and Experts

To contextualise the quantitative and qualitative findings, the study incorporated 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with MPs and communication experts. These interviews provided crucial interpretive insights into how MPs understand and use social media, the challenges they encounter, and the broader implications of online political communication in Albania.

Participants were selected to ensure political, gender, and professional diversity. MPs from the Socialist Party, the Democratic Party (both Vula and Rithemelimi factions), and the Freedom Party contributed their perspectives, along with experts from civil society, academia, and the media. Interviews followed a structured guide but allowed space for elaboration, enabling respondents to describe their routines, personal experiences, and reflections in their own words. The interview guides are included in Annex V.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded manually by the research team. The coding process followed a thematic analytical framework designed to identify recurring patterns, contradictions, and narrative clusters across respondents. Codes were grouped into broader analytical categories (such as account management, hostility and hate speech, ethical considerations, communication goals, and institutional gaps), ensuring consistency across transcripts. Citations used throughout the report reflect participants' exact wording wherever possible; identifying information has been anonymised except for references to political affiliation, which remain necessary for contextual clarity.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for research involving public online data and human subjects. All social media material analysed for this report was drawn exclusively from public Facebook pages belonging to Members of Parliament and other political actors. No private accounts, private messages, or personal data beyond publicly accessible metadata were accessed at any stage of the research. The collection and processing of this data complied fully with Meta's Terms of Service, as well as with applicable Albanian and European data-protection frameworks.

The interview component of the study was likewise guided by strong ethical safeguards. Participants were informed in advance about the aims of the research, how their contributions would be used, and their right to anonymity. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent—written or verbal—was obtained prior to each interview. Although quotations are used throughout the report to reflect the authentic language of respondents, identifying information has been anonymised unless political affiliation was necessary for contextual clarity.

All datasets, including extracted Facebook posts and interview transcripts, were handled and stored securely. Access was restricted to the research team, and the materials were used solely for analytical purposes within this study. No personal data beyond what is publicly available was collected, processed, or retained.

Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted with awareness of several methodological limitations inherent to researching digital political communication. Although Facebook remains the dominant platform for public-facing political discourse in Albania, the study does not capture MPs' full cross-platform activity on Instagram, TikTok, or X, where communication styles, audience demographics, and content strategies may differ. As a result, the analysis reflects only one—albeit central—component of MPs' digital presence.

The dataset is also shaped by the constraints of CrowdTangle, which, despite being Meta's official tool for public-page analysis, does not provide access to private profiles, restricted posts, audience demographics, or algorithmic distribution details. Its metrics reflect engagement outcomes but not the underlying mechanisms that drive visibility, limiting the ability to fully explain why certain posts are amplified more than others.

Qualitative coding introduces a different set of limitations. Although coders followed a detailed codebook and applied double-coding procedures to ensure consistency, subjective interpretation cannot be fully eliminated when classifying tone, sentiment, or thematic intent. Similarly, distinctions between thematic and personal content, or between mobilising and informative posts, occasionally involved interpretive judgement.

The interview component, while valuable for contextualisation, is based on insights from a limited number of MPs and experts. Although efforts were made to include diverse political perspectives, the findings cannot be generalised to all parliamentary actors. Some respondents may also have been influenced by political sensitivities or social desirability bias when reflecting on ethical behaviour, hate speech, or communication strategies.

Finally, the study reflects a specific political moment—June 2023 to May 2024—outside an electoral campaign period. Posting patterns and audience engagement are known to change during election cycles, and the dynamics observed here may not fully correspond to behaviour in high-intensity political periods.

Despite these constraints, the triangulation of quantitative monitoring, qualitative coding, and in-depth interviews provides a robust, multi-layered understanding of MPs' digital communication practices and the structural forces shaping political discourse on Facebook in Albania.

FINDINGS OF THE MONITORING

This chapter presents the core findings of the study, combining large-scale quantitative monitoring, systematic content analysis, and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with Members of Parliament and independent experts. Together, these three layers offer a comprehensive picture of how Albanian MPs use Facebook to communicate, mobilise, shape political narratives, and engage with citizens in an increasingly digitised and algorithmic-driven public sphere.

Drawing on a dataset of 38,397 posts published on the verified Facebook pages of 110 MPs between June 2023 and May 2024, the first section maps the structural patterns of MPs' online activity: how frequently they post, which formats they prefer, how audiences respond, and how visibility is distributed across parties, gender, and political roles. This quantitative analysis highlights the dominant actors, identifies moments of unusually high engagement linked to political or national events, and reveals the platform-level dynamics, including video amplification and networked re-sharing of content, which shape the digital hierarchy of influence.

The second section revolves from the question *how much* MPs communicate to *what* they communicate. Based on detailed coding of more than 31,000 thematic posts and 7,300 personal posts, it examines the narrative strategies that structure MPs' online presence. It distinguishes between institutional communication and symbolic, emotional, or identity-based messaging; identifies the actors and institutions most frequently referenced; and maps the main policy themes that populate MPs' digital agendas. The analysis shows how Facebook is used to promote government achievements, contest political rivals, frame policy debates, respond to national symbolism, and cultivate personal connection with constituents. It also highlights which themes resonate most strongly with the public, quantified through interactions and video visibility.

The final section complements these data-driven insights with qualitative perspectives from interviews with MPs and communication experts. These testimonies illuminate how MPs themselves perceive the role of social media in political and parliamentary life, how they manage their accounts, and how they experience online hostility, pressure, and ethical dilemmas. Expert insights provide additional context on the broader information ecosystem, highlighting persistent challenges such as the one-way nature of political communication, the spread of misinformation, and the absence of institutional guidelines for ethical and transparent digital engagement.

Together, the three sections of this chapter provide a multidimensional understanding of MPs' digital behaviour: its scale, its narrative content, its strategic motivations, and its implications for Albania's democratic landscape. The findings show that social media, particularly Facebook, has become a central stage for political visibility and agenda-setting, while also exposing gaps in accountability, ethical standards, and citizen participation.

Facebook Use Patterns of Albanian MPs—Monitoring Data

This section presents a comprehensive quantitative overview of how Members of Parliament used Facebook between 1 June 2023 and 31 May 2024, based on the monitoring of 110 public pages and 38,397 posts. It maps the structural features of MPs’ online activity—including posting frequency, temporal patterns, follower dynamics, content formats, engagement levels, and video visibility—and identifies the actors, timeframes, and formats that dominate the digital landscape. The analysis provides the empirical foundation for understanding how visibility is produced on Facebook, how engagement is distributed, and which communication practices shape political influence on the platform.



Adoption by and Audience Size of Albanian MPs on Facebook

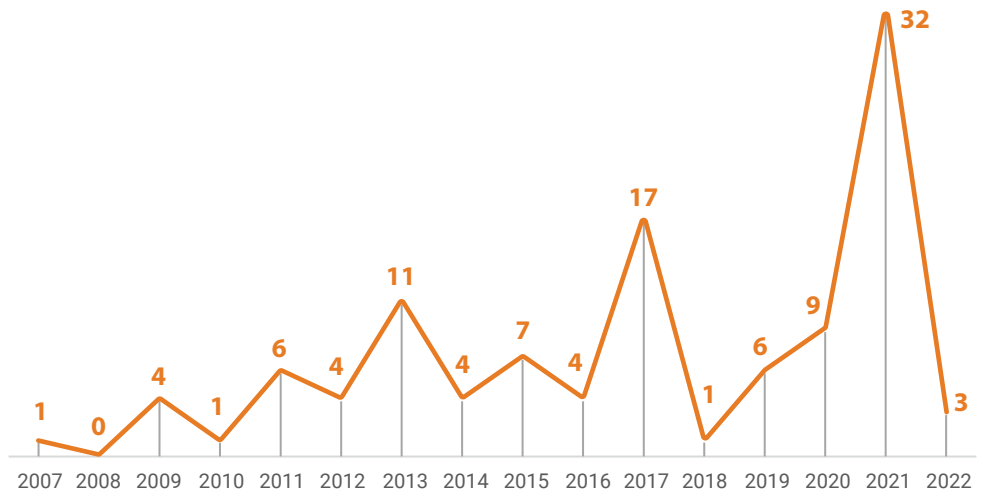
Facebook has become an essential part of political life for Albanian MPs. It is the platform where they maintain visibility, communicate achievements, respond to public events, and keep a steady presence between election cycles. During this monitoring period, 110 public Facebook pages belonging to sitting MPs were tracked through CrowdTangle, offering a clear picture of how widely the platform is used and how unevenly its audiences are distributed.

A Gradual but Election-Driven Shift to Digital Campaigning

The adoption of Facebook by MPs was neither sudden nor uniform. The first political figure in the legislature to open a public Facebook page was Jorida Tabaku in 2007, at a time when social media was still emerging as a political tool. Throughout the late 2000s and early 2010s, the number of MPs with Facebook pages grew slowly, but this pattern changed dramatically during the last decade.

As illustrated in Figure 1, clear spikes appear in 2013, 2017, and 2021—each one an electoral cycle year. In these periods, many MPs either opened new pages or reactivated dormant ones, signalling that Facebook is closely tied to campaign cycles, when competition for visibility intensifies.

Figure 1: Number of Facebook pages created by Albanian MPs, 2007–2022



After 2021, growth flattened, indicating that by the time the current monitoring period began, the platform had already reached saturation among MPs.

The alignment of Facebook-page-creation peaks with parliamentary election cycles demonstrates that MPs view social media primarily as a campaign instrument rather than a continuous channel for public deliberation with voters while in office.

Disparities in Audience Size

Although Facebook is used widely by MPs, the size of their online followers varies dramatically. At the very top of the distribution, a handful of political leaders reach exceptionally large amounts of followers, as shown in Table 1. Prime Minister Edi Rama remains the most followed Albanian MP on Facebook, with more than 1.6 million followers. He is seconded by former Prime Minister Sali Berisha, with more than 1.1 million, and Lulzim Basha, whose page still includes over 630,000 followers. These three MPs stand apart from the rest of the legislature and are the only political actors with follower counts above half a million.

Beneath this top tier, the next most visible MPs—including Taulant Balla, Elisa Spiropali, Ogerta Manastirliu, Agron Shehaj, and Monika Kryemadhi—maintain a count of followers ranging from 90,000 to 150,000. These pages represent a small elite group that enjoys consistent national visibility, though at a significantly lower scale compared to the top three political actors.

Table 1: Top 10 MPs by number of followers (June 2023)

Rank	MP	Followers (June 2023)
1	Edi Rama	1,622,211
2	Sali Berisha	1,118,792
3	Lulzim Basha	638,316
4	Taulant Balla	151,719
5	Elisa Spiropali	122,229
6	Ogerta Manastirliu	113,533
7	Agron Shehaj	113,432
8	Monika Kryemadhi	92,513
9	Evis Kushi	84,937
10	Damian Gjikhuri	70,950

Source: CrowdTangle, monitoring dataset (110 public MP Facebook pages).

A broader mid-range cluster consists of MPs followed by 10,000 to 50,000 users—the category where most legislators fall. These MPs tend to have active pages with regular visibility but operate largely within more localised or thematic communities, rather than national audiences. For many MPs in this group, Facebook serves mainly as a constituency-focused communication tool rather than a mass-reach platform.

At the lower end of the distribution, a significant number of MPs have follower counts below 10,000, including several with only a few thousand followers. A handful of MPs—particularly new or less publicly prominent representatives—have very small online audiences of under 2,000 followers, and some fewer than 1,000. These pages tend to have limited visibility beyond close political circles and core supporters.

The distribution among different clusters reveals a highly uneven landscape of digital influence in social media. A few nationally prominent leaders dominate Facebook's political space, while the majority of MPs communicate with modest or small audiences. The distribution mirrors long-standing hierarchies in Albanian political life: the visibility of party leaders and senior officeholders remains significantly higher, both offline and online, than that of most MPs.

Temporal Patterns of Posting Activity

The content posting behaviour of Albanian MPs fluctuated substantially over the 12 months monitored through CrowdTangle, covering 110 public Facebook pages between 1 June 2023 and 31 May 2024. The dataset of 38,397 posts reveals clear patterns shaped by the political calendar, seasonal shifts, and periods of heightened public engagement.

A Year Marked by Political Rhythms and Seasonal Shifts

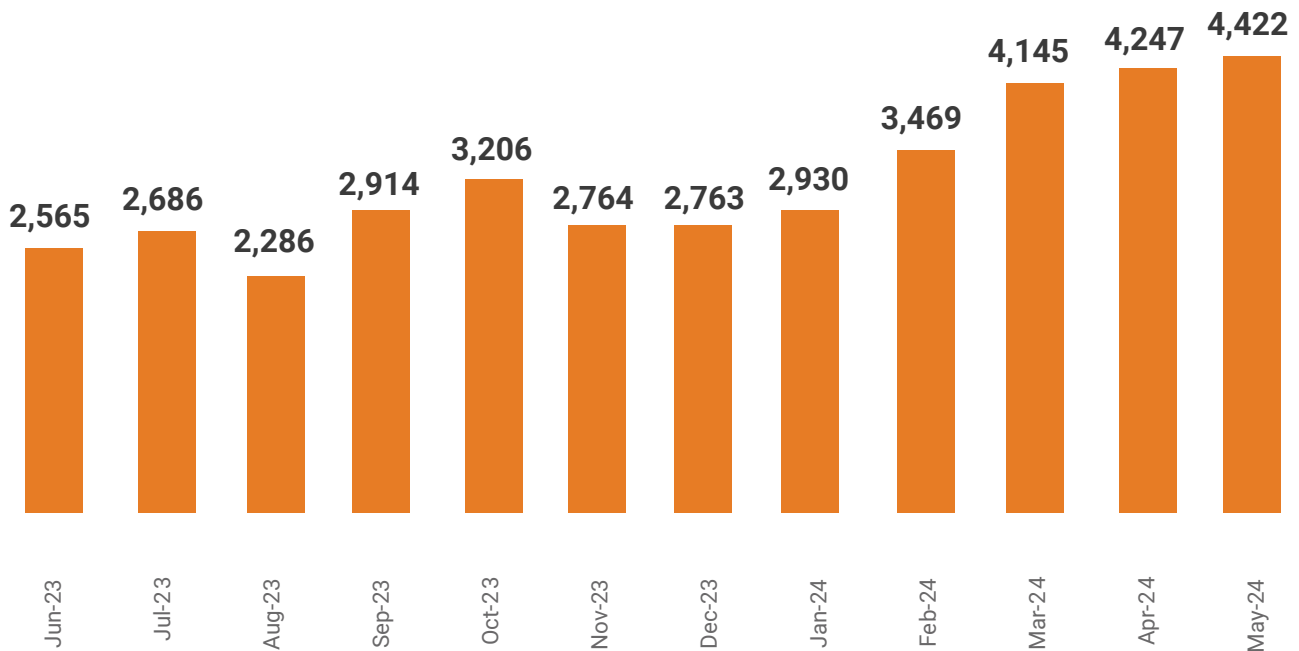
Monthly posting volumes varied considerably among MPs. Activity was moderate during the summer months immediately following the May 2023 local elections, as MPs shifted away from campaign messaging and toward softer, lifestyle-oriented content. In June, July, and August, MPs published 2,565, 2,686, and 2,286 posts respectively.

Posting activity increased markedly in September (2,914 posts) and reached the first major peak in October (3,206 posts). This surge aligned with renewed parliamentary activity and the nationwide enthusiasm surrounding Albania's UEFA Euro 2024 qualifying matches, which dominated public discourse and created a wave of politically themed and patriotic content.

From November 2023 to January 2024, activity stabilised between roughly 2,700 and 2,900 posts per month—a period characterised by consistent institutional communication, committee work, and end-of-year public engagements. Posting intensified again in early 2024, starting with 3,469 posts in February, and rising significantly in March (4,145) and April (4,247). The highest monthly volume of the entire monitoring period was recorded in May 2024, with 4,422 posts, reflecting a period of

heightened political engagement and increased legislative and public activity before the summer season. Figure 2 illustrates this progression across the full 12 months.

Figure 2: Monthly posting activity of Albanian MPs (June 2023–May 2024)



Who Posted the Most and Why it Matters

Posting frequency varied sharply among MPs. A small group of highly active pages produced a substantial share of all posts, while the majority posted at significantly lower levels. As shown in Table 2, the top 10 MPs by posting frequency include both high-profile national leaders and MPs who rely on frequent updates to maintain visibility in their constituencies.

Sali Berisha was the most prolific MP by a wide margin, publishing 2,886 posts, or roughly 55 posts per week. He was followed by Edi Rama (2,103 posts) and Taulant Balla (1,926 posts), who maintained steady institutional communication throughout the year. The next most active MPs were Petrit Vasili (1,537 posts) and Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi (1,291 posts), whose posting patterns reflect a combination of party activity, sectoral updates, and—during summer months—tourism promotion, in her role as Minister of Tourism and Environment.

The rest of the top 10 includes Albana Vokshi, Petro Koçi, Ismet Beqiraj, Antoneta Dhima, and Vullnet Ruzhdi Sinaj. These MPs relied on frequent posting to maintain visibility within their constituencies or political groups, often sharing local events, political reactions, and community-focused content. The presence of MPs from both the majority and the opposition in the top 10 indicates that high posting frequency is not exclusive to any single parliamentary group but reflects diverse communication strategies across the legislative body.

Table 2: Top 10 MPs by posting frequency (June 2023–May 2024)

Rank	MP	Total posts	Approx. weekly avg.
1	Sali Berisha	2,886	≈ 55
2	Edi Rama	2,103	≈ 40
3	Taulant Balla	1,926	≈ 37
4	Petrit Vasili	1,537	≈ 30
5	Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi	1,291	≈ 25
6	Albana Vokshi	1,170	≈ 23
7	Petro Koçi	1,064	≈ 20
8	Ismet Beqiraj	1,013	≈ 19
9	Antoneta Dhima	977	≈ 19
10	Vullnet Ruzhdi Sinaj	969	≈ 19

Weekly averages calculated across 52 weeks. Data source: CrowdTangle monitoring of 110 public MP Facebook pages.

A strong positive correlation ($r \approx 0.76$) was observed between posting frequency and follower count, indicating that MPs who post more frequently tend to sustain larger audiences. The correlation between posting frequency and total engagement was moderate ($r \approx 0.43$), suggesting that while regular activity helps maintain visibility, content relevance and tone remain decisive in driving audience interaction.

Posting Hours and Engagement Patterns

Temporal analysis by time of day reveals consistent posting behaviour aligned with users’ online habits. MPs were most active during working hours, particularly between mid-morning and late afternoon, while early-morning and late-night posts were less common.

Interestingly, engagement data shows a partial reversal of this trend: posts published around midnight—particularly on Sundays and Mondays—generated the highest average interaction (≈ 75 engagements per post). This pattern suggests that some MPs strategically post during low-traffic periods to benefit from reduced competition in users’ News Feeds and achieve higher algorithmic visibility.

The pattern and timing of MPs’ online activity reflect a hybrid communication approach, combining routine institutional updates with opportunistic engagement around emotionally charged or

symbolic moments. Even during low-intensity political periods, MPs maintain an active presence through lifestyle and event-driven content. This pattern underscores how Facebook serves primarily as a visibility and performance platform, optimised for reach and resonance rather than deliberative communication.

Engagement and Influence Patterns

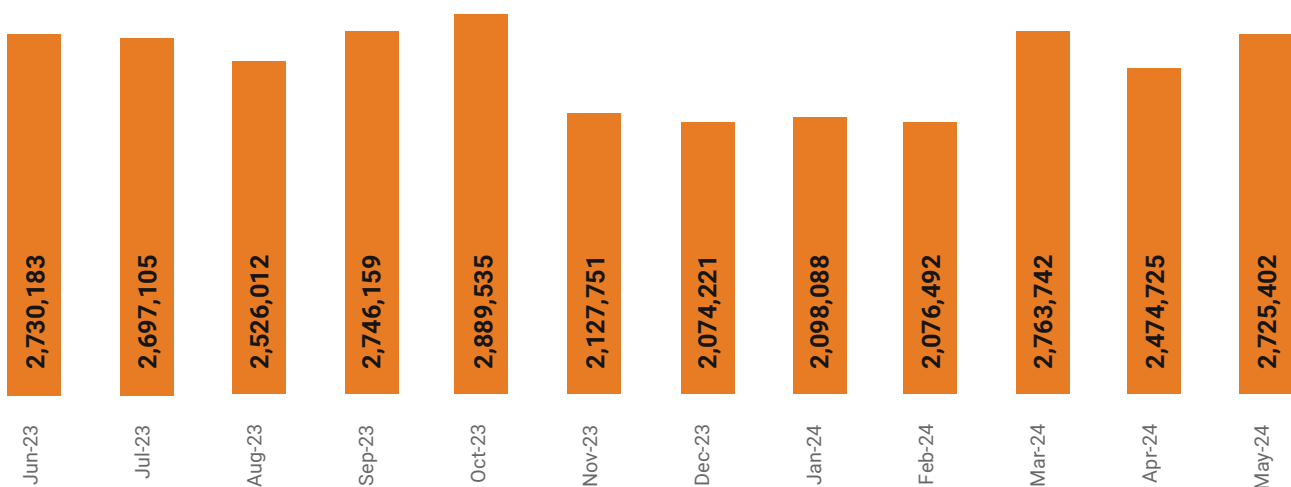
The 110 monitored Facebook pages of Albanian MPs generated a total of 29.9 million interactions during the monitoring period (likes, comments, shares, and reactions). Interaction levels remained relatively steady across the year but displayed several distinct peaks tied to political events and moments of heightened national attention.

A Year of Stable Engagement with Politically Charged Peaks

Monthly interactions fluctuated between 2 million and 2.9 million, with the lowest levels recorded during the winter months and two clear periods of increased activity. The first major peak occurred in October 2023 (2.89 million interactions), driven largely by the nationwide excitement around Albania's UEFA Euro 2024 qualifying matches, which generated unusually high engagement on posts infused with patriotic themes and collective identity.

A second, sustained rise took place between March and May 2024, when monthly interactions respectively exceeded 2.7 million (see Figure 3). This period corresponded with intense parliamentary debates, increased public visibility of government initiatives, and greater online mobilisation by both majority and opposition MPs. These patterns suggest that Facebook engagement responds not only to political developments but also to symbolic national events that dominate public attention.

Figure 3: Monthly volume of interactions on MPs' Facebook posts (June 2023–May 2024)



“Likes” and “love” reactions remained the dominant engagement modes, confirming that quick, affective responses outweigh dialogue-based interactions such as comments or shares. Only a small fraction of posts—usually those addressing conflict, emotion, or symbolism—generated extended discussion threads.

High-Engagement Spikes and Events

Beyond monthly trends, the dataset shows distinct daily spikes linked to major political, cultural, or national events, confirming the event-driven nature of digital political engagement. These peaks reinforce the idea that social media operates as a real-time amplifier of public sentiment.

1. Peak Engagement—12 October 2023 (394,000 interactions)

The highest daily engagement occurred on 12 October 2023, following Albania’s 3–0 victory over Czechia in the Euro 2024 qualifiers. Posts celebrating the match—particularly those by Edi Rama and Sali Berisha—dominated the day’s interactions. Rama’s celebratory tone, patriotic imagery, and nationalistic rhetoric resonated strongly online, consistent with research showing that political leaders strategically leverage non-political events to reinforce emotional connection and national identity. All five most-engaged posts on this day were published by Edi Rama and Sali Berisha.

1. [Edi Rama](#): 68,710 interactions – 🇦🇱 BRAAAV🏆🏆🏆🏆🏆 SHQIPEEEEE 🙌 Jaaaaasiiiiir As...
2. [Edi Rama](#): 36,878 interactions – TIRANA LIVE 🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰
3. [Edi Rama](#): 31,574 interactions – LETS GOOOO TOOO EUUUUR🏆🏆🏆🏆🏆 GO ALBAAAANIII...
4. [Edi Rama](#): 30,521 interactions – 🇦🇱 BRAAAV🏆🏆🏆🏆🏆 SHQIPEEEEE 🙌 Taaaaaullaant S...
5. [Sali Berisha](#): 17,641 interactions – Le të ndjekim supergolim e Jasir Asanit! #sb

2. Second-Highest Peak—12 May 2024 (267,000+ interactions)

The second major spike occurred on 12 May 2024, during Edi Rama’s visit to Athens, where he addressed the Albanian diaspora. The visit unfolded amid diplomatic tensions—intensified by the ongoing trial of the politician Fredi Beleri and the European Parliament elections in Greece. Rama emphasised that the visit was intended for diaspora engagement, distancing it from Greek domestic politics. On this single day, 65.6% of all interactions occurred on Rama’s page alone, reflecting how high-salience international events can dramatically shift attention toward executive actors.

1. [Edi Rama](#): 83,194 interactions – KRENAR PËR SHQIPTARËT E GREQISË ❤️🇸🇰❤️ KRENAR PËR...
2. [Edi Rama](#): 44,838 interactions – JENI BOTA ❤️🇸🇰🇷🇸❤️🇸🇰🇷🇸 *Live Athinë
3. [Edi Rama](#): 30,833 interactions – 📷FotoALBUMI i një dite të paharrueshme shqipta...
4. [Edi Rama](#): 21,906 interactions – 🇷🇸FALEMINDERIT NGA ZEMRA🇸🇰🇷🇸 *Para nisjes për...
5. [Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi](#): 21,437 interactions – Mirë se ju gjetëm në Athinë 😊 *Shihemi pas pak...

3. National Holiday Peak—28 November 2023 (Independence Day)

Another notable spike corresponded to Albanian Independence Day on 28 November 2023. Posts commemorating the holiday generated exceptionally high visibility, particularly those published by Edi Rama. This confirms previous findings that symbolic events and national holidays act as powerful mobilisers of digital audiences (Schill, 2012).

4. Sports-Driven Peaks—10 and 11 September 2023

The fourth and fifth largest daily spikes occurred on 10 and 11 September 2023, linked to Albania's 2–0 victory against Poland in another Euro 2024 qualifying match. Sports-related content—especially celebratory posts by Edi Rama, Taulant Balla, and Erion Braçe—dominated engagement. All five most-engaged posts across the two days were related to the football match.

1. [Edi Rama](#): 39,375 interactions – ❤️🇷🇸❤️🇷🇸❤️🇷🇸❤️🇷🇸❤️🇷🇸❤️🇷🇸❤️🇷🇸❤️🇷🇸
2. [Edi Rama](#): 31,040 interactions – MIRËMËNGJES 😊 dhe me dy eurogolat e një mbrëmje të madhe...
3. [Taulant Balla](#): 13,866 interactions – ❤️🇷🇸❤️🇷🇸 Futbollli nuk ka më ekipe të mëdha dhe ekipe të vogla!
4. [Taulant Balla](#): 10,790 interactions – SUPER GOOOOOOOOL 🇷🇸🇷🇸 JASIR ASANI 🇷🇸🇷🇸
5. [Erion Braçe](#): 10,106 interactions – GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOL DAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAKUUUU!

These spikes highlight how MPs, particularly those in leadership positions, adapt their communication strategies to real-time public sentiment, integrating symbolic national moments,

sports victories, and diplomatic events into their online messaging. This behaviour aligns with the logic of the hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013), where political actors blend scheduled communication with opportunistic, event-responsive messaging shaped by digital affordances and algorithmic attention cycles.

Overall, MPs' Facebook engagement reflects a communication environment that is steady in normal periods but highly sensitive to symbolic events, national sentiment, and moments of political polarisation—with the leadership of political parties consistently positioned at the centre of these engagement surges.

Who Generates the Most Engagement

Engagement on Facebook is highly concentrated among a small number of political figures. As shown in Table 3, Prime Minister Edi Rama dominates the digital landscape by a substantial margin, accumulating 12.4 million interactions, or roughly four out of every 10 interactions generated by all monitored MPs combined. Former Prime Minister Sali Berisha follows with 3.7 million interactions, and Taulant Balla with 2.9 million, completing a core group of leaders whose posts consistently drive national-level visibility.

Several ministers also appear among the most-engaged pages, including Ogerta Manastirliu, Belinda Balluku, Elisa Spiropali, and Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi. Their strong performance reflects a mix of institutional visibility, frequent use of video content, and sector-specific communication that attracts sustained audience attention.

Table 3: Top MPs by total engagement (June 2023–May 2024)

Rank	MP	Interactions	Share of total
1	Edi Rama	12,408,675	41.5%
2	Sali Berisha	3,678,208	12.3%
3	Taulant Balla	2,873,885	9.6%
4	Ogerta Manastirliu	1,225,890	4.1%
5	Belinda Balluku	959,975	3.2%
6	Elisa Spiropali	866,223	2.9%
7	Erion Braçe	845,223	2.8%
8	Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi	795,728	2.7%
9	Evis Kushi	555,075	1.9%
10	Lulzim Basha	540,272	1.8%
–	100 other MPs	5,180,261	17.3%
Total		29,929,415	100%

The scale of Rama’s interactions, which accounts for 41.5% of all recorded engagement, underscores how executive office translates into sustained online visibility. Edi Rama, Sali Berisha, and Taulant Balla accounted for over 63% of all interactions, reflecting the central role of party leaders and senior government officials in shaping Albania’s online political discourse.

The pattern is even more pronounced when looking at the top 10 MPs: this group alone captures just over 80% of total interactions, while the remaining 100 MPs share only 17.3%. Such a steep distribution highlights a highly centralised digital environment, where a limited number of political figures exert disproportionate influence over audience attention and engagement.

The impact of institutional power on Facebook engagement becomes even clearer when examining the sharp decline in interactions following Evis Kushi’s departure from the Ministry of Education in September 2023.

Case Study: Declining Engagement after Leaving the Executive

The trajectory of Evis Kushi’s Facebook engagement provides a clear example of how holding—and subsequently leaving—an executive post shapes online visibility in social media. Kushi served as Minister of Education until September 2023, after which her role reverted solely to that of an MP. The monthly data from June 2023 to May 2024 reveals a sharp decline in interactions immediately following her exit from the cabinet, despite relatively stable posting frequency.

During the last months of her ministerial mandate (June–September 2023), Kushi maintained a high level of visibility, averaging 65 posts per month and generating substantial engagement—peaking at 128,201 interactions in June and remaining above 45,000 interactions through September. These months coincide with the ministry’s intensive communication cycle tied to exams, school preparation, and policy announcements.

However, starting in October 2023, the decline is immediate and pronounced. Interactions drop to 44,900 in October—a reduction of nearly 60% compared to June—and fall even further in November (13,451 interactions), the lowest point of the entire monitoring period. While her posting frequency decreases slightly after September, the magnitude of the engagement drop far exceeds any decline in content volume, indicating a loss of institutional amplification and public visibility linked to her departure from the executive.

In the following months (December 2023 to May 2024), engagement stabilises at significantly lower levels, fluctuating between 15,479 and 57,205 interactions per month. Although occasional peaks appear—such as in March 2024—none approach the levels recorded during her ministerial tenure.

The overall pattern illustrates a structural dynamic visible across the dataset: executive offices strongly enhance online visibility, and stepping out of a ministerial role results in an immediate and substantial decline in engagement, even when posting behaviour remains active.

This case highlights the degree to which digital influence on Facebook is tied not only to individual communication strategies of MPs, but also to their institutional function, hierarchy, and access to executive platforms.

Engagement Efficiency and the Dynamics of High-Performing Posts

To assess performance beyond raw audience size, the analysis examined an overperforming score, which measures how each post performs relative to the MP's typical engagement baseline. A score above 1.0 indicates that a post exceeded expected performance, regardless of the page's follower count or historical averages. Using this metric, approximately one-third of all posts in the dataset performed above their baseline, showing that visibility on Facebook is not determined solely by audience size.

High-performing posts shared several common characteristics. Content that featured emotional storytelling, personalised narratives, symbolic or patriotic imagery, or rapid responses to breaking events tended to surpass expectations. MPs such as Erion Braçe and Ogerta Manastirliu repeatedly produced posts that outperformed their typical engagement levels, demonstrating that even mid-tier or smaller pages can achieve substantial reach when content resonates strongly with audiences.

For instance, one of the most engaging posts discusses the production of watermelons in the area Divjake where Braçe is an MP, while another covers life moments like weddings and celebrations. Braçe also shares posts about football victories, such as cheering for the national football team. His content resonates deeply with his audience by connecting with everyday life, local achievements, and national pride, making his posts highly engaging. Erion Braçe's top five outperforming posts are:

1. Post on 20 August, 2023: CERME SEKTOR, #DIVJAKE 🍉 12 KOKRA SHALQI NE 1 M... (Native Video) – Overperforming Score: 101.50
2. Post on 26 December, 2023: #NELUSHNJE, NE TREG; ME DUAR NE KOKE! (Native Video) – Overperforming Score: 21.69
3. Post on 3 August 2023: NE DASEM, NE SHTEPINE E GIMIT-CERME PASHA! (Native Video) – Overperforming Score: 17.42
4. Post on 20 November 2023: UUUUUUUUFFFFFFFFF! (Native Video) – Overperforming Score: 17.06
5. Post on 10 September 2023: GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOL DAAAAAAAAAAAAAKUUUU! (Native Video) – Overperforming Score: 16.41

All of these posts are native videos, demonstrating their effectiveness in driving high engagement. The total engagement for Erion Braçe's top five outperforming posts is 107,228 interactions.

The analysis of overperforming scores suggests that many MPs struggle to create content that resonates with their audience. There are many factors that affect the overperforming score from content format, posting time, messaging, and tone to algorithm changes. Regardless of the reasons, the findings reflect broader challenges in political communication in the digital area. MPs must compete for attention in a crowded online space, where constituents are constantly exposed to diverse information sources. The ability to craft compelling, interactive, and timely content is crucial for maintaining relevance and fostering meaningful connections with the public.

Engagement behaviour also reflected platform dynamics. While MPs posted mainly during daytime hours, the highest engagement occurred on posts published around midnight, particularly on Sundays and Mondays, averaging roughly 75 interactions per post. These spikes suggest that off-peak posting—when fewer political actors publish content—increases the likelihood of amplified visibility due to reduced competition in users’ News Feeds.

These trends show that engagement on MPs’ Facebook pages is shaped by a combination of content quality, narrative appeal, and algorithmic timing. Leaders with large followings still dominate overall interactions, but individual posts can break past expected levels when they tap into emotionally charged or symbolically meaningful themes, or when strategically timed during low-traffic hours.

Content Format and Media Type

The analysis of the 38,397 Facebook posts published by 110 Members of Parliament between 1 June 2023 and 31 May 2024 shows a communication environment overwhelmingly dominated by visual formats. As in previous monitoring cycles, Albanian MPs rely heavily on images and videos rather than text-based statements or external links, confirming Facebook’s function as a platform of political visibility and controlled narrative performance.

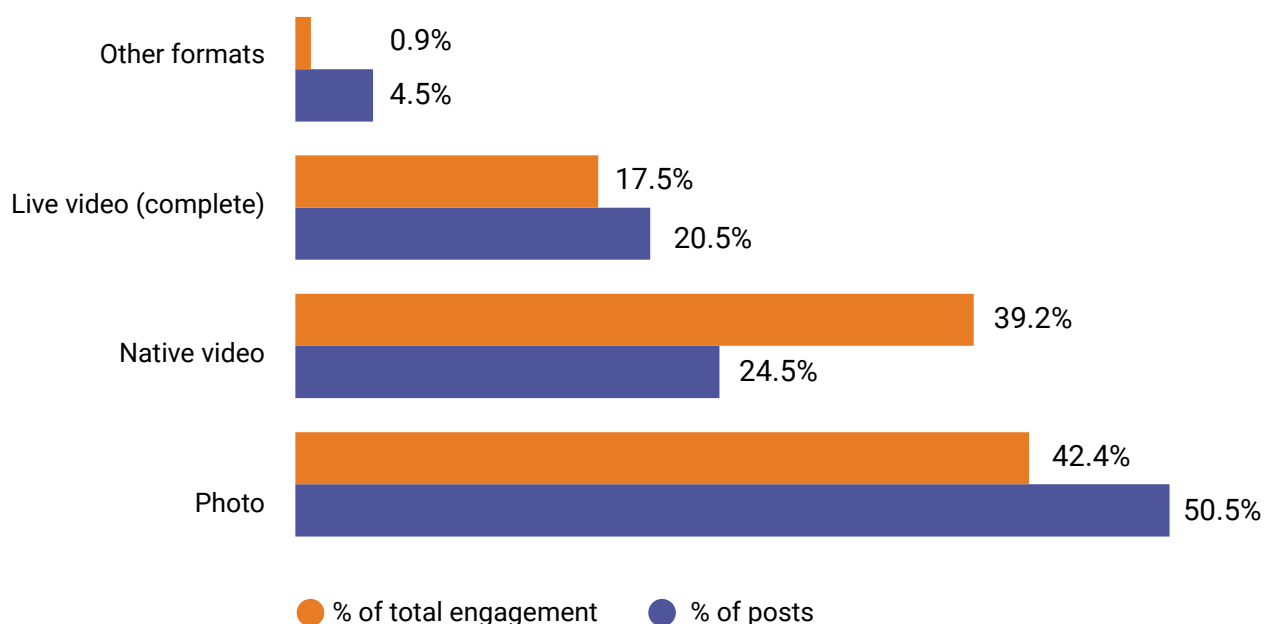
Photo posts constitute the largest share of content, accounting for 50.5% of all posts. MPs use images to document inaugurations, constituency meetings, ministerial events, and plenary activities, as well as to humanise their public personas through informal or behind-the-scenes snapshots. While photo posts sustain a steady pattern of visibility, their interaction rates are comparatively a little more modest, generating 42.4% of all recorded engagement.

Video content, however, is the most powerful driver of engagement. Native videos represent 24.5% of all posts yet generate 39.2% of total interactions—two to three times more engagement per post than photos or link-based content. Facebook’s algorithmic design, which favours audiovisual material and rewards content likely to trigger emotional responses, further amplifies the reach of native videos.

Live videos are also central to MPs’ communication strategies. With 20.5% of all posts and 17.5% of total engagement, live broadcasts are widely used for press conferences, inaugurations, speeches, and public events. Their perceived immediacy and authenticity help secure rapid bursts of interaction, and their replicability across party networks often extends their visibility well beyond the primary page.

By contrast, non-visual formats perform poorly. Link posts represent just 2.2% of total output but generate only 0.38% of engagement, reflecting Facebook’s consistent deprioritisation of outbound links. Text-only status updates make up 1.3% of posts and account for 0.46% of interactions, while YouTube links and other external videos are marginal and systematically penalised by the platform’s algorithm.

Figure 4: Share of posts vs share of total engagement by content format (June 2023–May 2024)



“Other formats” includes status (text-only), link, YouTube and other video formats

These patterns confirm that Facebook is not used by MPs as a space for two-way deliberation, policy explanation, or institutional transparency. Instead, it functions as a curated visual arena, where political actors project authority, identity, and narrative control through images and especially video content. Formats that could direct audiences outside the platform—especially links—are employed sparingly and perform poorly, underscoring Facebook’s role as a closed communication ecosystem.

Video Engagements and Hierarchies of Visibility

Video content is the most powerful and algorithmically favoured format used by Albanian MPs on Facebook. Although videos constitute fewer posts than photos, they overwhelmingly dominate audience response, generating 696 million views during the monitoring period. This confirms a central trend in Albanian digital politics: visibility on Facebook is driven far more by audiovisual performance than by volume of posting.

However, the distribution of video views is extremely unequal, reflecting entrenched political hierarchies and the logic of the platform’s algorithm. A small group of high-visibility MPs, mostly party leaders and senior ministers, attract disproportionate levels of attention. This concentration stems from:

- Large follower bases and high posting frequency, which amplify initial reach.
- Institutional prominence, providing a constant stream of visually rich content (press statements, inaugurations, ministerial activities).

- Heavy reliance on native and live videos, which Facebook prioritises over photos, links, or external videos.

To illustrate these disparities clearly, Table 4 below presents the top MPs by total video views, ranked from highest to lowest share of all video views recorded in the dataset. Original (native) video views and cross-post views are separated to better capture visibility patterns.

Table 4: Top MPs by total video views (June 2023–May 2024)

Rank	MP	Total video views	Share of total
1	Edi Rama	151,988,823	21.8%
2	Taulant Balla	62,463,162	9.0%
3	Sali Berisha	54,845,153	7.9%
4	Petro Koçi	47,034,705	6.8%
5	Ismet Beqiraj	43,290,239	6.2%
6	Vullnet Ruzhdi Sinaj	33,928,001	4.9%
7	Klotilda Bushka Ferhati	22,982,161	3.3%
8	Anila Denaj	22,374,587	3.2%
9	Bledi Çuçi	22,146,122	3.2%
10	Erion Braçe	25,794,980	3.7%
–	Other 100 MPs (combined)	361,708,761	51.3%
Total		696,032,195	100.0%

As the above cited data shows, Prime Minister Edi Rama, with 151 million video views, alone accounts for 21.8% of all video views, surpassing the next two MPs combined. His communication style—highly curated native videos, professionally produced footage, and emotionally resonant narratives—benefits greatly from Facebook’s algorithmic biases toward audiovisual content.

Taulant Balla and Sali Berisha follow with 62.5 million and 54.8 million total video views respectively. Both rely heavily on frequent posting and live video formats, especially during moments of political tension, parliamentary debate, or high-salience national events.

A second tier of MPs—including Petro Koçi, Ismet Beqiraj, Vullnet Ruzhdi Sinaj, Klotilda Bushka Ferhati, Anila Denaj, and Bledi Çuçi—also secure substantial reach. Their visibility reflects a mixture of political roles (ministers or senior legislators), active video production, and occasionally the amplification effect of cross-posts.

Yet, even this extended group accounts for a small share of the total, compared to the top three MPs. The remaining 100 MPs collectively generate just over half of all video views (51.3%), underscoring the steep imbalance in digital visibility.

This data is evidence that video visibility on Facebook is shaped by a combination of hierarchical political structures, posting intensity, and platform-driven incentives. While nearly all MPs use video formats, true audience reach remains concentrated among a limited set of political leaders whose audiovisual communication strategies dominate the Albanian political information environment.

Networked Visibility and Re-sharing Dynamics

Beyond individual posting activity and audience engagement, MPs' visibility on Facebook is also shaped by the dynamics of re-sharing, a mechanism that redistributes content across political networks and amplifies its reach well beyond the originating page. The monitoring data reveals a highly asymmetric structure of re-sharing behaviour, in which a small group of political leaders serves as the central hubs of content circulation.

Prime Minister Edi Rama stands at the core of this network. His posts were re-shared 3,154 times by fellow MPs during the monitoring period, far exceeding the re-sharing activity of any other political figure. The next tier of political actors included Taulant Balla (451 shares), Lulzim Basha (440 shares), Sali Berisha (211 shares), and Blendi Klosi (62 shares), which appear significantly lower in comparison. This hierarchy reflects both the institutional prominence of these actors and the organised communication strategies within parliamentary groups, where re-sharing operates as a tool of message alignment and agenda-setting.

The concentration of re-sharing around Rama's content is further reinforced by the behaviour of several Socialist MPs who play an active role in amplifying the Prime Minister's messaging. MPs such as Vullnet Sinaj (390 shares), Bledi Çuçi (291), Ismet Beqiraj (274), Klotilda Bushka Ferhati (246), and Anila Denaj (178) act as key intermediaries in circulating his posts across the party's online ecosystem. This structured pattern illustrates how Facebook networks become instruments of coordinated digital communication, in which political actors collectively reinforce central narratives through repeated content replication.

A closer look at performance indicators confirms the powerful effect of coordinated re-sharing. Videos created by Edi Rama and redistributed across MPs' networks accounted for almost half of all his video views, with re-shared content attracting more than twice the visibility of the videos hosted on his own page. This amplification effect demonstrates how networked sharing allows ruling-party communication to exploit Facebook's algorithmic preference for widely circulated posts.

Other political actors also benefit from this dynamic. Around one-third of Taulant Balla's total video visibility derives from posts re-shared by other MPs, while Lulzim Basha's re-shared content generates more engagement than his own primary uploads, reflecting his reliance on network amplification to reach broader audiences. Even Sali Berisha gains a significant portion of his video visibility from re-shared material, underscoring the strategic value of coordinated circulation across opposition networks as well.

These performance patterns show that Facebook visibility is not merely a function of individual audience size or content production but is deeply influenced by the collective behaviour of parliamentary networks. Re-sharing allows political actors to multiply their reach, reinforce party narratives, and dominate the online agenda through coordinated digital dissemination. In this

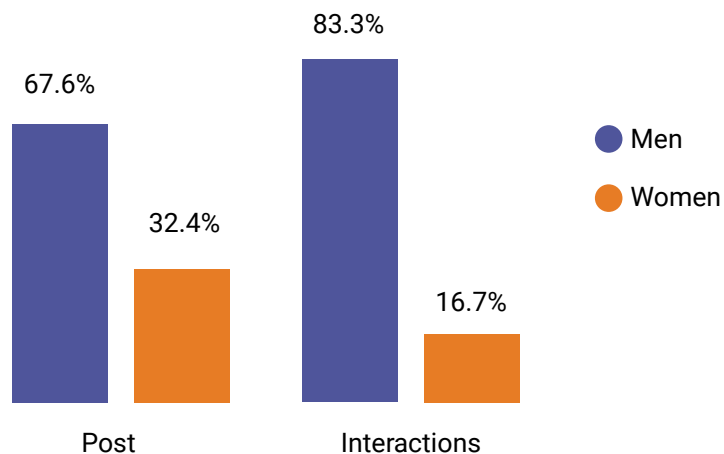
environment, MPs function not only as content creators but also as strategic amplifiers, contributing to a hybrid communication system where influence is distributed through interconnected networks rather than isolated pages.

Gender Representation and Engagement Disparities

The gender-disaggregated analysis of the 110 monitored Facebook pages reveals a persistent imbalance between women MPs' activity levels and the audience engagement their content receives. Among the monitored MPs, 39 are women, representing 35.5% of the total. During the monitoring period, women MPs published 12,439 posts, accounting for 32.4% of all 38,397 posts. This demonstrates that women MPs participate actively in online political communication, contributing a substantial volume of content comparable to that of their male colleagues.

However, their visibility and audience response remain significantly lower. Women MPs accumulated 5 million interactions, representing only 16.7% of the 29.9 million total interactions in the dataset. The gap between their share of posts (32.4%) and their share of interactions (16.7%) illustrates that content published by women MPs consistently generates lower engagement rates (Figure 5). This pattern aligns with broader international research showing that women politicians face systemic barriers in digital communication, including reduced algorithmic amplification and lower audience responsiveness.

Figure 5: Share of total posts and total interactions by gender



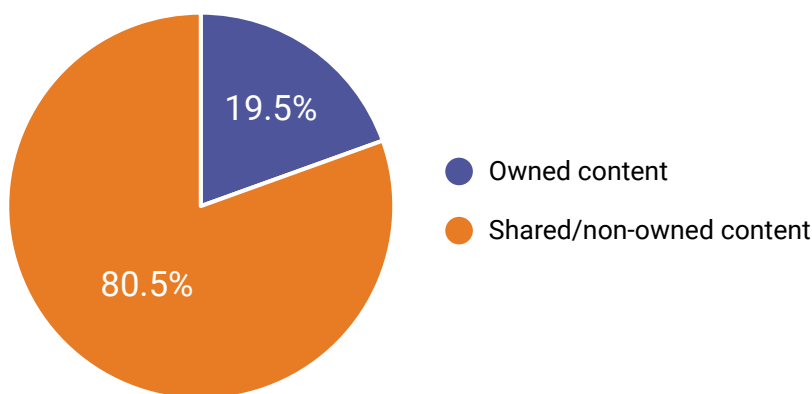
A more detailed look at content formats shows that women MPs made intensive use of audiovisual communication. During the monitored year, they published 1,718 live videos and 629 native videos, making live video the most frequently used format among women MPs. These were often employed to broadcast community visits, public events, speeches, or ceremonial occasions—formats that signal immediacy, accessibility, and transparency.

Despite receiving lower engagement overall, women MPs achieved meaningful visibility through video content. Videos posted on their pages generated 156.9 million views, representing 22.6% of the 696 million total video views in the total dataset. Although this proportion remains lower than

their share of total posts, it underscores that video—especially when supported by networked re-sharing—remains an important channel through which women MPs extend their reach.

As shown in Figure 6, most of this visibility comes from re-shared content rather than original production. Only 19.5% of women MPs’ video views (≈ 30 million) were generated by videos they created themselves, whereas 80.5% (≈ 127 million) came from shared or non-owned videos.

Figure 6: Video views for women MPs: owned vs shared content



This reliance on re-shared videos reflects both an opportunity and a constraint. Shared videos benefit from Facebook’s algorithmic preference for already-engaged content, enabling wider exposure. However, the comparatively low performance of women MPs’ original videos highlights structural limitations: without network amplification, their content struggles to achieve similar levels of reach.

Despite these systemic barriers, several women MPs stand out for consistently strong engagement. As shown in Table 5, women holding executive portfolios—including Ogerta Manastirliu, Belinda Balluku, Elisa Spiropali, and Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi—command substantially higher visibility than the broader cohort of women MPs, largely due to institutional prominence and intensive use of video formats.

Table 5: Top 10 women MPs by total engagement (June 2023–May 2024)

Rank	MP	Total interactions	Avg. posts/week
1	Ogerta Manastirliu	1,225,890	~13
2	Belinda Balluku	959,975	~10
3	Elisa Spiropali	866,223	~10
4	Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi	795,728	~12
5	Evis Kushi	555,075	~9
6	Ermonela Felaj Valikaj	45,789	~7
7	Edona Bilali	119,228	~7
8	Anila Denaj	343,716	~14
9	Milva Ekonomi	102,039	~11
10	Albana Vokshi	138,463	~22

These findings reveal a clear structural trend, where women MPs contribute a significant share of total content but receive disproportionately low engagement, and their visibility is heavily concentrated among those with executive responsibilities. While video formats offer women MPs meaningful opportunities to increase their reach, especially through shared content, the platform nonetheless reproduces broader gender inequalities present in Albanian political life. Digital visibility remains closely tied to institutional status, audience size, and algorithmic tendencies that favour emotionally charged or confrontational content, which are modes of communication more frequently used by male MPs.

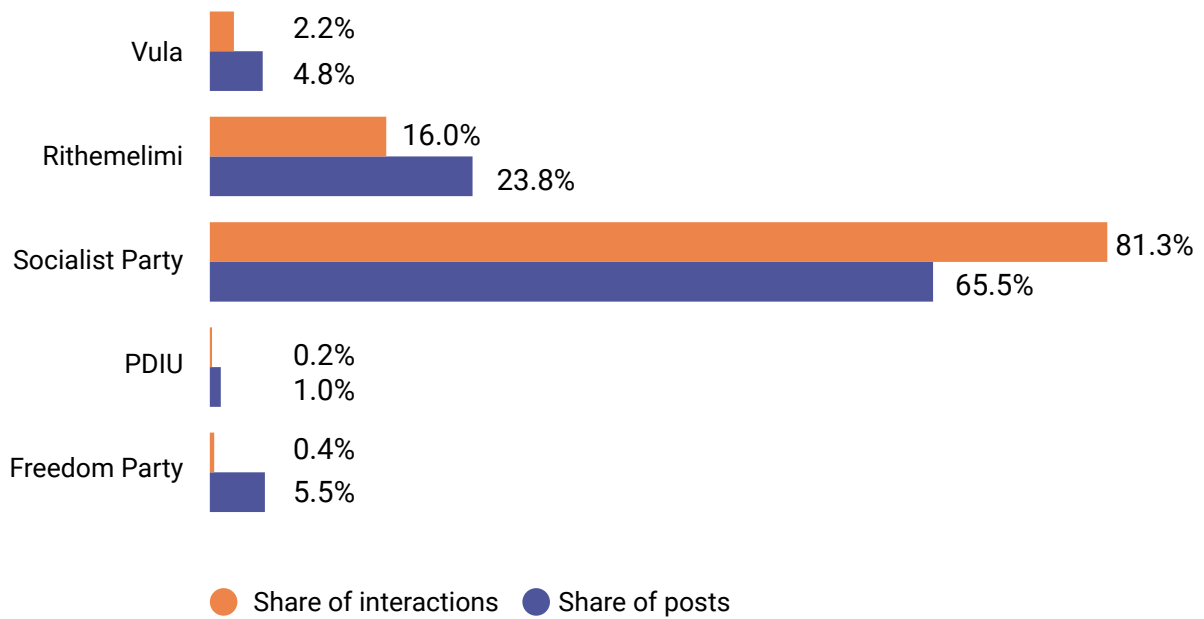
Comparative Analysis of Parliamentary Groups

The distribution of Facebook activity across parliamentary groups reflects both the political configuration of the current legislature and the uneven digital presence of MPs online. During the monitoring period, 110 MPs maintained active public Facebook pages. Their parliamentary alignment was as follows: 61 MPs from the Socialist Party (PS), 34 from Rithemelimi, 7 from the Vula faction, 5 from Partia për Drejtësi, Integrim dhe Unitet (PDIU), and 3 from the Freedom Party (Partia e Lirisë). This parliamentary composition immediately places PS in a position of structural dominance, representing more than half of all MPs included in the dataset.

Posting behaviour directly mirrors these structural disparities. MPs from the Socialist Party published 25,138 posts between June 2023 and May 2024, accounting for 65.5% of all posts captured during the monitoring period. The Rithemelimi faction—significantly smaller in size but highly active—generated 9,121 posts (23.7%), while the Vula faction produced 1,855 posts, and Freedom Party and PDIU posted far less frequently (1,915 and 368 posts respectively). These patterns indicate that smaller groups either invest fewer resources in continuous online communication or lack the institutional capacity to maintain a high-volume social media presence.

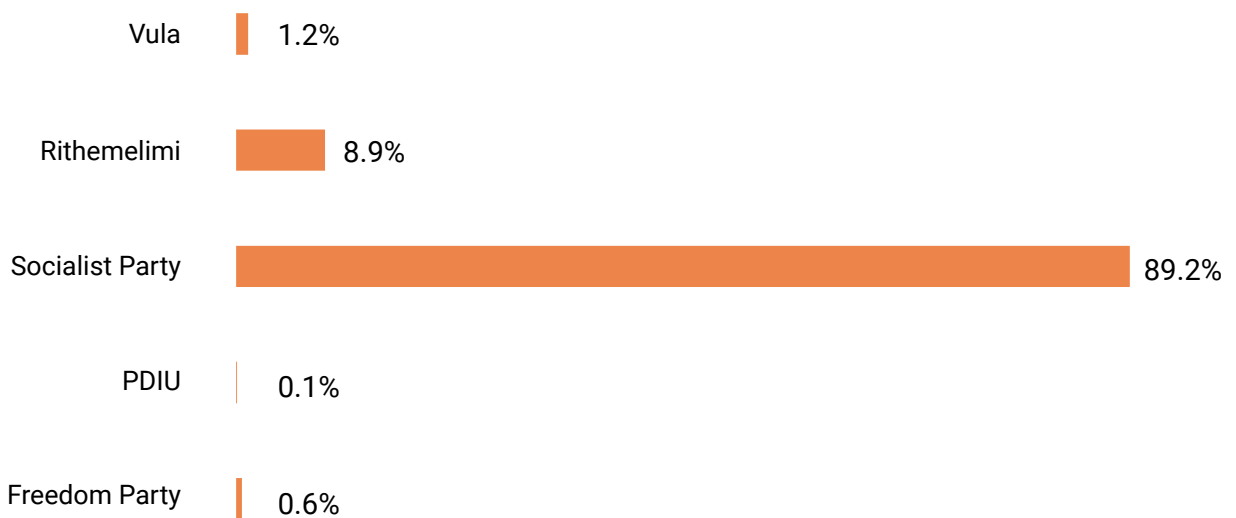
Engagement patterns reinforce these inequalities. As shown in Figure 7, MPs from the Socialist Party captured 24.33 million interactions, representing 81.3% of all interactions recorded for the period. Rithemelimi follows with 4.78 million interactions (16.0%), which—although considerably lower than the ruling majority—still reflects strong audience mobilisation around opposition figures. By contrast, the Vula faction accounts for 662,824 interactions (2.2%), while PDIU and Freedom Party account for only a marginal share. In each case, engagement closely tracks group size, but also reflects the differing communication strategies employed by incumbents and opposition MPs.

Figure 7: Posting activity and total interactions by parliamentary group



Video visibility, a central driver of political exposure on Facebook, amplifies this imbalance even further. As illustrated in Figure 8, Socialist Party MPs generated 621.3 million video views, or 89.2% of total visibility recorded across all pages. The Rithemelimi faction follows with 61.6 million views, while Vula MPs accumulated 8.3 million views. PDIU and Freedom Party remain at the margins, with fewer than 4 million views each. These findings confirm that incumbency and executive activity—frequently communicated through live videos, inaugurations, inspections, and ministerial announcements—produce a disproportionate share of video-based engagement.

Figure 8: Total video views by parliamentary group



Taken together, the results show that the Socialist Party dominates Facebook activity across all major indicators: number of posts, total interactions, and video reach. However, this dominance should be interpreted in context. With 61 MPs, the Socialist Party enjoys a numerical advantage that naturally translates into higher output and far greater visibility. Moreover, incumbency provides access to institutional events, public appearances, and sectoral updates that lend themselves to visually compelling content—content that algorithms tend to privilege.

Opposition groups—especially Rithemelimi—remain highly active and generate substantial engagement relative to their size, largely through confrontational or emotionally charged communication. Yet smaller parties and factions face structural constraints that limit their digital footprint.

Overall, the comparative analysis highlights how Facebook amplifies existing power hierarchies within the Albanian political system. Groups with more MPs and greater institutional presence produce more content, attract more engagement, and achieve far greater video visibility. Smaller parties, even when active, struggle to compete within a digital ecosystem that reinforces political asymmetries rather than levelling them.

Content and Narratives in MPs' Facebook Communication

This section examines the substance of what Albanian MPs communicate online, drawing on a structured qualitative coding of all thematic and personal posts. It explores the types of content MPs publish, the actors and institutions they highlight, the purposes their posts serve, and the thematic areas that define their political communication. Through this analysis, the section reveals how MPs construct narratives around government action, party politics, public policy, symbolic events, and emotional appeals. It also identifies the themes that attract the highest engagement and video visibility, offering insight into how political messages circulate and resonate within Albania's digital public sphere.



Types of Posts: Thematic and Personal Communication

The qualitative coding of the 38,397 Facebook posts published by Albanian MPs reveals a communication environment shaped by two dominant modes of expression: thematic posts, which convey institutional activities, political positions, or policy issues; and personal posts, which communicate symbolic, emotional, or individualised messages. This distinction is essential for understanding how MPs balance formal political messaging with personalised visibility within a highly curated digital environment.

Throughout the monitoring period, MPs overwhelmingly privileged thematic communication. A total of 31,091 posts, representing 81.0% of all published content, fell into this category. These posts typically documented governance activities, party events, parliamentary interventions, sectoral achievements, diplomatic engagements, and reactions to national or international developments. The predominance of thematic content also reflects the procedural nature of MPs' communication practices: the majority of these posts were informational updates, often carefully framed to signal competence and institutional presence rather than encourage interaction or debate.

Personal posts were far less common, with 7,306 posts (19.0% of all content), yet they played a disproportionately significant role in shaping audience engagement. These posts included holiday and commemorative messages, condolences, expressions of solidarity, participation in community events, and moments of symbolic or emotional resonance. Although they accounted for only a fifth of total output, personal posts generated 8.9 million interactions, or 29.6% of all recorded engagement. Their higher per-post resonance reflects the strong appeal of emotional and identity-based content on Facebook, where symbolic gestures and personalised messaging tend to elicit stronger reactions than procedural institutional communication.

The relationship between post types and engagement is summarised in Table 6.

Table 6: Distribution of post types and relative engagement (June 2023–May 2024)

Post type	Number of posts	Share of total posts	Total interactions	Share of interactions
Thematic posts	31,091	81.0%	21,062,331	70.4%
Personal posts	7,306	19.0%	8,867,084	29.6%
Total	38,397	100.0%	29,929,415	100.0%

Visual formats reinforce this division. MPs rely overwhelmingly on photos and videos in both categories, with minimal use of text-only posts or external links. Thematic posts typically include photo galleries or short institutional videos documenting meetings, inaugurations, inspections, or parliamentary speeches. Personal posts, by contrast, often feature symbolic imagery or clips from community gatherings, cultural celebrations, or commemorative events—formats that lend themselves more readily to emotional response.

Differences in individual communication strategies also emerge clearly. High-profile figures such as Sali Berisha and Edi Rama mix thematic updates with emotionally charged personal posts that consistently generate high engagement, leveraging their large audiences to drive both institutional and affective messaging. In contrast, ministers such as Taulant Balla, Ogerta Manastirliu, and Belinda Balluku post predominantly thematic, institution-centred content tied to their portfolios, resulting in a more formal and predictable communication style.

Personal posts frequently function as emotional anchors, particularly during national holidays, commemorative dates, or moments of crisis. These posts routinely outperform thematic content relative to their volume, revealing how Albanian MPs—regardless of political alignment—use symbolic and affective communication to reinforce proximity, relatability, and shared identity with their audiences.

Video Visibility and the Power of Thematic Content

The divide between thematic and personal content becomes even more pronounced when examining video views, a critical indicator of visibility and reach. Across the monitoring period, MPs generated approximately 696 million video views, and thematic content overwhelmingly dominated this dimension of visibility.

Thematic posts accounted for 87.9% of all video views, or roughly 612 million views, while the personal posts generated only 12.1%, or 84 million views, despite producing far stronger engagement per post.

This asymmetry underscores a structural characteristic of MPs' digital communication: although audiences respond more strongly to personal messages, the algorithmic and network dynamics of

Facebook heavily prioritise thematic, institutional video content. These posts, which were often tied to ministerial events, inaugurations, press conferences, or high-profile political statements, are more likely to be re-shared within party networks and to garner extended viewership due to their length, relevance, and institutional framing.

This analysis demonstrates that Albanian MPs employ a dual communication strategy on Facebook. Thematic posts, which are abundant in volume and amplified through institutional networks, project authority, competence, and political presence, and dominate long-form visibility through video reach. Personal posts, though fewer, serve to cultivate proximity, empathy, and symbolic resonance and contribute disproportionately to emotional engagement. This combination shapes MPs' online presence within Albania's hybrid media landscape, where political legitimacy and emotional appeal are intertwined but distributed differently across post types.

Thematic Posts and their Internal Dimensions

This section takes a closer look at the internal structure of MPs' thematic communication on Facebook: not just how much they post, but who they talk about, what they prioritise, and how different themes perform with audiences. Building on the quantitative overview of activity and engagement, it disaggregates thematic posts along three key dimensions. First, it examines the subject of communication—which actors and institutions receive visibility and how this reflects Albania's centralised political system. Second, it analyses the thematic areas that dominate MPs' output, from party activity and justice to agriculture, European integration, and social policy, highlighting the balance between institutional content and symbolic or identity-driven messages. Third, it explores what drives engagement across these themes, showing where citizens react most strongly and how video views and interactions diverge across policy fields.

Subject of Posts

Analysing the subject of thematic posts allows us to understand how MPs construct political visibility: whose actions they highlight, which institutions they elevate, and how they distribute attention across different layers of governance. This dimension is essential because it reveals the degree to which Facebook functions as an extension of executive communication, a forum for legislative visibility, or a relay for narratives emerging from media, oversight bodies, or international actors.

The analysis of thematic posts reveals a clear hierarchy in the types of actors and institutions that MPs choose to highlight in their Facebook communication. Reflecting Albania's centralised political environment, MPs overwhelmingly focus on *government activity*, while legislative, local-government, and externally sourced content occupy far smaller portions of the digital agenda.

As shown in Table 7, posts referring to executive actors—including ministers, prime-ministerial activities, and government institutions—constitute 58.9% of all thematic posts (18,304 posts). These posts generate a disproportionately high share of total engagement, accounting for 67.3%

of all interactions (14.2 million) and an even more pronounced 74.8% of total video views (457.5 million). This dominance underscores how Facebook has become an extension of government communication, where executive visibility—through achievements, inaugurations, inspections, sectoral updates, and public-relations content—shapes the bulk of the political narrative.

Posts related to *legislative activity and party politics* make up 14.6% of thematic posts (4,545 posts) but account for only 6.3% of interactions (1.3 million) and 4.2% of video views (25.8 million). This disparity reflects both the procedural and often technical nature of parliamentary content and the tendency of MPs to prioritise more visually compelling executive-style communication over detailed legislative messaging. Even for high-profile opposition figures, engagement often stems from conflict-driven commentary rather than institutional legislative work.

Content referencing *local government*—mayors, municipal initiatives, local infrastructure projects, or constituency-based activities—represents 5.6% of posts (1,741 posts) and generates 4.6% of interactions (978,000) and 3.6% of video views (22.1 million). These posts are typically driven by MPs with strong territorial links or those involved in decentralisation or regional development. However, compared with central government content, their reach and visibility remain modest.

The *other* category accounts for 20.9% of thematic posts (6,501 posts) and 21.7% of interactions (4.6 million), along with 17.4% of video views (106.3 million). This diverse category includes posts referencing media outlets, journalists, oversight institutions, the judiciary, civil society organisations, international actors, and external events. Although these posts broaden the informational ecosystem of MPs' communication, they do not rival the visibility generated by executive-related content. Their engagement levels suggest that audiences respond more strongly to political actors than to institutional or media references unless the content relates to emotionally charged or high-salience events.

Table 7: Share of posts and engagement by subject (June 2023–May 2024)

Subject	Posts (n=31,091)	Interactions (n=21,062,331)	Video views (n=611,796,234)
Government activity (executive)	58.9%	67.3%	74.8%
Legislative activity and party politics	14.6%	6.3%	4.2%
Local government	5.6%	4.6%	3.6%
Other (media, independent institutions, judiciary, civil society, etc.)	20.9%	21.7%	17.4%

The analysed data confirms that the executive dominates the thematic communication landscape, both in volume and in audience response. The government's advantage is especially visible in video-based communication, where ministers and the prime minister account for three-quarters of all video views generated by MPs. This suggests that Facebook's algorithmic preferences for audiovisual content further amplify incumbent visibility.

Even when accounting for opposition activity or the diverse range of actors included in the *other* category, the platform largely reproduces Albania’s structural political asymmetries, where the executive sets the agenda, shapes the narrative, and captures the bulk of digital attention.

Thematic Areas of Communication

The qualitative analysis reveals a clear hierarchy of thematic priorities in MPs’ Facebook communication. While MPs use Facebook to communicate across a wide range of policy and political issues, their output is heavily concentrated in a handful of themes—most notably political and party activity, justice and security, agriculture and tourism, and European integration. Other areas such as education, health, infrastructure, economic policy, and environmental issues appear consistently, though with more modest visibility.

As shown in Table 8, the largest share of posts falls under *political activity and party events* (30.9%). These posts typically include announcements about party meetings, mobilisation efforts, appearances by senior leaders, and reactive commentary on political developments. Their prevalence underscores the highly polarised nature of Albania’s political environment, where MPs often use Facebook to reinforce party narratives, signal factional alignment, or showcase internal party dynamics.

Table 8: Distribution of posts by thematic area (June 2023–May 2024)

Thematic area	Number of posts	Share of total thematic posts
Political activity and party events	9,605	30.9%
Justice, security, and public order	3,154	10.1%
Agriculture, tourism, and rural development	3,073	9.9%
European integration and foreign policy	2,994	9.6%
Education, health, and social services	2,494	8.0%
Infrastructure and public works	2,203	7.1%
Economy, finance, and employment	1,862	6.0%
Parliamentary processes and government procedures	1,758	5.7%
Populism/emotionally charged appeals	910	2.9%
Energy and environment	674	2.2%
Other (commemorative, symbolic, misc.)	2,364	7.6%
Total	31,091	100.0%

Posts addressing *justice, security, and public order* comprise the next substantial thematic area. MPs frequently use these posts to comment on police operations, anti-corruption measures, judicial reforms, or high-profile criminal cases. Tone and narrative differ sharply across parties: governing MPs emphasise institutional achievements, while opposition MPs focus on failures, accountability gaps, or perceived politicisation of the justice system.

Content on *agriculture, tourism, and rural development* is particularly prominent among MPs representing rural regions or sector-specific ministries. These posts document field visits, local development initiatives, promotional campaigns, and project inaugurations, reflecting the centrality of these sectors to Albania's economy and political agenda.

Posts related to *European integration and foreign policy* also appear frequently. These include posts about diplomatic meetings, international events, regional cooperation, and commentary on EU reform progress. Governing-party MPs tend to highlight alignment with EU priorities and progress on reforms, while opposition MPs often frame EU-related content around delays, democratic concerns, or failures in negotiation processes.

Other policy domains—including *education, health, and social services, economy and employment, energy and environment, and parliamentary processes*—make up smaller but meaningful portions of MPs' communication. These posts often focus on sectoral achievements, community-level investments, social protection measures, or environmental campaigns.

The *other* category includes symbolic and commemorative content: holiday messages, condolences, tributes, community tragedies, and posts reacting to major national or local events. These posts play a central role in personalisation and identity-based communication, complementing the more formal thematic content.

This thematic distribution demonstrates a hybrid communication strategy, in which MPs use Facebook both to showcase institutional activity, especially in politically salient sectors, and to connect with citizens through symbolic and emotive content. Political positioning, sectoral promotion, and national identity reinforce each other in a communication environment shaped by intense partisanship and algorithmic incentives for emotional engagement.

What Drives Public Engagement across Thematic Areas

Beyond the frequency of posts, the engagement and visibility associated with each thematic area provide deeper insight into what captures public attention on Facebook. The data shows that citizens respond most strongly to themes that combine political impact with tangible, real-world implications.

Political activity and party events remains the most interactive category, generating almost 5 million interactions—around one-quarter of all thematic engagement. These posts document party meetings, internal mobilisation, leadership appearances, and partisan reactions to political developments. Their high engagement reflects the strongly polarised nature of Albania's political environment, where partisan competition drives a steady flow of reactions, shares, and comments.

Themes related to *agriculture, tourism, and rural development* also draw substantial attention, with

3.46 million interactions and 81.1 million video views. This high level of public interest indicates the relevance of these sectors for citizens' livelihoods and local economies. Posts in this category often highlight achievements in tourism, promotion campaigns, or visits to rural communities, making them highly relatable and visually appealing.

Similarly, *infrastructure and public works* generates a significant response, accumulating 2.7 million interactions and around 80 million video views. These posts typically showcase inaugurations, inspections, or new public investments, combining institutional messaging with visible, concrete results, all elements that consistently attract strong public interest.

Themes that speak to public safety, like *justice, security, and public order*, also perform strongly, producing 1.8 million interactions and 60.5 million video views. While the tone varies between government and opposition actors, the consistent volume of engagement shows that crime, policing, and judicial developments remain central to public debate.

Although posts on *European integration and foreign policy* generate a more modest number of interactions (1.6 million), they achieve the highest total video visibility with 107.8 million views. This divergence suggests that while users may not actively react to these posts, they watch and circulate them widely, reflecting sustained interest in Albania's international positioning and EU-related developments.

Other policy fields, including *education, health, and social services, economy and employment, energy and environment, and parliamentary processes*, collectively contribute to the diversity of political communication, though they attract lower levels of engagement. Even so, topics such as education, healthcare, and social welfare still produce more than 2.3 million interactions, affirming their everyday relevance.

These patterns reveal a two-fold dynamic, in which citizens engage most actively with politically charged or highly visible domestic themes, while international and symbolic content achieves the greatest reach through video circulation. This interplay of political mobilisation, policy relevance, and emotional resonance shapes the hierarchy of public attention across MPs' Facebook communication.

In-Depth Content Analysis of Key Thematic Narratives

The thematic analysis of MPs' Facebook posts offers a deeper understanding of how Albanian politicians construct political narratives, mobilise supporters, and frame public debates. Beyond the descriptive coding of themes and post types, this section examines the content, tone, and strategic use of language in posts addressing the most prominent topics: corruption and justice reform, European integration and foreign policy, and gender and minority issues. Together, these themes reflect not only the political priorities of the main actors but also the broader socio-political currents shaping Albania's digital public sphere.

1. *Corruption and Justice Reform: A Polarised Battle for Legitimacy*

Corruption and justice reform remain among the most dominant and emotionally charged topics in MPs' communication. All major political actors engage with these themes, but their narratives diverge sharply, mirroring Albania's highly polarised political environment.

For the Socialist Party, justice reform is framed as a historic success and one of the government's most defining achievements. Posts highlight progress in strengthening institutions, aligning with EU standards and consolidating the fight against corruption and organised crime. The tone is consistently positive and confident, emphasising transformation, modernisation, and Albania's steady alignment with European governance norms. In this narrative, justice reform becomes both a symbol and a tool: a symbol of responsible leadership and a tool to differentiate the governing majority from the opposition. Posts frequently portray the reform as a national project threatened by anti-reform forces, arguing that the Socialist Party has carried the burden of institutional renewal while others attempt to undermine it for political gain. This framing reinforces the government's image as the guardian of Albania's European future.

Opposition, by contrast, approaches the topic through a lens of crisis and institutional decay. Posts adopt a sharply accusatory tone, alleging widespread corruption within the government, manipulation of public tenders, and misuse of state resources. The justice reform, which is celebrated by the ruling party, is portrayed as a failed project, politicised and weaponised to protect government allies while prosecuting opposition figures. The arrest and indictment of Sali Berisha by Special Prosecution Against Corruption and Organised Crime (SPAK) figures heavily in this rhetoric. The opposition frames these developments as examples of selective justice, arguing that anti-corruption institutions have been captured by the executive and used for political persecution. Under this narrative, corruption becomes not only a policy failure but proof of democratic backsliding.

These competing messages form one of the most polarised thematic arenas in Albanian political communication. Justice reform is simultaneously a badge of honour and a symbol of systemic injustice, depending on the political actor. This clash of narratives is emblematic of a broader struggle for political legitimacy, with Facebook functioning as a primary stage where these battles are fought.

2. *European Integration and Foreign Policy: Shared Priority, Divergent Tone*

Another key thematic cluster centres on Albania's European trajectory and foreign policy relationships. The analysis of more than 17,000 posts referencing the EU or EU-related vocabulary shows that integration remains a unifying topic across political actors, although the tone and framing differ.

The Socialist Party consistently adopts an optimistic, forward-looking tone when communicating about the EU. Posts highlight reform progress, constructive engagement with Brussels, support from EU member states, and Albania's increasing alignment with European standards. Italy, in particular, appears as a central partner, mentioned in more than 300 posts, with almost always positive sentiment. Even the controversial Italy–Albania migration agreement is framed by government actors primarily through

the lens of partnership and cooperation. Turkey also appears as a valued partner in posts highlighting infrastructure projects, humanitarian aid, or cultural collaborations. Meanwhile, references to Greece remain largely positive but more nuanced, given periodic diplomatic tensions and sensitive issues such as minority rights and the Fredi Beleri case.

Opposition parties acknowledge the importance of EU integration but use EU institutions as a benchmark to critique government performance. Many posts convey frustration with slow progress, lack of democratic reforms, or actions perceived as damaging Albania's credibility. Rather than challenging the goal of European integration, the opposition leverages EU expectations to highlight governance failures at home.

Beyond the EU, global conflicts are also reflected in MPs' communication. Posts referencing Ukraine overwhelmingly express solidarity and alignment with NATO and EU positions. Russia, in contrast, is consistently depicted as an aggressor, reflecting Albania's firm pro-Western geopolitical orientation. Other conflicts, such as Israel–Palestine, appear only sporadically.

Despite differences in tone, European integration remains one of the few topics treated as a shared national priority. It is simultaneously used to project government competence and to hold the government accountable—resulting in a rich but contested narrative space.

3. *Gender and LGBTI Themes: Limited Frequency, Strong Symbolism*

Themes related to women's rights, gender equality, and LGBTI issues appear less frequently than other major topics, but they carry symbolic significance. Posts most often appear around commemorative dates or in the context of institutional initiatives related to gender equality, social protection, or anti-discrimination.

Messages referencing women's rights tend to be positive and supportive, highlighting progress, success stories, or policy initiatives. Posts celebrating women in leadership roles, community events, or gender-equality programmes contribute to a broader narrative of social inclusion.

However, the dataset also includes 85 posts coded as "defamatory campaign", often targeting women or using gendered rhetoric as a political weapon. These posts underscore the vulnerability of women in public life and reflect broader concerns about gendered disinformation and online hostility.

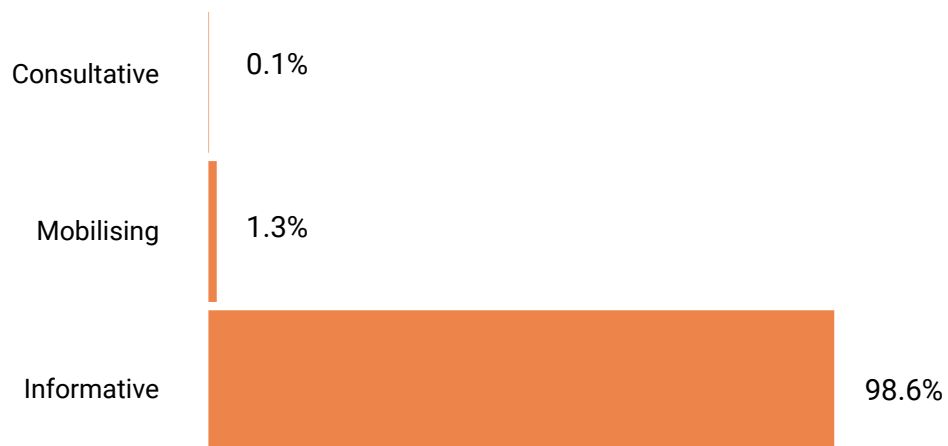
Engagement levels with gender-related content are moderate, suggesting that while these themes do not dominate political discourse, they remain relevant symbolic markers of institutional commitment and societal values.

Purpose and Communication Goals of MPs' Facebook Posts

The analysis of 31,091 thematic posts confirms that Albanian MPs overwhelmingly use Facebook as a one-way communication channel, centred on broadcasting information rather than fostering dialogue or participation. As shown in Figure 9, 98.6% of thematic posts are coded as *informative*. These posts disseminate announcements, institutional updates, parliamentary activities, party communications, or sectoral achievements, typically without inviting reactions, debate, or public input.

By contrast, *mobilising* posts, which include persuasive language, emotional appeals, or explicit calls to action, constitute only 1.3% of thematic content. *Consultative* posts, which seek public opinion or participation in policy or community initiatives, remain almost entirely absent, representing just 0.1% of thematic communication.

Figure 9: Share of posts based on purpose



This distribution reflects a top-down communication model. MPs rely on Facebook to shape narratives, maintain political visibility, and control message framing, but rarely use it to facilitate two-way engagement. The platform serves primarily as an instrument for agenda-setting and political branding rather than participatory exchange.

One notable exception is Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi, who produced comparatively more consultative posts related to tourism planning and community consultation processes. Yet even these posts generated modest engagement, typically between 191 and 691 interactions, indicating that the public is not accustomed to, nor incentivised to engage with, participatory formats within MPs' pages.

Engagement behaviour further reinforces the hierarchical nature of communication goals.

- Informative posts generate 98.0% of all thematic interactions (approx. 20.6 million) and 98.5% of thematic video views (about 601 million).
- Mobilising posts, though only 1.3% of content, produce 1.8% of interactions and 1.5% of video views—slightly above their proportional weight, suggesting that emotionally charged messages can trigger stronger responses.
- Consultative posts perform the weakest, with only 25,593 interactions and 123,593 video views, accounting for just 0.02% of all thematic video engagement.

Together, these findings demonstrate that MPs overwhelmingly use Facebook as a visibility and message-control tool, not as a venue for public consultation or deliberation. The platform is employed to project authority, disseminate political narratives, and reinforce their legitimacy, while interaction, participation, and dialogue remain largely absent from MPs' online behaviour.

Personal Posts and the Use of Symbolic or Emotional Communication

While thematic posts dominate MPs' Facebook output, personal posts constitute a strategically important layer of communication that shapes how politicians cultivate identity, visibility, and emotional connection with the voters and the public at large. Although they represent only 19% of all posts (7,306 posts), personal posts generate 29.6% of all interactions and play a disproportionate role in video visibility. This makes them significantly more engagement-efficient and highlights the importance of symbolic and affective content in the contemporary digital political sphere.

Personal posts cluster into four recurring sub-themes, each serving a distinct communicative purpose:

Commemorative dates form the largest share (27.9%), reflecting MPs' reliance on shared historical memory and national symbolism to situate themselves within widely recognised cultural narratives. These posts include national holidays, anniversaries, tributes, and memorial messages and are highly visible but less emotionally charged, generating 19.7% of personal interactions and 12.8% of personal video views.

Events, TV appearances, conferences, and public meetings account for 20.3% of personal posts and nearly mirror commemorative content in engagement (19.4%). These posts project activity, institutional presence, and public visibility, signalling relevance and authority without strong emotional appeals. Their video view share (13.4%) reflects their informational rather than affective nature.

Community events and citizen engagement (16.4%) highlight MPs' relational communication, including local visits, interactions with constituents, and participation in community life. These posts foreground accessibility and proximity, though they generate more modest engagement (11.7%). Their stronger performance in video views (18.6%) suggests that audiences respond positively to real-life interactions captured in visual form, even if they do not always react or comment.

Finally, *populist or emotionally charged content* accounts for only 10.7% of personal posts and emerges as the most powerful driver of online visibility. These posts rely on empathetic messaging, symbolic gestures, shared grievances, or emotionally resonant appeals, and they generate a disproportionate 20.4% of personal-post interactions and 29.1% of video views. Their outsized impact demonstrates how strongly emotional content drives attention and amplification on Facebook's algorithmic environment.

Table 9: Distribution and engagement of personal posts (June 2023–May 2024)

Personal post category	Posts (n=7,306)	Interactions (n=8,867,084)	Video views (n=84,235,961)
Commemorative dates	27.9%	19.7%	12.8%
Events, TV, conferences, meetings	20.3%	19.4%	13.4%
Community events and citizen engagement	16.4%	11.7%	18.6%
Populist/emotionally charged content	10.7%	20.4%	29.1%

These engagement trends show that personal posts are not peripheral or anecdotal additions to MPs' communication. They are an essential emotional counterbalance to the largely informational nature of thematic posts. While thematic content projects competence and authority, personal posts project connection, identity, and affective resonance. Their strategic use enables MPs to shape how they are perceived, not only as political actors but also as cultural figures embedded in national, communal, and symbolic life.

Insights from In-Depth Interviews with MPs and Experts

This section contextualises the monitoring findings by analysing insights from semi-structured interviews with MPs and independent experts in political communication, media, and parliamentary affairs. It explores how MPs understand and manage their social media presence, the pressures and dilemmas they face online, their experiences with hate speech and misinformation, and how they perceive the role of Facebook in public engagement and democratic accountability. Expert perspectives complement these views by assessing the broader implications of MPs' digital behaviour, highlighting structural gaps, ethical concerns, and opportunities for more transparent and constructive online communication.



MPs' Use and Management of and Institutional Support for Social Media

In order to better understand how Albanian MPs use social media, the authors conducted structured interviews with MPs from various parliamentary groups, including the ruling Socialist Party, the opposition Democratic Party, and the Freedom Party. Four structured interviews were also held with experts in political communication and parliamentary affairs. The findings below summarise the main trends emerging from these interviews.

According to MPs, Facebook and Instagram are the primary platforms used for political communication, as they are widely known and enable direct contact with voters. Some MPs also use X/Twitter and TikTok to reach younger or English-speaking audiences. The choice of platform is generally guided by ease of use and perceived effectiveness in disseminating political and parliamentary messages.

"I use Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X. I consider them an essential tool for communicating with the public." – Socialist Party MP

Account management models vary. Some MPs handle their profiles personally, while others rely on collaborators, assistants or volunteer party members. A number of opposition MPs reported receiving help from party activists or from organisations such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI). Others emphasised that they prefer to manage their accounts themselves in order to maintain a direct relationship with voters.

"I mostly manage them myself, but I also have a girl from the party's youth wing who helps me." – Freedom Party MP

Financing for social media activities mainly comes from MPs' own funds. Several interviewees underlined that they incur minimal or no direct costs, as they create and post content themselves, occasionally with voluntary support from party activists. There is no dedicated financial or technical support from Parliament, beyond general requirements to declare campaign-related expenditures.

“Zero cost. It is my private page. I create and post everything myself.” – Democratic Party MP

“No, zero, I have not had any kind of assistance from Parliament.” – Freedom Party MP

MPs generally consider social media highly important for communicating with voters, promoting parliamentary work, and expressing political positions. Some see these platforms as spaces for public debate, while others mainly use them to defend party lines or push partisan narratives. Opposition MPs in particular stressed that they rely on social media to bypass what they describe as “media censorship” and to convey their positions when they feel excluded from mainstream outlets.

“If an MP is not on social media, they do not ‘exist’.” – Freedom Party MP

At the same time, MPs pointed to a lack of structured policies and support from the Albanian Parliament on social media use. Most stated that there are no official guidelines or institutional assistance, leaving them to navigate digital communication individually. Some parties—notably the Socialist Party—have provided occasional training sessions on public communication that include social media strategies, but these are neither systematic nor mandatory. MPs from smaller parties and opposition groups often rely on external organisations for training and support.

Despite the absence of formal policies, MPs recognise the strategic importance of social media and several called for more structured support, including dedicated aides to summarise parliamentary debates or prepare content for public dissemination. Others observed that their parties are gradually becoming more aware of the role of digital platforms and are informally providing training, particularly to younger members and activists. However, the lack of clear guidelines from Parliament or parliamentary groups also raises concerns about ethical use, misinformation, and the potential misuse of these platforms for political attacks rather than constructive engagement.

Overall, the interviews highlight major disparities in how MPs use social media. While some rely on personal experience and informal learning, others benefit from professional assistance through party networks or international programmes. This uneven access to skills and resources affects the quality and effectiveness of their communication strategies and contributes to wide variation in whether social media is used for meaningful engagement or mainly for propaganda and self-promotion.

Hate Speech, Ethics, Political Attacks, and Election Campaign Dynamics

The responses from Albanian MPs indicate that hate speech and abusive comments are a common feature of their online experience. Several MPs, particularly women, described frequent exposure to offensive language, insults, and defamatory attacks. Some women MPs said they have considered legal action against online harassment, while others have opted to block users or disable comments on particularly hostile platforms such as TikTok. MPs from different parties agreed that social media can be a hostile environment, where political debate often escalates into personal attack, making digital engagement burdensome and emotionally taxing.

Despite these challenges, there is no formal strategy from Parliament or from most political parties

to protect MPs from online abuse. Interviewees said they deal with hate speech individually, by reporting comments, blocking users, or attempting to correct misinformation in direct messages. One Socialist Party MP mentioned following Meta's reporting policies when dealing with harmful content. There was a broad sense that online abuse is seen as an unavoidable aspect of political life, especially during election periods. Some MPs also linked the tone of social media attacks to aggressive rhetoric used in parliamentary debates, reflecting a broader political culture of confrontation.

Opinions diverged on whether MPs from their own or opposing parties use social media ethically. A Socialist Party MP argued that the boundaries of ethics online are difficult to define and admitted that while most colleagues maintain certain standards, there are cases where political actors engage in misinformation or hate speech.

"We don't know where the boundaries of ethics begin and end. That's another debate." – Socialist Party MP

An opposition Democratic Party MP suggested that some MPs may not personally post unethical content but may encourage activists or supporters to engage in online attacks, defamation, or the intentional spread of false narratives. Another opposition MP argued that hate speech and manipulation are more prevalent among those in power, alleging that ruling party MPs are more likely to use propaganda and narrative manipulation to serve political interests. At the same time, several interviewees acknowledged that ethical concerns are not limited to one party and that social media political discourse is highly polarised across the board.

MPs unanimously reported that neither Parliament nor their parties have a formal strategy to address online attacks. Two women opposition MPs confirmed that they manage online abuse entirely on their own, without any psychological, legal, or institutional support. Other MPs made similar statements, explaining that while online attacks are frequent, there are no dedicated protective mechanisms, leaving them dependent on ad hoc measures such as blocking or reporting.

Some MPs stressed the need for stronger protections and future regulations to prevent escalation of online harassment, especially for opposition MPs and women, who they consider more exposed. The current lack of institutional response leaves MPs vulnerable to smear campaigns, coordinated trolling and politically motivated attacks, with potential long-term effects on participation and representation—particularly for those already facing gendered or minority-based hostility.

Interviews also explored the use of social media for consultation and legislative input. A few MPs described using social media in more participatory ways. One opposition MP explained that she used online feedback to inform her proposal for a National Register of Convicted Sex Offenders, initially testing the idea on social media before formalising it in Parliament. Another opposition MP noted that she frequently monitors debates in the comment sections of her posts to gauge public opinion on infrastructure projects such as the planned Skavica Hydropower Plant or the Arbri Road:

"Not in the sense of a survey, but through the debates generated in the comments under my posts." – Democratic Party MP

However, several MPs remained sceptical of social media as a meaningful forum for legislative consultation. One argued that while citizens send messages about upcoming hearings or draft laws, social media discussions rarely have the depth or structure required for informed policymaking.

Another said he had not used social media in a structured way for legislative initiatives, even though he recognised its value as a barometer of public sentiment.

MPs also reflected on the dual role of social media as a tool for parliamentary communication and a platform for political attack. One opposition MP stated openly that MPs use social media for both purposes—promoting their work and engaging in confrontation. A Socialist Party MP emphasised that platforms allow MPs to express themselves freely, leaving it to each individual to decide whether to prioritise legislative content or political rivalry. A Freedom Party MP criticised government-affiliated politicians for using social media primarily as a propaganda tool, often by re-sharing content from Prime Minister Edi Rama rather than fostering debate. Opposition MPs underlined that, given their limited access to mainstream media, social networks are essential to convey their positions.

“Social media is a modern agora.” – Socialist Party MP

Most MPs agreed that the boundary between parliamentary work and political attack is often blurred, as disputes in Parliament spill over onto social media. A Democratic Party MP remarked that some MPs use their accounts mainly for self-promotion, while others weaponised them to criticise opponents rather than discuss policy issues. A Socialist Party MP, by contrast, downplayed the role of political attacks, insisting that MPs primarily use social media to inform the public about their work. There was broad consensus, however, that election periods amplify these dynamics: social media communication becomes more intense, more frequent, and more aggressive, as parties compete for visibility and voter persuasion. Outside campaign periods, MPs described their communication as more diversified and somewhat less confrontational.

Expert Perspectives on MPs’ Social Media Practices and Democratic Impact

Experts interviewed for this study highlighted both the opportunities and shortcomings of MPs’ social media use. They agreed that digital platforms have transformed political communication, enabling direct interaction between politicians and citizens and reducing dependence on traditional media. At the same time, they stressed that this transformation has often weakened journalistic mediation and shifted the focus from substance to visibility.

According to experts, many MPs use social media primarily for self-promotion rather than for transparency or meaningful dialogue. Instead of reporting on legislative processes or inviting public input, they tend to replicate campaign-style communication, concentrating on image-building, events, and partisan messages. While social media could, in principle, expand democratic engagement, experts argued that in practice it is frequently treated as a broadcast channel rather than a space for two-way communication.

“Social media has overturned the traditional model of controlled communication, where print media carefully edited news and reactions, television had structured weekly programming, and MPs faced no public pressure to respond except within their party structures.” – Academic

Experts also underlined the absence of formal guidelines or training on ethical and effective social

media use. Parliament does not provide clear regulations in this area, and political parties offer limited, ad hoc support. As a result, MPs manage their accounts largely on their own, often without professional advice on how to balance visibility, accountability and responsible communication.

A key concern raised by experts is the rise of hate speech and misinformation in online political discourse. Women MPs are particularly exposed to gender-based attacks, harassment, and defamatory content. Disinformation remains widespread, and some politicians themselves contribute to it by sharing unverified or misleading information for political gain. Experts stressed the need for stronger transparency mechanisms, including alignment with European standards on digital political advertising and online accountability, to mitigate manipulation and restore trust.

While the dominant pattern is one-way communication, experts acknowledged a small number of good practices. Some MPs use social media to explain legislative issues, address public concerns, and raise awareness about specific policies. In rare cases, they host live Q&A sessions, conduct online polls, or consistently respond to citizen questions. Others use their platforms to expose corruption or advocate for reforms that receive limited coverage in mainstream media.

“A good practice is live interaction, where politicians take questions directly from citizens. However, even this has its flaws, as access is limited, and those engaging are often preselected. A major issue remains the use of public institutions’ social media accounts for political purposes, which fundamentally undermines state independence.” – Representative of a Civil Society Organization (CSO)

Experts nevertheless emphasised that such examples remain isolated. In most cases, social media is used more as a tool for political marketing than as an instrument for democratic participation.

The interviews also pointed to structural constraints that limit meaningful consultation. Experts noted that many MPs lack staff or institutional support to moderate discussions, verify information, or systematically process public input. Open debates are often avoided due to fear of criticism or trolling, reinforcing a preference for tightly controlled, one-directional communication. As a result, social media rarely functions as a genuine forum for citizen participation in legislative processes.

Experts agreed that social media has become a central arena for shaping voters’ opinions on both issues and individual politicians. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok now act as primary sources of political information, particularly for younger demographics. Politicians use them to craft their public image, set narratives, and respond to controversies in real time, often bypassing the scrutiny associated with traditional journalism.

“Political parties now require MPs to maintain an active social media presence, even those who are not naturally inclined to do so. This shows how crucial digital platforms have become in shaping political narratives and influencing voter behaviour.” – Representative of a Civil Society Organization (CSO)

However, experts warned that the same features that make social media powerful tools for engagement also facilitate misinformation, polarisation, and manipulation. Emotionally charged and populist messages tend to perform better than reasoned debate, incentivising confrontational and symbolic content over substantive discussion. While social media can expose abuses and bring neglected issues into the public eye, there is no guarantee that such exposure translates into institutional accountability.

The lack of coordinated responses to hate speech and online abuse, combined with unequal access to professional support, reinforces existing political and socio-economic asymmetries. Experts concluded that, without clear institutional frameworks and stronger commitments to ethical, interactive communication, social media in Albania will continue to function primarily as a vehicle for political branding and conflict, rather than a robust instrument for transparency, accountability, and democratic engagement.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings presented in this study offer a comprehensive analysis of how Albanian Members of Parliament use Facebook to shape political communication, construct public narratives, and engage with voters and citizens at large. By combining large-scale quantitative monitoring with qualitative content analysis and in-depth interviews with MPs and experts, the research reveals both the structural trends that define MPs' online visibility and the lived experiences that shape their day-to-day digital habits.

This section interprets the results through a broader analytical lens, examining what the data suggests about power-structure dynamics within Albanian legislative politics, the incentives created by social media platforms, and the implications for democratic engagement. Rather than restating statistical findings, the discussion synthesises the evidence to identify the underlying forces that drive MPs' behaviour online—from institutional asymmetries and algorithmic amplification to gendered patterns of visibility, the prevalence of emotional content, and the absence of ethical or institutional safeguards.

In doing so, this chapter highlights how Facebook functions not just as a communication tool, but as a political battleground that shapes opportunities, amplifies inequalities, and influences the tone and quality of Albania's public sphere. The following sections unpack these dynamics and outline the broader democratic implications emerging from the study.

Facebook as the Central Arena of Albanian Political Communication

The findings of this study confirm that Facebook has become the primary arena of political communication in Albania, shaping how elected representatives construct their public presence and how citizens encounter political information. For MPs, Facebook functions simultaneously as a public bulletin, a media substitute, a platform for symbolic performance, and a battleground for political competition. The platform enables them to communicate without journalistic mediation, to frame their activities on their own terms, and to maintain constant visibility before audiences who rely heavily on social media for news and information on legislative developments.

The platform's importance reflects Albania's broader communication environment, characterised by high internet penetration, mobile-first consumption, and declining trust in traditional media. In this competitive communication environment, MPs describe a strong expectation to post frequently, respond to developments in real time, and maintain continuous visibility. Such need creates constant pressure that many MPs experience as demanding and, at times, emotionally taxing. Quantitative data corroborates this: over 38,000 posts were published by 110 MPs within a single year, illustrating a communication culture where regular output is essential to retain political relevance.

The evidence shows that Facebook is no longer simply a channel through which politics is communicated. It actively shapes the rhythm, style, and incentives of political life, influencing which narratives gain traction, whose voices dominate the public agenda, and how political legitimacy is achieved in the digital age.

Executive Dominance and Structural Asymmetries in Online Visibility

A striking pattern in the dataset is the overwhelming dominance of executive actors, meaning the Prime Minister, ministers, and senior government officials, in setting the digital political agenda. Executive-related posts constitute the majority of thematic communication and generate a disproportionate share of total engagement and video views. This reflects Albania's institutional configuration, where executive actors control most public events, nationwide initiatives, and visually rich activities that lend themselves to high engagement on Facebook.

Facebook's algorithms further amplify this advantage. Executive content is highly shareable and frequently re-circulated through coordinated re-sharing within the majority parliamentary group, creating a visibility multiplier that extends far beyond the executive's own pages. Opposition MPs, by contrast, rely heavily on conflict-driven or reactive messaging—a communication style that attracts engagement but lacks the structural amplification provided by coordinated networks or government visibility.

As a result, legislative activity remains comparatively marginal in the digital sphere. Parliamentary debates, committee work, and policy deliberations, which are foundational elements of democratic accountability, receive rather limited attention and significantly lower engagement. This reinforces an already evident institutional imbalance, in which the executive dominates both political decision-making and the online space where political authority is performed and perceived.

Facebook as a Broadcast Channel, Not a Participatory Space

Although social media has the potential to foster public debate, MPs use Facebook almost exclusively as a one-way communication tool. The analysis shows that nearly all thematic posts serve informational or promotional purposes, while mobilising or consultative posts are exceedingly rare. The platform is treated primarily as a space to announce activities, showcase accomplishments, or frame political narratives, rather than engage in meaningful dialogue.

Interviews with MPs and experts consistently noted the limits of interaction in social media platforms. Comment sections are often avoided due to hostility; direct messages overflow with citizen requests unrelated to parliamentary functions; and open debate carries reputational risks that MPs prefer to avoid. The psychological and political incentives are aligned by maintaining narrative control and avoiding unpredictability, which is seen as a safer mode than engaging in deliberation.

In this context, Facebook allows MPs to speak at citizens, but rarely with them. The platform expands the reach of political messages but does little to deepen participatory democratic practices or enrich public consultation.

Emotional and Populist Content as Key Drivers of Engagement

Although procedural and informational posts dominate MPs' output, engagement is concentrated around personal, symbolic, and emotionally charged content. Personal posts, which account for only 19% of all posts, generate nearly one-third of all interactions, clearly outperforming institutional communication. Within this category, emotive and populist content, including expressions of solidarity, national pride, gratitude, or identity, are particularly impactful, drawing large volumes of reactions, comments, and video views.

This dynamic reflects well-established patterns in digital political communication, in which platforms reward emotions such as anger, pride, and empathy. Albanian MPs, responding knowingly or intuitively to these incentives, integrate emotional cues and symbolic gestures into their communication strategies. As a result, digital political discourse becomes tilted toward spectacle and sentiment, often at the expense of policy depth or deliberative reasoning.

Persistent Gender Gaps in Digital Visibility

Despite producing content at similar levels to men, women MPs receive significantly lower engagement, visibility, and reach on Facebook. Women constitute 35.5% of monitored MPs and generated 34.9% of all posts, yet received only 17.1% of total interactions. This discrepancy is not rooted in activity but in structural and behavioural dynamics of online political communication.

Women MPs achieve considerable visibility through video content—approximately 157 million views—but the vast majority of these views originate from re-shared rather than self-produced content. Original videos created by women MPs account for only 19.5% of their total views. This indicates that women often rely on networks and cross-posted material for visibility, while men, especially high-profile opposition figures, generate engagement through direct, often confrontational communication.

These patterns mirror global research showing that algorithms, audience expectations, political norms, and online harassment disproportionately undermine women's digital participation. Interviews further confirm that women MPs face intense gendered hostility online, shaping their willingness to engage and influencing communication styles. In Albania's context, high-visibility women ministers partially offset this disparity numerically, but do not eliminate the structural gender gap in everyday engagement.

Hostility, Hate Speech, and Weak Institutional Protection

Interviews reveal a widespread perception among MPs that Facebook has become an increasingly hostile space. Nearly all interviewees reported experiencing harassment, insults, defamatory accusations, or coordinated attacks, with women MPs describing particularly severe gendered

abuse. MPs repeatedly noted that there is no institutional support or training provided, from either Parliament or political parties, in order to help them navigate these threats.

This absence of guidance leaves MPs to rely on individual coping mechanisms, such as deleting comments, blocking users, or reporting content. These reactive strategies do little to mitigate sustained harassment, especially during political crises or periods of heightened partisan conflict. The result is a digital environment that discourages participation and open dialogue, and risks silencing vulnerable voices.

Without institutional measures or digital security protocols, online hostility becomes not only a personal burden for MPs but a threat to equal participation in democratic life.

Ethical Ambiguity and the Absence of Guidelines for Digital Conduct

The study finds that online political communication in Albania is carried out in an environment with no formal ethical guidelines, no parliamentary oversight, and minimal party-level training. MPs navigate social media based on personal judgement, partisan incentives, and the logic of platform algorithms rather than shared professional norms.

This vacuum fosters inconsistent attitudes toward online ethics. Some MPs emphasise responsibility and careful communication; others view aggressive rhetoric as inherent to political competition; still others acknowledge indirect involvement in misinformation or harassment via party activists or affiliated online communities. Experts highlight that some MPs unintentionally amplify misleading content due to the speed and volume of online communication.

The lack of institutional norms mirrors broader regulatory gaps in Albania's digital political landscape, including weak transparency requirements for political advertising, limited safeguards around micro-targeting, and minimal oversight of partisan online behaviour. This unregulated environment incentivises attention-seeking tactics and contributes to the erosion of trust in political communication.

Broader Democratic Implications

Taken together, these findings depict a digital political environment that offers unique opportunities for visibility but also introduces significant democratic risks. Social media enables MPs to circumvent traditional media filters, communicate rapidly with citizens, and highlight their work more widely. For opposition MPs, it provides a critical alternative to perceived media bias. It can also amplify diverse voices within parties and enhance public awareness of political developments.

At the same time, structural inequalities, including those between the executive and legislature, among high-profile politicians and ordinary MPs, and between men and women, are reproduced and intensified online. Engagement incentives prioritise emotional or polarising content over policy

substance. Harassment and misinformation undermine constructive debate. And the absence of institutional protections discourages deliberation, accountability, and equal participation.

In this context, Facebook functions as both an essential political tool and a source of democratic strain. The challenge ahead is whether institutions, political parties, and MPs themselves will adopt ethical standards, digital safeguards, and participatory practices that harness the democratic potential of social media or whether Albania's digital political arena will remain shaped primarily by algorithmic logics, partisan confrontation, and individual coping strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight an online communication environment that is active, highly visible, and deeply embedded in the everyday work of Albanian MPs. At the same time, it is characterised by structural asymmetries, limited institutional support, frequent hostility, and a near absence of ethical or professional guidance. Improving this environment does not require complex regulatory reforms or futuristic technological interventions. Rather, it calls for a set of practical, feasible actions that Parliament, political parties, MPs, civil society, and researchers can begin implementing with the resources and institutional structures already in place. The recommendations below are therefore modest but meaningful, addressing the most urgent needs identified through the monitoring data and in-depth interviews.

Strengthening Institutional Guidance and Professional Standards

One of the most consistent gaps identified by MPs and experts is the absence of any institutional guidance on how elected representatives should use social media in their professional role. Parliament does not provide written policies, orientation, or training, leaving MPs to rely entirely on personal judgement or partisan advice. A first practical step would be for Parliament to adopt a short and accessible set of guidelines on digital communication. These do not need to be highly technical or regulatory in nature. A simple document outlining expectations around respectful communication, verification of information before posting, transparency of paid promotion, and the distinction between institutional and party messaging would already provide a shared frame of reference.

Such guidelines would be particularly useful for new MPs entering Parliament with limited experience in digital communication. A brief induction session, held at the beginning of each legislature or when new MPs take office, could serve as a practical orientation on managing a public page, reporting abusive behaviour, and navigating the differences between personal and institutional communication. These steps would not impose new constraints on MPs but would support them in operating more confidently and ethically in a demanding digital environment.

Addressing Online Harassment and Improving Digital Safety

Hostility, hate speech, and targeted harassment emerged as a major theme in the interviews, especially for women MPs who face disproportionate levels of gendered abuse. At present, MPs receive no support from Parliament or political parties when navigating online harassment, leaving them to handle the problem individually, typically through blocking users, deleting comments, or ignoring abuse. This approach is insufficient, particularly in cases of coordinated attacks or threatening behaviour.

A realistic and helpful intervention would be the establishment of a single point of contact within Parliament responsible for advising MPs on how to report abusive content, documenting recurring patterns, and liaising with Meta or the state police when necessary. This would not require specialised staff or a new unit; assigning this responsibility to an existing administrative office would already fill an important gap. Complementary to this, Parliament could organise occasional training sessions on digital safety for MPs and their assistants, focusing on practical skills such

as filtering comments, using advanced page moderation tools, documenting harassment, and activating additional privacy settings. These measures would help mitigate the psychological and political impact of online hostility and create a baseline of safety and support, especially for women MPs who bear the brunt of gender-based attacks.

Improving Transparency and Reducing Ambiguity in Political Communication

This study reveals that Facebook, while offering unprecedented visibility, also allows for blurred boundaries between institutional, personal, and partisan communication. The absence of basic transparency standards facilitates ambiguity, particularly in contexts involving re-shared content, coordinated messaging, or sponsored posts. MPs themselves often expressed a desire for clearer norms, noting that transparency builds public trust and protects them from accusations of manipulation.

A practical step would be for MPs and parties to voluntarily disclose when posts are sponsored or when they form part of coordinated party communication. Even a simple label of “paid promotion” or “shared from party communication” would help citizens distinguish between different types of content. Likewise, MPs could commit to verifying information before re-sharing it, especially given the powerful amplification effect of re-sharing networks documented in this study. These small acts of transparency would align Albania more closely with emerging EU standards on digital political communication while remaining entirely feasible in the current political landscape.

Encouraging Limited, Controlled Forms of Public Engagement

Although Facebook has the potential to enhance democratic participation, Albanian MPs overwhelmingly use it as a one-way broadcast platform. Yet interviews show that MPs recognise the value of public consultation but struggle to manage hostile comment sections or unrealistic expectations from citizens. Expecting MPs to engage in open, unmoderated deliberation is neither practical nor desirable. However, small and structured engagement formats can create meaningful opportunities for dialogue without exposing MPs to unnecessary risks.

Some MPs already experiment with moderated Q&A sessions or polls. Institutionalising such practices—even in a minimal form—could foster more balanced interaction. MPs might host occasional short Q&A sessions where questions are pre-filtered, or publish weekly summaries of their parliamentary work with an invitation for feedback via private message rather than public comments. Parliamentary committees could adopt a similar approach by posting brief, accessible updates on upcoming hearings or legislative developments. These low-risk, low-resource mechanisms would enhance transparency and allow citizens to follow political processes more closely.

Reducing Gender Gaps in Digital Visibility

The gendered disparities observed in this study demonstrate that women MPs face structural disadvantages in achieving visibility and engagement, despite comparable levels of activity. Addressing this issue requires targeted but achievable measures. Political parties, for example, could provide women MPs with optional communication support, such as basic video-editing tools, ready-made graphic templates, or short training sessions on improving organic reach. These interventions

would help reduce disparities between MPs with extensive communication resources and those who rely on personal effort alone.

Parliament can contribute as well by ensuring that institutional communication channels highlight the work of women MPs across committees, legislative initiatives, and oversight activities. This would not only increase their visibility but also counter the algorithmic bias that tends to favour confrontational styles of communication more commonly employed by male politicians.

Improving Internal Party Practices

Parties play a significant role in shaping MPs' communication strategies. Yet interviews reveal that party support is inconsistent, informal, and uneven across groups. A more structured approach is both realistic and beneficial. Parties could clarify the distinction between official party pages and MPs' personal pages, reducing confusion and potential misuse of institutional resources. They could also discourage anonymous or semi-anonymous affiliated pages from conducting attacks on political opponents—a practice that contributes significantly to the toxicity of online discourse.

Providing MPs with simple, centralised resources, such as photographs from events, generic templates, or short internal briefings, would help reduce the wide disparities in message quality between MPs with strong staff support and those with limited means. These actions do not require new funding but can significantly improve the coherency and professionalism of political communication.

The Role of Civil Society and Researchers

Civil society organisations, including BIRN, have an important role to play in monitoring, analysing, and explaining digital political communication in Albania. This study demonstrates the value of independent monitoring in identifying harmful practices, documenting inequalities, and informing constructive recommendations. Continued monitoring, whether on an annual basis or tied to key political cycles, would help to track evolving trends, measure the impact of reforms, and provide a counterbalance to opaque or manipulative communication practices.

Beyond monitoring, civil society actors can contribute to public literacy by producing clear, accessible explainers of how political communication works online. Brief materials on re-sharing dynamics, emotional manipulation, algorithmic biases, or misinformation patterns would help citizens navigate the digital environment more critically. Likewise, further gender-sensitive research on hate speech, visibility gaps, and communication barriers would support targeted advocacy initiatives.

Civil society can also serve as a bridge between MPs and technology companies, facilitating dialogue with Meta on issues such as harassment reporting mechanisms or political advertising transparency.

Engaging Meta and Regulatory Partners

Although Albania cannot unilaterally regulate global platforms, collaboration with Meta and other social media companies remains a practical and necessary step. Discussions should prioritise realistic improvements, such as enhanced reporting channels for high-risk accounts, clearer labelling

of political content, and faster responses to coordinated harassment. These requests are consistent with Meta's existing safety programs and have been implemented in other small markets. Albania can benefit from similar support without requiring legislative intervention.

ANNEX I. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Over the past decade, the rapid rise of social media has spurred extensive theoretical reflection on its transformative role in political communications. Scholars have drawn on longstanding theories of political communication while also recognising the new challenges—and opportunities—that digital platforms present. This review examines the main theories that various scholars have used in understanding the use of social media networks by politicians (full list in Bibliography).

Agenda-Setting Theory: Politicians Shaping the Agenda on Facebook

Agenda-setting theory, rooted in communications research, posits that the issues most emphasised by the media become the issues the public perceives as important. With the rise of social media, the agenda-setting role is no longer held exclusively by traditional news outlets—politicians themselves can now attempt to set the public agenda through their Facebook activity. Unlike the one-way communication of traditional media, social media enables political figures to directly inject their preferred topics and frames into public discourse, potentially influencing both citizen opinion and subsequent news coverage (i.e. agenda-building).

Very often, politicians' Facebook posts become news in their own right, effectively allowing the politician to set the media agenda or at least force certain issues into public discussion. The interactive and viral nature of social networks means that a post highlighting a particular issue (e.g. corruption, immigration, a policy success) can be shared widely and shape what followers talk about. Moreover, high-engagement posts can spill over to traditional media reporting. Politicians' communications over social networks allow leaders to influence what the public and press pay attention to outside the confines of traditional journalism.

Deliberative Democracy

Deliberative democracy theory emphasises the importance of reasoned, inclusive dialogue in the public sphere. An open question is whether social networks serve more as a campaign rally venue or as a Habermasian town hall. Habermas (1989) envisioned an ideal space for rational-critical debate, where citizens could come together to deliberate on matters of common concern. Social media, in theory, expands this public sphere by making political discourse more accessible and participatory. Yet, critics argue that the same platforms often fall short of these democratic ideals. Instead of fostering measured, rational debate, social media is driven by algorithms that prioritise engagement over quality, frequently amplifying sensational, emotionally charged content (Vaidhyanathan, 2018; Sunstein, 2001).

Joshua Cohen's work on deliberative democracy emphasises inclusivity and reasoned debate (Cohen, 1989). Social media theoretically opens the door to more voices participating in political dialogue.

In practice, though, the format tends to favour soundbite-driven exchanges over deep deliberation. While platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook provide a stage for interaction, the result is often a performative display of opinions rather than a genuine engagement with complex policy issues (Chadwick, 2013; Tufekci, 2017).

In contrast, Chantal Mouffe's agonistic democracy offers a more realistic appraisal of the political landscape. Mouffe (2000) contends that political life is inherently conflictual, and that platforms which accentuate ideological struggle—such as social media—can be seen as arenas where dissent and contestation are not only inevitable but also necessary. Traditional models of deliberative democracy often assume that through rational discussion and public reasoning, political adversaries can converge on shared values and reach consensus. However, in practice, political conflicts are deeply rooted in identity, values, and power struggles—dimensions that are seldom resolved merely through reasoned debate. Mouffe argues that political life is characterised by passionate disagreements that cannot be fully resolved, and that attempting to suppress these conflicts in the name of consensus can lead to exclusion or the marginalisation of dissenting voices. Instead, agonistic democracy embraces conflict as a positive force.

James Fishkin's experiments with deliberative polling provide another angle on the issue. His work suggests that when deliberative practices are structured properly, social media could be harnessed to facilitate more informed decision-making and inclusive public discourse (Fishkin, 1991). However, such initiatives remain the exception rather than the rule, as the spontaneous, unstructured nature of most online interactions often undermines the depth and rigor of deliberative engagement (Strandberg, 2013).

Self-Presentation and Personal Branding

Another major theoretical lens is self-presentation and personal branding. Erving Goffman's (1956) notion of self-presentation, the idea that individuals perform roles and manage impressions in social interactions, has been widely applied to politicians' behaviour on social media (Goffman, 1956; Hogan, 2010). Social media platforms allow politicians to construct a curated persona—essentially a political brand—by selecting what aspects of their life and work to highlight (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013).

Unlike the era when politicians were known mainly through formal speeches and news reports, today's leaders often share personal photos, behind-the-scenes updates, and informal messages on their public social media accounts to shape their public image (Stanyer, 2008; Karvonen, 2010). This aligns with a broader trend of the personalisation of politics, where voters pay as much attention to the individual candidate's character and lifestyle as to party platforms (Van Aelst, Sheafer & Stanyer, 2012). Politicians present themselves not just as officials, but as relatable human beings—sharing content that blurs the line between the personal and the political (Enli, 2015). Common self-presentation strategies include posting family photos, engaging in light-hearted or humorous posts, highlighting hobbies or cultural references, and using a conversational tone (Metz, Kruikeimer & Lecheler, 2020).

This humanising content is intended to build trust and likability, complementing more traditional posts about policy achievements or political attacks on opponents (Graham, Jackson & Broersma, 2016). Such personal branding builds a direct affinity with followers and engenders a sense of loyalty

independent of party structures (Ekman & Widholm, 2015). It also allows politicians to navigate their portrayal in independent media—by providing a controlled stream of positive self-representation, they can counterbalance critical press coverage with their narrative (Enli & Rosenberg, 2018).

Overall, self-presentation theory helps explain why politicians invest significant effort into social media, as it offers a stage to perform political identity and continuously engage in impression management (Ross & Bürger, 2014).

ANNEX II. QUANTITATIVE DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

This annex provides a detailed overview of the technical steps underpinning the quantitative component of the study, including how Facebook data was extracted through CrowdTangle, how post-level indicators were defined, how the dataset was cleaned and consolidated, and which analytical techniques were applied.

Data Extraction Tool

Data for the quantitative analysis was collected through CrowdTangle, Meta's official analytics platform for public Facebook pages. For every post published during the monitoring period, CrowdTangle automatically retrieved the following fields:

- post type (photo, link, native video, live video, status, cross-post);
- total interactions (reactions, comments, shares);
- total video views (including cross-posted views);
- post overperformance score;
- page overperformance score;
- message text;
- external links; and
- timestamp information (date and time of posting).

These standardised data fields formed the foundation for all quantitative indicators used in the study.

Post-Level Indicators

The following dimensions were analysed to understand MPs' communication patterns and audience response:

- volume of posts;
- monthly posting patterns;

-
- format usage (photos, live video, native video, links);
 - total interactions;
 - total video views;
 - engagement-per-post ratios;
 - post and page overperformance scores; and
 - cross-post visibility and re-sharing patterns.

Together, these indicators allowed the study to examine both **output** (posting activity) and **performance** (audience reaction).

Data Cleaning and Consolidation Procedures

Following extraction, all CrowdTangle data was consolidated into a unified Excel database. The research team applied several cleaning and harmonisation procedures to ensure consistency:

- standardising MP names and faction labels;
- harmonising post-type categories;
- distinguishing original posts from re-shared content;
- correcting metadata inconsistencies;
- removing duplicate posts arising from cross-posting; and
- tagging each MP by gender, party affiliation, parliamentary role, and faction.

These steps ensured comparability across entries and coherence for subsequent analysis.

Analytical Techniques and Tools

The analysis combined multiple methodological approaches, including:

- pivot table analysis (aggregating data by MP, party, format, theme, month);
- time-series analysis (examining changes over the monitoring period);
- engagement calculations (interactions per post, views per video);
- descriptive statistics (distributional measures, averages, medians); and

- cross-sectional comparisons (e.g. gender differences, party differences).

ChatGPT was used strictly for supportive tasks such as:

- keyword clustering;
- validation of post-type classification; and
- summarising repeating textual patterns.

All AI-assisted outputs were manually reviewed and verified to ensure accuracy and methodological rigor.

ANNEX III. LIST OF MPs WHOSE FACEBOOK PAGES WERE MONITORED

Name of the MP's public page		
Edi Rama	Bujar Leskaj	Greta Bardeli Gjoni
Sali Berisha	Petrit Vasili	Arbi Agalliu
Taulant Balla	Ermonela Felaj Valikaj	Laert Duraj
Ogerta Manastirliu	Mimi Kodheli	Teuta Ramaj
Belinda Balluku	Orjola Pampuri	Nasip Naco
Elisa Spiropali	Edmond Spaho	Emilia Koliqi
Erion Braçe	Gerta Duraku	Baftjar Zeqaj
Mirela Kumbaro Furxhi	Enkelejd Alibeaj	Ilir Pendavinji
Evis Kushi	Erisa Xhixho	Flamur Hoxha
Lulzim Basha	Asllan Dogjani	Shpresa Marnoj
Damian Gjijnuri	Klotilda Bushka Ferhati	Ramadan Likaj
Niko Peleshi	Florenc Spaho	Ismet Beqiraj
Anila Denaj	Eduard Shalsi	Lindita Metaliaj
Ulsi Manja	Agron Çela	Saimir Korreshi
Toni Gogu	Lefter Gështenja	Fatmir Xhafaj
Vullnet Ruzhdi Sinaj	Anduel Tahiraj	Merita Bakiu-Faqja Zyrtare
Denis Deliu	Plarent Ndreca	Ornaldo Rakipi
Ina K. Zhupa	Tomor Alizoti	Zheni Gjergji
Albana Vokshi	Andia Ulliri	Shkelqim Bullari
Bledi Çuçi	Flutura Aça	Eduard Ndreca
Jorida Tabaku	Xhemal Qefalia	Mesila Doda

Edona Bilali	Pranvera Resulaj	Kasem Mahmutaj
Lindita Nikolla	Olta Xhacka	Bledjon Nallbati
Jurgis Çyrbja	Oerd Bylykbashi	Arben Pellumbi
Blendi Klosi	Elda Hoti	Gezim Ademaj
Pandeli Majko	Klevis Xhoxhi	Alban Xhelili
Agron Shehaj	Arkend Balla	Seladin Jakupllari
Milva Ekonomi	Monika Kryemadhi	Ferdinand Xhaferaj
Xhelal Mziu	Ilir Metaj	Mirela Pitushi
Antoneta Dhima	Dashnor Sula	Sorina Koti-Deputete e Partisë Demokratike te Shqiperisë Qarku Korçë
Etilda Gjonaj	Tritan Shehu	Lodovik Hasani
Flamur Noka	Bardhyl Kollçaku	Isuf Çelaj
Etjen Xhafaj	Ilda Dhori	Petrit Doda
Lavdrim Krrashi	Hatixhe Konomi	Helidon Bushati
Blerina Gjylameti	Klodiana Spahiu	Tatiana Piro
Ervin Salianji	Agron Gjekmarkaj	Kreshnik Collaku
Gazment Bardhi	Petro Koçi	

ANNEX IV. CODING FRAMEWORK: INDICATORS AND ALLOWED VALUES

Table 10: Indicators completed depending on the selected post type

Post type	Field	Purpose	Subject	Sentiment	Category	Repost	Actor
Thematic	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓
Personal	–	–	–	–	✓	✓	✓

Table 11: Values for each coding indicator included in the coding scheme

Field	Purpose	Subject	Sentiment	Category	Repost	Actor
Economy – finance – employment – tenders – concessions	Informative	Executive	Neutral	Personal / family event	Yes	Party leader
Education – health – social services – vulnerable groups	Mobilising / persuasive	Judiciary	Positive	Populism	No	Minister
Justice – security – organised crime – public order	Consultative	Independent institutions	Negative	Community event / citizen engagement	–	Mayor
European integration – foreign policy	–	Local government	Mixed	Events – conferences – receptions	–	Central institution
Infrastructure – public works – inaugurations	–	Legislative / party politics	–	Commemorative dates	–	Local institution
Agriculture – tourism – rural development	–	Media / journalists	–	Other	–	Politician
Parliamentary – government process	–	Other	–	–	–	Political party
Energy – environment	–	–	–	–	–	Media
Political activity – party activity	–	–	–	–	–	Other
Populism	–	–	–	–	–	–
Other	–	–	–	–	–	–

ANNEX V. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDES

This annex presents the structured guides used to conduct in-depth interviews with Members of Parliament and communication experts. The interview protocols were designed to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing respondents the flexibility to elaborate on their experiences, perceptions, and practices.

Introduction to the Interview Process

In the digital age, social media has become a vital tool for political communication, transparency, and public engagement. Recognising this, BIRN is conducting a comprehensive study on how members of the Albanian Parliament utilise social media platforms to connect with citizens, promote their work, and navigate challenges like disinformation and hate speech.

Through these interviews, we aim to:

- Gain insights into the practices, knowledge, and strategies employed by MPs and experts in the realm of social media.
- Understand the institutional frameworks, policies, and training that guide social media use in Albanian politics.
- Explore the broader implications of social media on democratic processes, transparency, and accountability.

The findings from these discussions will contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between technology and politics, ultimately aiming to foster better practices and policies for digital communication in Albania's parliamentary system.

Interview with a Member of Parliament

As part of BIRN's study on the use of social media by members of the Albanian Parliament, we have decided to speak with MPs from different parliamentary groups about their use of social networks, their knowledge, and the challenges they face.

The use of social media by MPs

1. Which social media platforms do you use most frequently, and why have you chosen them?

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2. Do you manage your social media accounts yourself, or do you have a team assisting you?
 3. How do you cover the costs associated with preparing posts/videos, managing accounts, and advertisements? Are these expenses covered by the Parliament, your political party, or personally by you as an MP?
 4. How important is social media usage for Members of Parliament? What are the primary purposes for which you use social media? (e.g. communication with constituents, promoting parliamentary work, sharing personal opinions, etc.) What about other MPs?

Guidelines and training on social media

5. Does the Albanian Parliament have any written policies regarding social media use by its members? If yes, could you briefly describe what these policies include?
6. Does your party provide any guidance or training on the effective use of social media? If yes, what does this training cover?

Dealing with hate speech

7. Have you ever experienced hate speech or abusive comments on social media? If yes, how have you handled these situations?
8. Do you think MPs from your group or other parliamentary groups use social media ethically? Have there been instances where MPs have used hate speech, misinformation, or disinformation on social media?
9. Does the Parliament or your political party have any strategies to protect members from online attacks?

Function vs politician

10. Have you ever used social media to gather public opinion on a legislative initiative or another significant issue? If so, could you give us a concrete example?
11. Do your fellow MPs use social media for purposes related to their parliamentary activities, or is it primarily used for political purposes, such as attacking political opponents?
12. How would you assess the effectiveness of social media in helping to create policies based on voter opinions?
13. Reflecting on your communication and that of your colleagues on social media, what do you think are the main differences in communication during election campaigns compared to non-campaign periods?

Interview with Experts

As part of BIRN's study on the use of social media by members of the Albanian Parliament, we have decided to speak with experts who have an in-depth understanding of the impact of technology on politics and public communication.

Social media and politics

1. How do you think social media has changed the way Albanian politicians interact with citizens?
2. Do you think Albanian MPs use social media effectively to communicate and promote transparency?
3. What are some best practices in the use of social media by politicians in Albania, and what are some of the biggest challenges?

Policies and institutional framework

4. Are there clear policies or guidelines from the Albanian Parliament regarding the use of social media by its members?
5. Do you know if political parties in Albania provide training for their members on the professional use of social media?
6. How important is institutional collaboration in creating an ethical and professional framework for the use of social media by politicians?

The impact of social media on democratic processes

7. Do you think social media is being used by MPs to consult citizens on important political or legislative issues? Can you provide any concrete examples?
8. How much influence does social media have in shaping voters' opinions on specific issues or politicians themselves?
9. What role does social media play in enhancing transparency and accountability in parliamentary decision-making?

Hate speech and digital challenges

10. What are some of the main challenges faced by Albanian MPs on social media, particularly regarding hate speech and disinformation?

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