

Responsible Communication and Media Freedom – BULGARIA



Press Freedom Index Bulgaria

Television (BNT, bTV, Nova, etc.) and internet media are the main sources of information with print media progressively losing influence. The political affiliation of the members of the Council for Electronic Media negatively affects the editorial independence of the public media, while the independence of private media is threatened by their owners' interests in regulated sectors.

INDEX 2023

71 / 180

Score : 62.98

INDEX 2022

91 / 180

Score : 59.12

POLITICAL
INDICATOR

73
58.25

POLITICAL
INDICATOR

95
54.95

ECONOMIC
INDICATOR

133
37.91

ECONOMIC
INDICATOR

150
30.10

LEGISLATIVE
INDICATOR

57
70.25

LEGISLATIVE
INDICATOR

76
68.71

SOCIAL
INDICATOR

81
65.53

SOCIAL
INDICATOR

97
66.83

SECURITY
INDICATOR

53
82.94

SECURITY
INDICATOR

60
75.02

Political Context

Intimidation from politicians as well as administrative and judicial pressures against publishers and journalists are a common practice. After nearly 12 years of uninterrupted rule of Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, during which media freedom was in decline and certain outlets were used for exercising political influence, Bulgaria went through a series of early elections in 2021.



Elections

- Parliamentary Elections, **4 April 2021**
- Early parliamentary elections, **11 July 2021**
- Presidential and Early Parliamentary Elections, **14 and 21 November 2021**
- Early parliamentary elections, **2 October 2022**
- Early Parliamentary Elections, **2 April 2023**

2 years = 6 times

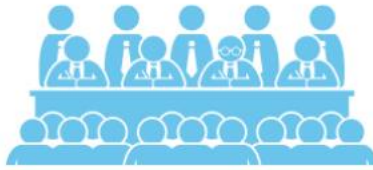


Elections in Bulgaria: 2023 Parliamentary Elections



6,651,284

**REGISTERED
VOTERS**



240

SEATS



651

**CANDIDATE
LISTS**



Elections in Bulgaria: 2023 Parliamentary Elections

The lack of a stable government has resulted in parliamentary gridlock, with parties unable to advance their policy priorities or implement much-needed reforms to address widespread concerns about corruption. Senior European Union officials have cited the country's inability to form a government and tackle corruption and inflation as a specific concern, and the political situation increasingly threatens to derail Bulgaria's accession to the Eurozone. The election also will raise questions about Bulgaria's precarious balancing act between the West and Russia; President Radev and interim Prime Minister Donev are widely seen as pro-Kremlin, while Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria, Bulgaria's ruling party from 2009 to the outset of the parliamentary deadlock in 2021 and the leading party in most pre-election polls, is pro-West.



The Role of the Media

- More than half of the Bulgarians believe that they have been kept well-informed by the media during the parliamentary election campaign in April 2023.
- Most voters have followed the news on TV.
- At the same time the influence of the social media and online news portals has been on the rise.
- The political communication of the parties is regarded as insufficient and incomprehensible.
- One in two respondents has criticised the one-sided communication by many politicians in the social media.
- **By Social Research Agency “Alpha Research”**



The Role of the Media

- More than 50% of the Bulgarians are satisfied with the information they received from the media during the parliamentary election campaign. They believe to be well and very well-informed.
- In turn, about 30% of the respondents claimed that they would like to be better informed.
- Hardly 9% of the respondents said that the media influenced their voting decision in contrast to almost two-thirds (61%) who claimed that the information presented in the media did not make them change their decision.



The Role of the Media

- ✓ Television has remained the most popular source of information during the election campaign.
- ✓ Private television stations have been preferred by about 59% of the respondents, followed by the national television preferred by 44%.
- ✓ The social media (33%) and online news portals (17%) come next.
- ✓ The print media have been the source of information for only 3% of the respondents.

This is particularly indicative of the declining power of newspapers and magazines compared to the online media, which are the number one information source for young users in particular.



Campaign Drew Deep Dividing Lines

- The GERB-UDF insisted during the campaign that the high inflation was a consequence of "the reckless financial policy of the last regular government of Bulgaria - of Continue the Change and their partners“;
- The CC-DB blamed it on "dysfunctional control bodies" and the war in Ukraine;
- Vazrazhdane on the "stupid policy of the European Central Bank and the US fiscal reserve";
- and BSP on "ill-considered decisions taken by Brussels".

Campaign Drew Deep Dividing Lines

On the war in Ukraine, the messages were divided between "for" and "against" providing military aid to Ukraine.



New Ways

Maria Gabriel left her job as Bulgaria's EU Commissioner at the request of her political patron, former prime minister and GERB leader Boyko Borissov, who nominated her as the candidate for prime minister on 10 May.

She is close to forming a new Bulgarian government as part of a complex political agreement with her centre-right GERB party's arch-foes – the reformist 'We continue the change' party of former prime minister Kiril Petkov.



New Ways

Under an unexpected agreement reached on Monday (22 May), however, the two parties would rotate prime ministers for a period of nine months each, and Gabriel would start as deputy prime minister.

According to the agreement between GERB and 'We continue the change', during the first nine months, the latter party's Nikolay Denkov would be prime minister, with Gabriel as deputy prime minister and foreign minister. They would then switch roles after nine months.



Media Freedom in Bulgaria

After the end of Borisov's era, by common belief the symbiosis between media and government is over. This is apparently also taken into account in the Reporters Without Borders 2022 Index, where Bulgaria ranks 91st (+21). But in 2023 there is a drop again - 71st.





Media Freedom in Bulgaria

Against this positive backdrop, some new concerns are emerging. The appointment of new members of the media regulator highlighted tension in the ruling coalition, which lawmakers described as "cultural war" and "cultural incompatibility". So far, no coordinated vision for the media sector has been demonstrated. Unfortunately, the vacuum at the ideological and organisational levels could be filled by corporate and private interests. It remains to be seen whether in conditions of "cultural war" Bulgaria will be able to adopt a truly democratic media policy.

Media Freedom in Bulgaria





Media Freedom in Bulgaria

- “There was a negative change in the media business model. The role of print media decreased significantly, the other types of media lost a lot of revenue, and in general, journalism lost a lot of space to social media,” Ivan Radev.
- Journalists were once again insecure in their jobs, and many quit the profession, he said.
- Bulgaria has the lowest number of journalists per capita in the EU and is believed to have just 3,000 media workers in total.



***Thank you for
your attention!***



Olga Stoyanova-Encheva

thank you!



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