

Freedom in the World 2016

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Freedom in the World 2016

The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties

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Anxious Dictators, Wavering Democracies **Global Freedom under Pressure**

Arch Puddington and Tyler Roylance

The world was battered in 2015 by overlapping crises that fueled xenophobic sentiment in democratic countries, undermined the economies of states dependent on the sale of natural resources, and led authoritarian regimes to crack down harder on dissent. These unsettling developments contributed to the 10th consecutive year of decline in global freedom.

The democracies of Europe and the United States struggled to cope with the Syrian civil war and other unresolved regional conflicts. In addition to compounding the misery and driving up the death toll of civilians in the affected territories, the fighting generated unprecedented numbers of refugees and incubated terrorist groups that inspired or organized attacks on targets abroad. In democratic countries, these stresses led to populist, often bigoted reactions as well as new security measures, both of which threaten the core values of an open society.

The year also featured the slowdown of China's economy and a related plunge in commodity prices, which hit profligate, export-dependent authoritarian regimes especially hard. Anticipating popular unrest, dictators redoubled political repression at home and lashed out at perceived foreign enemies.

However, in several important countries, elections offered a peaceful way out of failed policies and mismanagement. Voters in places including Nigeria, Venezuela, and Myanmar rejected incumbents and gave new leaders or parliaments an opportunity to tackle corruption, economic decay, and corrosive security problems. These fresh starts suggest that democratic systems may ultimately prove more resilient than their brittle authoritarian counterparts.

DEMOCRACIES IN DISTRESS

Whatever the underlying strength of their institutions, leading democracies betrayed a worrying lack of self-confidence and conviction during 2015.

Front and center was the democratic world's inability to present a unified and credible strategy to end the murderous war in Syria and deal with the refugee crisis triggered by the conflict. Having failed to support the moderate opposition to authoritarian president Bashar al-Assad in the conflict's early stages, the United States and Europe are now confronted with a crisis of global proportions. With its bewildering interplay of regional powers, proxy forces, jihadist groups, and urgent humanitarian priorities, Syria represents the most complex challenge to peace and stability in years, and thus far the leaders of the free world have fallen short even as fundamental democratic principles come under threat in their own countries.

The impact has been powerfully felt in Europe. The surge of asylum seekers from Syria and other conflict zones in 2015 provoked a confused and often ugly debate among the member states of the European Union (EU). While a few European leaders, notably German

chancellor Angela Merkel and Swedish prime minister Stefan Löfven, were initially outspoken in welcoming those fleeing barrel bombs and terrorist massacres, others flatly refused to accept Muslim refugees on their soil. Such hostility grew especially acute after coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic State militant group killed 130 people in Paris in November.

Czech president Miloš Zeman called those arriving from the Middle East an “organized invasion,” while Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán asserted inaccurately that “all the terrorists” in the Paris attacks “are basically migrants.” Even in Germany, despite the government’s welcoming attitude, neo-Nazis and other xenophobes assaulted refugees and set fire to reception facilities. Other European governments maneuvered to evade responsibility, using fences with razor wire, draconian laws, and onerous financial demands to push the flow of migrants away from their borders.

In effect, the European establishment’s inability to manage these new challenges—on top of the lingering economic woes that began nearly a decade ago—gave fresh impetus to those who have long questioned the European project and the liberal, universal values that it represents. In France, for example, Marine Le Pen of the right-wing National Front spoke of a split between “globalists and patriots,” suggesting that the mainstream, pro-EU socialist and conservative parties were indistinguishable and essentially anti-French.

The United States did not face refugee flows or terrorist attacks on the same scale as Europe, but it too is experiencing a crisis of confidence in its democratic institutions and international role. While the American system remains dynamic and open to the participation of minorities and immigrants, its elections and legislative process have suffered from an increasingly intricate system of gerrymandering and undue interference by wealthy individuals and special interests. Racial and ethnic divisions have seemingly widened, and the past year brought greater attention to police violence and impunity, de facto residential and school segregation, and economic inequality, adding to fears that class mobility, a linchpin of America’s self-image and global reputation, is in jeopardy.

With these concerns as a backdrop, the political debate over immigration and national security—at least on the right—took on an angry, anti-Muslim tone, and Islamophobic hate crimes spiked, especially after 14 people were killed in a terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California. Some elected officials on both sides of the political spectrum also cast doubt on America’s long-standing goal of supporting democracy overseas, arguing that U.S. involvement only causes instability.

THE AUTHORITARIAN ECONOMIC CRISIS

Although some authoritarian rulers sought to blame their problems on meddling by democratic powers, it became clear during 2015 that larger economic forces were at work. China’s slowing growth, punctuated by a stock-market plunge and abrupt devaluations of the currency, helped to reduce the prices of many commodities, slashing the export revenues of dictatorships around the world and threatening the economic underpinnings of their legitimacy.

The price of oil in particular, which was also pushed down by Saudi Arabia’s refusal to curb production and a longer-term increase in output by the United States, threatened the economic well-being of repressive petro-states from Angola to Azerbaijan. Wary of spending cuts, declining living standards, and the social unrest they could cause, most of these regimes cracked down on rights activists and other critics.

In China, modest reform measures in 2015—such as incremental judicial changes, relaxation of household registration rules, and a shift to a two-child policy—were more than offset by harsh campaigns against dissent and a renewed emphasis on the Communist

Party's leadership in political, social, and economic life. The government of Xi Jinping responded to the stock-market drop with aggressive interventions in the market itself, enhanced censorship and propaganda efforts, and a new crackdown on civil society. Within a 48-hour period in July, for example, over 200 individuals involved in public-interest legal activism were taken into custody in a nationwide sweep. Other targets, whose work the authorities had previously tolerated, included financial journalists, public health advocates, labor rights activists, and women's rights defenders. This escalation illustrated the growing brutality and anxiety of China's leaders. Prominent businessmen and securities traders were also rounded up, adding new risks to doing business in China. But in a sign that favored firms would join the regime in promoting a rosier view of the country, the Chinese internet giant Alibaba purchased the *South China Morning Post*, pledging to use Hong Kong's most prominent English-language newspaper to improve China's global image.

In many countries, the economic setbacks only compounded existing problems brought on by corruption or foreign policy blunders. Russia was forced to deal with falling oil prices at a time when international sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine—plus countersanctions that hurt Russian consumers at least as much as the intended targets—had already weakened its economy and threatened its indebted state-owned companies. Adding to its expensive military occupations in parts of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, the Kremlin intervened in Syria in late 2015 to shore up support for Assad. Analysts warned that it could prove costly in financial, military, and political terms.

The Russian authorities were sensitive to the possibility of popular discontent, using the state's high-volume propaganda apparatus to shift emphasis from the stalemate in Ukraine to the new adventure in Syria. The regime also took measures to stifle criticism of its foreign interventions. Opponents have been derided as traitors, forced from their jobs, arrested, or pushed into exile. To drive home the leadership's intolerance for dissent, President Vladimir Putin issued a decree making it illegal to publish information about military casualties even during peacetime. The head of a committee of soldiers' mothers was convicted of fraud after publicizing the cases of Russian troops killed in eastern Ukraine, where the Kremlin has implausibly denied that any Russian forces are deployed.

Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies, similarly hit by the drop in hydrocarbon prices, leaned heavily on their financial reserves as they sought to prop up the Egyptian regime, battle Shiite-led militants in Yemen, and maintain their domestic spending to avoid social unrest. The nervousness of the region's monarchs was reflected in heightened political repression, with Saudi authorities imposing more death sentences for a variety of crimes, including nonviolent offenses related to freedom of expression.

Low oil prices also posed a problem for Iran, which hoped to rebuild its sanctions-ravaged economy after reaching an agreement with the international community to limit its nuclear program. Even before the deal was completed, hard-line forces in the regime worked to smother public expectations that it would lead to a more open society. The crackdown featured a spike in executions, the shuttering of civil society organizations, and the arrest of journalists who wrote favorably about liberalizing policies or improved ties with the West. The trial and conviction of *Washington Post* correspondent Jason Rezaian, apparently on spurious espionage charges, ranks among the most notable cases. No details were made public, the trial was carried out in secret, and Rezaian was not allowed to mount a serious defense.

Venezuela experienced an economic freefall due to slumping oil revenues, years of gross mismanagement, and rampant corruption. In the months leading up to December elections, the country faced extreme shortages of staple goods, rising criminal violence, and the world's highest rate of inflation. The government of President Nicolás Maduro

responded with more repression, bringing politicized prosecutions against leading opposition figures and tightening its grip on the media.

However, in addition to serving as a cautionary example of authoritarian misrule, Venezuela illustrated the potential of elections to correct a country's course. The electoral system was weighed down by blatant gerrymandering, the misuse of state resources, and pronounced media bias, but a groundswell of public frustration with Maduro's government gave the opposition coalition a two-thirds supermajority in the National Assembly. The results set up a likely confrontation between the legislative and executive branches, and the ultimate outcome remained unclear at year's end. Nevertheless, the election gave Venezuela a real chance to reverse years of democratic and economic decline.

RENEWAL THROUGH ELECTIONS

Citizens in a number of other troubled societies similarly proved that change was entirely possible, and did so through the most tried-and-true democratic institution—the ballot box.

In Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and largest economy, voters fed up with rampant corruption and insecurity rejected the incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan, and elected Muhammadu Buhari to replace him, the first time ever that the opposition gained executive power through elections. Buhari, despite a checkered past, has since begun to fulfill pledges to address the country's massive corruption problem and accelerate the military campaign against the terrorist group Boko Haram.

In Myanmar, a huge turnout produced an overwhelming victory in parliamentary elections for longtime opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD), a remarkable turnaround in a country that until recently ranked among the world's most repressive.

Voters in Sri Lanka ousted their increasingly authoritarian and divisive president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, in favor of Maithripala Sirisena. Upon taking office in January, Sirisena overturned some of Rajapaksa's repressive policies and began repairing relations with both the country's Tamil minority and the international community.

And in Argentina, opposition candidate Mauricio Macri won the presidency by defeating the nominee of incumbent Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who with her late husband, Néstor Kirchner, had dominated the executive branch for over a decade. Combined with the Venezuela results, Macri's victory may be the beginning of a rollback of Latin America's populist movements, which had previously made impressive gains across the region.

There is, of course, no guarantee that electoral victories in societies with fragile institutions and histories of conflict or dictatorship will lead to stability, peace, and prosperity. But the people in these countries—exemplars of hope in a decade of regression—retained faith in the democratic process even after experiencing hardship after hardship, including military rule (Myanmar), civil war and authoritarian rule (Sri Lanka), entrenched corruption and a terrorist scourge (Nigeria), economic collapse and political repression (Venezuela), and economic setback and unaccountable government (Argentina). They prevailed despite, in some cases, an electoral playing field tilted sharply against the opposition; in other cases, a record of political violence; and in still other cases, apprehensions about what lies ahead when dictatorships give way to normal politics.

Some of these voters were also rejecting political figures who had publicly disdained the world's democracies and drawn closer to authoritarian powers like Russia, China, and Iran. They were willing to listen to candidates who talked about the rule of law, freedom of expression, and the right to be free of payoffs and bribes, and they were unimpressed by those who blamed every step backward on foreign plots.

These voters, in other words, aligned themselves with the universal principles of democracy and human rights—either explicitly or by deciding that the alternatives had simply failed to deliver. Indeed, the most valuable lesson of 2015 may be that when given the opportunity, people will choose the system that works. As all varieties of government face mounting pressure to perform, the coming year could demonstrate whether democracy is truly more responsive and durable than dictatorship.

NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN 2015

In addition to those described above, five major phenomena stood out during the year:

- **Overstaying Their Welcome:** Leaders in several countries maneuvered to extend their terms in office during 2015. Most prominent among these was Burundian president Pierre Nkurunziza, whose decision to run for a constitutionally dubious third term—which he won amid an opposition boycott in July—led to large-scale political violence. Similar schemes were in the works in Bolivia, Ecuador, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, and Rwanda. Although none of these countries has yet seen the violence experienced by Burundi, the moves all serve to perpetuate the rule of entrenched incumbents and deny citizens their right to freely choose their leaders. Meanwhile, Lebanon again failed to hold legislative elections after sitting lawmakers postponed them in both 2013 and 2014, citing disagreements over the electoral laws and security concerns stemming from the Syrian conflict. Governments in Afghanistan, Somaliland, and South Sudan similarly blamed stalled electoral reforms or security problems when delaying scheduled elections.
- **Threats to Democracy in Central America:** Vicious criminal gangs, political violence, and systemic corruption pose a growing threat to freedom and democracy in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The negative trend, though already well under way by 2015, represents a wake-up call for the region, which for years enjoyed comparative political stability after overcoming decades of civil war and military rule. In Guatemala, although prosecutors and protesters forced the president to resign and face corruption charges during the year, the case was built on the work of international investigators, and the subsequent elections featured violence and intimidation. Moreover, observers raised concerns about ties between the military and the party of the new president, Jimmy Morales. In Nicaragua, unlike in the other countries, the main threat to democracy is the political and institutional dominance of the ruling Sandinista party. Over the past several years, the Sandinistas have gained considerable control over the judiciary and security forces, abolished term limits, and shown an intolerance for dissent. Nicaragua also suffers from a cozy relationship between political elites and economic enterprise.
- **Lack of Progress for Women:** More than 20 years after members of the United Nations met in Beijing to establish principles for advancing gender equality, women remain at a distinct disadvantage around the world in terms of political rights and civil liberties. Despite modest increases in women’s political representation and the election of a number of female heads of government, examples of genuine progress are few and far between. The very limited steps that were hailed as victories in 2015—that women in Saudi Arabia, who must still obtain a male guardian’s permission to conduct many basic daily activities, were finally able to participate in tightly

controlled elections for largely powerless municipal councils, or that a ridiculously outdated law criminalizing adultery was struck down in South Korea—demonstrated just how low the bar has gotten in evaluating progress toward gender equality. Meanwhile, in many parts of the world, women’s economic aspirations and the broader economies of their countries continue to suffer from unequal rights to property and inheritance as well as discriminatory practices that prevent women from working outside the home.

- **Gridlock in the Balkans:** Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo all suffered from crippling government dysfunction in 2015. Macedonia’s ruling party was implicated in electoral fraud and an expansive wiretapping scandal, exacerbating a bitter political standoff with the opposition that ultimately required the EU to step in and broker snap elections for 2016. In Kosovo, lawmakers opposed to a deal on normalizing relations with Serbia repeatedly halted parliamentary debate by releasing tear gas within the chamber and pelting ruling party members with eggs. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s government, hampered by a complex, ineffective framework established under the 1995 peace accords, remained incapable of addressing the relentless obstructionism and endemic corruption that have plagued it ever since. Tensions were further aggravated when officials in the Republika Srpska, one of the country’s two constituent entities, rejected the authority of the national police, courts, and prosecutors, and began planning a referendum on the legitimacy of the national judiciary. Such disputes precluded democratic gains in all three countries, and ensured that EU accession remained a distant prospect. Conversely, Montenegro’s progress toward EU membership, even as the entrenched government of Prime Minister Milo Đukanović sanctioned the harassment of independent media, tarnished the bloc’s image as a purveyor of good governance and democratic norms.

- **Unfinished Business:** Although the world’s attention turned to new disasters during 2015, many of the previous year’s most dramatic setbacks for freedom continued to fester. Thailand’s post-coup government officially lifted martial law, but the military junta remained in complete control of the political system and continued to hunt down and punish any who expressed dissent. The government of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt, formalized in 2014 after the 2013 coup, finally allowed parliamentary elections, but they were marred by large-scale rigging, criminalization of and boycotts by opposition parties, and a tight grip on the media. Meanwhile, an Islamist insurgency continued to gain momentum amid unchecked abuses by security forces. Crimea, which dominated global headlines after Russia’s invasion in 2014, languished in a grim status quo, and de facto Russian control of the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine was solidified in both military and economic terms. Finally, South Sudan’s bloody civil war continued throughout the year despite a series of attempted cease-fires, subjecting the population to massacres, rapes, and large-scale displacement.

REGIONAL TRENDS

Middle East and North Africa: Regime Security over Public Safety

The conflicts raging across the Middle East and North Africa began in large part because entrenched rulers put their own interests and security above the safety and well-being of their people. In the countries that remain at peace, many leaders still embrace the same short-sighted priorities, raising the risk that they too could descend into disorder.

Although the Egyptian regime's self-defeating drive against dissent—a violent campaign enabled by American and Gulf state aid—has been widely criticized, a number of other Middle Eastern states have escaped international attention while they quietly clamp down on already limited political participation and civil liberties. These include Morocco and Kuwait, where journalists and civil society activists found themselves under fresh assault in 2015. The United Arab Emirates sought to further restrict scrutiny of the country's abhorrent labor conditions by denying entry to academic researchers, and Bahrain's government, with little pushback from its U.S. ally, continued its shameful efforts to silence the opposition by stripping its leading critics, most of them Shiites, of their citizenship.

Saudi Arabia, one of the worst human rights abusers in the world, increased the number of executions to its highest level in 20 years, and tried to cover up its failure to safeguard participants in the annual Hajj pilgrimage after a stampede killed more than 2,400 people. The kingdom's military campaign in neighboring Yemen showed a similar indifference toward protecting innocent lives.

Undergirding all of these cases is a model of governance that erodes the kind of long-term and inclusive stability the region desperately needs. By sacrificing public safety for regime security, these governments alienate and anger their citizens, squander public resources, and enfeeble the institutions that are necessary for sustainable political and economic development.

Also in 2015, relations between Israel and Palestinians remained combustible. In the aftermath of the previous year's war between Israel and Hamas, which caused the deaths of over 2,100 Palestinians and 73 Israelis, the peace process was moribund. Right-leaning Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu won reelection in March, and the deeply divided Palestinian political institutions in the West Bank and Gaza were in disarray. The administration of President Barack Obama reportedly concluded that it would be unable to make significant progress on peace talks during the remainder of its term. Meanwhile, individual Palestinians carried out a series of knife and vehicular attacks on Israeli Jews, and Israeli security personnel responded with deadly force.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Struggling with Term Limits and Terrorism

Democratic setbacks and violence triggered by African leaders' manipulation of term limits were offset by successful elections and peaceful transfers of power in key countries during 2015. Meanwhile, nations across the Sahelian belt from Mali to Kenya continued to grapple with threats from Islamist militants.

Burundian president Pierre Nkurunziza's controversial decision to run for a third term sparked civil unrest, a failed coup, and political violence that threatened to spiral into civil war. In neighboring Rwanda, where President Paul Kagame has efficiently closed the space for political opposition or critical viewpoints, Senate approval and a successful national referendum cleared the way for Kagame to potentially remain in office until 2034. And an October constitutional referendum allowed longtime Congo Republic president Denis Sassou-Nguesso to forego term limits and run to extend his rule in 2016, triggering the largest antigovernment demonstration since 1992.

Burkina Faso recovered from a September military coup by supporters of ousted president Blaise Compaore', who in 2014 had tried to change the constitution and extend his own 27-year rule, leading to a popular uprising. The country went on to hold its most successful presidential and legislative elections ever, marking a turning point in its political transition and serving as an example for other nations contending with leaders who attempt to overstay their mandates. Tanzania, whose presidents have consistently honored the two-term limit, held its most competitive elections since its transition to multiparty rule in the

early 1990s, with ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) candidate John Magufuli winning 58 percent of the vote. However, it was unclear whether Magufuli would reform laws passed earlier in the year that severely restricted freedom of expression.

While a deadly terrorist attack on a luxury hotel in Bamako in November triggered a state of emergency in Mali, there were few reports that the government used the incident to restrict citizens' basic freedoms. However, elsewhere in the region, violations of civil liberties and the rule of law continued in the fight against Boko Haram, which spread from northeastern Nigeria to parts of Cameroon and Chad. In the wake of yet another attack by Somalia's Shabaab militant group, which in April killed nearly 150 people at Garissa University College in northeastern Kenya, the government in Nairobi continued its ham-fisted domestic counterterrorism campaign. This included alleged extrajudicial killings and disappearances, as well as a crackdown on nongovernmental organizations and critical media.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia used the war on terrorism to justify a deadly crackdown on protests against forced displacement in the Oromia region in November and December, as well as ongoing repression of political opponents, journalists, bloggers, and activists.

Asia-Pacific: Religious Nationalism Linked to Political Tensions

In a wide range of Asian countries, there was a correlation in 2015 between strained political institutions and various forms of religious nationalism or extremism.

India's Hindu nationalist government, under pressure to deliver on its 2014 campaign promises, generally failed to curb a rise in anti-Muslim violence and intimidation, at times appearing to encourage or take advantage of religious divisions for political gain. In Bangladesh, as the major political parties continued their bitter standoff, Islamist radicals carried out a series of attacks on secular writers, foreigners, and Shiites.

The authorities in Malaysia stepped up enforcement of conservative dress codes and persecution of LGBT people at a time when the ruling party was reeling from a major corruption scandal. And in the tiny, oil-dependent sultanate of Brunei, the government restricted minority religious displays and moved toward implementation of a harsh new criminal code based on Sharia.

Anti-Muslim discrimination in Myanmar remained a serious problem during the year, and it was unclear whether a new NLD government would take the political risk of defending Muslims' fundamental rights. However, the failure of Buddhist nationalists to drum up voter support for the military-backed ruling party was a promising sign. The influence of Buddhist nationalists in Sri Lanka clearly waned after that country's change in leadership, with the newly elected administration promising a more inclusive model of governance.

Europe: Migrant Crisis Threatens Solidarity, Democratic Standards

The migration crisis in Europe put unprecedented pressure on the EU's fundamental principles of liberty, solidarity, and respect for human rights. The massive influx of people not only exposed areas of weak institutional capacity across the region, but also cast doubt on the EU's ability to maintain high democratic standards among current and aspiring member states in a time of rising populism.

The year began with the January election victory of the left-populist Syriza party in Greece, whose anti-EU rhetoric struck a chord with voters after years of externally imposed austerity. Although the new government was eventually forced to comply with its creditors' demands, important underlying problems—including governance deficiencies and a debt load that many view as unsustainable—have yet to be addressed. Nevertheless, the attention of Brussels had shifted to the migrants by the second half of 2015.

The EU's attempts to distribute responsibility for the settlement of refugees across the union met with resistance throughout the bloc, particularly from Central and Eastern Europe. These countries' blatant rejection of solidarity with asylum seekers and fellow member states, despite their own 20th-century histories of repression, foreign domination, and mass dislocation on the one hand, and the benefits they received from the EU on the other, represented a stinging blow to the European project.

The bloc's broader retreat from the goal of bolstering democratic values was underscored by its renewed interest in Turkey's membership bid, which had stalled for years as Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan exhibited increasingly authoritarian behavior. EU negotiators, seeking Turkey's assistance in stemming the migrant flow to Europe, apparently turned a blind eye to Erdoğan's repressive actions during 2015, including assaults on critical media and indiscriminate military operations in urban areas in the southeast in advance of the November elections.

Eurasia: In Pursuit of False Stability

While elections have served as an avenue to recovery for many ill-governed countries, several Eurasian states held national polls in 2015 that served as exhibitions of the unfettered power of longtime incumbents. Faced with slumping economies and security threats linked to foreign conflicts, these regimes sought to fortify themselves against any remaining opposition or dissent.

In Tajikistan, for example, the government of President Emomali Rahmon, who has ruled the country since 1992, ensured that the opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) lost all of its seats in legislative elections. The authorities then intensified their assault on the party over the subsequent months, revoking its registration, detaining its leaders, and effectively incapacitating what had been Central Asia's only legal Islamist political grouping.

Tightly controlled legislative elections in Azerbaijan, which followed another year of intense suppression of civil society, resulted in a hollow victory for the ruling party, with most opposition groups boycotting the vote. President Ilham Aliyev's government used the polls to show its teeth to the democratic world, barring several foreign journalists from covering the process and imposing restrictions on international observer groups that led some to suspend their monitoring missions.

In contrast, a deeply flawed election in Belarus actually seemed to improve President Alyaksandr Lukashenka's standing with democratic powers. His release of political prisoners before the vote, and the absence of violence in its aftermath, eased the way for plans by the United States and the EU—wavering in their determination to press for true liberalization—to reduce sanctions against Belarusian individuals and entities. There is little chance that Lukashenka's actions are signs of a genuine thaw. Rather, his gestures toward the West seem motivated by growing fears of Russian bellicosity and economic weakness.

Americas: Populists on the Defensive, Little Progress in Cuba

There were several important developments in Latin America during 2015.

First, although the populist left suffered major electoral reversals in Venezuela and Argentina, incumbent leaders in the region made clear their intention to remain in power. Thus in the wake of his party's overwhelming defeat in Venezuela's parliamentary elections, President Nicolás Maduro took steps to pack the Supreme Court and threatened to refuse to carry out decisions of the new legislative majority. In Ecuador, President Rafael Correa moved forward with a proposal to eliminate term limits and seek a fourth term in

office in 2017. Similar plans were under way in Bolivia, and Nicaragua had already abolished term limits in 2014.

Second, a number of regional heads of state were undermined by corruption scandals or an inability to stem violent crime. In Brazil, a democracy hard hit by the crash in commodities prices, President Dilma Rousseff faced impeachment efforts in the wake of a bribery scandal at the national oil company; Chile's President Michelle Bachelet was seriously weakened by a corruption case that implicated her son; and Mexico's President Enrique Peña Nieto was politically crippled due to a series of graft allegations and the persistence of organized crime in parts of the country.

Finally, little progress was made toward democratic reform in Cuba despite the resumption of diplomatic relations with the United States. There was a modest expansion of rights for religious believers and private business owners, and more Cubans exercised their new ability to travel abroad. But the political system remained closed to all but Communist Party loyalists, and freedom of expression was highly restricted. Nor were prospects especially bright for significant change in the immediate future. The administration of U.S. president Barack Obama urged patience with Cuba's pace of political change, and negotiations between Washington and Havana concentrated on removing other roadblocks to the lifting of the American trade embargo.

With additional input from Elen Aghekyan, Jennifer Dunham, Bret Nelson, Shannon O'Toole, Sarah Repucci, and Vanessa Tucker.

Introduction

The *Freedom in the World 2016* survey contains reports on 195 countries and 15 related and disputed territories. Each country report begins with a section containing the following information: population, capital, political rights rating (numerical rating), civil liberties rating (numerical rating), freedom rating (the average of the political rights and civil liberties ratings), freedom status (Free, Partly Free, or Not Free), “electoral democracy” designation, and a 10-year ratings timeline. Each territory report begins with a section containing the same information, except for the capital and the electoral democracy designation. The population figures are drawn primarily from the *2015 World Population Data Sheet* of the Population Reference Bureau.

The political rights and civil liberties ratings range from 1 to 7, with 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free. The status designation of Free, Partly Free, or Not Free, which is determined by the average of the political rights and civil liberties ratings, indicates the general state of freedom in a country or territory. Any improvements or declines in the ratings since the previous survey are noted next to the relevant number in each report. Positive or negative trends that were not sufficient to trigger a ratings change may be highlighted by upward or downward trend arrows, which are located next to the name of the country or territory. A brief explanation of ratings changes or trend arrows is provided for each country or territory as required. For a full description of the methods used to determine the survey’s ratings, please see the chapter on the survey’s methodology.

The 10-year ratings timeline lists the political rights and civil liberties ratings and status for each of the last 10 years. Each year that is included in the timeline refers to the year under review, *not* the edition of the survey. Thus, the ratings and status from the *Freedom in the World 2016* edition are listed under “2015” (the year that was under review for the 2016 survey edition).

Following the section described above, each country and territory report is divided into two parts: an introduction and an analysis of political rights and civil liberties. The introduction provides a brief review of major events during the survey year. The political rights and civil liberties section summarizes each country or territory’s degree of respect for the rights and liberties that Freedom House uses to evaluate freedom in the world. This section is composed of seven parts that correspond to the seven main subcategories in the methodology. The scores for each subcategory, and any changes from the previous year, are noted next to the relevant subheading.

Afghanistan

Political Rights Rating: 6

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 32,247,000

Capital: Kabul

Ten-Year Ratings Time-line For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan experienced high levels of violence and political gridlock in 2015, and the country was second only to Syria as a source of refugees contributing to a migration crisis in Europe during the year.

The National Unity Government (NUG), formed after a disputed presidential election in 2014, survived its first year in office, though its leaders had difficulty filling key positions due to internal disagreements and resistance from the parliament. Legislative elections scheduled for 2015 had to be postponed, leading to an indefinite extension of the existing parliament's term.

A poll by the Asia Foundation found that the share of Afghans who believe their country is moving in the right direction fell from 55 percent in 2014 to 37 percent in 2015. The overall sense of insecurity intensified, with some 10 percent of the country's administrative districts in the hands of the Taliban rebel movement and a further 10 percent contested between government and insurgent forces. The Taliban sometimes exerted influence even in areas where the government was nominally in control.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 10 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12 (– 1)

Afghanistan's president is directly elected for up to two five-year terms and has the power to appoint ministers, subject to parliamentary approval. In the directly elected lower house of the National Assembly, the 249-seat Wolesi Jirga (House of the People), members stand for five-year terms. In the 102-seat Meshrano Jirga (House of Elders), the upper house, the provincial councils elect two-thirds of members for three- or four-year terms, and the president appoints the remaining one-third for five-year terms. The constitution envisages the election of district councils, which would also send members to the Meshrano Jirga, though these have not been established. Ten Wolesi Jirga seats are reserved for the nomadic Kuchi community, including at least three women, and 65 of the chamber's general seats are reserved for women.

In the 2014 presidential election, the two first-round winners—former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, who received 45 percent of the vote, and former finance minister Ashraf Ghani, who took 32 percent—faced off in a final round held on June 14, with a high reported turnout. After the Independent Election Commission (IEC) published preliminary results showing Ghani leading by more than 10 percentage points, the Abdullah camp alleged voter fraud, claimed victory, and threatened to overthrow the government. The

United States brokered an agreement calling for an internationally supervised audit and the formation of a national unity government. Ghani became president, and Abdullah became chief executive, a new post resembling that of a prime minister. The final vote tallies for the two candidates were not officially announced.

The April 2014 provincial council elections were also drawn out due to complaints over irregularities and a large quantity of fraudulent votes. It was not until late October that the election commission announced the winners of the 458 council seats.

The most recent parliamentary elections, held in September 2010, were deeply flawed. Then president Hamid Karzai did not inaugurate the new parliament until January 2011, ruling by decree in the interim. The parliament's term expired in 2015, with the NUG and current lawmakers unable to agree on reforms that would pave the way for elections. In June, Ghani issued a decree extending the parliament's term until new elections could be scheduled. Given the flawed 2014 vote, both sides of the NUG agreed that reforms were necessary, including the replacement of the incumbent IEC. An electoral reform commission established by the president proposed a variety of changes to the electoral laws and voting system during the year, such as the introduction of party-list proportional representation for a third of the Wolesi Jirga seats, but none of the amendments were approved by the parliament. The IEC commissioners could not be replaced without legislative changes. Even if elections were to proceed, the poor security situation raised questions about the possible disenfranchisement of voters in Taliban-held areas.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 6 / 16

Afghanistan's electoral system uses the single nontransferable vote, with most candidates for elected office running as independents and participating in fluid alliances linked to local and regional patronage networks. Political parties lack a formal role within the legislature, weakening their ability to contribute to stable policymaking and legislative processes. Despite their limited relevance in Afghanistan's government, parties have been free to seek registration since 2005, and over 70 are in existence.

The Taliban have consistently opposed the holding of elections. Although their calls to boycott the 2014 election were widely ignored, the presence of various armed groups and local strongmen, including those enlisted by the government as anti-Taliban militias, poses a major obstacle to free public participation in the political process, especially outside major urban centers. Government officials and politicians at all levels are regularly targeted for assassination.

The United States maintained about 9,800 military personnel in Afghanistan in 2015. In October, U.S. president Barack Obama extended the U.S. training and counterterrorism mission in the country, announcing that troop levels would remain unchanged until late 2016 or early 2017, when they would drop to about 5,500. The United States covers the bulk of the operating costs of the Afghan security forces. Although the NUG was formed on the basis of an agreement brokered by a U.S. envoy, both the United States and the Kabul government insist that the latter enjoys full sovereignty and control over political decisions.

The constitution recognizes multiple ethnic and linguistic minorities and provides more guarantees of equal status to minorities than historically have been available in Afghanistan. Since 2001, the traditionally marginalized Shiite Muslim minority, which includes most ethnic Hazaras, have enjoyed increased levels of political representation and participation in national institutions. Nevertheless, participation is curtailed for all segments of the population by lack of security, flawed elections, and the dominance of local patronage networks.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

The NUG failed to complete the process of forming a cabinet and appointing provincial governors during its first year in office. Although most positions were eventually filled, the parliament rejected the president's nomination for defense minister. Rampant corruption has weakened the security forces, and the deteriorating security situation—with sustained Taliban offensives and increased government reliance on local militias—has in turn contributed to impunity for corrupt practices. For example, while civil society groups urged the government to amend the mining law to promote transparency in 2015, a growing proportion of mining areas were controlled in practice by local strongmen or the Taliban.

According to the Asia Foundation's national survey, 90 percent of Afghans encounter corruption in their daily lives, mainly citing bribes to police and government officials. Some high-profile figures have been prosecuted, but with little deterrent effect. Former Kabul Bank chief executive Khalil Ferozi, who had been sentenced in 2014 to 15 years in prison for massive fraud that caused the bank's 2010 collapse, was reportedly allowed to leave prison during the day to continue his business activities, and in November 2015 he signed an agreement to participate in an investment project with the government worth about \$900 million. After a public outcry, the agreement was quickly canceled.

The parliament exercises a form of oversight by summoning ministers for questioning on their performance and retaining the power to dismiss them through no-confidence votes. However, this oversight process lacks transparency, regularity, and discipline, due in part to the absence of a functioning party system. Afghanistan was ranked 166 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 14 / 60 (+1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 6 / 16 (+1)

Afghanistan hosts a vibrant media sector, with multiple outlets in print, radio, and television that collectively carry a wide range of views and are generally uncensored. Media providers include independent and commercial firms, as well as a state broadcaster and outlets tied to specific political interests.

Journalists faced reduced levels of violence in 2015 compared with the previous year. Several government attempts to suppress content, including media coverage of the Taliban and the satirical Facebook page "Kabul Taxi," were largely unsuccessful. In October, the Taliban threatened two media houses, accusing them of publishing false reports. Rapidly expanding use of the internet and mobile telephones has broadened the flow of information and facilitated popular call-in programs on radio and television, but Taliban attacks on mobile-phone infrastructure periodically hinder communications.

While religious freedom has improved since 2001, it is still hampered by violence and discrimination aimed at religious minorities and reformist Muslims. The constitution established Islam as the official religion and guaranteed freedom of worship to other religions. Blasphemy and apostasy by Muslims are considered capital crimes, and non-Muslim proselytizing is strongly discouraged. Militant groups have targeted mosques and clerics as part of the larger civil conflict. Hindus, Sikhs, and Shiite Muslims, particularly those from the Hazara ethnic group, face official obstacles and discrimination by the Sunni Muslim majority. Moreover, conservative social attitudes, intolerance, and the inability or unwillingness of law enforcement officials to defend individual freedoms mean that those perceived as violating religious and social norms are highly vulnerable to abuse. In a widely

publicized case in March 2015, 27-year-old Farkhunda Malikzada was beaten to death outside a Kabul shrine after being falsely accused of desecrating the Koran. It later emerged that she had denounced the selling of amulets at the shrine as un-Islamic, allegedly leading the custodian to incite a mob to attack her. After a flawed trial and appeals, four of the assailants were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 10 to 20 years, and 10 police officers were disciplined for failing to stop the attack.

Academic freedom is largely tolerated in government-controlled areas. In addition to public schooling, there has been a growth in private education, with new universities enjoying full autonomy from the government. The expansion of Taliban control in rural areas has left an increasing number of public schools outside of government control. The Taliban impose harsh rules on schools in their territory, though the restrictions vary by region.

Although private discussion in government-held areas is largely free and unrestrained, discussion of a political nature is more dangerous for Afghans living in contested or Taliban-controlled areas.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

The constitution guarantees the rights to assembly and association, subject to some restrictions, but they are upheld erratically from region to region. Protests in Kabul during 2015 included demonstrations calling for harsher sentences against Malikzada's killers and a march to demand security for Hazaras after a series of abductions and murders.

Afghan civil society continues to play an important role, particularly in urban areas, where thousands of cultural, welfare, and sports associations operate with little interference from the authorities. Approximately 274 international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) remained active in Afghanistan in 2015, in addition to nearly 1,800 local NGOs. However, threats and violence by the Taliban and other actors have curbed the activities of many NGOs and hampered recruitment of foreign aid workers.

Despite broad constitutional protections for workers, labor rights are not well defined, and currently no effective enforcement or dispute-resolution mechanisms are in place.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

The judicial system operates haphazardly, and justice in many places is administered on the basis of a mixture of legal codes by inadequately trained judges. Corruption in the judiciary is extensive, with judges and lawyers often subject to threats and bribes from local leaders or armed groups. Informal justice systems, employing variants of both customary law and Sharia (Islamic law), are widely used to arbitrate disputes, especially in rural areas. The Taliban have installed their own judiciary in areas they control, but also conduct summary executions.

Prosecutions and trials suffer from a number of weaknesses, including lack of proper representation, excess reliance on uncorroborated witness testimony, lack of reliable forensic evidence, arbitrary decision-making, and failure to publish court decisions.

The police force is heavily militarized and primarily focused on its role as a first line of defense against insurgents in administrative centers. There are high levels of corruption and complicity in organized crime among police, particularly near key smuggling routes. The torture of detainees by Afghan police, military, and intelligence services reportedly remains common. Government-aligned strongmen and powerful figures within the security forces operate illegal detention centers.

The number of civilian casualties in the civil conflict continued to rise in 2015. The United Nations reported totals of 3,545 dead and 7,457 wounded for the year, surpassing

the record set in 2014. While most of the casualties were attributed to the Taliban, about 17 percent occurred at the hands of government and progovernment forces. The Taliban conducted a campaign of high-profile suicide bombings and complex attacks against civilian targets, such as restaurants and hotels, or targets where civilian casualties could be anticipated, such as military convoys moving through populated urban areas. The Taliban also launched a major offensive in Kunduz in October, briefly occupying the provincial capital, and another in the southern province of Helmand in December. Kidnappings are common in Afghanistan; a number of abductions during 2015 targeted Hazara civilians traveling on major roads, with the victims either killed or held for ransom.

Despite some legal protections, religious and ethnic minorities remain subject to harassment and discrimination, including in employment and education. As non-Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs are especially vulnerable, and many have emigrated. There is no legal protection for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) people, who face societal disapproval and abuse by police. Same-sex sexual activity is considered illegal under the penal code and Sharia.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 2 / 16

The government does not restrict the right of travel within the country or abroad, though insecurity and other obstacles hamper freedom of movement in practice. Some 1.2 million people were internally displaced in Afghanistan by the end of 2015, including more than 384,000 who were displaced by fighting during the year, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Many Afghans also fled abroad in 2015, making up a large percentage of those contributing to Europe's refugee crisis.

Citizens are formally free to own property, buy and sell land, and establish businesses. There has also been a trend away from government monopolies. Economic freedoms, however, are constrained by patronage, corruption, and the dominant economic role of a narrow, politically connected elite. Over the past decade the most profitable activities available to Afghans have been government and defense contracting, narcotics trafficking, and property and minerals development. Investors in all of these sectors have depended on connections to those in power. A combination of harassment, extortion, and arbitrary taxation make for a highly unfavorable business climate.

Although women have formal rights to education and employment, and some participate in public life, discrimination and domestic violence remain pervasive, with the latter often going unreported because of social acceptance of the practice. Women's choices regarding marriage and divorce remain circumscribed by custom and discriminatory laws. On some issues, customary practices withhold even rights that are guaranteed to women by Sharia. The forced marriage of young girls to older men or widows to their husbands' male relations is a problem, and many girls continue to be married before the legal age of 16. The courts and the detention system have been used to enforce social control of women, for example by jailing those who defy their families' wishes regarding marriage.

Women in urban areas typically enjoy greater access to education and formal employment, and are better able to participate in national politics. Women accounted for about 16 percent of the candidates in the 2010 parliamentary elections, and roughly 41 percent of registered voters were women; 69 female candidates were elected. While no women candidates ran in the 2014 presidential election, 273 women ran for provincial council seats, securing 97 of them. Female electoral participation has been limited by threats, harassment, and social restrictions on traveling alone and appearing in public.

Most victims of human trafficking in Afghanistan are children trafficked internally to work in various industries, become domestic servants, settle debts, or be subjected to commercial sexual exploitation. Victims of trafficking are frequently prosecuted for moral crimes.

Albania

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 2,892,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Tirana

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

Local elections held in June 2015 were viewed as an important test of democratic institutions in Albania, which had been designated a candidate for European Union (EU) membership in 2014. International observers said the polls were conducted peacefully, but raised concerns about pressure on voters by politicians, problems with election commission operations, and the improper use of government resources by the ruling coalition during campaigning.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 27 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 8 / 12

The unicameral, 140-member Kuvendi (Assembly) is elected through proportional representation in 12 regional districts of varying size. All members serve four-year terms. The prime minister is designated by the majority party or coalition, and the president—who does not hold executive powers but heads the military and plays an important role in selecting senior judges—is chosen by the parliament for a maximum of two five-year terms. Bujar Nishani, then the interior minister, was chosen as president in 2012.

Preparations for the 2013 parliamentary elections were disrupted by political deadlock in the seven-seat Central Election Commission (CEC), which prevented it from making crucial decisions that required a five-vote majority. Earlier, the CEC failed to decide on seat distribution for the country's electoral districts, leading the parliamentary majority—headed by the Democratic Party (PD) at the time—to intervene and set the allotments using outdated 2009 population figures. Monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) reported a number of other problems but found that the overall campaign was vibrant, competitive, and largely peaceful, despite an election-day shooting incident. In 2014, the CEC pledged to implement certain OSCE electoral recommendations, including filling three vacancies that had emerged from the 2013 deadlock. (The seats were filled in time for the 2015 local elections.)

In the 2013 parliamentary elections, the Socialist Party (PS) captured 65 seats, the Socialist Movement for Integration took 16, and two smaller PS-allied parties—the Unity for Human Rights Party, which represents ethnic Greeks, and the Christian Democratic Party—each garnered 1 seat. Meanwhile, the PD won 50 seats, and its junior partners—the nationalist Justice, Integration, and Unity Party and the Republican Party—took 4 and 3 seats, respectively. Voter turnout was reported at 54 percent. PS leader Edi Rama took office as prime minister, backed by the 37-party Alliance for a European Albania (ASHE), which was led by Rama’s PS.

Voters selected 61 mayors and 1,595 councilors in local elections held in June 2015. The ruling ASHE coalition won 63 percent of votes for local council races, and 45 mayoral seats. The PD-led opposition coalition, the People’s Alliance for Work and Dignity (APPD), won 32 percent of votes in local council races, and 15 of the mayoral seats. Voter turnout was 48 percent, a bit less than for the 2013 parliamentary polls.

The 2015 local elections were viewed by the EU a test of Albania’s democratization. Both the EU and the OSCE, which sent a monitoring mission, praised the election and campaigning period as peaceful; the OSCE also noted improved professionalism among mayoral candidates in Tirana. However, both the OSCE and EU raised concerns about the impartiality of electoral authorities, with the OSCE noting problems in CEC processes for candidate registration, some of which it linked to CEC politicization. It also raised concerns about the accuracy of voter rolls. Additionally, the OSCE documented widespread allegations of pressure on voters, especially public sector employees, who, sometimes under threat of losing their jobs, were urged to attend campaign events for members of the ruling coalition. Politicians from the governing coalition used public resources during their electoral campaigns, with some distributing property-legalization certificates.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

The two main political parties, the PS and the PD, are sharply polarized and given to personality-driven rivalry. As prime minister from 2005 to 2013, Sali Berisha of the PD worked to consolidate partisan control over state institutions, particularly after violent anti-government protests in early 2011. However, the Socialists’ electoral victory in 2013 and 2015 restored confidence in the ability of opposition forces to secure a rotation of power through elections.

Ethnic minorities have been able to campaign freely in their own languages in recent elections. While voters had access to ballot materials in minority languages in 2013, ballots for the 2015 local polls were only in the Albanian language. However, election officials provided voter education materials in minority languages. While the members of the Roma minority and other marginalized groups are vulnerable to political exploitation and vote-buying schemes such as the distribution of fuel vouchers and cash, OSCE observers noted in 2015 that minority communities are becoming increasingly aware of their voting power and more politically engaged.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

Corruption is pervasive, and the EU has repeatedly called for rigorous implementation of antigraft measures. Convictions of high-ranking officials and judges for corruption and abuse of power remain rare. The current government has taken some steps to remove the immunity of politicians who are accused of crimes. Over the last two years, several lawmakers from the ruling coalition have faced criminal charges. Additionally, in 2015 it emerged that a law firm had alleged that parliament speaker and leader of the Socialist Movement

for Integration, Ilir Meta, received a bribe from an international debt-collection company. Both Meta and opposition politicians have called for an international investigation of this allegation, underscoring a general lack of trust of Albanian courts.

The law on access to information complies with international legal standards, though it is not well implemented.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 40 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 13 / 16

While the constitution guarantees freedom of expression, the intermingling of powerful business, political, and media interests inhibits the development of independent news outlets; most are seen as biased toward either the PS or the PD. Reporters have little job security and remain subject to lawsuits, intimidation, and occasional physical attacks by those facing media scrutiny. The OSCE media monitoring of the 2015 election campaign observed that all the major media, including public media, favored one of the major political parties. The government does not limit internet access.

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, which is generally upheld in practice. There are no significant restrictions on free and open private discussion, including for online blogs and social media.

The government typically does not limit academic freedom, though students and teachers have faced political pressure ahead of elections. A proposal to raise tuition at public universities in order to increase the pool of government funds set aside for education was criticized by student protesters, who said it would divert public funding to private universities at the expense of poorer students, and erode academic freedom. In response, government officials said the measure would provide for equal treatment of public and private universities.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are generally respected. Demonstrations by opposition parties and civic groups are common, and they have generally been peaceful. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) function without restrictions but have limited funding and policy influence.

The constitution guarantees workers the rights to organize and bargain collectively, and most have the right to strike. However, effective collective bargaining remains limited, and union members have little protection against discrimination by employers.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but the underfunded courts are subject to political pressure and influence, and public trust in judicial institutions is low. In August 2015, the chairman of the parliamentary commission on the justice sector recommended constitutional changes aimed at revamping the High Court of Justice, which nominates judges prosecutes judges suspected of wrongdoing; the court has generally failed to address corruption in the judicial sector and is widely considered to be politicized. In September, the government Inspectorate for the Declaration and Audit of Assets and Conflict of Interests accused the chief judge of the Appellate Court of Tirana of corruption after uncovering 1.7 million (\$1.9 million) in suspicious assets.

Traditional tribal law and revenge killings remain a problem in parts of the north. Police reportedly engage in abuse of suspects during arrest and interrogation. Prison inmates suffer

from poor living conditions and a lack of adequate medical treatment. The PS-led government has replaced a number of prison officials and police commanders, and has disbanded several police units, to combat corruption and rising crime rates.

Albania is a transshipment point for heroin smugglers and a key site for European cannabis production. In August 2015, Albanian police destroyed a number of cannabis plantations in Albania’s northern mountains.

Roma face significant discrimination in education, health care, employment, and housing. A 2010 law bars discrimination based on race and several other categories, including sexual orientation and gender identity, and a 2013 reform of the criminal code introduced protections against hate crimes and hate speech based on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, bias against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people remains strong in practice.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

Albanians generally enjoy freedom of movement and choice of residence or employment, though criminal activity and practices related to traditional honor codes limit these rights in some areas. Access to higher education is affected by corruption. A raft of property-restitution cases related to confiscations during the communist era remain unresolved. Illegal construction is a major problem, as is bribery linked to government approval of development projects.

Women are underrepresented in politics and business, though the new cabinet appointed in 2013 included a record six women, including the first female defense minister. In the 2015 local elections, all parties met a new gender quota requirement that local council candidate lists be split evenly between male and female candidates. However, just 10 percent of the candidates for mayors were women.

While domestic violence is believed to be widespread, the parliament has adopted some measures to combat the problem in recent years. Convictions for human trafficking remain rare despite increased government enforcement. Young women make up about 90 percent of the workers in the important textile and footwear sector, in which child labor is not uncommon and some 40 percent of workers are not registered, according to the International Trade Union Confederation.

Algeria

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 39,948,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Algiers

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

Although it continued to project stability amid broader regional turmoil, Algeria began to confront the first signs of several impending economic and political challenges in 2015.

The country's natural-resource-dependent economy forced a number of difficult policy changes after the collapse in global oil prices during the year. While previously the government had envisioned slowly raising taxes and reducing subsidies to cope with decreasing revenues, in December it reversed course with an austerity budget that raised taxes on key commodities including electricity, fuel, and telecommunications services, sparking protests from opposition parties. The government also expanded its use of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, throughout the year to harvest shale gas to compensate for declining oil prices, which led to widespread and persistent protests in communities impacted by environmental damage.

Concerns also continued regarding the country's future political stability, particularly in the event of the death of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, now 78 and a victim of serious health problems. Sequestered from the public and most high-level officials for more than a year, Bouteflika is widely believed to be incapacitated while a small clique of advisers, led by his brother Saïd, rules the country.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 11 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 4 / 12

The president is directly elected for five-year terms. Constitutional amendments passed in 2008 effectively abolished the two-term limit, as well as increasing the president's powers relative to the prime minister and other parts of the government. Each of Bouteflika's four elections to the presidency has been tainted by accusations of fraud by his chief adversaries. The 2014 presidential vote was allegedly marred by ballot-stuffing, multiple voting, inflated electoral rolls, and the misuse of state resources to benefit the incumbent. The chief Western monitoring organizations did not participate in election observation. The official voter participation rate dropped precipitously from 75 to nearly 40 percent, and opposition figures and informal foreign observers stated that the actual participation rate might have been half or even less of official tallies.

The president appoints one-third of the members of the upper legislative house, the Council of the Nation, which has 144 members serving six-year terms. The other two-thirds are indirectly elected by local and provincial assemblies. In December 2015, elections were held to replace half of the 96 elected members of the upper house, with 23 seats going to the National Liberation Front (FLN), 18 seats to the military-backed National Democratic Rally (RND), and the remainder to smaller parties and independents. The People's National Assembly, the lower house, has 462 members directly elected for five-year terms. In the 2012 elections, the FLN won 208 seats, the RND increased to 68, and the Green Algeria Alliance—comprised of multiple Islamist parties—dropped to 49. The government estimated the election participation rate at 42 percent. While foreign observers from the European Union, United Nations, Arab League, and other institutions declared the elections largely free and fair, opposition candidates and some human rights groups asserted that the results were manipulated by the Ministry of the Interior. Fifteen parties that won a combined 29 seats boycotted the parliament. The National Election Observation Commission, a judicial body, condemned the elections as "not credible," though FLN and RND members on the commission refused to sign the final report.

A 2012 law required that female candidates comprise between 20 and 50 percent of any candidate list for legislative elections, depending on the number of seats in the electoral district.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 4 / 16

The Ministry of the Interior must approve political parties before they can operate legally. A 2012 law liberalized the party registration process, and 23 new political parties

were allowed to register for the first time since 1999 as a result. The FLN, RND, Green Alliance (comprised of the Movement of the Society of Peace, Ennahda, and Islah parties), the Front of Socialist Forces, the Workers Party, and a number of smaller parties sit in the current parliament. Parties cannot form along explicit ethnic or religious lines, and the Front Islamique de Salut (FIS), which swept the 1990 and 1991 elections, remains banned on this basis. A number of Salafi movements have attempted to establish political parties in recent years but are routinely denied permission by the state. In August 2015, Madani Mezrag, a former leader of the armed wing of the FIS, announced the creation of a new Salafi party, but the government subsequently refused to grant it legal status.

Increasing ethnic and sectarian communal violence is evidence of the perception of political marginalization and alienation experienced by most Algerians. Parliamentary seats in Algeria's rentier economic system help garner public funding for local needs, which give parliamentarians tax breaks and allow them to create small politico-economic fiefdoms. The Amazigh-dominated Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) party boycotted both 2012 and 2014 elections entirely.

The military and intelligence services continue to play an important role in politics, fueled by their ongoing rivalries. A longstanding power struggle between President Bouteflika and General Mohamed "Toufik" Mediène, the powerful head of the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS), came to an end in September 2015 when Mediène was dismissed as the head of DRS. This marked the culmination of Bouteflika's efforts to reduce the agency's power over political and economic affairs.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

In 2015, Algeria placed 88 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Rampant corruption plagues Algeria's business and public sectors, especially the energy sector. Despite anticorruption laws, a lack of government transparency, low levels of judicial independence, and bloated bureaucracies contribute to corruption. Few corruption investigations ever lead to indictments much less convictions, though there were a number of exceptions in 2015. In May, a court in Algiers sentenced two dozen people to prison for embezzlement of public funds and the payment of bribes in connection with the construction of Algeria's east-west highway, one of the country's largest ongoing infrastructure projects. In March, more than a dozen former top officials at state oil company Sonatrach were put on trial over a graft scandal; the case was later postponed and remained ongoing at year's end.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 24 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 7 / 16

Although some newspapers are privately owned and journalists remain aggressive in their coverage of government affairs, most newspapers rely on the central government for printing, and the state-owned advertising agency favors progovernment newspapers, encouraging self-censorship. A 2011 press law contains vague language that reinforces the government's ability to block reporting on certain topics, including those deemed to undermine the country's security or economic interests. Privately owned television channels were only formally authorized in 2014, although authorities had tolerated the existence some private broadcasters previously. Television faces numerous restrictions on sensitive content.

Authorities routinely use legal mechanisms to harass the press and censor controversial reporting. In February 2015, Mohamed Sharki, a former editor at the state-owned newspaper *Eldjournhouria*, was convicted on blasphemy charges for printing an article questioning

the divine authorship of the Quran. He was initially sentenced to three years in prison and a \$2,000 fine, though this was reduced to a one-year suspended prison sentence in November. Also in February, the Communications Ministry revoked the accreditation of Boualem Ghomrassa, a journalist with the London-based *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* newspaper, over political opinions he expressed during an interview on a foreign television station. In April, the satirical television program *Weekend* was suspended after it reported on the wealth and foreign real estate holdings of government officials.

A 2009 cybercrime law gives authorities the right to block websites “contrary to the public order or decency,” and a centralized system monitors internet traffic. Both government officials and private entities continued to use criminal defamation laws to pressure independent bloggers and journalists in 2014. In April 2015, police arrested cartoonist Tahar Dehejiche for publishing a cartoon critical of both the president and the practice of fracking in Algeria’s energy sector. After his initial acquittal in May, he was sentenced on appeal in November to a fine and six months in prison for “attacking the president.”

Algeria’s population is overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. Small non-Muslim communities do not face harassment, but they may gather to worship only at state-approved locations. Proselytizing by non-Muslims is illegal, and a 2006 ordinance tightened restrictions on minority faiths. Security services monitor mosques for radical Islamist activity. The rising influence of Salafi religious movements has alarmed the authorities, who had previously encouraged their growth. In February 2015, the government granted itself sole authority to issue fatwas, or religious judgments, in order to restrict the influence of independent Salafi imams.

Academic freedom is largely respected, though debate is somewhat circumscribed. Private discussion can take place relatively freely outside of certain sensitive topics.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12 (+ 1)

Since the state of emergency was lifted in 2011, the government has regularly used force to disrupt and discourage public gatherings and protests. In 2015, large-scale crackdowns lessened as compared to 2014, when several hundred members of the movement against Bouteflika’s reelection were arrested. Nevertheless, mass protests swept Algeria throughout 2015 in connection with the government’s increased use of fracking to extract shale gas in the country’s south. In February, opposition parties organized a march to protest the fracking policy in Algiers, where all demonstrations are banned; they were forcibly dispersed by police. Also in February, eight labor rights activists were convicted of “unauthorized gathering” under the penal code for demonstrating in support of another activist who had been sentenced to 18 months in prison on the same charge. The eight were each sentenced to one year in prison, with six months suspended.

The law on associations that came into effect in 2014 has been widely criticized for continuing to restrict the formation, funding, and operations of civil society organizations. Permits and receipts of application submission are required to establish and operate nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Both new and old organizations experience bureaucratic labyrinths while waiting not just for permits but also for application receipts. New cooperative agreements are required to work with foreign NGOs, but these relationships remain largely unauthorized.

Workers can establish independent trade unions, but the main labor federation, the General Union of Algerian Workers, has been criticized for being too close to the government and failing to advocate for workers’ interests. Algerian authorities have increasingly clamped down on efforts to form independent unions and to organize, including by using

administrative measures to prevent independent unions from operating. In July 2015, tramway workers in multiple cities launched a strike demanding better wages and a collective bargaining agreement under a new, independent trade union. The French management company that operates the tramway allegedly dismissed several union activists for organizing and refused to recognize any new union.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

The judiciary is susceptible to government pressure. International human rights activists have accused the security forces of practicing torture, and have also highlighted lengthy delays in bringing cases to trial. Prison conditions in Algeria generally do not meet international standards due to overcrowding and poor nutrition and hygiene.

In 2015, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) continued to attack Algerian police officers and political officials. In June, AQIM killed an army colonel and four other security force members in two separate attacks. In July, AQIM claimed responsibility for another attack that killed 11 Algerian soldiers in an ambush near Ain Defla.

Algeria's ethnic composition is a mixture of Arabs and Berbers. After years of marginalizing the Berber community, officials have made modest efforts to recognize the community's cultural demands. Tamazight, the Berber language, is now a national language. However, ethnic violence between Berbers and Arabs has worsened in recent years, particularly in the southern city of Ghardaia. In July 2015, clashes there between the two groups killed 22 people, leading to dozens of arrests. The government subsequently increased the security presence in the city to try to quell the tensions.

Same-sex sexual relations are punishable with two months to two years in prison, though no prosecutions were reported in 2015. Traditional social mores create an extremely hostile environment for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. In 2015, LGBT advocacy groups focused mainly on personal safety due to an increase in the intensity of hate speech coming from conservative clerics and the media.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

While most citizens are free to travel domestically and abroad, the authorities closely monitor and limit access to visas for non-Algerians. Men of military draft age are not allowed to leave the country without official consent. The land border between Algeria and Morocco has been closed for years, separating families that live in the border areas and forcing many to resort to illegal smuggling networks for routine travel.

The government plays a dominant role in the economy, leaving little room for private competitors. Numerous regulations make Algeria one of the most difficult environments in which to establish and operate a business. Property rights are not secure; some observers blame the lack of economic development.

Women continue to face discrimination at both the legal and societal levels. In 2013, 146 women were elected to the parliament, comprising a third of the body—a higher proportion than in any other Arab country. However, female lawmakers have a limited impact on the overall political system. Under the conservative 1984 family code, women do not enjoy equal rights in marriage, divorce, or inheritance.

A 2009 law criminalized all forms of trafficking in persons, and Algeria reported its first ever conviction under the law in 2015. However, according to monitors, the government is making virtually no effort to systematically enforce the ban, and trafficking victims themselves are frequently detained and harassed by authorities.

Andorra

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 78,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Andorra la Vella

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 39 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 57 / 60

Andorra held parliamentary elections in March 2015, after head of government Antoni Martí dissolved the 28-seat unicameral parliament, the General Council, in January. The Democrats for Andorra party won 15 seats, followed by the Liberal Party of Andorra with 8, an independent coalition with 3, and the Social Democracy and Progress party with 2. Martí remained the head of government. Women claimed 10 seats in the elections.

More than 50 percent of the population consists of noncitizens who do not have the right to vote. In 2015, out of Andorra's over 70,000 residents, only 24,509 were registered voters. Also in 2015, Andorrans living abroad were allowed to cast a postal vote for the first time.

In March, the U.S. Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network accused Andorra's fourth-largest bank, Banca Privada d'Andorra (BPA), of money laundering. Three senior bank officials allegedly accepted bribes to aid criminals in Russia, China, and Venezuela. Soon after, Andorran police arrested the bank's chief executive, Joan Pau Miquel Prats, and the Andorran government took control of the bank. In response to the scandal, the government passed a law in April allowing it to either restructure or liquidate the bank. Standard & Poor's dropped Andorra's credit rating as a result of the scandal to just two notches above junk status, threatening the country's financial security.

In February 2015, Andorra ratified the Additional Protocol to the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption.

In January 2015, parliament passed a law to help combat domestic violence.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Andorra, see Freedom in the World 2015.

↓ Angola

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 25,000,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6↓

Capital: Luanda

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ratings Change, Trend Arrow: Angola’s civil liberties rating declined from 5 to 6, and it received a downward trend arrow, because as the economy deteriorated, the government increased its repressive measures, including the persecution of journalists, young political activists, and certain religious groups.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

President José Eduardo dos Santos and his party, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), retained tight control over the political system and significantly restricted civil liberties during 2015.

The drop in global oil prices damaged Angola’s economy and state budget, which are heavily dependent on oil exports. The government was forced to adopt unpopular measures such as eliminating fuel subsidies and restricting the use of credit cards, stoking social unrest. In this context, the authorities worked to suppress dissent, violently dispersing a number of protests and detaining a group of young political activists on charges of plotting a rebellion.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 10 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

The 2010 constitution abolished direct presidential elections, stipulating instead that the leader of the largest party in the parliament would become president. The 220-seat unicameral National Assembly, whose members serve five-year terms, has little power, and 90 percent of legislation originates in the executive branch. The constitution permits the president to serve a maximum of two five-year terms, and to directly appoint the vice president, cabinet, and provincial governors. President dos Santos has been in power for 36 years, making him one of the longest-serving heads of state in Africa, but his first full term under the current constitution began in 2012, meaning he could legally serve until 2022.

The parliamentary elections held in 2012 were deeply flawed and followed a number of delays. The MPLA captured 72 percent of the vote, a notable decline from its 82 percent showing in 2008. Still, the party maintained its overwhelming dominance in the National Assembly, garnering 175 of 220 seats. The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) is the largest opposition party, holding 32 seats; the Broad Convergence for the Salvation of Angola–Electoral Coalition (CASA-CE) holds 8 seats, the Social Renewal Party (PRS) holds 3, and the National Front for Angolan Liberation (FNLA) holds 2.

In October 2014, dos Santos confirmed that already-delayed municipal elections, called for in the constitution, would again be postponed until after the 2017 general elections. The

president justified this unilateral decision by citing the difficulties experienced in organizing the 2012 elections and those anticipated in replacing existing local government institutions with new municipal governments. The opposition vehemently protested the decision.

In November 2015 dos Santos confirmed that the next general elections would be held in August 2017.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 6 / 16

Although five political parties are represented in the National Assembly, the ruling MPLA dominates Angola's party system. Mutual mistrust, the inability to agree on common strategy, and enticements from the more powerful and better-funded MPLA prevent opposition parties from coordinating their efforts. Nevertheless, in September 2015 the four opposition parties represented in the National Assembly held their first joint parliamentary meetings to promote dialogue and discuss the state of the country with civil society leaders.

Throughout 2014, opposition members had criticized the government's delay in establishing the Council of the Republic, a presidential advisory body that is constitutionally required to include members of the opposition. President dos Santos finally swore council members into office in February 2015; they had been appointed in January 2013.

Political activism in the exclave of Cabinda, home to a long-standing movement for independence or autonomy, is regarded with suspicion by the government and can draw criminal charges.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Corruption and patronage are endemic in Angola's entrenched political elite, which is largely unaccountable to the public. Allegations of corruption proliferated during 2015, including reports that the large Brazilian construction firm Odebrecht, which was already engulfed in a major corruption scandal in Brazil, had offered bribes to influential Angolans in order to secure local contracts. Reports of corruption involving a Portuguese conglomerate with suspected links to Portugal's former prime minister also surfaced, implicating an Angolan businessman who had helped the company secure construction contracts for public-works projects in Angola.

Angola was ranked 163 out of 168 countries and territories assessed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 14 / 60 (-4)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16 (-2)

Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, the state owns Angola's only daily newspaper, all national radio stations, and all but one national television station. These outlets, along with private media owned by senior officials and members of the dos Santos family, act as mouthpieces for the MPLA. Censorship and self-censorship are common.

Angolan authorities have consistently prevented independent journalists from reporting the news, denying them access to official information and events, preventing them from broadcasting, and threatening them with detention and prosecution. In May 2015, journalist Valentino Mateus was detained when he requested an interview with a police commander in Huíla. Also that month, journalist Rafael Marques de Morais received a suspended six-month sentence in a defamation case stemming from his reporting on human rights abuses in the diamond-mining industry. In October, the state attorney interviewed the director and

several employees of *O Crime* after the newspaper reported the suspected involvement of members of the police and military in drug trafficking.

The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but the government requires religious groups to meet rigorous criteria in order to receive legal recognition. In December 2015, the government proposed legislation that would reduce the membership threshold for legalization from 100,000 to 60,000. Legal approval was last granted to a new religious group in 2004. Roughly 1,200 religious groups operate illegally in Angola. All of those that have been officially recognized are Christian, despite the presence of tens of thousands of Muslims in the country. The government maintains that it has no bias against the practice of Islam. Although 15 percent of Angolans are evangelical Christians, the Universal Church is the only evangelical church recognized by the state.

In April 2015, the government reported that 13 civilians and 9 policemen were killed in a confrontation in Huambo Province between the authorities and members of the Light of the World Church, a breakaway sect led by a former Seventh-Day Adventist. Nonstate sources reported a much higher death toll, accusing the government of a massacre. Despite repeated requests from local and international human rights organizations, the government refused to allow an independent investigation of the incident. Shortly after the violence, President dos Santos declared the Light of the World Church to be a threat to peace and national unity.

There are no formal restrictions on academic freedom, though professors avoid politically sensitive topics for fear of repercussions.

While internet access is increasing in Angola, the government actively monitors internet activity and, in some instances, uses the data collected to crack down on dissidents. Offline communication is also subject to monitoring and punishment. In June 2015, police in Luanda arrested 15 young activists who had organized a book-club discussion about nonviolent resistance to authoritarian rule. They and two other suspects were charged in September with plotting a rebellion, and a trial was under way at year's end.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12 (– 1)

The constitution guarantees limited freedoms of assembly and association. In recent years, police and security forces have prohibited demonstrations, violently dispersed peaceful political gatherings, and intimidated and arrested protesters in provinces including Luanda, Malanje, and Benguela. In August 2015, government forces violently suppressed a peaceful demonstration in support of the 15 activists detained in June.

Several hundred nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in Angola, and many advocate for transparency, human rights protections, and political reform. Organizations that are critical of the government have frequently faced state interference and been threatened with closure. In March 2015, dos Santos issued a decree that requires NGOs to register with the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to operate; NGOs must obtain further authorizations to receive donations. Once registered, NGOs are required to submit to government supervision and audits.

The constitution includes the right to strike and to form unions, but the MPLA dominates the labor movement, and only a few weak independent unions exist. Still, strikes do occur: In October, cab drivers went on strike in Luanda to denounce corruption and the dearth of designated stops for loading and unloading passengers. Several taxis were vandalized and many drivers arrested during the strike.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16 (– 1)

In general, the courts are hampered by a lack of trained legal professionals, as well as insufficient infrastructure, a large backlog of cases, corruption, and extensive political

influence, particularly from the executive. Municipal courts function in 22 of 163 municipalities. Elsewhere, crimes and conflicts are frequently adjudicated by informal tribunals, or by local police.

The president appoints Supreme Court judges to life terms without legislative input. Several examples of judicial abuse and lack of due process arose in 2015, including the arbitrary arrest and irregular legal proceedings involving the 15 young political activists accused of plotting rebellion, Marques's flawed defamation case, and a separate rebellion case against Cabindan human rights activist José Marcos Mavungo, who was arrested in March and sentenced to six years in prison in September. International human rights organizations denounced Mavungo's conviction, noting the lack of evidence against him.

There is no effective protection against unjustified imprisonment, lengthy pretrial detention, extortion, or torture. In August 2015, the parliament approved a controversial new law that gave authorities greater discretion to extend pretrial detention.

Angolan jails are reported to be overcrowded, unhygienic, and plagued by sexual abuse. They also contain a number of political prisoners, advocates of the Cabindan autonomy movement, and members of peaceful activist groups.

Tensions in Cabinda remain high. The secessionist Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) and its supporters—many of whom live in exile—continue to call for talks on independence. Activists have alleged that Cabinda residents are not permitted to voice their opinions and are under constant risk of persecution and discrimination, as shown by the Mavungo case.

According to the head of police, there were more than 500,000 illegal immigrants living in Angola as of January 2015. West African immigrants complain of police harassment. Nevertheless, immigration from countries including Brazil, China, and Portugal remains high, and migrants from neighboring countries also continue to enter Angola in large numbers.

National law criminalizes "acts against nature," though there have been no recent cases of this provision being applied to same-sex sexual activity. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people sometimes suffer harassment, and few formal LGBT organizations exist. The first same-sex kiss between men to appear on national television was broadcast on a soap opera in January 2015. After many viewers complained, the show was suspended by the state broadcaster.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 3 / 16

Several organizations have been working to remove landmines that were placed during Angola's decades-long civil war. A significant drop in international funding in 2015 led to reduced demining. Landmines inhibit agriculture, construction, and freedom of movement, particularly in rural areas.

The process for securing entry and exit visas remains difficult and mired in corruption. Individuals who are critical of the government have faced problems when attempting to leave or enter the country. In November 2015, authorities prevented the well-known rapper and civic activist MCK from traveling to Brazil, where he was scheduled to give a concert. He had called for the release of the 15 people arrested in June for allegedly plotting rebellion.

Access to quality education is limited to Angola's elite and the expatriate community. Literacy rates remain low, due to the shortage of qualified teachers and the lack of school facilities, especially in rural districts. Corruption and absenteeism among some teachers continues to be a problem.

In 2015, the government continued a campaign of forced evictions in Luanda and other cities. In Viana, for example, dozens of families were evicted with no prior notice from officials.

Bribery often underpins business activity, and high-level corruption ensures that wealth and economic influence remain concentrated among those with political connections. Despite years of abundant oil revenues, Angola has one of the lowest life-expectancy rates in the world at 52 years, and a large share of the population still lives below the international poverty line.

Women enjoy legal protections and occupy cabinet positions and multiple seats in the National Assembly. However, de facto discrimination and violence against women continues, despite a 2011 law against domestic violence. Child labor is a major problem, and foreign workers are vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor in the construction and mining industries. The authorities have failed to effectively investigate human trafficking or prosecute offenders.

Antigua and Barbuda

Political Rights Rating: 2
Civil Liberties Rating: 2
Freedom Rating: 2.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 90,000
Capital: St. John's

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 33 / 40 (+2)
CIVIL LIBERTIES: 49 / 60

INTRODUCTION

In April 2015, Parliament passed a controversial banking act that increases the regulatory authority of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank over banks in Antigua and Barbuda. The move was in part a response to a financial crisis that had been sparked by a Ponzi scheme involving American investor R. Allen Stanford. Although a group of defrauded investors sued the government of Antigua and Barbuda in 2013, claiming that top officials were aware of Stanford's scheme and benefited from it, no Antiguan officials connected to the Stanford case have been brought to trial. The 2015 banking act provoked strong protests by the Antigua and Barbuda Workers Union because of restrictions on employee rights, especially severance payments, and the amount of authority the law delegates to the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank. Similar legislation was passed in other Caribbean countries.

Elections are administered by an Independent Elections Commission, whose effectiveness has improved since the 2009 elections. The electoral law now calls for continuous registration, which is considered more inclusive than the limited time period for registration that had previously been allowed for. Amendments to the Representation of the People Act were proposed in 2015 that would increase transparency in the campaign finance system.

Antigua and Barbuda has seen gradual improvement in accountability structures since 2004, when the government enacted a Freedom of Information Act. The Public Accounts

Committee can also expose governmental improprieties and wrongdoings, but historically it has not functioned effectively and there have been lengthy delays in submission of the Auditor General's report.

The country took initial steps in 2015 to join the appellate jurisdiction of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), with both major political parties signing a Memorandum of Understanding on constitutional reform in July. If successful, this would mean that the CCJ would replace the British Privy Council as the final court of appeal for the country.

The legislature abolished criminal defamation in April 2015, though certain similar cyber crimes remain subject to imprisonment or large fines under the Electronic Crimes Act of 2013.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Antigua and Barbuda, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Argentina

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 42,426,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Buenos Aires

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

In November 2015, Argentines elected Buenos Aires mayor Mauricio Macri of the centrist Cambiemos coalition as their next president. This ended a dozen years of rule by President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and her late husband, Néstor Kirchner, who held the presidency before her. By a slim 51.4 to 48.6 percent margin, Macri defeated Daniel Scioli of the ruling Front for Victory (FPV) coalition, a faction of the Justicialist Party, also known as the Peronist Party. In legislative elections, the FPV won a plurality of seats in the lower house, but lost its absolute majority there, while maintaining an absolute majority in the Senate. The Peronists lost the governorship of Buenos Aires Province for the first time since 1983, to María Eugenia Vidal of Cambiemos.

Macri took office in December and immediately began reversing some of Kirchner's populist policies, eliminating or reducing export taxes on various agricultural products, and lifting restrictions on foreign currency purchases. He also issued a number of decrees while the FPV-dominated legislature was in recess; one effectively overturned a 2009 media law designed to discourage monopolies, and another allowed Macri to fill two vacancies on the Supreme Court. The moves, which the new justice minister said were emergency measures protected by law, prompted some observers to allege that Macri was disregarding democratic processes.

In January 2015, Alberto Nisman, a federal prosecutor, accused then president Kirchner of protecting Iranian officials suspected of complicity in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires in exchange for a lucrative grain-for-oil deal. However, the night before he was to present his findings to Congress, Nisman was found dead in his home from a gunshot wound. Damián Pachter, a journalist who initially broke the news of Nisman's death on Twitter, subsequently fled to Israel, fearing his own life. A month after Nisman's death, tens of thousands of Argentines gathered in the capital to protest the government's inability to protect its own prosecutor, as well as its failure to provide justice to the victims of the bombing after more than 20 years. Following Nisman's death, Kirchner disbanded the national intelligence agency. A federal appeals court dismissed Nisman's charges against Kirchner in March. The circumstances surrounding Nisman's death were still unexplained at year's end.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 31 / 40**A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12**

As amended in 1994, the constitution provides for a president to be elected for a four-year term, with the option of reelection for one additional term. Presidential candidates must win 45 percent of the vote to avoid a runoff. The 2015 presidential election was pushed to a November runoff after neither Scioli nor Macri won a majority in the October first round; Macri narrowly prevailed in the second.

The National Congress consists of the 257-member Chamber of Deputies, whose representatives are directly elected for four-year terms, with half of the seats up for election every two years; and the 72-member Senate, whose representatives are directly elected for six-year terms, with one-third of the seats up for election every two years. While the ruling FPV won the most seats of any party in the Chamber of Deputies in October 2015 elections, it lost 26 seats compared to the previous legislature, and with it its absolute majority in the lower house. The opposition Cambiemos coalition gained 29 seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the elections. The FPV maintained its absolute majority in the Senate, gaining 2 seats to control a total of 42. Following the 2015 elections, the Cambiemos coalition controlled 15 Senate seats.

Voting in Tucumán Province's gubernatorial election in August was accompanied by the burning of ballot boxes and claims that candidates distributed bags of food to poorer citizens on election day. Upon an official announcement of the victory of Kirchnerite candidate Juan Manzur, thousands of people demonstrated peacefully in the provincial capital. Police violently dispersed the protest, employing tear gas and rubber bullets and injuring a number of people. In September, the provincial Supreme Court overturned an appeals court's decision to nullify the results, ruling that the election was valid. While the events in Tucumán sparked concern among a few observers about the general integrity of Argentine elections, few serious claims of fraud were raised following the legislative and presidential polls later in the year.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

The right to organize political parties is respected. The Peronists have been a dominant force in politics since 1946, and critics of the party have sometimes faced undue attention from tax officials in recent years. However, Argentina's multiparty political system affords opposition candidates the realistic opportunity to compete for political power, as demonstrated in the 2015 presidential election. The Justicialist (Peronist) Party has two opposing factions: the center-left FPV and the center-right Federal Peronism faction. Other parties

include Macri's centrist Radical Civic Union (UCR), the center-right Republican Proposal (PRO), and the Civic Coalition (CC), which together comprise the Cambiemos coalition. A third important force in Argentine politics is the United for a New Alternative (UNA) coalition, which includes the Renewal Front, a breakaway faction of Justicialist Party members not aligned with Kirchner.

Argentines' political choices are generally free from intimidation or harassment. Ethnic minorities have full political rights.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

Corruption plagues Argentine society, and scandals are common. Former president Carlos Menem, who currently serves as a senator, was sentenced in December 2015 to four and a half years in prison for embezzling public assets during his presidency to pay bonuses to other government officials. Menem, age 85, has congressional immunity and is not expected to serve his sentence. In October, former secretary of transportation Ricardo Jaime accepted a plea bargain in which he admitted to having accepted vacation packages and other gifts from the heads of companies that held government contracts; he received a one-and-a-half-year suspended sentence, and was fined more than \$200,000. A bribery and influence-peddling case against former vice president Amado Boudou remained open in 2015; he stands accused of secretly acquiring a majority stake in a printing firm with the intent of steering lucrative government contracts toward it. Federal courts rejected Boudou's appeal in 2015, and a trial is expected in 2016. Argentina was ranked 107 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Argentina does not have a federal law on access to information, despite several attempts to pass one in Congress. Several provinces have passed their own freedom of information laws, but enforcement and funding problems have undermined their impact. In December, Macri's administration began consulting with civil society representatives on a draft access to information law.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 48 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

Argentine law guarantees freedom of expression, and Congress decriminalized libel and slander in 2009. However, in 2015 Cristina Kirchner's administration continued to pressure opposition media through verbal attacks, disparaging critical media as political opponents. Despite multiple Supreme Court rulings urging the federal government to adhere to objective criteria for the allocation of official advertising, Kirchner's administration continued to make discriminatory use of official advertising contracts, doling them out as political rewards. Separately, in June, the high court in the province of Córdoba ruled that the region's newspapers were required by law to publish parties' political announcements free of charge for a period of ten days before each election. Press freedom advocates characterized the mandate as media expropriation and, by imposing what had to be published, a form of censorship.

In December, while the FPV-dominated legislature was on recess, newly elected president Macri issued a decree that effectively overturned a 2009 media law designed to discourage monopolies. This prompted criticism that the president was disregarding democratic processes and undermining regulatory structures established by the 2009 law.

While Argentina is a relatively safe country for journalists, provincial governments have sometimes applied selective pressure to suppress critical news. Juan Pablo Suárez, a

newspaper editor known for his criticism of the government, was accused in 2014 of sedition and “inciting collective violence.” He was the first journalist to be charged under Argentina’s 2011 antiterrorism law, which amended the penal code to prescribe doubled sentences if a crime was intended to terrorize the public. The aggravated penalty was dropped in response to strong public backlash, but his case was still pending at the end of 2015. Separately, in response to allegedly flawed electronic-voting software in the city of Buenos Aires’s local elections in July, a judge ordered a raid on the home of a whistleblower who had exposed the flaws. A judge also clamped down on internet coverage of the leaked information.

The government does not restrict access to the internet, which is widely used in Argentina. However, in August Argentina’s lower house began debating a series of reforms that would limit online expression by making it a criminal offense to publish discriminatory comments online. The vote had not taken place by year’s end.

Argentina’s constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Academic freedom is a cherished Argentine tradition and is largely observed in practice. Private discussion is vibrant and unrestricted.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are generally respected, and citizens organize protests to make their voices heard. However, in August, police violently dispersed thousands of people protesting alleged voter fraud in Tucumán Province’s gubernatorial election. Civic organizations are robust and play a major role in society, although some fall victim to Argentina’s pervasive corruption. Organized labor remains dominated by Peronist unions, and union influence has decreased in recent years. However, in March and June 2015 the country’s transportation unions called two nationwide, 24-hour general strikes, grounding flights, shutting down buses and trains, and paralyzing much of the country; the union members protested high inflation and taxes, and shrinking real wages for workers. Annual inflation in 2015 was estimated to be as high as 35 percent.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16 (– 1)

Inefficiencies and delays plague the judicial system, which can be subject to political manipulation. The Supreme Court, however, maintains relative independence. In December 2015, with the legislature on recess, Macri appointed two Supreme Court justices by decree. Argentine law allows for fair trials, a right that is generally enforced by the judiciary. Police misconduct—including torture and brutality against suspects in custody—is endemic. Prisons are overcrowded, and conditions remain substandard throughout the country. Arbitrary arrests and abuse by police are rarely punished in the courts, and police collusion with drug traffickers is common.

Drug-related violence increased in 2015 as international criminal organizations used the country as both an operational base and a transit route. The April murder of four people suspected of involvement in a drug-related dispute in Buenos Aires highlighted the increasing problem of Argentina’s drug trade. The four individuals, Paraguayan nationals, were shot at least 34 times in one of the city’s slums. A 2015 report on the drug trade by an Argentine nongovernmental organization presented evidence that Buenos Aires was home to at least 10 cocaine laboratories run by a Peruvian criminal network. Argentina’s northern and central regions have been particularly affected by the drug trade. The murder rate in the city of Rosario, in the northern province of Santa Fe, was five times the national average in 2014.

In 2005, the Supreme Court declared that laws passed in the 1980s to safeguard the military from prosecution were unconstitutional, laying the foundation for the prosecution of past military crimes. Following the ruling, then president Néstor Kirchner initiated proceedings against former officials involved in Argentina's so-called dirty war (1976–83), during which right-wing military rulers utilized brutal tactics to silence dissent. Such prosecutions continued under Cristina Kirchner's administration, with dozens of military and police officers convicted of torture, murder, and forced disappearance and sentenced to life in prison.

Argentina's indigenous peoples, who represent approximately 2.4 percent of the population, are largely neglected by the government and suffer disproportionately from extreme poverty and illness. Only 11 of Argentina's 23 provinces have constitutions recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples.

Argentina's LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community enjoys full legal rights, including the right to serve openly in the military. However, LGBT people face some degree of societal discrimination, and occasionally police brutality. A number of killings of transgender women that took place in fall 2015 remain unsolved. In September 2015, legislators in Buenos Aires Province passed a bill requiring that 1 percent of public sector positions be reserved for transgender individuals.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

The government respects citizens' constitutional right to free travel both inside and outside of Argentina. However, harsh government restrictions on foreign currency transactions have limited citizens' ability to travel and conduct business. In December, Argentina's new finance minister lifted the capital controls, and allowed the peso to float freely. Doing so allowed ordinary Argentines to purchase U.S. dollars, which was previously very difficult. Citizens generally enjoy the right to own property and establish private businesses. However, approximately 70 percent of the country's rural indigenous communities lack titles to their lands. Current laws require the government to perform a survey on land occupied by indigenous communities by November 2017. While any evictions before that time are technically illegal, forced evictions still occur. Indigenous communities increasingly struggled to defend their land rights in 2015 against oil and gas prospectors.

Women actively participate in politics in Argentina, and comprise over one-third of national legislators. Although abortion remains illegal, in 2012 the Supreme Court outlawed the prosecution of women who have had an abortion after being raped. An estimated 500,000 illegal abortions are performed each year, with a few resulting in death. Domestic violence against women is a serious problem, and women continue to face economic discrimination and gender-based wage gaps.

Same-sex marriage has been legal nationwide since 2010. A 2012 gender identity law allows people to legally change their gender without surgery or psychiatric evaluation.

Some sectors of the charcoal and brick-producing industries profit from the forced labor of men, women, and children from Argentina as well as from neighboring countries; forced labor is also present in the agriculture sector and among domestic workers and street vendors. Men, women, and children are subject to sex trafficking. Government funding for programs to assist victims of human trafficking is insufficient.

Armenia

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 3,000,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Yerevan

Freedom Rating: 4.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is examined in a separate report.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Corruption, constitutional reform, and a troubled geopolitical environment continued to present challenges to Armenia in 2015. A planned increase in electricity prices spurred mass protests in Yerevan and other cities beginning in May. Police met the protests with violence on several occasions, injuring and detaining participants as well as journalists who were covering the events.

In August, President Sargsyan formally submitted a reform proposal to transform Armenia's semipresidential government into a parliamentary system with an empowered prime minister. Although the Council of Europe's Venice Commission approved a modified version of the reforms in October, critics maintained suspicions that the plan was tailored to extend the tenures of ruling elites. In December, voters approved the proposal in a referendum marred by allegations of fraud.

In January, Armenia became a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, a regional trade alliance with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, which joined later in the year.

The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, an ethnic Armenian enclave that split from Azerbaijan following the collapse of the Soviet Union, remained tense in 2015 amid an escalation of violence that began in late 2014.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 16 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 5 / 12

Armenia has a semipresidential system with a directly elected president who may serve two consecutive five-year terms. The prime minister, nominated by a parliamentary majority and appointed by the president, forms the government. The legislature, the unicameral National Assembly, is made up of 131 members serving five-year terms. Ninety seats are chosen by proportional representation, and 41 are decided through races in single-member districts.

International election monitors documented severe limitations on opposition candidates in the 2013 presidential election, in which incumbent Sargsyan of the Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) won reelection. Observers documented the use of administrative resources for campaign purposes, as well as suspiciously high turnouts associated with support for the incumbent. International observers reported generally favorably on the 2012 parliamentary

elections, but noted government interference with the conduct of the vote and a poor procedure for appeals and complaints. The ruling HHK secured a majority with 69 seats, while its former coalition partner, the Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK), won 37 seats. The Armenian National Congress became the largest opposition party with 7 seats.

Controversial constitutional reforms, proposing a shift to parliamentarism and a fully proportional electoral system based on party lists, dominated political conversations in 2015. Critics claimed that the change would allow the term-limited president to obtain unfettered power as prime minister and solidify the HHK's electoral dominance due to the absence of a strong party system. Voter turnout in the December referendum was relatively low, and observers reported biased media coverage and problems with voter lists.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 7 / 16

People have the right to organize political parties in Armenia, but the ruling party's dominance and control of administrative resources prevents a level playing field. A total of six parties have representation in the current parliament, with the HHK holding 69 of 131 seats. The next largest party is BHK, followed by the ANC, led by former president Levon Ter-Petrosyan. Public funds for parties are minimal, and most funding is supplied by party leaders and oligarchs.

In 2014, four opposition parties banded together to challenge HHK initiatives, but their cooperation faltered in 2015 after a public dispute in February between the president and Gagik Tsarukyan, BHK leader and one of Armenia's wealthiest business magnates. During the month, Tsarukyan harshly criticized the proposed constitutional changes, organized meetings between BHK legislators and Russian officials, and encouraged Armenians to demand profound national reform. The president responded by accusing Tsarukyan of absenteeism from the parliament, launching an investigation into his commercial interests, and moving to strip him of his parliamentary mandate. Authorities subjected Tsarukyan and over a dozen associates to audits and raids on their homes and businesses. A number of BHK members left the party as a result of the harassment, while Tsarukyan escalated tensions by calling for demonstrations to demand the president's resignation. The conflict ended following a mediated meeting in late February, after which Tsarukyan called off planned demonstrations and announced his intention to leave politics. Naira Zohrabyan replaced him as head of BHK in March, and the party became more complacent during the year. Critics, including the opposition members, saw the ordeal as a campaign by the executive to neutralize the country's most viable opposition figure.

The constitutional reform proposal initially included a provision that parliamentary elections must produce a clear party majority, requiring a runoff in the absence of a clear winner. This option would have severely limited the ability of opposition parties to obtain representation and maintain stable constituencies. Following objections by domestic actors and the Council of Europe, officials abandoned the provision.

Ethnic Armenians comprise the vast majority of the population, and representatives of minority groups—of which the largest, Yezidis, make up approximately 1 percent of the population—have only been elected to public office at the local level. The reforms approved in December 2015 included quotas to ensure ethnic minority representation in the parliament.

C. Functioning of the Government: 4 / 12

The HHK and Sargsyan dominate political decision-making. The National Assembly includes some of the country's wealthiest business leaders, who continue entrepreneurial

activities despite conflicts of interest. Relationships between politicians and other oligarchs also influence policy and contribute to selective application of the law.

Corruption remains pervasive. Some senior officials faced judicial and disciplinary action for corruption-related offenses in 2015, and the government overhauled and renewed funding for the Anticorruption Council in February. However, watchdogs maintained low expectations of genuine change. Observers have noted that Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan, who has faced accusations of abuse of office and misuse of public funds, leads the Anticorruption Council. Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Armenia 95 out of 168 countries.

President Sargsyan conducted some dialogue with critics of the constitutional reform and leaders of the energy protests in 2015, indicating some willingness to cede to public opinion. However, in the absence of viable opposition, concessions do not indicate genuine accountability. Some challenges to accessing public information remain, although the parliament adopted regulations for the enforcement of Armenia's freedom of information law in October. High-ranking officials, including the prosecutor general and legislators, are required to file annual asset reports, but these declarations are rarely verified or investigated.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 30 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

There are several challenges to media freedom. Most print and broadcast outlets are affiliated with political or commercial interests, and journalists practice self-censorship to avoid harassment by government or business figures. Most independent and investigative outlets operate online. Several journalists reported being assaulted or having their equipment damaged by security forces during the energy protests in Yerevan in 2015, and a few reporters were temporarily detained. Police investigations into the incidents were ongoing at year's end. In October, the Constitutional Court issued a landmark decision in the case of *Ilur.am* editor Kristine Khanumyan, who had been ordered by a lower court to disclose her sources for a 2014 article about violence perpetrated by the Shirak province police chief. The Constitutional Court ruled that disclosure was not appropriate because the case did not involve a grave crime or the safety of an individual.

The constitution protects freedom of religion but grants the Armenian Apostolic Church—with which approximately 92 percent of Armenians identify—a special role in the “development of the national culture and preservation of the national identity.” Religious minorities have reported discrimination in the past, and some have faced difficulty obtaining permits to build houses of worship.

Although the Armenian constitution protects academic freedom, government officials hold several board positions at state universities, leaving administrative and accreditation processes open to political influence. There is some self-censorship among academics on politically sensitive subjects.

Private discussion is relatively free and vibrant. The law prohibits wiretapping or other electronic surveillance without judicial approval, but there have been reports of judges issuing warrants in cases lacking sufficient justification.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are legally guaranteed, though there are some restrictions. The civil society sector includes a few outspoken organizations and watchdog

groups, mostly in Yerevan and in northern Armenia. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) lack local funding and largely rely on foreign donors.

In January 2015, crowds gathered in Gyumri, Armenia's second largest city, following the murder of a local family by a Russian soldier who had deserted from a nearby military base. The demonstrators expressed anger at plans for the soldier to be tried by Russian courts, noting that Armenia had jurisdiction in the case according to a bilateral agreement. Protesters clashed with police, and several were injured.

Individual civil society activists were instrumental in initiating a string of protests in May after the Russian-owned Electric Networks of Armenia announced a planned increase in electricity prices, which the public perceived as a symptom of corruption and weak accountability by Armenian officials. The protests gained momentum in several cities in June, and in the capital, participants in the "Electric Yerevan" campaign blocked the city's main thoroughfare. Police forcefully dispersed the blockade, detaining over 200 and injuring several, but protesters returned and were able to continue demonstrating in June and July. In response, the government promised to subsidize the price increase and ordered an audit of Electric Networks of Armenia.

The law protects the right of workers to form and join independent unions, strike, and engage in collective bargaining. However, unions have little stature, and many are inactive.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The judiciary suffers from corruption and systemic political pressure. A 2013 report from the ombudsman's office noted rumors of a price list for bribing judges to avoid particular charges. Judges reportedly feel pressure to work with prosecutors to convict, and acquittal rates are extremely low. A March 2015 report from the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner found that the government used disciplinary hearings to pressure judges.

The rule of law does not usually prevail in civil or criminal cases, and authorities apply the law selectively. Police abuse of detainees and lengthy pretrial detentions remain a problem, and judges are generally reluctant to challenge arbitrary arrests.

The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is the subject of mediation led by Russia, the United States, and France, continued to show signs of escalation. More people were killed in the conflict in 2015 than in any other year since a ceasefire was declared in 1994.

Yezidis are Armenia's most populous ethnic minority. In 2014, the Yezidi community successfully lobbied the government to help Yezidis fleeing from violence in Iraq to resettle in Armenia. In 2015, authorities continued efforts to house and help integrate ethnic Armenian asylum seekers from Syria. Human rights watchdogs have criticized the government for discriminating against asylum seekers who are not of ethnic Armenian origin.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people continue to face violence and mistreatment at the hands of police and civilians. Although same-sex sexual activity was decriminalized in 2003, LGBT protections are not included in antidiscrimination laws.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

The law protects freedom of movement and the rights of individuals to choose their place of education, residence, and employment. In practice, access to higher education is somewhat hampered by a culture of bribery. Economic diversification and simpler regulations have increased the ease of doing business in recent years, but a lack of transparency and persistent cronyism continue to create unfair advantages for those with ties to public

officials. Armenian law adequately protects property rights, though officials do not always uphold them.

Domestic violence is common and not adequately prosecuted. The Armenian electoral code includes quotas to ensure that political parties include women on candidate lists. Nevertheless, the political system remains patriarchal, and there are only 13 women in the 131-seat National Assembly.

Armenia is a source and, to a lesser extent, destination country for men, women, and children subjected to sex and labor trafficking. According to the U.S. State Department’s 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, the government complies with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, and cooperates with antitrafficking NGOs.

Australia

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 1
Freedom Rating: 1.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 23,888,000
Capital: Canberra

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Australia has a strong, long-standing record of advancing and protecting political rights and civil liberties. However, the country continued to face criticism in 2015 from prominent domestic and international organizations for failing to meet its obligations toward asylum seekers. Additionally, the continued expansion of antiterrorism legislation raised questions about the government’s respect for fundamental freedoms.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40 (+1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

A governor general, appointed on the recommendation of the prime minister, represents the British monarch as head of state. The prime minister is the leader of the majority party or coalition in Parliament.

Voting is compulsory, and citizens participate in free and fair multiparty elections to choose representatives for the bicameral Parliament. The Senate, the upper house, has 76 seats, with 12 senators from each of the six states and two from each of the two mainland territories. Half of the state members, who serve six-year terms, are up for election every three years; all territory members are elected every three years. All 150 members of the House of Representatives, the lower house, are elected by popular preferential voting to serve three-year terms, and no state can have fewer than five representatives.

The most recent parliamentary elections were held in 2013. The Liberal Party/National Party coalition took 90 of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives. The Australian Labor Party won 55 seats, while smaller parties captured the rest. Of the 40 seats up for

election in the Senate, the Liberal coalition took 17, bringing its total to 33; Labor captured 12 for a total of 31; the Green Party took 4 for a total of 9; and smaller parties won the rest. Tony Abbott of the Liberal Party took office as prime minister, replacing Kevin Rudd of Labor.

In September 2015, Malcolm Turnbull successfully challenged Abbott for the leadership of the governing Liberal Party, winning a parliamentary vote and replacing Abbott as prime minister. Turnbull took office with promises of a change in the style of governance, with more thorough cabinet consultation and transparency—two areas in which the Abbott administration had been widely criticized.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16 (+ 1)

Political power alternates between the Labor Party and the Liberal Party/National Party coalition. The Green Party and smaller left-leaning parties tend to ally with Labor, while some rural-oriented and conservative parties often ally with the Liberals. Registration and continuing recognition as a political party require a party constitution and either one member in Parliament or 500 members on the electoral roll.

Australia's indigenous communities continue to fight for a greater voice in politics. Some voting restrictions—including the requirement of a fixed address and a ban on voting by prisoners serving a sentence of longer than three years—disproportionately affect indigenous peoples. In 2015, there were three indigenous legislators serving at the federal level; the first indigenous woman was elected to Parliament in 2013. In 2010, the Australian Election Commission established a special program to enhance the political participation of indigenous people, including by providing education about the electoral process and encouraging voting.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Anticorruption mechanisms operate at all levels of government, and laws against corruption by officials are effectively enforced. Australia was ranked 13 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. A high degree of transparency and accountability prevails in the functioning of government. Policies and initiatives are openly discussed, examined, and criticized in Parliament and the media.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 58 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

While the constitution does not explicitly protect freedoms of speech and the press, individuals and the media freely criticize the government without reprisal. Some laws restrict the publication and dissemination of material that promotes or incites terrorist acts. Ownership of private print media is highly concentrated, but there are many online, television, and radio news and entertainment outlets, both private and public. The government does not generally restrict access to the internet.

Religious and academic freedoms are generally respected. Private discussion is open and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are not explicitly codified in law, but the government respects these rights in practice. Workers can organize and bargain collectively.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and prison conditions generally meet international standards. Antiterrorism laws have tightened since 2001. Legislation enacted in 2005, with a 10-year sunset clause, allows police to detain suspects without charge and includes “shoot to kill” provisions, the criminalization of violence against the public and Australian troops overseas, and authorization for the limited use of soldiers to meet terrorist threats on domestic soil. Legal scholars and opponents of antiterrorism laws continue to question whether these measures are needed and effective. Australian immigration services have expanded the use of biometric data in the collection of fingerprints and facial images since 2011, with emphasis on individuals from countries deemed a high risk because of the presence of Islamist extremism.

Antiterrorism measures passed by Parliament in 2014 included provisions for the designation of “no-go zones” around the world. Australians traveling to such areas may be required upon return to show that they had not participated in terrorist activity. Individuals who travel to such areas without a “legitimate” reason—which include visiting family members or engaging in humanitarian work—can face up to 10 years in prison.

Further antiterrorism legislation was passed in 2015. A law adopted in December allows the government to revoke the Australian citizenship of dual nationals who engage in terrorist activities abroad or are convicted of terrorism in Australia. A bill passed in March requires internet and mobile phone providers to store users’ metadata for two years. Broad exceptions for third-party platforms and internal corporate and university networks raised questions about the law’s effectiveness. The legislation also prompted backlash from Australian privacy advocates, who argued that it enables mass surveillance disproportionate to the threat of terrorism, as well as from media freedom advocates, who criticized it for jeopardizing the ability of journalists to converse securely with sources.

Australia’s immigration and asylum policies continued to draw domestic and international condemnation in 2015, particularly in regard to the housing and vetting of asylum seekers at processing centers in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. Reports of poor living conditions, inadequate safety for women and children, lengthy delays in processing applications, and lack of sufficient healthcare and education services continued during the year. In a March 2015 report, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture stated that Australia’s handling of asylum seekers violated the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In August, the Senate published the findings of its inquiry into conditions in the Nauru facility; the report concluded that conditions at the center are inadequate and unsafe, and urged the government to remove children from all facilities in general, citing evidence of physical and sexual abuse, as well as mental trauma caused by detention.

In 2014, Australia signed a memorandum of understanding with Cambodia to relocate detainees from Nauru to Phnom Penh on a voluntary basis. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) condemned the agreement for simply shifting responsibility from one country to another, and others denounced it on the basis of Cambodia’s poor human rights record and lack of resources. In June 2015, the first four refugees to accept the relocation offer arrived in Cambodia.

The Australian Border Force Act, passed by Parliament in May, included binding secrecy and nondisclosure requirements that critics argued could prohibit workers at offshore detention centers from publicly raising concerns about the treatment of refugees, among other things. Although the government claimed that whistleblower protection law

would mitigate the new law's restrictions and allow workers to divulge information in line with their duties, opponents maintained that exceptions as well as discrepancies in the coverage areas of the two laws would leave workers vulnerable.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Citizens and legal residents in Australia enjoy the right to move freely and choose their own residence. With an open and free market economy, the country has a high level of economic freedom for businesses and individuals. Australia was ranked fourth in the world in the 2016 Index of Economic Freedom due to a stable monetary policy, prudent banking regulations, and protections for property rights.

Aboriginal peoples comprise approximately two percent of the population. Lagging considerably behind other groups in key social and economic indicators, they also suffer higher rates of incarceration, are more frequently involved in violent crimes, and report routine mistreatment by police and prison officials.

Women enjoy equal rights and are gaining greater parity in pay and promotion in public and private sector jobs. However, violence against women remains a problem, particularly for indigenous women. The military opened combat positions to women in 2012. In 2012, the government officially apologized to victims of homophobia, sexual predation, and rape in the military after a government-commissioned study found more than 1,000 claims dating back to the 1950s. In 2013, the government apologized for a policy that forced unmarried mothers to allow their babies to be adopted by childless couples. The policy lasted into the 1970s; thousands or tens of thousands of such forced adoptions are believed to have taken place.

An amendment to the Federal Marriage Act in 2004 defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman, but same-sex couples in de facto unions are afforded many of the same benefits that legally married couples receive. There were several attempts to legalize same-sex marriage in 2015, including through a cross-party bill introduced in August. While no legislative changes were made by year's end, the topic received considerable discussion, and some legislators voiced support for a referendum on the issue. Gay men and lesbians can serve in the military.

Australia is a destination country for victims of trafficking for the purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation. The government funds a support program for victims, and in 2015 began implementing a five-year action plan to combat human trafficking and slavery.

Austria

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 8,615,955

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Vienna

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Along with other countries in the European Union (EU), Austria experienced a large influx of asylum seekers and other migrants in 2015, many of them from Syria. The migration flow formed the background for increasingly stronger populist rhetoric from the ring-wing Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) party, which made gains in local elections in October. In February, legislators passed amendments to the law establishing recognition for Islam, strengthening protections for adherents of the religion while also restricting foreign funding for mosques and imams. Throughout the fall, lawmakers debated a controversial security law that would substantially increase the government's abilities to collect information with little oversight. Weak mechanisms for government transparency remained a notable concern.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40 (–1)**A. Electoral Process:** 12 / 12

The lower house of Parliament, the National Council (Nationalrat), has 183 members chosen through proportional representation at the district, state, and federal levels. Members serve five-year terms, extended from four in 2008. The president, who is elected for a six-year term, appoints the chancellor, who needs the support of the legislature to govern. The 62 members of the upper house, the Federal Council (Bundesrat), are chosen by state legislatures for five- or six-year terms.

In the 2013 legislative elections, Chancellor Werner Faymann's center-left Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) won 52 seats in the National Council, and the center-right People's Party of Austria (ÖVP) took 47. Their combined vote share of 50.9 percent, down from 78.8 percent in 2002, was their worst since World War II, and their combined number of seats fell from 108. Both parties were weakened by corruption scandals and by public discontent with their pro-EU policies. In December 2013, the SPÖ and the ÖVP reached an agreement to continue governing as a grand coalition.

The FPÖ took 40 seats in the 2013 elections, 6 more than it had won in 2008. Team Stronach for Austria (FRANK), a Euroskeptic, pro-business party founded in 2012 by Austrian-born Canadian car-parts magnate Frank Stronach, took 11 seats. The Austrian Green Party won 24 seats, while the centrist, pro-business New Austria (NEOS) won 9 seats. The far-right Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), which split from the FPÖ in 2005 and is considered less extreme, failed to win any seats, falling short of the 4 percent threshold necessary for inclusion in the National Council. Voter turnout was approximately 75 percent.

In the October 2015 municipal elections in Vienna, the FPÖ won one third of the vote but failed to muster the number needed to unseat Mayor Michael Häupl. In recent years, party leader Heinz-Christian Strache has sought to adopt a more moderate tone for the party and curb its openly xenophobic and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Nevertheless, during the election campaign, Strache expressed hostility toward refugees and immigration in general.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Although Austria has competitive political parties and free and fair elections, the traditional practice of grand coalitions has fostered public disillusionment in the political process. The participation of Slovene, Hungarian, and Roma minorities in local government remains limited despite governmental efforts to provide bilingual education, media, and access to federal funds. There is little minority representation in Parliament. After the 2013 elections, the National Council included one Muslim man and three Turkish-born Muslim

women. According to the 2014 edition of the Migrant Integration Policy Index, Austria provides immigrants with fewer opportunities for citizenship and political participation than most Western European countries.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12 (– 1)

Recent corruption scandals have damaged the reputation of Austria's political class. In August 2015, a former employee of FPÖ politician Uwe Scheuch and a media owner were convicted of abuses related to the fraudulent use of state advertising funds. In a 2013 Ernst & Young survey of business managers in Austria, more than 40 percent of respondents considered fraud and bribery to be widespread. Austria was ranked 16 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In 2014, Austria, along with Luxembourg, agreed to lift its veto of EU legislation that aims to end bank secrecy laws; among other things, the law requires member states to automatically share information on accounts held by EU citizens with the tax authorities in the citizens' home countries. A number of issues with transparency nevertheless persist. The Right to Information Rating, which assesses freedom of information laws worldwide, listed Austria last out of 104 countries assessed in its 2015 rankings. The government has also been criticized for lacking transparency in public procurement, and for failing to implement comprehensive protections for whistleblowers.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 58 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

The federal constitution and the Media Law of 1981 provide the basis for free media in Austria, and the government generally respects these provisions in practice. However, libel and slander laws protect politicians and government officials, many of whom—particularly members of the FPÖ—have filed defamation suits in recent years. Despite a 2003 law to promote media diversity, media ownership remains highly concentrated. There are no restrictions on internet access.

While there is no official censorship, Austrian law prohibits any form of neo-Nazism or anti-Semitism, as well as the public denial, approval, or justification of Nazi crimes, including the Holocaust. Legislation that came into effect in July 2015 outlawed the use of certain number and letter combinations for vehicle license plates because of their allusions to Nazism or the Islamic State (IS) militant group. The FPÖ has been accused of anti-Semitic rhetoric in recent years and has additionally been criticized for fueling anti-Muslim feelings in Austria through controversial advertising campaigns.

A number of recent high-profile court cases have centered on the balance between freedom of speech and the prohibition of hate speech. In July, based on a complaint filed by an Austrian Muslim organization, public prosecutors launched an investigation into a speech by Dutch politician Geert Wilders at an FPÖ gathering in Vienna in March. The organization claimed that Wilders, who had compared the Koran to Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and made references to Nazi ideology, had denigrated Islam and violated restrictions on speech about Nazism.

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed. Austrian law divides religious organizations into three legal categories: officially recognized religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations. Many religious minority groups have complained that the law impedes their legitimate claims for recognition and demotes them to second- or third-class status. In February, legislators amended a 1912 law that determined Islam's legal status in Austria, expanding the rights and protections granted to followers of the religion,

including officially recognizing Muslim holidays. However, local Muslim groups and religious watchdogs criticized a portion of the amendments that banned foreign funding for Muslim houses of worship and imams, noting that such restrictions do not exist for other religious groups in the country.

There are no government restrictions on academic freedom, and private discussion is both free and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are protected in the constitution and in practice. Nongovernmental organizations operate without restrictions. Trade unions are free to organize and to strike, and they are considered an essential partner in national policymaking.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and the Constitutional Court examines the compatibility of legislation with the constitution without political influence or interference. Conditions in prisons generally meet high European standards. In February 2015, Rakhat Aliyev—a former ally of Kazakhstan’s president who fell afoul of the government in 2007—was found dead in an Austrian prison, where he was in investigative custody in connection to the death of two bankers in Kazakhstan. In December, the Austrian justice ministry dismissed claims that Aliyev had been murdered.

In 2015, debate about the relationship between privacy and national security dominated public dialogue. Draft legislation on state security, which first came to a vote in Parliament in October, aimed to establish a new secret service, dramatically increase the government’s capability to collect information, and reduce judicial oversight over state security bodies. In the face of significant public backlash, the ÖVP and SPÖ agreed in November to change the draft to grant wider powers to the existing Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), rather than to a new agency. At year’s end, the legislation was scheduled for a vote in early 2016. Antiterrorism legislation passed in 2014 allowed the state to revoke the citizenship of anyone who has traveled abroad to fight with extremist militant groups.

Individuals are generally afforded equal protection under the law. However, increasing immigration flows have fueled some resentment and discriminatory practices toward minorities and foreigners. In 2015, Austria was a destination for a large number of asylum seekers as well as a major transit point for those trying to reach northern European countries, especially Germany. The government received more than 85,000 asylum applications during the year, marking an increase of more than 200 percent from 2014. While many Austrians showed themselves to be welcoming to refugees, growing numbers expressed support for the exclusionary views of the FPÖ, spurring the party’s strong showing in the Vienna local elections. In a report published in October, the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance denounced the negative and hostile rhetoric of the FPÖ and other groups toward minorities and migrants, including refugees. In November, the Austrian Press Council rebuked *Kronen Zeitung* for publishing an article suggesting that all refugees could be potential terrorists.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has criticized the country’s asylum legislation for being too restrictive. Some asylum seekers can be deported while appeals are pending, and new arrivals are asked for full statements within 72 hours. In addition, the number of people who have been naturalized has fallen dramatically since the establishment of a more restrictive national integration policy in 2009.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Austrian citizens enjoy freedom of movement and choice of residence. Roma and other ethnic minorities face discrimination in the labor and housing markets. The labor ministry has sought to promote integration of younger immigrants by providing German-language instruction and job training.

A 1979 law guarantees women's freedom from discrimination in various areas, including the workplace. However, the income gap between men and women remains significant. The 2009 Second Protection Against Violence Act increased penalties for perpetrators of domestic violence and authorized further measures against chronic offenders. Women made up 33 percent of the National Council after the 2013 elections.

A 2009 law permits civil partnerships for same-sex couples, giving them equal rights to pension benefits and alimony, but same-sex marriage is not recognized. The law does not provide same-sex couples with the same adoption rights or access to assisted reproductive technologies as heterosexual couples. In 2013, Parliament approved an amendment to the civil code to allow the biological children of an individual to be adopted by his or her partner, but it rejected a bill that would grant same-sex couples unrestricted adoption rights.

Azerbaijan

Political Rights Rating: 7↓

Population: 9,780,780

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Baku

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ratings Change: Azerbaijan's political rights rating declined from 6 to 7 due to an intensified crackdown on criticism and dissent; widespread violations in connection with the November 1 parliamentary elections; and serious violations of the right to a fair trial.

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Nagorno-Karabakh, which is examined in a separate report.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

President Ilham Aliyev and his Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP) escalated an aggressive campaign against criticism and opposition in 2015. Parliamentary elections in November took place amid unabated repression and with limited monitoring, as most international observer groups declined to cover the vote. International rights groups used the elections and the inaugural European Games, which Azerbaijan hosted in June, to draw global attention to the country's dismal human rights record. The government's crackdown on fundamental freedoms showed no sign of subsiding, however, and harassment, detention, and prosecution of opposition politicians, journalists, civil society activists, and their families continued during the year.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 5 / 40 (– 1)**A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12**

Azerbaijan's constitution provides for a strong presidency, and the 125-member Milli Majlis (National Assembly) exercises little or no independence from the executive branch. The president and members of parliament serve five-year terms; a 2009 referendum eliminated presidential term limits.

Elections since the early 1990s have been considered neither free nor fair by international observers. The 2013 presidential election saw incumbent Aliyev—who succeeded his father, Heydar Aliyev, in 2003—reelected to a controversial third term in office, in a vote marred by widespread irregularities and electoral fraud.

Parliamentary elections were held in November 2015 amid an intensifying government campaign against criticism and dissent; the main opposition parties boycotted the vote. According to official results, the ruling YAP won 71 seats, with 41 going to independent candidates who tend to support the ruling party, and the remaining 12 split among small progovernment parties. Several international election observers declined to send monitors. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) canceled its mission, stating that restrictions placed by the government on the number of observers would make effective and credible observation impossible. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly also canceled its mission, citing the restrictions placed on the OSCE/ODIHR. The European Parliament also declined to send a monitoring mission due to widespread human rights violations taking place in the country. Although the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) sent a small monitoring mission that claimed the elections met international standards, several human rights groups questioned the delegation's independence, and three of its members subsequently issued a dissenting opinion.

The electoral laws and framework do not ensure the free and fair conduct of elections. The nomination process for members of electoral commissions places the bodies under the influence of the ruling party, and commission members have been known to unlawfully interfere with the election process and obstruct the activities of observers. Complaints of electoral violations do not receive adequate or impartial treatment by the commissions or the judiciary.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 3 / 16

The political environment in Azerbaijan is neither pluralistic nor competitive. President Aliyev's YAP has dominated national politics since its founding in 1995, and nominal opposition groups and independents in the parliament tend to support the government.

Amendments to the electoral code in 2009 limited candidates' access to public campaign funding and reduced the official campaign period from 28 to 22 days. Changes made to laws on freedom of assembly and association in 2012 and 2013 further restricted candidates' ability to organize and hold rallies. The political opposition has virtually no access to coverage on television, which remains the most popular news source in Azerbaijan.

Opposition politicians are subject to arbitrary arrest on dubious charges as well as physical violence and other forms of intimidation, and have also reported widespread targeting of their relatives, some of whom have faced job dismissal and harassment by police. Tofiq Yagublu, deputy chairman of the Musavat party, and Ilgar Mammadov, leader of the Republican Alternative movement, remained in prison after being convicted in 2014 on spurious charges of involvement in mass disorder. Four activists from the opposition youth movement NIDA (Exclamation) who were arrested in 2013 in connection to antigovernment protests also remained behind bars in 2015.

The dominance of the ruling party limits the freedom of political parties to represent a diversity of interests and views, and there are no meaningful mechanisms to promote political representation of minorities.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12 (– 1)

The head of government and national legislative representatives are not elected in a free or fair manner. Aliyev and the YAP, which cemented its domination of legislative processes in the 2015 elections, determine and implement the policies of the government with little opposition.

Corruption is widespread, and wealth from the country's massive oil and gas exports creates ever-greater opportunities for graft. Because critical institutions, including the media and judiciary, are largely subservient to the president and ruling party, government officials are rarely held accountable for corruption. Several investigative reports published by foreign media in recent years have revealed evidence that President Aliyev and his immediate family control prodigious private assets, including monopolies in the Azerbaijani economy's most lucrative sectors. Despite the lack of safeguards against systemic corruption, the establishment of one-stop public service centers and e-government services in recent years may have contributed to improved public perceptions regarding petty corruption. Azerbaijan was ranked 119 of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In 2012, the president signed a series of legal amendments to allow companies' organizational structures and ownership to remain secret, significantly limiting journalists' ability to uncover corruption. Although public officials are nominally required to submit financial disclosure reports, disclosure procedures and compliance remain unclear, and the reports are not publicly accessible. In April 2015, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), an international platform that promotes good governance and transparency in resource-rich countries, demoted Azerbaijan from its membership to candidate status due to noncompliance with EITI standards for human rights.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 11 / 60 (– 3)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 3 / 16 (– 1)

While the constitution guarantees freedom of the press, the authorities severely restrict the media in practice. Broadcast outlets generally reflect progovernment views. Most television stations are controlled by the government, which also controls approval of broadcast licenses. Although there is more pluralism in the print media, the majority of newspapers are owned by the state, and circulation and readership are relatively small. Independent and opposition papers struggle financially and have faced heavy fines and other pressures as retaliation for critical coverage. Local radio broadcasts of international news services, including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Voice of America, have been banned since 2009, though they are available online. The authorities shuttered the Baku office of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in 2014. The few critical outlets that are able to disseminate information in the country—including the independent online television station Meydan TV, which operates from Germany—face constant pressure and risk. In 2015, representatives of Meydan TV and other critical outlets reported that their family members in Azerbaijan had faced threats, interrogations, and arbitrary detentions.

Defamation remains a criminal offense punishable by exorbitant fines and imprisonment. Journalists are threatened and assaulted with impunity, and many have been detained or imprisoned on fabricated charges of drug or weapons possession, ethnic hatred, high

treason, and hooliganism, among others. In January 2015, Seymour Hazi, a journalist known for critical coverage of the government, was sentenced to five years in prison for hooliganism. In September, investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova was sentenced to seven and a half years on charges of embezzlement, tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of power. Ismayilova, who hosted a radio show for the RFE/RL Azeri service, had published extensively about human rights violations and corruption among the ruling elites, including the president's family, and had previously faced smear campaigns, threats, and travel bans in connection to her work. In December, Rauf Mirkadirov of the *Zerkalo* newspaper was sentenced to six years in prison for allegedly spying for Armenia. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, there were eight reporters behind bars as of December.

Rasim Aliyev, an independent reporter and acting chairman of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS), which was shuttered in 2014, died in August after being severely beaten. Although the attack was ostensibly carried out by associates of a soccer player he had criticized on Facebook, Aliyev had reported receiving death threats before his social media post. It remained unclear at year's end whether the assailants' motive was connected to Aliyev's journalistic work.

The government restricts the practice of minority and "nontraditional" religions and denominations, largely through burdensome registration requirements and interference with the importation and distribution of printed religious materials. Among other restrictive laws, a 2011 measure prescribed prison sentences for leaders of unsanctioned religious services. A number of mosques have been closed in recent years, ostensibly for registration or safety violations. Dozens of individuals faced legal repercussions due to their beliefs in 2015. Several meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses were raided during the year, and members of the sect continued to be detained for allegedly violating state restrictions on the practice of religion. In June, the authorities denied reentry to the country's only legally acting Georgian Orthodox priest without providing official grounds. In November, police led a raid in Nardaran as part of an operation to arrest members of the unregistered Muslim Unity Movement, including founder and Shiite cleric Taleh Bagirov. At least four town residents and two police officers died in the raid. Bagirov and 13 others were arrested on several criminal charges, including conspiracy to overthrow the government.

The authorities have long linked academic freedom to political activity. Some professors and teachers have reported being dismissed for links to opposition groups, and students have faced expulsion and other punishments for similar reasons.

Law enforcement bodies are suspected to monitor private telephone and online communications—particularly of activists, political figures, and foreign nationals—without judicial oversight. The escalation of government persecution of critics and their families has undermined the assumption of privacy and eroded the openness of private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12

The government restricts freedom of assembly. Legal amendments increasing fines for organizing or participating in unauthorized protests came into effect in 2013, and changes adopted later that year extended the maximum periods of administrative detention for certain assembly-related offenses. Dozens of people were arrested in connection with a wave of antigovernment protests in early 2013, some of whom remained imprisoned at the end of 2015. In August 2015, police in Mingechevir responded with force to activists protesting the death of a man in police custody, and detained 21 participants.

Other regressive laws require nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to register all grants and donations with the Ministry of Justice, and to inform authorities of all donations

over \$250. The rules have been used to pressure both local and foreign organizations, many of which were forced to suspend operations when their bank accounts were frozen, and in some cases, their offices raided and closed. Officials increased hostile rhetoric towards foreign-funded NGOs, accusing them of undermining political stability.

A number of prominent rights activists were sentenced to prison on spurious charges in 2015. Among many cases, in April, Human Rights Club chairman Rasul Jafarov received a six-and-a-half-year term—later reduced on appeal by three months—for illegal entrepreneurship, tax evasion, and abuse of office. In August, Leyla Yunus, director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy, was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison on similar charges, and her husband, historian and academic Arif Yunus, received seven years in the same case. The two were conditionally released in December and November, respectively, due to deteriorating health. Prosecutors were pursuing separate charges of treason—based on allegations of spying for Armenia—against the couple at year’s end.

Although the law permits the formation of trade unions and the right to strike, the majority of trade unions remain closely affiliated with the government, and most major industries are dominated by state-owned enterprises.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16 (–1)

The judiciary is corrupt, inefficient, and subservient to the executive branch. In 2015, several politicized trials—including those of Aliyev, Ismayilova, Jafarov, and the Yunuses—provided further evidence of the judiciary being used to punish criticism of the government. A local coalition of nongovernmental organizations estimated that there were 93 political prisoners in the country as of December. Arbitrary arrest and detention are common, and detainees are often held for long periods before trial. Opposition figures, journalists, and activists who were arrested or sentenced in recent years have reported a variety of due process violations, including restricted access to legal counsel, fabrication and withholding of evidence, and abuse during arrest and interrogation. Leyla Yunus, among others, reported being psychologically and physically abused by prison officials, who also repeatedly denied her adequate access to doctors. Medical care in prisons is generally inadequate, and overcrowding is common. Torture is sometimes used to extract confessions.

Some members of ethnic minority groups have complained of discrimination in areas including education, employment, and housing. Although same-sex sexual activity is not a criminal offense, antidiscrimination laws do not specifically protect LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people, who have reported police harassment and other forms of bias or abuse.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16 (–1)

The government has increasingly restricted freedom of movement, particularly foreign travel, for opposition politicians, journalists, and civil society activists. Photojournalist and blogger Mehman Huseynov, for example, faces a travel ban in connection to an ongoing politically motivated criminal case against him. In July 2015, four staff members of Meydan TV were barred from leaving the country, and informed that they appear on a government blacklist. Also in July, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that Azerbaijani authorities’ refusal to issue a passport to Popular Front Party chairman Ali Kerimli violated his freedom of movement.

Property rights and free choice of residence are affected by government-backed development projects that often entail forced evictions, unlawful expropriations, and demolitions

with little or no notice. The authorities often violate the right of individuals to receive adequate compensation for expropriated property.

Traditional societal norms and poor economic conditions restrict women’s professional roles, and they remain underrepresented in both national and local government. Domestic violence remains a problem, and Azerbaijan is a source, transit point, and destination for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. The U.S. State Department’s 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report* maintained Azerbaijan’s Tier 2 ranking due to the government’s increased number of trafficking investigations and the enactment of a new national action plan.

Bahamas

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 1
Freedom Rating: 1.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 377,000
Capital: Nassau

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 54 / 60 (–4)

Harsh new immigration policies enacted in 2014 and 2015 have drawn protests from domestic and international observers, who decry inhumane conditions at migrant detention centers and the detention of children, and say the policies unjustly target people of Haitian descent. The new policies also threaten to block children born in the Bahamas to undocumented migrants from attending primary and secondary schools, and to make it more difficult for Bahaman-born children of migrants to attend universities. The immigration measures have served to further exacerbate stigma and discrimination against Haitian-Bahaman and Haitian migrants.

In June 2015, an unarmed Haitian migrant was confirmed to have been shot in the back of the neck by a police officer in an immigration raid, contradicting official reports. He was then detained for five months before finally being deported, though his lawyers claimed that they had never seen a copy of the deportation order against him, or the order permitting his detention.

In 2015 the government once again delayed a referendum, originally proposed in 2012, to end gender-based discrimination in the acquisition and transmission of Bahamian nationality. Under current rules, a child born to a Bahaman father and a non-Bahaman mother who are unmarried is not a Bahaman citizen at birth, nor is a child born outside the Bahamas to a Bahamian mother and a non-Bahamian father. Neither do children born in the Bahamas to non-Bahaman parents gain citizenship upon birth.

Separately, in March 2015, allegations emerged that V. Alfred Gray, a cabinet official and member of parliament, had abused his power in order to win the release of a constituent who had been convicted of a crime. While Gray admitted to contacting a magistrate in connection with the matter, the attorney general in May declined to pursue allegations of judicial interference against him. The developments raised concerns about political interference in the judicial system.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in the Bahamas, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Bahrain

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 1,412,300

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Manama

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,5,NF	5,5,NF	5,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,PF	6,6,PF	6,6,PF	6,6,PF	5,6,PF	7,6,PF

INTRODUCTION

After the opposition's boycott of the 2014 parliamentary elections and unsuccessful attempts at compromise, relations between Bahrain's government and the opposition remained tense in 2015. The opposition groups Al-Wefaq and the National Democratic Action Society, among others, faced heightened harassment during the year. In June, a Bahraini court sentenced Al-Wefaq president Ali Salman to four years in prison on a number of serious charges, including promotion of violent political change. Security forces arrested Ibrahim Sharif, former leader of the National Democratic Action Society, on similar charges in July, a month after releasing him from a prison sentence for his involvement in the 2011 uprising. Separately, authorities punished a range of critics, dissidents, and suspected extremists—including 72 people in January alone—by stripping them of citizenship.

Attacks on freedom of speech and the press continued during the year. In February, the government shuttered the satellite television station Al-Arab, owned by a Saudi prince, just hours after its launch because the station aired an interview with a leading member of Al-Wefaq. In August, authorities temporarily shuttered *Al-Wasat*, one of Bahrain's five Arabic daily newspapers, after it published criticism of the government.

Protesters and security forces clashed on several occasions. Police abuse, including arbitrary arrests and torture in custody, continued during the year, as did bomb attacks by civilians against police. In an exceptional case in May, six police officers were convicted for having tortured prisoners suspected of drug smuggling, one of whom had died.

The government continued its long-standing policy of naturalizing expatriates in an effort to tip the demographic weight of the country away from its Shiite majority.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 4 / 40 (– 1)**A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12**

The National Action Charter of Bahrain was approved in 2001, and the country was proclaimed a constitutional kingdom the following year. The 2002 constitution gives the king power over the executive, legislative, and judicial authorities. He appoints cabinet ministers and members of the 40-seat Consultative Council, the upper house of the National Assembly. The lower house, or Council of Representatives, consists of 40 elected members serving four-year terms. The National Assembly may propose legislation, but the cabinet drafts the laws.

Al-Wefaq, the country's leading Shiite opposition society, withdrew its 18 members from the Council of Representatives in 2011 and boycotted the interim elections to protest the government's crackdown on Shiite Muslims. As a result, all 40 seats went to government supporters. Al-Wefaq boycotted the 2014 legislative elections as well, allowing progovernment candidates to sweep the legislature once more. Largely progovernment independents won 37 of the 40 lower house seats. The remaining seats went to major Sunni societies.

The government touted the 2014 elections as a success, with a reported 51.5 percent voter turnout for the first round despite the opposition boycott. Al-Wefaq, however, estimated voter turnout at less than 30 percent. The government appears to have manipulated the vote by redrawing electoral districts and making monitoring more difficult in order to undercut the rise of potentially populist political networks, such as Islamist groups.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16

While formal political parties are illegal, the government has generally allowed political societies or groupings to operate after registering with the Ministry of Justice.

Bahrain has been in political crisis since 2011, when Bahraini activists, mostly from economically depressed Shiite communities, galvanized widespread support for political reform and against sectarian discrimination. The government declared martial law in response to the uprising and instituted a prolonged and violent crackdown.

While the government claims that political societies remain free to operate, it has imprisoned key opposition leaders. In addition to Salman and Sharif, a number of other opposition figures faced pressure in 2015. In August, police arrested former lawmaker and Al-Wefaq member Hassan Isa after he returned from a trip to Iran, accusing him of financing terrorism. The targeting of opposition figures follows several years of failed efforts to create cooperation. The government relaunched the so-called National Dialogue in 2013 in an attempt to engage the opposition in the political process but suspended it in 2014, when Al-Wefaq withdrew from the talks after one of its leaders was arrested for criticizing the government. After Al-Wefaq announced a boycott of the 2014 elections, a Bahraini court suspended the society's operations for three months.

A 2005 law makes it illegal to form political associations based on class, profession, or religion. The majority Shiite population is underrepresented in government.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

Bahrain has some anticorruption laws, but enforcement is weak, and high-ranking officials suspected of corruption are rarely punished. A source of frustration for many citizens is the perception that Khalifa bin Salman al-Khalifa, the king's uncle and Bahrain's prime minister since 1971, is both corrupt and a key opponent of reform.

Bahrain was ranked 50 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 3 / 0 (– 1)

The government has made concerted efforts to erode Bahrain's Shiite majority, mostly by promoting citizenship for foreign-born Sunnis. In 2015, the government maintained systemic sectarian discrimination, and continued recruiting Sunnis to become citizens and serve in the country's security services. Since 2011, the government has maintained a heavy security presence in primarily Shiite villages. Security forces restrict the movements of Shiite citizens, periodically destroy their property, and arrest critics and activists.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 10 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief:** 2 / 16

The government owns all broadcast media outlets, and the private owners of Bahrain's three main newspapers have close ties to the state. Self-censorship is encouraged by the vaguely worded 2002 Press Law, which allows the state to imprison journalists for criticizing the king or Islam or for threatening national security. In 2014, the king enacted a law criminalizing insults against him, with offenses carrying steep fines and a prison term of up to seven years. The government continues to block a number of opposition websites, including those that broadcast live events.

The government and its supporters have used the press to smear human rights and opposition activists repeatedly since 2011, most notably in separate campaigns against the opposition newspaper *Al-Wasat* and its editor, Mansoor al-Jamri. In August 2015, authorities suspended *Al-Wasat* after it ran an editorial criticizing the government and its supporters for routinely smearing opposition figures; the newspaper resumed operations after a week.

Several other individuals and outlets were targeted for exercising freedom of expression. In February, authorities closed the Manama-based television station Al-Arab just hours after it began operations because the outlet, which employed more than 200 people, aired an interview with a leading Al-Wefaq official. In November, photographer Sayed Ahmed Al-Mousawi was sentenced to 10 years in prison for allegedly supporting terrorism and stripped of his citizenship. Security forces arrested Al-Mousawi in 2014 after he photographed a series of protests, and held him for more than a year without formal charge. In December, police arrested Mahmoud al-Jaziri, a journalist covering parliamentary issues for *Al-Wasat*, on suspicion of involvement in terrorist activity. Media watchdogs denounced the arrest as unfounded; al-Jaziri was in detention without charge at year's end.

Islam is the state religion. However, non-Muslim minorities are generally free to practice their faiths. All religious groups must obtain a permit from the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs to operate legally, though the government has not punished groups that operate without permits.

Shiite religious and political figures face significant political hurdles to operating openly. In October, Shiite clerics lodged a complaint over the removal of black flags used in ceremonies for the Day of Ashura, which commemorates the death of the grandson of the prophet Muhammad. The identity of the perpetrators remained unclear at year's end.

Academic freedom is not formally restricted, but scholars who criticize the government are subject to dismissal. In 2011, a number of faculty members and administrators were fired for supporting the call for democracy, and hundreds of students and some faculty were expelled. Those who remained were forced to sign loyalty pledges.

There are strong suspicions that security forces use networks of informers, and that the government monitors the telephone and online communications of activists, critics, and opposition members. Users of social-media platforms have faced charges of "misusing" them by posting content unfavorable to the regime.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12

Citizens must obtain a license to hold demonstrations, which are banned from sunrise to sunset in any public arena. Police regularly use violence to break up political protests, most of which occur in Shiite villages. In 2013, in face of ongoing protests and rising levels of violence, King Hamad decreed additions to Bahrain's antiterrorism law that imposed heavy penalties on those convicted of demonstrating unlawfully, including large fines and the stripping of citizenship.

The 1989 Societies Law prohibits any nongovernmental organization (NGO) from operating without a permit. In 2014, the Ministry of Justice ordered all groups and associations to obtain permission before meeting with non-Bahraini diplomats and officials, limiting the contact of opposition and human rights networks with potentially supportive foreign governments and organizations. The order also required a government official to be present at any interaction. In August 2015, activist Maitham al-Salman of the Bahrain Human Rights Observatory was arrested after attending a meeting of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Bahraini human rights defenders continued to face harassment, intimidation, and prosecution on dubious grounds. Ghada Jamsheer, a prominent women's rights activist, was sentenced to prison in June for alleging corruption against several members of the royal family. Also in June, a court extended the four-year prison sentence of activist Zainab al-Khawaja by an additional nine months. Al-Khawaja, daughter of the imprisoned activist Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, was originally sentenced in 2014 for tearing up a picture of King Hamad. In July, the king pardoned human rights activist Nabeel Rajab, who was serving a six-month prison sentence after being convicted of insulting state institutions.

Bahrainis have the right to establish independent labor unions, but workers must give two weeks' notice before a strike, and strikes are banned in a variety of economic sectors. Private-sector employees cannot be dismissed for union activities, but harassment of unionist workers occurs in practice. Foreign workers lack the right to organize or seek help from Bahraini unions. Household servants remain particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

F. Rule of Law: 1 / 16

The king appoints all judges, and courts are subject to government pressure. Members of the royal family hold all senior security-related offices. Bahrain's criminal courts and those responsible for personal status laws are largely beholden to political interests. The country's judicial system is seen as corrupt and biased in favor of the royal family and its backers.

Although Bahrain has criminalized torture and claims it does not hold political prisoners, the country's prisons are full of human rights and prodemocracy activists. While some detainees are periodically denied access to family and lawyers, others enjoy limited opportunities for phone calls and other amenities. Detainees report frequent maltreatment by prison officials, who are rarely held accountable for abuse. In an exceptional case in May 2015, six police officers were convicted for having tortured prisoners suspected of drug smuggling, one of whom had died.

In 2011, the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry (BICI) concluded that security personnel had used excessive force when dispersing protests that year. In 2013, at the recommendation of BICI, the government created a police ombudsman to investigate allegations of brutality and the excessive use of force by security personnel. While several police officers were sentenced to prison terms as a result, including one who received seven years for killing a protester in 2011, sentences for those convicted of killing protesters have been light compared to those for political activists.

Bahrain's antiterrorism law prescribes the death penalty for members of terrorist groups and prison terms for those who use religion to spread extremism. Critics have argued that the law's definition of terrorist crimes is too broad, and that it has encouraged the use of torture and arbitrary detention. In November 2015, authorities arrested 47 people for allegedly having ties to Iran and planning terrorist attacks.

Bomb attacks continued to target police. In July 2015, an explosion in the village of Sitra killed two police officers and injured six others. A blast in August in the village of Karanah led to the death of an officer and injured seven others, including civilian bystanders.

The government uses revocation of citizenship as a punitive measure, particularly against critics and dissidents. While not all individuals who lose their citizenship are deported, they are forced to face the difficulties arising from a stateless status. In January, authorities stripped at least 72 people—among them Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, a member of the Bahrain Institute for Human Rights and Democracy, and Ali Abdulemam, an activist and blogger—of their citizenship on vague grounds related to national security and stability. An additional 56 people lost their citizenship in June after being convicted of operating a terrorist cell.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation is common, and most LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people hide their gender identity. Same-sex sexual activity is not illegal, but individuals have reportedly been punished for it.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

The government continued to obstruct foreign travel by key opposition figures and activists in 2015. Authorities also restricted movement inside the country, particularly for residents of largely Shiite villages outside Manama. A tight security cordon blocked easy access to the capital.

Although registered businesses are largely free to operate, obtaining approval can be difficult due to high capital requirements and political influence on the economy. For the wealthy elites who dominate the business sector, property rights are generally respected and expropriation is rare. However, Shiite citizens encounter difficulties and in some cases bans on purchasing housing and land. The al-Khalifa family has gifted vast swaths of land to regime cronies.

Although women have the right to vote and participate in elections, they are underrepresented politically. Women won three parliamentary seats in the 2014 elections. Women are generally not afforded equal protection under the law. The government drafted a personal status law in 2008, but withdrew it in 2009 under pressure from Shiite clergy; the Sunni portion was later passed by the parliament. Personal status and family law issues for Shiite Bahrainis are consequently still governed by Sharia (Islamic law) court rulings based on the interpretations of predominantly male religious scholars, rather than by any formal statute.

According to the U.S. State Department's 2016 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Bahrain is a destination for victims of human trafficking for forced labor and sexual exploitation. Some employers subject migrant workers to forced labor, and there are reports that abusers withhold workers' documentation in order to prevent them from leaving or reporting to the authorities. The government has taken steps to combat trafficking in recent years, but efforts to investigate and prosecute perpetrators remain weak.

↓ Bangladesh

Political Rights Rating: 4

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Freedom Rating: 4.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Trend Arrow: Bangladesh received a downward trend arrow due to a series of high-profile murders by Islamist militants, increasing restrictions on critical journalists, and censorship of media content.

Population: 160,411,000

Capital: Dhaka

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh continued to experience political and social unrest in 2015 as the ruling Awami League (AL) consolidated power, resisted calls for fresh elections, and clamped down on dissent. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) engaged in street action but found its operations hampered by the harassment of key party officials as well as by mass preventive detentions of party activists. The Islamist Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) party faced similar restrictive moves from the authorities in addition to ongoing proceedings against its leaders by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), which was formed to try war crimes and other atrocities committed during the 1971 war of independence. Several high-ranking JI members were executed during the year as a result of ICT rulings.

Harassment of outspoken civil society groups and opposition media continued to escalate, and the killing of four secular bloggers and a publisher by Islamist militant groups marked a sharp deterioration in the space for freedom of expression. Attacks against religious minorities by nonstate actors also escalated at the end of the year.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 21 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 7 / 12

Members of the unicameral National Parliament and the largely ceremonial president serve for five years. The National Parliament is composed of 350 members, 300 of whom are directly elected. Political parties elect a total of 50 female members based on their share of elected seats. The president is elected by the legislature.

In the 2014 national elections, the BNP and 17 allied parties boycotted the vote to protest what they said were unfair circumstances. This left the majority of elected seats (153) uncontested, ensuring an AL victory. The AL won 234 parliamentary seats, the Jatiya Party (JP) won 34, and independents and minority parties captured the remainder. Western monitoring groups declined to send election observers and criticized the conditions under which the polls were held. The elections were also marred by extensive violence—Human Rights Watch termed them the bloodiest since the country’s independence—and intimidation by a range of political parties. As a result, voter turnout was low at 22 percent, compared with 87 percent in 2008. A number of attacks specifically targeted members of the country’s Hindu and Christian minority groups, affecting around 700 people.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 9 / 16

Bangladesh has a strong two-party system in which power alternates regularly between political coalitions led by the AL and BNP. Following a series of parliamentary boycotts in 2013, the BNP boycotted the 2014 elections and continued to engage in street action in 2015 with the aim of forcing a change in government. The JI party was banned from taking part in the 2014 elections because of its overtly Islamist charter; the constitution bans religiously based political parties. A monthlong series of mass opposition protests, *hartals* (strikes), and transport blockades in early 2015 left more than 60 dead and dozens of others injured; more than 10,000 opposition activists were temporarily detained, and BNP leader Khaleda Zia was confined to the party headquarters for more than a month. The human rights group Odhikar registered more than 197 deaths and more than 8,300 people injured as a result of inter- or intraparty clashes during the year.

Ruling party harassment of the opposition BNP and JI parties remained widespread in 2015. Many BNP party leaders were imprisoned, under house arrest, living in hiding or exile, or facing serious legal charges that could bar them from office. An arrest warrant for Zia was issued in February, and legal proceedings against her continued throughout the year. Members of the JI faced ongoing waves of arrests. In September, security forces arrested 13 JI members on suspicion of fomenting discord in the garment sector by detonating homemade explosives. Meanwhile, authorities continued to implement death sentences ordered by the ICT against JI leaders; among others, Muhammad Kamaruzzaman was executed in April, and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid and Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury in November.

Religious minorities remain underrepresented in politics and state agencies, though the AL government has appointed several members of such groups to leadership positions.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12

Endemic corruption and criminality, weak rule of law, limited bureaucratic transparency, and political polarization have long undermined government accountability. Moreover, regular opposition boycotts of the National Parliament have significantly hampered the legislature's role in providing thorough scrutiny of government policies, budgets, and proposed legislation.

Bangladesh was ranked 139 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed by Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Under the AL government, anticorruption efforts have been weakened by politicized enforcement and subversion of the judicial process. In particular, the Anticorruption Commission (ACC) has become ineffective and subject to overt political interference. The ACC law was amended in 2013 to remove its authority to bring cases against officials without permission from the government. The government continues to bring or pursue corruption cases against the BNP; proceedings against Zia, among others, were ongoing in 2015.

The 2009 Right to Information Act mandates public access to all information held by public bodies and overrides secrecy legislation. Although it has been unevenly implemented, journalists and civil society activists have had some success in using it to obtain information from local governing authorities.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 28 / 60 (-1)**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 7 / 16 (-1)**

Bangladesh's media environment became less lively in 2015 amid expanding legal and regulatory restrictions and increasing harassment of and physical attacks against reporters

and bloggers. In February, the news show *Frontline* was suspended, allegedly because its host refused to defer to editorial guidance from the authorities. Contempt of court rulings are increasingly issued against journalists and other independent voices; in August, the Supreme Court upheld a contempt of court ruling against two editors of the Bengali daily *Janakantha*. Several dozen civil society activists who criticized the 2014 contempt ruling against British journalist David Bergman were also charged with contempt in 2015; most of the defendants apologized in order to avoid conviction. The 2014 National Broadcasting Policy allows for restrictions on coverage that is critical of the government or security forces or that is determined to threaten national security.

Violence against members of the media became markedly worse in 2015. Four avowedly secular or atheist bloggers and a publisher were murdered during the year, and several others were seriously injured. Islamist militant groups such as the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) and Ansar al-Islam were linked to the killings; although several ABT members were arrested in August, the government's response to the killings was criticized as insufficient and as a contributor to the diminishing space for free expression in the country. Dozens of bloggers remain on an Islamist "hit list," and some have fled or gone into hiding due to threats. In December, eight individuals, including the head of ABT, were convicted on charges related to the 2013 murder of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider. Among those convicted, two students were sentenced to death.

Censorship of digital content, including blocks on YouTube, Facebook, and high-profile Bengali blogs, has become increasingly common. During the political unrest in January, access to online messaging services such as WhatsApp was barred; key social media sites were also blocked for weeks near the end of the year. The Information and Communication Technology Act was used to arrest and charge a number of individuals for exercising freedom of expression online; Mohon Kumar Mondol, director of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) LEDARS, was charged in September for posting criticism on Facebook about the hajj, the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Various forms of artistic expression, including books and films, are occasionally banned or censored.

A 2011 constitutional amendment reaffirmed the secular nature of the state while also confirming Islam as the official religion; the Supreme Court rejected a challenge against provisions for the latter in September 2015. Although religious minorities have the right to worship freely, they face societal discrimination as well as harassment and legal repercussions for proselytizing. Minority groups and their houses of worship are occasionally the targets of violent attacks. Members of the Ahmadiyya sect are considered heretical by some Muslims, and despite state protection, they have encountered violence, boycotts, and demands that the state declare them non-Muslims. They are also occasionally denied permission to hold religious events. A number of attacks against religious minorities took place in late 2015, targeting Hindu, Christian, Ahmadiyya, and Shiite Muslim individuals and houses of worship.

While authorities largely respect academic freedom, research on sensitive political and religious topics is reportedly discouraged. Political polarization at many universities, including occasional clashes involving the armed student wings of the three main parties, inhibits education and access to services. Open private discussion of sensitive religious and political issues is restrained by fear of harassment.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

The constitution provides for the rights of assembly and association, but the government regularly bans gatherings of more than five people. Nevertheless, many demonstrations took

place in 2015. Authorities sometimes try to prevent rallies by arresting party activists, and protesters are frequently injured and occasionally killed during clashes in which police use excessive force.

Many NGOs operate in Bangladesh. While most are able to function without onerous restrictions, the use of foreign funds must be cleared by the NGO Affairs Bureau, which can also approve or reject individual projects. Groups that are seen as overly critical of the government, particularly on issues concerning human rights, are regularly denied permission for proposed projects and have been subject to escalating harassment and surveillance. Leading human rights NGO Odhikar continued to experience significant harassment in 2015, including judicial action, blocks on funding, surveillance, and interference in public activities.

Formation of labor unions became easier in 2015 due to legislative reforms. However, union leaders who attempted to organize or unionize workers continued to face dismissal or serious intimidation, including physical attacks. Organizations that advocate for labor rights, such as the Bangladesh Center for Workers' Solidarity, have also faced increased harassment over the past several years. Worker grievances fuel unrest at factories, particularly in the rapidly expanding garment industry, where strikes and protests against low wages and unsafe working conditions are common.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

Politicization of the judiciary remains an issue despite a 1999 Supreme Court directive ordering the separation of the judiciary from the executive. Political authorities have continued to make appointments to the higher judiciary, in some cases demonstrating an overt political bias. Harassment of witnesses and the dismissal of cases following political pressure are also of increasing concern. A 2014 constitutional amendment grants the legislature the power to impeach judges on the grounds of "incapability or misconduct."

The court system is prone to corruption and severely backlogged, with an estimated 2.3 million pending cases. Pretrial detention is often lengthy, and many defendants lack counsel. The indigent have little access to justice through the courts. Prison conditions are extremely poor, severe overcrowding is common, and juveniles are often incarcerated with adults. Suspects are routinely subject to arbitrary arrest and detention, demands for bribes, and physical abuse by police. Torture is often used to extract confessions and intimidate political detainees. The rate of custodial deaths has remained high; law enforcement agencies reportedly perpetrated 185 extrajudicial killings in 2015. More than 64 abductions and enforced disappearances were recorded during the year, a significant increase from 2014. Criminal cases against ruling party activists are regularly withdrawn on the grounds of "political consideration," undermining the judicial process and entrenching a culture of impunity.

The 1974 Special Powers Act permits arbitrary detention without charge, and the criminal procedure code allows detention without a warrant. A 2009 counterterrorism law includes a broad definition of terrorism and generally does not meet international standards.

Revisions to the 1973 International War Crimes Tribunal Act and the current tribunal's procedural rules were intended to help meet international standards on issues such as victim and witness protection, the presumption of innocence, defendant access to counsel, and the right to bail. However, concerns have been raised regarding political interference, due process shortcomings, and inadequate protection for witnesses and defense lawyers in ICT trials.

Violence by Islamist political parties and other pressure groups has increased in the past several years, and terrorist attacks by Islamist militant groups have escalated recently; the South Asia Terrorism Portal counted 25 civilian and security-personnel fatalities related to Islamist extremism in 2015.

Members of ethnic and religious minority groups face some discrimination under law as well as harassment and violations of their rights in practice. Indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts remain subject to physical attacks, property destruction, and land grabs by Bengali settlers and occasional abuses by security forces. In 2015, authorities announced that both foreign and domestic organizations and individuals would be banned from engaging in unsupervised talks with indigenous groups; some restrictions were lifted in response to a widely negative reaction by NGOs and the public. Indigenous leaders often criticize the national government for failing to implement provisions of the 1997 peace accord.

Roughly 270,000 ethnic Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh from Myanmar beginning in the 1990s are subject to substantial harassment; the vast majority do not have official refugee status and suffer from a complete lack of access to health care, employment, and education. The government has attempted to discourage a more recent influx of refugees by further marginalizing the Rohingya community and undermining the work of international organizations providing humanitarian aid.

A criminal ban on same-sex sexual acts is rarely enforced, but societal discrimination remains the norm, and dozens of attacks on LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals are reported every year. Transgender people face persecution. Although since 2013 they can be legally classified as a “third gender” if they desire, people registered as such have no inheritance rights under Sharia (Islamic law) provisions governing personal status matters in Bangladesh.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

The ability to move within the country is relatively unrestricted, as is foreign travel. Property rights are unevenly enforced, and the ability to engage freely in private economic activity is somewhat constrained. Corruption and bribery, inadequate infrastructure, and official bureaucratic and regulatory hurdles hinder business activities throughout the country. State involvement and interference in the economy is considerable.

The 2011 Vested Properties Return Act allows Hindus to reclaim land that the government or other individuals seized, but it has been unevenly implemented. Tribal minorities have little control over land decisions affecting them, and Bengali-speaking settlers continue to illegally encroach on tribal lands in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. A commission set up in 2009 to allocate land to indigenous tribes has suffered from delays.

Under the personal status laws affecting communities of all religions, women have fewer marriage, divorce, and inheritance rights than men. In rural areas, religious leaders sometimes impose flogging and other extrajudicial punishments on women accused of violating strict moral codes despite Supreme Court orders calling for an end to such practices. Women also face discrimination in social services and employment.

Rape, acid throwing, and other forms of violence against women occur regularly despite laws offering some level of protection. A law requiring rape victims to file police reports and obtain medical certificates within 24 hours of the crime in order to press charges prevents most cases from reaching the courts. Police also accept bribes to quash rape cases and rarely enforce existing laws protecting women. Giving or receiving dowry is a criminal offense, but coercive requests remain a problem. Odhikar noted an increase in dowry-related violence against women in 2015 compared with earlier years, with 209 cases recorded. A high rate of early marriage persists, with 65 percent of girls married by age 18. Despite a stated government commitment in 2014 to abolish the practice by 2041, a proposal to lower the officially permissible age of marriage from 18 to 16 was still under consideration in 2015.

Bangladesh remains both a major supplier of and transit point for trafficking victims, with tens of thousands of people trafficked each year. Women and children are trafficked both overseas and within the country for the purposes of domestic servitude and sexual exploitation, while men are trafficked primarily for labor abroad. A comprehensive 2013 antitrafficking law provides protection to victims and increased penalties for traffickers. However, training for law enforcement remains inadequate, as does regulation of enterprises such as labor recruitment agencies. The issue received fresh attention in May 2015 after traffickers abandoned thousands of Rohingya migrants at sea. An ensuing campaign against smuggling led to the arrest of dozens, including an alleged kingpin, in September.

Following the 2013 Rana Plaza factory collapse, in which more than 1,100 workers were killed, increased inspections and safeguards instigated by Western apparel companies led to the closure of around 200 of a total of 4,500 factories, according to industry representatives. However, working conditions remain extremely unsafe, and comprehensive reforms of the system are hampered by the fact that a growing number of factory owners are also legislators or influential businesspeople. In May 2015, murder charges were filed against 41 people for their alleged involvement in the Rana Plaza collapse.

Barbados

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 278,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Bridgetown

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 58 / 60 (– 1)

Infighting among members of the opposition Barbados Labour Party (BLP) continued in 2015. In November, the BLP expelled from its ranks longtime member and sitting member of Parliament Maria Agard. Agard said she would challenge the expulsion, and continued to sit in the House of Assembly, the lower house, at the year's end. The developments followed the 2014 resignation from the BLP of former prime minister Owen Arthur, who became an independent. The Democratic Labour Party (DLP) holds a majority in the Parliament, having won 16 of 30 seats in the House of Assembly in 2013 polls.

As Barbados continued to grapple with a struggling economy, a number of labor disputes involving public-sector workers emerged in 2015. The country's two leading trade unions adopted a policy of working at reduced speeds over complaints including the dismissal of 10 workers over age 60 at the state-run Barbados Investment and Development Corporation (BIDC), and threatened a national strike. Sanitation workers—including garbage collectors and grave diggers—as well as customs officials went forward with strike actions amid disputes with the government during the year.

Conditions remained difficult for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people in Barbados in 2015. The law criminalizes same-sex sexual relations and provides for sentences as severe as life imprisonment. While the law has not been applied in recent years, it remains among the harshest anti-LGBT laws in the Western hemisphere. LGBT people face discrimination in housing, employment, and access to health care. Occasional violent incidents against LGBT people continue, and go underreported due to many victims' fear of reprisals.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Barbados, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Belarus

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 9,524,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Minsk

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

President Alyaksandr Lukashenka secured a fifth term in the October 2015 presidential election, which failed to meet international standards, according to observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

The war in neighboring Ukraine, growing regional tensions, and a failing economy motivated Belarus to seek better relations with Europe and the United States during the year. In February, Lukashenka hosted leaders of France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine for talks that resulted in a new cease-fire agreement. Belarusian authorities then released six political prisoners in August, and refrained from violently suppressing protests during and after the October election, marking a contrast with the crackdown that followed the 2010 presidential vote.

In late October, the government was rewarded for the steps it had taken to improve its still-repressive human rights situation when the European Union and the United States granted the country temporary relief from sanctions.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 4 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

The president is elected for five-year terms without limits. The 110 members of the Chamber of Representatives, the lower house of the rubber-stamp National Assembly, are popularly elected for four years from single-mandate constituencies. The upper chamber, the Council of the Republic, consists of 64 members serving four-year terms; 56 are elected by regional councils, and 8 are appointed by the president.

Since Lukashenka was democratically elected to his first term in 1994, elections and referendums in Belarus have been marred by serious and systemic irregularities. During the 2012 parliamentary elections, the authorities blocked key opposition figures from running, harassed regime critics, denied the opposition access to the media, failed to administer the elections fairly, and prevented observers from independently verifying the vote count. The regime also pressured workers at state-owned enterprises to participate in the process. No opposition candidates won seats.

In October 2015, Lukashenka secured his fifth term in a noncompetitive presidential race, taking 83 percent of the vote. None of his three opponents received more than 5 percent, while the “against all” option received over 6 percent. OSCE observers concluded that the vote fell considerably short of meeting the group’s standards for democratic elections, citing significant violations in the counting of the results. The observers did take note of several positive developments, including the participation of the first-ever female presidential candidate and the peaceful pre- and postelection environment; the latter was welcomed as an improvement given the brutal crackdown on protests surrounding the 2010 election. However, key opposition figures refused to recognize the results of the 2015 election, citing in part a series of irregularities related to early voting; official figures showed that some 36 percent of the electorate had cast ballots during early voting.

The legal framework for elections fails to meet democratic standards. Among other problems, electoral commission members at the national and local levels are politically aligned with and dependent on the incumbent government, and independent observers have little access to the counting process. Inadequate opposition access to state-run media, which heavily favor Lukashenka, is also a major concern.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 3 / 16

There is no official progovernment political party, and very few lawmakers are affiliated with any party. Opposition parties have no representation in the National Assembly, and Lukashenka’s regime employs various tools to weaken and divide the opposition. These include harassment, imprisonment on trumped-up charges, and pressure on leaders and activists to leave Belarus or abandon politics.

Political parties encounter difficulties when seeking official registration. In 2015, the Ministry of Justice denied a registration application from the Belarusian Christian Democracy party for the fifth time. The Supreme Court later upheld the decision.

Six political prisoners, including 2010 presidential candidate Mikalay Statkevich, were released in August 2015 before their prison terms expired. Prior to their release, media reports had described the harsh treatment they received in prison. Another political prisoner, Mikalay Dzyadok, had his prison term extended for another year in February, days before it was set to expire.

In December, Belarusian human rights defenders concluded that Mikhail Zhamchuzhny, founder of the human rights organization Platforma, should be designated as a political prisoner. He was sentenced to six and a half years in prison in July after being convicted on charges that human rights organizations consider to be unsubstantiated and politically motivated. The group’s leader, Andrey Bandarenka, was sentenced to four years in prison in 2014 after being convicted of charges that were also disputed, including several counts of hooliganism and violence against women.

Other instances of political persecution include a case launched in August against five activists who were violently detained for marking a billboard with politically charged graffiti. Three of them faced criminal charges, while the other two were released. Another

presidential candidate in the 2010 election, Ales Mikhalevich, returned to Belarus after years in exile, though a criminal case against him was still pending.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

The constitution vests most power in the president, giving him control over the government, the judiciary, and the legislative process by stating that presidential decrees have a higher legal force than ordinary legislation.

The state controls 70 percent of the Belarusian economy, feeding widespread corruption. In addition, graft is encouraged by an overall lack of transparency and accountability in government. Information on the work of about 60 government ministries and state-controlled companies, including the Ministry of Information and the state broadcaster, is classified. Belarus ranks 107 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

There are no independent bodies to investigate corruption cases. Graft trials are held in a closed format isolated from the public, raising questions about the fairness of the process.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 13 / 60 (+3)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 3 / 16

The government systematically curtails press freedom. Libel is both a civil and criminal offense. A 2008 media law gives the state a monopoly over information about political, social, and economic affairs. The criminal code also contains provisions protecting the "honor and dignity" of high-ranking officials, including greater penalties in cases of defamation or insult.

Belarusian national television is completely under the control of the state and typically does not present alternative or opposition views. There are no privately owned nationwide broadcasting outlets. The state-run press distribution monopoly limits the availability of private newspapers. The authorities harass and censor the remaining independent media outlets. Freelancing or working for a foreign, unaccredited news outlet can be punished as criminal offenses.

The government seeks greater control over the internet through legal and technical means, even as Belarusians are increasingly turning to the internet as a more trustworthy source of news and information than traditional state-run media. Internet penetration reached about 62 percent in 2015.

Amendments to the 2008 media law went into effect at the start of 2015, giving the government greater powers to censor online content. The amendments further expanded the definition of mass media to include all websites and blogs that publish information, placing them under the supervision of the Ministry of Information. The government owns Belarus's only internet service provider, and authorities have repeatedly blocked access to opposition sites and independent media outlets.

Despite constitutional guarantees of religious equality, government decrees and registration requirements have increasingly restricted religious activity. Legal amendments in 2002 provided for government censorship of religious publications and barred foreigners from leading religious groups. The amendments also placed strict limitations on religious groups active in Belarus for less than 20 years. In 2003, the government signed a concordat with the Belarusian Orthodox Church, which is controlled by the Russian Orthodox Church, giving it a privileged position. The authorities have discriminated against or harassed the Roman Catholic Church and especially Protestant groups.

Academic freedom is subject to intense state ideological pressures, and institutions that use a liberal curriculum or are suspected of disloyalty face harassment and liquidation. Regulations stipulate immediate dismissal and revocation of degrees for students and professors who join opposition protests. Mandatory assignment of university graduates to state-sanctioned, low-paid jobs for two years after graduation pushes many young people to pursue higher education in European universities.

The use of wiretapping and other surveillance by state security agencies limits the right to free private discussion. Internet communications are reportedly monitored by the authorities.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12

The government restricts freedom of assembly for critical independent groups. Protests require authorization from local authorities, who can arbitrarily deny permission. Police routinely break up public demonstrations and arrest participants. The government's desire to improve its relations with Europe and the United States led to an easing of such practices in 2015; although fines and short detentions continued to be imposed, police refrained from beatings and mass arrests. Legislation curbing free assembly remained intact.

Freedom of association is severely restricted. More than 100 of the most active nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were forced to close between 2003 and 2005, and participation in an unregistered or liquidated political party or organization was criminalized in 2005. Registration of groups remains selective. As a result, most human rights activists operating in the country face potential jail terms ranging from six months to two years. Regulations introduced in 2005 ban foreign assistance to entities and individuals deemed to promote foreign "meddling in the internal affairs" of Belarus. In 2013, officials introduced legislation simplifying registration requirements for NGOs, but arbitrary denials of registration have not abated.

Independent trade unions face harassment, and their leaders are frequently fired and prosecuted for engaging in peaceful protests. No independent trade unions have been registered since 1999, when Lukashenka issued a decree setting extremely restrictive registration requirements.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16 (+1)

Although the constitution calls for judicial independence, courts are subject to significant executive influence. The right to a fair trial is often not respected in cases with political overtones. Human rights groups have documented instances of beatings, torture, and psychological pressure during detention. The power to extend pretrial detention lies with a prosecutor rather than a judge, in violation of international norms.

Authorities deliberately create advantageous conditions for the Russian language to increase its dominance, while the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognizes Belarusian as a "vulnerable" language. Ethnic Poles and Roma often face pressure from the authorities and discrimination.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals are subject to discrimination and regular police harassment. Mikhail Pishcheuski died in October after being severely beaten in 2014 for being gay; his attacker, a former schoolteacher, was convicted in what was reportedly the first-ever trial in Belarus to address violence targeting a gay person, but the perpetrator was released from prison in August 2015 after serving just 11 months of a 32-month sentence. In 2013, the Justice Ministry refused to register a gay rights NGO. The same year, the parliament proposed a law banning "homosexual propaganda," but has not

yet introduced it as legislation. An official website of the Belarusian government advises foreign gay couples traveling to the country “to avoid public displays of affection, and to book twin rooms rather than doubles.”

Since 2014, Belarus has accepted about 160,000 refugees from Ukraine as people fled the conflict there, providing them with schooling and medical treatment. Belarus coordinates its efforts with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16 (+2)

While an internal passport system limits freedom of movement and choice of residence, restrictions have eased in practice in recent years, leaving few significant obstacles to domestic and international travel. Nevertheless, some opposition activists are detained at the border for lengthy searches, and bribery to accelerate some of the administrative processes for traveling is common.

Although the economy remains dominated by the state, Belarus’s limits on economic freedom have also been gradually eased in recent years, allowing for greater property ownership, commercial activity, and small business operations. State interference in the economy now primarily affects larger businesses.

There are significant discrepancies in income between men and women, and women are poorly represented in leading government positions. Domestic and sexual violence against women are considered to be persistent and underreported. Sexual violence is addressed in the criminal code, and a 2008 law addresses the prosecution of domestic violence, but no legislative measures are aimed at preventing these problems. The constitution explicitly bans same-sex marriage.

Mandatory unpaid national work days, postgraduate employment allocation, compulsory labor for addicts confined to state rehabilitation facilities, and restrictions on leaving employment in specific industries have led labor activists to conclude that all Belarusian citizens experience forced labor at some stage of their life. Lack of economic opportunities have led many women to become victims of the international sex trade.

Belgium

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 1
Freedom Rating: 1.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 11,200,000
Capital: Brussels

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

The political environment in 2015 was dominated by concerns about terrorist activity in Belgium. Officials estimated that close to 500 individuals had traveled from Belgium to join extremist groups in Syria—the highest per capita rate in the European Union (EU). In

January, days after terrorists attacked the offices of the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine in Paris, Belgian security forces carried out nationwide raids against suspected Islamist militants. In November, after coordinated shooting sprees and suicide bombings in Paris killed 130 people, strong suspicions emerged that the attackers—several of whom were identified as Belgian nationals—had largely organized their operations in Brussels. Belgian officials took a number of emergency measures, including a high-security lockdown of the capital, numerous raids and arrests, and proposals for broader government authority in investigating and prosecuting terrorism suspects.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The Belgian monarchy is largely ceremonial, although the king retains constitutional authority to mediate during the process of government formation. Belgium's Federal Parliament consists of two houses: the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate. The 150 members of the Chamber are elected directly by proportional representation. The Senate is comprised of 50 members selected by community and regional parliaments, and an additional 10 members chosen by the first 50 based on the results of the Chamber of Representatives elections. Members serve five-year terms in both houses. The prime minister, who is the leader of the majority party or coalition, is appointed by the monarch and approved by the legislature.

The separatist New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) won 33 seats in the Chamber of Representatives in 2014, while outgoing prime minister Elio Di Rupo's Francophone Socialist Party (PS) won 23 seats. The Francophone Movement for Reform (MR) captured 20 seats, the center-right Christian Democratic and Flemish (CD&V) party took 18, and the Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats (VLD) won 14. The N-VA, the CD&V, the MR, and the VLD reached an agreement to form a center-right coalition government. The N-VA was included in the government for the first time, while the PS was excluded for the first time in more than two decades. Charles Michel of the MR became prime minister.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

The party system is robust but highly fragmented, with separate Flemish and Walloon parties representing all traditional parties of the left and right.

After the far-right, separatist Vlaams Blok (Flemish Bloc) party was banned in 2004 for violating the country's antiracism laws, it changed its name to Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) and removed some of the more overtly xenophobic elements from its platform. However, the party maintains an anti-immigration stance and a commitment to an independent Flanders. It captured only three seats in the Chamber of Representatives in the 2014 elections, down from 12 in 2010.

Ethnic and linguistic conflicts have prompted a series of constitutional amendments since 1970 devolving considerable power from the central government to the three regions in the Belgian federation: French-speaking Wallonia in the south; Flemish-speaking Flanders in the north; and Brussels, the capital, where French and Flemish share the same official status. The wealthier Flemish north has sought increased self-rule and reduced taxpayer support for the less prosperous Wallonia. Voting takes place along strict linguistic lines; with the exception of the bilingual district encompassing Brussels, parties are only permitted to run in their respective linguistic regions.

There are no restrictions on the ability of minority groups to participate in national or subnational politics. In the 2014 elections, 11 candidates of Turkish and Moroccan origin were elected to the Chamber of Representatives.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Corruption is relatively rare in Belgium, which was ranked 15 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Public officials can face heavy fines and up to ten years' imprisonment for corruption-related offenses, and enforcement of anticorruption legislation is generally adequate. In February 2015, the European Commission launched an investigation into whether favorable tax treatment given by Belgium to multinational corporations violated EU competition rules. The effort formed part of a wider inquiry into several member states' corporate tax agreements.

Legislators and other high-ranking elected officials are required by law to regularly disclose their assets as well as paid or unpaid mandates, executive functions, and occupations to the Court of Audit. Information about asset declarations is not publicly accessible, but declarations of interests are published in the official government gazette.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 56 / 60 (–1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Freedoms of speech and the press are guaranteed by the constitution and generally respected by the government. Belgians have access to numerous private media outlets. However, concentration of print media ownership has increased in recent decades. Internet access is unrestricted.

More than half of the country's population identifies as Roman Catholic. Freedom of religion is protected, but members of minority religious groups have complained of discrimination by the government as well as in housing and employment. A ban on the partial or total covering of the face in public locations has been in effect since 2011. Offenders can face a fine or up to a week in jail. In October 2015, a Brussels court began hearing a case against 11 members of the Church of Scientology's Belgian branch, who along with two affiliated groups were charged with offenses including fraud, extortion, and running a criminal organization. A conviction could lead to a ban on the organization in Belgium.

The government does not restrict academic freedom, and private discussion is open and vibrant. In June, the Belgian Privacy Commission filed a claim against Facebook, claiming that the company's tracking of the personal data of nonmembers—who, unlike members, have not agreed to the platform's terms of service—is unlawful due to the absence of explicit consent. In November, a Brussels court ordered Facebook to stop the practice within Belgium.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedom of assembly is generally respected. In October, Belgium's three main trade unions facilitated mass demonstrations in Brussels against the government's austerity policies. After some protesters attacked police officers and vehicles, security forces responded with tear gas and water cannons. Dozens were detained in the clashes.

Freedom of association is guaranteed by the Constitution, but antidiscrimination legislation penalizes membership in or cooperation with a group that "overtly and repeatedly practices or teaches discrimination" based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin.

Workers at companies that employ more than 50 people have the right to organize and join unions and to bargain collectively. Employers found guilty of firing workers because of union activities are required to reinstate the workers or pay an indemnity. In 2015, unions

continued to organize opposition to austerity measures, which they saw as favoring big corporations at the expense of workers' rights.

F. Rule of Law: 14 / 16 (– 1)

The judiciary is independent, and the rule of law generally prevails in civil and criminal matters. Police and armed forces are under civilian control, and the constitution protects the right to a free trial. Although conditions in prisons and detention centers meet most international standards, many facilities continue to suffer from overcrowding. Torture is illegal.

Concerns about potential terrorist attacks—particularly by affiliates of the Islamic State (IS) militant group—drove government priorities and discussions in the areas of security and rule of law in 2015. In January, Belgian security forces carried out a series of raids against a suspected Islamist militant cell. Several individuals were detained, and in Verviers, two suspects were fatally shot by police. In February, a court in Antwerp ruled that the group Shariah4Belgium was a terrorist organization that recruited fighters for extremist groups in Syria, and sentenced its leader to 12 years in prison. Seven members received prison sentences ranging from three to five years. Thirty-seven other defendants were convicted in absentia; although many were believed to have died in Syria, the court warned that militants often fabricate death records in order to avoid prosecution.

In November, days after coordinated attacks in Paris left 130 people dead, Belgian officials raised the threat assessment for Brussels to the highest level, imposing a complete lockdown from as police searched for a suspect believed to have returned to the capital. The lockdown lasted from November 21 through November 25, but police raids and heightened security continued through the end of the year. Although most individuals detained in the raids were released without charge, several suspects connected to the violence in Paris or other terrorist activity remained in custody at year's end. The judiciary granted extended detentions in a number of cases.

After evidence emerged suggesting that the November attacks had been planned in Belgium, some critics argued that the country's governance system was hampering coordination among security agencies and hindering efforts to combat extremism and arms trafficking. Prime Minister Michel called on legislators to pass a set of antiterrorism measures, including significant increases to the domestic security budget; an extension of the maximum period of detention without charge from 24 hours to 72 hours; the imprisonment upon return of Belgian citizens who fought with extremist groups abroad; a requirement that terrorism suspects wear electronic tags; the closure of houses of worship that propagate hate speech; and the lifting of a ban on nighttime police raids. Lawmakers were still debating the proposals, some of which require constitutional amendments, at year's end.

An influx of asylum seekers in 2015 strained government resources, and authorities struggled to provide adequate accommodations and to process applications in a timely manner. Belgium received approximately 39,000 first-time asylum applications in 2015—more than twice the amount received in 2014. The majority of applicants were Syrian, Iraqi, or Afghan nationals.

Antiracism and antidiscrimination legislation penalizes the incitement of discrimination, acts of hatred, and violence based on race, ethnicity, nationality, or sexual orientation. The human rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people are protected by strong legislation and supported by a vibrant community of civil society groups.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

The law provides for freedom of domestic movement and foreign travel, and the government upholds these rights in practice. Freedom of movement was restricted in Brussels

during heightened alert levels in November 2015. There are no restrictions on the right to choose one’s place of residence or employment, but Roma have faced expulsions and forced evictions. Commercial activity is regulated without arbitrary interference.

The government actively promotes equality for women. The state Institute for the Equality of Men and Women is empowered to initiate sex-discrimination lawsuits. In the 2014 elections, women won approximately 39 percent of seats in the Chamber of Representatives and 50 percent of seats in the Senate. Belgium legalized same-sex marriage in 2003, and in 2006, same-sex couples gained the right to adopt children.

In 2014, the Chamber of Representatives approved a bill making Belgium the first country in the world to legalize euthanasia for terminally ill children. Belgium had legalized euthanasia for terminally ill adults in 2002.

While the country has seen increased immigration in recent years, labor market integration of non-EU immigrants and their native-born children is low. Belgium remains a destination country for human trafficking, particularly for sexual exploitation and domestic labor; victims generally originate from Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Belize

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 2
Freedom Rating: 1.5
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population 368,000
Capital: Belmopan

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 36 / 40
CIVIL LIBERTIES: 51 / 60

In snap elections held in November 2015, the incumbent United Democratic Party (UDP) increased its majority from 17 to 19 seats in the House of Representatives, which has 31 directly elected seats. The opposition People’s United Party (PUP) took the remaining 12 seats. The UDP entered an unprecedented third consecutive term in government, with Dean Barrow retaining the seat of prime minister. Observers from the Organization of American States noted that the election was inclusive and conducted in a fair and professional manner. The UDP and PUP dominate Belize’s competitive two-party system, but a number of smaller parties are also active. The Belize Progressive Party fielded candidates in 25 districts in the 2015 elections, although it did not ultimately secure seats.

Belize continues to struggle with the negative effects of organized crime, gang violence, drug trafficking, and corruption, although to a much lower extent than its neighbors. In March 2015, the Supreme Court dismissed an appeal case against Elvin Penner, a legislator who was dismissed from his post in 2013 amid suspicions that he had facilitated the illegal issuance of a Belizean passport to a South Korean national. A local NGO had launched the appeal in 2014 after a court dismissed Penner’s case for lack of evidence. Separately,

authorities continued to investigate how David Nanes Schnitzer, an international fugitive wanted for involvement in financial crimes, had acquired Belizean citizenship. Police apprehended Schnitzer in November, but he escaped shortly after being released on bail. His whereabouts were unknown at year's end.

Indigenous communities continue to criticize the government for making their lands vulnerable to exploitation by foreign corporations, particularly by granting concessions. In a small victory, in June, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) upheld a 2013 decision by the Belizean Court of Appeals affirming ownership of ancestral lands for members of more than 30 Mayan communities. In another ruling in October, the CCJ ordered the government of Belize to compensate 25 members of the Maya community of the Toledo district for failing to protect their constitutional right to private property.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Belize, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Benin

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 10,583,034

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Porto-Novo

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

Benin remains among the most stable democracies in sub-Saharan Africa, having witnessed multiple free and fair elections and peaceful transfers of power since the country's transition to democracy in 1991. Tensions resulting from unusual political strife in recent years largely eased in 2015 following free and fair legislative and municipal elections, a declaration by President Boni Yayi that he would not amend the constitution to seek a third term, and an expansion of opposition representation in the legislature.

In May, the Netherlands suspended development assistance to the country amid suspicions that Beninese officials had misused funds intended to improve access to drinking water. Following government cooperation in investigating the case, the Dutch government resumed its assistance program by year's end.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 33 / 40 (+1)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12 (+1)

The president is elected by popular vote for up to two five-year terms and serves as both the chief of state and head of government. In November 2015, President Yayi announced that he would cease his pursuit of a third term in the 2016 presidential election. By year's end, nearly a dozen challengers had emerged to contest the election, including

Patrice Talon, a former Yayi ally. In September, the government began implementing procedures to enable Beninese citizens living abroad to participate electronically in the presidential contest, though concerns remained that burdensome registration requirements could stifle overseas voting.

Delegates to the 83-member, unicameral National Assembly serve four-year terms. Legislative elections were held in April under a reformed electoral code with stronger mechanisms for guaranteeing the transparency and integrity of the vote. Among other improvements, the code made the Autonomous National Electoral Commission, which includes representatives from both the ruling party and the opposition, a permanent electoral body. International observers deemed the elections free and fair, noting only minor logistical issues, including delays in some poll openings and shortages of voting materials. Yayi's Cowry Forces for an Emerging Benin (FCBE) won 33 seats, compared with 41 in the 2011 polls. The Build the Nation Union (UN) coalition took 13, and the opposition Democratic Renewal Party (PRD) took 10. Smaller parties split the remainder. The results produced a nearly even split between government loyalists and their opponents, with a slight advantage for the opposition.

Local elections, delayed for two years, were held in June. The vote proceeded smoothly and without serious problems, although turnout was low at just under 60 percent. Despite its poor showing in the legislative elections, the FCBE performed strongly at the local level, taking 493 seats on municipal councils, with the UN coalition winning 205 and the PRD capturing 132.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Benin has historically been divided between northern and southern ethnic groups. Support for Yayi and the FCBE is based primarily in the north, while much of the opposition's support comes from the south. There are dozens of political parties in Benin, and they are able to operate openly regardless of ethnic or regional affiliation.

The weakening of the FCBE in the National Assembly following the April 2015 elections significantly increased the power of opposition forces. The National Assembly elected Adrien Houngbédji, head of the PRD, as its president, and several other opposition politicians assumed high-profile cabinet roles.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Yayi came to power in 2006 on an anticorruption platform and subsequently enacted a number of measures to combat graft, including an internationally praised audit of 60 state-run companies. Corruption nevertheless continues to be a problem in Benin. In 2013, the government created the National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANLC), a move that has been praised by the international community. However, while the ANLC has the ability to hear complaints, recommend measures, and pass cases to the courts, it has no enforcement authority. The body received its first funding in 2015, and worked to build its operational capacity and engage with civil society during the year.

In May, the Dutch government cut off development aid to Benin amid allegations that local officials had embezzled more than \$4 million intended for water and sanitation programs. In July, an independent audit concluded that fraudulent contracts, primarily in the energy and water ministry, had been used to misappropriate the funds. The audit implicated parliamentarian Barthélemy Kassa, who previously served as head of the ministry, as well as dozens of other officials and business figures. In August, the National Assembly rejected a motion to revoke Kassa's parliamentary immunity. Investigations into other individuals named in the report were ongoing at year's end.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 49 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16**

Constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression are largely respected in practice. Print media exhibit pluralism of opinion and viewpoints. However, most media outlets receive direct financial support from politicians, and few are considered genuinely independent.

In January 2015, the National Assembly adopted legislation abolishing prison terms for numerous press offenses, including defamation, but retained high financial penalties. In recent years, the High Authority of Broadcasting (HAAC), the media regulatory body, has aggressively pursued certain media outlets with financial sanctions and suspensions, though no such incidents were reported in 2015.

The government does not restrict internet access, but penetration is still very low. Nonetheless, an increasing number of entities, from official news outlets to private bloggers, are publishing online.

The government actively seeks to ensure religious and academic freedoms. While the majority of Beninese identify themselves as either Muslim or Christian, many also practice some form of voodoo. Confrontations between religious groups are rare.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedom of assembly is generally respected, and requirements for permits and registration are not usually enforced. In an exceptional case in May 2015, security forces in Cotonou used tear gas to violently disperse a demonstration against police harassment of an opposition politician. Following the incident, the interior ministry announced a ban on all public protests until the conclusion of local elections in June.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including human rights groups, operated freely in 2015.

The right to organize and join labor unions is constitutionally guaranteed. While the guarantee extends to government employees, these individuals are restricted in their ability to bargain collectively. A 2011 law extended a ban on the right of military personnel and police officers to strike to include customs officers as well as water and forestry workers. Unions have historically played an active role in Beninese politics, and many were involved in the 2014 mass demonstrations protesting delayed local elections. In February 2015, police in the town of Abomey prevented a local primary teachers' union from holding a march to protest unpaid social security benefits. In March, teachers organized a national strike to demand a pay increase in line with recent raises for other government employees.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

Judicial independence is generally respected by the executive branch, but the courts are highly inefficient and susceptible to corruption, largely due to their persistent lack of funding. A series of strikes led by the National Union of Magistrates of Benin (UNAMAB) to protest a variety of issues—including executive interference in the judiciary, the dismissal of judges critical of the Yayi administration, and unpaid salaries—paralyzed the court system in 2014. Continuing strike actions in 2015, though fewer than in 2015, resulted in similar dysfunction. Judges staged a brief walk-out in April to protest the unilateral appointment of several new magistrates by the executive branch. In September, after the government continued to recruit magistrates without consulting UNAMAB as legally required, the union launched a monthlong strike.

Prison conditions are harsh, and overcrowding is a major problem. Criminal cases are rarely processed in a timely manner. In 2012, Benin ratified an international treaty to abolish

the death penalty, and promulgated a new code of criminal procedure in 2013 to reflect the change. Torture as a sentence for a crime is banned by the new code, though reports of abuses by police continue to occur.

Relations among Benin's ethnic groups are generally amicable, although regional divisions occasionally flare up, particularly between the north and south. Minority ethnic groups are well represented in government agencies, the civil service, and the armed forces. The constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, and disability, but it does not protect individuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation. Nevertheless, the only legislation directly restricting the rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people is the penal code of 1996, which imposes a higher age restriction on the age of consent for same-sex sexual activity (21) than for heterosexual activity (13).

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

In 2013, the government released a decree to better control roadblocks around the country and to reduce the incidence of extortion, although it is unclear how well this has been enforced. Due to widespread poverty, economic activity continues to be restricted, but changes to the processes surrounding business registration, anticorruption efforts, and regulatory reform since 2010 have improved Benin's commercial environment.

The constitution provides for gender equality, and a national gender promotion policy aims to achieve gender equality by 2025. However, movements to improve female representation in electoral politics have been largely unsuccessful. Only six women were elected to the National Assembly in 2015, a decrease from the eight elected in 2011. Women enjoy fewer educational and employment opportunities than men, particularly in rural areas. A 2004 family code improved women's inheritance, property, and marriage rights, and prohibited forced marriage and female genital mutilation, but it has not been strongly enforced.

Human trafficking is widespread in Benin; the vast majority of victims are girls trafficked domestically from rural to urban areas. A law formally outlawing the trafficking of children was passed in 2006, but no legislation specifically addresses the trafficking of adults.

Bhutan

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 757,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Thimphu

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and his government continued to make progress in implementing public transparency and anticorruption initiatives, including prosecutions against public officials accused of graft. However, journalists and rights monitors, both domestic and international, raised concerns about threats to press freedom.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 29 / 40**A. Electoral Process:** 10 / 12

King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck formally succeeded his father in 2008, though he had been in power since the outgoing king's abdication in 2006. The monarch is head of state, appoints a number of high officials in consultation with other bodies, and retains a waning degree of influence over ministerial positions. The monarchy is highly popular with the public.

The constitution provides for a bicameral Parliament, with a 25-seat upper house, the nonpartisan National Council, and a 47-seat lower house, the National Assembly. Members of both bodies serve five-year terms. The king appoints five members of the National Council, and the remaining 20 are popularly elected; the lower house is entirely elected, and the head of the majority party is nominated by the king to serve as prime minister. The logistics of voting and vote counting remain heavily dependent on expertise and technology from India.

In the 2013 parliamentary elections, the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) won 32 seats. The Druk Peace and Prosperity Party, which had dominated the first national elections in 2008, won the remaining 15 seats. Tobgay, the PDP leader, became prime minister. International monitors deemed the 2013 elections free and fair. The free vote and peaceful transfer of power were seen as signs of a healthy democratic system.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

Political parties, previously illegal, were allowed to begin registering in 2007. Bhutan now has two officially registered major parties and three smaller ones. One of the small parties—the Bhutan Kuen-Nyam Party (BKP)—was disqualified from participating in the 2013 elections due to its inability to field candidates in all constituencies. Citizens must receive government approval to form political parties and hold political rallies, which significantly hinders the development of parties.

Bhutan still relies on India for defense and many foreign policy matters, which are consequently somewhat excluded from domestic political debate.

Electoral rules stipulate that political parties must not be limited to members of any regional, ethnic, or religious group. No party exists to represent Nepali speakers. International monitors have noted that Nepali speakers have been turned away from voting.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Bhutan has made a rapid transition from a system in which the monarch and his advisers had enormous influence over Parliament to one in which Parliament determines its own policies. Although the king retains some powers and influence, the party in control of Parliament selects its own cabinet. The cabinet has increasingly taken on governance without deferring to the monarch for guidance, and Prime Minister Tobgay has shown more signs of independence than his predecessor.

Although corruption exists in Bhutan, the country has in recent years made significant strides in addressing the issue. The 2006 Anti-Corruption Act established whistle-blower protections, and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), whose role was strengthened and expanded in 2011, is tasked with investigating and preventing graft. The current government has repeatedly backed up the ACC's efforts to suspend and investigate officials suspected of graft.

Some of the most powerful political elites in the country have been held accountable by the courts in recent years, setting an example for lower-ranking officials. In July 2015,

Prime Minister Tobgay removed Foreign Minister Rinzin Dorje from office following corruption allegations against him, which eventually led to Dorje's conviction and sentencing to one year in prison in September. An appeal was pending at year's end.

Tobgay has welcomed a loyal opposition in Parliament, and has tried to make the office of the prime minister more open to the public through media appearances and the use of social media. He has also strengthened transparency by making the salaries of officials public and using his office to make the central and local budgets more open to review.

A right to information law passed by the National Assembly in 2014 would put the onus on government officials and agencies to release information. Its adoption was preceded by two years of significant and open debate. However, the upper house delayed action on the measure, and it had yet to win final adoption in 2015.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 1 / 0

The government has for decades attempted to diminish and repress the rights of ethnic Nepalis, and to force many of them to leave Bhutan, thereby changing the ethnic makeup of the country.

The government expelled a large percentage of Nepali speakers in the early 1990s, after previously stripping them of their citizenship. Many fled to Nepal as refugees. The government maintains that many Nepali speakers left Bhutan voluntarily or had been illegal immigrants, but in 1992, well over 100,000 such refugees living in extremely poor conditions in Nepal were denied reentry to Bhutan, and the Bhutanese government has consistently refused to repatriate them. A resettlement effort aimed at transferring the refugees to third countries began in 2007. By late 2015, more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal had been resettled, mostly in the United States, with approximately 18,000 remaining.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 27 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

Bhutanese laws protect freedom of expression and belief, but substantial barriers remain, including to press freedom. The National Security Act assigns prison terms for speech that creates or attempts to create "hatred and disaffection among the people" or "misunderstanding or hostility between the government and people," among other offenses. Defamation can be treated as a criminal offense, and self-censorship is believed to be a problem. While there are multiple private media outlets, many depend on advertising from state bodies. Nearly 40 percent of the population had internet access in 2015; social media as well as online news outlets were available.

A 2015 survey of 119 current and former Bhutanese journalists revealed general concerns about press freedom and access to information, as well as safety issues and fear of reprisals in connection with reporting that is critical of the government or other powerful groups. Almost half of the current journalists surveyed reported receiving threats in response to critical coverage, ranging from warnings of employment-related penalties to threats of physical abuse and harassment.

The constitution protects freedom of religion, but local authorities are known to harass non-Buddhists. While Bhutanese of all faiths can worship relatively freely in private, the Drukpa Kagyupa school of Mahayana Buddhism is Bhutan's official religion and receives state support through subsidies and other measures. The Hindu minority is also recognized and reportedly receives some state support. Bhutan's small Christian community has allegedly been subject to harassment by the authorities. In 2014, two Christian pastors who allegedly organized a Christian gathering without gaining permission from local officials

were convicted on charges related to improper licensing for public assemblies and unapproved receipt of foreign funds. By January 2015, both had paid fines in lieu of prison sentences.

Few restrictions on academic freedom have been reported. However, in a 2015 report on education equality, the UN special rapporteur on the right to education echoed concerns raised by other international monitors regarding reported alleged discrimination against ethnic Nepali students, who lack proper facilities and instruction in the Nepali language.

Private discussion is generally free and open, though restrictive laws and other factors may deter uninhibited speech on sensitive topics, such as those related to ethnicity or the monarchy.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, but public gatherings require government permission, which is often denied.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that work on issues related to ethnic Nepalis are not allowed to operate, but other local and international NGOs work with increasing freedom. Under the 2007 Civil Society Organization Act, all new NGOs must register with the government. The constitution protects the right of workers to form associations, but not for the purpose of conducting strikes. Most of the country's workforce is engaged in subsistence agriculture and is therefore not unionized.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

Since 2007, Bhutan has moved decisively toward a system based on the rule of law, and its judiciary is now considered generally autonomous. An independent Judicial Service Council controls judicial evaluations and promotions. Senior judges are appointed by the king on the recommendation of the National Judicial Commission, which includes the chief justice, the most senior Supreme Court member, the head of the National Assembly's Legislative Committee, and the attorney general. The Supreme Court serves as the final arbiter of appeals.

The civilian police force generally operates within the law. Prisons in Bhutan for the most part meet international standards. There are dozens of political prisoners being held in the country, according to NGOs, though at least 14 have been released since 2010. Most are jailed for being part of banned political groups or parties, such as the local communist party or parties that advocated for the rights of ethnic Nepalis; in some cases, the charges are allegedly fabricated to justify the arrest of government critics.

The constitution protects against discrimination based on sex, race, disability, language, religion, or societal status. While these provisions are generally respected, Nepali-speaking people reportedly face employment discrimination. Despite legal protections, people with disabilities continue to face societal discrimination, particularly in rural areas. There are no legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and no formal NGO in the country explicitly works on the rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. Same-sex sexual activity, described as sexual conduct "against the order of nature," remains a criminal offense and can be punished with up to a year in prison.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

Bhutanese citizens have the freedom to travel domestically and internationally, but no laws protect against forced exile. Bhutanese security forces sometimes arrest Nepalis seeking to enter the country. Those lacking a security clearance certificate are subject to

restrictions on freedom of movement and face difficulties in starting a business, but the government has in recent years simplified the process for obtaining a certificate.

Since 2013, Bhutanese are no longer required to wear traditional dress under most circumstances. Women participate freely in social and economic life but continue to be underrepresented in government and politics. The law protects against domestic violence, with the possibility of prison sentences ranging from one month to three years. Rape, including spousal rape, is also illegal. However, societal taboos lead many incidents of rape and domestic violence to go unreported. Moreover, despite improvements in law to protect women from gender-based violence, both government and NGO actors acknowledge a lack of public awareness about legal protections, particularly in rural communities.

Female household workers, who often come from rural areas or from India, are vulnerable to forced labor and other abuse, as are foreign workers in the construction sector. Laws against human trafficking and forced labor are weakly enforced.

Bolivia

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 10,475,500

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: La Paz (administrative), Sucre (judicial)

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, lawmakers from the governing Movement for Socialism (MAS) took steps to change Bolivia's constitution so term limits would not prevent President Evo Morales from running for reelection in the presidential election set for 2019. The amendment passed the Plurinational Legislative Assembly in September, but it still needed to be ratified in a national referendum, which was expected to take place in early 2016.

Subnational elections held in March 2015 showed irregularities, including the last-minute disqualification of opposition candidates. While the MAS prevailed in most contests throughout the country, the opposition won some crucial races.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 29 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

Bolivia's president is directly elected, and presidential and legislative terms are both five years. The Plurinational Legislative Assembly consists of a 130-member Chamber of Deputies and a 36-member Senate. All senators and 53 deputies are elected by proportional representation, and 70 deputies are elected in individual districts. Seven seats in the Chamber of Deputies are reserved for indigenous representatives. The 2009 constitution introduced a presidential runoff provision.

Presidential term limits are the subject of controversy. In September 2015, the Plurinational Legislative Assembly voted to amend the constitution in order to allow presidents to

run for three consecutive terms instead of two. The initiative must be ratified by a referendum, which was expected in February 2016. Its approval would enable Morales to run for a fourth term. A 2013 Plurinational Constitutional Tribunal ruling allowed Morales to run for a third term in 2014, stating that his first term in office did not count toward the constitutionally mandated two-term limit since it had begun before the current constitution was adopted.

In the 2014 general elections, Morales was reelected with 61.4 percent of the vote. Samuel Doria Medina of the Democratic Union Front (UD) obtained 24.2 percent of votes, and the three remaining candidates shared less than 15 percent of votes. In concurrent legislative elections, Morales's MAS party maintained a two-thirds majority in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly, the share necessary to pass constitutional reforms. The MAS took 89 seats in the lower house and 25 seats in the Senate, while the opposition UD won 31 deputies and 9 senators, followed by the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) with 10 deputies and 2 senators. The Organization of American States (OAS) electoral observation mission stated that the elections reflected the will of the people, but recommended that Bolivia strengthen its electoral institutions and campaign finance system. Bolivians living abroad were allowed to vote for the first time in 2014.

In March 2015 subnational elections, the MAS won control of more departments and municipalities across the country than any other party. However, the opposition won key mayoralties and governorships, including those of La Paz and Santa Cruz. The OAS electoral observation mission reported overwhelming citizen participation in the elections, but lamented the last-minute disqualification and substitution of candidates, which occurred after the ballots had been printed. As a result of these changes, voters had incorrect information on election day. Six out of seven Supreme Electoral Tribunal members resigned after the elections. In July, new members of the tribunal were elected with the support of the MAS majority in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16

Citizens have the right to organize political parties. Since Morales's 2005 election, the formerly dominant parties have all but collapsed, giving way to a series of new formations and short-lived opposition coalitions. The MAS draws support from a diverse range of social movements, unions, and civil society actors. Days ahead of the 2015 subnational elections, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal disqualified the UD in the department of Beni on the grounds that it disseminated an unauthorized poll, which resulted in the removal of its 228 candidates from the ballot.

Opposition politicians have claimed that the Morales administration persecutes them through the judiciary. In January, a legislative investigative committee recommended that 11 former government officials, including former president Jorge Quiroga, be prosecuted for treason over their roles in the privatization of state enterprises. In February, opposition leader Luis Ayllón of the Arriba Chuquisaca party was sentenced to almost two years in prison in a trial that stemmed from accusations of embezzlement over his alleged loss of a camera; Ayllón appealed the sentence in April. The same month, assemblywoman Hilda Saavedra was accused of incitement to crime and obstruction of the electoral process for organizing a vigil outside of the Chuquisaca Electoral Tribunal.

People are free to make their own political decisions without undue influence from the military, foreign powers, or other influential groups. The constitution recognizes 36 indigenous nationalities, declares Bolivia a plurinational state, and formalizes local political and judicial control within indigenous territories. However, although they are well represented in government, the interests of indigenous groups are often overlooked by politicians. The

Indigenous Fund, a government-led organization dedicated to providing aid for indigenous Bolivians, was marred by corruption scandals in February 2015 when it was discovered that over 210 million bolivianos (\$30.6 million) were diverted to fund political campaigns.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Corruption affects a range of government entities and economic sectors, including law-enforcement bodies and extractive industries. Anticorruption legislation enacted in 2010 has been criticized for permitting retroactive enforcement. The government has established an Anti-Corruption Ministry, outlined policies to combat corruption, and opened investigations into official corruption cases. In 2011, legislators voted to prosecute former presidents Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and Quiroga for approving hydrocarbon contracts alleged to have contravened national interests. The U.S. government has refused to extradite Sánchez de Lozada, who is also facing genocide charges for his role in the killing of dozens of indigenous protesters in 2003. In 2013, the Bolivian prosecutor filed corruption charges against Quiroga and requested that he be placed on house arrest, but a court granted substitute measures while the trial continues. Bolivia was ranked 99 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

A bill on Transparency and Access to Public Information was under consideration as of August 2015. It has been criticized for allowing government agencies to establish exceptions on what information would be publicly available.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 39 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

Although the constitution guarantees freedom of expression, in practice, the media are subject to some limitations. A Ministry of Communications exists, but no implementing regulation for the constitution’s “right to communication” has been passed. Most media outlets are privately owned, and ownership in the print sector has become consolidated. Radio is the leading source of information, but online media are growing in importance as a source of news. Many private newspapers and television stations feature opposition rather than progovernment opinion pieces; the opposite holds true in state media. A 2011 telecommunications law allocated 33 percent of all broadcast licenses to state-run media, another 33 percent to commercial broadcasters, and 17 percent each to local communities and indigenous groups.

Journalists and independent media operate in a somewhat hostile environment, and attacks continued to be reported in 2015. In June, reporter Roger Romero Cossio was beaten on the street by assailants who made references to his journalistic work. After covering a July protest in La Paz, radio journalist Juan Carlos Paco Veramendi was imprisoned for seven days without charge. Death threats against two journalists investigating police corruption in Cochabamba were reported in March.

In August, Vice President Álvaro García Linera announced the withdrawal of government financial help to media outlets that “lie” or “do party politics.” In January 2015, the National Press Association issued a statement that the Law of Life Insurance for Press Workers hurts the financial viability of media outlets and limits freedom of expression.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution. The 2009 constitution ended the Roman Catholic Church’s official status and created a secular state. The government does not restrict academic freedom. Private discussion is free from surveillance or other interference by authorities.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12

Bolivian law provides for the rights of peaceful assembly and freedom of association. However, protests sometimes become violent. A criminal investigation into police abuses related to the violent dispersal of a 2011 indigenous protest against a planned highway through the Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS) territory was ongoing at the end of 2015. In April, charges against several suspects, including former internal affairs vice minister Marcos Farfan, were dropped. In June, President Morales affirmed that the highway would be built. Two statutes have been criticized for allowing the government to dissolve nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In June 2015, President Morales threatened to expel any NGO from the country that obstructs the exploration of natural resources.

Labor and peasant unions are an active force in society and wield significant political influence. A 2013 law establishes regulations for workers' cooperatives, which, among other provisions, prevent members of cooperatives dedicated to production, services, and public services from joining a union in that cooperative. Critics have pointed out that this rule violates the right to association.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The judicial system has faced ongoing systemic challenges in recent years. Judicial elections were held in 2011 to remedy a crisis in the judicial branch, which had been plagued by resignations, corruption charges, and a backlog of cases. The elections were marred by procedural problems and voter discontent. Candidates for the Supreme Court, the Constitutional Tribunal, and other entities were nominated through a two-thirds vote in the legislature, which allowed the MAS to dominate the selection process. In 2012, a total of 56 new high-court judges took office, making Bolivia the first country in Latin America to swear in elected judges to its highest tribunals.

In January 2015, the Senate dismissed Constitutional Tribunal judge Soraida Cháñez Chiré from her post for malfeasance and breach of duties in her 2014 ruling to prevent a law on public notaries from coming into force. The decision was under appeal as of year's end.

Bolivian courts face a daunting caseload, though there have been some improvements in recent years. Official statistics reveal that more than 50 percent of judicial cases remained pending as of the end of each year from 2006 and 2013. Prosecutorial independence is viewed as weak. An investigation that began in March 2015 resulted in the June dismissal of 20 prosecutors in La Paz over allegations that they engaged in irregular practices.

In February 2015, Ignacio Villa Vargas, known as "El Viejo," was sentenced to eight years in prison in an abbreviated trial. He pleaded guilty to terrorism charges connected to an alleged 2008 plot to murder president Morales. Some observers claimed that such fast-track trials push innocent people to plead guilty in exchange for shorter court time and lesser sentences.

In June 2015, after Police General Rosario Chávez denounced cases of corruption regarding promotions for officers, she was demoted to a lower rank. In response to a 2014 incident in which low-ranking military officers demanded the banning of discrimination in the armed forces, the government dismissed 702 officers, three of whom were arrested and remained in military prison for more than a year. By June 2015, all three had been granted house arrest while they await their trials.

Bolivian prisons are overcrowded, and conditions for prisoners are extremely poor. An increase in urban crime rates and a 1988 law that substantially lengthened prison sentences

for drug-related crimes have contributed to prison overcrowding. In April 2015, Pastoral Penitenciaria Caritas reported that 85 percent of inmates in prison had not received a final sentence and that overcrowding had escalated to 350 percent of capacity. A pardon system issued in 2013 to address overcrowding authorized applications for release by various categories of prisoners, including women with children. In July 2015, another new pardon program was approved to allow releases on humanitarian grounds. Assaults in prisons continue to pose a significant problem.

While the constitution and jurisdictional law recognize indigenous customary law on conflict resolution, reform efforts have not fully resolved questions regarding its jurisdiction and proper application. This lack of clarity has allowed some perpetrators of vigilante crimes, including lynching, to misrepresent their actions as a form of indigenous justice.

In general, racism is rife in the country, especially against indigenous groups. The 2010 antiracism law contains measures to combat discrimination and impose criminal penalties for discriminatory acts. Bolivia has laws in place that prohibit discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. However, these laws are rarely enforced, and members of the LGBT community suffer widespread societal discrimination. Transgender individuals by law can change their name and gender identity on government forms, but judicial discrimination makes the process very difficult. Various LGBT organizations reported that only seven people have been able to successfully change their name or gender identity since 2007. Additionally, no laws condemn hate crimes against LGBT people. A study conducted by the Bolivian Coalition of LGBT Organizations (COALIBOL) in 2014 found that 93 percent of LGBT people have faced some form of discrimination from public officials, particularly police officers and civil service workers. Transgender people often resort to sex work due to employment discrimination and rejection of their credentials.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

While the law protects freedom of movement, protesters often disrupt internal travel by blocking highways and city streets. Women enjoy the same formal rights to property ownership as men, but discrimination is pervasive, leading to disparities in property ownership and access to resources.

Two controversial Supreme Decrees in 2015 threaten the right to prior consultation in cases of natural resource extraction, which is established in international legal provisions recognized by Bolivian law. In March, the government enacted Supreme Decree 2298, which establishes a 45-day limit on prior consultations regarding hydrocarbon activities and allows for the subsequent approval of land exploitation, even if the indigenous peoples involved did not participate. Supreme Decree 2366, issued in May, allows for oil and gas extraction in national parks provided that companies contribute 1 percent of their investments to poverty reduction and helping to prevent negative environmental consequences. Opposition leaders and human rights organizations have criticized the decrees. In August, the Ombudsman filed a request to review their constitutionality.

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation, but it reserves marriage as a bond between a man and a woman, and makes no provision for same-sex civil unions.

The 2014 general elections were the first in which half of the candidates were women. As a result, 47 percent of senators and 53 percent of deputies are women. Nevertheless, the justice system does not effectively safeguard women's broader legal rights. A 2014 law increased the penalties for rape and abuse, and included the recognition of spousal rape; created a specialized police force for crimes against women; and categorized violence

against women as a public health issue. More than half of Bolivian women are believed to suffer from domestic violence at some point during their lives. A 2012 law is intended to protect women from harassment and political violence; however, according to the Asociación de Concejalas de Bolivia, only 13 out of the 272 cases reported between 2010 and 2014 were resolved. The lack of enforcement and allocation of resources for the implementation of legislation protecting women was a concern raised during Bolivia's UN Universal Periodic Review.

Child labor and forced labor are ongoing problems. A law approved in 2014 allows children aged 12 to 14 to enter work contracts as long as they do not work for longer than six hours a day. Children as young as 10 are permitted to work in independent jobs such as shoe shining as long as they are under parental supervision. Human rights organizations and the International Labor Organization have condemned the law.

Trafficking in Bolivia is mainly for forced labor. A 2012 antitrafficking law is poorly enforced.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 3,650,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Sarajevo

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

A state-level coalition between the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), a Bosniak party; the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ BiH); the Serb Democratic Party (SDS) and its allies in the Republika Srpska-based Alliance for Change coalition; and the newly-formed Democratic Front (DF) struggled to enact legislation in 2015. An initiative backed by Germany and Britain to restart the country's stalled European Union (EU) bid likewise faltered, as the parties were unable to agree on details of reform efforts.

Meanwhile, Republika Srpska president Milorad Dodik began laying groundwork for a controversial referendum on the jurisdiction and legality of the country's state-level courts, within the framework of the 1995 Dayton Accords. The vote, initially scheduled for November 2015, was postponed. Dodik's push for a referendum was a major blow to the German-British reform agenda, which was initiated after the 2014 general elections and endorsed in writing by all the relevant political actors in the country, including Dodik.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 22 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 8 / 12

The 1995 Dayton Accords that ended the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) created a loosely knit state composed of two entities—the Federation, whose citizens are

mainly Bosniak and Croat, and the largely Serb Republika Srpska—that operate under a weak central government. The role of head of state is fulfilled by a three-member presidency comprising one Bosniak, one Serb, and one Croat; each is elected to a four-year term, which the three presidents serve concurrently.

The Parliamentary Assembly, a state-level body, has two chambers. The 15-seat upper house, the House of Peoples, consists of five members from each of the three main ethnic groups, elected by the Federation and Republika Srpska legislatures for four-year terms. The lower house, the House of Representatives, has 42 popularly elected members serving four-year terms, with 28 seats assigned to representatives from the Federation and 14 to representatives from the Republika Srpska. The House of Representatives elects the head of the Council of Ministers (equivalent to the prime minister), who leads the state-level government. The Federation and the Republika Srpska have their own presidents, parliaments, and other governing bodies, which are responsible for policymaking on the entity level. Many political posts are awarded under a population-based ethnic quota system prescribed by the Dayton Accords.

Recent elections were deemed generally free and fair. The SDA, the HDZ-BiH, and the SDS dominated the 2014 general elections, underlining ethnic divisions in Bosnian politics. The SDA took 10 of the 28 seats allotted to the Federation in the House of Representatives. The vote to fill the 14 seats allotted to the Republika Srpska was largely split between the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), which won 6 seats, and the SDS, which took 5. Denis Zvizdić of the SDA was appointed as head of the Council of Ministers. Mladen Ivanić of the Party of Democratic Progress (PDP), Dragan Čović of the HDZ-BiH, and Bakir Izetbegović of the SDA were respectively elected to the Bosnian Serb, Bosnian Croat, and Bosniak seats of the tripartite presidency.

A grand coalition consisting of the SDA, the HDZ BiH, the SDS and its Republika Srpska-based allies, and the DF exists in principle at the state level, although the group has managed to pass little in the way of legislation.

At the Federation level, a coalition between the SDA, HDZ BiH, and DF dissolved only a few months after the 2014 polls, with the DF citing irreconcilable differences with the two leading partners. A new coalition, led by the SDA and backed by a number of smaller parties, emerged in August 2015.

In the Republika Srpska, the SNSD secured a tenuous parliamentary majority following the 2014 elections. Shortly after the polls, audio recordings emerged in which Republika Srpska prime minister Željka Cvijanović of the SNSD can apparently be heard making a deal to purchase the votes of two opposition representatives in order to secure the party's control of the entity-level legislature.

Local elections are scheduled for October 2016, with the electoral status of Mostar still unresolved. Due to disputes between Bosniak and Croat parties, Mostar lacks legally elected representatives and has not held local polls since 2008.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

Political parties typically organize and operate freely, though the political arena in the Federation is generally limited to Bosniaks and Croats, while Serbs dominate politics in the Republika Srpska. Coalitions at all levels of government shift frequently.

The Office of the High Representative (OHR), which was created by the Dayton Accords, operates under the auspices of the United Nations and has the authority to remove elected officials if they are deemed to be obstructing the peace process. In recent years, the OHR has been reluctant to intervene in the country's politics. Additionally, under the Dayton Accords, representatives from each of the three major ethnic groups, at both state and

entity levels, may exercise a veto on legislation deemed harmful to their interests. As a result, Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats must agree on major legislation before it can advance. Such consensus is rarely reached.

Citizens who do not identify as Bosniak, Bosnian Serb, or Bosnian Croat are ineligible to run for the state-level presidency or serve in the House of Peoples. BiH's leaders have not enacted reforms addressing the 2009 Sejdić-Finci ruling at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which ordered that this exclusion be rescinded.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12 (–1)

Legislative deadlock continued across all levels of government in 2015. Only one major piece of legislation, a controversial labor law, has been passed in the Federation since the 2014 elections. The Republika Srpska assembly has similarly seen little meaningful debate.

The country's complex institutional framework provides many avenues for corrupt behavior among politicians, and corruption remains a serious problem. Enforcement of legislation designed to combat corruption is weak due to the lack of strong and independent anticorruption agencies and a dearth of political will to address the issue. When corruption probes are actually opened, they rarely result in convictions. In the Republika Srpska, there was no institutional response to recordings implicating Cvijanović in a vote-buying scandal benefitting the SNSD. Meanwhile, critics of the SNSD-led, entity-level government in the Republika Srpska have suggested that Dodik's drive to reject the jurisdiction of state-level courts was designed to both distract from a banking scandal involving figures linked with the SNSD, and strip state institutions of their ability to investigate corruption cases in the Republika Srpska.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 35 / 60 (–2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 10 / 16

The constitution and the human rights annex to the Dayton Accords provide for freedom of the press, but this right is not always respected in practice. While a large number of independent broadcast and print outlets operate, they tend to appeal to narrow ethnic audiences, and most neglect substantive or investigative reporting. The public broadcaster, BiH Radio Television (BHRT), which targets multiethnic audiences, has faced growing political and financial pressure in recent years. Police in December 2014, acting on a court order, raided the offices of the news website Klix.ba after it had publicized the recordings that appeared to reveal a vote-buying scheme in the Republika Srpska. Computers and other equipment belonging to the organization were confiscated, though in 2015 the Sarajevo Municipal Court ordered that they be returned, and later ruled that the raid had been illegal. In February 2015, the Republika Srpska's legislature passed a measure that criminalized the dissemination on social media of material that disturbed public order. The law drew a prompt rebuke from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Representative on Freedom of the Media. Following an outcry from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), journalists, and other domestic and international observers, the law was amended to exclude material that criticized government bodies, but not public officials. A coalition of journalists and other activists had launched a legal challenge of the measure by the year's end. Authorities are not known to restrict or illegally monitor communications on the internet.

Citizens enjoy freedom of religion, but only in areas where their particular ethnic group represents a majority. Acts of vandalism against holy sites of all three major faiths have been reported in recent years.

While the authorities do not restrict academic freedom at institutions of higher education, academic appointments are heavily politicized, with ethnic favoritism playing a significant role. Primary and secondary school curricula are also politicized; some Bosniak returnees in the Republika Srpska have sent their children to temporary alternative schools in protest of curricula they call discriminatory. Depending on their ethnicity, children use textbooks printed in Croatia, Serbia, or Sarajevo. At some schools in the Federation, Bosniak and Croat students are divided into classes on the basis of their ethnicity, meeting in segregated classrooms despite attending school in the same building. In 2014, the Federation's Supreme Court ruled that these divisions are discriminatory, but at the end of 2015 no action had been taken to implement the ruling.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12

The constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association, and the various levels of government generally respect these rights in practice. However, in 2014, security forces employed excessive force against people who participated in a series of antigovernment demonstrations, and at the end of 2015 no police officials had been convicted of wrongdoing.

A variety of NGOs operate. NGO representatives have claimed that the process of registering a new group is unnecessarily complex, and that officials in both the Federation and the Republika Srpska at times have interfered with NGO operations.

While no legal restrictions on the right of workers to form and join labor unions exist, discrimination against union members is common. In August 2015, the Federation approved a labor reform law over the objections of union members, who argued that it empowered business interests and eroded workers' rights. The measure, meant to be adopted in the Republika Srpska as well, was backed by the EU and the International Monetary Fund, from which BiH was seeking a loan. Unemployment in BiH is among the highest in Europe, and many workers have reportedly declined to file anti-union-related complaints with labor inspectors for fear of losing their jobs. However, courts in both the Federation and Republika Srpska frequently rule in favor of workers when faced with such cases.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16 (–2)

The judiciary remains susceptible to influence by nationalist political parties and faces pressure from the executive branch. The lack of a single, supreme judicial body and the existence of four separate court systems—for the central state, the Republika Srpska, the Federation, and the self-governing Brčko district—contributes to overall inefficiency. In 2015, Republika Srpska president Dodik began laying groundwork for a referendum intended to allow the entity to reject the jurisdiction of BiH's state-level courts. Dodik claimed that the Dayton Accords provide no basis for a state-level court system, and that state-level judicial authorities had demonstrated a pattern of anti-Serb bias. The referendum, if approved, would further impede the ability of BiH's judicial institutions to handle corruption and organized crime cases. Originally set for November 2015, the vote had yet to take place by the year's end. Dodik launched a similar initiative in 2011, but the EU helped to defuse the situation by initiating a dialogue on judicial reform.

The country has made some efforts to reduce its case backlog, but the number of cases pending in the court system remains high. The police do not always fully inform people of their rights upon arrest, and witness protection programs are not always available to those who need them. Prisons are overcrowded and prisoners sometimes face abuse. The state

court—which handles organized crime, war crimes, corruption, and terrorism cases—has made progress on adjudicating cases. Results of the 2013 census, the release of which has been delayed at least until 2016, are expected to formally display the extent of wartime ethnic cleansing. The rate of attacks against people displaced during the war but who later returned to their homes has decreased over the years. However, two attacks against returnees were reported in the Republika Srpska in 2015.

There are concerns about the small but increasingly visible presence of Islamic extremism in BiH. The Islamic State militant group in 2015 expanded efforts to lure Bosnian recruits to fight in Syria and Iraq, and the government has been ineffective in addressing the issue. In April, a purported Islamic radical attacked a police station in Zvornik, killing one police officer and injuring two more, before being fatally shot himself.

Members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community face discrimination and occasional physical attacks, as well as harassment in the country's media. In 2014, masked assailants burst into an LGBT film festival in Sarajevo and attacked panel speakers. The 2015 festival saw increased police protection, and took place without incident. Entity-level laws do not protect LGBT people from discrimination. While national laws do offer such protection, these measures are often disregarded.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

The law protects freedom of movement. Some issues surrounding the return of people displaced during the civil war persist, but few refugees are now attempting to return to their homes.

Unemployment hovers at around 44 percent, though there is a large informal economy. Individuals face discrimination in employment, housing, and social services in regions that are not dominated by their own ethnic group.

Women are legally entitled to full equality with men but are underrepresented in politics and government and face discrimination in the workplace. Sexual harassment is common. Police are largely unresponsive to violent domestic disputes, particularly in rural areas. Severe corruption helps to enable human trafficking for the purpose of prostitution and forced labor. The government has made some limited progress in training prosecutors and judges to handle trafficking cases, and has provided some funding for programs to assist victims. However, the legal system's capacity to adjudicate trafficking cases remains inadequate, and few services are available for male victims.

Botswana

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 2,140,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Gaborone

Freedom Rating: 2.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F

INTRODUCTION

While democratic traditions are strong in Botswana, critics of President Seretse Khama Ian Khama have expressed concerns about creeping authoritarianism, particularly in light of crackdowns on the media and questionable actions by Khama regarding the judiciary.

Botswana saw economic difficulties in 2015, attributed to a decline in diamond exports as well as significant electricity and water shortages. Following two quarters of economic contraction, the country had entered a recession by the year's end.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 28 / 40**A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12**

Khama is the son of Botswana's first president. The president is elected indirectly by the National Assembly and holds significant power, including the authority to prolong or dismiss the legislature, which cannot impeach him. Democracy advocates have alleged that power has become increasingly centralized around Khama, with many top jobs going to military officers and family members.

Botswana has a unicameral 63-seat National Assembly, of which 57 members are directly elected, 4 are nominated by the president and approved by the assembly, and 2 (the president and the attorney general) are ex-officio members. All members serve five-year terms with no term limits.

In the 2014 elections, the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) won 37 of the 57 contested seats. The Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC) won 17 seats, and the center-left Botswana Congress Party (BCP) won the remaining 3 seats.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

The BDP has dominated the political scene since Botswana's independence in 1966. In 2012, the opposition parties (Botswana Movement for Democracy [BMD], Botswana National Front, and Botswana People's Party) coalesced under the Umbrella for Democratic Change but continue to retain separate identities within constituencies.

The House of Chiefs is a 35-member national body that serves an advisory role on matters of legislation pertaining to tribal law and custom. It is composed primarily of members of the country's eight major Setswana-speaking tribes. Smaller groups tend to be left out of the political process. Under the Territories Act, land in ethnic territory is distributed under the jurisdiction of majority groups. Due in part to their lack of representation in the House of Chiefs, minority groups are subject to patriarchal Tswana customary law despite having their own traditional rules for inheritance, marriage, and succession.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Botswana's anticorruption body has special powers of investigation, arrest, and search and seizure, and the body has a high conviction rate. Despite this, President Khama has shielded a number of high-profile allies from indictment and prosecution.

There are almost no restrictions on the private business activities of public servants (including the president, who is a large stakeholder in the tourism sector), and political ties often play a role in awarding government jobs and tenders. In 2015, it emerged that members of parliament had secretly approved significant salary increases for themselves, as well as for the president and vice president. In September 2015, a newspaper reported that a company owned by the secretary general of the BDP won a 40 million pula (\$3.7 million) contract to build a new fire station in Molepolole, without any measure of competition or

open tender. There have been a number of allegations of corruption involving the politically appointed members of Land Boards.

During President Khama's terms, several government bodies, including the Directorate on Intelligence and Security Services (DISS), the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC), and the state media, have been reorganized under the Office of the President, raising concerns about the consolidation of power in the executive branch. Botswana does not have a freedom of information law, and critics accuse the government of excessive secrecy. Botswana was ranked 28 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 45 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

Freedom of expression is protected under Section 12 of Botswana's constitution. The Media Practitioners Act, which has not yet entered into force, compels all resident journalists to receive accreditation from a media council. It also establishes a complaints committee, whose members are appointed by the minister of presidential affairs and public administration, which can fine or deregister journalists who violate its code of ethics. Authorities are reluctant to offer advertising contracts to privately owned newspapers that criticize the government.

There was an uptick in attacks and pressure on Botswana's media in 2015. In January, the independent newspaper *Mmegi* experienced a cyberattack that destroyed a significant amount of its archived material. *Mmegi*'s editor claimed that the DISS was behind the attack, and that it had been carried out as retaliation for an article claiming that the DCEC had questioned DISS director Isaac Kgosi in 2012 about the origin of a large amount of money he had amassed since assuming the directorship. In May, following its publication of an investigative piece that implicated the DISS and BDP in corrupt behavior involving an oil contract, officials from the DCEC raided the offices of the *Botswana Gazette* and arrested and temporarily detained three staff members and the paper's lawyer. One of the journalists was reportedly charged under section 44 of the DCEC Act, which bans the disclosure of information related to an ongoing investigation. Also in May, the deputy editor of the *Sunday Standard* publicly denied that he had fired one of its journalists over an article critical of a government minister who happened to be one of the deputy editor's relatives. In June, the private radio station Yarona FM suspended its news and assignment editors after they aired a story alleging that the DISS's network had been hacked.

Nevertheless, Botswana has a vigorous and generally free press, with several independent newspapers and magazines. The private Gaborone Broadcasting Company (GBC) television system and two private radio stations have limited reach, with the result that many people rely on broadcasts from neighboring South Africa. State-owned broadcast outlets, which have a wider reach than the GBC and the two private radio stations, favor the ruling party.

The government does not restrict internet access, though access is rare outside cities. Freedom of religion is guaranteed, but all religious organizations must register with the government. Academic freedom is generally respected.

Private discussion is generally free in Botswana. However, reports of increasing electronic surveillance, rogue intelligence agents, and a lack of proper oversight mechanisms for spy agencies have contributed to a growing climate of suspicion and have reportedly dampened private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 10 / 12

The government generally respects the constitutional rights of assembly and association. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including human rights groups, operate

openly without harassment. However, the government has barred organizations supporting the rights of the San people (an indigenous tribal population) from entering the Central Kgalagadi Game Reserve (CKGR), the subject of a long-running land dispute. Demonstrations at the reserve have been forcibly dispersed.

While independent labor unions are permitted, workers' rights to strike and bargain collectively are dependent upon the type of service they render.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

Botswana's courts are generally considered to be fair and free of direct political interference, though the legal system is affected by staffing shortages and a large backlog of cases. Civil cases are sometimes tried in customary courts, where defendants have no right to legal counsel.

In one of the most publicized cases of 2015, President Khama suspended four High Court judges in August for bringing the judiciary into disrepute and undermining Chief Justice Maruping Dibotelo. The four were part of a group of 12 judges that signed a petition calling for Dibotelo's impeachment, after Dibotelo had accused them of improperly collecting housing allowances. Three of the judges later withdrew their signatures from the petition, and all four were challenging the suspensions at the year's end. The incident prompted rights group Amnesty International and other observers to express concern about judicial independence in Botswana. Separately, in December, Khama faced criticism for appointing two high court judges who apparently had little legal experience.

Occasional reports of police abuse to obtain evidence or confessions have been reported. Botswana's justice system includes corporal and capital punishment. In August 2015, foreign inmates who are HIV-positive secured the right to receive free antiretroviral therapy, despite the state's unsuccessful appeal.

Migrants from Zimbabwe continue to face xenophobia and are often denied salaries by being deported just before payday. Immigration policies in place since 2010 were designed to halt the flow of undocumented immigrants into the country, mostly from Zimbabwe. Botswana has built a fence along its border with that country, ostensibly to control foot-and-mouth disease among livestock; it is widely supported as a means of halting illegal immigration. Following the 2013 Zimbabwean elections, the government stopped granting refugee status to asylum-seekers from that country, stating it no longer necessary as the political situation in Zimbabwe had improved.

While same-sex sexual activity is not explicitly criminalized, "unnatural offences" are punishable by up to seven years in prison. However, there were no reported cases during 2015. A 2010 amendment to the Employment Act outlaws workplace dismissal based on an individual's sexual orientation or HIV status. In 2013, representatives of the NGO Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals of Botswana (LEGABIBO) filed a case with the High Court seeking review of a decision by the director of civil and national registration and the minister of labor and home affairs denying them registration. In 2014, in a landmark ruling, the Botswana High court determined that the government cannot deny an LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) group registration. The government has appealed the decision, with a ruling expected in 2016.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 11 / 16

Since 1985, authorities have relocated about 5,000 San to settlements outside the CKGR. The government insists that the San have been relocated to give them access to modern education and health facilities, rejecting claims that the government wants unrestricted access to diamond reserves in the region. In 2014, the San lost rights to hunt in

Botswana, effectively denying them a way of life. There have been reports of beatings, abuse, and arbitrary arrests of San people by police and park rangers. The San tend to be marginalized in education and employment opportunities.

With the exception of the restrictions imposed on the San, citizens of Botswana generally enjoy freedom of travel and internal movement. Botswana's regulatory framework is considered conducive to establishing and operating private businesses.

Women continue to be underrepresented in the government and judiciary. Since the 2014 elections, women make up roughly 10 percent of the National Assembly. Women enjoy the same rights as men under the constitution, but customary laws limit their property rights, and women married under traditional laws have the same legal status as minors. The 2004 Abolition of Marital Powers Act established equal control of marriage estates and equal custody of children, removed restrictive domicile rules, and set the minimum marriage age at 18. However, enforcement of the act is not uniform and generally requires the cooperation of traditional authorities, which is not always forthcoming.

Domestic violence and trafficking for the purposes of prostitution and labor remain significant problems. According to the U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, unemployed women, agricultural workers, children, and people from poorer rural areas are among the most susceptible to traffickers. Civil servants, including police and teachers, have been reported as clients of children forced to engage in sex work.

Brazil

Political Rights Rating: 2

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 204,519,000

Capital: Brasília

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

Rising inflation, Brazil's worst economic recession in 25 years, and allegations of official corruption battered President Dilma Rousseff's administration in 2015, leading to large but mostly peaceful protests and sustained public pressure for the president to resign less than a year into her second term. Opposition parties requested her impeachment over revelations that she had manipulated the government's accounts to disguise deficit spending, and the impeachment process was expected to begin in early 2016. Rousseff's credibility was further weakened by a major tax-related corruption scandal involving dozens of companies, including some branches of large international corporations.

Most damaging for the president was a multibillion-dollar bribery scandal at Petrobrás, the state-controlled oil company, in which money was allegedly funneled to members of her Workers' Party (PT) and other politicians. The sheer size and duration of the alleged

scheme was unprecedented: More than 100 people were arrested, including former Petrobrás executives, and 32 sitting members of Congress—most of them part of the ruling coalition—were under investigation for suspected involvement at year's end.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 33 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

Brazil is a federal republic governed under a presidential system. Elections are generally free and fair. The president is elected by popular vote for a four-year term and is eligible for reelection to a second term. President Rousseff, the incumbent, won the October 2014 election by a slim margin, taking 51.6 percent of the vote in a runoff against Aécio Neves of the centrist Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), who received 48.4 percent.

The bicameral National Congress is composed of an 81-member Senate and a 513-member Chamber of Deputies. Senators serve staggered eight-year terms, with one- to two-thirds coming up for election every four years. Members of the Chamber of Deputies serve four-year terms. In the October 2014 legislative elections, the PT remained the largest party in the lower house with 70 deputies, followed by the centrist, PT-allied Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) with 66 seats, and the opposition PSDB with 54 seats. The PMDB maintained its lead in the Senate, with 18 seats, while the PT held 12 seats and the PSDB held 10. Numerous smaller parties made up the remainder.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

Brazil has an unfettered multiparty system marked by vigorous competition between rival parties. The electoral framework encourages the proliferation of parties, a number of which are based in a single state. Some parties display little ideological consistency; the sheer number of parties means that the executive branch must piece together diverse coalitions to pass legislation, which may encourage corruption. Although the PT has been in power since 2003, no single force has been able to dominate the executive and both legislative branches in recent years. The PMDB, to which Vice President Michel Temer belongs, remained allied with the ruling PT as of the end of 2015, but showed an inclination toward leaving the governing coalition in order to field its own candidate in the 2018 elections.

A 2007 Supreme Court decision outlawed switching parties after elections, though lawmakers have continued to change on occasion for financial and other inducements. For example, Eduardo Cunha, the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies and a member of the PMDB, announced in 2015 that he would switch to the opposition.

Afro-Brazilians remain underrepresented in politics. The Senate has one self-identified black representative, and only one of Rousseff's cabinet members is black.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

In spite of the Rousseff administration's professed intolerance of corruption, graft remains endemic in Brazil, especially among elected officials, undermining their ability to make and implement policy without undue influence from private or criminal interests.

In March 2015, prosecutors announced a corruption case in which major companies allegedly paid bribes to Brazil's tax authorities in exchange for reducing their liabilities in tax disputes. Officials revealed that over the past 15 years, the government had been cheated out of \$6.1 billion in taxes and fines; 74 companies, including Ford Motor Brazil and the Brazilian unit of the Spanish bank Banco Santander SA, were under investigation along with 24 unnamed individuals at year's end.

In October 2015, the country's federal accounts court ruled that Rousseff had doctored government accounts in 2014 to hide a growing fiscal deficit prior to that year's elections, in violation of the Fiscal Responsibility Law. Brazil's electoral court also gave instructions in October to investigate other possible illegalities in Rousseff's 2014 presidential campaign. In December, Cunha, who was himself under investigation for corruption, agreed to begin impeachment proceedings against Rousseff. However, just days later, Brazil's Supreme Court disbanded the committee that had been formed to lead the impeachment process, forcing the opposition to start from scratch. The impeachment effort was expected to begin again in early 2016.

Also in 2015, Brazil was rocked by a major scandal involving the state-controlled oil company, Petrobrás. For at least the last decade, some of the country's largest construction companies paid billions of dollars in bribes and kickbacks to politicians, political parties, and Petrobrás executives in order to land lucrative contracts with the oil producer at inflated prices. The investigation produced more than 100 arrests and over 30 convictions, with charges filed against Cunha, senator and former president Fernando Collor, and José Dirceu, former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's chief of staff between 2003 and 2005. Rousseff, who had served as head of Petrobrás's board when much of the alleged corruption took place, was cleared of any wrongdoing by a parliamentary commission in October 2015, though some observers expressed doubt that she could have been unaware of the schemes.

Brazil was ranked 76 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Brazil is a cofounder of the Open Government Partnership, a multinational organization seeking to increase governmental transparency and democratic ideals while decreasing corruption. As part of its pledge to support these goals, Brazil enacted an Access to Information Law in 2012.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 48 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but politicians and influential businessmen continued to make use of existing laws to curtail critical reporting in 2015. Defamation, for example, remains a crime and carries a minimum sentence of three months in prison. A Brazilian blogger, Paulo Cezar de Andrade Prado, was imprisoned for more than four months in 2015 based on a 2014 defamation verdict.

Journalists, especially those who focus on organized crime or corruption, are frequently subjected to violence; at least 20 journalists have been killed in direct relation to their work since 2011, including six in 2015 alone. On a positive note, two separate juries convicted Alessandro Neves Augusto for the 2013 murders of two journalists, Gleydson Carvalho and Rodrigo Neto; he was sentenced to 14 years and 3 months for Carvalho's killing and 16 years for Neto's murder. Neto had covered police corruption and received death threats in response to his work, while Carvalho was reportedly killed to suppress information he said he had about Neto's death.

The news media are privately owned, and there are dozens of independent papers and broadcast stations across the country. Financial dependence on state advertising, however, sometimes renders the press vulnerable to manipulation.

Brazil has been praised as a champion of internet user rights. The 2014 Marco Civil da Internet, a so-called bill of rights for the internet, guarantees universal internet access and establishes strong privacy protections for Brazilian users.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right in practice. Academic freedom and private discussion are likewise unrestricted.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 10 / 12

Freedom of assembly is generally respected. However, in October 2015, a protester in Recife was shot at close range with a rubber bullet after inadvertently knocking an officer's hat off; the officer was suspended pending an investigation. A series of largely peaceful protests erupted in early 2015 in the wake of revelations about the Petrobrás bribery scandal. On March 15, about 1 million people took to the streets to protest corruption and the country's economic problems, and to call for Rousseff's impeachment. Additional major protests were held in April and August, with the latter attracting demonstrators in some 200 cities across the country.

There are no significant restrictions on freedom of association, and nongovernmental organizations are able to operate in a variety of fields. Industrial labor unions are well organized, and although they are politically connected, Brazilian unions tend to be freer from political party control than their counterparts in other Latin American countries. Labor issues are adjudicated in a system of special labor courts. Officials and employers sometimes engage in antiunion activity, including dismissal of organizers, and a number of labor activists have been threatened or murdered in recent years, particularly in rural areas. An estimated 200 people were injured in a May 2015 teachers' protest in the city of Curitiba as demonstrators opposed to pension changes attempted to break through police lines surrounding the state assembly.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16

The judiciary, though largely independent, is overburdened, inefficient, and often subject to intimidation and other external influences, especially in rural areas. Access to justice also varies greatly due to Brazil's high level of income inequality. Despite these shortcomings, the country's progressive constitution has resulted in an active judiciary that often rules in favor of citizens over the state. In May 2015, Congress amended the constitution to increase the age at which judges on higher federal courts must retire from 70 to 75. While proponents noted that this would help protect the country's strained pension system, critics argued that the move was political in nature, meant to deprive President Rousseff of five Supreme Court nominations she had expected to make before the end of her term.

Brazil has had a relatively steady annual homicide rate of about 26 per 100,000 residents in recent years, compared with a global average of less than 7 per 100,000. This high level of violence is perpetuated by impunity and corruption, as well as the illegal drug trade. Highly organized and well-armed drug gangs frequently clash with military police or with private militias comprising off-duty police officers, prison guards, and firefighters. In recent years, violence has decreased in the larger and more affluent cities, but increased in Brazil's poorer northeastern regions.

Brazil's police force remains mired in corruption and violence, and was responsible for the deaths of more than 3,000 people in 2014 alone. The victims are predominantly young and black, and can often be bystanders caught in crossfire between police and suspected gang members. Torture is used systematically to extract confessions from suspects, and extrajudicial killings are portrayed as shootouts with dangerous criminals. Police officers are rarely prosecuted for abuses, and those charged are almost never convicted. The long-term presence of special Pacifying Police Units (UPP) has apparently reduced crime in several urban *favelas*, or slums, though allegations of excessive or extrajudicial violence by the UPP continued to raise concerns about their tactics in 2015.

A 2013 law created a watchdog body known as the National Mechanism to Prevent and Combat Torture. It consists of 11 experts with unprecedented power to visit any civilian or

military facility where torture or ill-treatment has been documented. Despite this positive step, torture remained a serious problem in 2015. Brazilian law does not require that detainees be brought before a judge promptly after arrest, which increases opportunities for abuse in custody.

Brazil's prison system—which is known for its appalling living conditions—held an estimated 600,000 inmates in 2015, or around 200,000 more prisoners than its intended capacity. The country's prison population increased by 74 percent between 2005 and 2012, due principally to an increase in drug arrests. Forty percent of inmates in Brazil's prisons are awaiting trial, and they are often held with those convicted of crimes, in violation of international law. Pretrial detention can last for months or even years, as a chronic backlog in court cases routinely results in substantial trial delays. In July 2015, Brazil's lower house passed an amendment that will allow 16-year-olds to be tried as adults in cases of rape, murder, and assault; the bill was awaiting Senate approval at year's end.

In December 2014, Brazil's National Truth Commission released its report on human rights abuses committed during the country's military regime between 1964 and 1985. While the commission had no enforcement powers, it recommended repealing a 1979 amnesty and punishing those responsible for the crimes.

Brazilian law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, gender, disability, or social status, but the country continues to struggle with racial discrimination. Just over half of Brazil's population identify themselves as black or of mixed race. However, Afro-Brazilians suffer from higher rates of homicide, poverty, and illiteracy; almost 70 percent of Brazilians living in extreme poverty are black. Government policies that have begun to change these patterns include the 2010 Statute of Racial Equality, which granted land rights to inhabitants of *quilombos*—communities of descendants of escaped slaves. A 2012 affirmative action law requires public universities to reserve 50 percent of admission spots for students coming from public schools, most of whom are poor, and dictates that the number of students of African descent must increase in accordance with the racial composition of each state. In 2014, Congress passed a law requiring that at least 20 percent of its civil service employees be of African descent.

Indigenous peoples make up less than 1 percent of the population. Many indigenous communities suffer from poverty and lack adequate sanitation and education services. Unresolved and often violent land disputes between indigenous communities and farmers continued in 2015, as the latter frequently refused to vacate land that the constitution has demarcated for indigenous use. In the face of court cases that further delay already lengthy procedures, tribes occasionally resorted to forcible removal of those inhabiting their protected lands. However, in June, federal prosecutors told authorities to refrain from evicting an estimated 2,000 families—many of them indigenous—who live in an area of the Amazon where the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam is being constructed.

Although Brazil has a largely tolerant society, it reportedly has one of the world's highest levels of violence against members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community. According to Grupo Gay da Bahia, a Brazilian LGBT advocacy group, there were at least 317 murders of LGBT people in Brazil in 2014.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Brazilians enjoy freedom to travel within and outside of the country, and to make decisions about their places of residence and employment. Property rights are enforced, though requirements for starting new businesses are often onerous, and corruption and organized crime sometimes pose obstacles to private business activity.

A 2003 update to the legal code granted women rights equal to those of men for the first time in the country’s history. In 2013, Congress approved a constitutional amendment extending equal labor rights to household workers, many of whom are women. President Rousseff has pledged to make women’s rights a priority for her government, and appointed a number of women to each of her cabinets, though their representation has dwindled since Rousseff first took office. Women hold fewer than 10 percent of Chamber of Deputies seats, compared with 16 percent in the Senate.

Each state has a special force dedicated to addressing crimes against women, which are common in Brazil. In March 2015, Rousseff signed a new law that increases penalties for the murder of women and girls. While contraception is available, abortion is legal only in the case of rape, a threat to the mother’s life, or a rare and usually fatal brain deformity in the fetus. Many women who undergo illegal abortions are eventually hospitalized due to complications.

A 2013 law legalized same-sex marriage throughout the country.

Slavery-like working conditions pose a significant problem in rural—and increasingly urban—zones. A 2012 constitutional amendment allows the government to confiscate all property of landholders found to be using slave labor. Landowners who enslave workers also face fines and sentences of two to eight years in prison. Measures to fight the impunity of employers, such as mobile inspection units and a public “blacklist” of offending companies and landowners, have proven somewhat effective in reducing forced labor in rural Brazil. Official publication of the blacklist was halted in late 2014 following an injunction requested by a group representing real-estate developers. However, antislavery activists have used freedom of information laws to obtain and release the information, and the government announced in July 2015 that it would begin using drone aircraft in rural areas to investigate slave labor.

The government has sought to address the problem of child labor by cooperating with various nongovernmental organizations, increasing inspections, and offering cash incentives to keep children in school. Legislation enacted in 2014 classifies the sexual exploitation of minors as “a heinous crime,” with penalties of four to ten years in prison without eligibility for bail or amnesty.

Brunei

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 413,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Bandar Seri Begawan

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Brunei continued to implement an initial phase of new criminal regulations that were adopted in 2013 and are based on Sharia (Islamic law). This first phase, which

prescribes fines and jail terms for relatively minor religious offenses, was introduced in 2014. Plans to roll out the second and third phases of the regulations, which include severe penalties ranging from flogging to execution by stoning for some offenses, were put on hold through the end of the year. Observers noted that the harsh laws would have jeopardized Brunei's inclusion in the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact, which was moving toward signing and ratification.

Brunei's vast oil, gas, and mineral resources form the backbone of the country's development plan and the royal family's power, but the low price of oil and the possibility that Brunei's reserves will run out within two decades have led the government to pursue a more diversified economy, with greater emphasis on tourism and manufacturing.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 7 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

The hereditary sultan, Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah, is the head of state and prime minister, and continues to wield broad powers under a long-standing state of emergency imposed in 1984. He is advised by the Council of Cabinet Ministers, the Legislative Council, the Privy Council, and the Religious Council. Members of the unicameral Legislative Council are appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the sultan.

Elections are held for village-level councils that play a consultative role, though candidates are vetted by the government.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 3 / 16

Genuine political activity by opposition groups remains extremely limited. The National Development Party (NDP) was permitted to register in 2005 after pledging to work as a partner with the government and swearing loyalty to the sultan. Since the National Solidarity Party was deregistered without explanation in 2008, the NDP has been Brunei's sole legal political party. It has no formal political role, few activities in practice, and a small membership.

Ethnic and religious minorities have few opportunities for political participation. Village council candidates must be Muslim, and ministers and deputy ministers must be Muslim and Malay unless the sultan grants an exception.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

Although the appointed Legislative Council has no independent power, it formally passes the state budget and engages in question-and-answer sessions with government officials that show a continued openness to light oversight activity.

The government claims to have a zero-tolerance policy on corruption, and its Anti-Corruption Bureau has successfully prosecuted a number of lower-level officials in recent years, though in general there is little transparency.

Sultan Hassanal and his family members have held multiple positions in government. As part of an October 2015 cabinet shuffle, the sultan—who has long served as defense minister and finance minister—added the position of minister of foreign affairs and trade to his portfolio, replacing his brother, Prince Mohamed Bolkiah.

Discretionary Political Rights Question A: 1 / 4

Citizens have the opportunity to convey concerns to their leaders through the government-vetted councils of elected village chiefs, and through the members of the Legislative Council. The sultan also hears directly from citizens, though usually only from men, on certain days of the year and during festivals.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 22 / 60 (–1)**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 6 / 16**

Journalists in Brunei face considerable restrictions. Officials may close newspapers without cause and fine and imprison journalists for up to three years for reporting deemed “false and malicious.” Amendments to the sedition law in 2005 strengthened prohibitions on criticizing the sultan and the national “Malay Muslim Monarchy” ideology. The country’s main English-language daily newspaper, the *Borneo Bulletin*, is controlled by the sultan’s family and often practices self-censorship. A second English-language daily, a smaller, Malay-language newspaper, and several Chinese-language papers are also published. Brunei’s only television station is state run, but residents can receive Malaysian and other international broadcasts as well as satellite channels. Foreign journalists sometimes face difficulty gaining permission to report from Brunei. Local media have reported very cautiously on the new Sharia-based penal code and have mostly ignored international criticism.

The country’s internet practice code stipulates that content must not be subversive or encourage illegitimate reform efforts. Brunei has an active online discussion community, however, and social media are not censored, though they are frequently monitored.

The state religion is the Shafi’i school of Sunni Islam, but the constitution allows for the practice of other religions. Non-Shafi’i forms of Islam are actively discouraged, and marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims is not allowed. The regulations of the 2013 penal code that took effect in 2014 include provisions limiting the use of certain words and expressions deemed to be sacred to Islam in reference to other religions, whether in print, speech, or public statement. The words and expressions include some that are common in the Malay language, such as “Allah” (God) and “hukum” (law). The crime is subject to three years in prison and a maximum fine of \$12,000.

The new code also bans proselytizing of a religion other than Islam to Muslims or atheists, and requires Muslims to participate in fasts and other religious observances. By mid-2015, fewer than 20 people had reportedly been convicted of violating the new Sharia code, with most facing fines for smoking during the Ramadan fast or improper proximity to unrelated members of the opposite sex. Also in late 2014 and 2015, the authorities imposed limits on public displays of non-Muslim observances including Christmas and Chinese New Year.

Academic freedom is respected to some extent, though in 2013 a Burmese professor at Universiti Brunei Darussalam resigned his position, citing academic censorship. Some scholars reportedly practice self-censorship or release their work under pseudonyms in overseas publications to avoid repercussions in Brunei.

The government utilizes an informant system to monitor suspected dissidents, and online communications are monitored for subversive content. However, in practice there is relatively open discussion in public spaces on issues other than the royal family or Islamic law.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Emergency laws continue to restrict freedoms of assembly and association. No more than 10 people can assemble for any purpose without a permit; permits are relatively easily and frequently obtained for social occasions such as weddings. Most nongovernmental organizations are professional or business groups. All groups must register and name their members, and registration can be refused for any reason. The law guarantees the right to form and join a union, but only a single union is active—the Brunei Oilfield Workers Union.

Strikes are illegal, and collective bargaining is not recognized. Civil servants may not join a political party.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The constitution does not provide for an independent judiciary. Although the courts generally appear to act independently, they have yet to be tested in political cases. Civil and criminal law is based on English common law and is enforced in secular courts, while Sharia historically has been enforced in Sharia courts. Final recourse for civil cases is managed by the Privy Council in the United Kingdom, and for religious cases the Religious Council of Brunei.

The 2013 Sharia penal code, whose implementation began in May 2014, includes rules that apply to non-Muslims as well as Muslims. For example, those found guilty of getting pregnant out of wedlock or of cohabiting without being married, whether nonmarried Muslims or a nonmarried Muslim with a non-Muslim, can be subject to a fine and prison time. Many of the new Sharia rules overlap with existing provisions of the civil and criminal codes, but under the new Sharia code there will be different sentences and burdens of proof. While a defendant will only be tried in a single court under a single code, comprehensive rules dictating which court will try whom and for which crime were not fully established by the end of 2015. It also remained unclear when the final two phases of the new code—with their harsh corporal punishments—would be implemented.

Brunei retained the death penalty for crimes including drug trafficking and murder before the new Sharia code was launched, though the last known execution took place in 1957. Many criminal offenses, including immigration violations, can be punished in part with caning, and this penalty is commonly carried out, though an attending doctor can interrupt the process for medical reasons. Prison conditions generally meet international standards.

Thousands of stateless residents of Brunei, including longtime ethnic Chinese residents, are denied the full rights and benefits of citizens. However, the government continued to process permanent-residency applications during 2015, and those with a basic identity document have access to some government services and health and education subsidies.

Same-sex sexual activity is a crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison under the existing penal code, and in practice LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people do not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. The new Sharia code, if fully implemented, will prescribe execution by stoning for same-sex sexual relations.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16 (– 1)

Freedom of movement is respected. All government employees, domestic and foreign, must apply for permission to travel abroad, but permission is easily obtained.

The new Sharia penal code criminalizes “indecent behavior” by Muslims and non-Muslims, and enjoins women to dress “modestly.” Cross-dressing is a crime under the code, and at least one man was convicted and fined for the offense during 2015. Religious enforcement officers raid homes to arrest people for *khalwat*, the mingling of unrelated men and women, when there is probable cause. According to the new code, non-Muslims can be punished for *khalwat* if another defendant is a Muslim. Most first offenders are fined or released due to a lack of evidence.

Islamic law generally places women at a disadvantage in cases of divorce and inheritance, and the new Sharia penal code institutes offenses that fall mainly on women, such as pregnancies out of wedlock. All women in government-run institutions and schools are

required or pressured to wear traditional Muslim head coverings. In 2015, Brunei ranked 88 out of 145 countries in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap report; while it scored well on economic participation and opportunity, it performed poorly on health and survival and ranked last on political empowerment.

Migrants who come to Brunei to serve as household workers are often coerced into involuntary servitude or debt bondage, and can be subject to varying forms of abuse. There are approximately 100,000 migrant workers in the country, and they remain largely unprotected by labor laws and vulnerable to exploitation. Workers who overstay visas are regularly imprisoned and, in some cases, caned.

Bulgaria

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 7,181,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Sofia

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,2,F	1,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

The coalition government led by Prime Minister Boyko Borisov and his center-right party, Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), continued to function relatively effectively in 2015 despite the fallout from a 2014 banking crisis, very modest economic growth, a rising budget deficit, and a migrant crisis along the southern border. GERB easily won local elections held in October.

In May, the justice minister proposed a package of judicial reforms designed to increase the independence of the courts and reduce political influence. However, the parliament had rejected key provisions of the package by December, and the justice minister consequently resigned.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 33 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

The unicameral National Assembly, composed of 240 members, is elected every four years in 31 multimember constituencies. The president, elected for up to two five-year terms, is the head of state but has limited powers. The legislature chooses the prime minister, who serves as head of government. In the 2011 presidential election, Rosen Plevneliev of GERB defeated Ivailo Kalfin of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) in a runoff with 53 percent of the vote.

In the October 2014 parliamentary elections, GERB led with 84 seats, followed by the BSP with 39, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) with 38, the Reformist Bloc with 23, and the nationalist Patriotic Front with 19. A new populist party, Bulgaria without Censorship (BBT), took 15 seats, while the Alternative for Bulgarian Revival (ABV), a

Socialist splinter group led by former president Georgi Parvanov, secured 11 seats. The ultranationalist Ataka party also won 11 seats. GERB leader Boyko Borisov returned as prime minister, having been in opposition since 2013, and the party formed a governing coalition with the Reformist Bloc, the ABV, and the Patriotic Front.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) declared that the elections were open and competitive, and fundamental rights were respected. In a departure from the 2013 elections, there were no prominent allegations of large-scale fraud that cast doubt on the overall validity of the voting. Nevertheless, monitors noted that certain electoral regulations, including campaign finance rules, were poorly enforced. Observers blamed the unusually low voter turnout of approximately 48 percent on voter fatigue and lackluster campaigns. As in previous national elections, accusations of vote buying and other irregularities undermined public confidence in the process.

Local elections and a referendum on electoral reform were held in October 2015. President Plevneliev had initiated the referendum, proposing that citizens approve obligatory voting, electronic voting, and a mixed electoral system that allows some members of parliament to be elected on a majoritarian basis. However, the parliament rejected two of these proposals, meaning only the question on electronic voting was included in the referendum. Voters ultimately approved the idea, but the result was not binding due to low turnout; the parliament would only be required to consider the initiative. In the local elections, GERB led with about a third of all council seats and the mayoralties of most major cities, while the BSP and DPS lost ground. The process was marred by hacking attacks on the website of the electoral commission and other state institutions, which critics of the electronic-voting proposal cited as a sign that the integrity of future elections could be at risk.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

A record eight parties won seats in the 2014 parliamentary elections, passing a 4 percent vote threshold required for representation. The center-left BSP lost more than half its seats, as did Ataka, which had allied itself with the unpopular BSP-led government. GERB, which was founded in 2006 and governed from 2009 to 2013, is one in a series of center-right parties to rise and fall in Bulgaria's multiparty system. Since the 2014 elections, several National Assembly members have left the parties they were elected with and declared themselves independents.

The law dictates that electoral campaigns must be conducted in the Bulgarian language. The ethnic Turkish minority is represented by the DPS, but the Romany minority is more marginalized. Small Romany parties are active, and many Roma reportedly vote for the DPS. Two Romany candidates won seats in the 2014 elections, whereas none had won in 2013. Ataka and smaller nationalist parties regularly use hate speech in their campaigns, targeting ethnic Turks, Roma, Jews, Muslims, and Syrian refugees, among other groups.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Bulgaria, which joined the European Union (EU) in 2007, has struggled to meet the bloc's anticorruption requirements amid resistance from much of the political class. It was ranked 69 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The collapse of Corporate Commercial Bank (KTB) in 2014 resulted from an example of collusion among the political and economic elite. The New Bulgarian Media Group, owned by the family of DPS politician Delyan Peevski, had consistently supported the party in power, and its rapid expansion was backed by KTB. In turn, the bank received a great

deal of business from state-owned enterprises, creating a triangular relationship. A rift between Peevski and the bank's owner, Tsvetan Vassilev, allegedly triggered the run on KTB deposits that led to its takeover by the central bank.

In a positive development in 2015, the Supreme Administrative Court found that former GERB lawmaker Emil Dimitrov had improperly participated in the creation and adoption of legislation on health and smoking despite his family's involvement in the cigarette business, which amounted to a conflict of interest.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 47 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

The constitution protects freedom of expression, including for the press. The media sector is pluralistic, but dependent on financial contributions from the state—often in the form of advertising—and on private business interests. Some foreign media firms have withdrawn from the struggling market in recent years, and domestic ownership has become more concentrated in the hands of wealthy Bulgarian businessmen, leaving Bulgarian media more vulnerable to political and economic pressures. News outlets often tailor coverage to suit the interests of their owners. Although the state-owned media generally provide balanced coverage, ineffective legislation leaves them exposed to political influence. The government does not restrict internet access.

Religious freedom is generally respected, but Muslims and members of other minority faiths have reported instances of harassment and discrimination, and some local authorities have blocked proselytizing or the construction of minority religious buildings.

The government does not restrict academic freedom, and there are no significant impediments to free and open private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The authorities generally respect constitutional guarantees on freedom of assembly and freedom of association. Protests were held during 2015 on issues including proposed pay and benefit cuts for policemen and construction projects in environmentally sensitive areas.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate freely and have a degree of influence, though they suffer from funding shortages, often rely on foreign donors, and sometimes face hostility from politicians and economic interest groups. NGOs are affected by corruption and nontransparent procedures for various tenders and grant competitions, especially those related to EU funding.

Workers have the right to join trade unions, but public employees cannot strike or bargain collectively, and private employers often discriminate against union members without facing serious repercussions.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16

Bulgaria's judiciary has benefited from legal and institutional reforms associated with EU accession, but practical gains in efficiency and accountability have been lacking. The EU has noted ongoing flaws in the judicial appointment and disciplinary processes.

In December 2015, the National Assembly gave its final approval to constitutional amendments that will divide the Supreme Judicial Council so that separate entities oversee judges and prosecutors. However, lawmakers, including those from GERB, rejected a package of additional reforms originally proposed by Justice Minister Hristo Ivanov of the Reformist Bloc, which were designed to reduce political influence over the judiciary. Ivanov consequently resigned.

In July, the National Assembly elected Maya Manolova as the country's human rights ombudsman in a secret ballot, sparking a public outcry from civil society organizations. Manolova was widely viewed as an unpopular, highly partisan political figure with deep roots in the BSP.

Organized crime has been a serious problem, and scores of suspected contract killings since the 1990s remain unsolved. Incidents of mistreatment by police have been reported, and conditions in many prisons remain inadequate.

Ethnic minorities, particularly Roma, face discrimination in employment, health care, education, and housing, though the government and NGOs operate a number of programs meant to improve their social integration. Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is illegal, but societal bias against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people reportedly persists.

The government continued to extend fencing along Bulgaria's southern border to block the irregular entry of migrants and refugees, which increased during 2015. Human rights organizations reported new incidents in which such people were allegedly abused by security forces and summarily expelled back across the border into Turkey. Early in the year, the government discontinued payment of a small monthly allowance to asylum seekers in the country, citing financial difficulties.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16 (+ 1)

Bulgarians face no restrictions on the freedom of movement, whether for internal or external travel. They are also free to change residence and employment, though corruption and bias can sometimes restrict access to jobs. Authorities periodically demolish illegally constructed or irregular housing—mostly in areas occupied by Roma—without providing alternative shelter; several incidents of this kind were reported during 2015.

Bulgaria's shadow economy accounts for approximately one-third of the country's gross domestic product; corruption has been suggested as a key factor behind the phenomenon. Organized crime is believed to play an influential role in private business activity.

The constitution guarantees women equal rights, but gender discrimination is still a problem. Women account for about a fifth of the seats in the National Assembly. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs, women are paid about 13 percent below the average of their male counterparts and receive 40 percent less in pensions than males. Domestic violence is an ongoing concern.

The country is a source of human trafficking victims, of whom Roma make up a disproportionately large share. Bulgarians are subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor elsewhere in Europe. Although the government makes some efforts to combat trafficking, shelter victims, and punish complicit officials, these measures have not matched the scale of the problem, and punishments remain light in practice.

↑ Burkina Faso

Political Rights Rating: 4↓

Population: 18,450,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Ouagadougou

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ratings Change, Trend Arrow: Burkina Faso's political rights rating improved from 6 to 4, and it received an upward trend arrow, due to the holding of its most successful presidential and legislative elections ever and the subsequent installation of a civilian government, after the ouster of longtime president Blaise Compaoré in 2014 and a brief and ultimately unsuccessful military coup in September 2015.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	6,3,PF	4,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

In November 2015, voters in Burkina Faso elected a new president and parliament in polls described by national and international observers as the freest and most competitive ever to be held in the country. In late December, the inauguration of President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré and the seating of a new legislature marked the close of a transitional period that began in October 2014, when mass protests led to the resignation of longtime president Blaise Compaoré. Kaboré's People's Movement for Progress (MPP) won a plurality of seats in the parliament.

In September 2015, the presidential guard—the Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle (RSP), which was loyal to Compaoré—attempted to stage a military coup. However, the attempt failed when, amid massive popular protests against the RSP's actions, segments of the military backed the transitional government. RSP members shot and killed two dozen civilians during the unrest, which lasted about a week. The failed coup led interim authorities to delay the elections by over a month.

The transitional government passed a number of reforms in 2015, including the decriminalization of defamation and laws designed to improve conditions for women. Authorities during the transitional period also reopened investigations into two long-unsolved assassinations—those of journalist Norbert Zongo and of former president Thomas Sankara. Both cases saw high-profile individuals linked with Compaoré charged by the year's end, with Compaoré himself accused of involvement in the latter.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 21 / 40 (+ 12)

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12 (+ 4)

Compaoré took power after ousting Sankara in 1987, and remained in office for nearly three decades. Supported by his Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) party, Compaoré won Burkina Faso's first multiparty presidential election in 1991, and subsequent elections in 1998, 2005, and 2010. The CDP won a majority in each of the parliamentary

elections during Compaoré's time in office. International monitors judged elections in Burkina Faso during Compaoré's rule to be generally free but not entirely fair, due to the CDP's privileged access to state resources and the media.

A reform in 2000 introduced a limit of two five-year presidential terms. The constitution gives members of the National Assembly five-year terms. Electoral reforms in 2009 extended the right to vote in presidential elections and referendums to Burkinabé living abroad, but they have yet to be implemented.

In 2014, Compaoré attempted to amend the constitution to allow himself a third presidential term. The move prompted profound political instability and violent protests, leading the military to dissolve the National Assembly that October; Compaoré then stepped down from office. Following a brief period of military rule, a transitional government was established in late 2014, composed of representatives from civil society, the former political opposition, the military, and the former ruling party.

The transitional government successfully organized and administered the November 2015 presidential and legislative elections. Kaboré, of the MPP, a party formed to oppose Compaoré's proposed term-limit amendment, was elected president with just over 53 percent of the vote; turnout was more than 60 percent. Kaboré's closest rival, Zéphirin Diabré of the Union for Progress and Change (UPC), won 29 percent. The MPP won a plurality, but not a majority, in the National Assembly, with 55 of the 127 seats. The UPC took 33 seats, and the former ruling party, the CDP, won 18. Kaboré and the newly elected members of parliament were inaugurated in late December.

Election observers from local civil society groups, the Independent National Electoral Commission, and international missions noted only minor irregularities in the polls, with many describing the elections as the freest, fairest, and most competitive ever to be held in the country.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 9 / 16 (+3)

The Burkinabé constitution guarantees the right to form political parties. Following the 2015 legislative elections, 14 parties held seats in the National Assembly. In April 2015, the interim legislature voted to modify the electoral code, barring individual politicians who had supported Compaoré's term-limit changes from running in the upcoming presidential and legislative elections. The CDP contested the modifications at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Community Court of Justice, which in July ruled that the modifications were invalid. The Constitutional Court of Burkina Faso nevertheless upheld the reforms in August, leading to the exclusion of a number of candidates from the elections.

However, in general the end of Compaoré's regime gave way to a freer environment in which opposition parties were able to consolidate popular support during the campaigning period and gain power through the elections.

Efforts by the transitional government to reform the RSP were met with hostility from the military elite unit and, ultimately, its leaders attempted a military coup in September 2015. The maneuver sparked widespread protests, and failed after the national military's chief of staff moved to support the transitional government. The coup attempt delayed the presidential and legislative elections, originally scheduled for October, for several weeks. Transitional authorities declared the RSP dissolved in late September.

Minority rights are generally respected in politics, though a small educated elite, the military, and labor unions have historically dominated political life. Under the military and

transitional regimes, the ability of all groups to exercise full political rights and participate in political life was hindered, but this has been mostly reestablished with the return of an elected government.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12 (+5)

The creation of the transitional government allowed for policymaking and legislative action, which had come to a standstill following the dissolution of the National Assembly and suspension of the constitution in 2014. The government made several constitutional changes, including removing presidential term limits from the category of rules that may be modified, and setting them at two five-year terms, served either consecutively or separately. The transitional government also removed language regarding a second chamber of the legislature from the constitution; the chamber had never functioned during Compaoré's rule.

The selection of the members, ministers, president, and prime minister of the interim government was led by elites, leaving the government with little accountability to ordinary citizens. The successful elections and installation of a civilian government at the end of 2015 signified a marked improvement in government representation, accountability, and transparency. Corruption continued to be a problem in 2015, though prosecutors have pursued some high-level cases against former members of the Compaoré administration. Burkina Faso was ranked 76 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 38 / 60 (+2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16 (+1)

Although the constitution guarantees freedom of expression, which is generally respected, many media workers practice self-censorship, linked in part to years of impunity for Zongo's murder. The transitional government decriminalized defamation in September 2015. While defamation convictions can no longer result in jail time, the new law prescribes hefty fines of between 1 and 5 million CFA francs (\$1,700 to \$8,400) for violations; observers caution that such fines, if levied, could force many outlets out of business. There are several private television stations and dozens of private radio stations and newspapers. In July, the transitional government set plans to grant greater legal and financial autonomy to state-owned media outlets; it also set plans to establish publishing regulations that would improve ownership transparency. Journalists were generally able to report freely and critically on the 2015 elections. A number of reporters were attacked while covering events related to the failed coup, during which several media outlets also saw severe property damage inflicted. Large segments of the media community nevertheless continued to disseminate high-quality information during the crisis. The government does not restrict internet access, though penetration is low, with about 11 percent of people accessing the medium in 2015.

Burkina Faso is a secular state, and freedom of religion is respected. Academic freedom is unrestricted, though Compaoré had relied on repression to quell student-led protests and political agitation. Authorities are not known to engage in intrusive surveillance activities.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

The constitution provides for the right to assemble, though demonstrations have often been suppressed or banned. The RSP had a history of employing violence to repress mass gatherings. In October 2015, Amnesty International reported that RSP members fired on

civilian protesters and bystanders during the unrest that accompanied the failed coup, killing 14 people and injuring hundreds more.

While many nongovernmental organizations operate openly and freely, human rights groups have reported abuses by security forces. During the attempted coup, leaders of prominent civil society organizations were targeted by the former presidential guard, and in some cases their property was destroyed.

The constitution guarantees the right to strike, and unions frequently and freely engage in strikes and collective bargaining. Although only a minority of the work force is unionized, unions play an important role in the politics of the country and have used general strikes to effectively shut down the public and formal sectors.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16 (+ 1)

The judiciary is formally independent but has historically been subject to executive influence and corruption. The courts are further weakened by a lack of resources and citizens' lack of awareness of their rights.

The last few months of 2015 saw high-profile legal proceedings initiated against a number of officials associated with the former regime. Shortly after the failed coup, its leader, RSF general Gilbert Diendéré, was taken into custody along with more than a dozen others; he was charged with murder and threatening state security. In November, Diendéré was charged with involvement in the 1987 killing of former president Sankara, though the specifics of the allegations were not immediately publicized. In December, authorities issued an international arrest warrant for Compaoré in connection with Sankara's killing; at the close of 2015 the former leader was thought to be in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire. Also that month, authorities charged three former RSF members with involvement in Zongo's 1998 murder.

Police often use excessive force and disregard pretrial detention limits. Discrimination against ethnic minorities occurs, but is not widespread. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people, as well as those infected with HIV, routinely experience discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

The constitution provides for freedom of movement within the country, although security checks on travelers are common. Equality of opportunity has improved somewhat since the establishment of the transitional government; previously, CDP members often received preferential treatment in business matters, including for the acquisition of public contracts.

While illegal, gender discrimination remains common in employment and education, as well as in the upholding of property and family rights; it is particularly common in rural areas. In September 2015, the transitional government adopted two laws aimed at the prevention and punishment of domestic violence against women and children. Especially in the northern regions, early marriage contributes to lower female school enrollment and a heightened incidence of obstetric fistula. Human rights groups have recorded a significant drop in the prevalence of female genital mutilation since its criminalization in 1996.

Burkina Faso is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking in women and children. Child labor is present in the agricultural and mining sectors, among other industries. Women from neighboring countries are recruited by traffickers and transported to Burkina Faso, where they are forced into prostitution.

↓ Burundi

Political Rights Rating: 7↓

Population: 10,742,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6↓

Capital: Bujumbura

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ratings Change, Trend Arrow: Burundi's political rights rating declined from 6 to 7, its civil liberties rating declined from 5 to 6, and it received a downward trend arrow due to President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for a constitutionally dubious third term in July, which sparked violence including assassinations, arrests, torture of government critics, and escalating attacks by antigovernment forces. The government shut down nearly all private media and stepped up surveillance of citizens.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

Demonstrations broke out in the capital in late April 2015 after President Pierre Nkurunziza announced his intention to run for a third term in office, which was widely regarded as unconstitutional. At least two dozen people were killed, and many more were arrested or wounded, as police clashed with the protesters. The Constitutional Court approved the president's plan on May 5, though its members were reportedly subjected to intense pressure and intimidation by the regime. On May 13, a group of military leaders led a coup attempt against Nkurunziza while he was in Tanzania. Government forces quickly reasserted control and began a harsh crackdown on those suspected of involvement in the plot or opposition to the president.

The parliamentary and presidential elections, held on June 29 and July 21, respectively, resulted in victories for Nkurunziza and his ruling National Council for the Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) party. However, the opposition boycotted the elections, and UN observers found that the voting was neither free nor credible.

Freedoms of expression, association, and assembly were severely restricted throughout the year as the government moved to silence dissent. The authorities cracked down on private media outlets; suspended 10 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including several working on human rights issues; and closed the national university in Bujumbura. Reports of torture, forced confessions, and extrajudicial executions by security forces increased.

The overall security situation remained volatile, with both ordinary citizens and prominent individuals affected by rising political violence. An opposition party spokesman was killed by gunmen in May, a key ally of the president was shot to death in August, and leading human rights defender Pierre Claver Mbonimpa narrowly escaped an assassination attempt a day later. By the end of the year, at least 400 people had been killed and more than 200,000 people had fled the country, creating a refugee crisis in neighboring states. In December, a new rebel group announced its formation amid growing concerns that Burundi's fragile peace was collapsing, potentially plunging the country back into civil war.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 5 / 40 (–6)**A. Electoral Process:** 1 / 12 (–3)

A new constitution was adopted in 2005 after a series of agreements ended Burundi's 12-year civil war. According to the charter, the president, who is directly elected for up to two five-year terms, appoints two vice presidents, one Tutsi and one Hutu, who must be approved separately by a two-thirds majority in both the lower and upper houses of Parliament.

The lower house, the National Assembly, has 100 members directly elected by proportional representation for five-year terms. The constitution requires the National Assembly to be no more than 60 percent Hutu and no less than 40 percent Tutsi, with at least 30 percent of the seats held by women, and three deputies from the Twa ethnic minority. Additional members can be added, or “co-opted,” from the respective party lists to meet these requirements. The upper house, the Senate, consists of 36 members chosen by locally elected officials for five-year terms. Each of Burundi's 18 provinces chooses two senators—one Tutsi and one Hutu. As in the National Assembly, the Twa are guaranteed three seats in the Senate, and additional members can be co-opted to meet the 30 percent quota for women.

In April 2015, the CNDD-FDD announced that Nkurunziza would seek a third presidential term in elections scheduled for later that year. Critics charged that the move contravened the constitution and would jeopardize the country's fragile peace. Nkurunziza and his supporters argued that he was eligible to run again because he had been elected by Parliament rather than through a popular vote for his first term in office. Despite widespread public protests and international condemnation of the move, the Constitutional Court on May 5 ruled in favor of Nkurunziza, even as one of the court's justices fled abroad. Due to ongoing unrest in the country, the electoral commission postponed National Assembly elections until June 29 and the presidential poll until July 21. Indirect elections to the Senate were held on July 24.

In the National Assembly elections, the CNDD-FDD captured 60 percent of the vote and 77 seats. Despite having boycotted the vote, the opposition coalition remained on the ballot; Amizero y'Abarundi (Hope for Burundi) secured 11 percent of the vote (21 seats), while the Union for National Progress (UPRONA) captured 2 percent (2 seats). Subsequent reallocations and co-opting to meet constitutional quotas resulted in a full seating of 121 deputies. In indirect elections for the Senate, the CNDD-FDD took 33 of 36 elected seats; an additional 7 seats were co-opted. In the presidential poll, Nkurunziza defeated National Forces of Liberation (FNL) leader Agathon Rwasa, 69 percent to 19 percent. Rwasa had pulled out of the race, but his name—like those of other opposition candidates—remained on the ballot.

International observers from some organizations, including the European Union and African Union, refused to monitor the elections, saying they could not be free or fair given the growing violence and climate of intimidation. A UN mission observing the presidential poll confirmed that the overall environment had not been conducive to a free and credible electoral process.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 4 / 16 (–1)

More than two dozen political parties are active in Burundi, ranging from those that champion radical Tutsi positions to those that hold extremist Hutu views. Most are small in terms of membership, and many Tutsi have now joined formerly Hutu-dominated parties. The current legislature consists of members of the CNDD-FDD, a largely Hutu party associated with a former rebel group; the Tutsi-led UPRONA; and Amizero y'Abarundi, which

includes members of FNL, a former Hutu rebel movement. Many political parties include youth branches that intimidate and attack opponents.

Opposition parties, politicians, and their supporters faced harassment, intimidation, and violence throughout 2015, particularly after the failed coup attempt in May, which triggered a crackdown on those suspected of involvement. Security forces loyal to the president played a key role in the repression, as did Imbonerakure, the ruling party's youth wing.

Zedi Feruzi, leader of the opposition party Union for Peace and Development, was shot dead on May 24; he had spoken out against Nkurunziza's decision to run for a third term. Many opposition politicians and groups were operating in exile by year's end, including CNARED (National Council for the Restoration of the Arusha Accords and Restoration of the State of Rights), which accused Nkurunziza of violating the agreements that ended the civil war. Even some leading regime figures, such as Vice President Gervais Rufyikiri and National Assembly speaker Pie Ntavyohanyuma, fled the country in June after voicing opposition to Nkurunziza's third-term bid.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12 (–2)

In the absence of freely elected leaders, the government is accountable only to the ruling CNDD-FDD party, and no other group is able to effectively influence policies or legislation.

Corruption and nontransparent government practices are significant problems in Burundi, which ranked 150 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Burundi's largest anticorruption watchdog group, the Anticorruption and Economic Malpractice Observatory (OLUCOME), has been active in investigating and drawing public attention to official corruption in recent years.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 14 / 60 (–7)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 6 / 16 (–2)

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed, but press laws restrict journalists through broad, vaguely written provisions, and key independent news outlets were destroyed in the political violence of 2015. A 2013 media law has been widely criticized for limiting the protection of journalistic sources, requiring journalists to meet certain educational and professional standards, and banning content related to national defense, security, public safety, and the state currency. The law empowers the media regulatory body to issue press cards to journalists, suspend or withdraw cards as a result of defamation cases, and impose financial penalties for media offenses. The 15-member regulatory council is controlled by presidential appointees and journalists from state broadcasters. In 2014 the Constitutional Court largely rejected a challenge to the media law but reduced its high fines and penalties.

The government dominates the media through its ownership of the public television and radio stations; it also runs *Le Renouveau*, the only daily newspaper. Radio is the primary source of information for the majority of the population. However, five private radio stations were attacked by unidentified assailants and partially or totally destroyed after the May 2015 coup attempt. Some international radio broadcasts are available in the capital. Print runs of most newspapers remain small, and readership is limited by low literacy levels.

Throughout 2015, the government pressured journalists to name sources used in critical articles and threatened to shutter outlets carrying unfavorable coverage. Journalists are also

frequently subject to arbitrary arrest, harassment, or threats by police and the Imbonerakure, and many live in exile.

Access to the internet remains largely confined to urban areas. As protests began in 2015, the government attempted to cut off access to social-media sites used by the demonstrators. Many were able to circumvent the restrictions through the use of VPNs (virtual private networks).

Freedom of religion is generally observed. However, the Roman Catholic Church, which is influential in Burundi, clashed with the government in 2015 over issues including the legality of the president's bid for a third term.

For many years, civil strife and Tutsi social and institutional dominance impeded academic freedom by limiting educational opportunities for the Hutu, but this situation has improved since 2005. Burundi's national university was abruptly closed on April 30, 2015, amid the antigovernment demonstrations.

The ability to engage in open and free private discussion, particularly on opposition to the ruling party, is hindered by a fear of harassment by government supporters. Private citizens, including students and youth activists, faced increasing surveillance by the National Intelligence Service (SNR) in 2015.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 2 / 12 (– 1)

The constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association, but a 2013 law on public gatherings imposes restrictions on the right to assemble, including a one-day limit on the duration of demonstrations. The law holds the organizers of public gatherings liable for any legal infractions by participants and allows authorities to interrupt or cancel gatherings that pose a risk to public order.

Amnesty International reported that police used excessive force during the 2015 protests against a third term for Nkurunziza, including shooting at unarmed demonstrators as they fled. At least two dozen people were killed within weeks of the president's announcement in late April, and hundreds more were injured, detained, or arrested.

Onerous and costly registration requirements prevent many local NGOs from receiving official legal recognition. Registration must be completed in person at the Ministry of Interior in Bujumbura, which is difficult for NGOs based in remote areas, and extensive documentation is required. Crackdowns against Burundi's civil society sector intensified during 2015. Members of human rights groups that criticized the government faced surveillance, intimidation, threats, and arrest, leading many to seek refuge abroad. Between April and November, at least 15 NGO leaders were forced to flee the country after receiving threats, and two NGO members were killed by police. In November, the authorities suspended 10 NGOs, including some working on human rights issues. The leader of one of those groups—Pierre Claver Mbonimpa of the Association for the Protection of Human Rights and Detained Persons—was shot and seriously wounded in August; he had publicly criticized Nkurunziza's bid for a third term in office.

The constitution provides protections for organized labor, and the labor code guarantees the right to strike. The Confederation of Burundi Trade Unions has been independent since its establishment in 1995. Most union members are civil servants and have bargained collectively with the government.

F. Rule of Law: 1 / 16 (– 3)

Burundi's judiciary is hindered by corruption, a lack of resources and training, and executive interference in legal matters. In 2015, justices on the Constitutional Court were

reportedly intimidated into ruling in favor of Nkurunziza's decision to stand for a third term. The court's vice president, Sylvere Nimpagaritse, fled the country rather than approve the president's candidacy, which he deemed unlawful; he alleged that he and his fellow justices had come under enormous pressure, including death threats, to vote in favor of the proposal. The current judicial system struggles to function effectively or independently and cannot handle the large number of pending cases, many of which are politically sensitive. Crimes, especially those related to political violence, often go unreported or uninvestigated.

In April 2014, Parliament passed a law creating a truth and reconciliation commission to provide accountability for abuses committed between 1962 and 2008, though opposition members boycotted the vote due to concerns about the commission's lack of independence. In December of that year, Parliament elected 11 members to the commission in a vote that the opposition also boycotted; under the new law, members are elected by a simple majority. Of the 11 members, 6 are Hutu, 4 are Tutsi, and 1 is Twa. The opposition claimed that most were affiliates of the ruling party. The body has yet to begin its work, and many question the viability of the project given the 2015 violence.

Impunity for police brutality remains widespread. According to Amnesty International, the police and the SNR increasingly engaged in torture and other ill-treatment of detainees suspected of participating in the 2015 protests or subsequent antigovernment violence. Victims described being beaten with iron bars, burned with acid, and having their heads forced under dirty water. Detainees did not have access to lawyers and were forced to make false confessions under threat of death.

The general security situation deteriorated throughout the year, leading an estimated 200,000 people to flee the country. Even before the disturbances related to the president's reelection bid, the army was implicated in the extrajudicial killing of more than a dozen rebel fighters in the northern province of Cibitoke in January. Following the demonstrations that began in April, the authorities conducted house searches and made arrests in neighborhoods in Bujumbura thought to be harboring dissent. Antigovernment forces gradually stepped up attacks, including an assault in July by a group of armed rebels against army positions in the northwest. In August, General Adolphe Nshimirimana—a close ally of the president who was seen as the mastermind of the crackdowns on antigovernment protesters—was killed in a drive-by shooting and rocket attack. A rebel group calling itself the Republican Forces of Burundi (FOREBU) announced its formation in December 2015; its stated aim was to oust Nkurunziza by force. Also in December, following attacks on two military sites, security forces mounted raids in the capital and reportedly killed at least 87 people. According to the United Nations, the death toll from the political unrest had reached more than 400 by the end of 2015, though international organizations had difficulty collecting such data.

Albinos face a particular threat from discrimination and violence in Burundi. Since 2008, at least 18 albinos—whose body parts are believed by some to have magical properties—have been murdered. Although close to a dozen arrests have been made in connection with such crimes, only one has resulted in a conviction in recent years.

Members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community face official and societal discrimination. The 2009 penal code criminalizes same-sex sexual activity, and punishments include up to two years in prison.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16 (– 1)

The constitution provides for freedom of movement, though citizens are restricted from traveling outside their communities without a special permit on Saturday mornings as part

of a government effort to encourage participation in local service projects. In 2015, concerns for personal safety further restricted free movement, particularly in neighborhoods regarded as opposition strongholds where security forces conducted search operations. The deteriorating security situation also hampered private business activity in the country, and the capital was subjected to a nightly curfew on public transportation.

A 2014 land law strengthened the authority of Burundi's National Commission of Land and Other Belongings to resolve disputes between current landowners and refugees returning to reclaim their land. Critics argue that the law could lead the country back into ethnic conflict if it is not implemented in an unbiased manner, and may affect the tenuous relationship between major landholders—including business interests and the Catholic Church—and the regime.

Women have limited opportunities for advancement in the economic and political spheres, especially in rural areas. Sexual and domestic violence are serious problems but are rarely reported to law enforcement agencies. In late 2015, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights noted an increase in cases of sexual violence against women by security forces conducting searches for suspected opposition supporters.

Children in Burundi are often subject to forced labor and sex trafficking. In some cases they are sold into servitude by family members, or recruited and deceived by friends and neighbors. Government officials have largely failed to combat domestic child trafficking, and law enforcement officers are allegedly among the clients of girls being exploited for prostitution.

Cambodia

Political Rights Rating: 6

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 15,417,000

Capital: Phnom Penh

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

Although the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) ended its boycott of Parliament after reaching an agreement with the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) in 2014, the fragile truce quickly eroded in 2015. The authorities sentenced 11 opposition activists to prison on insurrection charges and arrested a CNRP senator for posting a disputed diplomatic document online. An arrest warrant was issued for opposition leader Sam Rainsy on defamation charges, and he remained outside the country at year's end. Prime Minister Hun Sen appeared to be working to solidify his hold over the CPP in advance of 2018 national elections.

Also in 2015, Parliament passed a new law that forces all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to register with the government and allows officials to deny licenses or disband the groups if they are judged to be partisan or to have undermined national unity,

peace, national security, or Cambodian culture. Authorities have increasingly harassed and detained NGO representatives, particularly those working on land rights issues.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 11 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 4 / 12

Under the current constitution, promulgated in 1993, the monarch, currently King Norodom Sihamoni, is chief of state. The monarchy remains highly revered as a symbol of national unity but has little political power.

Cambodia's bicameral legislature consists of a 123-seat National Assembly and a 61-seat Senate. National Assembly members are elected by party-list voting to serve five-year terms. In the Senate, 57 members are elected by local councillors, 2 are elected by the National Assembly, and 2 are appointed by the king for six-year terms. The prime minister is appointed by the king and approved by the National Assembly, and members of the Council of Ministers are nominated by the prime minister, appointed by the monarch, and approved by the National Assembly. Voting is tied to a citizen's permanent local residency, which cannot be changed easily.

In the 2012 Senate elections, the CPP won 46 seats. The remaining 11 seats went to the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), now part of the CNRP. In 2013 National Assembly elections, the CPP captured 68 of 123 seats, its worst showing since 1998. The CNRP won 55 seats. The elections were marred by reports of duplicate voter names, vote buying, and voters casting ballots in communes where they were not registered; the National Election Committee (NEC) identified more than 250,000 duplicate names and 290,000 names missing from voter rolls.

The CNRP rejected the official results, charging that it had won 63 seats, but—despite the NEC's findings—its petition for the creation of an independent authority to investigate its claims was unsuccessful. As a result, all 55 CNRP members refused to take their seats at the new National Assembly's opening session. The CPP and CNRP reached an agreement in July 2014 that ended the CNRP's boycott. The government agreed to recognize a minority leader in Parliament who would be responsible for representing opposition interests to the prime minister, create a new NEC with members appointed by both parties, and release seven opposition legislators from jail. The new election commission is considered less partisan than its predecessor, but it has not yet been tested in a national election.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 4 / 16

The constitution outlines the right of Cambodians to participate in multiparty democracy, but in practice, political opposition is restricted. Harassment or threats against opposition supporters are not uncommon, and opposition leaders have faced legal suits for criticizing the ruling party. The CPP is known to reward its supporters with coveted positions and financial incentives. In April 2015, Hun Sen announced his candidacy for the 2018 election, and in June he was elected CPP president.

Although the CNRP has constituted the most formidable opposition to the CPP in years, the government harassed and intimidated opposition lawmakers throughout 2014 and 2015. The two sides' 2014 pledges to foster a "culture of dialogue" largely broke down in 2015, as both parties verbally attacked each other and the government pursued criminal charges against CNRP politicians, including Sam Rainsy. In November, a court ordered Sam Rainsy's arrest based on a past defamation conviction, though the opposition said the verdict had been voided by a 2013 pardon. The National Assembly subsequently voted to remove Sam Rainsy from his seat and thereby revoke his parliamentary immunity. The

opposition leader, who was traveling abroad at the time, remained outside Cambodia at year's end. Separately, in August, police arrested a CNRP senator for posting an allegedly fake diplomatic document on Facebook. In October, a crowd of government supporters and security personnel attacked two opposition lawmakers outside the legislature; three members of Hun Sen's bodyguard unit were subsequently detained.

The politicized security forces limit citizens' political choices in Cambodia. Military and police commanders campaigned for the CPP before the 2013 elections, and the army helped suppress opposition demonstrations after the flawed vote. The military organized anti-CNRP demonstrations during 2015.

The constitution explicitly protects the rights of "Khmer people" only, leaving ethnic Vietnamese, Chinese, and other minorities vulnerable to political exclusion. Animosity toward the Vietnamese is common in Cambodian politics. Non-Khmer residents cannot easily establish their citizenship and political rights, particularly if their births were not registered, due to either discrimination or past conflict and political turmoil in the country.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

The CPP leadership sets and implements state policy, but the flawed electoral process undermines its legitimacy, and the intimidation and legal harassment directed at opposition lawmakers prevents them from contributing to governance.

Corruption remains a serious obstacle to Cambodia's economic development and social stability. A 2010 law established the Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU), but its implementation has been slow. Many in the ruling elite abuse their positions for private gain. Increased investment in mining, forestry, agriculture, textile manufacturing, tourism, hydropower, and real estate has brought notable economic growth in recent years, but these enterprises frequently involve land grabs by powerful politicians, bureaucrats, and military officers.

Nepotism and patronage undermine the functioning of a proper, transparent bureaucratic system. In the 2013 elections, the sons of high-ranking party leaders, including those of Hun Sen and Interior Minister Sar Kheng, ran for seats in Parliament, spurring accusations that CPP leaders were attempting to build political dynasties.

Cambodia was ranked 150 out of 168 countries and territories assessed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 21 / 60 (+1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

Freedom of speech is not fully protected. A 2010 law criminalizes defamation and bars written criticism of public officials or institutions. The government uses lawsuits, criminal prosecution, and occasionally violent attacks to intimidate the media. Authorities are especially sensitive to coverage of land grabs and extralegal resource extraction.

There are about 20 active newspapers and magazines, 18 television stations, and some 175 radio stations, most of which are controlled or influenced by the CPP. As part of the July 2014 political agreement, the government granted the CNRP the right to broadcast radio programs in the provinces, and in May 2015 Sam Rainsy announced that the CNRP was preparing to launch a television station, but it was not operational by year's end. There are no restrictions on access to foreign broadcasts via satellite.

Buddhism is the state religion, and the government supports Buddhist education, but the constitution bars religious discrimination. Most Cambodians are Theravada Buddhists and can practice their faith freely. Societal discrimination against religious minorities has been rare in recent years.

Teachers and students practice self-censorship when discussing Cambodian politics and history. In August 2015, the Ministry of Education issued a directive banning political activity at academic institutions, reinforcing a 2007 law on the subject.

Online criticism of the government and CPP leaders has been prosecuted under defamation laws, and the government reportedly monitors online discussion. In September 2015, the Interior Ministry said it would enforce rules requiring SIM card retailers to collect identification information from customers, and existing customers would have to submit such information to their service providers, raising concerns about privacy and surveillance.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Despite constitutional protections for freedom of assembly, the government often denies permits for demonstrations and sometimes uses force to disperse them. Protests in Phnom Penh were banned for the first half of 2014 following a violent January labor demonstration in which at least four people were killed. In July 2015, 11 opposition activists were sentenced to between 7 and 20 years in prison on insurrection charges related to a violent July 2014 protest.

Civil society groups work on a broad spectrum of issues and offer social services, frequently supported by international funding. Those that work on justice and human rights, as opposed to social or health issues, generally face more state harassment. In February 2015, the government expelled the foreign head of an NGO involved in organizing opposition to the proposed Chhay Areng dam in Koh Kong Province. In July, Parliament passed the Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations, which imposed a range of new restrictions on both domestic and foreign NGOs. Among other provisions, the law requires NGOs to register with the government and allows them to be shut down for undermining “national security,” “national unity,” “peace, stability and public order,” or Cambodian culture.

Cambodia has a small number of independent unions, and workers have the right to strike, though many face retribution for doing so. A lack of resources and experience limit union success in collective bargaining, and union leaders report harassment and physical threats. A March 2015 report by Human Rights Watch documented chronic abuse and underpayment in the garment sector, as well as retaliation by factory owners against workers who try to unionize, raise concerns over work conditions, or refuse to work overtime. During 2015, the government drafted a new Trade Union Law that many union leaders characterized as a means of suppressing labor disputes. If passed, the legislation would impose more government regulations on forming and operating unions, increase financial reporting requirements, and restrict the right to strike.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16 (+1)

The judiciary is marred by inefficiency, corruption, and a lack of independence. There is a severe shortage of lawyers, and the system’s poorly trained judges are subject to political pressure from the CPP. Abuse by law enforcement officers, including illegal detention and the torture of suspects and prisoners, is common. Jails are severely overcrowded, and inmates often lack sufficient food, water, and health care.

Although government supporters frequently enjoy impunity for abuses, three suspects in the October 2015 attack on two opposition lawmakers surrendered the following week and were detained and charged. They were later identified as members of Hun Sen’s body-guard unit. Their cases were pending at year’s end, and it remained unclear whether investigators would pursue other suspects.

Those who criticize judges can face retribution. In July 2015, a Phnom Penh court charged activist Ny Chakrya of the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association with defamation after he accused a judge and prosecutor of acting improperly in a land rights case. He faced more than three years in prison if found guilty.

Hun Sen has repeatedly opposed expanding prosecutions at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)—established to try leaders of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime—beyond the small handful of figures already indicted. One former prison chief was sentenced to life in prison in 2012, another defendant died in 2013, and defendants Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea were convicted of “murder, extermination, persecution on political grounds, and other inhumane acts” in 2014. A second trial against Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea on charges of genocide is ongoing. In March 2015, the ECCC charged alleged former labor camp leader Im Chaem and former navy chief Meas Muth with crimes against humanity and issued warrants for their arrest. In July, after police failed to execute the warrants, American jurist Mark Harmon resigned as the international co-investigating judge. He was the fourth foreign judge to resign from the tribunal. In August, former Khmer Rouge minister for social affairs Ieng Thirith died. The tribunal had charged her, but she was deemed mentally unfit in 2012 and did not stand trial.

Minorities, especially those of Vietnamese descent, often face discrimination. Refugees and asylum seekers in Cambodia also encounter discrimination and struggle to find employment. Nevertheless, under a multimillion-dollar resettlement agreement with Australia, Cambodia in 2015 accepted a small group of refugees who had been detained on Nauru. Also during the year, Cambodia frequently refused to offer protection to ethnic minority Montagnards fleeing Vietnam, where they are often persecuted by the Vietnamese government.

While same-sex sexual relationships are not criminalized, there is no legal protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people reportedly face some societal discrimination in practice.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

The constitution guarantees the rights to freedom of travel and movement, and the government generally respects these rights in practice. However, authorities have sometimes prevented the movement of protesters from the provinces to the capital, and citizens’ ability to choose their residence, employment, or educational institution can be affected by corruption.

In a related problem, land and property rights are regularly abused for the sake of private development projects. While estimates vary, the state has seized 12 percent or more of Cambodia’s land for such concessions. Hundreds of thousands of people have been forcibly removed from their homes, with little or no compensation or relocation assistance, to make room for commercial plantations, mine operations, factories, and high-end office and residential developments. In February 2015, a prominent land rights organization reported that the number of families filing land-dispute complaints had increased threefold between 2013 and 2014.

Women suffer widespread discrimination, particularly in the economic sphere. Rape and violence against women are common. In a high-profile incident in July 2015, real-estate tycoon Sok Bun was captured on video apparently kicking, punching, and stomping on a well-known female television personality. A trial was pending at year’s end.

Men, women, and children are frequently trafficked to and from Cambodia for prostitution and forced labor. Cambodian men are often forced to work in slavery-like conditions

on fishing vessels in international waters, and women have been drawn into forced prostitution or factory labor after traveling to China for brokered marriages. Corrupt officials reportedly impede antitrafficking investigations to protect suspects with government ties.

Cameroon

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 23,739,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Yaoundé

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2013	2014	2015
Rating	6,6NF	6,6NF	6,6NF	6,6NF	6,6NF	6,6NF	6,6NF	6,6NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Cameroon continued to struggle with high youth unemployment, an aging political leadership, and the lack of an obvious successor to President Paul Biya in the ruling party. Moreover, the security situation in the country's north and east remained precarious throughout the year. The Far North province, which borders the stronghold of Boko Haram in Nigeria, continues to face incursions from the Islamic militant group. Instability in neighboring Central African Republic (CAR), which shares a 500-mile-long border with Cameroon, has also led to increasing confrontations between Cameroon's military and rebel groups. Since the inauguration of Nigeria's new president in May 2015, cooperation in fighting Boko Haram has grown and some territory has been reclaimed from the group. However, Boko Haram launched a number of deadly attacks in Cameroon throughout the year, claiming the lives of more than 400 people.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 9 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

Now in his fourth decade in power, Biya retains a strong hold on Cameroon. His Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) controls the Senate, the National Assembly, and municipal councils by large majorities. In the 2011 presidential elections, Biya beat out nearly two dozen opponents to claim 78 percent of the vote; the poll was widely viewed as tainted. Despite his advanced age of 83, Biya has not groomed a successor. There is no provision for a presidential runoff, which impedes the ability of opposition candidates to unseat the incumbent.

Cameroon has a 180-seat National Assembly and established the 100-seat Senate in 2012; representatives serve five-year terms. In 2013, Cameroon held National Assembly elections, direct elections for municipal councilors, and long-delayed elections for its first Senate. The CPDM won 56 of the elected Senate seats, while the main opposition party, the Anglophone-led Social Democratic Front (SDF), won the remaining 14. Biya appointed an additional 30 senators, three from each of the country's 10 regions. The CPDM took 148 assembly seats and won 305 of the country's 360 communes. While some observers

characterized the elections as free and fair, there were also accusations that the CPDM paid bribes to certain municipal councilors of up to \$90 each.

Cameroon adopted a new electoral code in 2012 that introduced biometric voter registration. However, Biya still chooses the members of the electoral commission.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 3 / 16

Despite having almost 300 political parties, Cameroon remains essentially a one-party state. The numerous opposition parties often have aging leaderships and are highly fragmented, preventing any one from becoming a credible threat to the ruling CPDM or forming effective coalitions. The SDF is the largest opposition party and has a national base; other opposition groups suffer from ethnic and regional biases that limit their membership.

State patronage and Biya's control of high-level appointments help the CPDM retain power. The state also controls the release of mandated public funding for political parties, as well as the salaries of village chiefs, who in turn control their local votes.

The Baka minority is not represented in the legislature or in the top levels of government.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

Corruption is systemic and bribery is commonplace in all sectors. According to a Transparency International survey of citizens of 28 African countries in 2015, Cameroon reported the second-highest rate of bribery out of all countries surveyed, with 48 percent of respondents having to pay bribes to access public services. The National Anti-Corruption Commission (CONAC) was established in 2006, but its work has been regularly stymied by interference from the executive branch. In November 2015, CONAC published its annual report covering the year 2013, more than a year late. Its release was reportedly delayed after Biya attempted to pressure CONAC to omit high-profile officials named in the report by withholding permission for its publication. Biya ultimately approved the report's release, which revealed systemic corruption across multiple ministries and placed blame on a number of powerful cabinet officials. In a more positive development, CONAC reported receiving its highest-ever number of complaints from the public in 2015, which according to officials reflected not an expansion of corruption but increasing willingness on the part of citizens to report corrupt behavior.

Since late 2013, Cameroon has been classified as compliant with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), which asks countries to submit reports detailing the proceeds they have gained from the extraction of their natural resources. In July 2015, Cameroon's EITI report listed for the first time the names of the legal owners of licenses for exploration of natural resources. Cameroon was ranked 130 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 15 / 60 (-1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 7 / 16

The constitution guarantees free speech, and there are some 500 newspapers and 100 radio and television stations. However, genuine freedom of expression remains elusive. The constitution gives officials the power to ban newspapers based on a claimed threat to public order. Defamation remains a criminal offense, and the National Communications Council (CNC) has a history of harassing independent journalists and outlets.

Several journalists were arrested and detained in 2015. In July, Ahmed Abba, a Nigerian reporter for the Hausa service of Radio France International, was arrested in the Far North

region and subsequently interrogated over his reporting on the activities of Boko Haram. He was denied access to a lawyer until October, and he remained imprisoned without charge at year's end. In August, Simon Ateba, a Cameroonian reporter who had been living in Nigeria, was arrested upon returning to Cameroon to report on conditions in a refugee camp in the Far North. He was detained for four days. In September, a photographer for the newspaper *Génération Libre* was arrested for photographing police as they shut down a workshop being given by a civil society group. He is facing a number of pending charges, and as of December his trial had been postponed three times. In December, the government informed two journalists at different print publications that they would face charges before a military court for "failing to report on a matter affecting state security" following a 2014 incident in which they declined to publish unsubstantiated reports on the activities of CAR militants in the country.

There are no restrictions on internet use, but penetration is low, at about 20 percent in 2015.

Cameroonians can exercise religious freedom with generally little government interference. Religious groups are required to register with the government, though many operate unencumbered without official registration. In July, the government banned Muslim women from wearing full face veils in the Far North province following two suicide bombings in the region. Muslims were also prohibited from holding large gatherings to commemorate the end of Ramadan.

There are no legal restrictions on academic freedom, but state security informants operate on university campuses. Public criticism of the government and membership in opposition political parties can have a negative impact on professional opportunities and advancement.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association, while legally protected, are subject to significant restrictions, including a requirement that organizers notify the government before assemblies take place. In practice, this policy leads to frequent suppression of the right to free assembly. In July 2015, there were isolated protests on the occasion of French president Francois Hollande's visit to Cameroon. Many citizens feel France exerts undue political and economic influence on the country.

The influence of civil society has gradually weakened over the years, with many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) relying entirely on foreign assistance and others coopted or overtly supported by the regime. Other NGOs are no more than a registered name and a website.

Trade unions, strikes, and collective bargaining are permitted, and there is a growing public sector trade union movement, though unions are still subject to numerous restrictions. In June 2015, two unions representing medical personnel at public hospitals called a strike to demand improvements to their severely dilapidated facilities and equipment, as well as salary payments that had been delayed by as much as a year. The strike persisted for nearly two weeks and caused significant disruptions to medical service delivery before the government granted some concessions.

F. Rule of Law: 1 / 16 (-1)

The judiciary is subordinate to the Ministry of Justice, and political influence and corruption weaken courts. Lengthy pretrial detentions are commonplace, and there are reports of arbitrary detention and judicial harassment of activists. The security forces act with

impunity for human rights violations including excessive use of force, torture and other abuse, and extrajudicial executions. Prisons are overcrowded and conditions are sometimes life threatening. Between March and May 2015 alone, 40 prisoners died in the Maroua prison due to overcrowding and poor sanitation. The prison has no running water and only 20 latrines for over 1,200 inmates. Torture and abuse of detainees are widespread. In June, 84 children who had been held since being arrested in December 2014 from their Qur'anic schools—which the government accused of being fronts for Boko Haram—were released.

Boko Haram launched regular attacks against civilians throughout the year, resulting in more than 400 deaths and hundreds more injuries and abductions. In one of the worst incidents, more than 90 civilians were killed and 500 wounded in February when militants raided the town of Fotokol near the Nigerian border, slaughtering women and children, burning houses of worship, and pillaging food and livestock. The Cameroonian government has responded to such attacks with indiscriminate violence and lack of regard for the rights and safety of civilians. In 2015, over 1,000 suspects were arbitrarily detained, including teens and young boys, who have been housed in inhumane conditions. Many suspects have died while in custody and 130 remained unaccounted for at year's end.

In July 2015, the Cameroonian government began forcibly repatriating 15,000 Nigerian refugees who had fled Boko Haram violence in their home country. In December there were estimated to be almost 70,000 Nigerian refugees remaining in the country, in addition to more than 250,000 refugees from Central African Republic.

The roughly 30,000 members of the Baka pygmy community face discrimination in Cameroon. Many are born in isolated forest areas and lack birth certificates needed to obtain a national identity card, which excludes them from many government services.

Discrimination against the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community is also rife. The penal code forbids “sexual relations with a person of the same sex” and includes prison sentences of up to five years. In practice, people are prosecuted with no evidence of sexual activity, but rather on suspicions that they are gay.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

Travel is largely unrestricted, though Boko Haram activity in Cameroon's Far North has increased insecurity in the region.

Cameroon's ranking in the World Bank's 2016 *Doing Business* report dropped to 172 out of 189 economies. Agribusinesses operate with little or no consultation with local inhabitants, and a lack of transparency means people are usually unaware of potential environmental hazards. Concerns have been raised about the government's failure to recognize indigenous forest peoples' right to prior consent when logging concessions are granted.

The constitution guarantees equal rights to men and women, but traditional legal values often take precedence and do not always provide women full rights. Although the penal code criminalizes rape against women, perpetrators are declared innocent if the victim has reached puberty and freely consents to marriage. Female genital mutilation is still practiced, particularly in isolated areas of the extreme north, east, and southwest regions. Women are also traditionally barred from land ownership in Cameroon's predominately agricultural economy, creating a major obstacle to economic independence. A lack of inheritance rights further encourages dependency on men and can leave widows and orphans destitute. Women won 56 National Assembly seats in the 2013 elections, a significant increase over previous years, and 20 Senate seats.

Despite a 2011 law against human trafficking, Cameroon remains a source, transit, and destination country for forced labor and sex trafficking of children, as well as a source country for women who are subject to forced labor and prostitution in Europe.

Canada

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 35,833,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Ottawa

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

The Liberal Party, led by Justin Trudeau, won a clear majority in federal elections held in October 2015. When Trudeau took office as prime minister in November, he ushered in a cabinet composed equally of men and women, an unprecedented step in Canada's political history. Outgoing prime minister Stephen Harper resigned as leader of the Conservatives following his party's loss.

During the election campaign, the Liberals pledged to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada before year's end, a commitment that Trudeau defended in the face of criticism and security concerns following a November terrorist attack in France by the Islamic State (IS) militant group. That month, the government extended the timeline for resettlement to February 2016, and the plan was ongoing at year's end. Separately, at the G20 summit in November, Trudeau announced plans to withdraw Canadian jets from a bombing mission led by the United States against IS targets, although no firm timeline was announced by year's end.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Canada is governed by a prime minister, a cabinet, and Parliament, which consists of an elected 338-member House of Commons and an appointed 105-member Senate. Lower-house elections are held every four years, with early elections called only if the government loses a parliamentary no-confidence vote. The British monarch is head of state, represented by a ceremonial governor general who is appointed on the advice of the prime minister.

General elections must be held on the third Monday in October every four years. The most recent elections were held in October 2015. Trudeau's Liberal Party captured 39.5 percent of the vote and 54.4 percent of electoral districts, taking 184 seats. The party was able to form a majority government, and Trudeau was sworn in as prime minister in November. The Conservative Party, which held power under Harper for close to ten years, captured 31.9 percent of the vote but only 29.3 percent of electoral districts, winning 99 seats. The New Democratic Party (NDP) took 44 seats, Bloc Québécois (BQ) captured 10, and the Green Party won 1.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) conducted a needs assessment mission before the election as well as a mission during the vote. The OSCE reported that the elections were free and fair but noted the need for some improvements, including to minority participation.

In 2014, the Fair Elections Act—a broad and controversial set of measures promoted by the government to address voter fraud and update campaign finance laws—came into force. An open letter signed by 465 academics vehemently argued that the act would “undermine the integrity of the Canadian electoral process.” Critics have expressed concerns that the legislation could place indigenous peoples at a disadvantage due to its stringent requirements about voter identification and addresses.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Canadians are free to organize in different political parties, and the system is open to the rise and fall of competing parties. While two parties have traditionally dominated the political system—the Conservative Party, espousing a center-right to right-wing political position, and the Liberal Party, espousing a center to center-left position—recent years have seen the rise of new groups. A total of 23 political parties were registered in the 2015 elections. The center-left NDP lost its status as the official opposition party in the House of Commons after the vote, and the Conservatives became the dominant opposition to the Liberal government.

Critical issues facing Canada’s indigenous peoples, including high rates of suicide, violent victimization, and murder, received little attention in the 2015 electoral campaign. The Liberals proposed investment into education for indigenous communities, and the NDP pledged to initiate an inquiry into problems facing indigenous women. No party offered comprehensive solutions or strategies, however. After the October vote, parliamentary representation of indigenous and other “visible minority” groups, who together constitute nearly a quarter of Canada’s population, increased to approximately 17 percent.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12 (+ 1)

Canada has a reputation for clean government and a record of vigorous prosecution of corruption cases. The country was ranked 9 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Several administrations have been criticized for failing to effectively combat bribery of foreign officials in international business transactions, but the government has made efforts to improve in this area, including by strengthening the Corruption of Foreign Public Officials Act in 2013 to facilitate prosecution of Canadian entities that bribe foreign officials.

No major corruption revelations emerged in 2015, and authorities continued efforts to adequately process ongoing cases. The trial of Mike Duffy, a senator from Prince Edward Island, began in April and was ongoing at year’s end. Duffy was charged with 31 criminal offenses in July 2014 in connection to evidence that emerged in 2012 about exorbitant expense claims by Senate members. There was also considerable focus on corruption in Quebec during the year. The Charbonneau Commission, a public inquiry into public construction contracts in the province, issued its final report in November. The lengthy publication detailed 60 recommendations for the Quebec government, and concluded that corruption in the province was a more serious problem than originally perceived. The report also voiced concerns about the role of organized crime in Quebec’s construction sector.

Despite the existence of the Access to Information Act, there are some challenges to obtaining information, including delays and excessive costs. An investigation by the magazine *Maclean’s* revealed in September 2015 that a federal cost-saving plan had led to the loss of significant amounts of public data since 2012, including information from census, environmental, and socio-economic studies. Watchdogs voiced concerns about the situation’s negative ramifications for transparency and public information management.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 59 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16**

Canada's media are generally free; journalists are mostly protected from violence and harassment in their work and are able to express diverse views. However, defamation remains a criminal offense, punishable by up to five years in prison. No statutory laws protect confidential sources, and the courts often decide whether or not to respect source confidentiality on a case-by-case basis. Media ownership has become more concentrated in recent years.

In June 2015, legislators passed a controversial antiterrorism law following prolonged and heated debate. The legislation grants the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) wider authority to conduct surveillance and share information about individuals with other agencies. Its passage elicited considerable public uproar and led to a petition calling for its repeal. Canadian intellectuals as well as both domestic and foreign civil liberties watchdogs warned that the bill undermined the concept of privacy and could harm freedom of expression. Separately, a 2014 law against cyberbullying came into force in March. Critics have warned that the law's standards for granting access to internet and telecommunications user data were too low and threatened the right to privacy.

The constitution and other legislation protect religious freedom. However, there have been cases of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, including acts of violence and vandalism against Canada's Jewish and Muslim communities. In November, a mosque in Ontario was subject to arson. The police categorized the incident as a hate crime, and an investigation was ongoing at year's end. In recent years, there has been controversy over the legality of wearing religious clothing, particularly veils, in public. In 2011, the immigration ministry banned the wearing of any kind of face coverings at citizenship oath ceremonies. However, a Federal Court judge found in February 2015 that the ban unlawfully contradicted the federal Citizenship Act, and supported the right of individuals to wear face-covering veils for religious reasons. The ruling generated controversy during the election campaign, with Harper pledging to challenge it.

Academic freedom is generally respected. In May, several public sector unions staged demonstrations on behalf of federally funded scientists who voiced opposition to government interference in their work, particularly restrictions on sharing information about research. The scientists themselves did not protest for fear of losing their jobs. In November, Prime Minister Trudeau scrapped the restrictions, which had required federally funded academics to receive authorization before speaking to the press, among other things. An investigation into the scientists' allegations by Canada's information commissioner, launched in 2013, was ongoing at year's end.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are generally respected. However, in November 2014, four UN special rapporteurs reported that they had received information that the National Energy Board (NEB), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and the CSIS were engaged in systematic monitoring of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) slated to participate in NEB hearings about an oil pipeline. The rapporteurs voiced concerns that these activities did not have an adequate legal basis and could jeopardize the NGOs' independence and safety. In January 2015, the Canadian government replied to these concerns, stating that the agencies had acted in accordance with legal standards. The UN special rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association requested to make a country visit, but one had not been scheduled at year's end.

Trade unions and business associations enjoy high levels of membership and are well organized. The outgoing Harper government had adopted a tough line with unions representing public workers, and had somewhat restricted the rights of workers to organize, strike, and bargain collectively. In January, the Supreme Court delivered two rulings in support of organized labor. In one case, the court declared a constitutionally protected right to strike; in the second ruling, it found that the RCMP had a right to unionize as part of their constitutional right to freedom of association.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The judiciary is independent. Canada's criminal law is based on legislation enacted by Parliament; its tort and contract law is based on English common law, with the exception of Quebec, where it is based on the French civil code.

A 2012 anticrime law increased mandatory minimum sentences, provided for harsher sentences for young offenders, and eliminated conditional sentences such as house arrest or community service for some crimes. The 2013–14 Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator noted that the country's prison population had increased by 17.5 percent since 2005. The number of visible minorities in prison has risen significantly in the last decade; while the indigenous population comprises about 4 percent of Canada's population, they represent close to one-quarter of all inmates.

The government had made increasing efforts to enforce equal rights and opportunities for minority groups, although some problems persist. Members of Canada's indigenous population remain subject to discrimination and have unequal access to education, health care, and employment. There are legal protections for the human rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people, although some reports of discrimination and hate crimes persist.

Immigration and asylum were widely discussed issues in the lead-up to the October 2015 elections, and the Liberal Party's platform included a plan for the resettlement of 25,000 Syrian refugees by 2016. Trudeau prioritized resettlement after taking office, although he extended the deadline for completion until February 2016. Efforts to fulfill the plan were ongoing at year's end.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 16 / 16

Freedom of movement is constitutionally protected and upheld in practice.

Property rights are not constitutionally protected, and a 2012 survey published by the Fraser Institute found that Canadian property rights were significantly weak in comparison with peer Western states. In a landmark ruling delivered in June 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada held that, unless they signed a treaty with the government, Canada's indigenous populations still held title to their ancestral lands. The ruling also provided long-awaited details about the nature of indigenous title. However, the ruling may not necessarily afford indigenous communities a veto against government decisions on land where title claims have yet to be proven, which is the case for communities in much of British Columbia. In September 2015, the British Columbia Supreme Court rejected a First Nations challenge to a dam project, concluding that the government had fulfilled its obligations by providing the challengers with an opportunity to make their opposition heard.

Canada legalized same-sex marriage in 2005. Women's rights are generally well protected in law and in practice. Women hold approximately 26 percent of seats in the House of Commons, 39 percent in the Senate, and one-half in the cabinet. However, some problems persist. Indigenous women and girls face racial and economic discrimination, high

rates of gender-based violence, and mistreatment by police. In a June 2015 report, the RCMP concluded that the number of indigenous women and girls murdered between 1980 and 2012 was 4.5 times higher than the number of all other female homicides.

In 2012, Canada enacted the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, and the government continued efforts in 2015 to hold perpetrators accountable and to improve resources available to victims.

Cape Verde

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 514,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Praia

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60

In 2015, Cape Verde saw growing tensions between political parties in anticipation of 2016 general elections. Nevertheless, the main political forces came together in early 2015 to select new members of several official bodies, including a newly established Constitutional Court, and the National Election Commission (CNE). In May, the National Assembly approved a bill introducing a local referendum system; lawmakers from the governing African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV), the opposition Movement for Democracy (MpD), and other parties praised the measure for permitting more direct participation of local communities in political processes. Separately, in April, President Jorge Carlos Fonseca vetoed a bill that would have increased public officials' salaries by 65 percent. The measure, which lawmakers approved as Cape Verde continued to struggle with high unemployment, had prompted large popular protests.

Cape Verde has relatively low levels of government corruption. However, in 2015 MpD members alleged that several ministries had misappropriated government subsidies and grants. In November, Prime Minister José Maria Neves announced that officials were investigating the allegations. In December, Attorney General António Pedro Lopes noted that gaps in the country's laws that could allow some forms of corruption to go unpunished. Freedom of the press is guaranteed by law and generally respected in practice, but in October the Cape Verde Journalists' Association (AJOC) criticized an article of the electoral code that banned media outlets from spreading information deemed to be propaganda.

While Cape Verde's judiciary is independent, the capacity and efficiency of the courts are limited. After long delays, the Constitutional Court was established in October 2015. In parallel, the Supreme Court was restructured, as it no longer needed to perform the duties of a Constitutional Court. The criminal justice system is impeded by a lack of resources and poor coordination among relevant government entities. In April, Defense Minister Rui

Semedo expressed concern that Cape Verde lacked resources to adequately address growing piracy and drug, human, and arms trafficking on its shores.

While discrimination based on gender is prohibited by law, wage discrimination and unequal access to education persist. In April 2015, the Network of Women Parliamentarians Cape Verde (RMP-CV) proposed that at least 1 percent of all ministries' budgets be used to implement the National Plan for Gender Equality and Equity, which despite having been officially launched was not awarded any funding in the 2015 budget.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Cape Verde, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Central African Republic

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 5,552,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Capital: Bangui

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,P	F5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

While Central African Republic (CAR) was beset by periodic intercommunal violence throughout 2015, the fighting was less severe than it had been in the months that followed the 2013 coup, in which largely Muslim Séléka rebel forces had overthrown President François Bozizé. The modest lull in violence between former Séléka groups on one hand, and Christian militias known as anti-Balaka on the other, permitted the commencement of long-delayed presidential and parliamentary elections and a constitutional referendum. With the presidential election scheduled to conclude in early 2016, the nation appeared to be in its best position in years to take steps toward improving the security situation and strengthening weak government institutions.

In January 2015, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Mission in Central African Republic (MINUSCA) arrested the head of a leading anti-Balaka militia, Rodrigue Ngai-bona, also known as General Andilo. However, soon after, anti-Balaka elements kidnapped a government minister, a UN staff member, and a French aid worker. While all were later released, the incidents, along with Séléka forces' continued control over territory in the north, highlighted the relative weakness of the central government.

In May, the central government, MINUSCA, and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) hosted various armed groups and political parties at a "reconciliation forum" in Bangui, aimed at bringing stability to the country and facilitating the release of child soldiers—estimated to number between 6,000 and 10,000 across the many armed groups. Several

hundred child soldiers were released as a result of the forum's agreement, which also committed groups to end additional recruitment of children and to enter a process of disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation. However, the agreement's effects were limited, as a number of anti-Balaka groups boycotted the forum, while several participating factions of the former Séléka alliance later disavowed the deal. The killing of a Muslim man in September sparked renewed intercommunal violence between Muslim and Christian militias in Bangui, leading to more than 20 deaths and the escape of hundreds of prisoners from the city's Ngaraba prison. Despite a heavy security presence from UN and French troops in the capital, nonstate armed groups continued to operate checkpoints within Bangui and the surrounding countryside.

Divisions and fragmentation among the principal political coalitions in CAR inhibited efforts to achieve political reconciliation in 2015. The former Séléka alliance remained split into rival movements. Among the anti-Balaka forces, the movement remained split between factions that support former president Bozizé and those who oppose him.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 1 / 40 (+1)

A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12 (+1)

Following the 2014 resignation of then president and Muslim military leader Michel Djotodia amid an earlier wave of intercommunal violence, the 105-seat National Transitional Council (CNT), which had been appointed after the 2013 coup, elected Catherine Samba-Panza as interim president. Although the CNT is charged with creating a new constitution, poor security conditions across much of the country and logistical challenges forced the interim government to repeatedly postpone a constitutional referendum, as well as presidential and parliamentary elections.

A political forum initiated in October 2015 aimed to restart a dialogue and solidify plans to hold the long-delayed votes, but several major political parties and armed groups boycotted it. Nevertheless, a referendum on a new constitution that among other things limited the presidency to two five-year terms was conducted in December; it passed with approximately 93 percent support. At the end of December, the first round of the presidential and parliamentary elections took place. No presidential candidate emerged from the first round with a majority of the vote, and a runoff between the top two finishers is now scheduled for early 2016. Results of the elections to the unicameral, 105-seat National Assembly had not been announced at the year's end. While some irregularities were reported, there appeared to be no major incidents of election-related violence, and the polls were hailed as a success by MINUSCA and the Special Representative of the UN in the CAR.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16

Free political participation remained curtailed in 2015 by high intercommunal tensions and insecurity across the country. The main political parties—including the National Convergence Kwa Na Kwa (KNK), the Movement for the Liberation of the Central African People, and the Central African Democratic Rally—remain legal, but the CNT is not elected. No laws prohibit new parties, but the political and security environment make party competition difficult. In August 2015, Bertin Bea, the KNK leader, was arrested on charges of “inciting disorder,” though details surrounding the charge were unclear. KNK supporters subsequently converged upon the office where he was being held, and forced his release.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

Since the 2013 coup, government administration in CAR has been run by unelected officials operating in a largely nontransparent manner. The CNT is unable to provide basic public services such as security and electricity in much of the country. Corruption and nepotism have long been pervasive in all branches of the government, and addressing public sector corruption is difficult under the current security situation. CAR was ranked 145 of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Diamonds account for about half of the country's export earnings, but a large percentage circumvented official channels. In August 2015, the sanctions committee of the UN Security Council froze the assets of the Belgian subsidiary of diamond firm Badica/Kardiam for involvement in illegal trading of minerals with armed groups in CAR. Many of the factional splits among the major political parties in CAR are rooted in internal conflicts among political elites over control of illicit diamond and gold networks.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 1 / 0

Deliberate targeting of civilians by Séléka and anti-Balaka forces declined in 2015 from the highest levels of violence in 2013 and 2014. Nevertheless, periodic clashes have continued, and many civilians remain internally displaced or confined to ethnic and sectarian enclaves. In October, the UN Security Council committed to imposing sanctions against individuals responsible for the latest outbreak of violence that began the previous month.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 6 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16**

The 2004 constitution guarantees freedom of the press, though criminal penalties remain for some defamation charges. Given the security situation, those constitutional guarantees have not been reliably enforced, and the media environment for reporters remains restricted. Few residents outside Bangui enjoy access to national or international media sources or the internet. Since the onset of conflict in 2013, many community radio stations have been shuttered.

Officially CAR is a secular state, but religious and sectarian cleavages overlap with the country's current political divisions, and in 2015 sectarian clashes between Christian and Muslim populations continued to threaten the free practice of religion. Relatively few Muslims remain in Bangui or western towns. Some members of anti-Balaka groups demanded at the May reconciliation forum in Bangui that identity cards issued by Djotodia's Séléka government be cancelled—a challenge to the citizenship rights of Muslim communities perceived as “foreigners.”

Many schools and universities remain closed or without adequate resources, effectively interfering with academic freedom. Free expression of political views and private discussion of politics is also curtailed by the prevailing sense of insecurity and political instability in the country.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12

Freedom of assembly was restricted in 2015 by the security situation in CAR. Insecurity along main transportation routes curtailed the movement and operations of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which have also been prevented from entering areas of Bangui

controlled by armed groups. The ongoing violence has made it very difficult for unions to function properly.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The national justice system in CAR remained weak in 2015, and the provision of security and justice in much of the country fell largely to nonstate armed groups. Impunity for violence, economic crimes, and human rights violations remained widespread, and many abuses have not been investigated. In September hundreds of prisoners in Bangui's main jail escaped during intercommunal clashes, during which private residences and offices were reportedly pillaged. Military and police forces in CAR are incapable of exercising control, and the interim government has not rearmed the army. Corruption, political interference, and lack of training hamper the effectiveness of the judiciary, problems which have persisted under the CNT government.

At the request of the interim government, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is conducting an ongoing investigation into widespread allegations of rape, murder, forced displacement, persecution, and pillaging since 2012. The ICC was also handling cases related to an earlier wave of violence in the country, and the trial of former rebel leader Jean-Pierre Bemba and several of his codefendants opened in September 2015.

In June, President Samba-Panza enacted a law adopting a specialized court inside the justice system to investigate and prosecute crimes not likely to be covered by the ICC since 2003, to be composed of judges and prosecutors from CAR as well as from abroad. The hybrid justice mechanism represents the first attempt by a sovereign government to try crimes committed on its own territory in conjunction with the ICC.

Same-sex sexual acts are illegal in CAR, punishable by fines and imprisonment, although enforcement of this law is uncommon. Societal discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people remains strong, and many hide their sexual orientation.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 1 / 16

Widespread insecurity and religious persecution continued to hinder the movement of citizens and undermined the protection of private property in 2015. Private businesses and homes are regularly looted by armed militants, with little prospect for compensation or legal recourse for victims. The agricultural economy, the livelihood of the majority of the population, remained restricted by ongoing violence and insecurity. Irregular armed forces control much of the diamond and gold industry, and government agencies lack the capacity to regulate the extraction of natural resources. The Kimberley Process, a multigovernmental scheme to stop the trade of "conflict diamonds," suspended exports from CAR in 2013, but trade in illicit resources continues.

Constitutional guarantees for women's rights are not enforced, especially in rural areas. Domestic abuse and sexual violence against women is exacerbated by the ongoing conflict. In 2015, the UN conducted investigations into allegations of sexual misconduct by French military and UN peacekeeping personnel inside CAR; amid that probe, rape accusations against UN troops raised by Amnesty International prompted the August resignation of General Babacar Gaye as the head of MINUSCA.

The displacement of women and children has made them more vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking within the country, according to the U.S. State Department's *Trafficking in Persons Report*. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 25 percent of CAR's population has been internally displaced since the beginning of the conflict in 2013.

Chad

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 13,707,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: N'Djamena

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

Terrorist attacks increased throughout the country during 2015, particularly in the capital, N'Djamena, and the Lake Chad region. In one of the worst attacks, 38 people were killed in twin suicide bombings in N'Djamena in June. In response, President Idriss Déby Itno allocated Chadian military troops to the fight against the militant Islamist group Boko Haram, which claimed responsibility for many of the attacks. In May, N'Djamena was designated as the headquarters of the Multinational Joint Task Force military operation to fight Boko Haram in the region.

In February 2015, the government acknowledged that legislative elections scheduled for early 2015 would need to be postponed, after the electoral commission failed to organize a timely biometric electoral census. Subsequently, the National Assembly in a special session extended the mandate of the legislature and its deputies until elections could be held. A presidential election is scheduled for 2016.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 4 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12(– 1)

Chad has never experienced a free and fair transfer of power through elections. Déby took power in 1990 during a rebellion, and then overwhelmingly won elections in 1996, 2001, 2006 and 2011. Chad's president is elected for five-year terms, and a 2005 constitutional amendment abolished term limits. The executive branch dominates the judicial and legislative branches, and the president appoints the prime minister.

The unicameral National Assembly consists of 188 members elected for four-year terms. After being postponed nearly five years, legislative elections occurred in February 2011. Déby's Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS) party won 117 seats and 14 more went to MPS allies, leading to an absolute majority for the president. The most successful opposition party won only 10 seats. The European Union praised the peaceful and fair conduct of the elections, despite some logistical problems. However, the opposition claimed that irregularities occurred both before the vote—due to the government's media dominance and the use of state resources to benefit the ruling party—and during the elections, including issues with electoral rolls and voter registration cards. Citing these irregularities, the three main opposition candidates boycotted the presidential poll in April 2011, which Déby won with 89 percent of the vote.

Legislative elections were scheduled to take place in early 2015, but similar to the previous polls, they have been postponed until a biometric electoral census can be organized

throughout the country. The biometric census was promised after Déby's reelection in 2011 and scheduled for 2013, but the census stalled due to a lack of funds and equipment. It was finally launched in October 2015.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16

There are more than 70 registered political parties in Chad, though a number of them were created by the government to divide the opposition. The ruling MPS enjoys significant influence and has held a majority since the first legislative elections under the current constitution took place in 1997. The 2015 extension of the legislature's mandate guarantees the continued political dominance of the ruling MPS.

The political opposition is given legal recognition and allowed to publicly criticize the government, but in the past opposition political leaders have faced arrest and harassment. Opposition leaders have expressed fears that Déby will use the threat posed by Boko Haram to further increase his executive powers and extend his rule.

In June 2015, an appeal was submitted in the National Assembly to repeal the parliamentary immunity of Saleh Kebzabo, the leader of the largest opposition party, the National Union for Democracy and Renewal (UNDR). All deputies receive parliamentary immunity unless it is revoked by a vote in the National Assembly. Kebzabo accused the government of harassment and defamation in advance of the 2016 presidential election.

Members of Déby's northeastern Zaghawa ethnic group and other northern ethnic groups continue to control Chad's political and economic systems, causing resentment among the country's more than 200 other ethnic groups. Although they comprise roughly 35 percent of the population, Christians in the south have been excluded from political power for more than 20 years.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Déby enjoys unlimited discretionary power over the composition of the government, allowing him to dole out political patronage in the form of government positions. The power of the president to reshuffle the government without justification impedes the ability of the prime minister, as head of government, and the National Assembly to steer national policies without undue influence from the executive.

According to international monitors, corruption is endemic in Chad and prevails at all levels of government, from the presidential cabinet to the police force and local bureaucracy. Despite being an oil-producing country since 2003, Chad remains one of the world's poorest nations; Chad ranked 185 out of 188 states on the 2015 Human Development Index. Poor revenue management and oversight enable the diversion of oil revenues from national development projects to private interests and growing military expenditures, while fighting corruption continues to be unaddressed by the government. Chad was ranked 147 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

High-profile journalists, labor leaders, and religious figures have faced harsh reprisal for speaking out about corruption, including arrest, prosecution, and expulsion from the country. In one such instance in 2015, the president of the Chadian Students' Union, Nadjo Kaina, was arrested and detained for more than three weeks.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 16 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 7 / 16

The constitution formally provides for freedom of the press and expression. However, in practice both are restricted. Broadcast media are controlled by the state. The High Council of Communication (HCC) exerts control over most content on the radio—the most

important means of mass communication—and while there are roughly a dozen private stations, they face high licensing fees and the threat of closure for critical coverage. Reporting on rebel activity or any other sensitive security information has been banned since 2008. A 2010 media bill eliminated imprisonment as a punishment for libel, slander, or insulting the president, but introduced heavy fines or prison time for inciting racial and/or ethnic hatred and “condoning violence.”

Journalists frequently face persecution as a result of publishing critical views. In July 2015, the publisher of the privately owned newspaper *Abba Garde*, Moussaye Avenir de la Tchiré, avoided arrest by the National Security Agency and fled to Cameroon after the HCC ordered the closure of the newspaper and seizure of its most recent issue. The HCC’s decision came at the request of the president’s office, following the publication of an article entitled “Idriss Déby, the Hitler of Modern Times.” In June and October, authorities arrested and interrogated the publisher of the newspaper *Haut Parleur*, Stéphane Mbaïrabé Ouaye, in connection with an article accusing the president’s brother, Saleh Déby, the director general of customs, of corruption.

Although Chad is a secular state, Muslims, who comprise slightly more than half of the population, hold a disproportionately large number of senior government posts. At the same time, the authorities have banned certain Muslim groups believed to promote violence. Due to the 2015 suicide bombings in the capital—in which the perpetrators used burqas as a form of camouflage prior to the attacks—the government also banned the religious dress known as the burqa, which covers the face and entire body of adherents. In October, police arrested and fined dozens of women wearing burqas in the streets.

The government does not restrict academic freedom, but funds meant for the education system, as well as government-funded stipends, are regularly in arrears or completely lost to corruption. Space for open and free private discussion exists, but tends to be heavily self-censored due to fears of reprisal from the state’s repressive apparatus.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12 (+ 1)

Despite the constitutional guarantee of free assembly, the authorities at times ban demonstrations by groups thought to be critical of the government. For example, in March 2015 student protests were violently repressed, resulting in three deaths. Schools throughout the country were closed in an effort to prevent further protests on campuses. In August, the authorities arrested some 30 student union leaders for holding an unauthorized meeting to discuss their grievances over delayed government stipends.

Nevertheless, in 2015 there were an increased number of public events that allowed for critical views to be expressed. For example, throughout the year the civil society organization Comité de Suivi de l’Appel à la Paix et à la Réconciliation held several public political dialogues between leaders of civil society, the political opposition, and the presidential majority.

The constitution guarantees the rights to strike and unionize, but a 2007 law imposed limits on public sector workers’ rights to strike. Nevertheless, strikes do take place; the main coalition of public sector unions held a strike in July 2015, and other public sector strikes occurred during the year.

F. Rule of Law: 1 / 16 (– 1)

The rule of law and judicial system remain weak because the political leadership, especially the executive, heavily influences the courts. Civilian leaders do not maintain control of the security forces, which routinely ignore constitutional protections regarding search, seizure and detention. Human rights groups credibly accuse security forces and rebel groups

of killing and torturing with impunity. Prison conditions are severe, and many inmates are held for lengthy periods without charge.

In 2012, the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the Netherlands, called for the arrest of former Chadian president Hissène Habré, and he was arrested in 2013 in Senegal. His trial began in Senegal in July 2015, and while this process will likely render justice to Chadians who suffered during his rule—from 1982 until 1990—the contemporary Chadian judicial branch has played little to no role in the process.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there are more than 370,000 refugees who recently fled conflicts in neighboring Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Nigeria currently in Chad, and that this figure is likely to rise. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) also rose during 2015, notably those fleeing conflict between the Chadian military and elements of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region. Figures vary, but some reports claim the number of IDPs in Chad from the Lake Chad region alone to be as high as 75,000.

In July, the National Assembly voted to reinstate the death penalty, previously repealed in 2014, for crimes of terrorism. The following month, 10 Boko Haram members were found guilty of organizing the June suicide bombings in N'Djamena, and were executed by firing squad.

In September 2014, the cabinet approved a new penal code that criminalized same-sex relations and imposed heavy fines or prison terms on those convicted. Parliament had yet to ratify the penal code by the end of 2015. Due to cultural and legal restrictions, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) citizens are forced to conceal their sexual orientation and gender identity. No nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) related to LGBT rights function in Chad.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 3 / 16

Although constitutional guarantees for the freedom of movement exist, the government restricts the movement of citizens and controls the movement of both IDPs and refugees. Already limited by government control of the economy and repression of minority rights, increased insecurity from terrorist activities exacerbated the freedom of movement, employment, and education throughout the country.

Formal laws establishing land and property rights are nominally in force, but they are functionally irrelevant to the majority of the country's population owing to the state's minimal presence in rural areas; customary law governs land ownership and use rights in practice. Due to high levels of corruption, establishing and operating a business in Chad is extremely difficult. The World Bank's 2016 *Ease of Doing Business* report ranked Chad 183 out of 189 countries.

Chadian women face widespread discrimination and violence. In the 2011 elections, 24 female members were elected to the National Assembly, or about 13 percent. Female genital mutilation is illegal but commonly practiced. Chad is a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking, and the government has made minimal efforts to eliminate the problem.

Children are often forced into labor in both the agricultural and informal sectors. Young girls travel to look for work and often end up either forced into prostitution or abusive domestic servitude. According to the U.S. State Department 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Chad does not meet the minimum requirements for effectively addressing the child trafficking problem within its borders. Though the Chadian government has attempted to bring awareness to child trafficking and has provided NGOs and international organizations

with information on how to identify potential victims of trafficking, the number of convictions against traffickers in 2015 remains the same as the previous year and there are no services available specifically for victims of trafficking.

Chile

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 18,025,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Santiago

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

A series of corruption scandals characterized Chilean politics in 2015, and impeded President Michelle Bachelet's plans for large-scale tax and education reform. Two of the scandals involved allegations that corporations had made illegal contributions to political parties, and another centered on Bachelet's son and daughter-in-law, who were accused of using their political influence to secure a profitable real estate deal. In response to the events, the president proposed a series of anticorruption measures in April, and reorganized her cabinet in May.

In April, the administration succeeded in passing into law a proportional voting system, ending an arrangement in which the top two candidates in each district are elected, to the exclusion of smaller parties. Still, dissatisfaction with the president's inability to live up to campaign promises, coupled with the corruption scandals, seriously damaged her standing; the results of one poll, released in September, showed Bachelet's approval rating at 20 percent.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The president of Chile is elected for a four-year term, and consecutive terms are not permitted. The Senate's 38 members serve eight-year terms, with half up for election every four years, and members of the 120-member Chamber of Deputies are elected to four-year terms.

General elections held in 2013 were considered free and fair. The ruling center-left New Majority coalition—formerly known as Concertación—won 67 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 12 in the Senate, for a simple majority in both houses. Parties affiliated with the conservative Alliance coalition won 49 seats in the lower house and 7 in the Senate. Bachelet, who previously served as president from 2006 to 2010, was again elected president in 2013.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Chile has a multiparty political system with two dominant coalitions. The center-left New Majority coalition is composed of the Christian Democratic Party, the Socialist Party,

the Party for Democracy, and the Communist Party. The center-right Alliance coalition consists of the Independent Democratic Union and the National Renewal party. Most parties identify themselves on the basis of political, economic, and social ideology.

After many unsuccessful attempts at electoral reform, in April 2015 President Bachelet signed a law replacing Chile's "binominal system" of voting, in which the top two candidates in each district win seats, with a proportional system of representation. The binomial system, bequeathed from the era of military dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet, has effectively limited Congress to members of the two dominant coalitions. Under the new system, redrawn electoral districts are expected to create an environment more favorable to smaller parties and independent candidates. Additionally, the number of lower-house deputies will rise from 120 to 155, and there will be 50 upper-house representatives rather than 38. Forty percent of candidates must also be women. The new system is scheduled to go into effect starting with the 2017 general elections.

Some members of Chile's indigenous minority groups serve in municipal legislatures, but there are no indigenous representatives at the national level.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12 (– 1)

In 2015, three major scandals marred Chile's reputation for relatively low levels of corruption. One involved the financial firm Penta Group, whose owners were accused of evading taxes and illegally financing the opposition Independent Democratic Union through a variety of schemes. Jovino Novoa, a former Independent Democratic Union senator, was found guilty of tax fraud in November in connection with a related investigation. A mining company controlled by Pinochet's son was also accused of making illegal contributions to political parties, including the Independent Democratic Union but also to parties in the ruling New Majority coalition. Finally, in February, allegations emerged that the president's son and daughter-in-law had used their political influence to obtain a bank loan for a questionable property deal from which they made millions of dollars in profit. Prosecutors launched an investigation, which was ongoing at the year's end.

In response to the financing scandals, in April 2015 Bachelet proposed anticorruption reforms that would prevent private companies and anonymous donors from funding politicians. She also pledged to rewrite the constitution, which was put in place during Pinochet's military dictatorship. In May, she asked her entire cabinet to resign, resulting in five ministers being dismissed and four others being moved to different positions. The series of scandals, combined with slowing economic growth, forced Bachelet to stall plans for education and tax reforms.

Chile was ranked 23 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 57 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Guarantees of free speech are generally respected, though some laws barring defamation of state institutions remain on the books. The Spanish media group PRISA owns 60 percent of radio stations, and two private Chilean companies, El Mercurio and Copesa, own approximately 95 percent of newspaper titles. This duopoly in the print sector hinders the ability of independent media to compete. There are no government restrictions on the internet.

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally upholds this right in practice. The government does not restrict academic freedom. Chileans enjoy open and free private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12 (+ 1)

The right to assemble peacefully is generally respected. In large student protests that took place across the country in 2015, demonstrators demanded greater say in university operations as well as reforms to a variety of government policies, educational and otherwise. On several occasions, protesters clashed with police, who responded with tear gas and water cannons. However, there appeared to be fewer complaints of police violence against demonstrators in 2015 than in previous years. Nongovernmental organizations may form and operate without interference.

Despite strong laws protecting worker and union rights, antiunion practices by private employers are reportedly common.

F. Rule of Law: 14 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the courts are generally free from political interference. The right to legal counsel is constitutionally guaranteed, but indigent defendants have not always received effective representation.

The government has developed effective mechanisms to investigate and punish police abuse and corruption. However, excessive force and human rights abuses committed by the Carabineros—a national police element of the armed forces—still occur. Chile's prisons are overcrowded, and inmates suffer from physical abuse and poor sanitation.

In 2014, Bachelet announced a pledge to overturn a controversial amnesty law that protects military officers who committed human rights violations in the first five years of Pinochet's regime, which in its entirety lasted from 1973 to 1990. Critics of the law have deemed it inconsistent with Chile's commitment to respecting human rights. The announcement was largely symbolic, as many courts have circumvented the ruling in recent years, allowing for the sentencing of at least 262 individuals according to Amnesty International. In July 2015, a judge charged ten military officers in connection with the 1973 killing of activist and folk singer Victor Jara; also in July, a judge in a separate case charged seven military officials with the burning deaths of two protesters in 1986.

Approximately 1.5 million Chileans identify themselves with indigenous ethnic groups. While indigenous people still experience societal discrimination, their poverty levels are declining, aided by government scholarships, land transfers, and social spending. The slow and delayed repatriation of the ancestral land of the Mapuche indigenous group has been a cause of years of violent protest, including arson attacks on disputed lands, aggravated in recent years by the application of Chile's controversial antiterrorism law to cases of Mapuche resistance. The legislation, as modified from the Pinochet regime, allows for anonymous witness testimony, extended detention of suspects without charge, and lengthy sentences. In 2014, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights annulled the conviction of eight indigenous activists who had been tried under the antiterrorism law in 2003; the Bachelet administration agreed to adhere to the decision, but at year's end the antiterrorism law had not been modified.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people continue to face societal bias, despite a 2012 antidiscrimination law that covers sexual orientation and gender identity. Bachelet has voiced support for efforts to strengthen laws against hate crimes and discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

The constitution protects the freedom of movement, and the government respects this right in practice. Individuals have the right to own property and establish and operate private businesses, and are able to do so without interference from the government or other actors.

Violence against women and children remains a problem. Bachelet introduced a bill in January to decriminalize abortion in cases of rape, fetal impairment, or endangerment of the mother’s life. However, the bill was still in Congress at the end of 2015, held up by a rift within the ruling coalition over its various elements. At the year’s end, Chile remained one of only five countries in the world that allows imprisonment for the crime of abortion. In March, Bachelet announced the creation of a Women and Gender Equality Ministry, devoted to increasing gender equality in all government programs. Paternity leave is compulsory in Chile. In April, Bachelet signed into law a bill recognizing same-sex civil unions and granting cohabiting couples the right to join their partner’s health care plan and receive their pension benefits; the law took effect in October.

In February, Bachelet signed into law an education reform package designed to address a deep socioeconomic divide in Chile’s primary and secondary schools. Its measures ban for-profit elementary and high schools, and limits their selective entrance policies. However, the results of a poll released in September showed that 75 percent of respondents said they doubted the new reforms would reduce inequality in Chile.

While all forms of compulsory labor are illegal, forced labor, particularly among foreign citizens, continues to occur in the agriculture, mining, and domestic service sectors. In 2015, law enforcement agencies continued efforts to combat human trafficking, following measures in 2013 that increased the capacity of prosecutors and investigators to respond to the issue.

China

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 1,371,920,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Beijing

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Hong Kong or Tibet, which are examined in separate reports.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) general secretary Xi Jinping, who assumed his post in 2012, continued to display a centralized and hands-on leadership style—as well as an intolerance for dissent—in 2015. Xi heads a growing list of coordinating bodies that give him direct supervision over policy areas including domestic security, economic reform, internet management, and ethnic relations.

An aggressive anticorruption campaign reached the highest echelons of the party during the year, culminating with a sentence of life in prison for former Politburo Standing Committee member and internal security czar Zhou Yongkang. Party and government bodies also pushed forward incremental judicial reforms, relaxed household registration rules, and eased population controls.

However, such initiatives were accompanied by hard-line policies on political freedoms and civil liberties and a rejection of judicial oversight of party actions. Harassment of previously tolerated civil society organizations, women's rights defenders, labor activists, and human rights lawyers intensified during the year. In July, security forces detained over 250 individuals involved in public-interest legal work in an unprecedented crackdown on China's "rights-defense movement." Internet controls continued to tighten, and several professional journalists were detained, imprisoned, and forced to make televised confessions.

The government introduced, amended, or passed laws that could further infringe on freedoms of association, expression, and religion. In July, the legislature passed a new National Security Law that defines security broadly to include political considerations like retaining CCP domination of the "ideological sphere." An Antiterrorism Law was adopted in December, while draft legislation on cybersecurity and foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were pending at year's end.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 1 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

The CCP has a monopoly on political power, and its Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) sets government and party policy. At the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, a new PSC—headed by Xi—was announced following an opaque selection process. The committee shrank from nine to seven members. Party members—who number some 80 million nationwide, or about 6 percent of the population—hold almost all top posts in the government, military, and internal security services, as well as in many economic entities and social organizations. Xi, the CCP general secretary, also serves as chairman of the state and party military commissions, and was named state president in March 2013.

The country's legislature, the 3,000-member National People's Congress (NPC), is elected for five-year terms by subnational congresses. It formally elects the state president for up to two five-year terms, and confirms the premier after he is nominated by the president. However, the NPC is a largely symbolic body. Only its standing committee meets regularly, while the full congress convenes for just two weeks a year to approve proposed legislation. The current NPC was seated in March 2013.

The country's only competitive elections are for village committees and urban residency councils, which hold limited authority and are generally subordinate to the local CCP committees. The nomination of candidates remains tightly controlled, and many of the elections have been marred by fraud, corruption, and attacks on independent candidates.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16

The CCP does not tolerate any form of organized opposition or independent political parties. Citizens who attempt to form opposition parties or advocate for democratic reforms have been sentenced to long prison terms. Democracy advocate and 2010 Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo remained behind bars in 2015, having been sentenced in 2009 to 11 years in prison for his role in organizing the prodemocracy manifesto Charter 08. His wife, Liu Xia, has been under strict extralegal house arrest since 2010.

Several activists detained in previous years faced trial and imprisonment in 2015, including in connection with the New Citizens Movement—a loosely organized network of individuals seeking to promote the rule of law, transparency, and human rights—that was the focus of a crackdown launched in 2013. In May, a court in Hubei Province sentenced Liu Jiakai to five years in prison on charges of "inciting subversion of state power" for his online writings and for organizing gatherings of human rights defenders.

In addition to advocates of democracy and political reform, tens of thousands of grassroots activists, petitioners, Falun Gong practitioners, Christians, Tibetans, and Uighurs are believed to be in prison or extrajudicial forms of detention for their political or religious views, although complete figures are unavailable. In October 2014, the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China published a partial list of over 1,200 current political prisoners.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

Party leaders and disciplinary bodies in 2015 accelerated an antigraft campaign launched by Xi in November 2012. During the year, the campaign—described by experts as the most sustained and intensive effort of its kind in recent memory—increasingly focused on central government and party organs, state-owned enterprises, and the financial sector. Scores of senior state and party officials had been investigated and punished by mid-2015, including individuals from the security apparatus, the military, the foreign ministry, state-owned enterprises, and state media. Most notably, in June, former PSC member and internal security chief Zhou Yongkang was sentenced after a closed trial to life imprisonment, having been convicted of bribery, abuse of power, and leaking state secrets. In October, two of his close associates—Jiang Jiemin, former head of China’s largest state-run oil company, and Li Chuncheng, previously a top official in Sichuan Province—were sentenced to 16 years and 13 years in prison, respectively, on graft and abuse of power charges. Over 400,000 lower-ranking officials have also reportedly been disciplined by the party, prosecuted, or punished by the courts since the launch of the campaign.

Despite these efforts, corruption remained widespread, as the leadership rejected more fundamental reforms, such as requiring officials to publicly disclose their assets, creating genuinely independent oversight bodies, or lifting political constraints on journalists and law enforcement agencies. The leading agency behind the current campaign has been the CCP’s own Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. Prosecutions are typically selective and decision making highly opaque, with informal personal networks and internal CCP power struggles influencing both the choice of targets and the outcomes. Factional infighting was widely seen as the primary cause of Zhou’s prosecution, even if the charges themselves had merit. According to some experts, one byproduct of the arbitrary and political nature of the anticorruption campaign has been increased bureaucratic inertia and policy paralysis, as officials fear being punished for even legitimate governing decisions.

Crackdowns on independent anticorruption activists, including those in the New Citizens Movement, and reprisals against foreign media for investigations of influence peddling by top officials’ families, such as the long-term blocking of the *New York Times* website, have further undermined the effectiveness and legitimacy of the campaign. China was ranked 183 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CCP officials continued to seek input from academics and civic groups regarding certain policy areas, though without relinquishing control over the decision-making process. Since open-government regulations took effect in 2008, many agencies have become more forthcoming in publishing official documents. High-level party declarations encourage greater disclosure of information, though implementation of previous measures has been incomplete. The poor quality of official responses has dampened citizens’ initial eagerness to lodge complaints.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 2 / 0 (– 1)

The government continues to pursue policies, including large-scale resettlement and work-transfer programs, that are designed in part to alter the demography of ethnic minority

regions, especially Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. In late 2014, officials relaxed the household registration (*hukou*) requirements for Xinjiang in a manner that sparked an increase in Han Chinese migration in 2015 into areas that had been predominantly Uighur. Some Uighurs complained that their own ability to migrate within the region to the same urban areas remained restricted. Cash incentives encourage Uighur families to have fewer children than the permitted three-child limit for ethnic minorities, while in some locales, authorities have intensified crackdowns on “unauthorized births.” [Note: Tibet is examined in a separate report.]

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 15 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16

Despite relative freedom in private discussion and citizen efforts to push the limits of permissible public speech, China’s media environment remains extremely restrictive. All Chinese television, radio, and print outlets are owned by the CCP or the state. Moreover, all media outlets are required to follow regularly issued CCP directives to avoid certain topics or publish content from party mouthpieces. In addition to routinely censored topics like the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, directives issued in 2015 “guided” reporting or required deletion of content related to stock-market plunges, industrial accidents, the popular environmental documentary *Under the Dome*, high-level corruption, and extremist violence. Outlets that disobey official guidance risk closure, while journalists face dismissal and sometimes imprisonment.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), at least 49 journalists and online writers were behind bars in China as of December 2015, a record number for the country since CPJ began tracking it and the largest total in the world. The total number of Chinese citizens jailed for offenses involving freedom of expression, especially on the internet, was much higher.

Pressure on investigative journalism and liberal media outlets intensified during the year, as several respected journalists faced detentions, forced televised confessions, and questionable charges of bribery, “obtaining state secrets,” or “spreading false rumors.” Following a trend from 2014, mainstream print journalists were detained or sentenced to prison alongside internet-based writers, ethnic minority journalists, and freelancers; cases against mainstream journalists had previously been less common. Gao Yu, a prominent 71-year-old journalist, was sentenced in April to seven years in prison for “leaking state secrets.” Her sentence was reduced to five years in November, and she was released to serve it at home due to deteriorating health. In August, journalist Wang Xiaolu of the financial magazine *Caijing* was arrested and forced to make a televised confession regarding his coverage of the stock market. In December, former 21st Century Media chairman Shen Hao was sentenced to four years in prison for extortion and embezzlement.

Harassment of foreign reporters continued during the year, including occasional physical assaults, hostile editorials in state media, and intimidation of the reporters’ Chinese sources and staff. The authorities used the threat of visa denials to retaliate against foreign journalists and news organizations for investigative or critical reporting. In December, journalist Ursula Gauthier was expelled after publishing an article in a French magazine that was critical of Chinese policies in Xinjiang. In September, shortly before Xi Jinping’s state visit to the United States, Chris Buckley of the *New York Times* was granted permission to return to China; he had been forced to leave in 2012 after authorities refused to renew his press credentials. The websites of Bloomberg News and the *New York Times* have been blocked since 2012, when they reported on the wealth of top leaders’ families; Reuters and the *Wall Street Journal* have also been blocked. Some international radio and television

broadcasts, including the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Asia, have long been jammed.

The authorities block websites or force the deletion of content they deem politically threatening, and Chinese internet companies are obliged to adhere to official censorship directives. A range of Google services, the photo-sharing site Flickr, and cloud services like Dropbox were inaccessible in 2015 following blocks imposed the previous year. The U.S.-based social-media platforms Twitter and Facebook have been blocked for years. In July, the government introduced a new Cybersecurity Law that, if passed, would provide a legal basis for authorities to shut down internet connectivity at times of public security emergencies, while requiring companies to better enforce real-name registration rules and store user data in China.

Domestic microblogging and private chat services—with hundreds of millions of users—have grown rapidly since 2010 as a source of news, an outlet for public opinion, and a tool for civic mobilization. However, since 2013, the authorities have intensified real-name registration rules, criminalization of online speech, and restrictions on the sharing of unofficial news via popular platforms like Sina Weibo and Tencent's WeChat. During 2015, numerous individuals—particularly rights attorneys—who had used these tools for human rights advocacy or to express opinions critical of the government were arrested, prosecuted, and subject to smear campaigns in state media. Pu Zhiqiang, a prominent public-interest lawyer, was convicted in December of “stirring up trouble” and “inciting ethnic hatred” through seven Weibo posts that mocked government officials and criticized ethnic policy; he was given a suspended three-year prison sentence, barred from practicing law, and released from custody after 19 months in detention. In March, GitHub, a U.S.-based international code-sharing site that hosted websites censored in China, was hit with a massive denial-of-service attack that was traced to Chinese government servers and reportedly featured a new cyberattack tool dubbed “The Great Cannon” by researchers.

Religious freedom is sharply curtailed by the formally atheist CCP. All religious groups must register with the government, which regulates their activities, oversees clergy, and guides theology. Some groups, including certain Buddhist and Christian sects, are forbidden, and their members face harassment, imprisonment, and torture. The largest among them is the Falun Gong spiritual group, whose adherents continued to suffer detention in extralegal centers for forced conversion or sentencing to long prison terms during 2015. Those who advocated on their behalf were also punished; lawyers who had taken Falun Gong cases were among those arrested in the summer crackdown. Other unregistered groups, including unofficial Protestant and Roman Catholic congregations, operate in a legal gray zone. Some are able to meet quietly with the tacit approval of local authorities, but other “house church” gatherings are raided or evicted from their meeting locations. Harassment of both underground and state-sanctioned churches continued in 2015, especially in Zhejiang Province, where officials sought to curb the popularity of Christianity by removing publicly visible crosses and demolishing many church buildings. Some 1,200 crosses were removed between February 2014 and July 2015, according to Christian activists, and at least one pastor from a state-sanctioned church was sentenced to prison in 2015 for opposing the demolition campaign. An August amendment to the Criminal Law increased the maximum punishment for Article 300, “using a cult to undermine implementation of the law,” from 15 years to life imprisonment. The article is often invoked to punish religious believers.

Curbs on Islam among the Uighur population of Xinjiang remained intense in 2015, although authorities are more tolerant of religious expression among ethnic Hui Muslims throughout China. Authorities in Xinjiang continued to impose restrictions on religious attire, beards, and fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, in some cases sentencing

violators to prison. State repression of Uighur religious and cultural practices, coupled with socioeconomic grievances, have fueled frustration and radicalization among Uighurs, leading to a rising number of domestic terrorist attacks as well as peaceful protests that draw police violence. Such clashes have caused over 160 reported deaths since September 2014. Official restrictions on journalists' access to Xinjiang make it difficult to independently verify the details surrounding these incidents. An Antiterrorism Law adopted in December featured a very broad definition of "terrorism" that could result in tighter surveillance and harsher punishments for Uighurs involved in nonviolent religious and cultural activities.

Academic freedom is restricted with respect to politically sensitive issues. The CCP controls the appointment of top university officials, and many scholars practice self-censorship to protect their careers. Political indoctrination is a required component of the curriculum at all levels of education. The space for academic discussion of democratic concepts shrank further in 2015 amid top-down pressure on universities to shun "Western" ideals.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are severely restricted. Citizens risk criminal punishment for organizing demonstrations without prior approval, which is rarely granted. Nevertheless, workers, farmers, and urban residents held tens of thousands of protests during 2015 to express grievances. The authorities have struggled to suppress protests without exacerbating public frustration, using force in some cases while employing subtler strategies to deter or disperse large gatherings in others. The number of environmental protests has increased in recent years. During 2015, Chinese authorities used force and arrested participants during environmental protests in several provinces, with violent tactics most frequently employed in ethnic minority areas. In April, police arrested over 50 people and reportedly killed at least one person during a violent crackdown on herders in Inner Mongolia who were demonstrating against pollution.

Local authorities routinely intercept and harass petitioners traveling to Beijing to report injustices, at times detaining them in illegal "black jails." Detained petitioners, many of whom are women, are reportedly subject to beatings, psychological abuse, and sexual violence. Amendments to the Administrative Litigation Law that took effect in May 2015 strengthen the framework for citizens to challenge government actions in court, raising the possibility that some of the millions of grievances submitted annually as petitions might instead be handled by the courts.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are required to register, obtain a government sponsor, and follow strict regulations, including vague prohibitions on advocating non-CCP rule, "damaging national unity," or "upsetting ethnic harmony." Hundreds of thousands of organizations have formally registered, especially those whose work is not politically sensitive. Registration requirements for service-oriented "social organizations" were loosened under new regulations in many of China's provinces in 2014. However, pressure on independent and grassroots NGOs intensified in 2015 amid an increase in raids, staff detentions, forced closures, and asset freezes for advocacy groups working on public health, education, and women's rights issues—including the prominent Yirenping organization, the Transition Institute, and Weizhiming. In May, the government published a second draft of a Foreign NGO Management Law that, if passed, would increase the role of the Ministry of Public Security in supervising foreign NGOs; require more government permission and advanced registration to conduct even temporary activities; increase administrative burdens and official supervision for internal NGO affairs such as personnel and finances; and restrict overseas funding for Chinese individuals and NGOs. The law's passage was pending as of December.

Arbitration mechanisms established under 2008 labor laws have proven disappointing to workers, who complain of biased mediators, lengthy procedures, and employers' failure to comply with rulings. The only legal labor union is the government-controlled All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), which has long been criticized for failing to properly defend workers' rights. Nevertheless, workers have asserted themselves informally via strikes, collective petitioning, and selection of negotiating representatives. They have also used social media to bolster solidarity. Strike activity has surged in recent years. According to data published by the China Labour Bulletin, more than 2,700 strike incidents were reported in 2015, more than double the total for 2014.

Numerous labor rights activists were detained in 2015, especially in Guangdong Province, in the worst such crackdown in years. In May, Guangzhou authorities detained Liu Shaoming on suspicion of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" for his online writings and efforts to start a labor NGO; his trial was pending at year's end. Also in Guangdong Province, authorities in December raided five grassroots groups that assist and advise workers, detaining at least seven people for possible prosecution. Violent attacks against labor advocates reportedly increased as well. In one high-profile case in April, a group of unidentified men abducted, beat, and then abandoned Peng Jiayong, who had been advising female factory workers on strike in Guangdong. The abduction took place immediately after Peng was released from a police station.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

The CCP controls the judiciary. Party political-legal committees supervise the operations of courts at all levels, and allow party officials to influence verdicts and sentences. CCP oversight is especially evident in politically sensitive cases. Most judges are CCP members, and party and government officials determine judicial appointments, salaries, and promotions. Adjudication of minor civil and administrative disputes is fairer than in politically sensitive or criminal cases. However, even in commercial litigation and civil suits involving private individuals, previous limited progress toward the rule of law has stalled or been reversed in recent years.

Incremental reforms aimed at improving judicial performance began in 2014 and continued during 2015. The changes focused on increasing transparency, professionalism, and autonomy from local authorities, for example by having provincial rather than local officials oversee all courts. Some courts are also testing a jury-like assessor mechanism. Still, official statements—including the Supreme People's Court five-year plan released in February—continued to emphasize the supremacy of the party over the legal system.

Civil rights lawyers faced an unprecedented crackdown in 2015. Beginning on July 9, within 48 hours, over 200 individuals involved in public-interest legal work were taken into custody. As of November, at least 36 remained in criminal detention, house arrest, or enforced disappearance. State media engaged in an intense smear campaign against attorneys and law firms known for taking human rights cases, while the family members of some detained lawyers were also targeted. The 16-year-old son of lawyer Wang Yu was taken into custody multiple times and barred from traveling abroad; in October he was reportedly detained in Myanmar near the Chinese border and returned to house arrest in China. Lawyers who continued to take rights cases were prevented from seeing their clients, disbarred, and beaten.

Criminal trials, which often amount to mere sentencing announcements, are frequently closed to the public, and the conviction rate is estimated at 98 percent or more. Amendments to the criminal procedure code that took effect in 2013 include the exclusion of evidence

obtained through torture, access for lawyers to their clients, and the possibility of witnesses being cross-examined. Lawyers reported that access to their clients subsequently improved (except in politically sensitive cases), but other provisions have proven more difficult to implement. The trend of televised “confessions” by journalists, businessmen, and targets of corruption probes continued in 2015 and raised doubts about the protection of defendants’ rights.

Torture remains widespread in practice, either for the purpose of extracting confessions or forcing political and religious dissidents to recant their beliefs. Security agents routinely flout legal protections, and impunity is the norm for police brutality and suspicious deaths in custody. Overall, detention facilities are estimated to hold three to five million people. Conditions are generally harsh, with reports of inadequate food, regular beatings, and deprivation of medical care; the government generally does not permit visits by independent monitoring groups.

Under a 2013 reform, the decades-old network of “reeducation through labor” camps, in which individuals could be held for up to four years without a judicial hearing, has been abolished. Alternative nonjudicial detention systems were used during 2015 to hold the same categories of detainees, though often for shorter terms. Some camps were transformed into coercive drug-rehabilitation centers, and prostitutes were sent to “custody and education centers,” both of which typically involve forced labor. A growing number of activists, petitioners, microbloggers, and Falun Gong practitioners have been confined in extralegal “black jails,” “legal education centers,” or psychiatric facilities. Others faced formal prosecution, with some receiving harsher sentences than those possible under the labor-camp system.

In August, the government reduced the number of crimes carrying the death penalty from 55 to 46. Observers noted that since the most common capital crimes were not removed, the change was unlikely to significantly reduce the number of executions, which remains a state secret. An estimate by the San Francisco–based Duihua Foundation put the number at 2,400 for 2014. While still more than the combined total for the rest of the world, the figure represents a sharp decline from an estimated 12,000 in 2002. The government said it would end the previously common use of organs from executed prisoners as of January 2015, but prisoners would be allowed to make “voluntary” donations like other citizens, raising doubts as to whether any real change had occurred.

Chinese laws formally prohibit discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, religion, or health condition, but they do not guarantee equal treatment for all segments of society in practice. Ethnic and religious minorities, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people, the disabled, and people with HIV/AIDS face widespread de facto discrimination, in some cases with official encouragement. This includes discrimination in access to employment and education. Separately, despite international legal protections for asylum seekers and refugees, Chinese law enforcement agencies continue to seek out and repatriate North Korean defectors, who face imprisonment or execution upon return.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

The hukou system limits the ability of China’s 800 million rural residents and migrant workers to fully access urban social services, such as education for their children. Nevertheless, the government has explored reforms to the system. In December 2015, the State Council announced that beginning in January, migrants to cities would be able to apply for special urban residency permits granting them access to some social services, based on relatively loose criteria in small cities and towns and tighter restrictions in large cities. The

latter conditions include requirements on employment, residency length, and educational attainment that may be difficult for many migrants to meet.

Millions of people are affected by restrictions on foreign travel and passports, many of them Uighurs and Tibetans. Political and religious dissidents, human rights defenders, certain scholars, and their family members were also prevented from traveling abroad or to Hong Kong in 2015.

Property rights protection remains weak in practice. Urban land is owned by the state, even if the buildings that sit on it are privately owned. Rural land is collectively owned by villages. Farmers enjoy long-term lease rights to the land they farm, but are barred from selling or developing it. Low compensation standards and weak legal protections have facilitated land seizures by local officials, who often evict the residents and transfer the land rights to developers. Corruption is endemic in such projects, and local governments rely on land development as a key source of operating revenue, funds for debt repayment, and economic growth statistics that are critical to officials' careers. Residents who resist eviction, seek legal redress, or organize protests often face violence at the hands of local police or hired thugs. Since November 2013, the government has announced several policies aimed at expanding farmers' land rights, but the reforms had not been implemented on a large scale by the end of 2015.

The government in 2014 began instituting policies that could increase private-sector lending and strengthen market-based competition and energy pricing, though state-owned enterprises continue to dominate banking and other key industries. Repeated, aggressive state intervention to curb stock-market plunges during 2015 illustrated the ongoing role of government in the Chinese economy and the political motivations often driving such moves. Chinese citizens are legally permitted to establish and operate private businesses. However, those without official protection can find themselves at a disadvantage vis-à-vis competitors, in legal disputes, or in dealings with regulators. Foreign companies can similarly face arbitrary regulatory obstacles, demands for bribes and other inducements, or negative media campaigns.

China's population controls require couples to obtain government permission before having children. However, in December 2015, the Law on Population and Family Planning was amended to abolish the decades-old one-child policy, allowing all Chinese couples to have two children. While the authorities would continue to regulate reproduction, the change meant that fewer families would be likely to encounter the punitive aspects of the system in practice. Meeting birth quotas has long been crucial to career advancement for local officials. Consequently, some have continued to resort to brutal practices like compulsory abortion and sterilization, though this is less common than in the past. Relatives of unsterilized mothers or couples with unapproved births are subject to high fines, job dismissal, reduced government benefits, and occasionally detention. These controls, combined with commercial ultrasound technology and societal pressures favoring boys, have led to a general shortage of females, exacerbating the problem of human trafficking. Unregistered children cannot obtain hukou status without the payment of substantial fines.

Domestic violence affects one-quarter of Chinese women, according to official figures. In December 2015, the National People's Congress adopted the country's first law designed to combat domestic violence. The final version included psychological in addition to physical violence, but critics noted that sexual violence was not explicitly addressed, and that the law's application to relationships outside marriage, including same-sex couples, remained unclear. Several laws bar gender discrimination in the workplace, and gender equality has reportedly improved over the past decade, but bias remains widespread, including in job recruitment and college admissions. Women remain severely underrepresented in important

CCP and government positions. In March 2015, five women’s rights activists were detained because they had planned to distribute stickers on public transportation to raise awareness of sexual harassment; they were released after five weeks in custody following an international and domestic outcry.

Workers are routinely denied social insurance and other legal benefits, while dangerous workplace conditions claim many tens of thousands of lives each year. The use of juveniles in government-sanctioned “work-study” programs continues to be a serious problem. Forced labor and trafficking is common in many industries in China, frequently affecting rural migrants, and Chinese nationals are also trafficked abroad. Although “reeducation through labor” camps have been abolished, other forms of detention continue to feature forced labor.

Colombia

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 48,218,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Bogotá

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

The peace process between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) dominated the political environment in 2015. For much of the year, the peace talks appeared to be on a downward trajectory, and progress on the most sensitive issue—accountability for crimes committed during Colombia’s five decades of armed conflict—appeared stagnant. The talks reached a nadir following a FARC attack in April that killed 10 soldiers and prompted a government offensive that included extensive bombardment of FARC camps. In response to public pressure, the two sides agreed to accelerate the pace of the talks in July, and in late September, the framework of a transitional justice agreement was announced, with details added in December. The agreement called for a tribunal to investigate and prosecute crimes, with leniency given to the majority of participants, conditional on truthful testimony. Punitive provisions range from no more than eight years of “alternative penalties” (as opposed to imprisonment) for serious crimes with cooperation, and 20 years without; the leniency does not extend to those who committed war crimes or crimes against humanity. The agreement is intended to apply to guerrillas, state actors, and private citizens.

Reactions were not universally welcoming: the political right denounced the accord as amnesty for the guerrillas, while Human Rights Watch and some other watchdogs expressed apprehension about its terms as well. Nonetheless, most hailed the agreement as signifying a point of no return in the talks, and polls registered a significant rise in public optimism about the peace process, though a small majority remained skeptical about the overall prospects of successfully reaching a final accord. In October, the government and FARC also

agreed on a plan to investigate the more than 50,000 disappearances recorded in association with the conflict, and in December, Congress passed a law detailing the terms of a national referendum on the accord. However, disagreement remained on several key issues, including the terms of disarmament and mechanisms for implementing the agreement.

Regional elections held in October offered mixed results for the governing coalition led by President Juan Manuel Santos while weakening his predecessor and chief opponent, Senator Álvaro Uribe.

POIITICAL RIGHTS: 29 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12

The president is directly elected to a four-year term. As part of a series of constitutional amendments in 2015 known as the Balance of Power reform, immediate presidential reelection was eliminated. Congress is composed of the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives, with all seats up for election every four years. The nation at large selects 100 Senate members using a closed-list system; indigenous communities choose two additional members. The Chamber of Representatives consists of 166 members elected by closed-list proportional representation in multimember districts.

The 2014 legislative and presidential elections were relatively peaceful, although the former was plagued by accusations of fraud, vote buying, and connections with criminals. President Santos's main allies, the Liberal Party, the Social National Unity Party (U Party), and Radical Change, won a substantial majority in the Chamber of Representatives, taking 92 seats. In the Senate, however, the coalition won only 47 seats. Uribe's Democratic Center took the second-most Senate seats with 20, and also claimed 19 seats in the Chamber of Representatives, making it the primary opposition force.

President Santos won the second round of the 2014 election with 51 percent of the vote against Óscar Iván Zuluaga, who had won the first round with 29 percent to Santos's 26 percent. The balloting was considered relatively free and fair; the most dramatic scandal involved allegations that Andrés Sepúlveda, arrested in May 2014 and later sentenced to ten years' imprisonment on charges of cyberespionage, had shared illegally intercepted intelligence with Uribe and members of the Zuluaga campaign.

The 2015 regional elections fortified parties allied with the government, which won gubernatorial races in 23 of the 32 departments. In the most closely followed race, independent former mayor Enrique Peñalosa won the seat again in Bogotá, ending 12 years of rule by the left-wing Democratic Pole. The polls were characterized by accusations of improper influence by illegal groups, irregularities in voter registration, and insufficient candidate vetting by the major parties. There were also at least 20 politically connected murders, though this represented a significant decline in comparison with the 2011 elections.

The nine members of the National Electoral Council—elected by Congress for four-year terms based on party nominations—oversee the conduct of the country's elections, including the financing of political campaigns and the counting of votes.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16

The traditional Liberal-Conservative partisan duopoly in Congress has been supplanted in recent years by a newer party system that is still evolving. The new system is comprised of the traditional parties—which are often characterized by factionalism—as well as regional movements, ideological groups from both the right and the left, and technocratic or issue-oriented parties. Santos's centrist National Unity coalition, which enjoyed dominance in both chambers during his first term, continued to maintain the loose support of a

significant majority of legislators following the 2014 elections, despite the vocal and cohesive presence of the Uribe-led right.

In 2015, FARC and criminal gangs subjected several government officials to threats, harassment, and violence, in some cases fatal; some local officials resigned because of threats. Police forces and the National Protection Unit, a body under the Ministry of Interior, provided protection to hundreds of public officials during the year.

While general progress remains slow, the government has undertaken a series of steps to incorporate indigenous and Afro-Colombian voices into national political debates in recent years, including training programs to increase Afro-Colombian communities' capacity for governance and awareness of their broader political rights.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Corruption occurs at multiple levels of public administration. Graft scandals have emerged in recent years within an array of federal government agencies. The “parapolitics” scandal, which linked scores of politicians to illegal paramilitary groups, resulted in the investigation, arrest, or conviction of more than 90 legislators by the close of the 2006–10 Congress.

Part of the responsibility for combating corruption rests with the inspector general, who is charged with monitoring the actions of elected officials. Current inspector general Alejandro Ordóñez has removed multiple mayors and bureaucratic officials from office or suspended their right to stand for election. His dismissal of Gustavo Petro from his post as mayor of Bogotá in 2013 generated a backlash, and Petro returned to office in 2014 to serve out his term. Numerous officials from the Uribe administration have been convicted of corruption, trading favors, and spying on political opponents. In 2014, the magazine *Semana* published an article alleging corruption involving several senior members of the military, including contracting irregularities and significant kickbacks on government contracts. Colombia was ranked 83 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Public access to government information is generally available for a reasonable fee, though some lower level officials have reportedly required bribes to expedite access. Congress maintains an online platform on which legislators can voluntarily publish financial disclosures.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 34 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression, and opposition views are commonly expressed in the media. However, journalists face intimidation, kidnapping, and violence both in the course of reporting and as retaliation for their work. Nonetheless, dozens of journalists have been murdered since the mid-1990s, many of whom were targeted for reporting on drug trafficking and corruption. Most of the cases remain unsolved, and although violence has declined in recent years, a local media watchdog recorded at least 144 threats and other abuses against the press in 2015. Three journalists—Luís Carlos Peralta, Edgar Quintero, and Flor Alba Núñez—were murdered in 2015; all of them had previously experienced problems with local officials and criminals because of their reporting. Although the government has prosecuted several notorious cases of murdered journalists in recent years, convictions have been made in fewer than 15 percent of killings since 1977.

Self-censorship is common, and slander and defamation remain criminal offenses. The government does not restrict access to the internet, nor does it censor websites. Twitter and other social-media platforms have become important arenas for political discourse.

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the government generally respects this right in practice. The authorities also uphold academic freedom. University debates are often vigorous, though armed groups maintain a presence on many campuses to generate political support and intimidate opponents.

Human rights groups have criticized the government's use of civilian informants to gather information about suspected criminal and terrorist activities, warning that the practice threatens civil liberties, including the right to privacy.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12

Although provided for in the constitution, freedoms of assembly and association are restricted in practice by violence. During a demonstration in the department of Cauca in March 2015, police reportedly burned protestors' tents and used teargas against them.

The government provides extensive protection to hundreds of threatened human rights workers, but trust in the service varies widely. Scores of activists have been murdered in recent years, mostly by the criminal organizations that have succeeded paramilitary groups following a government-backed demobilization process in 2005. Although the Santos administration has reiterated its respect for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), violations against activists have continued and even increased in some areas. Land rights and victims' rights campaigners in particular are threatened by former paramilitaries seeking to silence criticism of assets acquired during the conflict. According to the We Are Defenders group, 34 human rights activists were murdered in the first half of 2015, largely at the hands of paramilitary successor groups.

Workers are allowed to form and join trade unions, bargain collectively, and strike, and antiunion discrimination is prohibited. Over the past two decades, Colombia's illegal armed groups have killed more than 2,600 labor union activists and leaders. Killings have declined substantially from their peak in the early 2000s, but still occur with regularity. Although a special prosecutorial unit has substantially increased prosecutions for such assassinations since 2007, few investigations have targeted those who ordered the killings.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

The justice system remains compromised by corruption and extortion, although the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court have demonstrated independence from the executive in recent years. In 2015, however, the Constitutional Court's reputation was severely damaged by allegations that its president had solicited a \$200,000 bribe to rule in favor of an oil company. During the year, legislators pressed ahead with the country's ongoing balance of power reforms, a series of far-reaching legislative changes that aim, among other things, to increase judicial accountability by creating a new oversight body that would conduct trials for abuses by members of the high courts.

Many soldiers operate with limited civilian oversight, though the government has in recent years increased human rights training and investigated a greater number of violations by military personnel. Collaboration between security forces and illegal armed groups has declined since the 2005 paramilitary demobilization, but rights groups report official toleration of paramilitary successor groups in some regions. Primary responsibility for combating these groups rests with the police, who lack the resources of the military, are frequently accused of colluding with criminals, and are largely absent from many rural areas where the groups are active. Nevertheless, many of the groups' key leaders have been killed or arrested in recent years, as have several of Colombia's most wanted drug traffickers.

The systematic killing of civilians to fraudulently inflate guerrilla death tolls has declined substantially since a 2008 scandal over the practice led to the firing of dozens of

senior army officers. More than 2,000 people may have been killed for such reasons. As of mid-2015, more than 900 soldiers had been convicted for these crimes, and thousands of security personnel remained under investigation at year's end. However, rights groups have claimed that high-ranking officers largely escape punishment, and the military continued to lobby for the inclusion of these crimes under the transitional justice umbrella.

Civil-military relations were a source of significant tension in 2015, largely due to the perception that a significant portion of the armed forces opposes the peace process. Jurisdiction and punishment for human rights violations are particularly sensitive issues. Convictions of high-ranking officers for forced disappearances prompted the passage of a 2012 constitutional amendment that expanded the jurisdiction of the military justice system, resulting in domestic and international outcry. In October 2013, the Constitutional Court struck down the amendment on the basis of procedural errors; while a similar bill was passed in April 2015, many of the most controversial provisions were omitted.

While violence has subsided since the early 2000s and homicides declined to their lowest level in decades in 2015, some areas, particularly resource-rich zones and drug-trafficking corridors, remain highly insecure. Following a series of military setbacks between 2008 and 2011, the FARC reorganized and focused on new tactics, including multiple attacks carried out by small units. The group maintained a unilateral ceasefire for much of 2015, making it one of the most peaceful years in Colombia in decades, though attacks skyrocketed when the ceasefire was breached between May and July. Guerrillas and paramilitary successor groups regularly extort payments from business owners and engage in forced recruitment, including of minors. The use of landmines in the internal conflict has added to casualties among both civilians and the military.

Impunity for crime in general is rampant, with convictions achieved in only 10 percent of murders. Most massacres during the conflict have gone unpunished. However, in November 2015, the attorney general announced an investigation into a 1997 massacre in the Antioquia department that will include scrutiny of the actions of Uribe, who was the region's governor at the time.

Afro-Colombians, who account for approximately 25 percent of the population, make up the largest segment of Colombia's more than five million displaced people, and 80 percent of Afro-Colombians fall below the poverty line. Areas with concentrated Afro-Colombian populations continue to suffer from abuses by the FARC and security forces.

Colombia is home to more than 1.7 million indigenous inhabitants. Most live on more than 34 million hectares granted to them by the government, often in resource-rich, strategic regions that are increasingly contested by various armed groups. Indigenous people have been targets from all sides in the country's various conflicts. In October 2015, the Constitutional Court upheld the validity of a decree issued by the government in 2014 that satisfies a commitment to increased autonomy for indigenous territories.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people suffer societal discrimination and abuse, as well as high levels of impunity for crimes committed against them. Local NGOs have reported cases of police abuse of persons due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, and contend that victims rarely pursue legal action out of fear of retaliation. Dozens of suspected homicides of LGBT individuals were under investigation in 2015. Members of the transgender community have experienced difficulties changing their gender designations on national identity documents and have been denied medical care when health care providers have refused to accept their government identification cards.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Freedom of movement, choice of residence, and property rights are restricted by violence, particularly for vulnerable minority groups. Travel in rural areas is further limited by

illegal checkpoints operated by criminal and guerrilla groups. Progress remains uneven on the implementation of the landmark 2011 Victims and Land Law, which recognized the legitimacy of claims by victims of conflict-related abuses, including those committed by government forces. While affected citizens continue receiving compensation, the legal process for land restitution is heavily backlogged, and the resettlement of those who were displaced during the conflict continues to move slowly.

Sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation remain major concerns. Thousands of rapes have occurred as part of the conflict, generally with impunity. The country has restrictive abortion laws, though a 2006 Constitutional Court ruling allowed abortion in cases of rape or incest or to protect the life of the mother. In June 2015, Congress adopted legislation specifically criminalizing femicide, the killing of a woman because of her gender or gender identity or as part of a campaign of violence. The law prescribes imprisonment of up to 50 years in prison for the crime.

Same-sex marriage remains a controversial issue, with a series of judicial and administrative decisions in 2013 allowing and then annulling same-sex unions. In November 2015, the Constitutional Court legalized adoptions by same-sex couples.

Child labor, the recruitment of children by illegal armed groups, and related sexual abuse are serious problems in Colombia. A 2011 free trade agreement with the United States and a subsequent Labor Action Plan called for enhanced investigation of abusive labor practices and rights violations, but progress remains deficient in several areas.

Comoros

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 764,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Moroni

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,4,PF	4,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

In January and February 2015, Comoros held competitive parliamentary elections on all three islands. The opposition criticized the election commission for inadequate preparations and alleged widespread use of state resources and state-run companies to support the campaign of President Ikililou Dhoinine’s party. The president’s party won the most seats and formed a parliamentary majority through alliances with smaller parties. The recently formed Juwa Party of former president Ahmed Abdallah Mohamed Sambi was the primary opposition faction.

Sambi attempted to run in the presidential election set for early 2016 despite the country’s unique electoral system, which rotates the presidency among the islands. The next

president was supposed to come from Grande Comore. At the end of 2015, the Constitutional Court ruled that Sambi, a native of Anjouan but a resident of Grand Comore, was ineligible to register as a candidate.

Relations between Comoros and France remain fragile, as Comoros claims the island of Mayotte—a French overseas department—as part of its territory. Large numbers of Comorans illegally migrate to the island in order to seek entry into mainland France, and the Comoran economy, which is primarily agricultural, relies heavily on remittances from Comoran citizens in France. The government announced in June 2015 that members of the diaspora, who reside predominantly in France, would be able to vote in the 2016 presidential election. However, the new policy was later withdrawn due to logistical challenges.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 24 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

Under the 2001 constitution, the president is directly elected for a single five-year term, with eligibility rotating among the three islands. The three candidates who lead the vote on the designated island advance to a second, nationwide round of voting. The unicameral Assembly of the Union consists of 33 members, with 9 selected by the assemblies of the three islands and 24 by direct popular vote; all members serve five-year terms. In addition to its own assembly, each of the three islands also has a directly elected governor. A 2009 referendum approved constitutional reforms that increased the powers of the union government at the expense of the individual island governments.

Dhoinine won the presidential election in 2010 with the support of then president Sambi, taking 61 percent of the vote and becoming the first president from the island of Mohéli. Dhoinine later broke away from Sambi's influence and created his own party, the Union for the Development of Comoros (UPDC); Sambi's Juwa Party is now the primary opposition in the parliament. The Constitutional Court upheld the 2010 presidential election results despite irregularities reported on the island of Anjouan.

In September 2014, President Dhoinine postponed municipal, island assembly, and parliamentary elections from November 2014 to late December 2014 due to delays in meeting electoral code provisions. The first round of voting was held in January 2015 after being postponed for a second time. The national election commission was able to administer the elections, though there were a number of irregularities in the provision of biometric voter cards and the creation of a voters' list. While international observers present during the polls deemed them calm and transparent, there were accusations of fraud.

The results left the UPDC with 11 seats in the Assembly of the Union, followed by Juwa with 10, the Democratic Rally of the Comoros (RDC) with 4, the Convention for the Renewal of the Comoros (CRC) with 2, and three smaller parties with 1 each. Three independent candidates also won seats.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16

Comorans have voted in several parliamentary and presidential elections since 1990, though military coups and secession attempts persisted into the early 2000s. The first peaceful transfer of power through elections occurred in 2006, which also marked the first time that the presidency rotated among the islands as mandated in the 2001 constitution.

Political parties operate freely and were able to campaign with minimal impediments in the 2015 parliamentary election period. Parties are mainly formed around particular leaders and draw on island or ethnic bases of support. Parties' platforms have historically been defined by their positions regarding the division of power between the union and local

governments, though many parties focused on issues such as youth unemployment during the 2015 legislative campaign.

The government occasionally disrupts opposition parties' activities by denying them meeting and assembly space. During the 2015 campaign period, the UPDC allegedly benefited from state resources and the assistance of state-run companies. Critics accused the state mobile telecommunications company of holding hiring blitzes as part of the campaign and directing employees to vote for the ruling party. Public-sector employment has risen in past election years.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12 (– 1)

In April 2015, the newly installed Union of the Assembly chose its president in an irregular election that sparked accusations of an “institutional coup” from the opposition. During the vote, opposition members were prevented from accessing the chamber, at times through the intervention of security forces. The opposition parties, deeming the election illegitimate, unsuccessfully brought a case calling for the dismissal of the assembly president to the Constitutional Court.

There are reports of corruption at all levels, including in the judiciary, civil service, and security forces. In 2011, the opposition CRC, led by former president Azali Assoumani, filed a complaint in a Moroni court against Sambi for alleged misuse of public funds while in office. The allegations concerned the sale of Comoran nationality to stateless individuals residing in Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, a practice used by Gulf regimes to avoid giving their stateless residents citizenship. In 2013, a police chief was arrested and later released in connection with the scheme; no other officials have been arrested, and the police chief was able to run and win a seat in the 2015 legislative elections.

Comoros enacted a law adding more severe penalties for embezzlement of public funds in 2014, but police and court officials rarely prosecute corruption cases. Comoros was ranked 136 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 31 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 10 / 16

The constitution and laws provide for freedoms of speech and the press, though self-censorship is reportedly widespread. No journalists were arrested for their work during 2015, though a supporter of former president Sambi's bid for reelection was arrested at a press conference in July for speech characterized as “incitement to hatred.” The government does not restrict access to the internet, but penetration remained low at about 7 percent in 2015.

Islam is the state religion, and 98 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. The president appoints the grand mufti, an official government position. Tensions have occasionally arisen between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, and both Shiite Muslims and non-Muslims are subject to discrimination and, more rarely, harassment and detention on criminal charges. Conversion from Islam and non-Muslim proselytizing are illegal, though such restrictions are unevenly enforced.

Academic freedom is generally respected, and there are few constraints on open and free private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12 (+ 1)

Freedoms of assembly and association are protected in the constitution, but the government has restricted these rights in practice. In February 2015, demonstrations over poor

water and electricity services on Grande Comore resulted in an army crackdown on protesters that left seven people injured. Twenty people were detained during the protests and later released.

A few human rights groups and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in the country, though they sometimes face obstacles. The head of the Comoran Federation of Consumers, former finance minister Mohamed Said Mchangama, was among those briefly detained for their role in protests during 2015.

Workers have the right to form unions, bargain collectively, and strike. In March 2015, taxi drivers in Grande Comore won concessions from the government after going on strike over road conditions and insisting that they would not pay taxes until the roads were improved.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16

The judicial system is based on both Sharia (Islamic law) and the French legal code, and is subject to influence by the executive branch and other elites. Minor disputes are often settled informally by village elders. In 2014, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Comoros Red Crescent began a program to improve conditions in the national prison. However, the prison, located in Moroni, is still severely overcrowded and lacks adequate sanitation, medical care, and nutrition.

In January 2015, a court sentenced 13 people to prison for planning a coup in 2013. They were released in December after a presidential pardon. The plotters included Mahmoud Ahmed Abdallah, the son of former president Ahmed Abdallah, and seven foreign nationals.

Same-sex sexual activity is punishable by fines and up to five years in prison.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

In 2014, Comoros passed a law guaranteeing freedom of movement for people living with HIV.

The government controls access to key services in the Comoran market, but has taken steps to allow more competition. For example, in October 2015 the Madagascar-based telecommunications company Telma was approved as the first mobile operator other than the state-run operator. Government-backed development projects sometimes sideline citizen interests and are vulnerable to bribery and corruption. Residents of a village in Grande Comore and their supporters protested during 2015 against a government deal with a French construction firm to operate a quarry in the area, which would expropriate their land.

The law prohibits discrimination based on gender, and the government has taken steps to improve the political participation of women. However, in practice women are still under-represented; only one woman was elected to the Assembly of the Union in 2015. Economic inequality also remains a challenge, as women have far fewer opportunities for education and salaried employment than men, especially in rural areas. In accordance with civil and some customary laws, women have equal rights in inheritance matters. However, this is complicated by the concurrent application of Islamic law, which limits gender equality. In addition, a poor system of land registration and women's difficulties in securing loans often negate the benefits of land ownership in practice. Sexual violence and workplace harassment are believed to be widespread, but are rarely reported to authorities.

In 2015, the government issued a new law providing penalties for the trafficking of children, who are often victims of forced labor within the country. A general update to the penal code to add provisions against trafficking in persons was passed in 2014 but has yet to be implemented.

Congo, Republic of (Brazzaville)

Political Rights Rating: 6

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 4,755,000

Capital: Brazzaville

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,PF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Congo constitution was amended in 2015 to remove age and term-limit restrictions on the presidency, thus allowing President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the Congolese Labor Party (PCT) to run for a third term in 2016. Although the constitutional referendum was strongly criticized by local opposition groups, the electoral commission reported 92 percent of votes in favor. The result was facilitated by intimidation, violence, and an opposition boycott.

Despite being one of sub-Saharan Africa's largest oil producers, corruption and decades of political instability have contributed to extreme poverty for most of the population. Congo was ranked 136 out of 188 countries on the 2015 UN Human Development Index.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 6 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12

The president is elected to seven-year terms. Congo modified its constitution in 2015 after an October referendum, removing term limits and age restrictions for the presidency in the lead-up to 2016 national elections. Under Congo's 2002 constitution, the presidency had been limited to two seven-year terms, with an age limit of 70 years. The 2015 changes, which were approved by 92 percent of voters, allow him to run for a third term at the age of 72. Opposition members and international observers noted that the referendum was marred by violence and intimidation.

President Sassou-Nguesso has been in office since 1979 through a combination of elections and a military coup, with the exception of a five-year period in the 1990s. Sassou-Nguesso was elected to his second term in office in 2009 with 78 percent of the vote; his closest challenger took just 7 percent. The election was peaceful and deemed free by African Union observers, but the opposition and a domestic rights group reported fraud. The Pan-African Union for Social Democracy (UPADS) boycotted presidential elections in 2002 and 2009.

Congo's bicameral parliament consists of a 72-seat Senate and a 139-seat National Assembly. Councilors from every department each elect six senators to six-year terms (with half of the seats up for election every three years); National Assembly members are directly elected to five-year terms. In 2012 elections, the PCT took 89 of the 139 available seats, and its allies won a further 28. The UPADS and the Congolese Movement for Democracy and Integral Development each won seven seats, and 10 parties won 5 seats or less each. Irregularities, opposition boycotts and disqualifications, accusations of fraud, low voter

turnout, postelection violence, and the lack of an independent electoral commission tarnish elections in Congo. The amended constitution reestablishes the post of prime minister, which had been eliminated in 2009.

A 2014 electoral law establishing procedures for the next elections was criticized for cementing the regime's control over the electoral commission. Although party lists for the National Assembly are required to have 15 percent women, this provision is routinely ignored.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16 (– 1)

More than 100 political parties are registered in Congo. Most parties are regional with narrow, ethnically based constituencies and little national power.

Intimidation and repression of political opposition is common. Six members of the UPADS were arrested just before the 2015 referendum. Guy Brice Parfait Kolélas, a minister in the former UPADS government, reported that the military blockaded his home following the vote. In November, the leader of the United for Congo party was arrested for his role in October demonstrations against the referendum. The 2015 referendum consolidated the PCT's dominance of the political system.

Members of Sassou-Nguesso's northern Mbochi ethnic group control key government posts. Other groups have some political representation, though the indigenous populations do not.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

Corruption is pervasive in Congo. The country has several active anticorruption bodies, but domestic prosecutions for corruption are limited and often politically motivated. Although the country became fully compliant with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2013, significant funds from Congo's oil sector are still reportedly lost to corruption. The state oil company is directly under the control of the president's family and advisers, and investigations have revealed the company has been used to siphon money to the regime's favored associates. After years of investigating Sassou-Nguesso and his family for the alleged embezzlement of public funds, in October 2015 French judges ordered the seizure of three properties in France belonging to Sassou-Nguesso's nephew. Congo was ranked 146 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Access to information is guaranteed in the constitution but not by law, and is not upheld in practice. There was no public consultation in the drafting of the new constitution.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 22 / 16 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 7 / 16 (– 1)

While the constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press, the government's respect for such freedoms is limited in practice. The government can impose fines for defamation and incitement to violence, and it systematically censors journalists. Self-censorship is common. Journalist Ghys Fortuné Bemba Dombe was briefly arrested in October after publishing an article accusing Sassou-Nguesso of receiving support from armed mercenaries to push forward favorable referendum results.

Internet and text messaging services were cut throughout Congo in the days leading up to the constitutional reform vote, coinciding with a planned opposition demonstration. Radio France Internationale's signal and internet connection were also blocked during this period. While independent journalists were unable to transmit, progovernment radio stations

remained in operation. Certain private media outlets that did not support the government continued to face suspensions in 2015.

Congo has no nationwide radio or television stations, so most civilians receive news from local broadcast sources. Most newspapers are privately owned, though the state publishes the only daily newspaper.

Religious freedom is generally respected. In May 2015, the government banned the wearing of the niqab, the full face veil, in public, citing concerns of security and terrorism.

Academic freedom is tenuous. Most university professors self-censor on politically sensitive topics, and many work as paid consultants for the government. In 2014, two professors at Marien Ngouabi University were arrested and a third was threatened with detention, ostensibly due to their criticisms of the government and affiliation with the opposition.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are provided for in the constitution but are restricted in practice. Groups must receive official authorization to hold public assemblies. Galvanized by the president's push to alter the constitution, thousands of Congolese demonstrated in September and October 2015 in the largest protests that have taken place under Sassou-Nguesso. The government responded by mobilizing pro-Sassou-Nguesso rallies that called for a "Yes" to the new constitution. In advance of the referendum, small groups in public places were arrested and questioned by police. Security forces violently dispersed several gatherings, particularly of the political opposition.

Nongovernmental organizations generally operate without interference as long as they do not challenge the ruling elite.

Workers' rights to unionize, strike, and bargain collectively are nominally protected by law, but only intermittently upheld. Most workers in the formal business sector belong to unions, which have also made efforts to organize in informal sectors such as agriculture and retail trade. Members of the security forces and other essential services are not allowed to form unions.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

Congo's judiciary is crippled by lack of resources and is vulnerable to corruption and political influence. In 2015, the Constitutional Court's confirmation of the national constitutional referendum results was viewed as a rubber-stamp approval of Sassou-Nguesso's efforts to remain in power. Traditional courts dominate the judicial system in rural Congo, presiding over local property, inheritance, and domestic cases.

The government generally maintains control over security forces, but in some instances members of the security forces violate rights with impunity. The Human Rights Commission (HRC), charged with addressing complaints about abuses committed by security forces, is largely ineffectual. Reports of arbitrary arrests and custodial torture continued in 2015. Prison conditions are life threatening.

Indigenous groups are concentrated in isolated rural areas, and urban neighborhoods tend to be segregated. These groups are actively discriminated against in hiring and other areas.

In 2015, an Amnesty International report found that Congo's forced deportations of thousands of nationals from neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the previous year, during which deportees were subjected to police brutality and rape, were akin to crimes against humanity. West African immigrants were targeted with arrest and deportation in May 2015.

While no law specifically prohibits same-sex sexual relations between adults, people found to have committed a “public outrage against decency” face punishments of up to two years in prison. The law prescribes up to three years in prison for same-sex relations if one participant is under the age of 21. These laws are rarely enforced. Two LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) rights groups exist in the country, focusing almost exclusively on the rights of gay men and HIV/AIDS issues.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

In 2015, domestic travel restrictions targeted members of the opposition and unregistered immigrants from the DRC. On two occasions in July, the leader of the UPADS was prevented from boarding a plane to Paris. The judicial system offers few protections for business or property rights.

Despite constitutional safeguards, legal and societal discrimination against women persists. Equal access to education and employment is limited, and civil codes regarding marriage formalize women’s inferior status. Most women work in the informal sector, where they may be subject to abuse. Violence against women is reportedly widespread. Rape, including marital rape, is illegal, but this crime is common and rarely reported. Women are underrepresented in government and decision-making positions, holding just 10 seats each in the National Assembly and Senate.

Most human trafficking in Congo is internal, controlled by armed groups largely in eastern provinces where government control is weak. Human trade in Congo commonly includes laborers for the mining and agricultural industries, workers for the sex trade, and less commonly, servants or soldiers (including some children) for armed militias. According to the U.S. State Department 2015 *Report on Trafficking in Persons*, Congo took substantial steps in 2015 to prosecute rogue elements of the Congolese national army and police for sex slavery and ceased government recruitment of child soldiers.

Congo, Democratic Republic of (Kinshasa)

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 71,167,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Kinshasa

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	6,6,NF	5,6,NF	5,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, violence, weak rule of law, and political maneuvering around a presidential election scheduled for 2016 exacerbated instability in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Attempts by President Joseph Kabila’s parliamentary coalition, the Alliance of the Presidential Majority (AMP), to amend electoral law were perceived by many as a move to extend Kabila’s tenure despite a two-term constitutional limit. Demonstrations against these efforts erupted in January and were met with violence by security forces, with human rights

groups documenting dozens of deaths and several disappearances. Journalists and human rights advocates continued to face harassment, abuse, and unlawful detention at the hands of state security as well as rebel groups during the year.

Numerous rebel groups remain active in the country's eastern provinces, contributing to mass internal displacement. Officers affiliated with the national army, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC), remained implicated in human rights violations, with little effective civilian control over their activities.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 9 / 40**A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12**

Article 70 of the DRC's 2006 constitution stipulates that the president is elected for up to two five-year terms, and Article 220 prohibits amendments to key elements of the state's political framework, including the number and length of presidential terms.

Kabila was declared the winner of the November 2011 presidential election amid widespread criticism of the election by international observers; he defeated longtime opposition figure Étienne Tshisekedi, 49 percent to 32 percent, according to the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI). Elections to the 500-seat National Assembly, held concurrently, were also criticized as deeply flawed. Kabila's People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD) won 62 seats, down from the 111 seats it held prior to November 2011, while Tshisekedi's Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) took 41. The AMP took a total of 260 seats. Tshisekedi supporters protested the results, and numerous civil society groups called for new elections.

The president nominates a prime minister from the leading party or coalition in the National Assembly, whose members are popularly elected to serve five-year terms. Provincial assemblies elect the 108-seat Senate, as well as provincial governors, for five-year terms. A long-neglected decentralization program was implemented in 2015, splitting the DRC's 11 provinces into 26, and the CENI scheduled local and provincial elections to take place in late 2015 through early 2016. In October 2015, the commission postponed the elections indefinitely, and Kabila appointed special commissioners to lead the new provinces.

The country's electoral framework does not ensure transparent conduct of elections, and opposition parties and civil society groups frequently criticize the CENI for lacking independence. Kabila's second term as president is set to end in 2016, and presidential and national legislative elections are scheduled for later in the year. However, in January 2015, the AMP's advancement of a bill mandating a national census to take place before the presidential election was widely viewed as an effort to delay the vote and extend Kabila's tenure. Although the provision connecting the election to the completion of the census was scrapped following mass protests, concerns remained that Kabila would not respect constitutional term limits. The decentralization reform, scheduled for implementation by 2010 but largely neglected until 2015, was also criticized as a stalling tactic; opponents also claimed it risked increasing unrest and political fragmentation ahead of elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 4 / 16

People have the right to organize political parties. In March 2015, the government estimated that 477 political parties were registered in the DRC. Political parties are often divided along ethnic, communal, or regional lines, and usually lack national reach. The AMP requires members to have national representation, ensuring that the PPRD remains in the majority within the coalition. Other key parties in the country include the UDPS, the

Union for the Congolese Nation (UNC), and the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC). Nearly 100 different parties and many independents are represented in the parliament.

Despite the existence of numerous parties, political pluralism remains limited in practice, and opposition members face intimidation and restrictions on their movement and mobilization. Members of the AMP who signed an open letter demanding that Kabila respect constitutional term limits and the election schedule were expelled from the coalition in September 2015; two signatories who held public office were dismissed from their posts. Also in September, Moïse Katumbi, once a close Kabila ally, resigned from the PPRD in protest of what he described as the government's efforts to delay elections and repress opponents. He was widely expected to run for president in 2016.

Discrimination and lack of access to institutions in rural areas hinder political participation overall; certain segments of the population are particularly marginalized.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

Recruitment for government posts is often determined by nepotism. Accountability mechanisms are weak, and impunity remains a problem. Clandestine trade in minerals and other natural resources by rebels and elements of the FARDC helps finance violence and depletes government revenues. Massive corruption in the government, security forces, and mineral extraction industries continues to paralyze the functioning of the government and development efforts intended to raise living standards.

The government has made some efforts to reduce opportunities for graft within the expansive state apparatus and national army. A system to pay civil servants and members of the military electronically was installed in 2012 with the aim of curbing corruption and ensuring regular, accurate payments. A new system of customs declaration implemented at the Kasumbalesa post on the Zambian border in 2014 streamlined the submission and processing of declarations. However, the system initially faced significant technological challenges, and enforcement remained dependent on the discretion of local officials. In March 2015, former justice minister Luzolo Bambi Lessa was made a special advisor to the president on corruption. The president's office filed a complaint against several public officials for corruption-related offenses in June, but the consequences of the complaint were not immediately clear at year's end.

Despite incremental improvements in revenue reporting, there is little transparency in the state's financial affairs. The law does not provide for public access to government information, and citizens often lack the practical ability to obtain information about state operations. The DRC was ranked 147 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 16 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 8 / 16

Although constitutionally guaranteed, freedoms of speech and the press are limited. Radio is the dominant medium in the country, and newspapers are found mainly in large cities. The content of private television and radio stations is occasionally restricted, but lively political debate occurs in urban areas. Social media usage is expanding among urban youth. The government does not usually restrict internet access or monitor online communications, but internet access and text messaging were temporarily suspended during the January 2015 demonstrations.

While the media often criticize Kabila and his government, political harassment of outlets and reporters is common. Pro-opposition and government-friendly outlets alike reported being pressured to carry progovernment content during the year. Intelligence officials cut off broadcasts by Canal Kin Télévision (CKTV) and Radiotélévision Catholique Elikya (RTCE) after they aired a communiqué from opposition groups calling for protests amid the electoral dispute in January.

Criminal defamation legislation as well as threats, detentions, arbitrary arrests, and attacks against journalists further restrict freedoms of speech and the press. In March, Congolese and foreign journalists were among those detained while attending a press conference in Kinshasa organized by Filimbi, a Congolese pro-democracy youth movement. In July, members of the National Intelligence Agency (ANR) arrested news distributor Dido Zamangwana while he was selling opposition newspapers in Kinshasa; he remained in detention at year's end. Also in July, a radio station manager, Simon Mulowa, was arrested after his station reported on problems related to decentralization. In September, the government banned the distribution of a film about a Congolese doctor treating victims of rape in the eastern DRC, claiming that it misrepresented the army; following pressure from civil society and international actors, authorities lifted the ban in October.

Journalists face difficulties in covering the ongoing conflict in the eastern DRC. State security forces arrested journalist Brinal Nundu in South Kivu in August while he was reporting on Burundian refugees in the region. According to an August 2015 Human Rights Watch report, local authorities in Tanganyika province, which had been part of Katanga province before decentralization, warned human rights and aid workers from speaking about a string of attacks by ethnic Luba fighters on an ethnic Batwa community earlier in the year.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and authorities generally respect it in practice. Although religious groups must register with the government in order to be recognized, unregistered groups operate unhindered. There are no formal restrictions on academic freedom; primary and secondary school curriculums are regulated but not strongly politicized. While private discussion of politically sensitive topics is open among close associates, it is limited by fear of potential reprisal.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedoms of assembly and association, though these are limited in practice. Groups holding public events must register with local authorities in advance, and security forces occasionally act against unregistered gatherings. There are approximately 5,000 registered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the DRC, though many have narrow scopes devoted to ethnic, partisan, and local concerns. NGOs are generally able to operate, though domestic human rights advocates are subject to harassment, arbitrary arrest, and detention. Professional organizations are permitted to organize and operate freely.

State authorities violated the right to association and peaceful assembly in 2015. In January, numerous civil society organizations participated in demonstrations in Kinshasa and other cities against the proposed changes to electoral law. According to Human Rights Watch, security forces killed 43 demonstrators, wounded dozens, and forcibly disappeared at least five. In a separate incident in March, at the press conference organized by Filimbi in Kinshasa, police arrested a group of attendees and bystanders, including several Congolese and foreign activists. While most of the detainees were released, two activists remained in pretrial detention at year's end, facing charges including conspiracy against the head of state, attempting to overthrow the government, and belonging to an organization that promotes violence. In March and April, police arrested and beat several activists from the

Struggle for Change (Lutte pour le Changement, or LUCHA) group who gathered in Goma to peacefully protest the Kinshasa arrests. A Goma court convicted four of them in September on the charge of inciting public disobedience, giving them six-month suspended prison sentences as well as 12 months of probation. In December, after attending a conference of African opposition movements held in Senegal, Filimbi and LUCHA reported that they had acquired an ANR memorandum in which they and other participants were blacklisted as part of a “destabilizing coalition.”

Congolese who fulfill a residency requirement of 20 years can form and join trade unions, though government employees and members of state security forces are not permitted to unionize. It is against the law for employers to retaliate against strikers. Unions organize strikes regularly. Some labor leaders and activists face harassment.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

President Kabila appoints members of the judiciary, which remains corrupt and subject to political manipulation. Courts are concentrated in urban areas, and the majority of the country relies on customary courts. Military courts are used often, even in civilian cases, and are subject to interference from high-ranking military personnel. The judiciary often exhibits bias against opposition and civil society members, while government and government-allied forces often enjoy impunity for even the most heinous crimes. Prison conditions are life-threatening, and long periods of pretrial detention are common.

An October 2015 Human Rights Watch report on the trial of FARDC officers accused of involvement in a 2012 mass rape concluded that the proceedings had failed both the victims and the defendants. Of the 39 soldiers tried in 2014, two were convicted and sentenced to life in prison, while over 20 soldiers, most of them low-ranking, were found guilty of minor crimes committed during the attack. Among those acquitted were 13 senior officers. The report charged that inadequate legal expertise, problematic evidence-gathering, and a culture of impunity for high-ranking officers pointed to deficiencies in the overall quality of the judiciary.

Civilian authorities do not maintain effective control of security forces. The FARDC are largely undisciplined, and soldiers and police regularly commit serious human rights abuses, including rape and torture. Low pay and inadequate provisions commonly lead soldiers to seize goods from civilians.

Government and government-allied forces often enjoy impunity for even the most heinous crimes. In March 2015, reports emerged that army personnel had participated in a mass nighttime burial in a village outside of Kinshasa. The government announced in April that 421 bodies had been lawfully buried at the site, among them unidentified individuals, stillborn babies, and people whose families could not pay for burial. However, human rights groups, local medical professionals, and others claimed that the circumstances of the burial were unusual, expressing suspicions that it may contain bodies of people killed or forcibly disappeared by security forces. In June, the relatives of missing activists and protesters filed a request for the grave to be exhumed; the authorities had not agreed to do so at year’s end.

Several former rebel leaders were convicted of human rights violations in foreign and international courts in 2015. In September, a German court found two former leaders of the Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda guilty of crimes committed in the DRC. Ignace Murwanashyaka was convicted of war crimes and leading a terrorist organization, and was sentenced to 13 years in prison. Straton Musoni was convicted of leading a terrorist organization and sentenced to eight years in prison. Separately, in February, the Appeals Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) upheld the 2012 acquittal of Mathieu Ngudjolo,

former senior commander of the Front for National Integration, of the charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. He was deported from the Netherlands to the DRC in May after Dutch authorities dismissed his requests for asylum.

Peace and the rule of law remain obstructed by active rebel groups, primarily concentrated in the country's eastern and southern provinces. The impact of years of fighting on civilians has been catastrophic, with over five million conflict-related deaths since 1998. The population of those regions is subject to displacement and violence due to continued rebel activity and indiscipline among the armed forces. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that as of March 31, 2015, there were more than 2.8 million internally displaced people in the provinces known as North Kivu, South Kivu, Orientale, Katanga, and Maniema at the time. Continuing fragmentation and changing coalitions among armed groups as well as between armed groups and the FARDC obstruct the de-escalation of conflict.

A wave of alarmingly brutal massacres that began in the Beni territory of North Kivu in October 2014 continued in 2015. The United Nations estimated that close to 600 people had been killed as of November 2015. The DRC government attributed the attacks to the Uganda-based Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel group, perceiving them as a response to a joint operation against the group by the FARDC and the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Other observers pointed to a more complex presence of local and international forces and alliances in Beni, and uncertainties remained about the identities and motives of the perpetrators. According to the United Nations, at least 300 people, including 33 FARDC soldiers, were arrested in connection to the violence as of May. ADF leader Jamil Mukulu, accused of orchestrating deadly violence in both Uganda and the DRC, was detained by Tanzanian authorities in April and extradited to Uganda in July.

Ethnic discrimination, including against Kinyarwanda-speaking minority populations, remains a significant problem in some areas of the country. The constitution prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, but they often find it difficult to find employment, attend school, or access government services. Although discrimination based on HIV status is also prohibited, people with HIV face stigma as well as difficulty accessing health care and education. No law specifically prohibits same-sex sexual relations, but legislators have made efforts to criminalize same-sex sexual activity, and individuals can still be prosecuted for such activity under public decency laws.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Freedom of movement is protected by law. Despite obstacles posed by security forces seeking bribes or travel permits, both domestic and international travel continue.

Individuals have the right to own property and establish private businesses, and legal avenues for commercial activity exist. The country's economy, reliant on the extraction of natural resources, has grown significantly in recent years, though the vast majority of Congolese are not employed in the formal economy. The World Bank estimated an average growth of 8 percent in 2015. Minerals, timber, and gold are components of a broader economy of extraction in which the national army, rebel groups, and political interests are involved. A complicated system of taxation and regulation has made bribery a regular aspect of business dealings, and embezzlement is pervasive.

DRC was recognized as a compliant member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2014 following a one-year suspension. Some progress has been made in the internal management of natural resources, including in implementing tracking and validation mechanisms for "conflict-free" minerals. However, tracking systems remain inefficient. An April 2015 report released by Global Witness and Amnesty International found

that 79 percent of companies that filed reports in 2014 in accordance with a U.S. disclosure law on conflict minerals in and around the DRC had failed to comply with minimum reporting requirements.

In conflict zones, various armed groups and FARDC soldiers have seized private property and destroyed homes. The majority of land in the DRC is held through customary tenure, and this lack of legal title to the land leads to regular confiscations of property.

Women face discrimination in nearly every aspect of their lives, especially in rural areas. Although Article 14 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination against women in any domain, the Family Code prescribes more restrictive roles, requiring that women obey their husbands and obtain their permission to seek employment and engage in legal transactions. Nevertheless, it has been increasingly common in recent years for young women to seek professional work outside the home or engage in commercial activities, particularly in towns and urban centers. Women are greatly underrepresented in government, making up only 9 percent of the National Assembly and 6 percent of the Senate.

Violence against women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence, has soared since fighting began in 1994; sex crimes often affect men and boys as well. Rebels and FARDC soldiers have been implicated in kidnappings, killings, and rape. Convictions for offenses such as mass rape remain rare. Abortion is prohibited, and women's access to contraception is extremely low; many health care providers require that women obtain permission from their husbands to access family planning services.

The DRC is both a source and destination country for the trafficking of men, women, and children for the purposes of labor and sexual exploitation. Although the law prohibits all forced or compulsory labor, the practice remains common and includes forced child labor in mining, street vending, and agriculture. Various rebel groups have reportedly forced civilians to work for them, at times imposing tolls on vehicles passing through territory held by the groups. The recruitment and use of child soldiers by rebel groups is also widespread.

Costa Rica

Political Rights Rating: 1

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 4,832,000

Capital: San José

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

President Luis Guillermo Solís faced several challenges in 2015, which contributed to declining approval ratings amid legislative gridlock. Crime increased, with homicides reaching a new record high, and the economy continued to be hampered by a large national debt and increases in the cost of living. The country's fiscal deficit was expected to approach 7 percent of gross domestic product in 2016.

The Solís administration drafted a series of reforms intended to address the deficit and inflation, but an existing plan to control public-sector wages led to strikes and protests, and lawmakers from other parties opposed the president's proposed tax reforms.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40**A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12**

The president of Costa Rica and members of the 57-seat, unicameral Legislative Assembly are elected for four-year terms and can seek a nonconsecutive second term. Presidential candidates must win 40 percent of the vote to avoid a runoff. A special chamber of the Supreme Court appoints the independent national election commission. Reforms to the electoral law ahead of the 2010 elections included revised regulations on political party and campaign financing. In the 2014 elections, Costa Ricans residing abroad were allowed to vote for the first time, and a new quota requiring that 50 percent of the candidates on party lists be women went into effect.

In legislative elections held in February 2014, the National Liberation Party (PLN) won 18 seats, followed by the Citizens' Action Party (PAC) with 13, the Broad Front (FA) with 9, and the Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC) with 8; five smaller parties won the remaining 9 seats. International observers highlighted Costa Rica's commitment to democracy in the elections.

In May 2014, the PAC's Luis Guillermo Solís was elected president following a second round of voting. Solís, who led the first round with about 31 percent of the vote in a field of 13 candidates, faced the PLN's Johnny Araya in the runoff. Araya ceased campaign activities amid low poll numbers during the runoff campaign, and Solís proceeded to win 78 percent of the vote. The PLN subsequently banned Araya from the party for four years for withdrawing from the race, a decision that was upheld by the country's electoral tribunal in March 2015.

The PAC lost control of the legislature in April 2015 following elections for the chamber's directorate, which gave the opposition five of six seats. As a result, the Solís administration faced difficulty passing legislation.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Beginning in 1949, power in Costa Rica long alternated between the PLN and the PUSC. However, dissatisfaction with party politics and political scandals resulted in defections from the PLN in the early 2000s. The newly formed PAC became a rising force in Costa Rican politics, while the PUSC has withered under the weight of various scandals. By the 2014 elections, it appeared that Costa Rica's traditional two-party system had collapsed, as nine parties won representation in the legislature.

In June 2015, the assembly passed a constitutional amendment declaring Costa Rica to be "multiethnic and plurinational." The amendment was signed by the president in August. However, indigenous rights have not traditionally been a government priority.

Citizens' political choices are generally free from domination by unelected elites, foreign powers, and other such forces, though the Roman Catholic Church can be influential on some issues.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Costa Rica's freely elected government and lawmakers set and implement state policy without interference. However, nearly every president since 1990 has been accused of corruption after leaving office, with the exception of Óscar Arias, who served from 2006 to

2010. The administration of President Laura Chinchilla (2010–14) was plagued by corruption scandals, though Chinchilla herself faced no charges. Some senior figures in President Solís’s party were implicated in a scandal over excessive payments in 2014. In July 2015, the French telecommunications company Alcatel-Lucent paid \$10 million to the Costa Rican Electricity Institute as part of its settlement of a civil case on corruption dating to the administration of President Miguel Ángel Rodríguez (1998–2002). Criminal convictions against Rodríguez and several other defendants were overturned for a second time on appeal in December 2015.

Though not free of corruption, the government is accountable to the electorate, and citizens generally have access to government information. Costa Rica was ranked 40 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

The media are generally free from state interference. Attacks against journalists are rare, and imprisonment was removed as a punishment for defamation in 2010. In 2014, the Supreme Court chastised authorities for monitoring a *Diario Extra* journalist’s telephone calls in an attempt to identify a suspected government whistle-blower. There are six privately owned daily newspapers. Both public and commercial broadcast outlets are available, including at least four private television stations and more than 100 private radio stations. Internet access is unrestricted. In April 2015, Solís fired the minister and vice minister of science, technology, and telecommunications after the ministry introduced a draft media bill that would have allowed regulators to close broadcast outlets if they repeatedly aired “lies” or violated “moral standards.” Critics had denounced the proposal as a threat to media freedom.

The government upholds freedom of religion in practice. Academic freedom is respected, and private discussion is generally free.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association, and the government upholds them in practice. Numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are active. Although labor unions organize and mount frequent protests with minimal governmental interference, employers often ignore minimum wage and social security laws, and the resulting fines are insignificant. In 2015, discussion of a bill that would curb public-sector wages and bonuses resulted in strikes by public employees, including teachers and health workers. Members of electrical workers’ unions protested a separate bill that would increase privatization of the country’s energy sector.

F. Rule of Law: 13 / 16

The judicial branch is independent, with Supreme Court judges elected by a supermajority of the legislature. However, there are often substantial delays in the judicial process, resulting in lengthy pretrial detention. There have been complaints of police brutality, and organized criminal networks are suspected of having infiltrated law enforcement institutions. Despite modest efforts by the government to improve prison conditions, overcrowding and violence remain serious problems.

The country’s Pacific coast serves as a major drug transshipment route. Analysts have noted that several Mexican drug cartels maintain a presence in Costa Rica. The Ministry of

Public Security has reported that most homicides in Costa Rica are related to organized crime and drug trafficking. The number of homicides increased 10 percent in 2015 to a record rate of 11.4 per 100,000 residents, though this remained far below the homicide rates in some other Central American countries.

Indigenous peoples, who make up 3 percent of the population, still face discrimination, particularly with regard to land rights and access to basic services. The government continued to resist pressure to pass the Indigenous Autonomy Bill, despite orders from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to protect groups in the Salitre Indigenous Reserve. A July 2015 report by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination underscored the problem of land seizures and the displacement of indigenous people. Costa Ricans of African descent have also faced economic discrimination.

A 2014 government survey revealed persistent discriminatory attitudes and practices among law enforcement officials toward LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. However, a 2014 law extended medical benefits to same-sex couples. In June 2015, the Supreme Court denied an appeal by a transgender woman seeking compensation from the country's health system for gender reassignment surgery conducted outside the country on the grounds that lack of access to the procedure in Costa Rica violated her rights.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Costa Ricans enjoy freedom of movement, as well as relative freedom in choice of residence and employment. Property rights are generally protected, though the dispossession of indigenous land undermines such rights. Individuals are free to establish businesses, and the business and investment climate is generally open.

Women face discrimination in the economic realm, and despite the existence of domestic violence legislation, violence against women and children remains a problem. Costa Rica is one of a number of countries that has criminalized "femicide," but the penalties apply only when the murder is committed by an intimate partner. The number of reported femicides has declined in recent years.

In September 2015, a 15-year ban on in vitro fertilization was lifted by presidential decree, bringing the country into compliance with a 2012 ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Costa Rica had been the only country in the world with a complete ban on the procedure. Numerous challenges to the decree were rejected by the Supreme Court.

A court decision in June 2015 granted common-law marital status to a same-sex couple for the first time, though the legislature has not fully legalized same-sex marriage.

Household workers are subject to exploitation and lack legal protections. Sex trafficking, forced labor, and child sex tourism are serious problems. A law that took effect in 2013 established penalties for human trafficking and organ trafficking as well as a fund for victims and prevention efforts. However, the U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report* found that government antitrafficking efforts were inadequate, noting that there were no trafficking convictions during the reporting period and that none of the more than \$3 million dedicated to fund antitrafficking efforts had been disbursed.

Côte d'Ivoire

Political Rights Rating: 4↑

Population: 23,281,300

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Yamoussoukro (official), Abidjan (de facto)

Freedom Rating: 4.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ratings Change: Côte d'Ivoire's political rights rating improved from 5 to 4 due to the circumstances surrounding the October presidential election, which was arguably the freest, fairest, and most peaceful in the country's history, and which demonstrated the political sphere's increasing autonomy from the military and international actors.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,6,NF	7,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	7,6,NF	6,6,NF	5,5,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, hopes mounted that Côte d'Ivoire was at long last turning the page from some 15 years of extreme political turbulence that had peaked in a 2010–11 postelection crisis that brought the country to the brink of disaster. In October, President Alassane Ouattara—leader of the Rally of the Republicans (RDR) party—won a second and final term in a landslide victory. Although the lead-up to the vote was marred by sporadic arrests of opposition supporters and dispersal of their rallies, the election was ultimately largely peaceful and found to be credible by domestic and international observers. Former president Laurent Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) party remains deeply divided, and its hardliners boycotted the election.

Longstanding concerns about victor's justice and reconciliation persist. The Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CDVR), established in 2011, delivered its final report to Ouattara in December 2014, but the report had not yet been made public as of the end of 2015. The Ivorian government refused to transfer Simone Gbagbo, Laurent Gbagbo's wife, to the International Criminal Court (ICC), where she faces four counts of crimes against humanity. She was instead prosecuted in Côte d'Ivoire for crimes against the state, receiving a 20-year prison sentence in March 2015. Meanwhile, the ICC moved forward with a joint case against Laurent Gbagbo and Charles Blé Goudé, a former youth minister and leader of a pro-Gbagbo militia; that trial is scheduled to begin in early 2016.

Pro-Ouattara forces have also been accused of committing war crimes during the 2010–11 crisis, and it emerged in the summer of 2015 that about 20 pro-Ouattara military officers had recently been charged in Côte d'Ivoire in connection with the violence. Previously, little had been done, either internationally or domestically, to bring pro-Ouattara forces to justice.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 20 / 40 (+3)

A. Electoral Process: 7 / 12 (+1)

The constitution provides for the popular election of a president and a unicameral National Assembly composed of 255 members for five-year terms. Ouattara won the 2015 presidential election in the first round with nearly 84 percent of the vote, according to the

Independent Electoral Commission (CEI). Pascal Affi N'Guessan of the FPI came in second, with 9.3 percent. Despite tensions and some government crackdowns on opposition rallies, the election was among the freest, fairest, and most peaceful in Côte d'Ivoire's history, and was found by international and domestic observers to be credible. According to the CEI, 54.6 percent of registered voters turned out.

The election was the first presidential poll since the 2010 vote, which had occurred after years of delays and triggered an internal conflict that left 3,000 dead and another one million displaced when Gbagbo, the incumbent, refused to concede the internationally recognized victory of Ouattara. Gbagbo was ultimately arrested with the assistance of French and UN troops, and Ouattara assumed office in April 2011.

Given large economic gains since taking office and a divided opposition, Ouattara was widely favored to win a second term despite concern over the possibility of electoral violence. As the election approached, tensions were fueled by disputes over the objectivity of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) and access to state media. Exacerbating matters, the government banned and dispersed several opposition protest rallies, arresting dozens of individuals, including opposition party officials. According to an October open letter signed by a coalition of human rights groups, at least three opposition protesters were detained in secret facilities for weeks before being sentenced to six months in prison on charges related to disturbing the public order. Three of the 10 presidential candidates withdrew, alleging rigging, and FPI hardliners called upon supporters to boycott the election. According to the CEI, 54.6 percent of registered voters turned out.

The first largely peaceful and fair parliamentary elections in more than a decade were held in December 2011. Ouattara's RDR party won 127 seats in the National Assembly, while the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire–African Democratic Rally (PDCI-RDA) placed second with 77 seats. The FPI boycotted the vote, leveling claims of bias against the electoral commission, protesting the jailing of its senior leadership, and accusing state security forces of intimidation. The RDR also won a majority of contests in the April 2013 local and regional elections, followed by the PDCI-RDA. Several opposition parties again boycotted those elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 8 / 16 (+ 1)

The RDR and the PDCI-RDA form the country's dominant coalition, holding a virtual lock on national political power. The FPI remains weak and disorganized, marked by deep divisions and infighting since Gbagbo's arrest, with supporters split between hardliners who insist on Gbagbo's release, and moderates who support N'Guessan. Although Ouattara visited a Gbagbo stronghold in September and called for forgiveness, national reconciliation has continued to be a challenge, with divisions persisting over long-detained Gbagbo supporters and accusations of "victor's justice" by Ouattara's government. However, for at least the moderate wing of the FPI, there are signs of renewed willingness to participate more fully in the political process, after the party boycotted the 2011 parliamentary and 2013 local elections.

The armed forces are increasingly under civilian control, making the military, so-called volunteers, and miscellaneous militia members less of a presence during the 2015 balloting than during previous elections.

A new nationality law allowing both male and female foreigners who marry Ivorian nationals to acquire citizenship went into effect in April 2014. Citizenship has been a perennial source of conflict since Ivorian nationalists adopted former president Henri Bédié's concept of "Ivoirité" to exclude perceived foreigners (including Ouattara) from the political process.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12 (+1)

With security forces increasingly under civilian control and the influence of international actors in domestic politics reduced compared to previous years, Côte d'Ivoire's acute crisis phase continues to recede. More than any time since 1999, the president and national assembly make their own policy.

Corruption remains endemic, with Côte d'Ivoire ranked 107 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Perpetrators seldom face prosecution or public exposure despite the government's official "zero tolerance" policy. According to a July Human Rights Watch report, despite the government making some progress in dismantling illegal checkpoints and thereby reducing extortion in and around Abidjan and on major roads, an anti-racket unit created in 2011 has made little impact outside those regions, and prosecutions for checkpoint extortion are rare. Some small steps have been taken to curb corruption in other arenas of the public sector. For example, in September the Ministry for Public Service announced that it had identified 2,286 public-sector workers who had not passed the requisite entrance exam, many of whom had likely bribed their way into their positions. Also in September, the High Authority on Good Governance (HABG), a body launched in 2014, invited high-level functionaries to disclose their assets. There has been some criticism that the HABG—which is ostensibly charged with fighting corruption—is too underfunded to prove effective, and its independence remains to be seen.

In 2013, the National Assembly passed an access to information law. In March 2014, the government announced that it would launch a Commission on Access to Information to monitor the application of the law.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 30 / 40 (+2)**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16 (+1)**

Freedoms of speech and of the press are protected by the constitution and by the country's laws, though there are prohibitions on speech that incites violence, hatred, or rebellion. These prohibitions are enforced by the media regulatory body, the Conseil National de la Presse (CNP), which frequently fines or reprimands journalists and suspends outlets for allegedly spreading incendiary or false information. In October 2015, the CNP issued three-day suspensions to three pro-Gbagbo newspapers for promoting a boycott of the presidential election. Journalists have been jailed for insulting Ouattara on two separate occasions since he was elected. In the most recent incident, Joseph Gnanhoua Titi, the editor of *Aujourd'hui*, a pro-Gbagbo daily, was arrested in July 2015 after his newspaper published an article linking Ouattara to the embezzlement of aid funds, among other misdeeds. Titi was held for six days before the charges against him were dismissed. Nonetheless, conditions for the press have improved since the end of the 2010–11 conflict, and incidents of violence and intimidation against journalists are rare.

There were no credible reports that the government restricted access to the internet or illegally monitored online communications. About 21 percent of the population had access to the medium in 2015.

Legal guarantees of religious freedom are typically upheld, though political and religious identities tend to overlap with ethnicity and geography. Religious and traditional organizations have been instrumental in leading the postconflict reconciliation process at the local level. A north-south, Christian-Muslim schism has been a salient feature of Ivorian life since the civil war started in 2002, and was brought to a head in the crisis of 2010–11. However, the schism has receded since then, and the current government is a center-north

coalition that includes Muslims and Christians. Ouattara has done much to address citizenship and identity problems that had plagued Muslims with family origins in Burkina Faso.

Academic freedom suffered severely during the 2010–11 conflict, as public universities throughout the country were closed, occupied by armed forces, and used as military bases and training grounds. They reopened to students in 2012, but have been slow to recover from the effects of the closure, facing infrastructure and staff shortages.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12

The constitution protects the right to free assembly, but this right is often denied in practice and is subject to politicization, as reflected in the banning and aggressive dispersal of certain opposition protests in the lead-up to the 2015 presidential election. Peaceful protests often escalate into violence, as was the case with a teachers' strike in April.

Freedom of association is constitutionally protected. Although this right has often been denied in practice, especially around political rallies, both domestic and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate freely. The right to organize and join labor unions is constitutionally guaranteed, and workers have the right to bargain collectively. In 2015, employees of several key sectors—including prison guards, teachers, and members of the military—went on strike.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The judiciary is not independent, and judges are highly susceptible to external interference and bribes. The country's courts became fully functional early in 2014, but, according to an April 2015 report on capacity-building and technical cooperation with Côte d'Ivoire commissioned by the UN Human Rights Council, the effectiveness of the justice system is hampered by a lack of judges. Prisons are severely overcrowded, and prolonged pre-trial detention is a serious problem for both adults and minors, with some detainees spending years in prison without trial. Incarcerated adults and minors are not always separated. In March, the National Assembly voted to revise the criminal code to abolish the death penalty, bringing it in line with the country's 2000 constitution, which prohibited the death penalty.

The security situation was stable but subject to volatility in 2015. Reports of illegal detentions, extortion, sexual violence, and forced disappearance at the hands of the Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (RFCI) and other security forces continued, though they decreased since the height of the political crisis. Opposition groups also accused security forces of torture and extrajudicial killings, but those allegations were not independently verified. The police and gendarmerie remain under-equipped and are not considered fully operational in all cities. In Abidjan, youths that fought in the 2010–11 conflict have regrouped into machete-wielding gangs known as "enfant microbes," which continue to be implicated in armed robberies and assaults in the city. This has led some citizens to form vigilante "self-defense" groups. In January, panic spread after a nationwide wave of child kidnappings and what appeared to be ritual killings.

In March, an ICC trial chamber joined the cases concerning Laurent Gbagbo and Charles Blé Goudé, both of whom stand accused of crimes against humanity relating to the 2010 post-electoral crisis. Although the ICC has said it is investigating pro-Ouattara actors, it has filed charges only against pro-Gbagbo defendants so far.

A collective trial against Simone Gbagbo and around 80 others closely associated with Laurent Gbagbo began in December 2014. In March 2015, Simone Gbagbo was sentenced to 20 years in prison by an Abidjan court. The trial was widely criticized due to the perceived weakness of the evidence, together with the fact that she was sentenced not for

human rights violations, but for undermining state security. Simone Gbagbo has been charged with crimes against humanity by the ICC. In December 2014, the ICC ruled that Côte d'Ivoire was required to transfer her, but the Ivorian government has thus far refused to comply.

The work of the Special Investigative and Examination Cell, created in 2011 to investigate crimes committed during and after the postelection crisis, has suffered from inconsistent support. After years of delay and understaffing, the group's work appeared to be gathering steam in early 2015. In June, however, human rights groups raised alarm at rumors of the imminent closure of two of the cell's major investigations. Prosecutors have complained that the government has prevented them from initiating investigations against pro-Ouattara forces.

It emerged in the summer of 2015 that the Ivorian government had charged about 20 former pro-Ouattara rebels in connection to the 2010–11 violence, a step that drew praise from human rights organizations.

In December 2014, the CDVR submitted its report to Ouattara, but the report has not yet been made public. The CDVR has been widely criticized for failing to achieve its broader goals of reconciliation. Although it collected over 72,000 testimonies, media coverage of the testimonials was spotty, and they were not broadcast nationally. This has further minimized the commission's impact. In March 2015, the government created the National Commission for Reconciliation and Compensation for Victims (CONARIV), conceived as the successor to the CDVR, and tasked it with overseeing a reparations program.

Members of the LGBT community face societal prejudice as well as violence and harassment by state security forces. The beginning of 2014 saw a wave of homophobic attacks that human rights groups described as unprecedented. In July 2015, the vice president of the National Human Rights Commission reported that the commission was investigating the 2014 incidents and that a police chief had been fired for ignoring the attacks.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16 (+ 1)

Freedom of movement has improved in Abidjan and along some major roads. However, according to the July Human Rights Watch report, illegal roadblocks and acts of extortion by state security forces remain a serious problem elsewhere, and the government's efforts to combat these practices have been undermined by inconsistent financial support and a failure to investigate and prosecute perpetrators. In the west and north of the country, highway robbery is a persistent problem.

Property rights are weak and poorly regulated, especially in the west of the country, and remain an ongoing source of conflict between migrants and "natives" who claim customary rights to land use and inheritance. Citizens have the right to own and establish private businesses, and in general economic opportunities for migrants have continued to improve compared to previous years, but obstacles abound. Côte d'Ivoire was ranked 142 out of 189 countries in the World Bank's 2016 *Doing Business* survey. According to the survey, while registering property has become easier in Côte d'Ivoire, obtaining construction permits and navigating the tax code remain serious challenges.

Despite constitutional protections, women suffer significant legal and economic discrimination, and sexual and gender-based violence are widespread. Rape was common during the 2011 crisis, and remains a serious issue. Impunity for perpetrators remains a problem, and when it is prosecuted, rape is routinely reclassified as indecent assault. In March 2015, the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights, and Public Liberties instructed law enforcement officials that costly medical certificates are no longer required to open a rape

investigation. In July, four women were integrated into the gendarmerie, the last of Côte d'Ivoire's security forces to exclude women.

Child labor and trafficking, particularly in the cocoa industry, is a serious problem that appears to be growing in Côte d'Ivoire, according to a July 2015 report by Tulane University. In June, Ivoirian police raided plantations in the country's western cocoa belt, freeing 48 children being held in slavery and making 22 arrests on child trafficking or exploitation charges.

Croatia

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 4,215,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Zagreb

Freedom Rating: 1.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F

INTRODUCTION

Croatia held a presidential runoff and parliamentary elections in January and November 2015, respectively. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović won the runoff by an extremely slim margin to become the first female president of post-independence Croatia. Following the parliamentary vote, the conservative Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), which won the most seats, agreed to form a ruling coalition with the centrist Bridge of Independent Lists (Most).

The Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court overturned major corruption-related convictions against former prime minister Ivo Sanader on procedural grounds during the year, ordering retrials in each case. Sanader was released in November to await the new trials.

Along with its neighbors in the Balkans and other European countries, Croatia faced an unprecedented wave of migration, particularly of asylum seekers from the Middle East. Aside from temporarily closing its border with Serbia in September, Croatia generally complied with international standards and regulations for the treatment of refugees.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40 (+1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The president, who serves as head of state, is elected by popular vote for a maximum of two five-year terms. Members of the 151-member unicameral Croatian Parliament (Hrvatski Sabor) are elected to four-year terms. The prime minister is appointed by the president and requires parliamentary approval.

Croatia held the runoff to its December 2014 presidential election in January 2015. Outgoing president Ivo Josipović of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) lost to Grabar-Kitarović of the HDZ by a margin of less than one percent.

Parliamentary elections were held in November—the first since Croatia joined the European Union (EU) in 2013. No party won an outright majority. The opposition HDZ, led by

Tomislav Karamarko, won 33.5 percent of the vote, securing 59 seats. Prime Minister Zoran Milanović's SPD came in second place with 56 seats, and parliamentary newcomer Most won 19 seats. The remaining seats went to smaller political parties and representatives of ethnic minorities. Most and the HDZ reached an agreement to form a coalition government in late December, following extended negotiations.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Following Croatia's first multiparty elections in 1990, the center-right HDZ ruled until 1999. Power has since alternated between the HDZ and the center-left SDP, including at the presidential level. Several smaller parties have also won parliamentary representation. In 2015, the surprisingly strong electoral performance of Most, which began as a regional platform in 2012, brought a degree of diversity to the party system and was perceived as a sign of popular dissatisfaction with the country's two major parties.

Eight parliamentary seats in a separate national constituency are set aside for ethnic minorities, including three for ethnic Serbs. Another constituency with three seats is reserved for representatives of Croatians living abroad. The interests of the Roma minority are generally underrepresented.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12 (+ 1)

A new criminal code, in effect since 2013, enforces stiffer penalties for various forms of corruption. In recent years, international bodies including the European Commission have noted progress in the prosecution of corruption cases, but maintained that stronger efforts are needed to eliminate malfeasance in public procurement processes. Corruption convictions against former prime minister Sanader were in the public eye in 2015. In 2012, a lower court found Sanader guilty of accepting bribes from a Hungarian energy firm and an Austrian bank, sentencing him to 10 years in prison. In a separate case in 2014, a court sentenced Sanader to nine years in prison for siphoning millions of dollars from the state, ordering him to repay \$3 million. In July 2015, the Constitutional Court reversed the 2012 convictions, and in October, the Supreme Court annulled the 2014 ruling, with both courts citing procedural errors and ordering retrials. The retrial of the bribery case began in September. Efforts to combat corruption have also led to investigations into the mayors of several cities for corruption-related offenses. Among other recent cases, Zagreb mayor Milan Bandić and two associates were charged in February with misusing public funds.

Public officials are required to submit financial disclosure reports and generally comply; freedom of information is legally guaranteed.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 50 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedoms of expression and the press, and these rights are generally respected in practice. However, journalists face political pressure, intimidation, and occasional attack. In May, investigative journalist Željko Peratović was attacked and beaten outside of his home. Although the assailants mentioned his reporting on illegal gravel excavation during the attack, Peratović claimed that the attack could be connected to his coverage of a murder in which the secret police of the former Yugoslavia were implicated. Police apprehended three suspects in May and were investigating the case at year's end.

The legacy of the 1991–95 war in Croatia remains a sensitive issue. In 2013, veterans protested a government plan to introduce bilingual public signs in Latin and Cyrillic to

serve the Serb minority, which comprises more than 30 percent of the population in some municipalities. The government continued implementing the project in 2014, and in August of that year, the Constitutional Court ruled against a proposed referendum on restricting the use of Cyrillic. However, tensions increased in August 2015 when the local administration of Vukovar, a town in eastern Croatia with a large Serb minority, passed a decision to erase Cyrillic from public signs. Also in August, commemoration ceremonies for the 20th anniversary of Operation Storm, the Croatian military's 1995 offensive against territory held by Serb separatists, escalated tensions between Croatia and Serbia. Each country issued official statements condemning the other's events, and gatherings in both Croatia and Serbia included xenophobic remarks and incidents.

The Croatian constitution guarantees freedom of religion. A group needs at least 500 members and five years of registered operation to be recognized as a religious organization. Members of the Serbian Orthodox Church continue to report cases of intimidation and vandalism, though such incidents are less common than in the past.

Academic freedom is guaranteed by law, though subjects such as sexual health remain taboo in the socially conservative country. In 2013, the Croatian Catholic Church launched a public relations campaign against a government health education program in primary and secondary schools that included information on sexual health and same-sex relationships. The Constitutional Court suspended the program, arguing that the government failed to consult with parents on the curriculum.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The constitution provides for freedoms of association and assembly, and a variety of nongovernmental organizations operate in Croatia without interference or harassment. In May 2015, veterans' protests that began in October 2014 turned violent as participants clashed with police outside the building of the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs, where they had maintained an encampment since the beginning of the protest. The protesters demanded that the minister resign, and called for dialogue with the prime minister about veterans' benefits.

The constitution allows workers to form and join trade unions, though unlawful dismissals of union members have been reported. Teachers' unions organized a strike stretching from late September to early October to demand a salary increase.

F. Rule of Law: 11 / 16

Judicial independence is generally respected. Under a new judicial appointments system that came into effect in 2013 to increase professionalism, all judicial candidates must complete training in a special state school. Despite some progress on improving efficiency as well as a high number of judges per capita, the system's case backlog remains above the EU average. Prison conditions do not meet international standards due to overcrowding and inadequate medical care.

The proceedings of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for war crimes committed during the 1991–95 conflict were ongoing in 2015 and are expected to conclude in 2017. In 2014, Croatia testified that the devastation of the city of Vukovar by Serbian troops in 1991 should be classified as genocide. Separately, in January 2015, the Constitutional Court of Croatia overruled a Supreme Court judgment that had found Croatian politician Branimir Glavaš guilty of war crimes against Serbs and sentenced him to eight years in prison. The Constitutional Court ordered new proceedings as well as an inquiry into whether Glavaš's human rights had been violated in the judicial process.

In July, Croatian officials announced plans to withdraw from an arbitration panel devoted to a protracted border dispute with Slovenia. The announcement followed a leaked conversation published by the Croatian newspaper *Večerni list* suggesting that a Slovenian representative on the panel had breached impartiality rules by sharing information with a member of Slovenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Croatia experienced an unprecedented wave of migration in 2015, with more than 550,000 people—primarily asylum seekers—arriving in the country during the year, mostly with the intent of continuing to other EU countries. Croatian authorities generally complied with international standards for the rights and treatment of asylum seekers, although the flow of migration strained government resources and raised tensions with neighboring states.

Respect for minority rights has improved over the past decade. Croatia has both an antidiscrimination act and legislation against hate crime. In 2014, Croatia adopted the Free Legal Aid Act, which aims to improve access to the legal system for vulnerable populations and to reduce discrimination. Nevertheless, Roma face widespread discrimination, including poor access to primary and secondary education.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

The constitution prohibits gender discrimination, but women have a higher unemployment rate and earn less than men for comparable work. Women hold 15 percent of parliamentary seats, well below the 40 percent target under law. Domestic violence against women is believed to be widespread and underreported. In domestic violence cases, victims as well as perpetrators are often detained for questioning.

In 2014, following a 2013 referendum that banned same-sex marriages, the parliament passed a law allowing same-sex civil unions. The law affords same-sex couples equal rights in inheritance, social benefits, and taxation. Same-sex couples cannot adopt children.

According to the U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Croatia does not comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but has made increasing efforts to do so in recent years, including through awareness and prevention campaigns. Women and children in Croatia are particularly at risk for sex trafficking.

Cuba

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 11,139,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Havana

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

In July 2015, Cuba and the United States reopened embassies in one another's capitals, officially reestablishing diplomatic relations after more than 50 years of cut ties. By January

2015, the government had freed all of the 53 political prisoners whose release the United States had requested in prior negotiations. Two dissidents were allowed to run as candidates in April elections to Cuba's municipal councils, though neither was successful. Unfortunately, the warming of relations did not lead to a comparable change in the Cuban government's respect for civil liberties and fundamental political rights.

The first-ever public Wi-Fi hotspots were opened across the island in June and July, increasing internet access for those who could afford the \$2 usage fee. Religious freedoms also expanded around the time of Pope Francis's historic visit to the island in September. However, during the year the regime also continued its systematic use of short-term "preventive" detentions—along with harassment, beatings, and "acts of repudiation"—to intimidate the political opposition, isolate dissidents from the rest of the population, and maintain political control of all public spaces. While the total number of political prisoners fell sharply in 2015, the number of political arrests remained roughly the same as in 2014, surging to historic heights in the last three months of the year.

Economic reforms continued in 2015 but at a slower annual pace than any year since 2011.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 1 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

The Castro brothers have long dominated Cuba's one-party political system, in which the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) controls all government offices and most civil institutions. Every five years Cubans go to the polls to elect delegates to the island's National Assembly, which then designates the members of the Council of State. This body in turn appoints the Council of Ministers in consultation with its president, who serves as chief of state and head of government.

Raúl Castro replaced his brother Fidel as president in 2008. In 2013 National Assembly elections, voters were asked to either support or reject a single PCC-approved candidate for each of the 612 seats. All candidates were elected. The new National Assembly reelected Raúl Castro for a second five-year term. A 2012 law imposed a limit of two five-year terms on all senior officials, making this Castro's last in office.

In the municipal council elections held in April 2015, for the first time two dissidents—Hildebrando Chaviano, a former government attorney who became an independent journalist, and Yaniel López, an opposition activist without a job—appeared on the ballot, running with 27,000 candidates seeking to fill 12,589 local offices. Though the two were designated as "counterrevolutionaries" in the official biographies posted in local polling stations and were ultimately defeated, they had been nominated by ordinary citizens in what was widely viewed as an extremely rare display of public defiance against the one-party system. The 2015 elections were also noteworthy for voter turnout of around 88 percent, representing a nearly six-point drop from the 2012 municipal vote. Some observers viewed lower turnout as an indication of voter dissatisfaction with the PCC.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

All political organizing outside the PCC is illegal, and independent campaigning is not permitted. Political dissent, whether spoken or written, is a punishable offense, and dissidents are systematically harassed, detained, physically assaulted, and frequently sentenced to years of imprisonment for seemingly minor infractions. The regime has called on its neighborhood-watch groups, known as Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, to strengthen vigilance against "antisocial behavior," a euphemism for opposition activity.

This has led to the use of “acts of repudiation,” or supposedly spontaneous mob attacks, to intimidate and silence political dissidents. In recent years, dissident leaders have reported an increase in intimidation and harassment by state-sponsored groups as well as short-term detentions by state security forces. The Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation (CCDHRN) documented 8,616 politically motivated short-term detentions in 2015, down from a record high of 8,899 in 2014.

The Cuban government relies heavily on the military as well as on members of the Castro family for control of both business and politics. President Castro’s son, Alejandro—a former member of the army—plays a key role in the administration, serving as both chief of intelligence and as a liaison with China. The president’s son-in-law, Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Callejas, is chief executive of Gaesa, the sector of the military that controls all business operations. Castro’s daughter Mariela Castro Espín has served as *de facto* first lady since her mother’s death in 2007.

The 2013 National Assembly elections were notable for the large number of women, young people, and Cubans of African descent elected to office. For example, Afro-Cuban Esteban Lazo Hernández replaced long-time national politician Ricardo Alarcón as president of Cuba’s National Assembly, and Ana María Marí Machado and Miriam Brito Saroca were elected vice president and secretary, respectively.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Though the 1976 constitution provides for the election of a National Assembly, which is vested with legal power to rule the country, in practice the assembly has little legislative power, meeting only twice a year for less than a week each time. Day-to-day executive power is wielded by Cuba’s Council of State along with the Council of Ministers. The head of the Council of State acts as president and prime minister.

Corruption remains a serious problem in Cuba, with widespread illegality permeating everyday life. The state holds a monopoly on most business transactions and cannot be challenged or held accountable for wrongdoing. However, Raúl Castro’s regime has made the fight against corruption a central priority, imposing long sentences on both high-placed Cuban officials and foreign business figures. For example, after three years in police custody under charges of bribery, fraud, and tax evasion, the 74-year-old Canadian transportation executive Cy Tokmakjian was released and allowed to return to Canada in February 2015. In March, senior representatives of the state-run egg distribution company in Havana were sentenced to between 5 and 15 years in prison for conspiring to divert more than 8 million eggs to the black market. The steady pace of new cases of high-level corruption indicates that the problem is chronic. Cuba was ranked 56 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 14 / 60 (+1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16 (+1)

The Cuban news media are owned and controlled by the state. The independent press is considered illegal and its publications are classified as “enemy propaganda.” Government agents routinely infiltrate the ranks of independent journalists, often accusing them of being mercenaries. Independent journalists, particularly those associated with the island’s dozen small independent news agencies or human rights groups, are subject to harassment.

Some state media have begun to cover previously taboo topics, such as corruption in the health and education sectors. A number of publications, especially those associated with the Catholic Church, have engaged in debates over the country’s future. Additionally, in

recent years Cuba has witnessed the growth of citizen journalism, an increase in the number of independent bloggers, and the appearance of a small number of independent, island-based news outlets—including the sites *Havana Times*, *Periodismo de Barrio*, *On Cuba*, and *14ymedio*. Low-circulation academic journals are similarly able to adopt a relative level of openness.

Hundreds of internet cafés have opened between 2013 and 2015, and nearly 60 public-access Wi-Fi hotspots were established in mid-2015. E-mail has been accessible via mobile phone since 2014. An estimated 150,000 Cubans now have daily access to the internet, up from just 75,000 in 2014. Still, the island is among the least connected nations in the Western Hemisphere.

While it remains illegal to print or distribute independent media, both journalists and Cuba's new media start-ups have used innovative methods to share information online via e-mail subscription services or weekly PDF news digests. A sophisticated data packet distribution system uses flash drives to circulate a weekly menu of digital information, and Cuba's new private mobile phone repair shops often double as independent media and phone app distribution points.

Official obstacles hamper religious freedom in Cuba. Churches may not conduct ordinary educational activities, and many church-based publications are plagued by state as well as self-censorship. However, the Roman Catholic Church has played an important role in civil society, enabling discussion of topics of public concern. Partly as a result of Pope Francis's positive role in U.S.-Cuba diplomatic negotiations, Cuba's Catholic Church enjoyed an unprecedented expansion in its pastoral rights in 2015, including periodic access to state media and public spaces, as well as the ability to build new churches and print and distribute its own publications. During Francis's visit to Cuba in September 2015, the public had broad access to papal events. On the other hand, the church has systematically refused to side with dissidents and has been accused of being too close to the state.

Academic freedom is restricted in Cuba. Teaching materials commonly contain ideological content, and affiliation with PCC structures is generally needed to gain access and advancement in educational institutions. On numerous occasions, university students have been expelled for dissident behavior, a harsh punishment that effectively prevents them from pursuing higher education. Despite the elimination of exit permits in 2013, university faculty, especially those in the social sciences, must still obtain permission from their superiors to travel to academic conferences abroad. It is also common for Cuba to periodically prevent dissident intellectuals from traveling abroad and to deny academic visas to prominent exiles who have been critical of the regime.

While Cubans do often engage in robust private discussions regarding everyday issues such as the economic reform process, food prices, foreign travel, and increasingly the lack of open internet access, they tend to self-censor when referring to more political issues such as human rights, fundamental freedoms, and civil liberties.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Restrictions on freedom of association remain the key political form of governmental control in Cuba. According to the constitution, citizens' limited rights of assembly and association may not be "exercised against the existence and objectives of the Socialist State." In addition, based on the 1985 Law on Associations no. 54, the government will not register any new association or organization that is not supervised by the state. Nearly all politically motivated short-term detentions in recent years have targeted members of independent associations, human rights groups, political parties, or trade unions. For example, systematic repression has continued against the peaceful public activities of civil and

human rights groups such as the Ladies in White and the Patriotic Union of Cuba (UNPACU). In 2015, the government prevented peaceful Sunday marches led by the Ladies in White, turning the planned demonstrations into a spectacle of harassment and arbitrary detention each week.

Following the arrest of a group of artists and activists led by Tania Bruguera in December 2014 after they attempted to hold a performance in the Plaza of the Revolution to air their grievances, Bruguera was detained several more times and her passport was confiscated for the first half of 2015. In August, she was able to return to her part-time residence in New York City. Graffiti artist Danilo “*El Sexto*,” who was imprisoned in December 2014 over accusations of “disrespecting the leaders of the Revolution” for spray painting the words *Fidel* and *Raúl* on a pair of pigs, was released in October 2015 after going on a hunger strike.

Independent racial advocacy or civil rights organizations are illegal, and no autonomous women’s or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) organizations are recognized by the state. Human rights activists and independent journalists and lawyers with the organization CubaLex (the Center for Legal Information, a public interest legal consultancy) have been subject to harassment. In March 2015, CubaLex released a statement claiming that its work was in danger because of stepped up campaigns to defame and harass its members. It cited a break-in at the group’s office, in which computer equipment and data were stolen after CubaLex presented its report about Cuban prisons to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights at the Organization of American States.

Cuban workers do not have the right to strike or bargain collectively, and independent labor unions are illegal.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16

The Council of State has total control over the courts and the judiciary. Laws on “public disorder,” “contempt,” disrespect for authority,” “pre-criminal dangerousness,” and “aggression” are frequently used to prosecute political opponents. Cuba does not typically grant international humanitarian organizations access to its prisons. However, for the first time since 2004, the government allowed a group of foreign correspondents access to some prisons in 2013, a few weeks before the UN Human Rights Council’s regular comprehensive review of practices on the island.

The CCDHRN estimated in 2014 that Cuba had more than 100 political prisoners. In December of that year, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) contractor Alan Gross was released along with former Cuban intelligence agent Rolando Sarraff Trujillo as part of the deal with the U.S. government. By January 2015, Cuba had released 53 additional political prisoners about whom the United States had expressed concern. However, human rights groups on the island have indicated that many of those released have limited freedom of movement and are at risk of rearrest. Indeed, at least six of the 53 political prisoners released have since been jailed on new charges; a majority have applied for refugee status to move permanently to the United States. The Cuban government claims it holds no prisoners of conscience, but various rights groups assert that there remained between 27 and 70 political prisoners at the end of 2015. As a humanitarian gesture leading up to the papal visit in September, the Cuban government issued pardons to more than 3,500 prisoners, but excluded those serving time for what the government characterizes as crimes against “national security”—a designation often used to charge political prisoners.

While racial discrimination has long been outlawed as state policy, Cubans of African descent have reported widespread discrimination and profiling by law enforcement officials

(many of them of African descent themselves). Many of these Cubans have only limited access to the dollar-earning sectors of the economy.

Cuba has made important strides in redressing discrimination against the LGBT community, thanks in part to the advocacy work of Mariela Castro Espín, President Castro's daughter and director of the National Center for Sexual Education (CENESEX). However, a bill proposing the legalization of same-sex marriage has been stalled in the National Assembly since 2008, even with the support of Castro Espín. The efforts of grassroots LGBT groups are largely ignored by the authorities, though they have, at times, been attacked by CENESEX.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

Freedom of movement and the right to choose one's residence and place of employment are restricted. The "Internal Migratory Regulations for the City of Havana and its Contraventions" stipulates that Cubans who move to Havana without state authorization risk losing housing and are subject to deportation back to their provincial cities. Separately, some political prisoners released on conditional freedom have complained that they are at times prevented from traveling outside of their home provinces, with occasional round-ups followed by deportations back to their homes when they are found attending dissident meetings elsewhere on the island. In addition, some political dissidents continue to be denied the right to travel abroad, including former political prisoners released under conditional freedom. In violation of International Labour Organization statutes, Cubans working abroad, in the export processing zone at the Port of Mariel, or for foreign companies on the island are not paid directly, but rather through the Cuban state in Cuban, or nonconvertible, pesos.

However, a 2013 migration law rescinded the exit visa and letter of invitation that were previously required to travel abroad. Since then, the law has generally been respected, with record numbers of Cubans either traveling abroad temporarily or emigrating permanently. Driven in part by fears that the United States' Cuban Adjustment Act, which allows Cubans who reach U.S. territory to remain and gain legal residency, would be repealed as U.S.-Cuban relations thaw, the number of Cubans seeking entry to the United States spiked in late 2015. Thousands of Cuban migrants flew to Ecuador, the starting point for a land route to the United States. Many were left stranded at the Costa Rica–Nicaragua border when the latter closed the crossing after a smuggling ring was disbanded. Another U.S. program that urges Cuban doctors serving in other nations to defect to the United States contributed further to the exodus, and the Cuban government responded in December by reinstating limits on the foreign travel of medical professionals.

The number of self-employment licenses rapidly expanded from 157,000 in October 2010 to more than 504,600 by May 2015, though the figure reportedly dropped in the second half of the year to 496,400. The number of legal occupations for self-employment grew from 178 to 201 between 2010 and 2015. In addition, 498 new nonagricultural cooperatives were approved during 2013 and 2014, 347 of which were actively doing business as of May 2015. However, the extent of private employment opportunities remains limited, with almost no professional jobs included in the expanded list of legal self-employment occupations. In addition, many workers in Cuba's new agricultural cooperatives were forced into their positions as the only alternative to being laid off. Opening a cooperative even in today's more permissive environment is an arduous, multiyear bureaucratic task requiring municipal and ministerial approvals, with the final green light reserved for the Council of Ministers itself.

Private credit and wholesale access to merchandise for the nonstate sector remain largely nonexistent, which also limits the expansion of private activity. Only state enterprises can enter into economic agreements with foreigners as minority partners; ordinary citizens cannot participate. While new U.S. regulations that went into effect in 2015 now allow U.S. companies to sell inputs to and buy products directly from Cuban entrepreneurs, the Cuban government has yet to permit such activity from its side.

The Cuban constitution establishes full equality for women, and women hold nearly 49 percent of National Assembly seats. However, they make up only 7 percent of the PCC's politburo, 14 percent of the party secretariat, and 22 percent of the Council of Ministers. Only one woman has achieved the rank of vice president. Additionally, women make up only 38 percent of Cuba's work force, even as they are well represented in most professions and have equal access to higher education. Cuban women average less than half of what men earn, mostly because men have access to higher-paying jobs; the gender gap is exacerbated by uneven opportunities opened up by recent market-oriented reforms.

The U.S. State Department claims that the government of Cuba does not fully comply with minimum standards for the elimination of sex trafficking and does not recognize forced labor as a problem in the country. However, Cuba has recently made significant efforts to address trafficking, including the prosecution and conviction of 13 sex traffickers in 2013 and the provision of services to victims in those cases.

Cyprus

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 1,153,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Nicosia

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed here do not reflect conditions in Northern Cyprus, which is examined in a separate report.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Cyprus made progress during 2015 in its recovery from a banking crisis that had forced it to accept a bailout loan from the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2013. The economy returned to modest growth following nearly four years of recession, and unemployment, though still high, began to fall after increasing significantly due to the austerity measures that the bailout required. The last controls on capital transfers were lifted in April, and the country was expected to fully exit from the bailout program in early 2016.

Economic hardship in recent years has stoked fears of rising nationalism. As an island that is not part of the EU's passport-free Schengen Area, Cyprus largely avoided the massive influx of migrants and refugees that stimulated nationalist sentiment in other EU member states in 2015, but the government was criticized for holding asylum seekers who did arrive on its shores in prison-like conditions for lengthy periods.

The April 2015 election of a new, pro-reunification president of Northern Cyprus, Mustafa Akıncı, raised hopes for a lasting solution to the island's partition, which resulted from a 1974 Turkish invasion of the north following a coup aimed at union with Greece. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is recognized only by Turkey. Reunification talks, which had stalled in October 2014 over a maritime territorial dispute, resumed in June.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40 (+1)

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

The Republic of Cyprus's president is elected by popular vote to a five-year term. The unicameral House of Representatives has 80 seats filled through proportional representation for five-year terms. The Turkish Cypriot community has 24 reserved seats, which have not been occupied since Turkish Cypriot representatives withdrew from the chamber in 1964.

In the 2013 presidential election, Nicos Anastasiades of the conservative Democratic Rally (DISY) party emerged as the victor, winning 57.5 percent of the vote in the runoff. Pledging efficient negotiations with the EU and the IMF over the bailout agreement, Anastasiades defeated Stavros Malas of the Progressive Party of the Working People (AKEL), whose platform opposed austerity.

In the most recent legislative elections, held in 2011, DISY took 20 seats, AKEL won 19, and the Democratic Party (DIKO) took 9; three small parties captured the remaining 8 seats.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Elections feature a diversity of parties, and the system is open to their rise and fall, leading to regular rotations of power. Minority groups participate fully in the political process. Following a 2004 ruling against Cyprus by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), a law was passed allowing Turkish Cypriots living in the south to vote and run for office in Republic of Cyprus elections. Turkish Cypriots cannot run for president, as the constitution states that a Greek Cypriot should hold that post and a Turkish Cypriot should be vice president (the vice presidency remains vacant). Three religious minorities—the Maronites (Levantine Catholics), Armenians, and Latins (Roman Catholics)—each elect a special nonvoting representative to the parliament.

Cyprus's economic crisis has bolstered the fortunes of nationalist, anti-immigration elements in the political arena in recent years. The far-right National Popular Front (ELAM) remains politically weak, winning just 2.69 percent of the vote in the 2014 European Parliament elections, but that was a substantial increase from the 0.22 percent it received in 2009.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12 (+1)

The banking and sovereign debt crisis limited the ability of Cyprus's president and legislature to determine the country's policies. In exchange for their bailout loan, the EU and the IMF imposed harsh terms on depositors and compelled the government to adopt austerity measures. The Anastasiades government struggled to find solutions that balanced the demands of its external creditors with the desires of its citizens. However, this pressure on Cypriot officials' autonomy eased as the country moved toward an exit from the bailout program in early 2016.

Corruption is not a major problem in Cyprus, but there is evidence that its banking system has served as a tax haven and permitted the laundering of illegally obtained money from Russia and other countries. There is no freedom of information law, and a draft bill presented by the government for comment in 2015 was criticized for its large number of

exemptions. Cyprus was ranked 32 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 56 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Freedom of speech is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. A vibrant independent press frequently criticizes the authorities, and several private television and radio stations compete effectively with public stations. Access to the internet is unrestricted.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution and protected in practice. Nearly all inhabitants of the south are Orthodox Christians, and some discrimination against adherents of other religions has been alleged. The government facilitates crossings of the UN buffer zone between north and south for the purpose of worship at religious sites.

State schools use textbooks containing negative language about Turkish Cypriots and Turkey, though a general climate of moderation has prevailed in recent years. There are no restrictions on open and free private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedom of association and assembly are generally respected. Cyprus's frequent protests against austerity policies have been almost uniformly peaceful. Nongovernmental organizations generally operate without government interference. Workers have the right to strike, form independent trade unions, and engage in collective bargaining. The law provides remedies for antiunion discrimination, though enforcement is uneven.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

Cyprus's independent judiciary operates according to the British tradition, upholding due process rights. The Council of Europe and other groups have noted cases of police brutality, including beatings of minorities. Prison overcrowding has decreased but remains a problem.

Despite some government efforts to combat prejudice and inequality, non-Greek Cypriot minorities as well as migrants and asylum seekers face discrimination and occasional violence. The authorities' long-term detention of irregular migrants and asylum seekers has drawn criticism from human rights organizations and prompted hunger strikes by detainees. The law bars detention exceeding 18 months for such individuals, though this rule has reportedly been violated in a number of cases.

Antidiscrimination laws prohibit bias based on sexual orientation but do not explicitly protect transgender people; laws barring incitement to hatred apply to both sexual orientation and gender identity. There is no provision for official recognition of transgender people. The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community faces societal discrimination in practice.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

Although the UN buffer zone dividing the island remains in place, freedom of movement has improved since 2004 due to a growing number of border crossings.

The status of property abandoned by those who fled north after the 1974 invasion is a point of contention in reunification talks. A 1991 law states that property left by Turkish Cypriots belongs to the state. Under the law in the north, Greek Cypriots can appeal to the Immovable Property Commission (IMP), which in 2010 was recognized by the ECHR as an adequate local authority for the resolution of property disputes. The Turkish government

informed Cyprus in 2014 that it would no longer fund the IMP, casting doubt on its future. It continued to operate as of 2015.

Gender discrimination in the workplace, sexual harassment, and violence against women are problems in Cyprus. Women are underrepresented in government. In November 2015, the parliament passed legislation allowing same-sex civil unions, but it did not include adoption rights for same-sex couples.

While the government has made genuine progress in combatting human trafficking, migrant workers remain vulnerable to sexual exploitation and forced labor.

Czech Republic

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 10,551,227

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Prague

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

The ruling coalition, led by Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka, operated relatively smoothly in 2015, although it faced a no-confidence vote over tax breaks that allegedly benefitted Deputy Prime Minister Andrej Babiš's firms. The May vote, called by the three leading opposition parties, was comfortably defeated in the lower parliamentary house. President Miloš Zeman continued to court controversy with his statements about the refugee crisis and by meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin twice, in defiance of official European Union (EU) and Czech policy. His popularity ratings recovered late in 2015 after a significant decline in the first half of the year.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The 200 members of the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of Parliament, are elected to four-year terms by proportional representation. The Senate has 81 members elected for six-year terms, with one-third up for election every two years.

The most recent legislative elections were held in 2013. The Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) finished first, capturing 50 seats, followed closely by its ally, the Movement of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO), which took 47 seats. The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) placed third with 33 seats. The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) won just 16 seats, down from 53 seats in 2010. The right-wing Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09 (TOP 09), the populist Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit), and the Christian Democratic Union–Czech People's Party (KDU–ČSL) won the remaining seats.

The president is directly elected under a 2012 constitutional amendment. The president can veto legislation and appoints judges, central bank officials, the prime minister, and other

cabinet members, but the post holds few other formal powers. Previous fears that Zeman was seeking to accumulate power in the president's office subsided in 2015, largely due to his declining popularity and more assertive governance by the ruling coalition.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Political parties are free to form and operate. The Czech party system has long been marked by fragmentation. In 2015, the populist Úsvit party experienced internal discord, with several members leaving to found new parties. Generally, however, the party system remained largely unchanged from 2014. Historically, the two main political parties have been the center-left ČSSD and the center-right ODS, which lost a significant share of seats in the 2013 elections. KSČM has been excluded from all national governments so far, but has formed several regional governing coalitions with ČSSD.

The Romany minority lacks meaningful political representation. None of the parties representing the estimated 250,000 Roma living in the country have reached the 5 percent parliamentary threshold, and Romany candidates lack adequate representation in the major parliamentary parties.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12

Despite the Czech Republic's history of unstable governments, the current ruling coalition is relatively robust. The governing parties did not suffer any by-election defeats which could have threatened their position, and no major conflicts emerged among party members. Thanks to its large parliamentary majority, the government comfortably defeated a motion of no-confidence in May 2015.

Corruption has been and continues to be a serious problem in Czech politics. In the early months of 2015, civil society activists claimed that the government was dragging its feet on the introduction of antigraft legislation, and a February report by the Council of Europe highlighted problems related to political party financing. Prime Minister Sobotka dismissed the criticism, arguing that the report evaluated his predecessors' performance and promising to introduce new measures.

In July 2015, a former leading member of the ČSSD, David Ráth, was convicted of corruption and sentenced to eight and a half years in prison following a lengthy trial—a case that could signal the strengthening of rule of law. Ráth appealed the verdict, and the case was ongoing at year's end.

The 2014–2015 World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness report noted a strong perception among business executives that government officials routinely favor certain well-connected businesses and individuals when awarding public procurement contracts. In March, Transport Minister Dan Tok of the ANO party was accused of ignoring corrupt practices and bribery during his time as head of the Czech arm of Skanska, a Swedish construction company. In government, Tok has earned the nickname “Mr. Clean” for spearheading a financial transparency campaign.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 57 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Freedom of expression is respected, though the constitution-based Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms limits this freedom in cases of threats against individual rights, state and public security, public health, and morality. Hate speech is a criminal offense, and police may prevent the dissemination of grossly offensive or racist materials at public

events. Promoting denial of the Holocaust or of past communist crimes is illegal, as is inciting religious hatred.

The media operate relatively freely, and the government does not place undue restrictions on content. Legislation protects private ownership of media outlets, but concerns remain about recent media acquisitions by wealthy business figures and their potential impact on journalists' ability to investigate local commercial interests. The government does not restrict internet access.

The government generally upholds freedom of religion. Tax benefits and financial support are provided to registered religious groups. The state has initiated a process to return land confiscated from churches by the 1948–89 communist regime, which will take place over the next 30 years. Expressions of Islamophobic sentiment increased in 2015, mostly due to the refugee crisis confronting European states. Several large protests took place against perceived “Islamification” of the country, and at least one—a demonstration held in Olomouc in May—was accompanied by distorted reporting in Czech media outlets. In November, the state prosecutor filed a criminal complaint against Martin Konvička, a leading figure of the far right, for inciting violence and hatred against Muslims.

Academic freedom is respected. Ceremonial presidential approval is required for academic positions. Private discussion is free and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Czechs may assemble peacefully, form associations, and petition the government. The Prague Pride Parade—an annual event held by the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community—had its biggest turnout to date in 2015. The number of attendees doubled from the previous year, with an estimated 35,000 people participating. No violent incidents took place.

Approximately 85,000 registered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in the country, generally without intimidation or interference from government or security forces. Most organizations struggle with weak funding, and only a small portion of registered NGOs are fully active.

Trade unions and professional associations function freely, though they are weak in practice. The largest trade union, the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (ČMKOS), incorporates 29 member unions and has over 300,000 members. Workers have the right to strike, though this right is limited for essential public employees, such as hospital workers and air traffic controllers.

F. Rule of Law: 14 / 16

The judiciary is largely independent, though its complexity and multilayered composition have led to slow delivery of judgments. A 2010 report produced by the country's counterintelligence agency found that corruption within the Czech Republic's judicial system was “very sophisticated,” making detection difficult.

The rule of law generally prevails in civil and criminal matters. While corruption and political pressure remain within law enforcement agencies, the office of the public prosecutor has become more independent in recent years.

Prisons in the Czech Republic suffer from overcrowding and poor sanitation. Following former president Václav Klaus's controversial prisoner amnesty in 2013, the police reported an increased crime rate in January 2014.

The 2009 Antidiscrimination Act provides for equal treatment regardless of sex, race, age, disability, belief, or sexual orientation. However, Roma face discrimination in the job

market and significantly poorer housing conditions, as well as occasional threats and violence from right-wing groups. President Zeman received criticism from Romany rights action groups in January 2015, when he advocated for Romany and disabled children to be segregated from their classmates in schools. In September, the Czech Constitutional Court ruled that judges cannot dismiss school segregation cases based on the percentage of Romany children in a classroom alone. Some activists argued that the decision did not go far enough to guarantee an inclusive educational system, particularly because it did not condemn the practice of administering intelligence assessments that determine children’s placement in either regular or special education programs.

Asylum seekers are routinely detained, and conditions in detention centers are generally poor. Amid a significant influx of asylum seekers in 2015, a former Constitutional Court justice warned the government that its approach to asylum could lead to legal action at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The authorities were under fire for lengthy detentions and the mistreatment of asylum seekers. In November, Prime Minister Sobotka criticized President Zeman for attending an explicitly anti-Muslim and antirefugee rally on the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. Sobotka also praised the efforts of volunteers who helped the government and NGOs provide basic services to asylum seekers and refugees.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Gender discrimination is legally prohibited. However, sexual harassment in the workplace appears to be fairly common, and women are underrepresented at the highest levels of government and business—as of 2015, they held 40 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. According to data from the European Commission, the gender pay gap in the Czech Republic is one of the largest in the EU.

The Czech Republic’s lustration law aims to keep those with close ties to the country’s former communist regime out of high-level political, judicial, and military positions.

Same-sex marriages are not legally recognized, but LGBT people do not otherwise face significant discrimination.

Human trafficking remains a problem, and criminal rings use the Czech Republic as a source, transit, and destination point; women and children are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The government has made increasing efforts in recent years to fund protective services and other resources for victims, and to prosecute perpetrators.

Denmark

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 5,676,025

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Copenhagen

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Parliamentary elections in June 2015 resulted in the defeat of the Social Democratic Party and the formation of a one-party Liberal minority government—the first time since 1981 that the government has not been composed of a coalition. The right-wing Danish People’s Party achieved a significant victory in the polls, earning 15 more seats to become the second-largest party in the parliament.

Concerns about militant extremism featured prominently in public discussion during the year. In February, a lone gunman carried out a two-part attack in Copenhagen, leading to the deaths of a film director at an event on freedom of expression and a security guard at a synagogue.

The refugee crisis confronting Europe in 2015 caused significant political and humanitarian strain in Denmark. Large numbers of refugees crossed the Danish border during the year, many on their way to seek asylum in other countries, especially Sweden and Finland; approximately 20,000 individuals applied for asylum in Denmark in 2015. In an emergency vote in November, legislators approved a series of controversial restrictions on asylum, affecting detention time, family reunification, and housing.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40**A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12**

The current constitution, adopted in 1953, established a single-chamber parliament (the Folketing) and retained a monarch, currently Queen Margrethe II, with mostly ceremonial duties. The parliament’s 179 representatives are elected at least once every four years through a system of modified proportional representation. The monarch chooses the prime minister, usually the leader of the majority party or government coalition.

Parliamentary elections were held in June 2015. The Social Democrats took 47 seats. The populist, anti-immigration, Euroskeptic Danish People’s Party had by far the most successful showing, winning 37 seats to become the second-largest party in the parliament. The center-right Liberal Party, led by Lars Løkke Rasmussen, won 34 seats. The Unity List-Red-Green Alliance took 14 seats; the Liberal Alliance, 13; Alternative, 9; the Social Liberal Party, 8; the Socialist People’s Party, 7; and the Conservative People’s Party, 6. The Liberals formed a one-party minority government in June, and enjoyed support from their allies in the so-called Blue Bloc—the Liberal Alliance, the Conservative People’s Party, and the Danish People’s Party. Rasmussen replaced outgoing prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt of the Social Democrats.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Numerous political parties compete in Denmark. Danish governments most often control a minority of seats in the parliament, ruling with the aid of one or more supporting parties. Since 1909, no single party has held a majority of seats, helping to create a tradition of compromise.

The Social Democrats, historically anchored in the working class, have lost their once-dominant position in Danish politics. Many of their core positions on social services and an expansive public sector have been adopted by parties across the spectrum. The Liberal Party has experienced a similar dynamic, with its positions on the importance of economic competitiveness spreading to the Social Democrats and other parties. The differences between the two major parties are thus variations of degree and emphasis, rather than deeply

held ideological distinctions. In recent years, the most significant political ascent has been that of the Danish People's Party, which has never formally been in government.

The territories of Greenland and the Faroe Islands each have two representatives in the Folketing. They also have their own elected institutions, which have power over almost all areas of governance, except foreign and financial policy. In 2009, Greenland passed the Self-Government Act, which gave it greater control over government functions, including its security apparatus and judicial system.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Levels of corruption are generally very low in Denmark, which was ranked 1 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. There were no major cases of corruption in 2015.

A final report on the so-called Taxgate scandal was released in 2014. The case involved leaked information regarding a 2010 tax audit of Thorning-Schmidt, who was an opposition leader at the time. The leak had occurred just one week before the 2011 general elections and had allegedly been carried out by Thorning-Schmidt's political opponents. Thorning-Schmidt was found not to have violated any tax laws, but the final report was criticized for not reaching any clear conclusions about the origin of the leak.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 58 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression. Domestic media reflect a wide variety of political opinions and are frequently critical of the government. The state finances radio and television broadcasting, but state-owned television companies have independent editorial boards. Independent radio stations are permitted but tightly regulated. Access to the internet is not restricted, and Denmark's internet penetration rate is among the highest in the world.

Since the 2005 publication of controversial cartoons by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* depicting the prophet Muhammad, Denmark has experienced a series of threats and attacks from militant extremists. In February 2015, a lone gunman—a Danish citizen of Palestinian origin—launched an attack on a freedom of expression event featuring Swedish artist Lars Vilks. He killed one audience member, a movie director, and wounded several police officers before escaping. Hours later, the assailant targeted a religious celebration at a Copenhagen synagogue, killing a security guard and wounding two police officers. The assailant died in a confrontation with police the following morning.

Freedom of worship is legally protected. However, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is subsidized by the government as the official state religion. The faith is taught in public schools, though students may withdraw from religious classes with parental consent. Denmark denies religious-worker visas, thereby restricting access to missionaries entering the country from abroad.

There are no official updated numbers for registered hate crimes motivated by religion due to Danish record-keeping protocols; however, the year 2015 featured anecdotal reports of an increased sense of insecurity among religious minorities in the country. In recent years, the country's Jewish community has reported increasing anti-Semitic harassment and violence. The Jewish community has for years requested better security for its cultural and educational institutions. In March 2015, following the February terrorist attack, the justice

minister requested 20 million Danish kroner (\$3 million) in additional funds to protect Jewish institutions. Separately, in June and August, vandals targeted Muslim cemeteries.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association. Demonstrations and other assemblies in 2015 were peaceful. Civil society is vibrant.

Workers are free to organize, and the labor market is mainly regulated by agreements between employers' and employees' organizations. There were no major strikes in 2015. In July, unions won a court case permitting them to strike if low-cost Irish carrier Ryanair did not raise salaries to match local budget airlines. Ryanair subsequently closed its Copenhagen and Billund air bases, although it continued to operate flights to and from both locations.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and citizens enjoy full due-process rights. The court system consists of 100 local courts, two high courts, and the 15-member Supreme Court, with judges recommended by the government and appointed by the monarch. Prisons generally meet international standards.

Immigration and asylum were contested issues in 2015. Amid an influx of refugees trying to reach European countries in 2015, Danish authorities tightened laws on entry, residence, and asylum, already some of the harshest in Europe. A government proposal to restrict legislation on citizenship, including raising standards for language assessments and extending the waiting period for applicants with a criminal history, was passed in October.

The Danish government received applications for asylum from over 20,000 people in 2015, an increase of more than 40 percent from the number received in 2014; applicants were primarily of Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghan origin. A large number of asylum seekers and other migrants also transited through Denmark to reach other countries, particularly Sweden and Finland. Danish-Swedish relations were strained during the year due to the Danish policy of allowing refugees to continue to Sweden without registering them in a central European Union (EU) database. Denmark's approach to asylum was a dominant and divisive topic of public discussion during the year. In August, a refugee center was defaced with Nazi and xenophobic propaganda, and a car outside the center was set on fire.

In an emergency vote in November, the parliament hastily passed several measures—part of a package proposed by the Liberal government—aimed at tightening legislation on asylum and immigration. Legislators had two working days to read and comment on the proposals before the vote. The measures included expanding the power of security forces to detain migrants, extending the timeline for family reunification cases, and housing single male asylum seekers in tents. Legal experts, members of the public, as well as local and international watchdogs expressed grave concerns with the changes, noting that legislators should have had more time to consider them. Some critics claimed the changes to be inhumane, noting that Denmark's surplus of housing could be used to accommodate refugees. A number of other bills from the package, including a measure that would enable the government to confiscate personal property from asylum seekers in order to pay for their care, were scheduled for a vote in 2016.

Discrimination, including based on gender identity or sexual orientation, is prohibited by law. A new gender recognition law came into effect in 2014, eliminating previous legislation that had required transgender persons to undergo psychiatric evaluation and sterilization—either by hormone therapy or surgery—when obtaining legal documents

reflecting their new gender. While progressive, the law mandates a six-month waiting period, after which applicants must reconfirm their decision. Citizens must be over the age of 18 to apply for a legal change in gender identity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Freedom of movement is protected by law and generally respected by the government, and authorities do not interfere with the rights of individuals to choose their residence, employment, and institution of higher education. However, in March 2015, a new law entered into force allowing police to confiscate the passport of any individual suspected of planning to leave Denmark to engage in armed conflict abroad. Critics have noted that the law, which arose from concerns about Danish nationals traveling to Syria and Iraq in particular, has a low evidentiary threshold, allows room for arbitrary decisions, and requires only minimal judicial oversight. By year’s end, seven citizens either had their passports confiscated or were denied new ones.

Private business activity is free from undue influence by government officials or nonstate actors.

Women enjoy equal rights in Denmark and represent half of the workforce and 37 percent of the parliament. However, disparities have been reported in the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

In 1989, Denmark became the first country in the world to adopt same-sex civil unions, and in 2012, the parliament overwhelmingly passed same-sex marriage legislation enabling couples to wed in the Lutheran state church of their choosing. Priests are not obligated to officiate but, when requested to do so, must find a colleague who will.

Denmark is a destination and transit point for women and children trafficked for sexual exploitation. Following the 2003 adoption of legislation that defined and criminalized such trafficking, the government began working regularly with nongovernmental organizations to implement prevention campaigns. In February 2015, 95 individuals were arrested in the biggest antitrafficking operation in Denmark to date, dubbed Operation Wasp’s Nest. The suspected perpetrators, a group of mostly Romanian nationals, were accused of luring up to 300 individuals to Denmark in a fraudulent scheme worth nearly 40 million Danish kroner (\$5.7 million). Trials in the case began in September; three defendants were convicted in December and given prison sentences ranging from two to three years. Proceedings against other defendants were ongoing at year’s end.

Djibouti

Political Rights Rating: 6
Civil Liberties Rating: 5
Freedom Rating: 5.5
Freedom Status: Not Free
Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 900,000
Capital: Djibouti

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

The administration of President Ismail Omar Guelleh continued to repress and harass journalists, human rights activists, and opposition leaders in 2015. An agreement between the ruling Union for a Presidential Majority (UMP) and the opposition Union for National Salvation (USN), reached in December 2014 after months of disagreement and noncooperation following the 2013 parliamentary elections, was not fully implemented in 2015, and the opposition claimed that the government was neglecting key democratic reforms promised in the deal. Although they continued protesting government inaction, USN representatives took their seats in the parliament in January; this marked the first time that the opposition held a presence in the legislature since the introduction of the multiparty system in 1992.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 9 / 40**A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12**

Djibouti's ruling UMP coalition has effectively usurped the state. A constitutional amendment passed by the National Assembly in 2010 removed the two-term limit for the president, reduced presidential terms from six years to five, and specified that candidates must be between the ages of 40 and 75. The changes allowed Guelleh to stand for a third term in 2011. His candidacy sparked a series of antigovernment protests in which at least two were killed and hundreds arrested, including the leaders of three opposition parties. The 2011 presidential campaign was marred by the harassment of opposition leaders and a clampdown on public gatherings. Guelleh ultimately faced only one challenger and won 81 percent of the vote. After the 2011 polls, Guelleh initially announced that he would not seek a fourth term in the next presidential election, scheduled for 2016, but opposition figures voiced skepticism. In December 2015, Guelleh declared that he would run again in 2016.

The 65 members of the unicameral legislature, the National Assembly, are directly elected for five-year terms. The 2010 constitutional changes provided for the formation of a bicameral legislature comprising the existing National Assembly and a newly created Senate, though steps to establish one have yet to be taken.

In February 2013, Djibouti held the first legislative polls contested by the opposition in a decade. In the weeks prior to the elections, the USN accused the government of censorship after its websites could not be accessed domestically. Although international observers declared the elections to be free and fair, the opposition alleged foul play and refuted the official results, which showed the UMP winning 55 seats and the USN taking 10. Representatives of the USN refused to take their seats in protest, but reached an agreement with the UMP on December 31, 2014, following 18 months of dialogue. Throughout the year 2015, the opposition alleged that the government had not respected key commitments enshrined in the agreement, including amnesty for opposition members and reform of the electoral commission. Opposition leaders also threatened to boycott the 2016 presidential election if the UMP does not fully implement the deal.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 3 / 16

Although the Djiboutian constitution provides full political rights, these rights are often ignored in practice. While Djibouti technically has a multiparty political system, the ruling UMP party has seized all state power. Political parties are required to register with the government.

Six political parties joined to form the USN coalition in the run-up to the 2013 legislative elections. Top USN officials have been repeatedly arrested since then. In May 2014,

USN spokesman Daher Ahmed Farah was arrested for the 16th time since returning to the country from exile in January 2013. He was imprisoned in five of these instances.

Opposition parties have traditionally been disadvantaged by Djibouti's first-past-the-post electoral system, as well as the government's abuse of the administrative apparatus. Amendments to the electoral law in 2012 awarded 20 percent of seats proportionally; before, the party that received the majority in a district won the entirety of that district's seats. In 2013, the 10 seats won by the opposition represented the first time that the ruling party had conceded any seats in the National Assembly.

Minority groups, including the Afar, Yemeni Arabs, and non-Issa Somalis, are represented at all levels of Djiboutian government. However, the majority Issa hold more prominent positions in both government and the private sector.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

The UMP has assumed full control of the state and dominates policymaking.

Corruption is a serious problem, and efforts to curb malfeasance in public agencies have met with little success. Djibouti ranked 99 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index, and 36 out of 54 countries ranked in the 2015 Ibrahim Index of African Governance.

Though no laws establish the right to access public information, the government has made legislation publically available and created some mechanisms for citizens to request information. Policymaking and public administration nevertheless remain largely nontransparent.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 19 / 40

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 6 / 16

Despite constitutional protections, freedom of speech is not upheld in practice. No privately owned or independent media operate domestically, though political parties are technically allowed to publish a journal or newspaper. The government owns the principal newspaper, *La Nation*, as well as Radio-Television Djibouti, which operates the national broadcast stations. Strict libel laws lead journalists to practice self-censorship.

Approximately 10 percent of the population has access to the internet. While the government typically places few restrictions on internet access, some opposition outlets have faced interference and harassment. The opposition internet radio station *La Voix de Djibouti*, run by exiles in Europe, was regularly blocked during the 2013 legislative elections, and its journalists are routinely targeted for arrest. The *La Voix* website editor and USN communications officer, Maydaneh Abdallah Okieh, has been repeatedly arrested for his coverage of human rights and Djibouti's political opposition. In May 2015, Okieh was detained and ordered to pay damages of approximately 2 million Djiboutian francs (\$12,000) to a military leader who won a defamation case against him in 2013; the suit concerned Okieh's coverage of police brutality at a peaceful protest. In case of nonpayment, Okieh may face imprisonment.

Islam is the state religion, and 94 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim. Religious matters are overseen by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. Legislation enacted in 2013 provides the ministry oversight authority over mosques. The government claimed that the new law would be used to counter foreign influence in the country, but has also used it to monitor the opposition. Security services have questioned imams who gave sermons on political or social justice themes; at least three imams have been imprisoned for giving sermons on political topics.

Academic freedom is not always respected. In 2014, local and international human rights monitors reported that authorities had suspended the salaries of at least 83 teachers and educational staff since October 2013, allegedly for affiliation with opposition groups and trade unions. Of these, 63 educators were reportedly dismissed.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are nominally protected under the constitution, but are often not respected in practice. More than 500 opposition figures were arrested for participating in protests after the 2013 legislative elections. In June 2015, five youth opposition members were detained for protesting against Guelleh's fourth presidential bid. In September, dozens of USN and youth group members were arrested at a protest in Dikhil; six of them remained in detention at year's end despite an order for their release by the Djibouti Court of Appeal in October. Separately, in December, police violently dispersed a religious demonstration in the capital. The government alleged that the crowd included armed individuals who attacked the police, injuring as many as 50 officers, and officials reported that 7 civilians died in the confrontations. Opposition groups claimed that the government opened fire on the crowd and killed up to 19 people; international estimates of the death toll ranged up to 30. Independent sources had not been able to resolve conflicting estimates at year's end. An unknown number of opposition members were detained in the aftermath of the incident.

Local human rights groups who cover politically sensitive matters do not operate freely and are often the target of government harassment and intimidation. In 2014, president of the Djiboutian Observatory for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights, Farah Abdillahi Miguil, was prevented from boarding a plane to the United States and had his passport confiscated. The incident occurred shortly after his release from prison, where he was detained without access to a lawyer, medical care, or contact with his family for more than a year. Women's rights groups hold an exceptional position in this restrictive environment; the government generally supports their educational efforts and trainings.

Though workers may legally join unions and strike, the government has been known to intimidate labor leaders and obstruct union activities. Officials have been accused of meddling in internal union elections and harassing members. The government has also frozen some unions' bank accounts, and kept them from receiving external funds from the diaspora and international labor rights organizations.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

The judicial system is based on the French civil code, though Sharia (Islamic law) prevails in family matters. The courts are not independent of the government. A lack of resources often delays legal proceedings. Security forces frequently make arrests without a proper decree from the judiciary, in violation of constitutional requirements. Constitutional amendments made in 2010 abolished the death penalty. Prison conditions are harsh but have improved in recent years.

Allegations of politically motivated prosecutions are common, and opposition groups consistently accuse the government of sanctioning arbitrary arrests and lengthy detentions. In 2010, Djiboutian businessman Abdourahman Boreh was convicted in absentia on charges of terrorism. Boreh, an opposition leader who planned to run in the 2011 presidential election and vocally criticized the constitutional amendments that allowed Guelleh to run for a third term, received a 15-year prison sentence. The Djiboutian government later froze Boreh's assets on the grounds that he abused his position as chairman of the Djibouti Port

and Free Zone Authority for private gain, and then brought a terrorism case before the London High Court. It was thrown out after the court discovered the majority of evidence to be false. The Djiboutian government subsequently followed up with a corruption case, and in October 2015, Guelleh was summoned to give testimony to the London court; he had not appeared as of December.

Same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Djibouti, and there are no laws in place to prevent discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Generally, matters of sexual preference or orientation are not discussed publicly.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

There are few employment prospects in the formal sector, as Guelleh and the ruling party tightly control all economic activity, including a number of lucrative military bases leased by the United States and China. Minority ethnic groups and clans suffer discrimination that contributes to their social and economic marginalization. Higher educational opportunities are also generally limited.

Though the law provides equal treatment for all Djiboutian citizens, women have fewer employment opportunities and are paid less than men for the same work. Women face discrimination under customary practices related to inheritance and other property matters, divorce, and freedom of movement. The law prohibits female genital mutilation, but some reports suggest that as many as 93 percent of women have undergone the procedure. An estimated 50 percent of girls now receive primary education following efforts to increase female enrollment in schools. While the law requires at least 20 percent of upper-level public service positions to be held by women, this requirement has not been enforced; women hold less than 13 percent of legislative seats and only one of 18 cabinet posts.

Dominica

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 68,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Roseau

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 57 / 60

Dominica faced its worst natural disaster in decades when a tropical storm passed close to its coastline in August, causing devastating damage and leading to an estimated 30 deaths and displacing more than 500 people from their homes. The World Bank assessed the damage at nearly \$500 million, and the International Monetary Fund provided \$8.7 million in immediate recovery assistance.

In May and June, residents of Salisbury organized demonstrations to protest poor agricultural conditions, and constructed road blocks in some parts of the town. The government deemed the demonstrations illegal, and the police response led to clashes; no serious injuries were reported. Some journalists covering the protests reported intimidation by security forces.

The country lacks legislation on access to information, and defamation remains a criminal offense. Government officials have used defamation lawsuits—or threats thereof—against members of the media, encouraging an environment of self-censorship. In 2014, after opposition leader and journalist Lennox Linton accused the government of harboring criminals, eight ministers filed a defamation suit against him, seeking \$1 million in damages. In November 2015, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit launched a defamation case against Linton after the journalist published a letter connecting Skerrit to a corruption case involving a former UN president.

The Dominica police force, which assumed responsibility for security after the military was disbanded in 1981, operates professionally, and there have been few complaints of violations of human rights in recent years. In 2014, five police officers were arrested in connection with the death of a detainee. In March 2015, the officers were formally charged with murder; the case was ongoing at year’s end.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Dominica, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Dominican Republic

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 10,508,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Santo Domingo

Freedom Rating: 3

Freedom Status: Party Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Status Change, Ratings Change: The Dominican Republic’s political rights rating declined from 2 to 3, and its status declined from Free to Partly Free, due to the decreased space for independent media, the implementation of a law preventing Dominicans of Haitian descent (as well as Haitian migrants) from exercising their civil and political rights, and an agreement between two leading parties to amend the constitution and allow consecutive presidential terms.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

The government of the Dominican Republic continued to struggle to address the crisis resulting from a 2013 Constitutional Court ruling that revoked citizenship from tens of thousands of Dominicans of foreign descent, many of whom were born to undocumented Haitian migrant workers. Under a 2014 law passed in response to the 2013 decision, the

government established pathways for people affected by the ruling to regain their citizenship, as well as for undocumented individuals born in the Dominican Republic to acquire residency and apply for naturalization. Only a small portion of those eligible for the two mechanisms had submitted applications by the appropriate deadlines in 2015, however. Under a parallel plan for the regularization of migrants born outside the Dominican Republic, the government reported that it had received applications from more than 280,000 individuals by the June deadline. A large number of individuals were unable to apply or meet the registration requirements, fueling concerns about potential statelessness and deportation.

Increased threats as well as the murder of a journalist strongly affected the environment for free and critical reporting. Separately, ahead of presidential, legislative, and local elections scheduled for 2016, the country's two main parties entered into an agreement to cooperate and support common candidates, substantially harming the level of competitiveness in the political sphere.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 29 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12

The Dominican Republic's bicameral National Congress consists of the 32-member Senate and the 183-member Chamber of Deputies, with members of both chambers elected to four-year terms.

The Dominican Liberation Party (PLD) captured 31 of 32 seats in the 2010 Senate elections; the Social Christian Reformist Party (PRSC) took the remaining seat. In the Chamber of Deputies, the PLD secured 105 seats, the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) and allied candidates won 75, and the PRSC took 3. The opposition presented allegations of electoral fraud to the Organization of American States (OAS), and international observers noted that campaigning resources were not equally distributed between government and opposition candidates. The OAS noted other irregularities, including vote buying, but certified the final results. Legislators elected in 2010 serve six-year terms, rather than four, in order to allow legislative, local, and presidential elections to be held simultaneously in 2016.

The PLD's Danilo Medina was victorious in the 2012 presidential election, winning 51 percent of the vote and defeating PRD candidate Hipólito Mejía. Former president Leonel Fernández of the PLD, who served three terms from 1996 to 2000 and 2004 to 2012, was barred by the constitution from seeking a consecutive term. Medina won on a platform focused on reducing poverty, improving the educational system, fighting corruption, and expanding infrastructure projects.

The country's 38th constitution, promulgated in 2010, removed restrictions on nonconsecutive presidential reelection but prohibited the president from being elected to consecutive terms. In June 2015, the legislature passed amendments to the constitution permitting consecutive presidential reelection but limiting time in office to eight years. The change will allow Medina to run for the presidency in 2016.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16 (– 1)

There are many active political parties, and they are able to freely participate in debate and discussions. Dominican politics was defined by competition between the PLD, the opposition PRD, and the smaller PRSC since the mid-1990s. In 2014, however, the Modern Revolutionary Party (PRM) split off from the PRD. The PRD supported the constitutional changes that would allow Medina to run again, and in September 2015, the party entered

into an alliance with the PLD to back Medina and common congressional and municipal candidates in 2016. The agreement substantially weakened the potential of the PRM to gain traction ahead of the vote, and decreased competitiveness on the political arena.

The military, economic oligarchies, and organized crime continue to have undue influence over people's political choices.

A 2013 Constitutional Court decision stripped Dominican-born descendants of Haitian migrants of their citizenship. Under pressure from international organizations, in 2014 the Dominican government adopted legislation to allow the reissuance of citizenship to those affected by the ruling, and to open a path for undocumented Dominican-born individuals to register and apply for naturalization. The United Nations and other international organizations urged the Dominican Republic to ease the registration processes, and voiced particular concern about the approximately 200,000 individuals who could be left stateless because of difficulties meeting registration requirements.

Naturalized citizens are barred from running for president or vice president and must wait ten years after naturalization in order to be eligible for a position in the Senate or cabinet.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Corruption remains a serious, systemic problem for the country at all levels of the government, judiciary, and security forces, as well as in the private sector. Despite active anticorruption campaigns, largely led by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the media, corrupt officials are able to continue their practices with impunity. Corruption is linked to a sharp increase in drug trafficking, as the Dominican Republic has become a major transit point for drug shipments from South America to the United States.

Measures to increase government transparency are ongoing, but implementation remains a problem. In 2010, the government launched the Anticorruption Participatory Initiative, aimed at increasing access to government information. Although state agencies generally respond to information requests, they often provide inaccurate or incomplete information.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 41 / 60 (-2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16 (-1)

The law guarantees freedoms of speech and press for all, but journalists face serious intimidation and violence when investigating sensitive issues, particularly drug trafficking and corruption. In February 2015, four journalists who had spoken out against discrimination against Haitians reported being harassed and receiving death threats. Separately, Blas Olivo, press director of the Dominican Agribusiness Association, was found murdered in April. In June, police reported that members of a drug trafficking gang were the primary suspects, but were unable to provide conclusive evidence; the case was ongoing at year's end.

Several national daily newspapers and a large number of local publications operate in the country. There are more than 300 privately owned radio stations and several private television networks alongside the state-owned Radio Televisión Dominicana (RTVD). Internet access is unrestricted, and roughly 48 percent of the population is online, although telecommunications infrastructure is still lacking in rural areas. According to the Dominican Association of Journalists, concentrated media ownership and influence from owners and advertisers fuels job insecurity and encourages self-censorship among journalists.

Freedom of religion is unrestricted, but the Catholic Church receives special privileges from the state. Constitutional guarantees regarding academic freedom are generally observed, and private discussion is unhindered.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 10 / 12

Freedom of assembly is generally respected, though some violations occur. In May 2015, police shot and wounded several environmental activists protesting a nickel mining project at the Loma Miranda mountain. In September, police in Moca shot and killed a man who reportedly had a mental disability amid demonstrations for improvements in municipal services. Freedom of association is constitutionally guaranteed, and the government upholds the right to form civic groups.

Workers, excluding military and police personnel, can form and join unions and have the right to bargain collectively. Labor unions are well organized. The National Council of United Trade Unions (CNUS), the Domestic Workers Association (ATH), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and other Haitian and Dominican unions have participated in protests against the 2013 citizenship ruling. As part of the migrant regularization plan, the government in 2015 began to issue residence permits to Haitian workers in the sugar cane industry.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16

The judiciary is politicized and plagued by corruption. The legal system offers little justice to those without the resources to offer bribes.

The Dominican Republic ranked 124th most dangerous out of 141 countries surveyed in the 2015 Gallup Law and Order Index, which takes into account perceptions of personal safety and experiences with crime and police. Authorities reported a decline in the murder rate in the first six months of 2015 as compared to the same period in 2014, particularly in the province of Santo Domingo. Extrajudicial killings by police remain a serious problem.

Prisons have been undergoing reform for the past decade to correct serious problems of overcrowding, poor sanitation, and violence. Some prisons have attempted to focus on inmate rehabilitation, education, and reintegration; by 2014, 18 of the country's 35 prisons reported focusing on this model in order to empower inmates to succeed after release. While the costs of running rehabilitation-focused facilities are much higher than those of conventional models, the new system boasts a 5 percent recidivism rate, compared to 50 percent for traditional prisons.

Dominicans of Haitian descent as well as Haitian migrants face persistent systematic discrimination, including obstacles to attending school and university, obtaining legal employment, and securing legal documents such as identification, birth certificates, and marriage licenses. In February 2015, a Haitian man was found lynched in Santiago. Local authorities dismissed the likelihood that the incident was a hate-crime, but the status of investigations remained unclear at year's end.

While same-sex sexual activity is legal in the Dominican Republic, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face discrimination and even violence. Members of the LGBT community are often blamed for high levels of HIV/AIDS in certain areas of the country. Same-sex relationships are considered taboo, and gender identity remains a sensitive topic. LGBT individuals are barred from working in certain public sectors, such as the police and armed forces, but efforts are underway to draft antidiscrimination legislation to provide critical protections to LGBT people and others.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16 (– 1)

The mistreatment of Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent continues to mar the country’s international reputation in the wake of its 2013 Constitutional Court ruling that 2010 legislation limiting Dominican nationality to children born to legal immigrants could be retroactively applied. In response, the government enacted a law in 2014 to reinstate the citizenship of individuals affected by the ruling, while also providing a process for Dominican-born individuals without documentation to acquire residency and become eligible for naturalization. In 2015, however, individuals who were able to apply for a restoration of nationality continued to report problems accessing their citizenship documents, and watchdogs estimated that only a small portion of individuals eligible for the two mechanisms applied by the appropriate deadlines.

The deadline for a parallel process to regularize the status of undocumented migrants, the National Regularization Plan, expired in June 2015. Close to 240,000 applicants—out of an estimated half a million people living undocumented in the country—were able to receive provisional residency, according to the government. Uncertainties about the regularization plan and fears of discrimination and harassment propelled thousands of immigrants of Haitian descent to cross into Haiti during the year, with many settling into camps along the border. In August, the government resumed deportations of undocumented migrants, which had been temporarily suspended in early 2014 to allow for the implementation of the regularization process.

Private business activity remains susceptible to undue influence by organized crime and even government officials.

Women occupy only 21 percent of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and violence and discrimination against women remains pervasive. In 2014, President Medina signed a law that decriminalized abortions in some situations, including in cases of rape and incest as well as when the pregnancy posed dangers to the mother’s life. In December 2015, the Constitutional Tribunal found the new law to be unconstitutional, effectively reinstating a complete ban on abortion.

Trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation remains a major concern, as does forced labor in the domestic and agricultural sectors. Those left without legal status after the 2013 Constitutional Court ruling are thought to be particularly vulnerable to trafficking. According to the U.S. State Department’s 2016 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, the government does not meet the minimum international standards for combatting trafficking but has made efforts to increase investigations and prosecutions in recent years.

Ecuador

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 16,279,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Quito

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

In December 2015, Ecuador's National Assembly, dominated by President Rafael Correa's ruling Alianza PAIS, approved a series of constitutional amendments that included the removal of term limits for all elected officials, among other measures. The amendments drew national protests throughout the year.

The government has increasingly cracked down on social media and other internet activity, leading some online outlets to disable public comment sections out of fear of reprisal. International and domestic organizations condemned the politically motivated closure of the press watchdog Fundamedios in September; the decision was later reversed.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 24 / 40**A. Electoral Process: 7 / 12**

The 2008 constitution provides for a directly elected president. The unicameral, 137-seat National Assembly is elected for four-year terms, with 116 members elected in 24 provinces (each province elects at least two representatives and then one additional representative for every 200,000 inhabitants), 15 elected through nationwide proportional representation, and 6 in multimember constituencies representing Ecuadorians living abroad. The president has the authority to dissolve the legislature once in his term, which triggers new elections for both the assembly and the presidency. The assembly can likewise dismiss the president, though under more stringent rules. The president can veto individual line items in legislation. The election law requires that women account for 50 percent of party lists in national legislative elections.

In the 2013 presidential election, Correa won a second term with more than 57 percent of the vote in the first round, followed by Guillermo Lasso Mendoza of the Creating Opportunities Movement (CREO) with 22 percent. In concurrent legislative elections, Correa's PAIS won an overwhelming 100 of the 137 seats. CREO took only 11 seats; the Social Christian Party won 6; Patriotic Society, Avanza, and the Pachakutik Plurinational Unity Movement won 5 each; and five smaller factions took 1 seat each. Following a 2008 constitutional mandate calling for a significant female presence in public office, women won 53 of 137 assembly seats in the 2013 elections.

International observers said the elections were generally free and fair. According to the Organization of American States (OAS), the environment for political competition among candidates was more equal than in previous elections due to new regulations imposed during the campaign period. The OAS noted, however, that competition between candidates in the precampaign period remained unregulated, giving an advantage to the incumbent. Prior to the elections, the Correa administration promoted changes to the parliament's seat-allocation formula that favored larger parties, which critics warned would benefit PAIS.

In 2014, the Constitutional Court announced that it would permit a legislative vote—as opposed to a referendum—on constitutional reforms proposed by the government, including the removal of the two-term limit for the presidency laid out in the 2008 constitution. Despite opposition calls to submit the proposals to a popular vote, the package only required two legislative discussions separated by 12 months. In December 2014, a majority in the National Assembly approved 15 constitutional amendments, including lowering the minimum age for running for the presidency to 30 years, limiting the subjects on which citizens and local governments could request a referendum, and ending term limits for elected officials. The removal of term limits included a provision restricting current officials who had already served two terms, including Correa, from running again in 2017, though they would

be eligible again starting in 2021. The opposition and several civil society groups condemned the amendments.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16

For decades, Ecuador's political parties have been largely personality based, clientelist, and fragile. Correa's PAIS alliance remains by far the largest in the legislature. Other parties include CREO, the Social Christian Party, and the Patriotic Society Party.

The 2008 constitution mandated that political organizations register as a requirement for eligibility in the 2013 general elections, although the process drew controversy. In preparation for the 2014 local elections, the registry of local organizations expanded. As of 2015, a total of 144 political organizations were legally recognized—10 at the national level and 134 at the local level.

Ecuador's constitution promotes nondiscrimination and provides for the adoption of affirmative action measures to guarantee equality and representation of minorities. In practice, however, indigenous groups often lack a voice in key decisions pertaining to their land and resources. The Pachakutik movement is loosely affiliated with the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE), the leading national organization representing indigenous groups.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

Ecuador has long been racked by corruption, and the weak judiciary and lack of investigative capacity in government oversight agencies contribute to an environment of impunity. Investigations into alleged corruption fall under the jurisdiction of the government's Office of Transparency and Social Control (FTCS), created under the 2008 constitution. In 2013, the agency launched a national plan aimed at eradicating corruption by 2017. The FTCS investigated 21 cases of corruption in 2015, though the budget for investigating such cases decreased by about 50 percent. In July, a corruption scandal involving the nation's police force resulted in the resignation of police commander Fausto Tamayo. In November, PAIS assembly member María Esperanza Galván was sentenced to three years in prison for eliciting bribes from government contractors.

Ecuador was ranked 107 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 35/ 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

Ecuador remained a hostile environment for freedom of expression in 2015. The press watchdog Fundamedios reported 377 cases of verbal, physical, or legal harassment against journalists during the year. Correa continued to use national broadcasts to castigate opposition leaders. The government also made use of its unlimited access to public service airtime to interrupt news programming on privately owned stations for the purpose of discrediting journalists.

After suing Correa for his response to a 2010 police revolt, opposition assembly member Cléver Jiménez and journalist Fernando Villavicencio were convicted of defamation in 2013 and received a reduced sentence of 12 months in 2014. They remained in hiding until changes to Ecuador's penal code allowed their convictions to expire in March 2015.

Ecuador's controversial Organic Law on Communications, approved by the National Assembly in 2013, has faced strong criticism from international press freedom groups and

human rights commissions for overly broad restrictions on the media. Among other provisions, the legislation created powerful regulatory bodies with little independence from the executive, placed excessive controls on journalistic content, and imposed onerous obligations on journalists and media outlets, such as barring reporters from working unless they hold degrees from accredited institutions. The law also employs vague language that could be used to censor critical reporting, prohibiting “media lynching” and “character assassination.” The former extends to investigative reporting, while the latter covers the dissemination of any information that could undermine the prestige of an individual or institution. The Constitutional Court upheld the law in 2014, rejecting a challenge by opposition politicians and civil society groups. According to Fundamedios, 161 sanctions to journalists and media outlets have been issued under the law. Separately, the independent daily *El Universo* has been subject to a series of fines, most recently in June 2015, when the media regulator ordered it to pay \$350,000 for refusing to publish the full response of the Ministry of Communications to an article that had appeared in the newspaper.

A new criminal code approved in 2013 contains potential restrictions on freedom of expression, including provisions penalizing the propagation of information that could erode equality, the unauthorized dissemination of personal information, the publication of false news that could affect the economy, and the defense of someone sentenced for a crime. The new code also retained existing libel and terrorism clauses. The constitutional reform package approved in December included a provision to make communications a “public service,” which gives the government broad regulatory powers over the media.

Critical content published online has been subject to increasing pressure from the government in recent years. The government has employed private firm Ares Rights to force the removal of YouTube videos and Twitter messages that are critical of the government on grounds of copyright infringement. In 2015, Twitter suspended the accounts of several government critics without explanation, including opposition assembly member Lourdes Tibán. In February, the website *Crudo Ecuador*, which had been critical of the government, closed after its administrator reportedly received death threats. In August, journalist Martín Pallares was fired from *El Comercio* for violating the newspaper’s policies by criticizing the government on Twitter.

Freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed and is generally respected in practice. Academic freedom is likewise unrestricted. Crackdowns on social media have led some online outlets to disable sections for public commentary for fear of reprisal. The government has also hired private firms for the monitoring of online content, and figures in the government have sued individuals for remarks made on social media, limiting free private discussion online.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12

Numerous protests occur throughout the country without incident, including widespread protests over the 2015 constitutional amendments. However, national security legislation that predates the Correa administration provides a broad definition of sabotage and terrorism, extending to acts against persons and property by unarmed individuals. The use of such charges against protesters has increased under Correa. According to Human Rights Watch, delays in the appeals process of sabotage and terrorism cases are likely the result of political pressure.

Weeks of national protests in August over indigenous rights left more than 100 injured, including civilians and police personnel. Human Rights Watch condemned the police use of excessive force and arbitrary detentions in response to the protests.

While the right to organize civic groups and unions is provided for by law, domestic and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have come under increasing government scrutiny and regulation. A 2013 presidential decree, codified in August 2015, introduced onerous requirements for forming an NGO, granted officials broad authority to dissolve organizations, and obliged NGOs to register all members. Critics contended that the decree violated international standards, and activists challenged its constitutionality in Ecuadorian courts. The government closed Fundamedios on September 8, 2015, after invoking the decree in January 2014 to seize control of the media watchdog. After strong international and domestic pressure, the decision was reversed on September 25, though the government ordered Fundamedios to stop interfering in political issues.

A 2011 presidential decree used broad language to limit the scope of foreign-sponsored NGOs, forbidding activities “incompatible with public security and peace,” among other things. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) left Ecuador in 2013 after the government denied it permission to renew existing programs or begin new activities.

Private-sector labor unions have the right to strike, though the labor code limits public-sector strikes. The December 2015 constitutional amendments limit public sector collective bargaining. There are more labor unions in the public than in the private sector. It is estimated that only a small portion of the general workforce is unionized, partly because many people work in the informal sector. Under the 2013 criminal code, public servants who “impede, suspend, or obstruct the execution of a law or regulation” may face sentences of one to three years in prison.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

As established under a 2011 reform, Ecuador’s highest-ranking judicial bodies are the 21-member National Court of Justice and the nine-member Constitutional Court. Opposition members and foreign experts expressed concern about the pronounced lack of transparency in the appointment process for the National Court of Justice, and the Constitutional Court has likewise faced criticism because members of the selection committee are closely aligned with the government. The system used by the Council of Popular Participation to vet candidates for the attorney general, appointed in 2011, was similarly criticized for its lack of transparency.

Judicial processes remain slow, with many inmates reaching the time limit for pretrial detention while their cases are still under investigation. Overcrowding plagues the prison system, and torture and ill-treatment of detainees and prisoners are widespread. The 2013 criminal code introduced more restrictive rules on pretrial detention, penalties for specific crimes such as hired killings, and tougher sentences for existing offenses. The government maintains strict visitation protocols for inmates’ families.

Indigenous people continue to suffer discrimination at many levels of society. In the Amazon region, indigenous groups have attempted to win a share of oil revenues and a voice in decisions on natural resources and development. The government, however, has steadfastly refused the claims of indigenous inhabitants, maintaining that development of protected land is a matter of national interest. Those who continue to campaign against the government often face harassment or violence. In August 2015, amid a nationwide protest against the government, indigenous leaders Salvador Quishpe and Carlos Pérez were imprisoned while demonstrating in downtown Quito and subsequently released. Pérez’s partner, Brazilian journalist Manuela Picq, had to leave the country after the government canceled her visa on the grounds that she had violated its terms by participating in the protest. Critics denounced the move as politically motivated.

Ecuador is the largest recipient of refugees in Latin America. A 2015 report by the UN Refugee Agency asserted that Ecuador needed to better uphold the right of asylum and to fight discrimination against refugees.

The government has shown some responsiveness in upholding the rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. The constitution includes the right to decide one's sexual orientation, and discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited by law. Nevertheless, LGBT individuals continue to face discriminatory treatment.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Freedom of movement outside and inside the country is largely unrestricted. Individuals can determine their place and type of employment. There has been some controversy over entrance to public institutions of higher education since the government introduced a nationwide examination and reorganized admission procedures.

Citizens have the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue influence by nonstate actors. While there may be delays due to red tape, Ecuador's business environment is close to the regional average, according to the World Bank's 2016 *Doing Business* report. A 2011 referendum, followed by an antimonopoly law, prevents asset holders in private financial institutions or private companies in the communications sector from simultaneously holding stakes outside each of these sectors.

Employment discrimination is common. The government has taken steps to protect women's rights through public campaigns and legal measures. The 2013 criminal code included femicide as a crime carrying penalties of up to 26 years in prison, and sexual harassment is punished with up to two years in prison. Since the code went into effect, the number of reported family violence cases rose significantly, registering a high of 3,748 from August 10 to December 31 of 2014 according to the Prosecutor's Office. The National Institute for Statistics and Censuses 2011 Survey on Gender Violence reported that 6 out of every 10 women have suffered from some form of gender violence; one in four of those has been subjected to sexual violence, though the most prevalent form of gender violence is psychological. The constitution does not provide for same-sex marriage, but civil unions are recognized. Impoverished, indigenous, and Afro-Ecuadorians as well as Colombian migrants are the most vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor in Ecuador.

Egypt

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 89,074,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Cairo

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi continued to wield both executive and legislative powers in 2015, with no elected legislature in place since the July 2013 coup against then president

Mohamed Morsi, which also dissolved the parliament. Legislative elections were finally held in late 2015 following a brief and tightly managed campaign period. The new, overwhelmingly progovernment parliament was scheduled to hold its first session in early 2016.

The government harshly restricted dissent and assembly by activists from across the political spectrum during the year. The media were also targeted, with authorities harassing and sometimes jailing journalists who reported on political opposition of any kind.

An armed insurgency based in the Sinai Peninsula continued to grow. In July, the state of emergency and nighttime curfew in Northern Sinai were extended for the third time following sophisticated attacks by a local affiliate of the Syria-based Islamic State (IS) militant group. Authorities also continued to demolish homes near the border with the Gaza Strip in an effort to halt the flow of weapons and militants through the area.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 9 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12 (+ 1)

In July 2013, following massive protests calling for the resignation of elected president Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the armed forces overthrew Morsi, suspended the constitution, and dissolved the upper house of parliament. The military—led by Sisi, then the armed forces commander and defense minister—installed a nominally civilian interim government but remained heavily involved in the political system. The courts had already dissolved the FJP-dominated lower house of parliament in 2012.

A new constitution was adopted by referendum under tightly controlled conditions in January 2014. The document nominally improved protections for women's rights, freedom of expression, and other civil liberties. However, these rights have not been enforced in practice, and the charter suffers from significant flaws, including an expansion of police and military autonomy and a provision allowing military trials of civilians.

With the new constitution in place, a presidential election was held in May 2014. Sisi resigned his post as head of the armed forces to stand as a candidate, and garnered more than 95 percent of the vote against a single opponent, leftist politician Hamdeen Sabbahi. However, no independent international monitors were able to verify the results. The vote was also marred by low turnout, the use of state resources to support Sisi's candidacy, voter intimidation, and arrests and assaults of poll monitors. With no legislature in place following his election, President Sisi ruled by decree.

Scheduled elections for a new, unicameral parliament were repeatedly delayed. In March 2015, the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) ruled that some articles in the electoral law were unconstitutional, but the government did not amend the provisions until July. The amendments increased the number of seats filled through two-round elections in single-member districts from 420 to 448, or 75 percent of the total. The number of seats allocated through party-list voting, with the leading bloc in each of four multimember districts winning all the seats in that district, remained the same at 120, as did the number of seats reserved for presidential appointees at 28. Also in July, Sisi abrogated a decree passed by former interim president Adli Mansour that required the SCC to rule on challenges to the constitutionality of election-related laws within five days of hearing the case. Critics warned that the move would allow the court to deem a parliament unconstitutional well after it is seated.

Parliamentary elections ultimately took place in two stages from October to December 2015, again featuring low turnout, intimidation, and abuse of state resources. The progovernment coalition For the Love of Egypt, consisting of some 10 parties, won all 120 bloc-vote seats. Independents, a number of whom were aligned with the coalition, won 351 of

the constituency seats, and the coalition parties' candidates generally outpolled their rivals in the remaining districts. Just three parties outside For the Love of Egypt won more than 10 seats: Protectors of the Homeland (18), the Republican People's Party (13), and Al-Nour (11). Many parties boycotted the elections and voiced serious reservations about their fairness, accusing security forces of harassment and intimidation. Groups that joined the boycott included two moderate Islamist parties, Al-Wasat and the Strong Egypt Party, and Egypt Awakening, a coalition of liberal and leftist parties. The FJP remained banned due to its affiliation with the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Nour, a Salafist party, was the only major Islamist group to participate in the elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 4 / 16

The government systematically persecutes opposition parties and political movements, disrupting their operations and constraining their ability to organize. Large numbers of Muslim Brotherhood members and supporters, including nearly all of the organization's senior leadership and Morsi himself, were arrested following the coup, and arrests continued through 2015. Civil society organizations estimate that as many as 40,000 people were being detained for political reasons as of 2015, most of them for real or suspected links to the Muslim Brotherhood. Authorities declared the Brotherhood a terrorist organization in December 2013, which allowed them to charge anyone participating in a pro-Morsi demonstration with terrorism and laid the foundation for the complete political isolation of the Islamist opposition.

The government has also persecuted non-Islamist critics and parties. In September 2015, the socialist Bread and Freedom Party alleged that interference by state security forces prevented it from legally registering. Alaa Abdel Fattah, perhaps Egypt's best-known secular activist, was sentenced to five years in prison in February for violating a highly restrictive law on public protests. The April 6 movement, one of the prodemocracy groups that catalyzed the January 2011 uprising against longtime authoritarian president Hosni Mubarak, was banned in 2014. The government detained the group's general coordinator, Amr Ali, in September 2015 in what was initially believed to be a forced disappearance. Ali was later confirmed to be in the notorious Tora prison, where he remained at year's end without formal charges.

Since the 2013 coup, the military has dominated the political system. The new constitution increased the military's independence from civilian oversight, including through the selection process for the post of defense minister, who must be a military officer. President Sisi, a former general, has ruled in a style that entrenches military privilege and shields the armed forces from accountability for their actions.

The new constitution banned parties based on religion, though a number of Islamist parties continue to operate in a precarious political and legal position. Coptic Christians, who account for some 10 percent of the population, are allocated 24 of the parliament's 120 party-list seats, and the 2015 election results indicate that their representation is almost entirely dependent on this quota system. The Coptic Church leadership has allied itself with President Sisi since the coup, apparently to ensure the security of its constituents. The party-list quotas also set aside small numbers of seats for women, workers and farmers, people under 35, people with disabilities, and Egyptians living abroad.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

Corruption is pervasive at all levels of government. Egypt was ranked 88 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Official mechanisms for investigating and punishing corrupt behavior remain very weak, and the major prosecutions that began after Mubarak's ouster in 2011 have faltered since the 2013 coup. In May 2015, Mubarak was deemed to have completed a three-year sentence for embezzlement, though he remained confined to a military hospital and still faced retrial in another case at year's end. In October, a court ordered the release of Mubarak's two sons with time served for their own corruption sentences, but separate charges against them for insider trading remained pending.

There were several notable convictions in corruption cases in 2015. In July, Mubarak-era prime minister Ahmad Nazif was sentenced to five years in prison, fined \$7 million, and ordered to return more than \$6 million in state funds. In September, another Mubarak regime figure, former housing minister Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman, was sentenced to three years in prison and ordered to pay millions of dollars in fines and restitution to the state. Also in September, Agriculture Minister Salah Helal was arrested on corruption charges and forced to resign.

Although noteworthy, such high-profile prosecutions remain exceptional in a climate of general impunity. In July, Sisi issued a decree granting the president the power to dismiss the heads of state auditing bodies, further undermining their independence.

As with its predecessors, the Sisi administration has offered very little transparency regarding government spending and operations. The International Budget Partnership gave Egypt a score of 16 out of 100 for budget transparency in its most recent assessment. The government missed key deadlines for finalizing the budget in 2015, which was approved without input from civil society or the public at large. The military is notoriously opaque with respect to its own extensive business interests, including in major projects like the "New Suez Canal," and regarding multibillion-dollar arms deals with various foreign powers.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 18 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16

Military authorities shut down virtually all Islamist and opposition media outlets following the 2013 coup and pressured others if they carried any critical coverage of the new government. As a result, state media and most surviving private outlets strongly support Sisi and the military.

Official censorship and self-censorship remained widespread in 2015. The Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, an Egyptian rights organization, documented 172 press freedom violations in the first half of the year, including censorship and physical abuse. Arrests of journalists on dubious charges continued, and media workers had increasing difficulty accessing or reporting on the Sinai. Although the three Al-Jazeera journalists sentenced in 2014 to at least seven years in prison were eventually freed or pardoned in 2015, the Committee to Protect Journalists found that 23 journalists remained behind bars as of December 2015, making Egypt second only to China for the number of reporters detained.

State interference in the publication and circulation of newspapers persisted during the year. In August, *Al-Mesryoon*, *Al-Sabah*, and *Sawt al-Ummah* were stopped from publishing issues or had issues destroyed before distribution due to state objections to their content. Civil society activists also criticized the regular issuance of gag orders preventing news outlets from covering sensitive legal cases.

A draft cybercrime law circulated in April 2015 was denounced by civil society groups for using vague language that could criminalize dissent online under the pretext of fighting

legitimate offenses such as hacking. The law would impose a life sentence without the possibility of parole if the purpose of the crime is to disrupt public order, jeopardize citizen safety, or harm national unity and social peace. The law was approved by the cabinet in May, but it had not been approved by Sisi or implemented by year's end.

Islam is the state religion, and most Egyptians are Sunni Muslims. Coptic Christians form a substantial minority, and there are very small numbers of Jews, Shiite Muslims, atheists, and Baha'is. The 2014 constitution made the right to freedom of religion "absolute" and was well received by religious minorities, though little has changed in practice since the document's adoption. Abuses against Copts continued in 2015, with numerous cases of forced displacement, physical assaults, bomb and arson attacks, and blocking of church construction. Christians were also arrested on charges of proselytizing, and similar allegations against Shiites led to the closure of a charity and the arrest of an activist.

Academic freedom has suffered since the 2013 coup. Despite a ban on political protests, universities have been a center of antigovernment demonstrations and the target of government crackdowns. In January 2015, Sisi issued a decree that allowed for the dismissal of university professors who engage in on-campus political activity.

Private discussion has become more guarded in the face of vigilantism and increased monitoring of social media for critical content. Media personalities have called on the public to inform on anyone they suspect of undermining the state, and some arrests have reportedly stemmed from overheard conversations in public places. Social-media users have faced arrest or prosecution for alleged offenses ranging from blasphemy to inciting protests or opposing the government online.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are tightly restricted. A November 2013 decree gave police great leeway to ban and forcibly disperse gatherings of 10 or more people. The law also prohibits all protests at places of worship and requires protest organizers to inform police at least three days in advance. Protests against the government were mounted throughout 2015, but they often ended in violent clashes with police and local residents, and police repeatedly used excessive force. On the anniversary of the 2011 uprising in January, authorities responded to Islamist demonstrations with tear gas and live ammunition, resulting in at least 23 deaths and 516 arrests, according to the government.

The 2002 Law on Associations grants the government sweeping powers over nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including the ability to shut down the groups, confiscate their funding, and block nominations to their governing boards. Individuals working with unregistered groups face prison terms. The government has in the past permitted NGOs to operate without registration, enforcing the law selectively. Under a 2014 decree, members of NGOs who use foreign funding to commit acts that "harm the national interest" face life imprisonment and fines of 500,000 Egyptian pounds (\$56,000). If an offender is a public servant or committed the violation for the purposes of terrorism, he or she could face the death penalty. Egyptian NGOs faced harassment in the form of office raids, arrests of members, and restrictions on travel throughout 2015. Hundreds of NGOs were shut down and had their assets confiscated due to alleged connections to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Strikes played a significant role in the 2011 uprising, and workers formed two independent union federations in 2011 and 2013, ending the long-standing monopoly of a state-allied federation. Strikes continued amid ongoing economic problems in 2015, with more than 1,100 labor protests reported, though this marked a decline from previous years. Authorities responded to the actions with raids, arrests, and intimidation. In April, a high-level court ruled that any government employee who participates in strikes or sit-ins would be forced into retirement; the decision was overturned in December.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

The Supreme Judicial Council, a supervisory body of senior judges, nominates most members of the judiciary. However, the Justice Ministry plays a key role in assignments and transfers, giving it undue influence over the courts. Judges played a leading role in the drafting of the 2014 constitution, which significantly enhanced the judiciary's autonomy, including by allowing each major judicial entity to receive its budget as a single line item and permitting the SCC to appoint its own chairman.

A number of criminal cases in 2015 featured severe violations of due process and demonstrated a high degree of politicization in the court system, which typically resulted in harsh punishments for perceived enemies of the government. At least 538 people were sentenced to death in 2015, including a final sentence for 183 people in a mass trial of alleged Muslim Brotherhood supporters who were accused of killing 11 police officers and two civilians in 2013. At least 22 people were executed during the year.

Although the constitution limits military trials of civilians to crimes directly involving the military, its personnel, or its property, an October 2014 presidential decree placed all "public and vital facilities" under military jurisdiction, resulting in the referral of thousands of civilian defendants to military courts. Charges brought in military courts are often vague or fabricated, defendants are denied due process, and basic evidentiary standards are routinely disregarded.

Police brutality and impunity for abuses by security forces were catalysts for the 2011 uprising, but no reforms have been enacted. Reports of alleged extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances increased markedly in 2015, with estimates among various NGOs ranging from dozens to several hundred cases. Prison conditions are very poor; inmates are subject to torture, overcrowding, and a lack of sanitation and medical care. An estimate based on media reports found more than 600 cases of torture and 137 people killed in detention in 2015. A highly controversial August 2015 antiterrorism law provided a vague definition for terrorism and granted law enforcement personnel sweeping powers and immunity while carrying out their duties.

Egypt was under a state of emergency from 1981 until May 2012, and for three months following the 2013 coup. The Emergency Law grants the government extensive powers of surveillance and detention. A state of emergency and nighttime curfew have been in place since October 2014 in Northern Sinai, with repeated three-month extensions. A decree extending the measures in July 2015 followed coordinated attacks by the region's IS affiliate that killed dozens of soldiers.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face severe persecution, and conditions have grown worse under the Sisi regime. While same-sex sexual activity is not explicitly banned, LGBT people have been charged with prostitution or debauchery. In January 2015, a court acquitted 26 men of debauchery charges after they were arrested in a televised raid on a Cairo bathhouse in late 2014. New raids and arrests were reported over the course of 2015.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

Freedom of movement and property rights were severely affected by the government's counterinsurgency efforts in the Sinai in 2015. In addition to the curfew, checkpoints, and other travel restrictions, the military has summarily demolished buildings in the town of Rafah to create a buffer zone along the border with the Gaza Strip, displacing thousands of families and destroying over 3,000 homes and other structures as of late 2015. Authorities also pumped seawater into smuggling tunnels in the area, raising health and environmental concerns.

The Sisi regime has periodically denied entry to foreign scholars or activists, and detained Egyptian dissidents or journalists when they visited the country from abroad or sought to leave. Among other cases in 2015, officials refused to renew the passport of opposition politician Ayman Nour, who left Egypt after the 2013 coup and was living in Lebanon.

The 2014 constitution clearly affirms the equality of the sexes, but this has not resulted in practical improvements for women. Thanks in large part to quotas, women won 75 seats in the 596-seat parliament in 2015, and another 14 were appointed by the president. Some laws and traditional practices discriminate against women, job discrimination is common, and Muslim women are disadvantaged by personal status laws. Domestic violence is widespread, and spousal rape is not illegal. Other problems include forced marriages and high rates of female genital mutilation or cutting.

Violence against women has surfaced in new ways since 2011, particularly as women have participated in demonstrations and faced increased levels of sexual violence in public. A 2014 decree criminalized sexual harassment, with prison terms of up to five years, as part of a national strategy to combat violence against women. Critics argued that the law was inadequate and the strategy was failing, citing a lack of protection for witnesses, continued cases of group sexual harassment in public, and harassment by police officers, which deters women from reporting crimes.

Egyptian women and children, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, and increasingly Syrian refugees are vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking in Egypt. The Egyptian authorities routinely punish individuals for offenses that stemmed directly from their circumstances as trafficking victims.

El Salvador

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 6,366,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: San Salvador

Freedom Rating: 2.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Trend Arrow: El Salvador received a downward trend arrow due to flaws in the 2015 legislative elections and increasing criminal violence, including threats against journalists, teachers, and the general public.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F

INTRODUCTION

After an intense campaign focused on security and economic challenges, March legislative election results were split between the formerly dominant Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA). A complex new system for allocating seats contributed to delays in finalizing the tally.

Violence increased dramatically in 2015 as a result of conflict involving the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), the Barrio 18 gang, other criminal elements, and the country's security

forces. The increased violence has affected nearly every facet of Salvadoran political, social, and economic life. With a tally of 6,650 murders—compared to 3,912 in 2014—El Salvador ended 2015 with the world’s highest homicide rate.

The Salvadoran government continued to support a variety of initiatives to confront security problems in 2015 while distancing itself from a previous policy of dialogue with gangs.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 33 / 40 (–2)

A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12 (–2)

El Salvador’s president is elected for a five-year term. The 84-member, unicameral Legislative Assembly is elected for three years. Three candidates contended for the presidency in 2014: former guerilla Salvador Sánchez Cerén of the incumbent FMLN, Norman Quijano of ARENA, and former president Antonio Saca of the Grand Alliance for National Unity (GANU). Cerén defeated Quijano in a very close runoff held in March. Turnout was 60 percent. Although Quijano accused the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) of fraud, domestic and international observers considered the elections free and fair.

In March 2015 legislative elections, ARENA won a total of 35 seats, 32 on its own and 3 in coalition with the National Coalition Party (PCN); the PCN and the Christian Democratic Party (PDC), which also had a coalition bloc, won an additional 3 seats. The FMLN won 31 seats, and its traditional partner GANA took 11; the National Reconciliation Party won 4. Turnout was 48 percent. Technical problems that prevented the transmission of voting results to election headquarters delayed final vote tallies and the seating of the new legislature in May. A monitoring mission from the Organization of American States (OAS) declared the vote broadly transparent and free, though it pointed out difficulties in the counting of votes and transmission of results. Some vote buying was alleged in rural areas. Candidates from San Salvador disputed the results, prompting the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court to call for an unprecedented recount that did not affect the results but delayed the seating of 24 deputies.

In November 2014, three months before the election, the Constitutional Chamber ruled that voters could cast ballots for candidates from more than one political party (cross-voting); previously, voters selected a party rather than individual candidates. The OAS questioned whether the date of the decision allowed sufficient time for parties to adapt before the election. The Constitutional Chamber continued to issue decisions on voting rules as late as a week prior to the election, prompting accusations by the FMLN that the chamber’s conservative majority was purposefully generating confusion that would disproportionately harm ruling-party candidates. Municipal council seats are now filled via proportional representation. Residential voting was extended to the entire country for the first time in the 2015 legislative and municipal elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

Since the end of the civil war in 1992, FMLN and ARENA have been the country’s two largest political parties, though there is significant support for GANA. In 2014, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ruled that *transfuguismo*—the practice whereby deputies abandon the parties with which they are elected—was unconstitutional.

Some Salvadorans continue to express concern that foreign governments and multinational corporations exert excessive influence over decisions made by local and national government officials.

The newly elected legislature included no members who identified themselves as representatives of ethnic minorities or indigenous groups, nor do these populations hold high-level government positions. A 2013 statute requires that 30 percent of all legislative and municipal candidates be women.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

The Constitutional Chamber delayed the swearing in of the legislature to wait for a ballot recount, leading FMLN legislators to accuse the court of implementing a partisan agenda intended to favor the country's right wing.

El Salvador was ranked 72 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Corruption continues to be a serious problem, and few high-level public officials have been charged or convicted.

Salvadoran authorities are making limited progress in their prosecution of government officials with alleged ties to organized crime and other criminal elements. In September, a former colonel was arrested on multiple weapons possession and arms trafficking charges. In October, the Supreme Court of Justice for the first time ordered an investigation into a sitting congressman, Reynaldo López Cardoza, on allegations of illicit enrichment. Despite these cases, the vast majority of crimes still go unpunished.

The Legislative Assembly passed a controversial Law on Integrity in December that requires public officials to declare their assets. The president signed the law later that month. Critics claimed the law failed to create a comprehensive framework to control corruption.

Journalists have condemned the government for failing to comply with an Access to Public Information Law passed in 2011 and regularly refusing to disclose information, often by citing supposed security concerns.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 36 / 60 (-4)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16 (-3)

The constitution provides for freedom of the press, and while this right is generally respected in practice, harassment following coverage of corruption and gang violence has increasingly led reporters to engage in self-censorship. For example, *El Faro* journalists were subject to death threats, illegal surveillance, and harassment following two July 2015 reports in which they accused police of abusing suspects in custody and unlawfully killing eight people. In April, President Sánchez accused the media of participating in a "psychological terror campaign" against his government after reporting on violent crime rates in the country. Like other news outlets in the region, the website of *La Prensa Gráfica* was cloned and two fake interviews with its president were published in July.

Salvadoran media are privately owned, but ownership is confined to a small group of powerful businesspeople that manipulate reporting in order to protect their political and economic interests. ARENA-aligned Telecorporación Salvadoreña dominates the market with three of the five private television networks. Online sites such as *El Faro* and *Contrapunto* provide alternative views and investigative reporting. Access to the internet is unrestricted. In recent years, the government and numerous other organizations have started programs to extend internet access to the poor.

The government does not encroach on religious freedom, and academic freedom is respected. However, religious leaders who work with former gang members and are critical of the government's approach to security have been harassed and received death threats. Moreover, gangs' strict enforcement of territorial boundaries has gravely affected the ability

of students and teachers to safely reach schools, and teachers have been increasingly subject to extortion.

There have been no recent reports of extralegal surveillance or government interference in private discussions or communications. However, given the prevalence of gang activity throughout the country, Salvadorans take precautions when discussing matters of public security outside their homes in order to minimize the risk of retaliation. In August, the Legislative Assembly began to consider a proposal that would expand the surveillance power of the Attorney General's Office; critics fear that the law will infringe upon citizens' right to privacy and be used against political opponents.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are generally upheld, and public protests have been permitted without obstruction. El Salvador's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate freely, though some have reported difficulties with registration. Labor unions have long faced obstacles in a legal environment that has traditionally favored business interests. In 2015, the Labor Court ruled five strikes illegal, though no arrests were made during the strikes.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16

El Salvador's judicial system remains weak and is plagued by corruption and obstructionism. In 2015, the left argued that some judicial decisions—like the constitutional chamber's decision to delay the seating of the legislature pending a vote recount—were partisan. Justice system officials have frequently been accused of brutality, corruption, and arbitrary arrest. In November, police issued arrest warrants for 12 former judges, prosecutors, and lawyers on charges of money laundering and corruption. Among them were three antimafia judges already under investigation for accepting bribes in exchange for favoring certain criminal defendants. As of December 2015, the Supreme Court had expelled or suspended at least four judges in connection with these cases, and prosecutions were proceeding.

Over 80 police officers and military personnel were killed, presumably by gang members, in 2015, and several car bombs exploded or were deactivated during the year. Current and former gang members make up 40 percent of the country's prison population, which continues to exceed capacity by 300 percent. Prisoners held on pretrial detention account for more than 25 percent of inmates. At least 31 inmates were murdered as of mid-October, while 27 prison employees were arrested on corruption charges during the year.

In terms of homicides per capita, El Salvador is one of the most violent countries in the world; homicides increased more than 70 percent from 2014 to 2015. The country has been on the U.S. list of "major" drug producing and transit countries since 2011, and the government has been criticized for not cracking down on organized crime, gangs, and drug trafficking networks more aggressively. In 2015, death squads wearing security force uniforms killed more than a dozen gang members, with no investigation or prosecutions for these extrajudicial killings.

A 2010 law criminalized gang membership, and despite offers of concessions from gang leaders there has been no movement toward repeal of the measure. In 2015, a security council comprised of both state and civil society actors considered a law offering benefits to gang members who choose to leave their gangs. In August, the Supreme Court upheld the October 2006 Special Law Against Acts of Terrorism, which allowed street gangs and those who finance them to be treated as terrorists and expanded the use of wiretaps and the

freezing of funds. According to one report, 1,312 gang members were charged with terrorism in 2015, including 304 who enforced a July bus boycott that resulted in the assassination of eight motorists.

Salvadoran law and a 1993 general amnesty bar prosecution of crimes and human rights violations committed during the civil war; the authorities have faced criticism from NGOs and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for failing to adequately investigate such crimes.

Article 63 of the constitution, ratified in 2014, recognizes indigenous peoples and pledges the state to adopt policies supporting maintenance of indigenous and cultural identity, values, and spirituality. However, no public policies or laws have been designed to advance this recognition. Along with poverty, unemployment, and labor discrimination, indigenous people also face challenges with regard to land rights and access to credit.

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is widespread in El Salvador, despite being prohibited by law. According to a local NGO, 18 transgender women were murdered in 2015, and rights groups have condemned officials for failing to adequately investigate such murders. In September, the Legislative Assembly approved legislation increasing penalties for hate crimes based on gender expression or sexual orientation.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16 (– 1)

Freedom of travel within El Salvador has been complicated by the government's inability to control mounting gang violence. The MS-13 and Barrio 18 gangs each control certain neighborhoods, making it extremely dangerous for citizens to travel, work, and live freely throughout the country. One report estimated that approximately 13,000 Salvadorans were internally displaced in 2014, in addition to thousands who fled to the United States. Approximately 70,000 children dropped out of school for fear of crime in 2014, and at least 72 students were murdered traveling between home and school as of November. Businesses and private citizens are subject to extortion by organized criminal groups on a regular basis. Gang threats and the murders of several bus drivers shut down the country's transportation system in July.

Canadian gold mining firm Pacific Rim is suing El Salvador for \$315 million for the country's failure to issue permits for gold extraction. Environmental advocates are concerned that the mining could jeopardize the country's water supply.

Women are granted equal rights under the constitution, but they are often subject to discrimination in employment and other areas. Abortion is punishable by imprisonment even when the life of the mother is at risk, and some women have been sent to jail despite credible claims that their pregnancies ended in miscarriage and not abortion. The constitutional chamber affirmed in 2013 that the "rights of the mother cannot be privileged over the fetus." Fifteen of the so-called Las 17—women who served jail time for pregnancy-related crimes—are still in prison. Violence against women, including domestic violence, is a serious problem.

In April, El Salvador's legislature granted preliminary approval to constitutional reforms that would ban same-sex marriage and adoption, but a two-thirds majority is required for the reforms to go into effect. In previous years, similar measures had failed to pass.

Despite government efforts, El Salvador remains a source, transit, and destination country for the trafficking of women and children for the purposes of prostitution and forced labor. Gangs often force children into trafficking and selling drugs, and migrants traveling

from or through El Salvador can fall victim to sex and labor trafficking rings. Corruption among public officials has stymied efforts to dismantle sex trafficking operations.

Equatorial Guinea

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 805,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Capital: Malabo

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo reshuffled his cabinet in April 2015. While he said the changes were meant to punish corrupt behavior and ensure implementation of austerity measures amid low oil prices, the move was seen by some observers as part of an ongoing effort to reduce the threat of a palace coup. Obiang promoted his eldest son, Teodorín “Teodorín” Nguema Obiang Mangué, to colonel in the army in August, adding to suspicions that Teodorín was being groomed to succeed his father. He also served as second vice president for defense and national security, a position that does not exist in the constitution.

Equatorial Guinea hosted the Africa Cup of Nations soccer tournament in January and February. Three individuals were arrested for distributing or possessing leaflets calling for a boycott of the event, but they were later released under international pressure.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 1 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

President Obiang, Africa’s longest-serving head of state and the leader of Equatorial Guinea since 1979, maintains an absolute grip on political and economic power in the country. He was credited with 95.4 percent of the vote in 2009, and as of 2015 he was expected to run in the next presidential election in 2016.

Under constitutional reforms approved in a 2011 referendum, Equatorial Guinea replaced its unicameral system with a bicameral parliament consisting of a 75-seat Senate and a 100-seat Chamber of Deputies. Fifteen senators are appointed by the president and five are ex officio members. Parliamentary and municipal elections were held in 2013. Obiang’s Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE) won 54 of the 55 contested Senate seats, 99 of the 100 seats in the lower house, and all but five of the local council seats. The remainder went to the Convergence for Social Democracy (CPDS), one of two opposition parties that independently competed in the elections.

The voting was held amid widespread reports of irregularities and intimidation of opposition members, and independent monitoring was very limited. Equatorial Guinea does not have an independent electoral body; the National Election Commission is led by the country’s interior minister, a prominent PDGE figure.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16

The regime keeps the country's small political opposition under strict control. The CPDS, the primary opposition party, is routinely denied access to the media. Ten other officially recognized parties are aligned with the PDGE. Campaign funds mandated by the constitution are regularly delayed. The regime's politicized control of the media, judiciary, police, and military make it difficult for new opposition groups to take hold within the country.

Following a November 2014 national dialogue with both recognized and unrecognized political parties, the government agreed to facilitate multiparty politics by relaxing existing rules for creating and registering parties, among other changes. Several laws were consequently enacted during 2015, and at least two new parties were reportedly registered, but it remained unclear whether the reforms would have a substantial effect on the environment for the 2016 presidential election. Opposition figures continued to face arbitrary detentions and other forms of harassment in 2015.

The ethnic Fang majority—and the president's family and regional group in particular—dominates political life in Equatorial Guinea, leaving minority groups with little influence.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

Despite Obiang's public statements of commitment to democracy and good governance, movement toward these goals has been almost nonexistent, and graft is rampant. The government is marked by nepotism. While Teodorín has served as second vice president since 2012, another of Obiang's sons, Gabriel Mbega Obiang Lima, is the oil minister.

Teodorín remains the focus of a formal investigation into money-laundering allegations launched by France in March 2014. In December 2015, a French court denied a request for the charges to be dropped on the grounds of diplomatic immunity. Separately, in October 2014, the U.S. Justice Department announced a settlement with Teodorín that required him to hand over assets worth approximately \$30 million gained through "bribes and kickbacks."

The budget process is opaque, and even the most basic information is difficult to find. The government has spent lavishly on selected infrastructure projects in recent years, including the controversial, ongoing construction of a new national capital, Oyala, on the mainland; the site is located just west of Mongomo, the ancestral home of Obiang and most of the rest of the political elite.

Equatorial Guinea is the third-largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa and has the continent's highest per capita income, though most of the population lives below the poverty line, and low global oil prices have put pressure on the state budget and economy. The government generally negotiates directly with companies for oil concessions rather than awarding them on a competitive basis. The country was delisted from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative in 2010, having failed to meet the requirements for validation.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 7 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16**

Press freedom is severely limited, despite constitutional protections. Journalists consistently exercise self-censorship, and those who do criticize the president, his family, or the security forces face dismissal and other reprisals. The websites of opposition parties and exile groups, along with Facebook, were blocked, presumably by the government, ahead of the 2013 elections. Libel remains a criminal offense. The handful of private newspapers

and magazines in operation face intense financial and political pressure and are unable to publish regularly. The government on occasion imposes news blackouts about foreign events such as the 2014 ouster of longtime Burkina Faso president Blaise Compaoré. Online versions of Spanish newspapers are regularly blocked, especially *El País*. About 21 percent of the population has access to the internet.

In February 2015, two journalists at the only private broadcaster, Asonga, were dismissed for allegedly sharing their reports with foreign media. Asonga is owned by Teodorín. At least one journalist was arrested in March for covering university protests, and others who did so were fired. In July, government officials issued a warning to a national television reporter after the station covered a fuel shortage at the national oil company.

The constitution protects religious freedom, though in practice it is sometimes affected by the country's broader political repression. Academic freedom is politically constrained, and self-censorship among faculty is common. There have been reports of university professors and teachers losing their positions due to their political affiliations.

Freedom of private discussion is limited. The government reportedly uses informants and electronic surveillance to monitor members of the opposition, nongovernmental organizations, and journalists, including the few members of the foreign press in the country.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Freedom of association and assembly are severely restricted, making it difficult for civil society groups and trade unions to operate. No independent human rights groups are legally represented in the country. Associations and political parties are required to register with the government through an onerous process. Opposition assemblies are typically blocked, and citizens are sometimes pressured to attend progovernment rallies.

In March 2015, students at the National University of Equatorial Guinea mounted a protest over a reduction in stipends and the opaque manner in which the recipients were selected. After several hours, security forces stormed the campus, sprayed tear gas, and arrested 56 students. The detainees were held without charges and released after 12 days.

The constitution provides for the right to organize unions, but many legal barriers exist to collective bargaining. While it has ratified key International Labour Organization conventions, the government has refused to register a number of trade unions. The country's only legal labor union is the Unionized Organization of Small Farmers.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The judiciary is not independent, and judges in sensitive cases often consult with the office of the president before issuing a ruling. Under the constitution, the president is the nation's first magistrate. He is also in charge of the body that appoints judges.

The government continued its practice of arbitrary arrests and detentions without trial in 2015, often holding prisoners incommunicado. Torture and excessive force by the police occur routinely, and graft is endemic in the security forces. Military justice operates under a system dating to General Francisco Franco's rule in Spain (Equatorial Guinea was a Spanish colony until 1968), and civilians may face trial in military courts for certain offenses.

Prisons, several of which are located on military bases, are overcrowded and feature harsh conditions, including beatings and denial of medical care. In one high-profile case, Italian businessman Roberto Berardi, who was released in July 2015 after more than two years in prison, reported torture and other forms of abuse against himself and fellow inmates. Berardi, a former business partner of Teodorín's, had been convicted of theft in a

flawed 2013 trial after a falling out with the president’s son; the authorities were accused of jailing him to suppress information that could be used in foreign corruption cases against Teodorín.

The ethnic Bubi population forms the country’s principal minority group. The Bubi are indigenous to Bioko Island, where the current capital is located, and suffer persistent societal discrimination. Immigrants, including irregular migrants, also make up a significant portion of the population. They are subject to regular raids, physical abuse, and extortion by police.

While discrimination and stigma against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals exist, same-sex sexual activity is not illegal.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 3 / 16

Freedom of movement is protected by law but restricted in practice through measures such as police checkpoints, which often require the payment of bribes. Authorities have also denied opposition members reentry from abroad or restricted their movements within the country. Two opposition leaders were arbitrarily confined to the Mongomo area beginning in March 2015.

Equatorial Guinea has one of the most difficult business environments in the world. Pervasive corruption and onerous bureaucratic procedures serve as major impediments to private business activity, and property rights are poorly protected.

Constitutional and legal guarantees of equality for women are largely ignored, although women won 22 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the 2013 elections. Violence and societal discrimination against women are reportedly widespread. The civil code and customary law put women at a disadvantage with respect to property and inheritance.

Foreign workers in the oil and construction industries are subject to passport confiscation and forced labor. Equatoguinean and foreign women and children are also vulnerable to forced labor, including in the sex trade. Corrupt officials are often complicit in human trafficking, and authorities frequently extort or deport trafficking victims, according to the U.S. State Department.

Eritrea

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 5,200,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Capital: Asmar

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

International pressure increased on Eritrea’s authoritarian government with the publication of a damning report by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in June 2015. The

report concluded that “systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations” were being committed by the government and suggested that some of the abuses could constitute crimes against humanity.

The number of Eritreans attempting to flee repression has reached unprecedented levels. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that 5,000 people made the journey each month during 2015, placing their lives in the hands of people traffickers. Many headed for Europe. According to the European Union (EU), about 37,000 Eritrean refugees claimed asylum in 2014 and more than 12,000 additional refugees claimed asylum in the first half of 2015.

Under increased scrutiny, the regime of President Isaias Afwerki made tentative moves to end Eritrea’s international isolation. Journalists from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) were invited into the country, though their movements were tightly restricted. Talks began with the EU on ways to reduce the flow of migrants out of Eritrea, with an aid package worth 200 million euros (\$227 million) being offered.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 1 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

Following Eritrea’s formal independence from Ethiopia in 1993, a Transitional National Assembly chose Afwerki to serve as president until elections could be held. He has remained in charge ever since. His rule has become harshly authoritarian, particularly since the end of a bloody border war with Ethiopia in 2000.

A new constitution, ratified in 1997, called for “conditional” political pluralism and an elected 150-seat National Assembly, which would choose the president from among its members by a majority vote. This system has never been implemented, and national elections planned for 2001 have been postponed indefinitely.

The Transitional National Assembly comprises 75 members of the ruling party—the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ)—and 75 elected members. In 2004, regional assembly elections were conducted, but they were carefully orchestrated by the PFDJ and offered no real choice to voters.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

Created in 1994, the PFDJ is the only legal political party. The PFDJ and the military are in practice the only institutions of political significance in Eritrea, and both entities are strictly subordinate to the president. While certain ethnic minority groups in Eritrea face discrimination and oppression, members of minority groups do hold positions in the PFDJ, the military, and government.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Corruption is a major problem. The government’s control over foreign exchange effectively gives it sole authority over imports, and those in favor with the regime are allowed to profit from the smuggling and sale of scarce goods such as food, building materials, and alcohol. According to the International Crisis Group, senior military officials have profited from smuggling Eritreans out of the country, allegedly colluding with Sudanese paramilitary groups to capture escaped Eritreans and hold them hostage until their families pay ransom.

The government operates without public scrutiny, and few outside a small clique around the president have any insight into how policy and budget decisions are made or implemented.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 2 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 0 / 16**

The government shut down the independent media in 2001, and controls all broadcasting outlets. However, in 2013 a dissident group began circulating an underground newspaper, *Echoes of Forto*, in Asmara, written by a team based inside and outside the country. The dissidents described the paper as a pilot project, but said they hoped to expand it. The United Nations has described Eritrea as the least connected country in the world. The government controls the internet infrastructure and is thought to monitor online communications, although only about 1 percent of the population can access the medium. Approximately 1 percent of the population has a landline and 7 percent have a mobile-phone subscription. Foreign media are available to those few who can afford a satellite dish. Six journalists from government-controlled Radio Bana station who had been held without charge for almost six years were released in January 2015. However, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) estimated that 17 journalists remained in prison in Eritrea as of December 1, 2015, the highest number in sub-Saharan Africa.

The government places strict limits on the exercise of religion. Since 2002 it has officially recognized only four faiths: Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Lutheranism as practiced by the Evangelical Church of Eritrea. Members of evangelical and Pentecostal churches face persecution. Jehovah's Witnesses are barred from government jobs and refused business permits and identity cards. A UNHRC estimate from April 2015 said that 58 Jehovah's Witnesses were in prison for their beliefs. According to Amnesty International, members of other churches have been jailed and tortured or otherwise ill-treated to make them abandon their faiths. Abune Antonios, patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, has been under house arrest since speaking out against state interference in religion in 2006. The government has also interfered in the practice of Islam, appointing some muftis directly and imposing doctrine. Practicing religion during national military service is banned, including for religious leaders.

Academic freedom is constrained. Students in their last year of secondary school are subject to obligatory military service at Sawa Military Training Center, where conditions are harsh. Academics practice self-censorship and the government interferes with their course content and limits their ability to conduct research abroad. Eritrea's university system is effectively closed, replaced by regional colleges that primarily function as centers for military training and political indoctrination.

Freedom of expression in private discussions is limited. People are guarded in voicing their opinions for fear of being overheard by government informants. The surveillance network extends overseas, where members of the diaspora have faced intimidation and harassment from regime loyalists.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Freedom of assembly and association are not recognized. According to testimony provided to the United Nations, people congregating in groups of more than three or four risk arrest. The government maintains a hostile attitude toward civil society, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are allowed to engage only in humanitarian relief activities. A 2005 law requires NGOs to pay taxes on imported materials, submit project reports every three months, renew their licenses annually, and meet government-established target levels of financial resources. No international NGOs have worked in Eritrea since the last were forced to leave in 2011. The government placed strict controls on United Nations operations in the country, preventing staff from leaving the capital.

The government controls all union activity. The National Confederation of Eritrean Workers is the country's main union body and has affiliated unions for women, teachers, young people, and general workers.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The United Nations, in its June human rights report, said, "It is not law that rules Eritreans—it is fear." The judiciary, which was formed by decree in 1993, is understaffed, unprofessional, and does not issue rulings at odds with government positions. Most criminal cases are heard by the Special Court, composed of PFDJ loyalists chosen by the president. The International Crisis Group has described Eritrea as a "prison state" for its flagrant disregard of the rule of law and its willingness to detain anyone suspected of opposing the regime, usually without charge, for indefinite periods. According to the United Nations, most accused never get a court hearing and do not know why they have been detained. In 2013, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that there were between 5,000 and 10,000 political prisoners in Eritrea. They include surviving members of a group from the ruling party who publicly criticized Afwerki in 2001 and a group of journalists detained the same year. Scores of people were arrested following a 2013 coup attempt, and no information has been released about them.

Torture, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and political arrests are common. Prison conditions are harsh, and outside monitors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross are denied access to detainees. Juvenile prisoners are often incarcerated alongside adults. In some facilities, inmates are held in metal shipping containers or underground cells in extreme temperatures. Prisoners are often denied medical treatment and many suffer poor physical health due to the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in which they are held. The government maintains a network of secret detention facilities.

The pastoralist Kunama people, one of Eritrea's nine ethnic groups, face severe discrimination for allegedly collaborating with Ethiopia in the 1990s. According to the United Nations, they have been the victims of extrajudicial killings and have been denied access to their traditional land. Same-sex sexual relations are criminalized and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals face legal and social discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 2 / 16

Freedom of movement, both inside and outside the country, is tightly controlled. Eritreans under the age of 50 are rarely given permission to go abroad, and those who try to travel without the correct documents face imprisonment. According to Eritreans who fled abroad, citizens even require written permission to move around freely inside the country. The authorities have adopted a shoot-on-sight policy toward people found in locations deemed off-limits, such as mining facilities and areas close to the border. Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers who are repatriated from other countries are detained.

The United Nations reported that authorities in Eritrea had forcefully evicted thousands of residents from their homes by destroying the property without due process. The military, security forces and known government sympathizers face no consequences for such illegal acts as property seizure.

A conscription system ties most able-bodied men and women—even those under age 18—to obligatory military service and can also entail compulsory labor for enterprises controlled by the political elite. Testimony heard in a Canadian class-action lawsuit said conscripts were used in the construction of Eritrea's only commercial mining operation, partly owned by a Canadian company, Nevsun Resources Ltd. The official 18-month

national service period is open-ended in practice, and conscientious-objector status is not recognized. The UNHRC describes this system as enslavement and concludes that through its system of open-ended conscription, the government “refuses to treat its citizens as human beings with rights, dignity and a free will.”

The police frequently conduct round-ups of people thought to be evading national service; those who resist can be executed on the spot. The government imposes collective punishment on the families of deserters, forcing them to pay heavy fines and putting them in prison if they cannot pay. The government levies a compulsory 2 percent tax on income earned by citizens living overseas, and those who do not pay place their relatives in Eritrea at risk of arrest.

Women hold some senior government positions and some efforts have been made to promote women’s rights, with laws mandating equal educational opportunity, equal pay for equal work, and penalties for domestic violence. However, traditional societal discrimination against women persists in the countryside. The government banned female genital mutilation in 2007, though the practice remains widespread in rural areas. Sexual abuse of women during military service is a serious problem.

The U.S. State Department’s 2016 *Trafficking in Persons Report* expressed particular concern about forced labor among both residents in Eritrea and those fleeing the country, blaming the military’s conscription policies and the government’s tight control over travel.

Estonia

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 1,310,500

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Tallinn

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Following the March 2015 parliamentary elections, the ruling pro-business Reform Party formed a coalition with the center-left Social Democratic Party (SDE) and the center-right Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica (IRL). The legislature became increasingly fragmented throughout the year, calling into question the stability of the government. By late 2015, four cabinet ministers, including the foreign minister, had been replaced.

Two separate corruption scandals in 2015—one involving opposition leader Edgar Saviisaar and another the managers of the port of Tallinn with close ties to the Reform Party—shook the country’s political landscape.

The Russian annexation of Crimea and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine continued to raise tensions in Estonia about the potential for Russian expansionism. Estonia, which has a significant minority population who speak Russian as their primary language, launched a new publicly financed television channel in Russian in 2015 to counteract anti-Western

broadcasts from Moscow. In an operation reminiscent of the Cold War, Estonian intelligence officer Eston Kohver, who had been imprisoned by Russia in August on charges of espionage, was released in September in exchange for Russian spy Aleksei Dressen. Also during the year, the process of finalizing the long-awaited border treaty between Estonia and Russia continued.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40 (–1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The 1992 constitution established a 101-seat, unicameral Parliament (Riigikogu), whose members are elected for four-year terms. A prime minister, chosen by the president and confirmed by the parliament, serves as head of government. The president is elected by parliamentary ballot to a five-year term, filling the largely ceremonial role of head of state. Toomas Ilves, who currently is not a member of any political party, has been president since 2006. Independent observers have deemed recent elections free and fair.

In parliamentary elections held in March 2015, the ruling Reform Party led by Prime Minister Taavi Rõivas captured 30 seats, down slightly from 33 in 2011, while its previous coalition partner, the SDE, took 15 seats, down from 19. The IRL experienced the greatest loss, winning only 14 seats, or 9 fewer than four years earlier. Meanwhile, the opposition Centre Party took 27 seats, or just 1 more than in 2011. The public's dissatisfaction with traditional political parties benefitted two new parties: the conservative, anti-establishment Free Party took 8 seats, and the far-right Conservative People's Party won 7 seats. Voter turnout was 64 percent, with online voting used by about 30 percent of voters.

Following lengthy negotiations, the Reform Party formed a majority coalition with the IRL and SDE; Rõivas was reelected prime minister. However, the three partners had serious policy disagreements, and the government remained shaky throughout the year. During the summer, the SDE attempted to change the coalition agreement and even considered withdrawing from the coalition. Following its decision to remain in the government, all three SDE cabinet ministers were replaced.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Estonia's political parties organize and operate freely. Their members can be citizens of Estonia or of another EU member state. Despite facing corruption scandals and some unpopular policies, the Reform Party has dominated the government since 2007. Its main rival on the left is the Centre Party, which has connections with Russia's main political party, United Russia, and draws much of its support from Estonia's Russian-speaking population. Newer political forces, the Free Party and Conservative People's Party, are represented for the first time in the parliament following the 2015 elections.

Only citizens may participate in national elections. As a result, ethnic Russian residents of Estonia whose citizenship remains undetermined—constituting approximately 7 percent of the population—cannot vote in national polls. Resident noncitizens are permitted to vote in local elections, but may not run as candidates.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12 (–1)

There have been occasional problems with government corruption. Recent years have seen heavily publicized allegations of money laundering within both the Reform Party and the Center Party.

Several scandals emerged in 2015, including allegations implicating politicians from both the ruling and opposition parties in bribery, money laundering, and political patronage.

In September, Edgar Savisaar, the mayor of Tallinn and leader of the Center Party, was detained by police on suspicion of taking bribes in 2014 and 2015. In another case, managers at the Port of Tallinn with close ties to prominent politicians were arrested in August on bribery charges.

Recent surveys show that Estonian residents perceive widespread corruption within the country. However, it continues to score highly on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, ranking 23 of 168 countries and territories surveyed in the 2015 report.

Public access to government information and asset declarations of officials is provided for both in law and in practice, and the government involves nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and ordinary citizens in the drafting of legislation. In March 2015, the Finance Ministry approved a new ethics code for government officials.

In July 2015, Foreign Minister Keit Pentus-Rosimannus of the Reform Party resigned following a court ruling holding her partly liable for debts accumulated by her father's bankrupt trucking company, Autorollo. Although she denied any wrongdoing and said she would appeal the decision to the Supreme Court, Pentus-Rosimannus explained that she would step down out of respect for Estonia and its government institutions. Top members of the Reform Party had been implicated two years earlier in the so-called Autorollo scandal, in which significant funds were transferred from the firm's coffers just ahead of its bankruptcy declaration.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 56 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

The government generally respects freedom of the press. Public and private television and radio stations operate in Estonia, and there are a number of independent newspapers, including at least one in Russian. In September 2015, the authorities launched ETV+, the only government-funded television channel entirely in Russian, to counter anti-Western television broadcasts from Moscow. A 2010 law authorized fines for outlets that disseminate news deemed libelous, as well as for journalists who refuse to reveal sources under certain circumstances. It remains illegal to insult court officials or police officers in connection with their official responsibilities. The government does not restrict access to the internet, which is widely available throughout the country, or monitor private online communication.

Religious freedom is respected in law and in practice.

Academic freedom and private discussion are respected. A 2011 law mandates that public Russian-language high schools must teach 60 percent of their curriculum in the Estonian language. In 2013, the government rejected a petition from Tallinn's city council to allow four public secondary schools in the city to waive that requirement.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedoms of assembly and association, and the government upholds those rights in practice. Civil society is vibrant.

Workers may organize freely, strike, and bargain collectively, although public servants at the municipal and state levels may not strike. The Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions has reported private-sector violations of union rights, including workers threatened with dismissal or pay cuts if they formed unions.

F. Rule of Law: 14 / 16

The judiciary is independent and generally free from government interference. Laws prohibiting arbitrary arrest and detention and ensuring the right to a fair trial are largely

observed. There have been reports of law enforcement officials using excessive force when arresting suspects. A police officer who was found guilty in January 2015 of having used excessive force in 2011 was sentenced to one year in prison and three years' probation. While the country's prison system generally meets international standards, some inmates reportedly have inadequate access to health care.

Asylum seekers and refugees are legally protected and provided with basic services, including cultural orientation programs. In the first eight months of 2015, the government gave temporary protection to 33 people, mostly from Ukraine, who might not ultimately qualify as refugees.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 91,000 residents of Estonia, or just over 6 percent of the country's population, are stateless. Most are ethnic Russians who came to Estonia during the Soviet era and whom the Estonian government regards as immigrants who must apply for citizenship through a process including passing an Estonian language examination. The authorities have adopted policies to assist those seeking naturalization, such as funding language courses.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

Estonia's constitution allows citizens and noncitizens holding government-issued identity documents to travel inside Estonia and abroad. Although corruption in the business sector is problematic, Estonian residents enjoy a high level of economic freedom.

Violence against women, including domestic violence, remains a problem. Local governments in cooperation with NGOs provide victims of gender-based violence with assistance, including counseling and legal aid. Women in Estonia earn on average 30 percent less than men, the largest gap in the European Union. Estonia is a source, transit point, and destination for women trafficked for the purpose of prostitution. Estonia criminalized human trafficking in 2012.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation is legally prohibited, though harassment of members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) communities is reportedly common. In October 2014, Estonia's parliament narrowly approved legislation permitting same-sex partnerships. The law allows two people in a civil union nearly identical rights to those of married couples, but does not allow same-sex partners in a civil union to adopt; it does allow a person to adopt his or her partner's biological child.

Ethiopia

Political Rights Rating: 7↓

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 98,148,000

Capital: Addis Ababa

Ratings Change: Ethiopia's political rights rating declined from 6 to 7 due to the government's systematic constriction of political space surrounding the May parliamentary elections. The ruling party took all the seats in the lower house, the preelection period was marked by the detention and arrest of opposition members, and discrimination against and harassment of Muslims and the Oromo population limited their participation in the political process.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Ethiopia held its first parliamentary elections since the death of longtime Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 2012. The ruling party and its allies won 100 percent of the seats, eliminating the token opposition member elected in 2010. Opposition party members were intimidated, detained, beaten, and arrested in the run-up to the polls.

Five journalists with the Zone 9 blogging collective, which is known for coverage of governance and human rights issues, were acquitted of terrorism charges in October 2015 after spending a year and a half in prison, though prosecutors later appealed their acquittals. Charges against two other Zone 9 bloggers and three associated journalists were dropped in July; the same month, journalist Reeyot Alemu was released from prison. Nevertheless, harassment, arrests, and prosecutions of opposition figures and journalists continued. Notably, in August, courts convicted 17 participants in the landmark 2012 protests staged by members of Ethiopia's Muslim community, as well as a journalist with a Muslim newspaper, on terrorism charges; their sentences ranged from 7 to 22 years.

Protests over a controversial government plan to cede parts of Oromia State to the federal capital region of Addis Ababa resumed in November 2015, and human rights groups reported more than 75 people were killed in clashes between demonstrators and Ethiopian security forces. In December, Ethiopian authorities called the mostly peaceful protesters "terrorists," and authorized the Anti-Terror Task Force, a military body, to respond to them. Prominent Oromo opposition leaders, scores of protesters, and at least one journalist were arrested in connection with the demonstrations.

Tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea heightened in 2015, and formal dialogue remains frozen. Border clashes occurred in July, and the Ethiopian Federal Police reported that 30 "infiltrators" were killed or captured. The Ethiopian-Eritrean border remains highly militarized, and reports that U.S.-based opposition leader Berhanu Nega (deemed a terrorist by Ethiopia for his affiliation with banned group Ginbot 7) planned to travel to Eritrea to lead a rebellion strained relations further. In July, Ethiopian prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn threatened "appropriate action" if Eritrea continued supporting actors trying to destabilize

Ethiopia. Meanwhile, on-again, off-again peace talks between the government and the Oga-den National Liberation Front (ONLF), a separatist group that has fought for independence since 1991, continued in Nairobi, Kenya. Two ONLF negotiators allegedly abducted while in Nairobi were released by Ethiopian authorities in June.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 4 / 40 (–3)

A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12

Ethiopia's bicameral parliament is made up of a 153-seat upper house, the House of Federation, and a 547-seat lower house, the House of People's Representatives. The lower house is filled through popular elections, while the upper chamber is selected by state legislatures; members of both houses serve five-year terms. While the lower house's seats are equal to a fixed number of constituencies, the upper house's seats are adjusted in proportion with the population. The lower house selects the prime minister, who holds most executive power. The president, a largely ceremonial figure, serves up to two six-year terms and is indirectly elected by both houses. Hailemariam has served as prime minister since 2012, and Mulatu Teshome as president since 2013.

As in past contests, Ethiopia's 2015 parliamentary and regional elections were tightly controlled by the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), with reports of voter coercion, intimidation, and barriers to registration. Elections were held on time, and official results were released within a month.

The opposition lost their sole seat in parliament, as the EPRDF and its allies took all 547 seats in the lower house. Both the opposition party coalition Medrek and the Semayawi Party, also known as the Blue Party, voiced serious concerns about the ruling party's behavior leading up to and on election day, and ultimately rejected the election's results.

The African Union (AU) was the only international organization to send election observers to Ethiopia's 2015 contest. (The European Union was not invited to observe, its officials said in February, noting that the EPRDF had rejected recommendations it issued following the 2010 elections.) The AU declared elections "peaceful and credible," but noted irregularities including voter coercion and inconsistent poll hours.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16 (–2)

Opponents of the EPRDF find it nearly impossible to operate inside Ethiopia. In the lead-up to the May 2015 elections, opposition party members were intimidated, detained, beaten, and arrested. The Semayawi Party reported that more than 50 of its members were arrested ahead of the polls. Three opposition members were killed in the aftermath of the elections, though the Ethiopian government denies opposition claims that the killings were politically motivated. Eighteen Semayawi Party members were arrested in July for planning a demonstration to take place during U.S. president Barack Obama's visit to Ethiopia later that month.

Both the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party, formerly represented by one seat in parliament, and the Semayawi Party alleged that the EPRDF used procedural technicalities to block their candidates' registration. Nearly half of Semayawi candidates were deregistered on administrative grounds, a decision the opposition group pointed to as evidence of government repression. The opposition repeatedly questioned the independence of the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. Separately, in the wake of the December 2015 Oromo protests, leaders of the opposition Oromo Federalist Congress were arrested on suspicion of inciting violence.

Political parties in Ethiopia are often ethnically based. The country's major ethnic parties are allied with the EPRDF, but have no room to effectively advocate for their constituents. The EPRDF coalition is comprised of four political parties and represents several ethnic groups. The government favors Tigrayan ethnic interests in economic and political matters, and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front dominates the EPRDF. The 1995 constitution grants the right of secession to ethnically based states, but the government acquired powers in 2003 to intervene in states' affairs on issues of public security. Secessionist movements in Oromia and the Ogaden have largely failed after being put down by the military.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12 (- 1)

Ethiopia's governance institutions are dominated by the EPRDF, which controlled the succession process following Meles' death in 2012. The EPRDF continues its tight hold on Ethiopian politics under Hailemariam, who was reelected as party chair in August 2015 at the EPRDF's annual congress.

Corruption remains a significant problem in Ethiopia. EPRDF officials reportedly receive preferential access to credit, land leases, and jobs. Petty corruption extends to lower-level officials, who solicit bribes in return for processing documents. In response to a 2013 World Bank study detailing the country's corruption, the Federal Ethics & Anti-Corruption Commission made a string of high-profile arrests of prominent government officials and businessmen throughout 2013 and 2014, resulting in several convictions. In May 2015, the Ethiopian parliament removed two federal judges from the bench in connection with past corruption convictions. Despite cursory legislative improvements, enforcement of corruption-related laws remains lax in practice. Ethiopia was ranked 103 out of 168 countries and territories by Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 11 / 40

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 3 / 16

Ethiopia's media are dominated by state-owned broadcasters and government-oriented newspapers. Privately owned papers tend to steer clear of political issues and have low circulation, and journalists operating inside the country practice self-censorship. Defamation is a criminal offense, and a 2008 media law increased fines for defamation and allows prosecutors to pursue cases without complaints from aggrieved parties. The law also allows prosecutors to seize material before publication in the name of national security.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Ethiopia holds at least 10 journalists behind bars—the second-highest number of jailed journalists in sub-Saharan Africa after Eritrea as of December 2015. Restrictions are particularly tight on journalists perceived to be sympathetic to protests by the Muslim community, and journalists attempting to cover such events are routinely detained or arrested. In August 2015, Yusuf Getachew, arrested while covering the 2012 Muslim protests as editor of *Ye Muslimoch Guday* magazine, was convicted on terrorism charges and sentenced to seven years in prison. A terrorism case against Yusuf's colleague, Solomon Kebede, was ongoing at the year's end. Oromo Radio and TV anchor Fikadu Mirkana was arrested in December 2015 for unknown reasons, though the channel had been airing stories about the outbreak of the Oromo protests.

Those reporting on opposition activities face harassment and the threat of prosecution under Ethiopia's sweeping 2009 antiterrorism law. Since 2011, at least 15 journalists have been convicted under its provisions. In July 2015, the government released five journalists

and bloggers, two of them associated with the Zone 9 collective, and dropped the incitement and terrorism charges levied against them. A day later, the government released journalist Reeyot Alemu, who was convicted in 2011 of “planning and promoting a terror attack” and originally sentenced to 14 years in prison, though that was later reduced to five on appeal. Reeyot had nearly served her full term when released. In October 2015, the remaining Zone 9 members originally arrested in 2014 were acquitted of terrorism charges, though one, Befekadu Hailu, still faced separate charges of inciting violence at the year’s end. At the end of December, prosecutors appealed the acquittal and summoned the bloggers back to court. *Negere Ethiopia* editor-in-chief Getachew Shiferaw was also arrested in late December; observers expected him to be charged under the antiterrorism law. Print editions of that paper, affiliated with the Semayawi Party, have been shut down, though it continues to publish online.

Due to the risks of operating inside the country, many Ethiopian journalists work in exile. According to CPJ, 34 Ethiopian journalists went into exile between June 2014 and May 2015, a sharp increase from previous years. Authorities use high-tech jamming equipment to filter and block news websites seen as pro-opposition. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), since 2010 the Ethiopian government has developed a robust and sophisticated internet and mobile framework to monitor journalists and opposition groups, block access to unwanted websites or critical television and radio programs, and collect evidence for prosecutions in politically motivated trials. In 2015, leaked emails from the Italian company Hacking Team revealed that Ethiopia was paying for its surveillance tools as late as March 2015, some of which targeted Ethiopians in the diaspora. The Ethiopian government denies that Hacking Team’s surveillance software is used to illegally target journalists and opposition leaders. Hacking Team later in 2015 said it had severed its relationship with Ethiopian authorities.

The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but the government has increasingly harassed the Muslim community, which comprises about 34 percent of the population. (About 44 percent of people in Ethiopia are Orthodox Christian, while about 19 percent are Protestant.) In August 2015, 18 Muslim activists (including Getachew) who were arrested following the 2012 protests over alleged government involvement in the Muslim community’s affairs were sentenced to prison terms of between 7 and 22 years on terrorism charges. The activists maintain their innocence. Also in August, authorities arrested another 20 people and charged them with promoting an extremist Islamic ideology and of attempting to topple the government and establish a new one based in Sharia (Islamic law).

Academic freedom is often restricted in Ethiopia. The government has accused universities of being pro-opposition and prohibits political activities on campuses. There are reports of students being pressured into joining the EPRDF in order to secure employment or places at universities; professors are similarly pressured in order to ensure favorable positions or promotions. The Ministry of Education closely monitors and regulates official curricula, and the research, speech, and assembly of both professors and students are frequently restricted.

The presence of the EPRDF at all levels of society—directly and, increasingly, electronically—inhibits free private discussion. Many people are wary of speaking against the government. The EPRDF maintains a network of paid informants, and opposition politicians have accused the government of tapping their phones.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed by the constitution but limited in practice. Organizers of large public meetings must request permission from the authorities

48 hours in advance. Applications by opposition groups are routinely denied and, in cases when approved, organizers are subject to government meddling to move dates or locations. Since 2011, ongoing peaceful demonstrations held by members of the Muslim community have been met with violent responses from security forces.

In April 2015, tens of thousands of people turned out to mourn 30 Ethiopian migrants murdered by the Islamic State militant group in Libya. The demonstration included Ethiopians frustrated with the government, and clashes between protesters and police broke out following pro-EPRDF speeches. The Ethiopian government blamed the chaos on the Semayawi Party, who reported that their members were detained and beaten by security forces. At least 100 people were reportedly arrested in the demonstrations' aftermath.

Demonstrations erupted in November 2015 after land was cleared for an investment project linked to the controversial Addis Ababa Master Plan, which envisioned the expansion of the capital into parts of Oromia State. Protests quickly spread throughout the region, and clashes between demonstrators and the police left at least five dead, according to the government. Activists allege that as many as 75 people were killed after security forces used excessive force against protesters—firing live ammunition, beating protesters, and detaining hundreds without charge, sometimes during late-night home raids. While some protesters were responsible for property damage (in at least one case burning down a police station), the government alleged that they were also linked with terror groups, and dispatched the Anti-Terror Task Force to combat them.

The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation restricts the activities of foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by prohibiting work on political and human rights issues. Foreign NGOs are defined as groups receiving more than 10 percent of their funding from abroad, a classification that includes most domestic organizations as well. The law also limits the amount of money any NGO can spend on “administration,” a controversial category that has included activities such as teacher or health-worker training. Since the law’s approval, the government has amended the “administration” category so that salaries, transport, and training costs would not be considered administrative expenses; however, some NGOs have reported that the directive is not being implemented. NGOs have struggled to maintain operations as a result of the law.

Trade union rights are tightly restricted. Neither civil servants nor teachers have collective bargaining rights. All unions must be registered, and the government retains the authority to cancel registration. Two-thirds of union members belong to organizations affiliated with the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, which is under government influence. Independent unions face harassment, and trade union leaders are regularly imprisoned. There has not been a legal strike since 1993.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16

The judiciary is officially independent, but its judgments rarely deviate from government policy. The 2009 antiterrorism law gives great discretion to security forces, allowing the detention of suspects for up to four months without charge. Conditions in Ethiopia’s prisons are harsh, and detainees frequently report abuse. CPJ and Ethiopian sources reported that former *Feteh* editor Temesgen Desalegn, who was convicted on defamation charges in 2014 and sentenced to three years in prison, has been denied medical care and family visits.

Yemen’s June 2014 arrest and extradition of British citizen Andargachew Tsige to Ethiopia at the government’s request sparked outrage from human rights groups. Andargachew is secretary general of the banned opposition group Ginbot 7, and was sentenced to death

in absentia in 2009 and again in 2012 for allegedly plotting to kill government officials. As of 2015 he remains detained in solitary confinement at an undisclosed location in Ethiopia, according to the British government, which continues to be denied access to him.

The federal government generally has strong control and direction over the military, though forces such as the Liyu Police in Somali Region sometimes operate independently.

Repression of the Oromo and ethnic Somalis, and government attempts to co-opt their political parties into EPRDF allies, have fueled nationalism in the Oromia and Ogaden regions. Persistent claims that government troops in the Ogaden have committed war crimes are difficult to verify, as independent media are barred from the region.

Same-sex sexual activity is prohibited by law and punishable by up to 15 years' imprisonment.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

While Ethiopia's constitution establishes freedom of movement, insecurity—particularly in eastern Ethiopia—prevents unrestricted movement into affected sites.

Private business opportunities are limited by rigid state control of economic life and the prevalence of state-owned enterprises. All land must be leased from the state. The government has evicted indigenous groups from various areas to make way for projects such as hydroelectric dams. It has also leased large tracts of land to foreign governments and investors for agricultural development in opaque deals that have displaced thousands of Ethiopians. Indian firms have leased the majority of land available to foreign firms; that amount is reported to be more than 3.5 million hectares (13,500 square miles). Up to 70,000 people have been forced to move from the western Gambella region, although the government denies the resettlement plans are connected to land investments. Similar evictions have taken place in Lower Omo Valley, where government-run sugar plantations and hydroelectric dams have put thousands of pastoralists at risk by diverting their water supplies. Journalists and international organizations have persistently alleged that the government withholds development assistance from villages perceived as being unfriendly to the ruling party.

Women are relatively well represented in parliament, holding nearly 39 percent of seats in the lower house, 32 percent in the upper house, and four ministerial posts. Legislation protects women's rights, but these rights are routinely violated in practice. Enforcement of the law against rape and domestic abuse is patchy, and cases routinely stall in the courts. Female genital mutilation and forced child marriage are technically illegal, though there has been little effort to prosecute perpetrators. Ethiopia has made some progress in recent years implementing its National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor. However, many children continue to work in dangerous sectors and lack access to basic education and services. In September 2015, Ethiopia charged three men with smuggling after a number of Ethiopian migrants died—including those killed by the Islamic State in Libya—while trying to reach Europe.

Fiji

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 867,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3↓

Capital: Suva

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ratings change: Fiji's civil liberties rating improved from 4 to 3 due to a decline in reports of harassment or restrictions on the activities of domestic and international nongovernmental organizations.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,3,P

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Fiji continued to make progress following free and fair democratic elections in November 2014 that brought an end to nearly eight years of military rule, though some complaints about the elected government persist. While the new administration, led by Prime Minister J. V. (Frank) Bainimarama, has promised to end corruption, promote economic growth, and ease racial and religious tensions, some of its actions have been criticized as heavy-handed. In May 2015, a disciplinary committee issued a two-year suspension from parliament to an opposition legislator for making derogatory remarks toward the speaker. In August, the government charged 70 persons with sedition for allegedly participating in a breakaway movement that promotes political violence and incites communal antagonism. Nevertheless, the government has received praise from the European Union and United Nations, which have noted significant progress on the human rights situation in Fiji, though the opposition remains dissatisfied with continued reports of abuses by the security forces.

International trade with key partners, as well as critical foreign aid, has been restored following the return to democracy. Political and economic relations also continue to deepen with China. Like many other Pacific Island states, Fiji received growing sums of grants, loans, and donations in kind from Beijing in 2015, in addition to inking a number of cooperative agreements throughout the year. To attract more Chinese tourists and investment, since March Chinese nationals can enter Fiji visa-free and stay for up to 30 days.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 27 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

The constitution of 2013 provides for a single-chamber parliament with 50 members elected to serve four-year terms in a national-constituency, proportional representation system. The party with the greatest number of seats selects the prime minister. The voting age was lowered to 18 years. Citizens overseas can vote, but only those residing in Fiji can stand as candidates. The president is elected from parliament between two candidates, one named by the prime minister and one by the leader of the opposition. As head of state, the president—who is elected for one three-year term and eligible for reelection to a second

term—holds a largely ceremonial role. The president can be removed only for incompetence or misbehavior by a tribunal appointed by the chief justice at the request of the prime minister. George Kenrote, a retired major-general, replaced Ratu Epeli Nailatikau as president in November.

In 2014, Fiji had its first democratic election since a military coup in 2006. Bainimarama, leader of the 2006 coup and head of the interim regime until 2014, led the new Fiji First party to win 32 seats. The Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA) and the National Federation Party (NFP) took 15 and 3 seats, respectively. Of the 50 legislators, eight are women. Voter turnout was 84 percent. International observers certified the elections were free and fair, with no reports of violence or intimidation.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16

Political affiliations had traditionally been associated with ethnicity. The Bainimarama-led interim government pushed for national unity and a national identity transcending ethnicity, race, and religion. For the 2014 general elections, all political parties were required to have English names to appeal to all ethnic groups. Reserved seats and special considerations for certain ethnic and religious groups were eliminated.

The dominance of Fiji First in parliament and its popularity with the public has left little space for opposition forces to assert themselves politically. After winning no seats in the 2014 elections, the Fiji Labor Party, the longstanding opposition party, became defunct and ceded that role to SODELPA. Moreover, other institutions that provided checks on the government have been weakened in recent years. The Great Council of Chiefs, comprised of hereditary leaders representing Fiji's indigenous population, was abolished in 2012. In March 2015, the government signaled it would not be revived.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12 (+1)

Bainimarama's Fiji First government has said that it will prioritize combatting official abuse and corruption, which remain pernicious and a major source of public grievance. The Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) had investigated many cases, including against high-profile political figures, and the number of citizen complaints filed with FICAC continues to grow. However, in June 2015 the head of FICAC stated that more resources are needed for the body to pursue investigations independently, as it currently must rely on referrals and assistance from entities it is supposed to be investigating.

Several measures have been introduced to increase transparency and accountability, such as live internet broadcasts of parliament sessions and posting meeting notes and budgets online for public review. But with Fiji First holding a parliamentary majority and Bainimarama's forceful leadership, opposition lawmakers and concerned citizens have complained that the government is pushing through bills, budgets, and decisions without allowing adequate time or input from lawmakers or citizens. For example, in June 2015 ruling party lawmakers outvoted opposition members to decide there will only be four weeks of parliamentary sessions in 2016.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 34 / 60 (+1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16

Fiji has several private television and radio stations and newspapers. There are no government restrictions on access to the internet, but poor infrastructure limits access for many outside urban areas. More people are using online media to access news and entertainment.

Recently the International Telecommunications Union commended Fiji for adding public internet centers, reducing cost of access, and expanding electronic government information and services.

The opposition and other critics of the government have accused the administration of using state power to silence critics. For example, the vaguely worded Media Industry Development Decree bans reporting critical of the government or harmful to “national interest public order.” In February 2015, the Media Industry Development Authority, the body that enforces the decree, ruled that the *Fiji Sun* newspaper had violated the law in a report that alleged SODELPA ran on race and land issues during the 2014 elections. However, the authority reversed its decision in March following considerable public criticism.

Freedom of religion is generally respected. No attacks on Hindu temples have been reported in recent years and there were no reports of other religiously motivated crimes in 2015.

Academic freedom is generally respected, but lack of resources affects quality of instruction. Two prominent academics and critics of the former military government, Brij Lal and his wife Padma Lal, were deported in 2009 and 2010 and remain barred from returning to Fiji. The interim government removed preferences in college admissions and scholarships for indigenous Fijians. Since 2014, primary schools had to teach English, iTaukei, and Hindi to all students in an effort to eliminate ethnic divisions.

There were no confirmed reports of government restrictions on private discussion on political matters or other sensitive topics in 2015. Personal blogs and other forms of social media, both for and against the government, operate with relative freedom, unlike traditional media.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12 (+ 1)

Most restrictions on freedom of assembly and association under the interim government have been removed or relaxed. Police permits are required for public gatherings and protests, but there were no reports of denials or last minute cancellations in 2015. The general environment for civil society groups and labor unions is improving.

The government has promised to review existing labor laws to ensure compliance with international standards and the constitution, but has given no timeline for completion. The Essential National Industries Decree remains in place with its restrictions on collective bargaining, freedom of association, and other workers’ rights and benefits. In April 2015, government, industry, and union representatives signed an agreement in Geneva to try to build a more positive relationship. However, trade unions continued to express concerns about existing labor laws and their lack of implementation, and have appealed to international advocates who will be visiting Fiji in 2016 to investigate labor-related issues.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16

The judiciary, though generally independent and well-regarded in society, operates under a number of logistical challenges. Personnel and resource shortages complicate handling of cases in a timely manner.

Prisons are overcrowded but meet minimum international standards. The acting commissioner of the Corrections Service was removed in December 2015 for alleged abuse of office.

Military and police brutality is a significant problem. In February 2015, nine police and military personnel were charged with the rape and murder of a man in their custody and with conspiring to conceal the crime. In October, another five police and military officers

were charged for assaulting a recaptured prison escapee. Police Commissioner Ben Groenewald abruptly resigned in November, blaming military interference in policing and a lack of political will to address police shortcomings. The government's handling of sedition and other charges against dozens of men accused of participating in a separatist movement has been criticized as excessively harsh by the opposition and some legal experts; they have also accused the state of ignoring an allegation of assault against their defense lawyer. In March 2015, the parliament unanimously ratified the UN Convention Against Torture.

Indigenous Fijians previously enjoyed special consideration in many areas of education and political representation. However, the interim government removed many of these privileges in a bid to foster a sense of national unity, a policy also being pursued by the current administration. An estimated 250,000 people—many of them educated and skilled Indo-Fijians—left Fiji in the last 25 years because of discrimination, economic hardship, and political instability. In recent years, a few thousands have returned or reclaimed Fijian citizenship for themselves and their children.

Fiji decriminalized same-sex sexual activity in 2010, and the 2013 constitution bans discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. However, due to conservative social mores, discrimination and violence persist. In August 2015, President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau launched a campaign in partnership with the United Nations to combat prejudice and violence against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) persons. In December, the Fiji Film Festival for the first time focused on human rights and gender-based violence, and featured a number of transgender characters in its films. The festival was well received with no incidents of violence.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Citizens enjoy broad freedom to travel, live, work, and seek education inside and outside the country. Citizens can freely own property and establish businesses.

Although discrimination and violence against women are common, there are now more resource centers for women that assist victims. In November 2015, the government announced it was allocating funding for the establishment of a hotline to assist victims of domestic violence. The number of reported assault cases has increased in recent years, which the government attributes to greater willingness on the part of victims to seek justice.

Fijian and foreign national women and children are subject to sex trafficking and forced labor in Fiji. The government's lax visa policy and location as transportation hub for the region has facilitated Fiji's position as a prime transit country for sex trafficking.

Finland

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 5,476,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Helsinki

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Parliamentary elections in April 2015 resulted in a change of government, as the opposition Center Party (KESK) gained the greatest number of seats and formed a coalition with the incumbent National Coalition Party (KOK) and the controversial anti-immigration Finns Party.

Europe's refugee crisis challenged the new government, with arrivals spiking in the fall and straining available resources and public receptiveness. Meanwhile, the economy continued to shrink, leading to a wide-ranging strike against austerity measures in September that brought much of the transportation system to a standstill for a day. The government and participating unions had not reached an agreement by year's end.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The president, whose role is mainly ceremonial, is directly elected for a six-year term. The president appoints the prime minister and deputy prime minister from the majority party or coalition after elections; the selection must be approved by the parliament. Representatives in the 200-seat, unicameral Eduskunta are elected to four-year terms. Elections in Finland are free and fair.

Former finance minister Sauli Niinistö of the KOK handily won the presidency in 2012, defeating the Green League candidate, Pekka Haavisto, with 63 percent of the vote.

In the April 2015 parliamentary elections, the KESK gained 14 seats to become the largest party, with a total of 49. The Finns Party placed second with 38 seats, followed by the moderate conservative KOK with 37 and the Social Democratic Party with 34. The remaining seats were captured by the Green League (15), the Left Alliance (12), the Swedish People's Party (9), and the Christian Democrats (5). A representative of the Åland Islands held one seat. At the end of May, KESK leader and new prime minister Juha Sipilä formed a government with the KOK and the Finns Party. Finns Party leader Timo Soini was appointed foreign minister.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Finland boasts a robust multiparty system with strong opposition parties.

The position of the Finns Party on the subject of immigration remains a controversial subject, both within and outside the party. While Soini has sought to maintain a more moderate stance, several high-profile party members who serve in the parliament also

belong to the nationalist group Suomen Sisä. This faction has expressed fierce disagreement with the party leadership's compromises. Suomen Sisä chairman and Finns Party lawmaker Olli Immonen's anti-immigration statements on social media in July 2015 renewed doubt about whether Soini could maintain control over the party's radical elements. Representative James Hirvisaari was expelled from the party in 2013 for posting pictures online of a friend performing a Nazi salute in the Eduskunta; his expulsion was interpreted by some as an effort to shift the party's image toward the political mainstream. However, more recent incidents have not resulted in similar penalties, including comments by a reserve councilor in Helsinki who called for the forced sterilization of male African immigrants in May 2015. Meanwhile, the Finns Party's participation in the governing coalition apparently cost it some public support, with an October opinion poll showing a drop of 7 percentage points since the elections.

Citizens from minority ethnic groups enjoy full political rights. The Åland Islands—an autonomous region located off the southwestern coast whose inhabitants speak Swedish—have their own 30-seat parliament, as well as a seat in the national legislature. The indigenous Sami of northern Finland have a legislature with limited powers, but they do not have guaranteed representation in the Eduskunta, accounting for less than 0.1 percent of the population.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Corruption is not a significant problem in Finland, which was ranked 2 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. A 2009 law was amended the following year to require candidates and parties to report campaign donations of more than 800 (\$900) in local elections or 1,500 (\$1,700) in parliamentary elections. In a scandal that shocked the country, the former head of Helsinki's police narcotics unit was charged in May 2015 with multiple corruption and drug offenses, including smuggling approximately 1,000 pounds of hashish into Finland. The case was ongoing at year's end.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 60 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Finnish law provides for freedom of speech, which is respected in practice. Finland has a large variety of newspapers and magazines and protects the right to reply to public criticism. Newspapers are privately owned but publicly subsidized. There is also a diverse range of television and radio outlets, and the internet is widely used and unrestricted.

In October 2015, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that Finnish authorities had not acted in violation of freedom of expression when they convicted a photographer in 2007 for disobeying the police while covering a 2006 demonstration.

Finns enjoy freedom of religion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church are both state churches and receive public money from the income taxes of members; citizens may exempt themselves from contributing to those funds, but must renounce their membership. Religious communities other than the state churches may also receive state funds. Religious education is part of the curriculum in all secondary public schools, but students may opt out in favor of more general instruction in ethics.

Academic freedom is respected. In March 2015, the parliament voted against ending compulsory teaching of Swedish as a second language in Finland's schools by a large

margin. However, legislators approved a motion by the KOK and KESK to allow Russian to be taught instead of Swedish in eastern Finland.

There are no impediments to open and free private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are upheld in law and in practice. Independence Day celebrations in December 2015 led to unusually violent clashes between right-wing nationalists, anarchist groups, and police in Helsinki. Police temporarily detained 130 people, and 30 had been charged with various offenses by year's end.

Nongovernmental organizations operate without restrictions. Workers have the right to organize and bargain collectively, though public-sector workers who provide services deemed essential may not strike. Approximately 70 percent of workers belong to trade unions. In the country's largest strike in over two decades, tens of thousands of protesters rallied in Helsinki on September 18, 2015, closing down ports, disrupting flights, and stopping train and bus service. The one-day strike was organized to protest the government's recent austerity proposals, which included cutting Sunday and overtime pay and reducing the number of holidays. Negotiations between the government and the unions failed to produce an agreement by the end of 2015.

F. Rule of Law: 16 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the courts operate without political interference in practice. The president appoints judges on the recommendation of the justice minister, advised by a Judicial Appointments Board composed mostly of senior judges. The Ministry of the Interior controls police and Border Guard forces.

Ethnic minorities and asylum seekers report occasional police discrimination. The criminal code covers ethnic agitation and penalizes anyone who threatens a racial, national, ethnic, or religious group.

Finland received more than 32,000 asylum applications in 2015. A sudden influx in the fall stretched the country's resources and inflamed political and public resistance to accepting refugees. Authorities struggled to process applications and provide housing for applicants; in September, Prime Minister Sipilä offered up his own home to accommodate some of them. Refugees have been subject to some physical attacks, including attempted arson at an asylum center and an incident in which assailants hurled fireworks and stones at a bus traveling to a reception center, both in September. In the same month, demonstrators in the northern border town of Tornio formed a human chain to stop refugees from entering Finland from Sweden, while pro-immigration demonstrations took place on the Swedish side. Finland abstained from a September vote of European Union interior ministers that approved national quotas for resettling 120,000 refugees currently in Italy and Greece. Under this and other intra-European relocation plans agreed to during 2015, Finland was expected to take in 3,200 asylum seekers over two years.

The constitution guarantees the Sami people cultural autonomy and the right to pursue their traditional livelihoods, which include fishing and reindeer herding. Their language and culture are also protected through public financial support. However, representatives of the community have complained that they cannot exercise their rights in practice and that they do not have the right to self-determination with respect to land use. While Roma also make up a very small percentage of the Finnish population, they are more significantly disadvantaged and marginalized.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 16 / 16

Finland has one of the most expansive legal definitions of “freedom to roam” in the world. Provided the privacy of a private residence is not violated and no environmental damage is incurred, anyone is free to use any land, public and private, for outdoor recreation purposes, without having to seek permission beforehand. Intellectual and physical property rights are upheld in Finland. There are no major obstacles to establishing a business, and the country boasts a well-regulated, transparent, and open economy.

Women enjoy equal rights in Finland. Women hold 41.5 percent of the seats in the Eduskunta. Despite a law stipulating equal pay for equal work, however, women earn only about 85 percent as much as men with the same qualifications. Domestic violence is an ongoing concern.

In late 2014, the parliament passed a bill legalizing same-sex marriage after it was submitted by citizens’ initiative—a constitutional mechanism whereby petitions with more than 50,000 signatures must be considered by lawmakers. President Niinistö signed the measure in February 2015, but another citizens’ initiative to reverse the law gathered the required number of signatures by July. The parliament was expected to debate that proposal in 2016; the same-sex marriage law, if upheld, was scheduled to take effect in 2017.

Finland remains a destination and a transit country for men, women, and children who are subjected to sex trafficking and labor exploitation in various industries. According to the U.S. State Department, the government actively prosecutes trafficking offenses, and victims have access to protection and assistance, though victim identification remained a challenge, particularly for child victims.

France

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 64,346,720

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Paris

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

The year 2015 was flanked by several horrific attacks in France. On January 7, two French-born brothers of Algerian origin terrorized the Paris office of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, killing 12 people. Two days later, an accomplice took several hostages at a kosher market in the capital, taking four lives before he was killed by police. In the aftermath of these events, the government enacted a law granting security agencies extensive new surveillance powers.

On November 13, terrorists affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) militant group carried out coordinated attacks at a concert hall and cafés in central Paris as well as outside of a stadium in the northern suburb of Saint-Denis, killing 130 people in shooting sprees and suicide bombings. The stadium attack took place during a game attended by President

François Hollande. Nine assailants died either during the attacks or in later confrontations with police, and most suspects identified by year's end were French or Belgian nationals. Several had traveled to Syria to join IS and then returned; some had been on international security watch lists.

Following the November attacks, Hollande declared a state of emergency, under which security forces conducted thousands of raids and detained hundreds for questioning without judicial oversight. The attacks exacerbated anti-immigrant sentiment, contributing to the early lead of the far-right National Front (FN) in regional elections held in December. The FN was later defeated in all races through a coordinated effort by the political center.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The French president and members of the lower house of Parliament, the 577-seat National Assembly, are elected to five-year terms. The upper house, the 348-seat Senate, is an indirectly elected body whose members serve six-year terms. The prime minister is appointed by the president, who is elected by direct, universal suffrage in a two-round system. In the 2012 presidential election, Hollande—a Socialist Party (PS) candidate—won the first round with 28.6 percent of the vote, beating incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), who took 27.2 percent. Marine Le Pen of the FN placed third, with 17.9 percent. Hollande won the election in the runoff, taking 51.6 percent of the vote to Sarkozy's 48.4 percent to become France's first Socialist president since François Mitterrand left office in 1995.

In 2012, the center-left PS and its allies won an absolute majority of 314 seats in the National Assembly, while the UMP and its allies took 229 seats. In the 2014 Senate elections, the PS lost its majority to the UMP and the center-right Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI), while the FN won two seats—its first ever in the upper chamber.

In regional elections held in December 2015, the FN led the first round of voting in 6 of the 13 regions at stake. The PS then withdrew from some races to encourage its supporters to vote for the Republicans—the successor of the UMP, which changed its name in May—in order to block the FN, which failed to win any regions in the second round.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Parties organize and compete on a free and fair basis. The PS and the Republicans are the largest parties. Since taking over the FN in 2011, Le Pen has sought to rebrand it as a mainstream party, albeit a strongly anti-immigration and anti-European Union (EU) one. In April 2015, Le Pen moved to oust her father, who held the position of honorary president of the FN, after he publicly reiterated anti-Semitic views. The party's executive board voted in August to expel him. The 2015 regional elections demonstrated the lengths to which the traditionally dominant parties of the center will go to keep the FN out of power.

The 2012 parliamentary elections yielded a record eight new members from immigrant backgrounds. However, they comprised less than 2 percent of the National Assembly, prompting renewed calls from minority rights groups for a law ensuring ethnic diversity in politics.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12

A number of governmental corruption cases linked to Sarkozy's presidency continued in 2015. In an ongoing probe into alleged illegal financing of Sarkozy's 2007 presidential campaign by former Libyan leader Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi, Sarkozy's former chief of staff

and interior minister Claude Guéant was charged in March 2015 with tax evasion and forgery. In December, France's Court of Justice of the Republic ordered International Monetary Fund managing director Christine Lagarde to stand trial for negligence over a 404 million (\$436 million) government payment to businessman Bernard Tapie, which she had authorized as Sarkozy's finance minister in 2008. Earlier in December, an appeals court had ordered Tapie to repay the amount with interest. At year's end, authorities were investigating whether the compensation was a quid pro quo for Tapie's support for Sarkozy's campaign. France was ranked 23 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

French law provides for public access to government information. France ranked 7 out of 102 countries in the 2015 Open Budget Index, indicating very high levels of budgetary transparency and financial disclosure. In December 2015, the government declassified hundreds of thousands of official documents from the World War II-era Vichy regime, which had collaborated with Nazi Germany.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60 (−4)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16 (−1)

While the media operate freely and represent a wide range of political opinions, the events of 2015 had a wide impact on press freedom. Saïd and Chérif Kouachi stormed the Paris office of *Charlie Hebdo* in January, killing 12 people—including a number of the magazine's cartoonists and writers as well as two police officers. *Charlie Hebdo* is known for its controversial cartoons and has published several caricatures of the prophet Muhammad, which in 2011 provoked a firebombing of the magazine's office. The assailants claimed to be members of an Al-Qaeda affiliate in Yemen, and at least one had reportedly trained at a camp run by the group there in 2011. The brothers were killed by police two days after the attack. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the killings made France the second deadliest country for journalists in 2015.

A 2014 counterterrorism law empowered authorities to block websites or bring criminal charges for incitement or glorification of terrorism, with penalties reaching seven years in prison. In January 2015, in the wake of the Paris attacks, more than 250 people were charged with condoning or provoking terrorism; some received prison sentences after accelerated court proceedings. In March, five websites were blocked under the law. The same month, a court used the law to convict comedian Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala for a Facebook post that allegedly sympathized with Amedy Coulibaly, an associate of the Kouachis who carried out the January attack on a kosher market in Paris. Dieudonné, as he is popularly known, received a two-month suspended prison sentence.

In December 2015, a court in Lyon acquitted Le Pen of charges of inciting hatred with a 2010 campaign speech in which she had likened public Muslim prayer to the Nazi occupation of France.

In May 2015, the French data regulation agency ordered Google to comply with requests to remove objectionable or outdated search results from its global search engine, not just its French website, under a 2014 ruling by the European Court of Justice that affirmed the "right to be forgotten." The order was upheld on final appeal in September.

The constitution protects freedom of religion. Strong antidefamation laws prohibit religiously motivated attacks, and Holocaust denial is illegal. France maintains the policy of *laïcité*, whereby religion and government affairs are strictly separated, though the government has relationships with organizations representing the country's three major religions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism). A 2004 law bans "ostentatious" religious symbols in

schools; Muslim girls' headscarves were widely seen as the main target of this law. In 2014, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) upheld France's ban on clothing that covers the face, including the burqa and niqab, in public spaces.

Such restrictions remained the subject of controversy in 2015. In April, a 15-year-old Muslim girl in northeastern France was sent home from school twice for wearing a skirt that school officials found to be too long and in violation of the religious symbols ban. The Collective Against Islamophobia in France reportedly documented nearly 130 similar incidents in 2014. In November 2015, the ECHR rejected a challenge to the ban filed by a Muslim social worker who lost her job at a hospital in 2000 after refusing to remove her headscarf at work.

Following the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve announced that authorities had closed three mosques—two in the Paris area, one in Lyons—and four “clandestine” Muslim prayer rooms in Nice due to alleged “Islamist radicalization.” This marked the first time that French officials closed Muslim houses of worship on these grounds.

Academic freedom is respected by the government. Private discussion is open and vibrant. However, in May 2015, the parliament approved a new law granting the government expanded powers to conduct domestic surveillance, including monitoring and bulk collection of communications data, as well as expanded authority to use hidden cameras and microphones. The law authorizes the use of sophisticated intelligence technology to intercept all telephone, text message, and email conversations in targeted areas. Only limited judicial oversight of these activities is prescribed.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12 (– 1)

Freedoms of assembly and association are normally respected, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can operate freely. However, the state of emergency imposed in response to the November 2015 terrorist attacks included a ban on demonstrations, which was applied during a major UN climate conference in Paris. Similar conferences have sparked large public protests in the past.

After racially and religiously charged riots erupted in Ajaccio, Corsica, in December, the island's prefect banned public gatherings in the affected neighborhoods. The prohibition remained in effect through the end of the year, but demonstrations took place in other areas of the capital city.

Trade unions are strong despite declining membership and a lack of legal protections relative to more corporatist European countries. In October, Air France workers angered by planned layoffs stormed the airline's headquarters, assaulting security and executive personnel.

F. Rule of Law: 13 / 16 (– 2)

France has an independent judiciary, and the rule of law generally prevails in court proceedings. In June 2015, an appeals court in Paris ruled that five individuals of Arab and African descent had been illegally detained and searched in instances of racial profiling by police. The judgment, the first of its kind in France, stated that police may only stop and search people on the basis of objective criteria not related to race. However, the court also ruled that this standard did not apply in so-called dangerous areas that merit heightened scrutiny, an exception criticized by rights advocates.

The state of emergency imposed after the November 13 attacks in Paris allowed authorities to take extraordinary measures, including conducting raids, detentions, and house

arrests of suspects without warrants or judicial oversight. On November 19, the National Assembly voted to extend the state of emergency for three months. In December, the government proposed a constitutional amendment that would allow a state of emergency to last for an unlimited period. It would also empower authorities to strip dual nationals of French citizenship if they are convicted of terrorism or an attack on national interests.

Migrants and refugees in France suffer both from societal discrimination and abuse by government officials. Surging immigration and refugee flows from Muslim-majority countries have exacerbated anti-Muslim sentiment, which has been potent in France for years. Observers reported significant increases in bias-related crimes such as mosque vandalism, verbal assaults, and xenophobic graffiti in 2015. In May, French police were filmed assaulting a number of migrants near the port city of Calais without provocation, deploying pepper spray against them as they fled. During the December riots in Corsica, crowds vandalized a Muslim prayer room and burned copies of the Koran.

Thousands of migrants, largely of African and Middle Eastern origin, remained in an informal camp on the outskirts of Calais at year's end. In July and August, groups of migrants attempted to evade security at the entrance to the Channel Tunnel in order to reach the United Kingdom while hiding in trucks and freight trains. Several died as a result of traffic accidents.

In September, Hollande announced that France would accept 24,000 refugees over the course of two years under a proposed EU quota. However, following the November attacks and revelations that the perpetrators had traveled through Europe in the planning stages, France successfully pushed for tighter border controls across the Schengen Area, and implementation of the quota agreement was in doubt at year's end.

Police in Paris demolished the country's oldest Roma camp in August, evicting 300 people without warning. According to the European Roma Rights Centre, there were more than 11,000 evictions in 2015, down from 13,000 in 2014 and nearly 20,000 in 2013. In September 2015, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) called on France to end its "punitive and destructive policy" of eviction.

Anti-Semitic sentiments became pronounced following the January attack on a kosher market in Paris. Jewish rights groups reported more than 500 anti-Semitic incidents in the first four months of 2015, an increase of more than 80 percent over the same period the previous year. This climate contributed to record numbers of French Jews relocating to Israel, with some 8,000 moving in 2015. In April, Prime Minister Manuel Valls announced a three-year government campaign against "racism, anti-Semitism, hatred of Muslims, hatred of foreigners, and homophobia." The campaign will include increased monitoring of hate speech online and tougher penalties for hate crimes.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited by law. French law forbids the categorization of people according to ethnic origin, and no official statistics are collected on ethnicity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

There are normally no restrictions on freedom of travel or choice of residence or employment in France, but a number of exceptions have been made in recent years. A 2014 counterterrorism law imposed a travel ban on anyone suspected of planning to become a jihadist; the passports of such individuals can be confiscated for a period of six months to two years. The law was first used in February 2015, when the Interior Ministry seized the passports of six people suspected of planning to travel to Syria to join terrorist groups; hundreds of French citizens have reportedly traveled to Syria and Iraq for that purpose.

Separately, under the state of emergency imposed in late 2015, authorities were empowered to place individuals under house arrest, require them to report to police stations, and confiscate their passports without prior judicial authorization. Hundreds of individuals were confined to house arrest in the aftermath of the November attacks.

Private businesses are free to operate. In July 2015, the government pushed through measures to liberalize multiple sectors of the economy; these measures aim to ease entry to certain professions, facilitate the firing of employees, and allow stores to open on Sundays in areas frequented by tourists.

Gender equality is protected in France, and constitutional reforms in 2008 institutionalized economic and social equality. However, in the 2015 Global Gender Gap report, France ranked 132 out of 145 countries in perceptions of the wage gap between women and men, despite its overall strong ranking. After the 2012 elections, women held a record 27 percent of seats in the National Assembly.

France legalized same-sex marriage in 2013. In September 2015, a court in Marseille gave one of the city's deputy mayors a five-month suspended sentence for her refusal to conduct a marriage ceremony for two women.

Civil rights groups and scholars have reported evidence of labor market discrimination against women, French Muslims, immigrants of North African descent, and others outside the traditional elite. While France's government takes actions against human trafficking, the problem persists in the commercial sex trade; other victims are forced into domestic labor.

Gabon

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 1,751,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Libreville

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

During 2015, Gabon's political leaders jockeyed for position ahead of presidential and legislative elections in 2016. In February, the government repealed a 2011 ban on the main opposition party National Union (NU), enabling NU candidates to run in the 2016 elections. However, NU's leader, André Mba Obame, died of illness in April, sparking violence by opposition supporters in Libreville, the capital. Also in 2015, Jean Ping, another high-profile opposition figure, emerged as a leading challenger to President Ali Bongo Ondimba in the 2016 presidential election.

The offices of opposition newspapers *La Loupe* and *L'Aube* were raided in 2015, and documents and computers were seized by unknown perpetrators.

A variety of strikes from employees of the public sector took place during the year, calling for better wages for civil servants and better pensions for the retired. While Gabon

has one of the highest per capita income levels in Africa, a large minority of the population still lives in poverty.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 9 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 9

Gabon's bicameral parliament consists of a National Assembly, whose 120 members are elected by popular vote for five-year terms, and a 102-seat Senate indirectly elected by regional and municipal officials for six-year terms. Presidential term limits were abolished in 2003, and the president, who is elected by popular vote for seven years, has the power to dissolve the National Assembly. President Omar Bongo Ondimba—who had ruled the country since 1967—died in June 2009, and his son, Ali Bongo Ondimba, won elections held in September of that year, claiming 42 percent of the vote. He main challengers included several senior figures of the ruling Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG), who ran as independents. Although the opposition challenged the official results amid violent protests, the Constitutional Court upheld Bongo's victory following a recount.

Some opposition parties boycotted the 2011 National Assembly elections over the government's failure to implement biometric technology for voter registration; the ruling PDG won all but seven seats. Biometric registration was in effect for the 2013 municipal and regional elections, which were overwhelmingly won by the PDG as well.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 4 / 16

The government is dominated by the PDG, which has held power since it was formed in 1968. The country has several opposition parties, but they are fragmented, and many are spinoffs of the PDG. In February, the government repealed a 2011 ban against the NU. However, the NU's leader, Obame—who had refused to concede defeat in the 2009 presidential election—died in April. His death led some NU supporters to set fire to the embassy of Benin and burn cars in Libreville.

Other opposition groups include United Opposition Front for Change (FOPA) coalition, which was formed in 2014. Its ranks include Jean Ping, a foreign minister under Omar Bongo and a former chair of the African Union Commission, as well as former PDG secretary general Jacques Adiahénot.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

Investigations by other countries, especially France and the United States, have documented extensive patronage under Omar Bongo's regime. Since taking office, Ali Bongo has attempted to distance himself from his father. He has reduced the size of the presidential cabinet, eliminated ghost workers from the public payroll, formed the National Commission against Illegal Enrichment to combat corruption, and launched an anticorruption probe aimed at finding millions of dollars siphoned off from a decade's worth of development projects during Omar Bongo's reign. However, corruption remains an issue. Gabon was ranked 99 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In 2014, the government launched an investigation into hundreds of millions of dollars in state funds allegedly stolen during the final years of Omar Bongo's regime. Critics say the probe targeted regime opponents, such as former prime minister Jean Eyeghé Ndong. The operation led to the arrest in August 2014 of a current minister, Jeannot Kalima, for alleged misappropriation of funds when he was a senior public works official under Omar Bongo. In August 2015, Bongo announced he would donate his share of his father's estate to

Gabonese youth. Also in August, French police temporarily detained Maixent Accrombessi, Bongo's chief of staff, in connection with a corruption investigation; he was later released on the grounds that he had diplomatic immunity.

Gabon was delisted as a candidate for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2013 because it submitted its validation report after the deadline. In 2014, the government held a National Workshop to take steps to reenter EITI, and in 2015, it appointed a president to lead the action plan aimed at reacquiring membership.

In May 2015, the government approved a UN Development Programme-backed, three-year strategy to fight corruption and money laundering. Facilitators of the project include the National Commission for the Fight against Illicit Enrichment and the National Agency for Financial Investigation, as well as members of civil society and the private sector.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 25 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 10 / 16

Press freedom is guaranteed by law and the constitution but restricted in practice. Both private and government-affiliated newspapers and websites criticize the government, but self-censorship occurs, especially regarding topics related to the president. While technically independent, Gabon's main media regulatory body, the National Communication Council (CNC), is often subject to political influence from the ruling party and the Ministry of Communications, to which it reports.

In 2014, opposition newspapers *La Loupe* and *L'Aube* closed temporarily after claiming fake progovernment issues had replaced their original publications on newsstands. The government denied the allegations. In October 2015, unknown assailants raided the offices of both *La Loupe* and *L'Aube*, seizing computers and important documents. In November, the minister of communication issued a statement threatening *La Loupe* with prosecution via the CNC for an article on poor governance in Gabon.

There are no government restrictions on internet access or reports of illegal monitoring or surveillance. In 2015, the government was internationally recognized for implementing initiatives intended to increase internet access among the population.

Gabon is a predominantly Christian country, and many of its minority Muslim population are noncitizen residents from West Africa. Religious freedom is enshrined in the constitution and largely upheld by the authorities. In July 2015, authorities instructed security forces to monitor those wearing full face veils in public places after terrorists had used them as a means to disguise their identities in nearby countries. Wearing the veil is legally permitted however.

The government does not restrict academic freedom.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

The rights of assembly and association are legally guaranteed. Public protests must be approved by the government, and security forces have used harsh tactics to keep order. In March 2015, security forces used tear gas and fired blanks against protesters calling for various reforms in education, retirement, and salaries.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) serve as an important counterweight to the lack of an effective political opposition, and are generally free to investigate and report on civil liberties abuses. However, their numbers are small.

Unions are relatively strong and influential, and the private industrial sector is almost entirely unionized. Strikes are frequent, and in 2015, members of the public sector mobilized to demand higher wages for civil servants and a reevaluation of retirement pensions,

while students called for improvements on issues including scholarships and school cancellations. In February and March, Libreville experienced periods of internet blackouts after employees of Gabon Télécom, the country's main internet and phone provider, organized strikes as a means to seek better pay after the company was privatized in 2007.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The law stipulates that the judiciary be independent, but it is accountable to the Ministry of Justice, through which the president has the power to appoint and dismiss judges.

Prison conditions are harsh and facilities are severely overcrowded. The main prison in Libreville, built to hold 500 inmates, has approximately four times that many. Pretrial detention is often lengthy, and access to proper medical care is limited. Human rights organizations are technically allowed to visit prisons, but some reportedly experienced problems in obtaining authorization. Torture is specifically outlawed by the constitution, including of inmates, yet cruel treatment continues to occur in prisons nonetheless. Mob violence is pervasive, and residential burglaries are reportedly on the rise.

Ritual killings remain a serious problem, especially before elections, as some believe limbs, genitals, and organs can be used to increase strength. Many go unreported and impunity is a problem. After several bodies were discovered with parts missing, the government introduced a stricter penal code in 2015, condemning perpetrators of ritual killings and other mutilations to life in prison.

The country's large population of noncitizen African immigrants is subject to harassment and extortion. Police occasionally beat and detain immigrants who do not have valid identification or residence permits. According to the law, indigenous peoples have the same civil rights as others, yet in practice, they are often marginalized from societal institutions. They reportedly experience discrimination in the workplace and live in extreme poverty.

Gabon has no specific statute outlawing same-sex sexual activity, but bias against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people remains an issue. Most members of the LGBT community choose to keep their identities a secret to avoid housing and employment discrimination. There were no reports of violence directed against LGBT members in 2015.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

There are no laws restricting internal travel, but police often monitor travelers at checkpoints and demand bribes. Married women seeking to either obtain a passport or travel abroad must have permission from their husbands. Gabon was ranked 144 of 189 countries in the 2015 World Bank *Doing Business* report.

Women hold positions at all levels of private business and the government, including 15 of 120 seats in the National Assembly and 19 of 100 seats in the Senate. Rape is illegal under the law, but spousal rape is not mentioned and no law exists against sexual harassment. However, rape is rarely prosecuted and is often unreported due to societal taboos.

Gabon's relatively stable economy makes it attractive for smugglers who want to lure young people into the country, and teenagers from neighboring countries are commonly trafficked into Gabon. Many boys end up as street vendors or mechanics, while girls are forced to work as domestic servants. Although the government often does not respond to issues of trafficking, in 2015 the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare delivered aid to 14 victims found by local NGOs.

The Gambia

Political Rights Rating: 7↓

Population: 2,022,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Banjul

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ratings Change: The Gambia's political rights rating declined from 6 to 7 due to an amendment to the electoral laws that significantly increased the registration fees for candidacy in presidential, legislative, and local elections, adding to the impediments that opposition candidates already faced in the country's repressive political environment.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

The regime of President Yahya Jammeh tightened legal restrictions on the beleaguered opposition during 2015. With a presidential election due in 2016, the parliament, dominated by the ruling Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC), passed legislation in July that dramatically raised the registration deposits required for presidential, legislative, mayoral, and local council candidates.

Jammeh pardoned over 300 prisoners in mid-2015 during the month of Ramadan. Although more than a dozen political prisoners were among those released, others remained behind bars at year's end, including members of the opposition United Democratic Party (UDP). The president also further undermined the independence of the judiciary by forcing out three Supreme Court judges in May and June following rulings that favored former military commanders accused of involvement in 2006 and 2009 coup plots.

Security forces continued to harass journalists and opposition activists in 2015, and Jammeh repeated his public threats against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. At the end of the year, the parliament passed a law that banned female genital mutilation.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 5 / 40 (–2)

A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12 (–1)

The president is elected by popular vote and is eligible for an unlimited number of five-year terms. Elections are violent and rigged. Before the 2011 presidential poll, which featured deadly clashes between government supporters and opponents, the Independent Electoral Commission failed to share the electoral register with opposition parties, shortened the campaign period, and hampered opposition campaigns. Jammeh secured his fourth term with 72 percent of the vote; opposition parties rejected the results as fraudulent.

Of the 53 members of the unicameral National Assembly, 48 are elected by popular vote, with the remainder appointed by the president; members serve five-year terms. Six of seven opposition parties boycotted the 2012 legislative elections after demands for electoral reform were rejected. The APRC won 43 elected seats. African Union observers noted a "gross imbalance" between the resources of the APRC and other parties, and the presence

of security personnel and traditional chiefs in polling stations. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) refused to send observers.

In July 2015, the parliament passed amendments to the election law that increased the registration deposit for presidential candidates from 10,000 dalasi to 500,000 dalasi (\$12,000), a considerable sum given the average annual income of just \$450. The amounts required from National Assembly and mayoral candidates were raised to 50,000 dalasi, and the sum for local council candidates was increased to 10,000 dalasi. Jammeh also rejected ECOWAS's proposed two-term limit for presidents in West Africa as the country prepared for a presidential election in 2016.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 4 / 16 (– 1)

Jammeh and the APRC dominate politics, and the politicized security forces suppress the opposition. Although Jammeh pardoned over 300 prisoners in mid-2015, political opponents who remained incarcerated included the UDP's national treasurer and two other UDP members. The three were convicted of sedition in 2013 and have allegedly been tortured in custody.

The July 2015 election law amendments imposed prohibitive new registration requirements on political parties. Most notably, parties must deposit over \$12,000; gather the signatures of 10,000 registered voters, up from 500; ensure that all executive members live in The Gambia, and hold biannual congresses.

Members of Jammeh's minority Jola ethnic group hold important positions in the government, and the dominance of the APRC limits the extent to which any group can participate and advocate for its interests in the political system.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

The president, who is not freely elected, exercises most control over decision making, and government operations in general are opaque. Official corruption remains a serious problem, and reports of state officials participating in drug trafficking have been numerous. In February 2015, Jammeh told the National Assembly that an anticorruption commission formally established under a 2012 law would soon be fully operational. The Gambia was ranked 123 out of 168 countries and territories assessed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 13 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 3 / 16

Laws on sedition give the government discretion in silencing dissent, and independent media outlets and journalists are subject to harassment, arrest, and violence. There are harsh criminal penalties for use of the internet to criticize government officials and providing "false information" to a public servant. Journalists are often jailed without charge for longer than the 72 hours allowed by law.

State-run outlets dominate the media landscape. Ownership of private television stations is prohibited, but a small number of privately owned newspapers and radio stations operate. Many opposition and news websites are blocked. Alagie Ceesay, director of Taranga FM, was detained for one day in January 2015 following a failed December 2014 coup, and was released with instructions to air only music and no news. The station eventually resumed regular coverage. Ceesay was then abducted by suspected government agents in July, detained by the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) later that month, and charged in August with sedition for allegedly sharing an anti-Jammeh photograph via mobile phone.

Separately in July, staff writers for the *Voice* newspaper were summoned by the NIA, photographed, and interrogated for several hours. The paper had recently come under pressure from its printer over its coverage of the opposition and human rights issues.

Religious freedom is generally protected. However, the authorities occasionally target Muslim groups or clerics who depart from practices condoned by the Supreme Islamic Council, which has close ties to the government. Religious instruction in schools is mandatory.

Academic freedom is severely limited at the University of The Gambia, with security forces on campus and political activities discouraged. The APRC controls curriculum decisions and appointments. Sait Matty Jaw, a history lecturer who had been arrested and charged with conspiracy in 2014 based on his research and advocacy on women's rights, was acquitted in April 2015, but the government said it would appeal.

Free and open private discussion has been steadily eroded over the past decade by credible fears of government surveillance and retaliation.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are legally protected but constrained by state intimidation. While legal requirements for holding peaceful assemblies are not extremely onerous, meetings using public announcement systems require registration. The UDP sought such registration for a series of campaign events across the country in April 2015, but the police delayed replying until the eve of the tour. When UDP members proceeded without a public announcement system, police physically blocked their movements in a tense standoff for four days before issuing a permit.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the country operate under constant threat of reprisals and detention. Workers—except for civil servants, household workers, and security forces—can form unions, strike, and bargain for wages under the law, but the labor minister has the discretion to exclude other categories of workers.

F. Rule of Law: 1 / 16

Although the constitution guarantees an independent judiciary, Jammeh selects and dismisses judges. In May 2015, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, a Pakistani national, reportedly resigned under pressure and was forced to leave the country after the court acquitted or commuted the death sentences of several former military commanders who had been convicted in connection with coup plots from 2006 and 2009. The president dismissed two other Supreme Court judges, apparently for similar reasons, in June. Separately, in March, two officers and a soldier were given death sentences and three other officers were sentenced to life in prison following a secret trial for their alleged role in the December 2014 coup attempt. Dozens of family members of suspected 2014 coup plotters were also detained through early 2015, with some held for nearly six months.

The judicial system recognizes customary and Islamic law, primarily for personal status and family matters. Impunity for the security forces is a problem. The NIA is authorized to search, arrest, or seize any person or property without a warrant in the name of state security. Prisons are overcrowded and unsanitary, and torture is reportedly common.

The Gambia's ethnic groups coexist in relative harmony, though Jammeh is accused of giving preferential treatment to the Jola, whose presence in the army reportedly increased after the 2014 coup attempt.

Consensual same-sex sexual relationships are a criminal offense. Even an attempted sex act can draw seven years in prison, and defendants with repeat offenses or who are HIV

positive face life imprisonment for “aggravated homosexuality.” In May 2015, Jammeh gave a speech in which he threatened to slit the throats of gay men.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

State employees must obtain permission from the administration to travel abroad, and it is a criminal offense to abscond while on government business in another country. Freedom of movement is also impaired by security checkpoints. Some of the numerous checkpoints set up after the 2014 coup remained in place in early 2015.

Property rights are not secure. Village chiefs allocate land for various uses, but poor record keeping and high rates of turnover in village hierarchies foster land disputes and confusion about ownership and leases. Problems with due process related to the illegal seizure of land also persist. Regulatory hurdles impede the establishment and operation of businesses.

Women enjoy less access to higher education and employment than men. Sharia provisions on family law and inheritance discriminate against women. Rape and domestic violence are common, despite laws prohibiting them. Female genital mutilation is widespread in The Gambia, though a law passed in December 2015 criminalized the practice.

Although child labor and forced labor are illegal, women and children are subject to sex trafficking, domestic servitude, and forced begging. The government does little to prosecute offenders or identify and protect victims of human trafficking in the country.

Georgia

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 3,800,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Tbilisi

Freedom Rating: 3

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Note: The numerical rankings and the subsequent report do not include South Ossetia or Abkhazia, which are considered in separate reports.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

Rule of law conditions in Georgia showed signs of improvement in 2015, with a landmark Constitutional Court decision in September against the power of prosecutors to extend pretrial detentions past the constitutionally mandated nine-month limit. However, a number of other developments called into question the strength of the country’s democratic institutions. Prosecution of members of the former United National Movement (UNM) government continued during the year, and the handling of an ownership dispute involving Rustavi 2, the largest opposition news channel, raised concerns about the extent of political pressure on Georgian media.

In December 2015, Belgium became the final state to ratify Georgia’s Association Agreement with the European Union (EU), which Georgia had signed the previous year.

The roles of Russia and Western countries in the political trajectory of Georgia continued to be a contested topic of discussion.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 27 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

Georgia's unicameral Parliament is composed of 150 members, with 77 selected by party list and 73 in single-member districts; members serve four-year terms. Georgia has a dual executive, with the prime minister serving as head of government and the president as head of state. The president is selected by direct election for a five-year term. The president chooses the prime minister, but is constitutionally bound to select the individual nominated by the party that won the most legislative seats. The prime minister nominates cabinet members for parliamentary approval; the president selects members of the National Security Council.

Parliamentary elections in 2012 marked the first time an opposition party took power through elections in post-independence Georgia, and were considered free and fair by international observers. The Georgian Dream coalition, a bloc of parties led by wealthy businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili, captured 85 seats, leaving the UNM in the minority with 65 seats.

In the 2013 presidential elections, Georgian Dream candidate Giorgi Margvelashvili won 62 percent of the vote, ahead of UNM candidate David Bakradze, who won 22 percent. While observers reported some violations, they noted no cases of abuse of administrative resources or pressure on voters, which had been issues in past elections, and praised the Central Election Commission for its professionalism.

Georgian Dream candidates largely swept municipal elections in 2014, winning mayoral seats in the eight largest cities of the country, including in Tbilisi, and taking more than half of local council seats. The elections marked the first time that voters outside of Tbilisi could directly elect mayors of cities and heads of municipal districts.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16 (+ 1)

Georgian political life is vibrant, and people are generally able to form political parties and assert their own candidacies with little interference. Electoral law, however, prohibits parties from forming "according to a regional or territorial principle," a significant limitation for ethnic minority groups whose populations are concentrated in southern Georgia.

Former president Mikheil Saakashvili's UNM party dominated Georgian politics from 2004 to 2012, when it lost parliamentary control to the Georgian Dream coalition. Georgian Dream has since seated three prime ministers: Ivanishvili from November 2012 until his resignation a year later; Irakli Garibashvili, who replaced Ivanishvili but resigned in 2015; and Giorgi Kvirikashvili, who replaced Garibashvili. Both Kvirikashvili and Garibashvili have served on the executive board of Ivanishvili's Cartu Bank in the past.

The popularity of the Georgian Dream has shown signs of decline, however, and in 2014, the Free Democrats abandoned the coalition. The UNM continues to be the dominant opposition force, but its appeal is weakened by the legacy of the Saakashvili administration, particularly its heavy-handed use of financial investigation services and alleged high-level corruption. A number of challenger parties have made headway in this environment, including the pro-Russian United Opposition, led by former parliamentary speaker Nino Burjanadze. Another party, the Alliance of Patriots, which is skeptical of deepening ties with Western institutions like the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), gained enough votes in the 2014 local elections to qualify for public election funds.

The Georgian Orthodox Church retains an influential role in the country, and there are reports of Russian efforts to fund political opposition and of the proliferation of pro-Russian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and media. However, domestic political forces and the electorate are largely able to exercise freedom of choice and pursue their political interests without interference.

Ethnic minorities are underrepresented in elected positions, and few opposition parties address ethnic minority needs specifically. As of 2015, Parliament included three legislators of ethnic Armenian origin, three of Azeri origin, and one of Ossetian origin.

C. Functioning of the Government: 7 / 12

Institutionally, the dual executive authority in Georgia provides foreign policy and security powers to the president. In 2015, a rivalry persisted between President Margvelashvili and Prime Minister Garibashvili, both members of the Georgian Dream. Margvelashvili criticized Garibashvili's management, decried lack of accountability and overlapping authority enabled by Georgia's government system, and also targeted former prime minister Ivanishvili, accusing him of covertly dominating the political process after leaving office. Ivanishvili was instrumental in advancing the Georgian Dream's development and 2012 parliamentary victory, and the extent of his influence on elected officials remained subject to speculation in 2015.

Although petty corruption has been largely eliminated in recent years, a number of broader problems exist. Parliament has limited oversight capabilities, and existing anticorruption bodies remain inefficient. In a December 2015 report, the local chapter of Transparency International noted that regulation of conflicts of interest remains weak, and that the majority of state agencies have no mechanisms for the protection of whistleblowers, even when required to do so by law. A number of recent corruption cases against UNM politicians have led to questions about political influence on anticorruption mechanisms. In a high-profile case in September 2015, a Tbilisi court found Gigi Ugulava, former mayor of the capital, guilty of misuse of public funds and sentenced him to four and a half years in prison. Georgia ranked 52 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Government transparency has shown signs of improvement in recent years. According to the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), a Georgian NGO, government bodies responded to 86 percent of information requests between January and November 2015.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 37 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression: 11 / 16 (– 1)

Georgian media are relatively free from censorship and direct political control, and the media environment has become significantly more pluralistic in recent years, in part because of "must carry, must offer" requirement introduced for cable providers in 2012. However, a number of developments have called into question the vulnerability of independent media to undue pressure. In June 2015, Parliament passed a law against the incitement to violence criminalizing any form of expression that causes discord and poses an "obvious, direct, and substantive threat." The initial language of the bill was revised following criticism by human rights groups—in particular, the proposed penalty of imprisonment was reduced to a fine except in cases leading to death or other extreme consequences. Nevertheless, opponents of the legislation maintained that it could be used to curtail freedoms of speech and the press.

Rustavi 2, the largest opposition television channel in Georgia, faced a severe financial crisis due to a court decision in August to freeze its assets amid an ownership dispute between former and current shareholders. In November, the Tbilisi City Court appointed two temporary administrators to Rustavi 2, dismissing the station's director general and chief financial officer. While the role of the government in the dispute remained subject to speculation, media groups voiced concerns about judicial irregularities in the handling of the case as well as negative rhetoric about the outlet by Georgian Dream members.

The Georgian constitution guarantees freedom of religion but grants unique privileges to the Georgian Orthodox Church, including immunity for its patriarch. Georgia's religious minorities—among them Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Muslims—have reported discrimination and hostility, including from Georgian Orthodox priests and adherents, and are insufficiently protected by the state.

Academic freedom is generally respected.

Public concerns about government surveillance increased in 2015. The Law on Personal Data Protection, which enables security services to conduct electronic surveillance with permission from the judiciary and a specially appointed inspector, came into force in March. Privacy watchdogs and other NGOs claimed that the law was too permissive and granted the government excessive access to data, noting that it did not require permission for monitoring internet data. In July, Parliament adopted legislation for the creation of a new surveillance agency, the Security Service of Georgia, which was launched the following month. Local watchdogs decried the law for granting the agency excessive power, and Georgia's ombudsman voiced concerns about weak oversight of its activities.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

Freedom of assembly is generally respected. In May, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights groups held rallies under heavy security and without reported incidents. Protestors led by Georgian Orthodox priests had injured participants in LGBT marches in 2012 and 2013, and no events had been held in 2014.

The civil society sector has grown significantly in recent years, but is concentrated in the capital. Parliament has institutionalized regular meetings with Georgian NGOs.

Workers are allowed to organize, but trade unions remain weak. Legislators adopted a new labor code in 2013 with additional protections for workers' rights.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16

Executive and legislative interference in the judiciary remains a substantial problem, although judicial transparency and accountability have improved in recent years, in part due to increased media access to courtrooms. Jury trials are only held for certain crimes in Tbilisi, Batumi, and Kutaisi, and legislators have debated postponing plans to expand the jury trial system to the rest of the country. Human rights organizations have consistently criticized prosecutors' practice of repeatedly filing new charges against detainees to prolong their time in pretrial detention, an act made possible by a discrepancy between the criminal code and the constitution. In September 2015, in a case brought by Ugulava, the Constitutional Court found the practice to be unconstitutional, ruling that pretrial detentions must not exceed the constitutional limit of nine months. Ugulava was among many former UNM officials to face criminal charges since 2012, which has raised questions about political influence on the prosecutorial process. However, a mixture of acquittals and convictions as well as the September 2015 Constitutional Court ruling have suggested a notable degree of independence in the judiciary's handling of the cases.

Human rights watchdogs and the ombudsman continued to urge the government to adequately investigate allegations of police abuse. In 2015, some members of the security forces faced disciplinary measures or prosecution for excessive use of force. In December, prosecutors charged former deputy minister of defense Davit Akhalaia and former chief of the military police Megis Kardava, among others, with illegal imprisonment and torture, accusing them of beating and abusing a suspect in order to force a confession; the case was ongoing at year’s end. Separately, in November, a Tbilisi court found a detective guilty of the premeditated murder of a human rights activist who had been critical of police violence, sentencing him to 20 years in prison.

In 2014, Georgia passed an antidiscrimination law providing protection against discrimination on the basis of various factors, including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity. However, enforcement remains uneven.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Freedom of domestic movement and international travel are respected, and individuals have the freedom to choose their place of residence without interference.

The Heritage Foundation’s Index of Economic Freedom ranked Georgia 22 of 178 countries in 2015, noting the regulatory ease of registering a business and recent government efforts to eradicate corruption. However, protections for property rights remain weak. Hundreds of complaints of illegal confiscation of private property have been filed in recent years, predominantly regarding decisions made during the UNM era. Although a special agency was charged with handling these claims in 2015, officials noted that there was an extensive backlog of cases at year’s end.

Domestic violence remains a problem, though investigations and prosecutions of such incidents have increased. Employer discrimination against women is common, as are reports of sexual harassment, which is not explicitly prohibited by law.

Georgia is a source, destination, and transit country for human trafficking linked to sexual exploitation and forced labor. According to the U.S. State Department’s 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, the government does not meet the minimum requirements for the elimination of trafficking, but enhanced the resources and capacity of bodies devoted to the issue in 2015.

Germany

Political Rights: 1

Population: 81,132,000

Civil Liberties: 1

Capital: Berlin

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

More than one million refugees entered Germany in 2015, the majority coming from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. This record-breaking influx, which heavily strained the

resources of the German government, led to contested public discussions about immigration and asylum. Anti-immigration violence increased amid the crisis, with the Ministry of the Interior recording a sharp rise in attacks on refugee shelters during the year.

In July, the investigative journalism website Netzpolitik.org reported that two of its journalists were under investigation for treason for the publication of articles that contained classified state information. The case, driven by the office of the federal prosecutor, marked the first use of treason charges against a journalist in Germany since 1962, and was widely criticized by media watchdogs and the German public as a restriction of press freedom. The case was dropped in August.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 39 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The German constitution provides for a lower house of parliament, the Bundestag (Federal Assembly), as well as an upper house, the Bundesrat (Federal Council), which represents the country's 16 federal states. The Bundestag is elected at least every four years through a mixture of proportional representation and single-member districts, which can lead the number of seats to vary from the minimum 598. The members of the Bundesrat are appointed by state governments. Germany's head of state is a largely ceremonial president, chosen jointly by the Bundestag and a group of state representatives to serve up to two five-year terms. The chancellor—the head of government—is elected by the Bundestag and usually serves for the duration of a legislative session. The chancellor's term can be cut short only if the Bundestag chooses a replacement in a so-called constructive vote of no confidence. In Germany's federal system, state governments have considerable authority over matters such as education, policing, taxation, and spending.

Joachim Gauck was elected president in 2012. In the 2013 federal elections, a total of 631 representatives were elected to the Bundestag. Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), won a total of 311 seats—the best showing for the Christian Democrats since 1990, when Germany reunified. The CDU's previous coalition partner, the pro-free market Free Democratic Party (FDP), failed to meet the 5 percent threshold to qualify for seats for the first time since 1949. The center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) took 193 seats, and the Greens won 63. The far-left party the Left took 64 seats. The right-wing, Euroskeptical party Alternative for Germany (AfD) failed to qualify for seats.

The SPD had previously ruled out governing with the Left, which is widely viewed as a successor to the East German communists. In 2013, the CDU reached an agreement with the SPD to form a so-called grand coalition government, as they had done during Merkel's first term (2005–09).

State-level elections took place in 2015 in the city-states of Bremen and Hamburg, with the AfD gaining legislative seats in both.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Under electoral laws that, for historical reasons, are intended to restrict the far left and far right, a party must receive either 5 percent of the national vote or win at least three directly elected seats to gain representation in the parliament. The dominant political parties have traditionally been the SPD and the CDU-CSU.

The influence of Germany's extreme-right party, the National Democratic Party (NPD)—an anti-immigration, anti-European Union (EU) party that has been accused of glorifying Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich—has been on the decline, but support for the

AfD has grown in recent years. In addition to making gains in the 2015 state elections in Bremen and Hamburg, the party won seven seats in the European Parliament elections in 2014. In May 2015, founder Bernd Lucke and more moderate members left the party, citing its increasingly nationalist attitude and negative stance against refugees and immigrants.

All 16 German states petitioned the Federal Constitutional Court in 2013 to ban the NPD, calling it a neo-Nazi antidemocratic group. Previous attempts to outlaw the party have failed. The movement against the NPD continued in 2015, but no significant changes had occurred by year's end.

After Bodo Ramelow became the first member of the Left to hold a premiership in 2014, when he was elected to the position in Thuringia, Chancellor Merkel and President Gauck publicly criticized the party's inclusion in a state government.

The 2013 federal elections resulted in the first black members of the Bundestag, with one each from the CDU and the SPD. The CDU also saw its first Muslim deputy elected to the Bundestag. Overall, the number of Bundestag members from immigrant backgrounds rose from 21 to 34.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Germany is free from pervasive corruption and was ranked 10 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. The government is held accountable for its performance through open parliamentary debates, which are covered widely in the media. In a report released in April 2015, however, Transparency International criticized the German government for its lenient laws on lobbying activities, noting that there is poor regulation and disclosure of relationships between public officials and lobbyists.

In October, the Bundestag approved a controversial law on data retention. The legislation had elicited criticism upon introduction earlier in the year, due to both general privacy concerns and a particular section of the law about illegal data handling. Watchdogs voiced concerns that the law could be used to punish whistleblowers, who receive few legal protections in Germany. The Constitutional Court had ruled against indiscriminate data retention in 2010, as did the European Court of Human Rights in 2014. Supporters of the 2015 legislation framed it as a compromise, noting that it limits the types of information that can be stored as well as the duration of storage. The law entered into force in December.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 56 / 60 (-1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Freedom of expression is enshrined in the constitution, and the media are largely free and independent. Hate speech, such as racist agitation or anti-Semitism, is punishable by law. It is also illegal to advocate Nazism, deny the Holocaust, or glorify the ideology of Hitler.

In July 2015, Netzpolitik.org received notice from the office of Germany's prosecutor general that its chief editor, Markus Beckedahl, and a journalist, André Meister, were under investigation for treason. The charges against Beckedahl and Meister stemmed from two articles on surveillance by the government, published on the website in February and April, that contained internal documents from the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), Germany's internal security agency. The investigation led to both a public outcry and tensions among government bodies over its legality. In August, the case was dropped, and the Ministry of Justice forced the prosecutor general into early retirement.

Internet access is generally unrestricted. In 2013, documents leaked by former U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden revealed that the NSA, collaborating with Germany's Federal Intelligence Service (BND), had secretly collected extensive data on communications in Germany, and had monitored Chancellor Merkel's mobile phone. In 2014, a parliamentary inquiry was launched into the nature of cooperation between the NSA and BND. The inquiry was ongoing in 2015. In September, a witness testifying before the parliament's investigative committee accused the BND of obstructing investigations by destroying emails.

Freedom of belief is legally protected. However, eight states have passed laws prohibiting female Muslim schoolteachers from wearing headscarves, while Berlin and the state of Hesse have adopted legislation banning headscarves for all civil servants. Several mosques were attacked or vandalized in 2015, including in Ludwigsburg and Bielefeld in September. Also in September, media in Münster reported that a gun had been fired through the window of a local synagogue.

Academic freedom is generally respected, and higher education is free of charge to students. Private discussion is unrestricted. Censorship of online discussion was the subject of debate in 2015, with many media representatives and senior politicians, including Chancellor Merkel, calling on Facebook, Google, and Twitter to delete comments containing hate speech. In December, following considerable government pressure, the companies agreed to control such content. In a controversial move, in November, prosecutors in Hamburg initiated an investigation into Facebook's Germany-based European manager for failure to remove hate speech from the social media platform.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The right of peaceful assembly is respected in practice, except in the case of outlawed groups, such as those advocating Nazism or opposing democratic order. Civic groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate without hindrance.

Trade unions, farmers' groups, and business confederations are generally free to organize. In September 2015, a specialized labor court in Hesse halted a strike by Lufthansa pilots, finding that the pilots attempted to influence the general strategy of the company rather than distinct wage or benefit issues, which is not permitted under German law.

F. Rule of Law: 14 / 16 (–1)

The judiciary is independent, and the rule of law prevails. Prison conditions are adequate, though the Council of Europe has criticized some of Germany's preventive detention practices.

Amid the Netzpolitik.org affair in 2015, Justice Minister Heiko Maas faced criticism from several sides, both for allowing the investigation to proceed for several months and for intervening in prosecutorial affairs after the case was brought to light in July.

The threat posed by terrorist groups to national and regional security remained a major concern. By September, the BfV had identified at least 730 individuals who had traveled from Germany to Iraq and Syria to join the Islamic State (IS), despite a 2014 government ban on all forms of support for the militant group. Security forces arrested several individuals throughout the year on suspicion of terrorist activity. In December, a court in Lower Saxony sentenced two men to prison—one for four years and three months, and the other for three years—on charges of terrorism; they had returned to Germany after fighting with IS in Syria.

More than one million refugees entered Germany in 2015—a record-breaking number. By year's end, approximately 477,000 asylum applications were filed with the government.

Contending with inadequate funding and a shortage of temporary housing, federal states and municipalities struggled to ensure safe and humane accommodations. The residents of several cities formed community groups to assist the government in providing basic services to migrants.

According to the Interior Ministry, there were approximately 850 attacks on refugee shelters by mid-December 2015—four times the number recorded in the previous year. More than 90 of these attacks involved arson. Right-wing groups, including supporters of the NPD, held demonstrations against migrants on several occasions during the year, and made open calls to close Germany’s borders—a sentiment echoed by many senior politicians. The activities of the anti-immigration, anti-Islam group known as the Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA), which had developed into a large protest movement in 2014, notably declined in early 2015. However, the group began gaining support in the fall of 2015, following a surge in refugee arrivals over the summer months. Despite considerable domestic and international criticism, Chancellor Merkel maintained an open-door policy for refugees and an insistence on the inviolability of the right to asylum.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Freedom of movement is legally protected and generally respected, although the refugee crisis and security concerns related to IS have led to some restrictions on travel. In April 2015, the government introduced legislation allowing the confiscation of identity documents from German citizens suspected of terrorism as a way to prevent them from traveling abroad, particularly to Iraq and Syria. The rights to own property and engage in commercial activity are respected.

Women’s rights are protected under antidiscrimination laws. However, a considerable gender wage gap persists, with women earning approximately 22 percent less in gross wages than men. A law requiring large German companies to reserve at least 30 percent of seats on their non-executive boards for women is set to come into effect in 2016. Following the 2013 federal elections, women gained 6 of the 16 federal cabinet positions and 36 percent of the seats in the Bundestag.

Limited same-sex partnership rights are respected. New adoption and tax legislation passed in 2014 gave equal rights to same-sex couples in these areas, in accordance with 2013 rulings by the Constitutional Court. However, the government does not grant same-sex couples the right to marry, instead providing the option of a civil partnership.

According to the U.S. State Department’s 2015 Trafficking in Persons report, migrants from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia are targeted for sex trafficking and forced labor. Asylum seekers are also particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Ghana

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 27,672,800

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Accra

Freedom Rating: 1.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F

INTRODUCTION

Ghana's judiciary was thrown into crisis in October following the release of a documentary that implicated 34 judges and scores of officials in accepting bribes over the past two years.

Ghana's main political parties continued preparations for the 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections, with both the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) and its main rival, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), holding primaries during the year. Guided by recommendations from the Supreme Court for reforming the administration of elections, the Electoral Commission (EC) introduced a series of changes and continued consulting with political parties on revising the voter register.

Ghana's economy continued to weaken, facing high inflation, currency depreciation, credit-rating downgrades, and slower-than-expected economic growth. In April, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a three-year \$918 million program to boost economic growth, employment, and investor confidence.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Ghana has experienced competitive multiparty elections since 1992. The president and vice president are directly elected on the same ticket for up to two four-year terms. Members of the unicameral, 275-seat Parliament are also elected for four-year terms.

In 2012, John Mahama of the NDC was elected president with 50.7 percent of the vote, while Akufo-Addo of the NPP took 47.7 percent. In concurrent parliamentary elections, the NDC captured 148 seats and the NPP took 123; a small party won the remaining seat. Limited technical problems, including the breakdown of new biometric machines used to register and identify voters, led to the extension of voting by a day at many polling places. Although international and domestic observers praised the elections as free, fair, and peaceful, the NPP disputed the results, questioned the neutrality of the EC, and filed a legal suit before the Supreme Court. In 2013, the Supreme Court dismissed the NPP's claim and ruled that Mahama had been fairly elected. For many domestic and international observers, the peaceful resolution of the legal challenge underscored the consolidation of democracy and respect for rule of law in Ghana.

In June 2015, President Mahama appointed Charlotte Osei as the new chair of the EC, following the retirement of the previous chair. Opposition parties and domestic stakeholders, while approving of Osei's character and qualifications, criticized President Mahama's unwillingness to consult with lawmakers and party officials in the appointment process.

In October, the EC held a public forum in which the NPP, along with domestic rights groups including the Christian Council of Ghana, demanded a complete overhaul of the voter registry. Following the recommendations of an independent panel, in December the EC decided against overhauling the registry.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Ghana's multiparty system provides ample opportunity for opposition parties to participate meaningfully in the political process. The NPP and the NDC dominate the political system. The country has experienced two peaceful, democratic transfers of power between presidents from the NPP and NDC, in 2000 and in 2008. The legal framework provides for equal participation in political life for the country's various cultural, religious, and ethnic minorities.

In May 2015, Adams Mahama, NPP chairperson of the Upper East Region, was attacked and killed. Police arrested and charged three suspects in the murder, including George Afoko, brother of NPP chairman Paul Afoko. Paul Afoko was indefinitely suspended from the NPP, exacerbating internal divisions within the party. In September, members of the NPP and the Let My Vote Count Alliance (LMVCA) were allegedly beaten and arrested during a demonstration in which they called for an overhaul of the voter register. NPP leader Nana Akufo-Addo and leaders of the LMCVA condemned the attacks and called for an independent investigation, which President Mahama instructed the police to conduct.

The NPP is traditionally supported by the Akan people and the NDC by the Ewe and other northern groups. Although the lines have been blurred over the years, ethnicity continues to play a role in voting patterns and representation.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Political corruption continues to be a problem, despite active media coverage, the existence of robust legal and institutional frameworks to combat it, and the government's willingness to investigate major scandals. The media, opposition parties, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continue to criticize the government for its inability to prevent political corruption and prosecute public officials suspected of malfeasance.

In September 2015, President Mahama fired Lauretta Lamptey, chair of the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ)—Ghana's leading anticorruption body—for allegedly mismanaging commission funds linked to the renovation of her official residence. In 2014, officials were accused of bloating the public payroll with ghost workers. The European Union (EU), which had made resolution of the scandal a precondition for resumption of EU aid payments, restarted those payments in May 2015 after the government made a plan to address irregularities. A court case involving parliamentarian Abuga Pele, who was charged in 2014 for allegedly granting interest-free loans worth \$100 million to private companies without parliamentary approval, continued in 2015.

The government continued to strengthen the institutional and legal anticorruption framework in 2015. Following the passage of the National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (NACAP) in 2014, which aims to improve the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of corruption by strengthening a number of state agencies, the CHRAJ trained 35 ethics and integrity compliance officers. A UN report released in February 2015, however, highlighted the government's inability to implement its anticorruption policies and effectively prosecute offenders. A report by the Institute of Economic Affairs, while commending Ghana's oil and gas industry for making progress in revenue and expenditure transparency, recommended the passage of a Right to Information Bill and the disbursement of more resources

to parliamentary oversight bodies. In October, Parliament indicated that it would begin debate on a Right to Information bill, though the bill had not been passed by year's end.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 46 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. Ghana has a diverse and vibrant media landscape that includes state and privately owned television and radio stations, and several independent newspapers and magazines. The internet has generally been unrestricted. However, government agencies occasionally restrict press freedom through harassment and arrests of journalists, especially those reporting on politically sensitive issues. In September 2015, journalists and media organizations condemned presidential staffer Stan Dogbe, who allegedly attacked Ghana Broadcasting Corporation journalist Yahayah Kwamoah and damaged his recording device. In May, supporters of the NPP in the Upper East Region were suspected of attacking Staff FM radio journalist Edward Adeti during a party meeting. The NPP apologized for the incident and committed to hold the perpetrators accountable. Media groups have criticized police for failing to protect journalists from TV-Africa who were attacked while covering demonstrations in the slum known as Sodom and Gomorrah in Accra.

Although criminal libel and sedition laws were repealed in 2001, powerful figures attempt to use the legal system to punish dissent. In September, Justice Paul Dery, one 34 judges implicated in a high-profile bribery scandal, sued four journalists and the Media Foundation for West Africa for promoting a video that documents judges and judicial staff accepting bribes. The suit had been withdrawn by the end of September.

Religious freedom is constitutionally and legally protected, and the government largely respects it in practice. However, Muslim families have complained that the compulsory Christian prayer sessions and church services that are widespread in Ghana's public schools seek to promote Christianity and violate their children's religious freedom.

Academic freedom is legally guaranteed and upheld in practice, and private discussion is both free and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The rights to peaceful assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. Permits are not required for meetings or demonstrations. Public discontent with the government's management of the economy and inability to tackle political corruption prompted numerous public protests, demonstrations, and strikes throughout 2015.

NGOs are generally able to operate freely, and they play an important role in ensuring government accountability and transparency.

Under the constitution and 2003 labor laws, workers have the right to form and join trade unions. However, the government forbids or restricts labor action in a number of industries, including fuel distribution, public transportation, and the prison system. In August 2015, Ghanaian doctors held a three-week strike over working conditions and a pay package that they claimed severely hampered outpatient and emergency services at public institutions.

F. Rule of Law: 11 / 16 (– 1)

Judicial independence in Ghana is constitutionally and legally enshrined. While the judiciary has demonstrated greater levels of impartiality in recent years, corruption remains

a challenge. In September, Ghana's judiciary was thrown into crisis following the release of a documentary that allegedly showed 34 judges and scores of judicial officials accepting bribes in exchange for favorable judgments over the past two years. Chief Justice Georgina Wood and the Judicial Council launched investigations into the allegations and fired 20 lower court judges in December.

Police in Ghana have a history of using excessive force, making arbitrary arrests, detaining suspects for extended periods, and taking bribes. In March, high-ranking police officials, including a commissioner, were arrested and charged for their involvement in a scandal in which approximately 200 potential police recruits were given fake acceptance letters and charged around \$500 to begin training at the police academy.

Ghana's prisons are overcrowded, and conditions are often life-threatening, though the prison service has attempted to reduce congestion and improve the treatment of inmates. In June, the prison service launched an effort to seek private funding for the revitalization of Ghana's prison systems. Ghana continues to cooperate with the UN Refugee Agency to protect the rights of the 21,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the country.

Communal and ethnic violence occasionally flare in Ghana. In July, four people were killed and another injured in violence related to a chieftaincy dispute in Bimbilla in the Northern Region.

Ghanaian law prohibits "sexual intercourse with a person in an unnatural manner." There were no reports of adults being prosecuted for same-sex sexual activity in 2015. Nevertheless, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people continue to face societal discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Freedom of movement is guaranteed by the constitution and respected by the government, and Ghanaians are free to choose their place of residence. However, poorly developed road networks and banditry make travel outside the capital and touristic areas difficult. Police have been known to set up illegal checkpoints to demand bribes from travelers. Bribery is also rife in the education sector. According to the 2015 Global Corruption Barometer's report, more than 25 percent of Ghanaians with contact with public schools during the past year admitted to paying a bribe to obtain educational services.

Weak rule of law, corruption, and an underregulated property rights system remain significant impediments to economic freedom and business confidence in Ghana. Bribery is a common practice to start a business and register property.

Despite equal rights under the law, women suffer societal discrimination, especially in rural areas, where opportunities for education and wage employment are limited. However, women's enrollment in universities is increasing, and a number of women hold high-ranking positions in the government: six members of the current cabinet are women, and 30 of the 275 parliamentary seats went to female legislators in the 2012 elections.

Domestic violence and rape are serious problems, and the practice of female genital mutilation continues in the north. The government has worked to combat gender-based violence by expanding the police's domestic violence and victim support unit, creating gender-based violence courts, establishing domestic violence shelters, and training police and service providers likely to encounter domestic violence situations.

Ghana serves as a source, transit point, and destination for the trafficking of women and children for labor and sexual exploitation. Children in Ghana, especially in the region surrounding Lake Volta, are vulnerable to exploitation in the agricultural and fishing industries. While the government has taken some steps in recent years, it still fails to implement appropriate antitrafficking legislation and effectively fund antitrafficking agencies.

Greece

Political Rights: 2

Population: 11,500,000

Civil Liberties: 2

Capital: Athens

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

With Greek voters exhausted by austerity measures required by international in exchange for debt relief, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) won snap elections held in January 2015, ousting the previous governing coalition of the center-right New Democracy (ND) and the center-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). With support from its smaller coalition partner, the right-wing populist Independent Greeks (ANEL), SYRIZA then sought to renegotiate the onerous terms of bailout loans the country had agreed to in 2010 and 2012, but faced resistance. In June 2015, hoping to use public opposition as a bargaining chip in the negotiations, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called for a referendum on the most recent proposal Greece had received from its lenders.

Over 61 percent of voters rejected the deal in the plebiscite held in July, but Greece's creditors still refused to make major concessions. With the country on the brink of financial collapse, the Tsipras government accepted creditors' tough terms for a \$96 billion debt relief package in August, rather than risk being forced out of the eurozone. Some 40 hard-line anti-austerity politicians from SYRIZA rejected the deal or abstained from voting on the decision, though support from other parties assured its approval.

Facing a split within SYRIZA, Tsipras called snap elections, which took place in September. SYRIZA once again won the vote and formed a coalition with ANEL, and Tsipras returned as prime minister. By year's end, a measure of stability has returned to Greece. However, the government still faced the challenges of meeting the bailout deal's difficult conditions and engaging in further negotiations with creditors.

Separately, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees fleeing war and political instability in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere strained the Greek state's ability to accommodate such a large population, leading to a human rights crisis. Since the construction of a fence along a key section of the Evros River, Greece's natural border with Turkey, in 2012, most refugees have entered Greece by boat from Turkey to nearby Greek islands: Lesbos, Chios, Kos, and Samos. In 2015 alone, more than 850,000 migrants made the perilous crossing to Greece, most of them attempting to make their way to other EU countries.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 35 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The 300 members of Greece's legislature, the unicameral Hellenic Parliament, serve four-year terms. Of them, 288 are elected by proportional representation, and 12 are elected

from national party lists. The largely ceremonial president is elected by a parliamentary supermajority for a five-year term. The prime minister is chosen by the president and is usually the leader of the largest party in the parliament. Recent elections in Greece were regarded as free and fair.

By creating an impasse in December 2014 over the election of a successor to retiring president Karolos Papoulias, SYRIZA effectively forced the governing coalition, led by the center-right ND, to call snap parliamentary elections, which were set for January 2015. Campaigning on promises to ease austerity measures and to renegotiate agreements with Greece's troika of creditors—the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—SYRIZA scored a resounding victory, winning 149 seats compared to ND's 76. The right-wing extremist party Golden Dawn and the new center-left To Potami (the River) party each won 17 seats. The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) took 15 seats and the right-wing populist Independent Greeks (ANEL) took 13, as did PASOK. Turnout was about 64 percent. Lacking an outright majority, SYRIZA formed a coalition government with ANEL, which had also run on an anti-austerity platform, and Tsipras became prime minister.

Amid difficult negotiations with international creditors, in June 2015 Tsipras called a referendum on the latest debt deal that creditors had extended. Over 61 percent of voters rejected the deal's terms in a July plebiscite that saw roughly 63 percent turnout. Tsipras accepted the deal despite the result, seeking to prevent Greece's exit from the eurozone, and called early elections after a splinter faction of SYRIZA defected over the move.

SYRIZA won reelection in a snap vote in September, taking 145 seats in the parliament, and once again formed a coalition with ANEL, which won 10; Tsipras stayed on as prime minister. ND took 75 seats; Golden Dawn won 18; the Democratic Coalition, composed of PASOK and the center-left party Democratic Left (DIMAR), took 17; KKE, 15; To Potami, 11; and the Union of Centrists (EK), 9. The splinter faction that left SYRIZA over the debt deal, Popular Unity, failed to win enough support to qualify for parliamentary seats. Voter turnout stood at 57 percent, lower than in previous elections.

The country has generally fair electoral laws, equal campaigning opportunities, and a system of compulsory voting that is weakly enforced. Since 2010, documented immigrants are allowed to vote in municipal elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Greece's multiparty system features vigorous competition between rival parties. Until recently, the post-1980 political landscape had been dominated by PASOK and ND. PASOK has rapidly lost ground in elections since the sovereign debt crisis emerged in late 2009. It finished last among the parties that received representation in the January 2015 elections, but later joined DIMAR in a coalition that placed fourth in the September elections. SYRIZA remained popular in 2015 despite economic turmoil, and was the leading party in both of the year's elections. SYRIZA's coalition partner, ANEL, was founded in 2012 by disillusioned members of ND. The party has vehemently opposed austerity programs linked to the bailout deals, characterizing them in its founding document as "national humiliation and violent economic attack."

Golden Dawn is Greece's third-largest party, and has retained support despite a government crackdown that began after a party supporter murdered antifascist rap artist Pavlos Fyssas in 2013. Golden Dawn president Nikolaos Michaloliakos and 68 other party members face charges of belonging to or founding a criminal organization; their trial began in April 2015 but has been characterized by bureaucratic delays, and remained open at the

year's end. Mihaloliakos and another senior party member were released from pretrial detention in March 2015 after serving 18 months, the maximum time authorities may detain someone ahead of their trial.

Greece's largest minority population, the Muslim community in the province of Thrace, is allowed full political rights and has four representatives in parliament after the latest election.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Corruption remains a problem in Greece, with tax evasion representing a serious challenge for the government. While tax enforcement efforts have become more robust in recent years, authorities have largely failed to prosecute tax evasion by economic elites. It is estimated that Greece's undeclared economic activity is 6 percent higher than the European average; tax evasion is enabled in part by a high rate of self-employed workers who encounter little oversight. Separately, in an encouraging sign, the parliament voted in August 2015 to lift immunity for ND deputy Vasilis Giogiakas so that he may face charges stemming from past actions taken as the governor of the Thesprotia region.

Greece was ranked 58 out of 168 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 48 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

The constitution includes provisions for freedoms of speech and the press, and these freedoms are generally protected. The public broadcaster, Hellenic Radio Television (ERT), closed in 2013, diminishing the diversity of opinions in the mass media. In 2014, the smaller New Hellenic Radio, Internet, and Television (NERIT) succeeded ERT as the nation's public broadcaster. ERT returned to the air in June 2015, and its operations were merged with NERIT's. More than 2,600 former ERT employees received reemployment offers at the broadcaster.

Citizens generally enjoy access to a broad array of privately owned print and broadcast outlets, and internet access is unrestricted. There are some limits on speech that incites fear, violence, and public disharmony, as well as on publications that offend religious beliefs, are obscene, or advocate the violent overthrow of the political system. Antidiscrimination legislation passed in 2014 criminalized denial of the Holocaust and other genocides, including the World War I era mass killing of Armenians in Turkey. Some journalists have been physically assaulted by police while covering anti-austerity protests over the past three years.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, though the Greek Orthodox Church receives government subsidies and is considered the "prevailing" faith of the country. Members of some minority religions face discrimination and legal barriers, such as permit requirements to open houses of worship and restrictions on inheriting property. The constitution prohibits proselytizing, but this restriction is rarely enforced. Opposition to the construction of an official mosque in Athens remains substantial; Muslim inhabitants are forced to worship in improvised mosques.

Academic freedom is respected in Greece, and the educational system is free of political indoctrination. Private discussion is open and free.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed by the constitution and the government generally protects these rights in practice, though there are some limits on groups

representing ethnic minorities. Golden Dawn has attempted to intimidate assemblies of immigrants and immigrant advocacy groups. However, such instances have become somewhat less frequent since the crackdown on Golden Dawn's leadership. In some cases, police have not adequately defended the rights of immigrants to assemble.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate without interference from the authorities, and workers have the right to form and join unions. Major anti-austerity protests and strikes have occurred frequently in recent years. The vast majority of participants have been peaceful, but several protests have turned violent due to confrontations between anarchist elements and the police.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and the constitution provides for public trials. Prisons suffer from overcrowding, as do immigrant detention centers, particularly those on the Greek islands dealing with the recent surge of migrants and refugees. Immigrants are disproportionately affected by institutional problems in the judicial system.

Acts of racist violence are an ongoing problem, though observers have noted a slight decline since the crackdown on Golden Dawn. In a May 2015 report, the Racist Violence Recording Network stated that 81 acts of racially motivated violence had taken place in Greece in 2014, affecting at least 100 victims. Anti-Semitic attitudes are widespread. A 2013–14 survey by the U.S.-based Anti-Defamation League found that 69 percent of respondents from Greece held anti-Semitic views. While such attitudes do not often translate into violence against people, the Racist Violence Recording Network has reported desecrations of Jewish buildings and monuments. In 2014, the government approved legislation that increased penalties for attacks motivated by ethnicity or sexual orientation, but the law has been criticized for failing to protect victims of hate crimes from deportation proceedings.

An influx of refugees and migrants into Greece created a human rights crisis in 2015, and the resources of the Greek state remain insufficient for accommodating such a large population. Authorities have been unable to implement an adequate system for processing asylum applications. Many refugees are housed in overcrowded, poorly equipped, and unsanitary welcome centers, or have resorted to sleeping in public parks and squares. Authorities have forcibly moved migrants and refugees living in outdoor encampments to separate sites. In December, more than 1,000 people camped in the village of Idomeni, on the border with Macedonia, were relocated to an overcrowded stadium outside Athens after Macedonia increased border controls, granting entry only to refugees with proof of origin from Iraq, Syria, or Afghanistan. In September, the European Union (EU) agreed to relocate 160,000 refugees from Greece and Italy, which had also seen a surge in migration, to other countries in the bloc. By mid-November, only 1,418 spots had been made available, and just 147 relocations had occurred. In December, the EC pledged 80 million (\$87 million) to help Greece with temporary housing for asylum-seekers.

The country's Romany community continues to face considerable governmental and societal discrimination. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals encounter some discrimination and occasional violent attacks.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Freedom of movement is generally unrestricted. Government bureaucracy exerts influence over the ability to start and operate businesses, and political parties have been involved in smoothing the process for their supporters. As a result, the field for business activity is not level for all participants.

Women continue to face discrimination in the workplace and held only 20 percent of the seats in parliament at the end of 2015, a decline of 3 percent from the representation gained in the January elections. Zoe Konstantopoulou of SYRIZA was elected parliamentary speaker following the January elections, but was replaced by a man after the September polls. Domestic violence remains a problem.

Greece serves as a transit and destination country for the trafficking of men, women, and children for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. The U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report* noted a decline in the enforcement of Greek antitrafficking laws.

Grenada

Political Rights Rating: 1

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Freedom Rating: 1.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 111,000

Capital: St. George's

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 51 / 60

Politics in 2015 were dominated by the ongoing constitutional reform process, led by a Constitution Reform Advisory Committee (CRAC) whose government-appointed members include representatives from political parties, religious denominations, and other groups. In March 2015, the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), withdrew from CRAC, claiming the body's members were pushing through recommendations without NDC input and without undertaking adequate public consultation. In December, over NDC protests that the ruling New National Party (NNP) had hijacked the reform process, six bills developed by the CRAC saw their first reading in the lower house of parliament. Among other things, the bills sought to improve constitutional protections for individual freedoms, to reform electoral bodies, and to implement various reforms to the judicial system and rules governing the functioning of the parliament. A much-delayed referendum on a new charter is set for April 2016.

The NNP won all 15 seats in the lower house in 2013 elections, winning 59 percent of the vote to the NDC's 41 percent. Due to the lack of parliamentary opposition after the elections, the governor-general appointed three former NDC ministers to the upper house.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face significant societal discrimination in Grenada. Same-sex sexual activity between men is prohibited by criminal law and can carry jail sentences of as long as 10 years. Grenadian representatives at an April 2015 meeting of a UN human rights review committee stated that there was little public support for writing protections for LGBT people into a draft constitution. However, several civil society groups actively promote LGBT rights; in November 2015, police participated in an LGBT awareness workshop sponsored by one such group.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Grenada, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Guatemala

Political Rights Rating: 4↓

Population: 16,183,752

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Guatemala City

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ratings Change: Guatemala's Political Rights rating declined from 3 to 4 because of the increasing influence of organized crime and business interests in campaign funding, as well as the murder of municipal office candidates and their family members during the campaign.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Months of protests over a corruption scandal as well as an investigation jointly carried out by Guatemala's Public Ministry and the UN-backed International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) led to the resignations and arrests of dozens of government and private sector officials, including President Otto Pérez Molina and Vice President Roxana Baldetti Elías. The multiple graft schemes cost Guatemala more than \$200 million in lost revenue and resulted in the medical-malpractice deaths of at least 10 patients at state-run hospitals. Alejandro Maldonado was sworn in as vice president in May following Baldetti's resignation that month, and became president when Pérez Molina stepped down in September. In addition to the rampant corruption, Guatemala was plagued by violence and threats against human rights defenders and members of the media, as well as against labor, land, and indigenous rights activists.

It was in this context that Guatemalans voted in September and October in national and local elections. The Renewed Democratic Liberty (LIDER) party and National Unity for Hope (UNE) won the most congressional seats, leaving Pérez Molina's Patriotic Party (PP) tied for third place with a new party, Todos. Comedian Jimmy Morales of the National Convergence Front (FCN) took the presidency in the October runoff.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 23 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 8 / 12 (– 1)

The constitution stipulates a four-year presidential term and prohibits reelection. Members of the 158-seat, unicameral Congress of the Republic are elected to four-year terms. In September 2015 legislative elections, LIDER captured 45 seats and UNE won 32 seats. Todos and the scandal-plagued PP each won 18 seats, a drop for the PP of 38 seats from its total in the 2011 elections. Nine other parties took the remaining 45 seats. Morales won a

plurality in the concomitant presidential vote and, with 67 percent, defeated former first lady Sandra Torres of the UNE in an October runoff. Turnout was 71 percent for the September vote and 56 percent for the October runoff.

The elections were generally judged free and fair. However, as in the past, electoral observers reported irregularities including intimidation, vote buying, and the burning of ballots and electoral boxes. A total of 11 municipal contests had to be repeated in October because of problems with the September votes. Since the beginning of the electoral campaign, an estimated 20 election-related murders occurred, mostly involving mayoral candidates and their relatives. The Public Ministry documented at least 532 arrests and 34 injuries to police officers in connection with the election process. LIDER's presidential candidate, Manuel Baldizón, alleged fraud in the preliminary results of the official vote count that put him in third place in the first round of presidential voting. He then withdrew his candidacy and left the party.

In July 2015, the Guatemalan Supreme Court ruled that Zury Ríos Sosa, daughter of former military leader Efraín Ríos Montt, could register as a presidential candidate despite constitutional stipulations barring the relatives of coup leaders or dictators from running for the presidency. Her candidacy had earlier been turned down by the electoral commission. She won under 6 percent of the vote in the September election.

A July CICIG report estimated that 50 percent of known campaign donations come from contractors doing business with the state and another 25 percent from organized crime. The CICIG report also found that nearly all political parties spend more money than they report receiving, and that they exceed spending limits.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

Elections take place within a highly fragmented and fluid multiparty system. A total of 14 candidates vied for the presidency in September and 13 political parties won congressional seats. Newly formed Todos won 18 seats.

The government uses the military to maintain internal security, despite restrictions imposed by the 1996 peace accord ending the 36-year civil war. Following his election, Morales took steps to limit the influence of the military in his administration, vowing not to appoint retired officers to the top posts in his cabinet.

Although they comprise 44 percent of the population, members of indigenous communities hold just 20 congressional seats. There are no indigenous members in the cabinet. In 2015, 113 out of 333 Guatemalan mayors were indigenous.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12

Despite impressive efforts to combat corruption in 2015, serious problems remain. Dozens of current and former high-ranking government officials, lawyers, bureaucrats, and retired military officials were arrested throughout the year as a result of corruption investigations into the country's customs service, social-security agency, health-care system, judiciary, municipal government, and Congress. Baldetti was arrested in August and Pérez Molina was arrested in September for their roles in a massive corruption scandal involving millions of dollars paid in bribes to avoid customs duties. Several members of their administration either were fired or resigned under clouds of suspicion. For example, Pedro Muadi, a former congressional leader, was arrested in October after accusations that he embezzled up to \$81,000 in government funds between 2013 and 2014. In October, the mayor of Chinautla was arrested for allegedly stealing municipal funds totaling more than \$1 million. As of October, two dozen lawmakers would not be allowed to take office in January 2016

because of either their alleged crimes, or because they were barred by article 164 of the constitution for being government contractors.

Guatemala was ranked 123 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. According to a recent Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) study, in 2014 approximately 20 percent of respondents reported that they were victims of corruption.

In November, Congress approved reforms aimed at making more transparent the processes for government award and issuing of contracts.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 31 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

While the constitution protects freedom of speech, journalists often face threats and practice self-censorship when covering sensitive topics such as drug trafficking, corruption, organized crime, and human rights violations. Threats come from public officials, drug traffickers, individuals aligned with companies operating in indigenous communities, and local security forces. The Observatory for Journalists of the Center for Informative Reports about Guatemala (CERIGUA) reported that 59 attacks against journalists occurred in the first half of 2015. The government has made commitments to improving journalist protection, but little concrete progress has been made.

Mexican businessman Remigio Ángel González owns a monopoly of broadcast television networks in Guatemala and has significant holdings in radio. Newspaper ownership is also concentrated in the hands of business elites, and most papers have centrist or conservative editorial views. While the government is making an effort to improve the country's telecommunications infrastructure, internet access remains limited. The government is believed to conduct illegal online surveillance.

The constitution guarantees religious freedom. However, indigenous communities have faced discrimination for openly practicing the Mayan religion.

Although the government does not interfere with academic freedom, scholars have received death threats for questioning past human rights abuses or continuing injustices.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, though police frequently threaten force and have at times used violence against protesters. Unprecedented, sustained, and largely nonviolent citizen protests against corruption occurred in front of the National Palace in Guatemala City and elsewhere in the country throughout much of the year.

In August 2014, more than 1,500 police officers occupied the Q'eqchí communities of Cobán, Chisec, and Raxruhá following a nonviolent resistance movement in protest against the proposed Santa Rita hydroelectric dam. Three Q'eqchí villagers were killed, five were detained, and more than 60 were injured in the police raid. The dam project threatens the integrity of ancestral Q'eqchí territory and was approved without community consultation, despite requirements in the Guatemalan Peace Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The constitution guarantees freedom of association, and a variety of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in Guatemala, though they face significant obstacles. NGO reports indicated that human rights workers were subjected to 337 attacks by mid-August 2015, including nine deaths. In July, shots were fired outside the offices of the human rights organization Centro de Acción Legal Ambiental y Social de Guatemala (CALAS), which was set to publicize damning evidence against a mining company the next day.

Guatemala is home to a vigorous labor movement, but workers are frequently denied the right to organize and face mass firings and blacklisting, especially in export-processing zones. Trade-union members are also subject to intimidation, violence, and murder, particularly in rural areas during land disputes. According to the International Trade Union Confederation, Guatemala is the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists. In September, a member of the Japala city union was assassinated after he had successfully won reinstatement following a court order that found he and 182 other workers were illegally terminated.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

The judiciary is hobbled by corruption, inefficiency, capacity shortages, and the intimidation of judges and prosecutors. Witnesses and judicial-sector workers continue to be threatened and, in some cases, murdered. Police are accused of torture, extortion, kidnapping, extrajudicial killings, and drug-related crimes, though several notable prosecutions took place in 2015.

Prison facilities are overcrowded and rife with gang- and drug-related violence and corruption. According to Guatemala's Directorate General of the Prison System, as of October, 19,810 people were imprisoned in a system designed to hold 6,412 people. Of those behind bars, 49 percent are awaiting trial. In 2014, the military was deployed to reinforce security at the country's 22 prisons. Dozens of prisoners were murdered in 2015. In September, at least 4,000 prison officers participated in a general strike demanding a salary increase and an end to the preferential treatment of individual prisoners such as former vice president Baldetti.

Although homicides have decreased by approximately one-third since 2009, Guatemala remains one of the most dangerous countries in Latin America. Violence related to the transport of drugs between South America and the United States has spilled over the border from Mexico, with rival Mexican and Guatemalan gangs battling for territory. These groups have operated with impunity in the northern jungles, which serve as a storage and transit hub for cocaine. The Pérez Molina administration responded to this situation by expanding the military's role in fighting crime, including creating special task forces to investigate kidnappings, robberies, extortion, and homicides, and building five military bases along well-known drug trafficking routes.

Citizens continue to take the law into their own hands. The lynching of suspected criminals frequently occurs. According to the police, at least 84 people were lynched between January 2012 and May 2015.

A small number of perpetrators of human rights atrocities from the 1960–96 civil war are being prosecuted. The trial of Ríos Montt—whose 2013 conviction for genocide was overturned by the Constitutional Court 10 days after it was issued—is scheduled to resume in January 2016, a delay that has prompted criticism from international human rights groups. The trial will take place behind closed doors without Ríos Montt's presence and will not result in criminal sanctions; the former dictator suffers from dementia and has been deemed unfit for a public trial.

Indigenous communities suffer from especially high rates of poverty, illiteracy, and infant mortality. Indigenous women are particularly marginalized. Discrimination against the Mayan community is a major concern.

Members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community are not covered under antidiscrimination laws, and continue to face discrimination, violence, and police abuse. President-elect Morales has made homophobic comments in the past. According to the Human Rights Ombudsman, people suffering from AIDS also face discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

Nonstate actors including gangs and organized criminal groups threaten freedom of travel, residence, and employment. Private businesses continue to experience high rates of contraband smuggling and extortion by these groups. Property rights and economic freedom rarely extend beyond those Guatemalans with wealth and political connections. In recent years, the government has approved the eviction of indigenous groups to make way for mining, hydroelectric, and other development projects.

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender, though inequalities between men and women persist in practice. Sexual harassment in the workplace is not penalized. Young women who migrate to the capital for work are especially vulnerable to harassment and inhumane labor conditions. Physical and sexual violence against women and children, including domestic violence, remain widespread, with perpetrators rarely prosecuted. Women are underrepresented in government posts.

Guatemala has one of the highest rates of child labor in the Americas. Criminal gangs often force children and young men to join their organizations or perform work for them, and government officials are often complicit in trafficking.

Three activists who were members of Guatemala's Council of Displaced Peoples (CONDEG) were kidnapped in September following a judicial decision against palm oil manufacturer Repsa, in which the court ruled that the company had polluted the La Pasión River with pesticides. The same month, an indigenous activist protesting against the production of palm oil was murdered. In 2014, the U.S. trade representative requested that an arbitration panel meet to determine whether Guatemala has broken its commitment to protect workers. If found guilty, the country could be fined up to \$15 million annually or denied trade benefits.

Guinea

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 10,985,600

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Conakry

Freedom Rating: 5.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,6,NF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

By late 2015, the Ebola epidemic, which had its origins in southeast Guinea in late 2013 and soon spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone, appeared to be nearing its end. The outbreak killed over 11,000 people across the subregion and seriously damaged Guinea's fragile economy. It also worsened already-strained relations between Guinea's citizens and their government and stoked fear and suspicion among some Guineans, resulting in attacks on health workers and those accused of spreading the virus. Arrests and criminal trials for the perpetrators of those attacks began in early 2015; one trial resulted in life imprisonment

for 11 accused of killing eight members of an Ebola education team of health workers, journalists, and others in a village near the city of Nzerekore.

Societal tensions were also apparent in the lead-up to Guinea's presidential election, held in October 2015. While calm prevailed on election day, violent clashes between supporters of rival political parties and between opposition party supporters and security forces occurred both before and after the vote. Although opposition candidates raised allegations of electoral fraud, incumbent Alpha Condé easily won a second term in the first round of voting that, while logistically disorganized, was judged to be valid by international observers.

Corruption remains pervasive, and Guinea's courts continue to be under-resourced and overburdened. Impunity for Guinea's security forces remains a problem, with little accountability for the hundreds of deaths and injuries of protesters and civilians over the last decade.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 17 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12

Guinea's president is elected by popular vote for up to two five-year terms. The legislature was dissolved in 2008 amid a bloodless coup precipitated by the death of President Lansana Conté. The leader of the coup, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, was shot and seriously injured in late 2009 by a member of his own guard following the violent repression of an opposition rally, in which security forces killed more than 150 people and raped and beat hundreds of others in and around Conakry's central stadium. A political accord facilitated a return to civilian rule in 2010. The new constitution that was adopted as part of the political transition established a number of independent entities to secure democratic rights, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), a national human rights body, and a constitutional court. In the 2010 presidential election, longtime opposition leader Alpha Condé of the Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) defeated former prime minister Cellou Dalein Diallo of the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) in a runoff vote.

Condé stood for reelection in 2015, once again facing Diallo as well as six other candidates from various opposition parties. The months preceding the election were characterized by ethnic tensions, violence between RPG and UFDG supporters, and deadly clashes between opposition supporters and security forces. At issue were disputes over the electoral calendar, including the sequencing of presidential and local elections, and the composition of the CENI. In May, former coup leader Camara announced his intention to return to Guinea from Burkina Faso, where he lives in exile, to stand for election. In July, he was indicted in Guinea for his role in the 2009 stadium massacre, and in August, authorities prevented Camara from entering the country, rendering him unable to return and contest elections.

Although fears of violence were high, election day ultimately proved peaceful. Condé won in the first round, garnering 57.8 percent of the vote. Three opposition candidates alleged fraud and vote rigging and lodged unsuccessful challenges with the constitutional court. International observers deemed the vote valid despite a number of logistical problems, including a lack of voting materials and delayed openings at some polling places. The constitutional court affirmed Condé's victory in late October, and Diallo, finishing in second place with 31.4 percent, eventually retreated from calls for his supporters to take to the streets to protest the results.

Of the National Assembly's 114 seats, 38 are awarded through single-member constituency races and 76 are filled through nationwide proportional representation, all for five-year terms. Under the electoral law, at least 30 percent of the candidates on the proportional

representation lists must be women. The first parliamentary elections since the 2008 coup were held in September 2013. The months preceding the elections were marred by violence, ethnic and religious tensions, and disputes over the rules governing the polls. Recurrent protests resulted in more than 50 deaths between January and September 2013. The RPG won 53 seats, the opposition UFDG won 37 seats, the Union of Republican Forces (UFR) won 10, and a dozen smaller parties divided the remainder. The newly elected legislators took office in January 2014. Women hold nearly 22 percent of the seats in the National Assembly.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 8 / 16

The main political parties are the RPG and the UFDG. More than 130 parties are registered, most of which have clear ethnic or regional bases. Relations between the RPG and opposition parties are strained, and violent election-related clashes between RPG supporters, who are predominantly drawn from the Malinké ethnic group, and UFDG supporters, who are largely from the Peul ethnic group, have inflamed tensions.

In March 2015, opposition parties withdrew from the National Assembly over the postponement of local elections until after the presidential vote. They claimed that this sequence would disadvantage their presidential candidates, because local officials, who are disproportionately RPG supporters, play key roles in the electoral process. The opposition then launched a series of street protests in April and May in Conakry and other cities. In response to the protests, Guinea's security forces employed excessive and lethal force, with some officers using ethnic slurs against opposition demonstrators and at times passively watching or actively participating in the looting of property, according to reports from human rights watchdog groups.

In August, the government reached an agreement with the opposition to replace a number of local officials with their supporters to help ensure the fairness of the vote. Under the agreement, the composition of the local councils would reflect the results of the 2013 legislative elections. In addition, the government agreed to set up a committee of the CENI to review the voter registration lists.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

Corruption remains rampant, with Guinea ranking 139 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. The National Anti-Corruption Agency (ANLC), the state agency tasked with fighting corruption, reports directly to the presidency, and is reported to be underfunded and understaffed.

However, Guinea was declared in full compliance with the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative in July 2014. It has won praise for its proactive response to a scandal that erupted in 2013, when it was revealed that former president Conté allegedly accepted bribes to award a mining license worth billions of dollars to BSG Resources, owned by Israeli diamond magnate Benny Steinmetz. A 2014 Guinean government inquiry condemned the deal, and BSG's rights to the vast, untapped Simandou iron-ore mine were rescinded. In 2015, Swiss and U.S. officials continued investigations into whether BSG Resources paid bribes to secure its now-cancelled mining concession. Separately, in November 2015 Guinea's government took steps to address the problem of "ghost workers" on the public sector payroll, hiring 700 individuals to verify the regular presence of government workers at their offices.

In 2010, the interim legislature passed an access to information law, but it has never been effectively implemented.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 23 / 40 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

The 2010 constitution guarantees media freedom. In 2010, the interim legislature passed a law that decriminalized press offenses and more clearly defined defamation provisions. It also passed a law creating a new media regulatory body, the High Authority for Communications (HAC). However, the HAC has struggled to balance freedom of expression with sensible regulations. In September 2015, the HAC banned radio phone-in programs in the run-up to the presidential election, though many stations reportedly refused to comply. Attacks on the press persist, but the government has shown increasing political will to reprimand—if not punish—the perpetrators. In May 2015, three journalists covering the election-related protests were assaulted by security forces while attempting to document the use of excessive force against demonstrators. Two of the police officers involved received disciplinary sanctions, including suspensions, but no legal proceedings were brought.

Several dozen newspapers publish regularly in Guinea, though most have small circulations. More than 30 private radio stations and a few private television stations compete with the public broadcaster, Radio Télévision Guinéenne (RTG). Due to the high illiteracy rate, most of the population accesses information through radio; internet access remains limited to urban areas.

Religious rights are generally respected in practice. Some non-Muslim government workers have reported occasional discrimination. People who convert from Islam to Christianity sometimes encounter pressure from members of their community. Religious practice was curtailed somewhat by Ebola-related warnings against traditional Muslim burial rituals, which involve physical contact with the bodies of the dead and thus exacerbate the risk of contagion. In April 2015, the Archbishop of Conakry canceled an annual Christian pilgrimage in compliance with a government directive aimed at limiting the spread of Ebola.

Academic freedom is generally respected, and there are few limits to free and open private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12 (– 1)

Freedom of assembly is enshrined in the constitution, but this right is often restricted. Under Guinea's criminal code, organizers are required to notify authorities three days in advance of public assemblies and demonstrations. In practice, assemblies held without notification are considered unauthorized and are often violently dispersed, leading to deaths, injuries, and arrests.

Clashes between protesters and security forces were routine in the run-up to the 2015 presidential election, resulting in a handful of deaths and numerous serious injuries. Police and other security forces also engaged in theft and banditry, stealing from protesters and bystanders and destroying property. Some protesters also engaged in violence and criminal behavior during the protests. In June, the National Assembly passed the Law on Maintaining Public Order, which sets out guidelines for when force may be used by the authorities during protests, among other provisions. While this was seen as a step in the right direction, the law still contained restrictions on spontaneous protests, and allows the security forces to disperse a protest if they have reason to believe that someone in the crowd is carrying a weapon.

Freedom of association is generally respected. However, Guinean civil society remains weak, ethnically divided, and subject to periodic harassment and intimidation. Although workers are allowed to form trade unions, strike, and bargain collectively, they must provide 10 days' notice before striking, and strikes are banned in broadly defined essential services.

Public and private sector unions launched a brief strike in January 2015 after the government delayed implementation of promised wage increases and salary requirements, but ended the action after reaching an agreement with the state days later.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

The judicial system has demonstrated some degree of independence since 2010, though the courts remain understaffed and underfunded, and have been slow to prosecute high-profile criminal cases—most prominently, the massacre of opposition protesters at Conakry stadium in 2009. The courts have interviewed almost 400 victims of the massacre since proceedings began, but despite evidence of abuses committed by dozens of members of the security forces, only 14 people had been charged as of late 2015, including former coup leader Camara and his vice president, Mamadouba Toto Camara. A lack of political and financial support has stymied progress in the investigations, though the justice minister has promised that trials will begin in 2016.

In a sign of progress, in 2015 the government adopted a five-year judicial reform plan that would address issues including judicial corruption and understaffing, and revise certain legal texts in an effort to align them with international best practices.

Security forces continue to engage in arbitrary arrests, torture of detainees, and extrajudicial executions. Prison conditions remain harsh and are sometimes life threatening. Prolonged pretrial detention is a longstanding problem, with the majority of prisoners in Conakry languishing for extended periods without trial, and resulting in severe overcrowding. The judicial reform plan included provisions for improved water delivery and health care at the country's largest prison, and the construction of a new prison to help relieve overcrowding.

Antidiscrimination laws do not protect LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. Same-sex sexual activity is a criminal offense that can be punished with up to three years in prison, and although this law is rarely enforced, LGBT people have been arrested on lesser charges.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Freedom of movement—long hindered by rampant crime and ubiquitous security checkpoints—was further restricted by a national public health emergency in response to the Ebola epidemic, including new restrictions imposed on five western provinces for a 45-day period beginning in March 2015.

Private business activity is hampered by corruption and political instability, among other factors. A centralized Agency for the Promotion of Private Investments aims to ease the registration process. Following recent reforms, property registration processes have become faster and less expensive. Meanwhile, the Ebola epidemic brought some economic activity to a near-standstill, devastating the agricultural and mining sectors central to the economic health of the nation.

Societal discrimination against women is pervasive. Rape and sexual harassment are common but underreported due to fears of stigmatization. In November 2015, there were peaceful demonstrations against impunity for rampant sexual violence. While women have legal access to land, credit, and business, they are disadvantaged by inheritance laws and the traditional justice system. Guinean law allows husbands to forbid their wives from working. Female genital mutilation is nearly ubiquitous, affecting up to 96 percent of all girls and women in the country.

Guinean women and children are subject to sex trafficking and forced labor in various industries. Guinean boys have been forced to work in mines in Guinea and in neighboring

countries, and women and children have been sex trafficked to other parts of West Africa as well as Europe and the Middle East.

Guinea-Bissau

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 1,788,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Bissau

Freedom Rating: 5.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	6,5,PF	6,5,NF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, growing tensions between President José Mário Vaz and Prime Minister Domingos Simões Pereira resulted in the dismissal of the latter in August. After months of political uncertainty, a new government led by Carlos Correia of the ruling the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde (PAIGC) was appointed by the president in October. The new government's proposed budget was rejected in December 2015 and, if not confirmed in 2016, may lead to yet another government or new elections.

Corruption remains a major problem, bolstered by Guinea-Bissau's prominent role in international drug trafficking and by the government's limited resources to combat it. International donors, encouraged by successful elections in 2014, pledged some \$1.2 billion to support economic and political stability in Guinea-Bissau in 2015.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 16 / 40 (–1)

A. Electoral Process: 7 / 12 (–1)

Under the constitution, the 102 members of the National People's Assembly are elected by popular vote for four-year terms. The president is elected through a two-round system of voting for a term of five years.

A total of 13 candidates competed in the 2014 presidential election. In the first round, José Mário Vaz of PAIGC won 40.98 percent of the vote, while independent Nuno Gomes Nabiam followed with 24.79 percent. In the second round held in May, Vaz took the presidency by a landslide, winning 61.9 percent of the vote to Nabiam's 38.08 percent.

Fifteen parties competed in the 2014 legislative elections. PAIGC took 55 seats and was allocated two additional seats for diaspora representation, bringing its total to 57. The Party of Social Renewal (PRS) secured 41 seats; the Party for Democratic Convergence (PDC) took two seats; and the Party for a New Democracy (PND) and the Union for Change (UM) won one seat each.

Monitoring groups and local human rights organizations reported some instances of intimidation or beatings of election officials and candidates in the election period. One PRS candidate for the legislature was reportedly kidnapped by unknown armed assailants. Voting

was otherwise relatively peaceful and transparent, and the 2014 elections were considered free and fair by international observers.

Vaz's August 2015 dismissal of the popular Pereira and his government was opposed by the population, the political class, and the international community, and sparked a political crisis. After the dismissal, Vaz unilaterally named Baciro Djá as the new prime minister, despite objections from the PAIGC. However, Djá's appointment was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, which ruled that the prime minister had to be selected by the party that won the most recent elections. In September, Vaz and the PAIGC agreed on Correia as the compromise new prime minister; Correia's government was sworn in the following month.

In February 2015, the members of the ad hoc Commission on Constitutional Reform took office in a ceremony chaired by the President of the National Assembly, Cipriano Cassama'. The commission is expected to prepare for public consultation a revised draft constitution by February 2016. The National Assembly will then cast a final vote on adoption of a new constitution. In November 2015, the Technical Secretary of the Commission noted that significant progress had been made toward finalizing a draft.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 8 / 16

Dozens of political parties are active in Guinea-Bissau, and 13 of them competed in the 2014 legislative elections. The two largest parties are PAIGC and the PRS. Smaller parties such as the PCD are competitive but institutionally weak. In November 2014, Nabiam established a new party, the United People's Assembly–Democratic Party of Guinea-Bissau (APU-PDGB).

The limited capacity of the security and justice sectors leads to a lack of effective civilian oversight over the defense and security forces, which has frequently threatened the political process and the functioning of state institutions. The country's 2014 elections, held two years after a military coup, marked a significant improvement in democratic governance. The head of the armed forces, Biaguê Nan Tan, in 2014 publicly declared his intention to instill a commitment to constitutional order within the military, and managed to do so even during the political crisis that began in August 2015.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Although the election of legislators and a president in 2014 marked a positive step toward accountability, the political situation in Guinea-Bissau was tense in 2015 due to disputes between Vaz and the PAIGC over the responsibilities assigned to the president in the constitution.

Weak governance, a strained economy, and widespread poverty have created an environment conducive to bureaucratic and large-scale corruption through all levels of the government and the military. Guinea-Bissau was ranked 158 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The government elected in 2014 has voiced commitment to fighting corruption and increasing transparency. However, in June 2015 the secretary of state for communities was detained due to his alleged involvement in selling diplomatic and service passports. In July, it was reported that the foreign minister was prevented from leaving the country pending investigation of his involvement in a fisheries deal with a Chinese company in 2013.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 23 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 10 / 16

Although the constitution provides for freedoms of speech and the press, these freedoms are often restricted. Journalists regularly face harassment and intimidation. In August

2015, the prime minister, Djá, dismissed the heads of the public television and radio broadcasters due to their coverage of the political crisis.

There are no reports that the government restricts access to the internet, but lack of infrastructure greatly limits penetration.

Religious freedom is legally protected and usually respected in practice. Academic freedom is similarly guaranteed and generally upheld.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12

In general, the government does not interfere with the freedom of assembly as long as protesters secure the necessary authorizations. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are vocal in their opposition to human rights abuses and increased economic and social insecurity, and generally operate freely.

Workers are allowed to form and join independent trade unions, but few work in the wage-earning formal sector. The right to strike is protected, and government workers frequently exercise this right. Teachers went on strike for more than a month in late 2015, demanding better pay and work conditions.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16

Judges and magistrates are poorly trained, irregularly paid, and highly susceptible to corruption and political pressure. In March 2015, the Ministry of Justice launched a four-year justice reform program aimed at improving judicial independence and integrity, as well as access and delivery of justice. It remains to be seen whether the government will be able to secure sufficient donor funding to implement the program.

There are very limited material and human resources to conduct criminal investigations. Violence and homicides continue to pose serious problems. The UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office conducts regular monitoring of prisons. Problems reported include disregard for due process; lack of access to legal and medical assistance; severe overcrowding; poorly maintained physical infrastructure; and absence of potable water, toilets, and hygiene facilities.

Because of its weak institutions and porous borders, Guinea-Bissau has become a major transit point for cartels trafficking illegal narcotics to Europe. The armed forces and some state entities have been linked to drug trafficking, according to the UN Office for Drugs and Crime. In November 2015, Minister of Defense Adiata Nandigna noted that the Bijagós archipelago was a trouble spot and that Guinea-Bissau requires continued international cooperation to combat transnational organized crime.

In July 2015, the military placed Rear Admiral José Zamora Induta, who headed the army from 2009–10 and is suspected of leading a plot to overthrow the government in 2012, under house arrest and transferred him to the army barracks in Mansoa in September. In November, the Supreme Military Court ruled that the military tribunal that had ordered Induta's arrest had no jurisdiction. Induta was allowed to leave the barracks but could not leave the country, after the prosecutor general charged him with terrorism, homicide, and trying to subvert the country's constitutional order.

No laws prohibit same-sex sexual activity, but social taboos and discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people persist.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Illegal exploitation of timber and fish, which increased following the 2012 coup, has caused extensive environmental damage in Guinea-Bissau. During an extraordinary session in 2013, the National People's Assembly called on the government to urgently address the

rapid depletion of the few remaining forests and related ecosystems in the country. Despite a five-year moratorium approved in mid-2015, some 20,000 hectares of forest are reportedly being cut down each year, primarily by an international criminal gangs.

Women face significant traditional and societal discrimination, despite some legal protections. They generally do not receive equal pay for equal work, have fewer opportunities in education and employment, and face some restrictions in inheritance and ownership matters. According to a 2015 UN Security Council report, 34 percent of girls are subjected to forced marriage in Guinea-Bissau. Local NGOs estimate that 80 percent of those cases occur in the eastern regions.

A 2011 law banned female genital mutilation and established penalties of up to five years in prison for violators. Since its enactment, three cases have been prosecuted under the law. In parallel, there have been efforts to proactively change habits. In May 2015, 10 female cutters (*fanatecas*) committed at a public ceremony organized by a local NGO to abandoning female genital mutilation and to report any known cases.

The parliament passed a law in 2013 that criminalized domestic violence and established support centers for women. However, many victims do not press charges due to mistrust of the police or courts. Nevertheless, in June 2015 the first domestic violence case was brought to court under the new law.

Trafficking in persons, especially children, is a serious problem, although there is some NGO activity to combat the practice and return trafficked persons to their homes. In 2014, the Association of the Friends of Children of Guinea-Bissau declared that it had been involved in 108 cases of child trafficking in 2014, 76 of which involved crossing the border into Senegal. The latter remains a major destination for child trafficking.

Guyana

Political Rights Rating: 2
Civil Liberties Rating: 3
Freedom Rating: 2.5
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 743,000
Capital: Georgetown

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F

INTRODUCTION

In February 2015, A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) and the Alliance for Change (AFC) formed a coalition to contest the May general elections with a single list of candidates. The coalition, led by retired general David Granger of the APNU, ultimately won by a narrow margin, ending 23 years of rule by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C).

The new administration undertook a number of actions to expose and control the country’s pervasive corruption, including passage of a law to combat money laundering and the establishment of an agency to investigate graft by the previous government.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 32 / 40 (+2)**A. Electoral Process:** 11 / 12

Guyana's 1980 constitution provides for a strong president and a 65-seat National Assembly, with members elected every five years. The president appoints four additional, nonvoting members. The leader of the party with a plurality of parliamentary seats becomes president for a five-year term.

In the May 2015 elections, the APNU-AFC coalition took 50.3 percent of the vote and 33 seats, leaving the incumbent PPP/C with 32 seats. Although the seat totals were essentially the same as in the previous National Assembly, the fact that the APNU and AFC ran as a bloc in 2015 allowed them to install Granger as president. The outgoing president, Donald Ramotar, had prorogued the assembly in November 2014 to prevent a vote of no confidence by the two opposition parties, but he was forced to call early elections in January 2015 when the suspension failed to ease the pressure on his minority government.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

Guyanese politics have historically been dominated by a tense split between descendants of indentured workers from India, known as Indo-Guyanese, who generally back the PPP/C, and Afro-Guyanese, who traditionally supported the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) party. The PNCR, now the core element in the APNU, grew out of the People's National Congress, which had ruled Guyana autocratically from independence in 1966 until the PPP won elections in 1992. The APNU-AFC victory in 2015 was only the second rotation of power in the country's history.

Some Guyanese have begun voting across racial lines, especially since the 2006 elections and the establishment of the multiracial AFC. However, race remained a salient issue during the 2015 campaign period. Observers from the Carter Center, for instance, warned against political rhetoric that risked stoking hostility among the country's ethnic groups.

The indigenous minority remains politically marginalized, though a small number of parliament seats and cabinet positions are held by indigenous people, and a Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs is tasked with improving conditions for indigenous communities.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12 (+2)

The 2015 elections ended a political impasse in which President Ramotar had attempted to govern despite his party's lack of a majority in the National Assembly. Although he avoided a no-confidence vote in November 2014 by using his constitutional authority to prorogue the assembly for up to six months, the suspension did little to ease tensions, and Ramotar formally dissolved the legislature in early 2015 so that elections could be held.

The PPP/C government's failure to address pervasive corruption was a major source of friction with the main opposition parties. Guyana was ranked 119 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. The country is a transit point for South American cocaine destined for North America and Europe, and corruption linked to the illegal drug trade allegedly affects high-level state officials.

The new APNU-AFC government pledged to combat corruption through a variety of initiatives. In June, the National Assembly passed long-stalled legislation to strengthen controls on money laundering and financing of terrorism. The government also established a State Asset Recovery Unit (SARU), which began auditing state-owned companies. Among other cases, the SARU investigated a scandal in which state-owned National Industrial and

Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) had spent large sums to develop land that it subsequently sold at favorable prices to members and associates of the PPP/C government, including former president Bharrat Jagdeo. In October, the SARU recommended that the attorney general pursue criminal charges against at least five former PPP/C ministers.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 42 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Although freedom of the press is generally respected, the media have had an uneasy relationship with the government. Several independent newspapers operate freely, including the daily *Stabroek News* and *Kaieteur News*. However, opposition party leaders have complained that they lack access to state media. The first private radio station began broadcasting in 2012. Government officials have used libel lawsuits to suppress negative media coverage. In late 2014, *Kaieteur News* published a transcript of an alleged phone call by the attorney general at the time to one of the paper's senior reporters, in which he threatened deadly repercussions if the paper continued its critical reporting on the PPP/C government. Internet access is not restricted.

Guyanese generally enjoy freedom of religion, and the government does not limit academic freedom. There are no restrictions on free and open private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 10 / 12

The government largely respects freedoms of assembly and association. While police have shot at political protesters in the past, there were no notable crackdowns in 2015. Nongovernmental organizations operate freely.

The right to form labor unions is generally upheld, and unions are well organized. However, laws against antiunion discrimination are poorly enforced.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16 (+ 1)

The judicial system is independent, but due process is undermined by shortages of staff and funds. Police violence, abuse of detainees, and harsh, overcrowded conditions in prisons remain concerns in Guyana. In 2015, however, Public Security Minister Khemraj Ramjattan, leader of the AFC, moved to dismiss police officers who had been found responsible for past abuses. The country continued to suffer from a high rate of violent crime, though previously rising crime statistics appeared to be leveling off or decreasing by the end of 2015.

Racial polarization has had an impact on law enforcement. Although Afro-Guyanese have historically dominated the police force, they have also raised concerns about police brutality against their population.

The nine indigenous groups in Guyana face challenges in accessing state resources, especially in education and health care. The 2006 Amerindian Act aimed to strengthen indigenous peoples' rights to their land and local self-governance, but many communities continue to experience isolation and discrimination. In August 2015, the Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana (TAAMOG) sued the government over its dismissal of nearly 2,000 Amerindians who had been employed under the Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme (YEAP). YEAP was established to reduce unemployment among Amerindians aged 18 to 40, but the new government argued that it had failed to provide useful training and that many recruits were used for partisan political work.

Sexual activity between men is punishable with a maximum sentence of life in prison, and cross-dressing is criminalized for both men and women. Police routinely intimidate gay men.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

There are no legal and few practical restrictions on freedom of movement and residency in Guyana, though racial polarization may limit individuals' free access to some areas. All citizens have the right to own and operate businesses and to own property, but economic activity is affected by widespread corruption and organized crime with links to the drug trade.

Violence against women, including domestic abuse, is widespread. Rape often goes unreported and is rarely prosecuted. Guyana permits elective abortion. Although women enjoy legal equality with men, they remain significantly underrepresented in the workforce and face discrimination in employment and compensation.

Sex trafficking and forced labor are problems for both Guyanese citizens and migrant workers, particularly in mining communities in the country's interior. The government has made some efforts to combat trafficking in persons, but the relevant programs lack adequate resources.

Haiti

Political Rights: 5

Population: 10,900,000

Civil Liberties: 5

Capital: Port-au-Prince

Freedom Rating: 5.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

Haitian voters headed to the polls in 2015 for parliamentary, presidential, and local elections. The first round of parliamentary elections, held in August, was marred by violence and reports of widespread violations. The second round of the parliamentary vote was held concurrently with local elections and the first round of the presidential vote in October, with international monitors again reporting grave shortcomings. President Michel Martelly's hand-picked successor, Jovinel Moïse, was declared the winner in first round of the presidential election, earning a place in a runoff against Jude Célestin. However, Célestin and other opposition candidates rejected the first-round results, and their supporters took to the streets to demand an independent investigation into allegations of electoral fraud. An evaluation commission was established, and the runoff, which had been scheduled for December 2015, was postponed until 2016.

Legislative processes were largely paralyzed in 2015, as the terms of all but 10 legislators expired in January. Haiti's cholera epidemic, which erupted in 2010, worsened during the year because of heavy rains as well as poor sanitation for those still displaced by the 2010 earthquake and for migrants living in camps along Haiti's border with the Dominican Republic. More than 31,000 new cases were reported from January to November.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 17 / 40**A. Electoral Process: 4 / 12**

Haiti's constitution provides for a president directly elected for a five-year term and a prime minister who is appointed by the president and approved by the parliament. The bicameral parliament is composed of the Senate, whose 30 members serve six-year terms, and the Chamber of Deputies, whose 118 members serve four-year terms. President Martelly took office in May 2011 through elections compromised by reports of fraud, voter intimidation, and illegal exclusion of political parties and candidates.

Midterm parliamentary and municipal elections constitutionally required in 2011 and 2013 were delayed for years, leading to vacancies and legislative paralysis that allowed Martelly to govern with increasingly little oversight. Laurent Lamothe resigned as prime minister in December 2014, and by mid-January 2015, the terms of two-thirds of the Senate, all members of the Chamber of Deputies, and every mayor had expired. A new prime minister, Evans Paul, took office in January, days after the official dissolution of the legislature.

The president formed a Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) in February. The first round of parliamentary elections was held in August. The CEP reported that violence forced 54 of the 1,508 polling centers throughout the country to suspend their operations. A network of Haitian observers labeled the vote "an affront to democratic standards," and considered the irregularities serious enough to jeopardize the legitimacy of the legislature. Voter turnout stood at 18 percent.

In October, voters cast ballots in runoff parliamentary elections, as well as in the first round of presidential and municipal elections; the disrupted parliamentary votes were also rerun. While improved security measures led to a decrease in violence during these polls, fraud was rampant. International monitors noted that *mandataires*, political party representatives accredited to observe the voting process, misused their accreditations to cast multiple ballots and in some instances intimidated voters. Voter turnout remained low at 27 percent, which international monitors noted could gravely exacerbate the impact of multiple voting. No party won a parliamentary majority. The Haitian Tet Kale Party (PHTK), which supports Martelly, took 26 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and was aided by an addition 15 won by three of its allies. The Vérité (Truth) party won 13 seats, and smaller parties divided the remainder. Of the contested seats in the Senate, PHTK ally Konvansyon Inite Demokratik (KID) and Vérité won three seats each, PHTK won two seats, and four smaller parties captured one seat each.

In November, the CEP released the results of the first round of the presidential election, in which 54 candidates participated. The official results showed Moïse in the lead with 33 percent of the vote, and Célestin following with 25 percent. Observers from the Organization of American States (OAS) and a group of foreign donor nations, including the United States, accepted the official results, but Haitian civil society groups and opposition candidates rejected the outcome and called for an independent investigation into allegations of fraud. Amid protests, Martelly established an evaluation commission in December, days ahead of the scheduled presidential runoff, which was subsequently postponed until 2016.

B. Political Pluralism & Participation: 8 / 16

Political parties generally did not face legal or administrative barriers to registering or running in the 2015 elections, and reports of prosecution and harassment of opposition politicians decreased in comparison with 2014. Nevertheless, the electoral system appeared to favor the preferences of incumbent powers. The number of members required to form a

political party was decreased from 500 to 20 in 2014, leading to a proliferation of groups on the party scene, many of which were suspected to be formed in order to aid Martelly and his allies. This environment allowed an unusually large number of party representatives to obtain observer accreditation for the 2015 polls, and allegations of fraud and misconduct by these individuals were not properly investigated.

Insufficient investments in state capacity have continued to hinder the state from effectively asserting a central role in development, allowing donor countries and international organizations to wield significant influence over policymaking. The UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) has been in the country since 2004; the UN Security Council voted to renew MINUSTAH for an additional year in October 2015, authorizing up to 4,971 military and police personnel as part of the mission. MINUSTAH faces growing opposition from the Haitian people, as it is increasingly perceived as an occupying force. The number of military and police personnel authorized as part of MINUSTAH has declined in recent years, down from its peak in the aftermath of the devastating 2010 earthquake, when the mission was authorized to have up to 13,331 personnel.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12

A defunct parliament, election chaos, corruption allegations, and poor collaboration among agencies impaired governance in 2015. In March, Nonie Mathieu, former president of the Superior Court of Auditors and Administrative Disputes, was accused of misusing \$600,000 in public funds on purchases of office equipment that the agency never received. In December, parliamentary candidate Gerald Jean admitted on national radio that he had paid more than \$25,000 in bribes to an electoral court judge and to a CEP member in order to secure a parliamentary seat on appeal. Haiti was ranked 158 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 24 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression & Belief: 10 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but press freedom is constrained by the feeble judiciary and the inability of police to adequately protect journalists from threats and violence. With a literacy rate of 60 percent and little print or online news material in Haitian Creole, radio remains the main source of information. Media and other observers have expressed concern about government interference with freedom of the press. In January 2015, Radio Tele Kiskeya denounced the Martelly administration for offering gifts of \$800 to Haitian journalists after hosting them at a reception in the National Palace the previous month.

The government generally respects religious and academic freedoms. However, when violations do occur, victims have few protections.

Haitians are generally able to engage in open private discussion of political topics. Those with access to the internet, which reached 11.4 percent of the population in 2014, use online communications, including social-media platforms, without harassment or interference.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

The 1987 constitution guarantees freedoms of assembly and association, though these freedoms are often violated in practice. Antigovernment demonstrations took place on several occasions in 2015, particularly in November and December in response to reports of

electoral fraud. Protesters often encountered police violence. The murder of Daniel Dorsainvil, general coordinator of the Platform of Haitian Human Rights Organizations (POHDH), remained unsolved at year's end; Dorsainvil was killed along with his wife in 2014.

The right of workers to organize is protected by law, but unions face many challenges. The right to strike is severely limited, and workers frequently face harassment and other repercussions for organizing.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

The judiciary is inefficient and weak, and is burdened by a lack of resources, a large backlog of cases, outdated legal codes, and poor facilities. Bribery is rampant at all levels of the judicial system. Official court business is conducted primarily in French, rendering proceedings only marginally comprehensible to many of those involved. Police are regularly accused of abusing suspects and detainees, and impunity continues to be a problem. The ponderous legal system has little credibility in the public eye, and police are regularly accused of abusing suspects and detainees. Although police operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice, impunity is a significant problem. Haitian law guarantees a hearing within 48 hours after arrest, but pretrial detainees comprised an estimated 70 percent of the prison population at year's end. In some prisons, the occupancy rate has reached close to 800 percent of maximum capacity in recent years.

The prosecution of members of the administration of former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier for crimes against humanity remained stalled in the Appellate Court in 2015. Separately, in April, Woodly Etheart and Renel Nelfort, leaders of a gang accused of leading vicious kidnapping operations in Haiti, were exonerated in a trial without a jury. Human rights groups denounced the decision as politicized and corrupt, accusing the judge and prosecutor for the case as well as the Port-au-Prince chief justice of illegal collusion.

Despite the government's failure to address discrimination and violence against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals, a movement for the human rights of LGBT people has gained momentum in recent years.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

The government generally respects freedom of movement and the rights of individuals to choose their own employment, education, and residence. Beginning in June 2015, more than 49,000 Haitian migrants crossed the border from the Dominican Republic to Haiti. The wave of migration was prompted by a June deadline set by Dominican Republic authorities for the registration of those residing in the country without formal status or documentation. In December, the International Organization for Migration estimated that close to 68 percent of those crossing the border to Haiti reported having no documentation. Haitian officials offered few services and resources to returnees. By year's end, approximately 2,600 people had settled in four camps along the border between the two countries; several residents of the camps, which were beleaguered by unsanitary conditions, died of cholera by year's end. As of June, a total of 61,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) were living in camps around the country, most of them victims of the 2010 earthquake.

Spotty record keeping at the national level and corruption in the enforcement process have resulted in severe inconsistencies in the protection of property rights; those with political and economic connections frequently rely on extrajudicial means of enforcement. Forced evictions are often carried out without prior notice and with police or other government participation, and authorities do not always provide proper restitution for confiscation

of private property. Haiti's economy was ranked 182 out of 189 in the World Bank's *Doing Business 2016* report, which noted grave shortcomings in business registration procedures and contract enforcement.

While the constitution mandates 30 percent female representation "in national life and in public service," women made up only 8 percent of candidates in the 2015 parliamentary elections. Spousal rape and sexual harassment are not explicitly prohibited by law. A draft penal code offering significant protections for victims of gender-based violence continued to stall in 2015.

According to the U.S. State Department's 2016 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Haiti is a source, transit, and destination country for the trafficking of men, women, and children for the purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation. A long-awaited antitrafficking law was promulgated in 2014, but enforcement remained weak in 2015.

Honduras

Political Rights Rating: 4

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Freedom Rating: 4.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 8,340,000

Capital: Tegucigalpa

Trend Arrow: Honduras received a downward trend arrow due to the government's failure to address corruption and impunity for crimes against journalists, human rights defenders, land rights activists, and the poor and other marginalized segments of society, who are routinely subject to violence by both state and nonstate forces.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

A major corruption scandal involving the Honduran Institute of Social Security (IHSS) rocked the country in 2015. The ruling National Party (PN) and President Juan Orlando Hernández allegedly benefited from the \$300-million scandal that activists claimed resulted in as many as 3,000 patient deaths. Protesters, collectively referred to as the Indignados (the Outraged), held weekly marches demanding the president's resignation and the establishment of an international anti-impunity body. Meanwhile, the adoption of a constitutional amendment allowing indefinite presidential reelection and the circumvention of a congressional vote on military policing led critics to charge that Hernández was eroding democratic governance.

Honduras continued to have one of the highest homicide rates in the world as drug traffickers, organized criminals, and street gangs preyed upon communities, often in collusion with authorities. The militarization of police was accompanied by an increase in abuses. Violence and intimidation against journalists, human rights workers, and land rights activists went unpunished, despite a new human rights defenders law.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 19 / 40 (–1)**A. Electoral Process:** 7 / 12

The president is elected by popular vote for a four-year term. The leading candidate is only required to win a plurality; there is no runoff system. In April 2015, the Honduran Supreme Court voided Article 239 of the constitution, which had limited presidents to one term. Members of the 128-seat, unicameral National Congress are also elected for four-year terms using proportional representation by department.

In 2013 general elections Hernández of the PN won 38 percent of the vote in a field of eight candidates for president. Xiomara Castro of the Liberation and Refoundation Party (LIBRE) won 28.8 percent, followed by Liberal Party (PL) candidate Mauricio Villeda with 20 percent and Salvador Nasralla of the Anti-Corruption Party (PAC) with 14 percent. In concurrent legislative elections, the PN won 48 seats, LIBRE won 37, the PL won 27, and the PAC won 13; three smaller parties each won 1 seat.

Election observers noted a number of irregularities, including the harassment of international observers by immigration officials, vote buying, problems with voter rolls, and potential fraud in the transmission of tally sheets to the country's electoral body, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). More than a dozen opposition activists and candidates were murdered during the campaign season. Castro and the LIBRE party contested the results and demanded a recount, which the TSE partially conducted; in the end, nearly all complaints were rejected and the TSE certified Hernández's victory. In June 2015 Hernández admitted that funds from the IHSS scandal—in which companies with links to IHSS were involved in money laundering and bribery—were used in his 2013 election campaign, though he denied knowledge of it. Analysts speculate that access to those funds gave him a significant advantage.

Monitors from the Organization of American States (OAS) found that the TSE did not have clear rules for processing candidate registration applications and noted inconsistencies in the development of voter lists. The OAS also found that campaign finance laws in Honduras were not stringent enough to ensure fair and transparent elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 9 / 16

Political parties are largely free to operate, though power has mostly been concentrated in the hands of the PL and the PN since the early 1980s. In 2013, LIBRE, the PAC, and the Patriotic Alliance Party (ALIANZA) all participated in elections for the first time, winning a significant share of the vote and disrupting the dominance of the PL and the PN.

The military, after decades of ruling Honduras, remains politically powerful. President Hernández's appointments of military officials to civilian posts, many related to security, underscored that influence.

Minorities are underrepresented in Honduras's political system. No representatives of the Afro-Honduran (Garifuna) population were elected to Congress in 2013; one English-speaking Afro-Honduran and one Misquito person won seats. No election materials were printed in indigenous languages. In 2014, the Ministry for Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Hondurans was folded into the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion, a move criticized by indigenous rights activists.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12 (–1)

In 2014, the Hernández administration eliminated five cabinet-level ministries and created seven umbrella ministries in an effort to cut costs. Critics have argued that the restructuring concentrates power in too few hands.

In 2014, Mario Zelaya, former head of the IHSS, and several other IHSS officials were arrested on charges related to the misappropriation of more than \$300 million in public funds. In May 2015, Globo TV released leaked documents detailing the scandal, including evidence that the PN had received significant sums. The revelations sparked months of protests. In October, the Hernández government responded by signing an agreement with the OAS to create the Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH). Critics, noting that the body would operate under existing Honduran judicial officials, questioned whether it would be able to function independently.

Corruption remains a serious problem. According to the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 23 percent of Hondurans were victims of corruption in 2014. Honduras was ranked 112 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. In 2015, at least 35 mayors and deputy mayors were under investigation for connections to organized crime. In October, the mayor of Sulaco was arrested for heading a criminal organization.

The Law on Classification of Public Documents Related to Security and National Defense, a 2014 statute allowing the government to withhold information on these topics for up to 25 years, continued to undermine transparency. The law covers information regarding the military police budget, which is funded by a security tax.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 26 / 60 (–3)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16 (–1)

Authorities systematically violate the constitution's press freedom guarantees. Numerous radio and television stations reported continued harassment in 2015, including police surveillance, assaults, threats, blocked transmissions, power outages, and government harassment of journalists. Radio Globo director David Romero Ellner received threats against his life after he exposed the social security embezzlement scandal, and in November Romero was convicted of slander against a prosecutor. In October, Julio Ernesto Alvarado, a journalist at TV Globo and Radio Globo, was prevented by Honduran immigration officials from traveling to Washington, D.C., to participate in an Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) hearing on his case. In 2013, Alvarado had been banned from working as punishment in a defamation case. In December, the Honduran government suspended the work ban, complying with an IACHR ruling issued more than a year earlier.

Honduras is ranked the most deadly country in the Americas for journalists by the IACHR. Most cases go unprosecuted. A law to protect journalists and human rights defenders went into effect in June 2015. Repression and violence have resulted in self-censorship. Internet use is generally unrestricted, though the government may have monitored some online communication in 2015.

Freedom of religion is broadly respected. Academic freedom is threatened as educators are subject to extortion by gang members, who control all or parts of schools in some areas. In 2015, students protested the extension of school hours into the evening, which they argued compromised their safety. In March 2015, four student protesters, one as young as 13, were found murdered. Student protesters demanding participation in governance and protections against the privatization of the Honduran National Autonomous University (UNAH) have faced threats following peaceful occupations of university buildings.

Under the Special Law on Interception of Private Communications, passed in 2011, the government can intercept online and telephone messages. Violence, threats, and intimidation by state and nonstate actors curtails open and free private discussion among the general population.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12 (– 1)

Constitutional guarantees of freedoms of assembly and association have not been consistently upheld. Human rights defenders and political activists continued to face significant threats in 2015, including harassment, surveillance, detentions, and murder.

In January 2015, after revoking the legal status of thousands of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in 2014, the government announced that some 4,100 more would lose their legal status. International bodies have noted that the registration process has become overly complicated; some NGOs have suggested that the moves are intended to silence criticism.

Labor unions are well organized and can strike, though labor actions often result in clashes with security forces. Threats against union leaders and blacklisting of employees who sought to form unions remained problems in 2015. In June, a representative of the Worker's Union of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (SITRAUNAH) was murdered.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16 (– 1)

Political and business elites exert excessive influence over the Honduran judiciary, including the Supreme Court. Judicial appointments are made with little transparency. Judges have been removed from their posts for political reasons, and a number of legal professionals have been killed in recent years. Prosecutors and whistleblowers handling corruption cases are often subject to threats of violence.

In 2012, Congress potentially violated the constitution by voting to remove four of the five justices in the Supreme Court's constitutional chamber after they ruled a police reform law unconstitutional. In 2013, the legislature passed a measure granting itself the power to remove from office the president, Supreme Court justices, legislators, and other officials. It also curtailed the power of the Supreme Court's constitutional chamber and revoked the right of citizens to challenge the constitutionality of laws. In 2015, questions were raised about the constitutionality of the ruling allowing indefinite reelection of presidents when one of the justices from the Supreme Court's constitutional branch attempted to rescind his approval of the decision.

The government continued to rely on the armed forces to fight crime in 2015. Critics contend that too much power is being concentrated in the hands of the military. Army officers have been found guilty of involvement in drug trafficking and other crimes. An active army general was appointed as security minister in 2014. The militarization of domestic policing has resulted in an increase in reported abuses, including murder, illegal detention, and torture. The police force is highly corrupt, and officers engage in criminal activities including drug trafficking and extortion. Hundreds of juveniles have reportedly been killed in "social cleansing" campaigns by police. Police officers have committed extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and illegal searches. In February 2015, four members of the military police were arrested on charges of attempted kidnapping. The same month, nine members of the elite Tigres police unit were charged with stealing \$1.3 million during a 2014 drug raid.

Impunity is a serious problem in Honduras. Fewer than 4 percent of homicides between 2010 and 2013 ended in a conviction. According to the government, approximately 80 percent of crimes committed in Honduras are never reported, and police investigate only 4 percent of those that are. Prison conditions are harsh, the facilities are notoriously overcrowded, lengthy pretrial detention is a problem, and inmate violence often goes unpunished. In 2015, at least 25 prisoners were killed in acts of prison violence. Prosecutors have attested that protection for witnesses in criminal cases is insufficient.

In April 2015, the Honduran government passed the Law on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Media Workers, and Justice Operators. The law provides legal protections for these individuals and intends to promote a safer environment for human rights activists to conduct their work. As of December 2015, four human rights defenders had brought forth cases, though the effectiveness of the law is yet to be determined. Although there is an official human rights ombudsman, critics claim that the work of the office is politicized.

In 2015, Honduras continued to have one of the highest murder rates in the world at approximately 61 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, down from 68 per 100,000 in 2014. Discrepancies in homicide data between the Violence Observatory of UNAH and police have resulted in suspicions that the state may manipulate homicide rates. Most murders are attributed to organized crime, including transnational youth gangs and Mexican drug-trafficking syndicates. In July 2015, Congress increased prison terms for gang members to between 20 and 30 years and established sentences for gang leaders of up to 50 years. The changes to the penal code also increased sentences for gang members who attack state officials or pressure minors, pregnant women, or the elderly into committing crimes.

Discrimination against the indigenous and Garifuna populations is widespread. Both groups experience higher rates of poverty and socioeconomic exclusion than the average citizen.

The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community faces discrimination, harassment, and physical threats. A 2005 constitutional amendment prohibits same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption. Rights groups reported that at least 215 LGBT activists and individuals were murdered between 2009 and 2015. According to a 2014 study conducted by a coalition of human rights groups, police officers and gang members carry out most of the violence against members of the LGBT community.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

Honduras's ongoing violence and impunity have reduced personal autonomy for the average citizen. Some Hondurans living in particularly violent neighborhoods have been forced to abandon their homes and businesses. Children have been fleeing the country to avoid forced recruitment into gangs.

Corruption is a serious problem in the private sector. In October 2015, three members of the prominent Rosenthal family, owners of Grupo Continental, were indicted on money laundering charges in U.S. federal court.

The conflict between indigenous groups, authorities, and private actors persisted in 2015, with clashes among peasants, landowners' private security forces, and state forces. More than 90 people, mostly landless peasants, died between 2009 and 2012 in violence related to fertile land where lucrative palm plantations are located in the Bajo Aguán region in northern Honduras. In 2015, Global Witness named Honduras the most dangerous country per capita for environmental and land activists. In November, the president of the Land Defense Committee of Cristales and Río Negro, also a candidate for local office, survived an assassination attempt. In December, the son of an indigenous leader was killed in Santa Elena de la Paz. Military death squads have been implicated in some killings, though they are rarely brought to justice. In December 2015, a soldier convicted in the killing of indigenous activist Tomás García Domínguez was sentenced to 30 to 90 days in prison, even while the penal code sets a sentence of 15 to 20 years for such a crime.

Indigenous and Garifuna residents have faced various abuses at the hands of property developers and their allies, including corrupt titling processes and acts of violence. Indigenous and Garifuna populations are rarely fairly compensated for the expropriation of their

lands and resources, and communities are often forcibly evicted. The clearing of land for clandestine airstrips used in the drug trade has increased pressure on indigenous groups in remote areas of the country. In June 2015, an arrest warrant was issued for Canadian investor Randy Jorgensen for depriving Garifuna communities of their legal rights to land in Trujillo Bay through illegal sales. In December, the Inter-American Court on Human Rights condemned the Honduran government for failing to protect land rights of a Garifuna community in Triunfo de la Cruz. In September, a 16-year-old boy was killed when military and police evicted the Regalo de Dios community in Villanueva, Cortes. In December, two Garifuna civilians were killed in Irióna by soldiers in what the military described as an antidrug operation.

Violence against women is a serious problem, and femicide has risen dramatically in recent years. Many of these murders, like most homicides in Honduras, go unpunished, despite the fact that femicide was added as a crime to the penal code in 2013. Women also remain vulnerable to exploitation by employers, particularly in the low-wage *maquiladora* (assembly plant) export sector. Following the 2013 elections, 33 of 128 seats in Congress were held by women; only 22 of 298 mayoralties were held by women.

Child labor is a problem in rural areas and in the informal economy. Honduras is primarily a source country for human trafficking, and women and children are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked for the sex trade and forced labor. Domestically, gangs have forced Hondurans to traffic drugs, perform sex work, and carry out violent acts. Police and government officials have been implicated in protecting sex trafficking rings and paying for sex acts.

↓ Hungary

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 9,835,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Budapest

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Trend Arrow: Hungary received a downward trend arrow due to laws, policies, and practices that sharply curtailed the ability of refugees to seek asylum in the country, the ongoing deterioration of the media environment, and the effects of large-scale government corruption on commercial activity and competition.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

Support for Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s Alliance of Young Democrats–Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz) party declined steeply at the end of 2014 and in the first months of 2015. Together with its junior coalition partner, the Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP), it lost two parliamentary by-elections in 2015, the first of which went to a leftist

candidate and cost the coalition its two-thirds parliamentary supermajority. The second by-election went to the radical-nationalist Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) party, whose popularity peaked in April but gradually returned to about 15 percent. Fidesz's poll numbers recovered in August and September, apparently reflecting support for the government's tough stance on migration.

Roughly a million migrants and refugees streamed into the European Union (EU) in 2015, many of them fleeing conflict zones in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. Hungary became the main entry point for those reaching the EU's core via Greece and the Balkans. The Orbán government responded to the influx of asylum seekers by constructing a razor-wire fence along Hungary's southern border and adopting extensive new immigration and border-control regulations designed to deter new entries and ease the rejection of asylum applications. In December, the European Commission launched infringement procedures over Hungary's new asylum legislation, which appeared to breach EU standards.

Separately, in May, the government finalized its proposal to replace the controversial progressive advertising tax it had pushed through in 2014 with a flat tax rate of 5.3 percent. The original law was suspended by order of the European Commission in March, pending an investigation to assess whether it gave certain companies an unfair competitive advantage, in violation of EU rules.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 32 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

Voters elect representatives every four years to a 199-seat, unicameral National Assembly under a mixed system of proportional and direct representation. The National Assembly elects both the president and the prime minister. The president's duties are mainly ceremonial, but he can influence appointments and return legislation for further consideration before signing it into law.

The Fidesz-KDNP coalition won the April 2014 parliamentary elections with 45 percent of the vote, capturing exactly two-thirds (133) of the seats. Unity—a new coalition of five leftist parties—won 38 seats. Jobbik took 23 seats, while the green-liberal Politics Can Be Different party won 5 seats.

Throughout the rancorous campaign, opposition parties criticized recent changes to electoral legislation, including rules that facilitated the creation of instant parties, splitting the antigovernment vote; alleged gerrymandering in the ruling coalition's favor; and the government's heavy influence over state television and radio. Most of these grievances were echoed by critical assessments from international transparency watchdogs and an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) election-monitoring delegation, which also pointed to strong government influence over media and advertising outlets and grossly unequal financial resources. Election monitors also suggested that the dual system for foreign voters, under which ethnic Hungarians who have been awarded citizenship but have never lived in the country can register and vote more easily than native Hungarian citizens living abroad, “undermine[s] the principle of equal suffrage.”

Zoltán Kész, an independent candidate who drew support from left-wing parties, won with 43 percent of the vote in a February 2015 parliamentary by-election in Veszprém, a traditional Fidesz stronghold. The Fidesz candidate, Lajos Némedi, secured 34 percent. Fidesz-KDNP consequently lost the two-thirds parliamentary supermajority it had held since 2010.

In April, Lajos Rig of Jobbik won a by-election in Tapolca, which had also overwhelmingly supported Fidesz in 2014. Rig's victory marked the first time Jobbik had won a single-member district outright, as opposed to gaining seats through proportional representation.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

After Fidesz's electoral victories in 2014, public support for the party declined significantly due to corruption allegations, political infighting, and an attempt to tax internet traffic, among other factors. With the political left plagued by infighting, Jobbik was the country's second-most popular party as of 2015. According to data released in April by the polling agency Medián, 18 percent of Jobbik supporters said they had voted for Fidesz the year before. However, the 2015 refugee crisis created an opportunity for Fidesz to reassert itself among anti-immigrant and Euroskeptic voters. The ruling party's popularity, which was at a two-year low of 24 percent in March 2015, bounced back to 34 percent by November, according to Medián. A large number of smaller parties compete in elections, but a party must take at least 5 percent of the national vote to win parliament seats by proportional representation.

Hungary's constitution guarantees the right of ethnic minorities to form self-governing bodies, and all 13 recognized minorities have done so. Minorities can also register to vote for special minority lists—with a preferential vote threshold—in parliamentary elections, but they are then excluded from the general party-list voting. None of the 13 minority lists won enough votes to secure a seat in 2014, meaning each is represented only by a nonvoting spokesperson. The Romany population in particular has long been underrepresented in political office.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Corruption remains a notable problem in Hungary, which ranked 50 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Using its supermajority, the Fidesz-led coalition has appointed allies to lead state agencies with anticorruption roles. The lack of an appropriate public-spending database presents an obstacle to the transparency of government finances.

Transparency International's Hungary chapter reports that a number of companies with close ties to the government are supported primarily by public funds. The board of Hungary's Public Procurement Authority has 19 members, 7 of whom are government appointees and 3 of whom are chosen by nominally independent public institutions led by allies of the prime minister. In July 2015, the procurement board banned former Orbán ally Lajos Simicska's construction firm Közgép from participating in public tenders for three years on the grounds that the company had included "false data" in one of its bids. Before a much-publicized rift between Simicska and Orbán came to a head in February 2015, Közgép had won billions of forints in state contracts.

In April, the European Commission suspended approximately \$2.6 billion in planned transfers to Hungarian economic development programs due to suspected corruption and irregularities in the awarding of tenders. Shortly afterward, public protests against corruption and the erosion of democratic freedoms were held in 50 towns and cities across Hungary. In June, two European Commission offices opened investigations into public contracts involving EU development funds awarded to Elios Innovatív at a time when the company was owned in part by Orbán's son-in-law, István Tiborcz. Neither investigation was complete at year's end.

Separately, in March, the Foreign Ministry withdrew 3.8 billion forints (\$14 million) from the Quaestor brokerage firm days before it went bankrupt; the firm's chief executive was thought to be close to Fidesz politicians. The ministry denied allegations that it acted on inside information, and Orbán explained that he had instructed ministries to withdraw public funds from brokerage firms after observing the failure in February of another company, Buda-Cash.

In 2014, the U.S. State Department issued travel bans against several Hungarians—including the head of the government tax authority—on the basis of corrupt activity. Details released in 2015 suggested that a Hungarian lobbyist was empowered to offer U.S. food producer Bunge a lower value-added tax (VAT) in exchange for the transfer of 2 billion forints (\$7 million) to a government-affiliated think tank. The investigation continued throughout 2015.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 47 / 60 (–3)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 13 / 16 (–1)

Hungary's constitution protects freedoms of speech and the press, but complex and extensive media legislation enacted under the Fidesz government is widely deemed to have undermined these guarantees. Since 2011, media outlets must register with the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH), which can revoke licenses for infractions. A Media Council under the NMHH can close outlets or impose fines of up to \$950,000 for failure to register or for airing content that incites hatred. Fidesz, with its parliamentary supermajority, controlled the initial appointments to the Media Council, whose members serve nine-year terms; it now requires some outside support for the approval of its nominees. The government has withdrawn most advertising from independent media since Fidesz took power in 2010.

Editorial bias and political pressure are problems at both public and private media outlets. In August 2015, a leaked memo revealed that the Media Service Support and Asset Management Fund (MTVA), which is supervised by the Media Council and is responsible for funding and content production for all public media, had instructed employees of Hungarian state television not to include footage of children in news pieces about migrants and refugees. When questioned, the MTVA cited a need to protect the children, but the memo was widely interpreted as a government effort to limit public sympathy for refugees.

Közzép owner Simicska controls a large conservative media empire that was considered pro-Fidesz until the mogul's relationship with Orbán began to sour in 2014. A few new Fidesz-friendly outlets were founded in 2015, but their initial reach was limited. Also in 2015, associates of the government and of Simicska asserted rival claims to the ownership of TV2, Hungary's second-largest commercial television station. A lawsuit on the matter was pending at year's end.

Politicians regularly file criminal defamation charges against journalists and bloggers. In 2015, cases were brought against 17 people who posted on Facebook about a suspicious property sale by the mayor of Siófok, and against the editor of a prominent blog who criticized xenophobic statements by a Budapest district mayor. The criminal code requires internet service providers to block content deemed illegal by a court order. Websites hosting illegal content are placed on a nonpublic "blacklist" operated by the NMHH. In 2014, the Constitutional Court ruled that website operators are responsible for user comments on blog posts or news commentary that may violate media laws.

In July 2015, legislators voted to extend the maximum response time for public information requests from 15 to 30 days and allow government agencies to charge a fee for fulfilling such requests. Another provision of the hastily passed bill allows public bodies to keep certain data private for 10 years if they have been used in decision-making processes. Freedom of information advocates denounced the changes as an attempt to deter journalists and citizens from investigating potential government corruption. Nevertheless, President János Áder signed the bill into law.

The constitution guarantees religious freedom and provides for the separation of church and state. Adherents of all religions are generally free to worship. Religious communities

have the same legal standing as recognized churches. However, a two-thirds parliamentary majority must approve the right of any religious community or church to receive tax and other benefits reserved for “accepted churches.” Anti-Semitism remains a problem, particularly among far-right groups.

The state generally does not restrict academic freedom. However, a gradual overhaul of the public education system has raised concerns about excessive government influence on school curriculums, and legislation adopted in June 2014 has the potential to reduce the autonomy of universities. There are no significant constraints on freedom of private discussion in Hungary.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association, and the government generally respects these rights in practice.

State funding to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society groups is distributed through the National Cooperation Fund (NEA), whose nine-member council is dominated by government and parliamentary appointees. In 2014, the government appeared to retaliate against critical NGOs by launching a far-reaching investigation into the funding that several hundred of them had received via the Norway Grants, a charitable foundation supported primarily by the Norwegian government. In January 2015, a district court ruled that the National Bureau of Investigation’s 2014 raid on the Ökotárs Foundation—one of the NGOs involved in the disbursal of Norway Grants funds in Hungary—had been illegitimate. The government finally agreed in December to conclude its investigations into the work of NGOs supported by Norway Grants in exchange for the release of development funds previously earmarked for Hungary. The government maintains that “not everything was in order” with the operations of NGOs funded by Norway Grants, and the Ökotárs Foundation will not be part of the management and distribution of Norway Grants money in the next funding cycle.

The government recognizes workers’ rights to form associations, strike, and petition public authorities. Trade unions represent less than 30 percent of the workforce.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16 (– 1)

Judicial independence is a matter of concern. Of the 14 judges currently on the Constitutional Court, 11 were appointed by the Fidesz government. In March 2015, a group of Hungarian civil liberties watchdog organizations released a joint study of 23 high-profile Constitutional Court cases, 10 of which were adjudicated before Fidesz-appointed judges constituted a majority, and 13 after. The study found that before the majority, all cases had come out against the interests of the government; after Fidesz appointees became dominant on the court, the government’s interests won out in 10 of the 13 rulings.

Prisons are generally approaching European standards, though overcrowding, inadequate medical care, and poor sanitation remain problems. Inmates do not have access to independent medical staff to assess abuse allegations. In March 2015, the European Court of Human Rights ordered Hungary to pay 84,000 (\$89,000) in damages to six prison inmates who had been held in highly overcrowded and unsanitary conditions.

Hungary has taken a number of steps to improve monitoring of Romany legal rights and treatment, but Roma, who form Hungary’s largest ethnic minority, still face widespread discrimination and poverty. Romany students continue to be segregated and improperly placed in schools for children with mental disabilities. A court ruling on a civil suit in September 2015 was the first against police accused of anti-Roma discrimination.

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is banned under the Act on Equal Opportunity. However, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) people face harassment in practice, including from police and government officials.

Amendments to asylum legislation passed in June and July 2015 allowed the detention of migrants in temporary camps, sped up asylum assessments, and limited opportunities to appeal asylum decisions. The government then deemed Serbia, among others, a “safe third country” under the revised asylum law, allowing officials to reject most asylum applications from people who reached Hungary via Serbia without examining cases individually. In September, the parliament overwhelmingly voted to make illegal border-crossing punishable by up to three years in prison and expulsion from the country. More legislation adopted in September allowed Hungary’s army to enforce border controls, restrict civil liberties, and employ “coercive weapons designed to cause bodily harm, although in a nonlethal way, unless it cannot be avoided.” That month, Hungarian riot police used tear gas and water cannons against crowds of frustrated asylum seekers who had broken through a border gate.

Some government figures and the Jobbik party have engaged in xenophobic rhetoric in recent years. During the summer of 2015, the government erected Hungarian-language billboards warning migrants to obey “our laws” and not to take Hungarian jobs. In September, footage of a camera operator for the Jobbik-affiliated station NITV kicking and tripping migrants spread across social media; she was fired shortly afterward.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16 (– 1)

Hungarians enjoy freedom of travel and choice of residence, employment, and institution of higher education. Citizens have the right to own property and establish private businesses. Cronyism remains a serious concern, however. Critics of recent sectoral taxes see them as efforts by the state to drive out or take over foreign businesses. In December 2014, the parliament adopted a law forcing large or corporate-owned retailers to close on Sundays, while small or family-owned shops may remain open. The difficulties of Simicska-owned businesses and EU investigations into state contracting practices in 2015 further illustrated the extent to which business success depends on government connections.

Women possess the same legal rights as men, but they face employment discrimination and tend to be underrepresented in high-level business and government positions. Women hold only 20 of 199 seats in the National Assembly—the lowest percentage in Europe—and no cabinet posts. Government leaders show little interest in women’s rights concerns. Magyar Telekom—the Hungarian unit of Deutsche Telekom and Hungary’s biggest telecommunications company—ended its affiliation with Hungarian pop star Ákos Kovács in December 2015 after he made a series of sexist comments during a television interview. The government responded by canceling its mobile internet subscriptions with the company. The same weekend, parliament speaker László Kövér told ruling party lawmakers that “the highest level of self-fulfillment for our daughters should be to bear grandchildren for us,” prompting a public outcry. The right to life from conception is protected under the 2011 constitution, but access to abortions remained largely unrestricted in 2015.

Same-sex couples can legally register their domestic partnerships. However, the constitution enshrines the concept of marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

Hungary is a transit point, source, and destination for trafficked persons, including women trafficked for prostitution. Roma and unaccompanied asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable.

Iceland

Political Rights Rating: 1

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Freedom Rating: 1

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 330,800

Capital: Reykjavík

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

A series of major strikes took place in Iceland during the year, and public and private employers struggled to reach agreements with unions about higher wages. Although the refugee crisis confronting Europe did not heavily affect Iceland, the issue of asylum dominated public dialogue in August and September, when the public launched an initiative to increase the government's annual quota for resettlement. Separately, the special prosecutor's office continued pursuing cases against former bank officials accused of malfeasance related to the 2008 financial crash. The office is scheduled to be abolished in 2016, with the district prosecutor absorbing its responsibilities.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The Icelandic constitution, adopted in 1944, vests power in a president, a prime minister, the 63-seat unicameral legislature (Althingi), and a judiciary. The Althingi, arguably the world's oldest parliament, was established in approximately 930 AD. The largely ceremonial president is directly elected for a four-year term, and the prime minister is appointed by the president. President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson was elected to his fifth term in 2012, defeating independent candidate Thóra Arnórsdóttir, a journalist for Iceland's National Broadcasting Service (RÚV).

The legislature is elected for four-year terms but can be dissolved for early elections under certain circumstances. In the 2013 parliamentary elections, the center-left ruling coalition of the Social Democratic Alliance (SDA) and the Left-Green Movement (VG) lost half of its total seats—the biggest loss by a governing coalition since Iceland's independence in 1944. Major voter concerns included austerity measures, taxation levels, and Iceland's application for membership in the European Union (EU), as well as a countrywide problem of high household debt. The Progressive Party and the Independence Party each won 19 seats, the SDA took 9 seats, the VG captured 7, and two new parties—Bright Future and the Pirate Party—secured 6 and 3 seats, respectively. Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson, leader of the Progressives, took office as prime minister, heading a coalition government composed of his own party and the Independence Party.

Municipal elections were held in Reykjavík in 2014. Keeping a public promise announced in 2013, the comedian-turned-mayor Jón Gnarr did not run for reelection and, following the conclusion of the vote, disbanded his Best Party. The SDA, which won the most seats in the capital's city council, entered into a coalition with Bright Future, VG, and the Pirate Party.

The constitution, the election law of 2000, and related legislation establish a clear and detailed framework for conducting elections. An extensive constitutional reform process, launched by popular initiative in 2009, led to the drafting of a new constitution that, among other things, would harmonize the number of votes per seat in all constituencies. The draft was approved by referendum in 2012, but the initiative has since stalled in the legislature.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Political parties are able to register and operate without undue interference. The center-right Independence Party dominated Icelandic politics until 2009, when Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir's SDA-VG coalition won a majority, but a center-right alliance between the Progressive Party and the Independence Party retook the parliament in 2013.

The banking crisis of 2008 spawned several new parties and movements, and the 2013 parliamentary elections were contested by 15 political parties; six gained representation in the Althingi. By comparison, seven parties had competed in 2009. In its five years of political activity, Gnarr's Best Party proved to be one of the most successful new groups, as did its sister party in the Althingi, Bright Future. Both developed coherent, left-leaning agendas. The Pirate Party—which holds three parliamentary seats and focuses on direct democracy and internet freedom—remained the most popular political party in 2015, according to independent polls.

Foreigners can vote in municipal elections if they have been residents for at least five years, or three years if they are citizens of Nordic countries.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12 (+ 1)

In March 2015, the foreign ministry announced plans to end Iceland's accession talks with the EU. The ruling coalition that took power in 2013 has maintained strong opposition to EU membership, particularly voicing disagreement with EU regulations on fishery and agriculture. A previous attempt to withdraw Iceland's bid failed in 2014 amid public demonstrations demanding that the decision be put to a referendum. The government did not seek a referendum or parliamentary approval before the March 2015 announcement.

Corruption is not a pervasive problem in Iceland, which was ranked 13 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. However, the country has experienced a number of fraud scandals in recent years. The office of the special prosecutor, established in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse to investigate corruption, has been remarkably successful in bringing bankers and politicians to trial for their role in the crash. Icelandic courts found several former banking executives guilty of fraud and market manipulation in 2015, including the former CEO and a former chairman of Kaupthing Bank, which the government took over in 2008. In June, the parliament approved measures to restructure the prosecutorial system, abolishing the office of the special prosecutor and transferring its responsibilities to the district prosecutor, an office that also handles police misconduct. The changes will go into effect in 2016.

A political scandal involving a fabricated memorandum led to Hanna Birna Kristjánsdóttir's resignation from her post as interior minister in 2014. The memorandum, leaked from the ministry in 2013, contained false information about Tony Omos, a Nigerian asylum seeker whose potential deportation had sparked protests across Iceland. The memo had alleged that authorities suspected Omos of criminal behavior, which many construed as an attempt to influence his asylum case. In 2014, Kristjánsdóttir's personal assistant admitted to leaking the memo and was convicted of a breach of confidentiality following a state investigation. In January 2015, the parliamentary ombudsman published a report criticizing

Kristjánsdóttir's conduct during the inquiry into the leak, noting that she had jeopardized the independence of investigations by communicating with the Reykjavík police chief. Also in January, several legislators—including fellow members of the Independence Party—called for Kristjánsdóttir's resignation from the Althingi, but she returned to her duties later in the year, following a short leave.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 60 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of speech and of the press. In 2010, the parliament unanimously passed the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative, which mandates the establishment of robust free speech and press freedom laws, particularly for the protection of investigative journalists and outlets. Iceland's print publications are diverse and include both independent and party-affiliated newspapers. The autonomous RÚV competes with private radio and television stations. Private media ownership is concentrated, with the media company 365 controlling most of the major private television and radio outlets as well as the free newspaper *Frettabladid*, which enjoys the highest circulation in the print market. Internet access is unrestricted.

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, with equal protection under the law for different religions groups. About three-quarters of Icelanders belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The state supports the church through a special tax, which citizens can choose to direct to the University of Iceland instead. A long-planned mosque in Reykjavík gained attention in the May 2014 municipal elections when Progressive mayoral candidate Sveinbjörg Birna Sveinbjörnsdóttir spoke out against the use of public lands for the building. Permission to construct the mosque was requested in 1999 but only granted in 2013. Close to 900 individuals identifying as Muslim lived in Iceland as of 2015. In November, leaders of the construction effort unveiled the final design of the planned mosque. That month, President Grímsson revealed that the government of Saudi Arabia had donated approximately \$1 million to aid construction.

A 2008 law requires the teaching of theology in grades 1 through 10. Academic freedom is respected, and the education system is free of excessive political involvement.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of association and peaceful assembly are generally upheld. Many nongovernmental organizations operate freely and enjoy extensive government cooperation.

The labor movement is robust, with more than 80 percent of all eligible workers belonging to unions. All unions have the right to strike, with the exception of the National Police Federation. The year 2015 featured high levels of activism by unions representing both public and private sector employees. In October, local media reported that police officers had orchestrated a number of actions to enhance their collective bargaining capacity, including refraining from issuing traffic tickets and taking leaves en masse in order to pressure the government to respond to their concerns. Unions representing workers in the academic, health care, tourism, and fisheries sectors engaged in continuous limited strike actions in the first half of the year, focusing particularly on pay increases. In April, the Federation of General and Special Workers approved plans to hold a general strike, leading employers in some private industries to make concessions. However, labor activity in other sectors, including the medical and public sectors, continued throughout the year; by October, more than 3,500 civil servants and 158 state agencies were involved in a coordinated strike action.

F. Rule of Law: 16 / 16

The judiciary is independent. The law does not provide for trial by jury, but many trials and appeals use panels of several judges. Prison conditions generally meet international standards.

The constitution states that all people shall be treated equally before the law, regardless of sex, religion, ethnic origin, race, or other status. Beginning in August, discontent about Iceland's quota for refugee resettlement—capped at 50 individuals on an annual basis—led to significant public pressure on the government. By September, more than 12,000 Icelanders had signed a letter to the welfare ministry calling for a higher quota, with many signatories offering to provide material aid for refugees. The parliament doubled the quota within weeks.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 16 / 16

Freedom of movement is constitutionally protected and respected in practice. Women have equal rights under law, and more than 80 percent of women participate in the workforce. However, a pay gap exists between men and women despite laws designed to prevent disparities. In the 2013 elections, women took 40 percent of seats in the Althingi. In 2009, Sigurðardóttir became Iceland's first female prime minister and the world's first openly lesbian head of government.

The parliament unanimously passed a law legalizing same-sex marriage in 2010, and a 2006 law established full and equal rights for same-sex couples in matters of adoption and assisted pregnancy. A comprehensive law on transgender issues adopted in 2012 aimed to simplify legal issues pertaining to gender reassignment surgery, to ensure full and equal rights for transgender people, and to guarantee relevant health care.

The Althingi passed a law criminalizing human trafficking in 2009.

India

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 1,314,098,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: New Delhi

Freedom Rating: 2.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Indian-controlled Kashmir, which is examined in a separate report.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F

INTRODUCTION

The “Modi Wave” that swept Prime Minister Narendra Modi to power in the 2014 national elections experienced some setbacks in 2015, with major defeats for his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Delhi and Bihar state elections and retreats on key elements of the government's reform agenda. Meanwhile, threats to freedom of expression increased,

including intimidation of and attacks against writers, journalists, academics, and bloggers by Hindu extremist groups. An uptick in violence against Muslims was linked to a campaign led by Hindu nationalists to tighten legal restrictions on the sale and consumption of beef.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 35 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Elections have generally been free and fair. Members of the lower house of Parliament, the 545-seat Lok Sabha (House of the People), are directly elected in single-member constituencies for five-year terms, except for two appointed members representing Indians of European descent. The Lok Sabha determines the leadership and composition of the government. Most members of the less powerful 250-seat upper house, the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), are elected by state legislatures using a proportional-representation system to serve staggered six-year terms; up to 12 members are appointed. Executive power is vested in a prime minister and cabinet. The president, who plays a largely symbolic role but possesses some important powers, is chosen for a five-year term by state and national lawmakers. Current president Pranab Mukherjee, a former cabinet minister and veteran Congress Party leader, was elected in 2012.

In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP won 282 seats and its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition won 336, ensuring a stable majority for the new government; turnout was 66 percent. The incumbent Congress Party and its United Progressive Alliance (UPA), headed by Rahul Gandhi, won just 44 and 60 seats, respectively. Modi, a three-term chief minister from the western state of Gujarat, was sworn in as prime minister. The elections, conducted with electronic voting machines, were broadly free and fair.

The Congress Party and its allies still controlled the Rajya Sabha in 2015 with 126 seats; the BJP-led alliance held only 63. Opposition to BJP policies in the upper chamber led the government to abandon key agenda items during the year, including a land acquisition bill. The BJP controls the governments of just eight of India's 29 states.

Elections held in the capital territory of Delhi in February 2015 and the state of Bihar in five phases from October to November were generally seen as free and fair. In Delhi, the anticorruption Aam Aadmi Party, formally launched in 2012, won a landslide victory with 67 of 70 seats in the legislative assembly. Despite extensive campaigning by Modi in Bihar, the BJP won only 58 of 243 seats against a coalition that included Rashtriya Janata Dal, Janata Dal, and the Congress Party, which together won 178 seats.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

India hosts a dynamic multiparty system. The Congress Party ruled at the federal level for nearly all of the first 50 years of independence, but the BJP became a major force in Parliament in the 1990s. Recent elections have tended to result in ruling coalitions involving large numbers of parties; the contests are fiercely competitive and characterized by anti-incumbency voting trends. In 2014, the two main national parties won only about 50 percent of the vote combined. Nonetheless, the disproportionate translation of votes to seats put the BJP in the clear majority in the lower house, marking the first time a single party won a majority of seats in the Lok Sabha since 1984. It also relegated the Congress Party to its weakest position to date.

Political participation is affected to a certain degree by insurgent violence in some areas and ongoing practical disadvantages for some marginalized segments of the population. Nevertheless, women, religious and ethnic minorities, and the poor vote in large numbers.

There is some representation for historically marginalized groups. The current BJP government includes one Muslim cabinet minister, for minority affairs. Twenty-two Muslims were elected to the Lok Sabha in 2014. Quotas for the chamber ensure that 84 and 47 seats are reserved for the so-called scheduled castes (Dalits) and scheduled tribes, respectively. There are similar quotas for these historically disadvantaged groups in state assemblies.

Modi is a controversial figure due to his role as chief minister during the 2002 Gujarat riots, an outbreak of communal violence in which more than 1,000 Muslims were killed, and in which he has been accused of complicity. There was evidence of a BJP strategy of communal polarization in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Assam in 2013 and 2014 surrounding the parliamentary election campaign; divisive speeches by politicians including Modi and Amit Shah—Modi's Uttar Pradesh campaign chief and the current national BJP party president—were blamed for fueling or capitalizing on deadly communal clashes.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Elected leaders have the authority to govern in practice, and civilian control of the military is codified in the constitution. However, political corruption has a negative effect on government efficiency and economic performance. India was ranked 76 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Though politicians and civil servants at all levels are regularly caught accepting bribes or engaging in other corrupt behavior, a great deal of corruption goes unnoticed and unpunished. This is particularly the case in the energy and construction sectors, and in state infrastructure projects more broadly.

Domestic and international pressure has led to legislation aimed at addressing corruption. The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, which the president signed in 2014, creates independent government bodies tasked with receiving complaints of corruption against public servants or politicians, investigating claims, and pursuing convictions through the courts. Modi and members of his government have signaled support for the law, but there is little evidence that it is being effectively implemented.

The 2005 Right to Information (RTI) Act is widely used to improve transparency and expose corrupt activities, though there are questions about its enforcement. Since the enactment of the RTI Act, at least 45 right to information users and activists have been murdered and more than 250 have been assaulted or harassed. In May 2015, the Lok Sabha adopted amendments to the 2014 Whistleblowers Protection Act. Opposition members criticized the changes for diluting the effectiveness of the act, which was already regarded as limited in scope. The amendments had not been considered by the Rajya Sabha as of December.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 42 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 13 / 16

The private media are vigorous and diverse, and investigations and scrutiny of politicians are common. Nevertheless, revelations of close relationships between politicians, business executives, and lobbyists and some leading media personalities and owners of media outlets have dented public confidence in the press in recent years. In the period surrounding the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, major media owners reportedly put pressure on journalists in order to avoid the political consequences of publishing critical stories on key parties and politicians; similar forms of self-censorship continued in 2015.

While the state continues to dominate the radio sector, and private radio stations are not allowed to air news content, the television and print sectors have expanded considerably

over the past decade, with many new outlets targeting specific regional or linguistic audiences.

Internet access is largely unrestricted, though officials periodically implement overly broad blocks on supposedly offensive content to prevent communal or political unrest. The 2000 Information Technology Act criminalizes the sending of offensive messages by computer, and this has been interpreted to allow for censorship of critical commentary on political parties and specific politicians. For example, in the month after the 2014 elections, at least 18 people were reportedly arrested and questioned for anti-Modi posts on social-media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. The authorities have also used security laws, criminal defamation legislation, hate-speech laws, and contempt-of-court charges to curb critical voices on both social media and traditional media platforms.

There is increasing concern about harassment of bloggers and social-media users by Hindu nationalists. Hindu groups have also mobilized to suppress books that are perceived as critical of Hinduism or Hindu nationalism. In 2014, in response to a lawsuit, a publisher withdrew U.S. academic Wendy Doniger's book *The Hindus: An Alternative History* from sale; a different publisher made it available in 2015.

Hindus make up about 80 percent of the population, but the Indian state is formally secular. Freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. However, legislation in several Hindu-majority states criminalizes religious conversions that take place as a result of "force" or "allurement," which can be broadly interpreted to prosecute proselytizers. Some states require government permission for conversion.

An array of Hindu nationalist organizations and some local media outlets promote anti-minority views, a practice that critics charge is tolerated or even encouraged by the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Modi. In 2015, growing antiminority violence was linked to increasingly aggressive Hindu nationalists and a campaign to ban the sale and consumption of beef, which targets Muslims. The BJP-led state of Maharashtra has enacted the strictest ban in the country, though other states have various limits and prohibitions on the slaughter, sale, or consumption of beef. In September, a Muslim farmer in the state of Uttar Pradesh was killed by a Hindu mob that suspected him of having killed and eaten a calf.

Academic freedom is generally robust, though intimidation of professors and institutions over political and religious issues sometimes occurs. Violent attacks and threats against liberal writers and academics by radical Hindu nationalists increased during 2015. In August, M. M. Kalburgi, a scholar and critic of Hindu idol worship, was shot dead at his home. Hindu extremist groups such as Sri Ram Sene and Sanatan Sanstha have threatened secular thinkers. This climate of violence and intimidation and the general lack of response from the government have had a chilling effect among Indian intellectuals. Separately, scholars and activists accused of sympathizing with Maoist insurgents have faced pressure from authorities and alleged torture by police.

Private discussion in India is generally open and free. However, a nationwide Central Monitoring System launched in 2013 is meant to enable authorities to intercept any digital communication in real time without judicial oversight; India does not have a privacy law to protect citizens in case of abuse.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 10 / 12 (–1)

There are some restrictions on freedoms of assembly and association. Section 144 of the criminal procedure code empowers the authorities to restrict free assembly and impose curfews whenever "immediate prevention or speedy remedy" is required. State laws based

on this standard are often abused to limit the holding of meetings and assemblies. Nevertheless, protest events take place regularly.

Human rights organizations operate freely, but they continue to face threats, legal harassment, excessive police force, and occasionally lethal violence. While India is home to a strong civil society sector and academic community, foreign monitors and journalists are at times denied visas to conduct research in the country on human rights and other topics. Under certain circumstances, the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA) permits the federal government to deny nongovernmental organizations access to foreign funding. The government has been accused of abusing this power to target political opponents. In April 2015, the authorities canceled the FCRA licenses of some 9,000 charities for failing to declare details about foreign donations. The crackdown included the suspension of Greenpeace's license for the additional infraction of damaging India's economic interests; Greenpeace has campaigned against environmental damage caused by energy-producing industries. The government also put the Ford Foundation on a watch list in April while it investigated the foundation's funding of a local organization run by a critic of Modi.

Although workers in the formal economy regularly exercise their rights to bargain collectively and strike, the Essential Services Maintenance Act has enabled the government to ban certain strikes. New labor laws passed in Rajasthan in 2015 raised the threshold for unionization (in terms of the number of workers) and granted employers greater power over dismissals.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16

The judiciary is independent of the executive branch. Judges have displayed considerable activism in response to public-interest litigation matters. However, the lower levels of the judiciary in particular have been rife with corruption, and most citizens have great difficulty securing justice through the courts. The system is severely backlogged and understaffed, leading to lengthy pretrial detention for a large number of suspects, many of whom remain in jail longer than the duration of any sentence they might receive if convicted.

Police torture, abuse, and corruption are entrenched in the law enforcement system. Citizens frequently face substantial obstacles, including demands for bribes, in getting the police to file a First Information Report, which is necessary to trigger an investigation of an alleged crime. Custodial rape of female detainees continues to be a problem, as does routine abuse of ordinary prisoners, particularly minorities and members of the lower castes. According to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), 111 deaths occurred in police custody during the last eight months of 2015.

The NHRC is headed by a retired Supreme Court judge and handles roughly 8,000 complaints each year. While it monitors abuses, initiates investigations, makes independent assessments, and conducts training sessions for the police and others, its recommendations are often not implemented and it has few enforcement powers. The commission also lacks jurisdiction over the armed forces, one of the principal agents of abuse in several parts of the country, further hampering its effectiveness. The NHRC nevertheless makes a contribution to accountability by submitting reports to international bodies such as the UN Human Rights Council, often contradicting the government's account of its performance.

Security forces operating in the context of regional insurgencies continue to be implicated in extrajudicial killings, rape, torture, arbitrary detention, kidnappings, and destruction of homes. The criminal procedure code requires that the government approve the prosecution of security force members; approval is rarely granted, leading to impunity. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act grants security forces broad authority to arrest, detain,

and use force against suspects in restive areas; civil society organizations and multiple UN human rights bodies have called for the act to be repealed. A number of other security laws allow detention without charge or based on vaguely worded offenses.

The Maoist insurgency in the east-central hills region of India is of serious concern, although the annual number of casualties has decreased since its peak in 2010. The South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) documented 251 related fatalities—including 93 civilian deaths—in 2015. Among other abuses, the rebels have allegedly imposed illegal taxes, seized food and shelter, and engaged in abduction and forced recruitment of children and adults. Local civilians and journalists who are perceived to be progovernment have been targeted. Tens of thousands of civilians have been displaced by the violence and live in government-run camps.

Separately, in India's seven northeastern states, more than 40 insurgent factions—seeking either greater autonomy or complete independence for their ethnic or tribal groups—continue to attack security forces and engage in intertribal violence. Such fighters have been implicated in numerous bombings, killings, abductions, and rapes of civilians, and they operate extensive extortion networks. The number of deaths related to the northeastern insurgencies decreased from 465 in 2014 to 273 in 2015, according to the SATP.

The criminal justice system fails to provide equal protection to marginalized groups. Muslims, who make up 14 percent of the population, are underrepresented in the security forces as well as in the foreign and intelligence services. In parts of the country, particularly in rural areas, informal community councils issue edicts concerning social customs. Their decisions sometimes result in violence or persecution aimed at those perceived to have transgressed social norms, especially women and members of the lower castes.

The constitution bars discrimination based on caste, and laws set aside quotas in education and government jobs for historically underprivileged scheduled tribes, Dalits, and groups categorized by the government as “other backward classes.” However, members of the lower castes and minorities continue to face routine discrimination and violence. Many Dalits are denied access to land and other public amenities, are abused by landlords and police, and work in miserable conditions.

The penal code forbids “intercourse against the order of nature.” A 2009 decision by the Delhi High Court decriminalized consensual sex between adult men in private. However, a panel of the Supreme Court reversed that ruling in 2013, finding that an act of Parliament would be required to change the penal code. Such a bill was introduced in December 2015 but voted down in the lower house. Widespread discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people continues, including violence and harassment in some cases, though the Supreme Court recognized transgender people as a third gender in 2014.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Freedom of movement is hampered in some parts of the country by insurgent violence or communal tensions, though violence from insurgencies has decreased in recent years. Property rights are somewhat tenuous for tribal groups and other marginalized communities, and members of these groups are often denied adequate resettlement opportunities and compensation when their lands are seized for development projects. While many states have laws to prevent transfers of tribal land to nontribal groups, the practice is reportedly widespread, particularly with respect to the mining and timber industries. A 2013 law provided increased rights to people threatened with displacement for industrial and infrastructure projects, but critics said it included arbitrary rules and went too far in restricting development. The Modi government sought to weaken these protections, but abandoned the effort due to opposition in the upper house.

There is some degree of female representation in government. Modi's cabinet includes seven female ministers; chief ministers in the states of Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and West Bengal are women. Female quotas are in place for elected positions in India's three-tier local government system.

Rape, harassment, and other transgressions against women are serious problems, and lower-caste and tribal women are particularly vulnerable. Mass demonstrations after the fatal gang rape of a woman on a Delhi bus in 2012 prompted the government to enact significant legal reforms. However, egregious new cases, including the rapes of children under the age of 5, emerged in 2015, leading to calls for further action. Despite criminalization and hundreds of convictions each year, dowry demands persist. A 2006 law banned dowry-related harassment, widened the definition of domestic violence to include emotional or verbal abuse, and criminalized spousal rape. However, reports indicate that enforcement is poor.

Muslim personal laws and traditional Hindu practices discriminate against women in terms of inheritance, adoption, and property rights. The malign neglect of female children after birth remains a concern, as does the banned but growing use of prenatal sex-determination tests to selectively abort female fetuses.

Article 23 of the constitution bans human trafficking, and bonded labor is illegal, but the practice is fairly common. Estimates of the number of affected workers range from 20 to 50 million. Children are banned from working in potentially hazardous industries, though in practice the law is routinely flouted.

Indonesia

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 255,742,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Jakarta

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,4,PF	2,4,PF	2,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's new parliament, seated in October 2014 after April elections, voted in January 2015 to reinstate direct elections for subnational administrative heads (governor, district chief, and mayor). The move confirmed the president's 2014 decision to halt a law passed by the outgoing parliament that would have abolished such elections.

Broader reform efforts were hampered by institutional rivalry between what has become known as a "judicial mafia"—including elements of the national police, the parliament, and some judicial bodies—and reform-oriented agencies such as the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). President Joko Widodo ("Jokowi") appeared unable to control the infighting, casting doubt on his anticorruption and reformist credentials.

The rivalry escalated in 2015, catalyzed by the nomination of Budi Gunawan—then a suspect in an ongoing corruption case—as chief of the national police. The police and

judiciary mounted multiple legal attacks on members of the KPK, the independent Judicial Commission, and the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) in retaliation for graft investigations and findings that questioned the quality of legal decisions. In December, parliament speaker Setya Novanto resigned amid allegations that he demanded a 20 percent stake in mining company Freeport Indonesia in exchange for accelerating a contract renewal.

An air-pollution crisis, driven in large part by the illegal clearing of forest for agriculture, affected parts of Indonesia and the surrounding region, underscoring the authorities' failure to enforce existing regulations and rein in influential resource-extraction companies.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 31 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12 (+ 1)

Independent monitoring groups have found elections in Indonesia to be free and fair. The president is directly elected and serves as both head of state and head of government. The House of Representatives (DPR), with 560 seats, is the main parliamentary chamber. The 132-member House of Regional Representatives (DPD) is responsible for monitoring laws related to regional autonomy, and may also propose bills related to regional autonomy and the relationship between central and local governments. All legislators serve five-year terms with no term limit. Presidents and vice presidents can serve up to two five-year terms.

Jokowi, the candidate of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), won the July 2014 presidential election with 53 percent of the vote, defeating former general Prabowo Subianto. The PDI-P, the party of former president Megawati Sukarnoputri, led the April 2014 DPR elections with 19 percent of the vote and 109 seats. Golkar, the party of former president Suharto, won 91 seats, followed by Prabowo's Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) with 73 seats. The Democratic Party (PD) of outgoing president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono received 61 seats. Three Islamic parties—the National Mandate Party (PAN), National Awakening Party (PKB), and United Development Party (PPP)—increased their total vote share, taking 49, 47, and 39 seats, respectively. A fourth, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), fell to 40 seats. NasDem and the People's Conscience Party (Hanura) won the remainder, with 35 and 16 seats, respectively. Irregularities were reported in some regions, including political violence during the preelection period in Aceh and voter-list inflation, ballot stuffing, and community bloc voting in Papua.

After the new parliament restored direct elections for subnational administrative heads in January 2015, Indonesia in December held nine gubernatorial elections, 36 mayoral elections, and 224 district head elections. Five contests were postponed at the last minute due to legal disputes. The elections were the first in which relatives of incumbent officials were allowed to stand as candidates; in July, the Constitutional Court struck down legislation that had banned family members from contesting elections. An increasing number of local election results have been disputed at the Constitutional Court. Of the 269 jurisdictions that conducted balloting, the court received complaints from 132; Papua generated the largest number of complaints, with 16.

Under a 2012 law, the hereditary sultan of Yogyakarta is that region's unelected governor. The position is nonpartisan, and the sultan is subject to a verification process with minimum requirements—such as education—every five years beginning in 2016. The prince of Paku Alaman serves as deputy governor of the region.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

The right to organize political parties is respected in Indonesia, though in recent years the election laws have been amended to favor large parties by imposing eligibility requirements for parties to run for the parliament or field a presidential candidate. Only 12 parties

passed verification processes for the 2014 national elections, down from 48 in 1999. One new national party, NasDem, competed in the 2014 elections. Gerindra and Hanura competed for the first time in 2009.

Some local governments have discriminated against minorities by restricting access to national identification cards, birth certificates, marriage licenses, and other bureaucratic necessities, limiting their political rights and electoral opportunities. However, despite growing religious intolerance and historical hostility toward certain ethnic groups, a number of minority politicians won important posts in 2014, including Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (“Ahok”), an ethnic Chinese Christian, and DPR member Jalaludin Rakhmat, a Shiite Muslim.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

Elected officials determine the policies of the government, though national authorities have faced difficulties in implementing decisions due to resistance at the local and regional level. Separately, observers have warned that the military is regaining influence over political and economic affairs. The defense minister appointed by Jokowi in 2014 is a former army chief of staff, breaking with a pattern in which civilians have held the post since 1999, and in recent years the army has signed agreements with various ministries and state companies to provide everything from security at public infrastructure sites to assistance with family planning programs.

Corruption remains endemic, including in the parliament and the police. Indonesia was ranked 88 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In December 2015, Setya Novanto resigned as DPR speaker shortly before he was found guilty, but not sanctioned, by the parliament’s Ethics Council. Setya and oil importer Muhammad Riza Chalid were accused of seeking a 20 percent stake in mining company Freeport Indonesia in exchange for an expedited contract renewal. An investigation by the Attorney General’s Office (AGO) was ongoing at year’s end. Other high-ranking officials who faced arrest, trial, or conviction on corruption charges during 2015 included members of parliament, a former police general, former cabinet ministers, and a former governor.

To a certain extent, Indonesia’s partial progress against official corruption has paradoxically handicapped the functioning of government. Risk-averse administrators do not spend their budgets, reducing investments in important areas such as infrastructure. For this reason, Jokowi in August issued a circular to regional leaders assuring them that administrative “errors” related to spending would not be criminalized.

Acrimony between rival agencies has hindered anticorruption efforts. In particular, the KPK and the national police have engaged in a series of disputes since 2009, highlighting fundamental disagreements over governance reform among political elites, as well as Jokowi’s weak position vis-à-vis entrenched interests, including those in his own party. Jokowi’s nomination of a new national chief of police, Budi Gunawan, in January 2015 set off a chain of events in which KPK leaders and police officials exchanged accusations of criminal wrongdoing. As a public outcry against Budi’s possible appointment and alleged corruption grew, Jokowi decided in February to nominate acting police chief Badrodin Haiti to serve as police chief. However, to placate Budi’s political backers in the PDI-P, the president installed him as deputy chief. Jokowi also suspended the chairman and deputy chairman of the KPK, and a graft case against Budi was subsequently dropped. In December, after the expiration of the existing KPK’s term, five new commissioners were approved by the DPR. Observers warned that the year’s events would leave the KPK weakened.

Civil society groups are able to comment on and influence pending policies or legislation. However, government transparency is limited by obstacles such as a 2011 law that criminalizes the leaking of state secrets to the public.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 34 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

Indonesia hosts a vibrant and diverse media environment, though press freedom is hampered by a number of legal and regulatory restrictions. Licensing rules are stringent but unevenly enforced, meaning that thousands of television and radio stations operate illegally. Before 2015, foreign journalists were not authorized to travel to the restive provinces of Papua and West Papua without special permission. Jokowi announced in May that the ban would be lifted, though some journalists seeking to visit the region continued to report bureaucratic resistance from security agencies, including visa delays and denials, while those able to work in the provinces noted instances of surveillance and threats against sources.

Treason and blasphemy laws are routinely used to limit freedom of expression by minority groups, separatists, and those criticizing the government and security apparatus. Journalists often practice self-censorship to avoid running afoul of civil and criminal defamation laws. In several cases during 2015, public officials or their alleged proxies brought defamation cases against journalists or one another as part of broader internecine disputes, including those involving the KPK and national police. Reporters sometimes face violence and intimidation, which frequently goes unpunished. A December report by the Legal Aid Institute for the Press (LBH Pers) found 47 incidents of violence against journalists in 2015, of which 17 were perpetrated by the police.

Censorship and self-censorship of books and films for allegedly obscene or blasphemous content are fairly common. Official and unofficial censorship has long been in place regarding a period in 1965–66 when alleged members of the Indonesia Communist Party (PKI) were massacred. Communism has since been banned in Indonesia. In recent years, as public dialogue has increased amid the publication of new books and documentaries about the era, censorship has also increased. In October 2015, the Ubud Writers and Readers Festival was ordered to cancel several events on the 1965 massacres, and a student magazine was forced to destroy all printed copies of an edition that included an article on the topic.

The 2008 Law on Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE Law) extended libel and other restrictions to online media, criminalizing the distribution or accessibility of information or documents that are “contrary to the moral norms of Indonesia” or related to gambling, blackmail, or defamation. In March 2015, a woman was sentenced to five months in prison and fined Rp 100 million (\$7,500) under the ITE Law for making allegedly indecent statements online; her former husband had accessed her Facebook account and turned the private chat in question over to police. Also that month, a university student was sentenced to two months in prison, six months’ probation, and a fine of Rp 10 million (\$750) for online comments in which she insulted the province of Yogyakarta.

Indonesia officially recognizes Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, though local customary practices (*adat*) also exist. Individuals have the option of leaving the religion section of their national identity cards blank, but those who do often face discrimination, and in practice this is rarely done. In 2014, the religious affairs minister affirmed that the Baha’i faith is a religion rather than a sect, but it is not yet included in formal legislation. Atheism is not accepted, and the criminal code contains provisions against blasphemy, penalizing those who “distort” or “misrepresent” recognized faiths.

National and local governments have repeatedly failed to protect religious minorities from violence and discrimination, and exhibited bias in investigations and prosecutions. To obtain a permit to build a new house of worship, a religious group must gather the signatures of 90 congregation members and 60 local residents of different faiths. Most older buildings—Muslim or otherwise—do not have such permits, but the law has been used to target houses of minority faiths. Various congregations have struggled to secure local permission to build houses of worship in parts of Java, even when authorized by the Supreme Court. In August 2015, authorities yielded to protesters and halted construction on a properly permitted Roman Catholic Church in West Java. Separately, a Christian mob destroyed a mosque in Papua in July, and Muslim mobs torched three churches in Aceh in October, prompting several thousand Christian residents flee the area. Criminal cases against the suspected instigators were pending at year's end, but the Aceh authorities demolished additional churches due to an alleged lack of building permits.

Violence and intimidation against Ahmadiyya, an Islamic sect with approximately 400,000 Indonesian followers, persisted in 2015, and the central government continued to tolerate discrimination by local governments. In July, an Ahmadiyya mosque in Jakarta was closed by local officials who claimed it lacked the proper permit. In a rare official defense of the group, Jakarta governor Ahok later criticized the closure and said he would help informal Ahmadiyya mosques in residential buildings to secure zoning exemptions. The Shiite Muslim minority has also suffered violence and intimidation, including forced conversion. In October, the mayor of Bogor banned Shiites from assembling to observe Ashura (Ashura).

In recent years, hard-line Islamist groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) have engaged in raids and extrajudicial enforcement of Sharia (Islamic) bylaws, and pressured local governments to close churches and non-Sunni mosques. Their violent activities are not supported by the country's main Islamic organizations, but they often have the support of high-ranking government officials, and security forces have been criticized for tacitly aiding them by ignoring their abuses. In April 2015, two FPI leaders were sentenced to seven months in jail for inciting a riot in 2014.

Academic freedom in Indonesia is generally respected, and there are no major obstacles to open and free private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

Freedom of assembly is usually upheld, and peaceful protests are common in the capital. To limit their impact on traffic and business, in October 2015 Ahok tried to restrict all demonstrations to three locations in the capital. After an outcry, the decree was revised in November to remove the location restrictions and other rules, though limits on times and noise levels remained in place. A 2010 regulation allows national police to use live ammunition to quell situations of "anarchic violence."

Authorities have restricted the right to assembly in regions of conflict. Flag-raising ceremonies and independence rallies in Papua are routinely disbanded, often violently, and participants have been tried for treason.

Indonesia hosts a strong and active array of civil society organizations, but some human rights groups are subject to government monitoring and interference. Independence activists in Papua and the Maluku Islands, and labor and political activists in Java and Sulawesi, remain targets for human rights abuses, as do those calling for better regulation of extractive industries. In a rare instance of accountability, the September 2015 murder of environmental activist Salim Kancil, who opposed a local mining operation in East Java, drew public

attention and led to the swift arrest of the alleged perpetrators. Such outcomes are far less likely in outlying regions with a smaller media presence.

The 2013 law on mass organizations requires all civic and religious nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to register with the government and submit to regular reviews of their activities. It limits the types of activities NGOs can undertake, and bars them from committing blasphemy or espousing non-Pancasila ideologies, such as atheism and communism. The government is empowered to dissolve noncompliant organizations.

Workers can join independent unions, bargain collectively, and with the exception of civil servants, stage strikes. Legal strikes can be unduly delayed by obligatory arbitration processes, and laws against antiunion discrimination are not well enforced. Some unions have resorted to violence in their negotiations with employers, and labor-related demonstrations are common.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

The judiciary, particularly the Constitutional Court, has demonstrated its independence in some cases, but the court system remains plagued by corruption and other weaknesses. An October 2015 report by Amnesty International found that many defendants are denied proper access to legal counsel, including in death penalty cases. The application of the death penalty for drug-trafficking crimes has been revived under Jokowi; more than a dozen people were executed for such offenses during 2015, including foreign citizens. The Jakarta Legal Aid Institute (LBH Jakarta) noted an increase in the number of complaints regarding violations of the right to a fair trial in 2015.

The security forces are also rife with corruption and other abuses, and personnel regularly go unpunished or receive lenient sentences for human rights violations. Military service members accused of crimes against civilians are tried in military courts, which lack impartiality and often impose light punishments. Information garnered through torture is admissible in the courts, and torture carried out by law enforcement officers is not a criminal offense. KontraS (Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence) documented 274 victims of torture between June 2014 and May 2015, including 183 who were subjected to caning in Aceh.

Poor prison governance is compounded by endemic overcrowding. Prison riots and protests over lack of services have led to numerous jailbreaks. Wealthy and high-profile prisoners, including those convicted of corruption, are allegedly able to obtain special privileges and trips outside of prison.

Security forces have been fairly successful in suppressing the country's terrorist networks, though hundreds of Indonesians have reportedly traveled to Syria and Iraq to join jihadist groups, raising the threat of future domestic attacks.

Since the 1950s, separatists have waged a low-grade insurgency in the provinces of Papua and West Papua, where the central government's exploitation of natural resources and the heavy police and military presence have stirred resentment. Deadly confrontations between security forces and protesters are common, as are extrajudicial killings, tribal conflict, and violence related to labor disputes at foreign-operated mines and other resource-extraction enterprises. Jokowi has made achieving peace and development in Papua a priority of his presidency. In May 2015 he pardoned five jailed separatists, and leading political prisoner Filep Karma was released in November after a sentence reduction for good behavior, though many prisoners refused to apply for clemency and thereby admit guilt. Jokowi also called for an end to Indonesia's transmigration program in the region; the program relocates poor families from densely populated areas, especially Java, to other parts of the

country, fueling tensions in Papua. However, the minister of transmigration later contradicted the president, saying the program was successful and would continue.

A number of districts have issued local ordinances based on Sharia that in many cases are unconstitutional, contradict Indonesia's international human rights commitments, or are difficult to enforce due to lack of clarity. Many are never reported to the Home Affairs Ministry for review. In October 2015, Aceh implemented a new Sharia-based criminal code that applies to non-Muslims as well as Muslims. It bans all sexual relations outside of marriage and criminalizes same-sex sexual activity, among other restrictions. A group of civil society organizations filed a request for review at the Constitutional Court, which was ongoing at year's end.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face widespread discrimination, harassment by local officials, and attacks by hard-line Islamist groups that sometimes enjoy support from local authorities. In addition to the many local bylaws—in Aceh and elsewhere—that effectively criminalize LGBT people, a 2008 antipornography law labels same-sex sexual acts as “deviant.” Transgender people are routinely arrested and sent for counseling. In September 2015, two women were arrested by Sharia police in Aceh for allegedly being lesbian; the two women had been seen hugging in public.

Ethnic Chinese, who make up less than 3 percent of the population but are resented by some for reputedly holding much of the country's wealth, continue to face harassment.

Indonesia granted temporary protection to thousands of refugees and migrants who were stranded at sea during 2015, but the country is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not accept refugees for asylum and resettlement.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

Freedom of travel and choice of residence, employment, and higher education are generally respected. However, the ability to obtain private business licenses and public employment is often limited by the need for bribes or other inducements. Corruption also affects businesses' daily operations and routine interactions with the state bureaucracy.

Property rights are threatened by mining and logging activity on communal land and state appropriation of land claimed by indigenous groups, particularly in Kalimantan. In 2015, KontraS recorded 40 violations of land rights, which typically involved harassment and violence by the police and military. In 2013, the Constitutional Court ruled that indigenous people have the right to manage “customary forest” lands they inhabit. A March 2015 ministerial regulation called for mining and plantation companies to allocate at least 20 percent of their land concessions for management and use by local people, though many companies reportedly failed to comply.

Discrimination against women persists, including in the workplace. Working men receive tax benefits that are unavailable to their wives, as husbands are deemed the heads of households. A 2008 law states that 30 percent of a political party's candidates and board members must be women. In 2014, 94 women (approximately 17 percent) were elected to the 560-seat DPR, a slight decrease from the previous term. Abortion is illegal except to save a woman's life or in instances of rape. Adults over 15 years of age must have corroboration and witnesses to bring rape charges. Sharia-based ordinances in a number of districts infringe on women's constitutional rights, and the ordinances' restrictions on dress, public conduct, and sexual activity are disproportionately enforced against women and LGBT people. Marriages must be conducted under the supervision of a recognized religion, which can sometimes obstruct interfaith marriages; civil marriage is not possible. Women applying to work for the police and military must undergo “virginity tests.”

Many Indonesian workers are trafficked abroad for forced labor, including women in domestic service and men in the fishing industry. Traffickers are often able to avoid punishment due to corruption among law enforcement officials.

Iran

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 78,483,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Tehran

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

In July 2015, Iran reached an agreement with the United States and other world powers to limit its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, raising hopes that the pact would ultimately strengthen President Hassan Rouhani and allow him to fulfill promises to decrease state intervention in Iranians' lives. However, there were no significant improvements in the human rights situation during the year, as hard-liners in control of key state institutions, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and the judiciary, appeared determined to prevent any attempts at reform.

With elections for the parliament and the Assembly of Experts scheduled for February 2016, hard-liners launched a new crackdown in 2015. At least four journalists were arrested, while several intellectuals, artists, and human rights activists were sentenced to lengthy prison terms. *Washington Post* correspondent Jason Rezaian, an Iranian-American, was sentenced to an unspecified prison term following a closed-door trial on widely criticized espionage charges. There was also a surge in executions during the year, with estimates indicating that the number easily exceeded the reported total for 2014.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 7 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

The supreme leader, who has no fixed term, is the highest authority in the country. He is the commander in chief of the armed forces and appoints the head of the judiciary, the heads of state broadcast media, and the Expediency Council—a body tasked with mediating disputes between the Guardian Council and the parliament. He also appoints six of the members of the Guardian Council; the other six are jurists nominated by the head of the judiciary and confirmed by the parliament, all for six-year terms. The supreme leader is appointed by the Assembly of Experts, which also monitors his work. However, in practice his decisions appear to go unchallenged by the assembly, whose proceedings are kept confidential. The current supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, succeeded Islamic Republic founder Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989.

Elections in Iran are not free and fair, according to international standards. The Guardian Council, controlled by conservatives, vets all candidates for the parliament, president,

and the Assembly of Experts—a body of 86 clerics who are elected to eight-year terms by popular vote. The council has in the past rejected candidates who are not considered insiders or deemed fully loyal to the clerical establishment, as well as women seeking to run in the presidential election. As a result, Iranian voters are given a limited choice of candidates.

The president, the second-highest-ranking official in the Islamic Republic, is elected by popular vote for four years and can serve two consecutive terms. Ahead of the 2013 election, the Guardian Council disqualified more than 600 candidates, including former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Rahim Mashaei, an aide to incumbent president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, apparently due to political infighting. Nearly all of the eight approved candidates, including Rouhani, were deemed close to Khamenei. Only one reformist candidate, who was widely seen as lacking both charisma and significant popular support, was allowed to run. In the run-up to the election, censorship increased, the government intensified its press crackdown, and authorities restricted the already slow speed of the internet. However, Rouhani's victory—with nearly 51 percent of the vote amid 72 percent turnout—appeared to reflect the choice of the voters.

For the 2012 elections to the 290-seat, unicameral parliament, the Guardian Council disqualified one-third of the registered candidates, including incumbent members, opposition reformists, and supporters of Ahmadinejad, who had increasingly clashed with the supreme leader and rival conservative factions. Though there were no claims of systematic fraud, several sitting lawmakers accused the IRGC of rigging activities. The official results were seen as favoring Khamenei's conservative supporters.

As the country prepared for the 2016 parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections in 2015, officials renewed a debate over the role of the Guardian Council. Rouhani suggested in August that the council's proper function is to supervise rather than administer elections. His comments appeared to reflect concern that the body would bar moderate and reformist candidates from running. Hard-line officials hit back, including the IRGC commander Mohammad Ali Jaafari, who warned against weakening the "pillars of the revolution."

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16

Only political parties and factions loyal to the establishment and to the state ideology are permitted to operate. Reformist parties and politicians have come under increased state repression, especially since 2009.

In 2015, two new reformist parties—Nedaye Iranian (Voice of Iranians) and Etehad Mellat Iran (Iranian National Unity)—were established ahead of the 2016 parliamentary elections. Hard-liners were critical of the decision to allow the two parties to operate, noting that some of their members belonged to the banned Participation Front (Mosharekat). The head of Etehad Mellat and at least one other member of the party were summoned to court in 2015 in what was seen as a warning to the reformists.

Iran's leading opposition figures—Mir Hossein Mousavi; his wife, university professor Zahra Rahnavard; and reformist cleric Mehdi Karroubi—have been under house arrest since February 2011 with no access to the outside world. Mousavi and Karroubi were presidential candidates in the disputed 2009 election, and the three are seen as the leaders of the reformist Green Movement, whose mass protests were brutally suppressed following that vote.

The parliament grants five seats to recognized non-Muslim minorities: Jews, Armenian Christians, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, and Zoroastrians. However, ethnic and especially religious minorities are rarely awarded senior government posts, and their political presence remains weak. In September 2015, Iranian media reported that the government had for the first time appointed a Sunni Muslim to serve as an ambassador.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

The elected president's powers are limited by the supreme leader and other unelected authorities. The powers of the elected parliament are similarly restricted by the supreme leader and the unelected Guardian Council, which must approve all bills before they can become law. The council often rejects bills it deems un-Islamic. Nevertheless, the parliament has been a platform for heated political debate and criticism of the government, and legislators have frequently challenged presidents and their policies.

Corruption remains endemic at all levels of the bureaucracy, despite regular calls by authorities to tackle the problem. Powerful actors involved in the economy, including the IRGC and bonyads (endowed foundations), are above scrutiny. In its 2015 Corruption Perception Index, Transparency International ranked Iran 130 out of 168 countries and territories.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 10 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 2 / 16

Freedom of expression and access to information remain severely limited both online and offline. However, some journalists and citizens say the situation improved slightly after Rouhani took office. The state broadcasting company is tightly controlled by hard-liners and influenced by the security apparatus. News and analysis are heavily censored, while critics and opposition members are rarely, if ever, given a platform on state-controlled television, which remains a major source of information for many Iranians. State television has a record of airing confessions extracted from political prisoners under duress, and it routinely carries reports aimed at discrediting dissidents and opposition activists.

Satellite dishes are banned, and Persian-language broadcasts from outside the country are regularly jammed. Authorities periodically raid private homes and confiscate satellite dishes.

Newspapers and magazines face censorship and warnings from authorities about which topics to cover and how. Journalists state that they are often forced to practice self-censorship when working on sensitive issues. In late July 2015, the government allegedly instructed newspaper editors to praise the nuclear agreement and avoid publishing content that would suggest a rift among officials. In August, a hard-line daily was suspended over its coverage of the nuclear talks, while two other hard-line media outlets received warnings.

Since Rouhani became president, several new dailies and magazines have been granted publishing licenses, but a number of publications and websites have been closed or suspended. In January 2015, the daily *Mardom-e Emrouz* was shut down after it published a cover photo of American actor George Clooney expressing solidarity with the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, the target of a terrorist attack the previous week. In April, a magazine dedicated to women's issues and run by prominent editor Shahla Sherkat was temporarily banned over coverage of cohabitation outside of marriage.

Nineteen journalists were behind bars in Iran as of December, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The year's most high-profile case was that of *Washington Post* reporter Jason Rezaian, in detention since July 2014. He was tried on espionage charges in four closed hearings between May and August. In November, Iran's judiciary said Rezaian had been sentenced to an unspecified jail term. The espionage accusations have been widely described as baseless.

Tens of thousands of websites remain filtered, including news sites and social media, which have otherwise become a relatively free platform of expression for many Iranians.

The government has said it is pursuing “smart filtering” for social-networking sites such as Instagram, allowing it to block certain content without obstructing the entire service.

Authorities continue to target online activists. In September, reports emerged that well-known internet activist and founder of the popular Weblogina portal Arash Zad had been detained since the previous month on unknown charges. Facebook activist Soheil Arabi, who had been arrested in 2013 and sentenced to death in 2014 for “insulting” the prophet Muhammad, had his death sentence commuted by the Supreme Court in June, though he still faced seven and a half years in prison, with two years of supervised theological study. Reporters Without Borders said in September that more than 100 online activists and bloggers had been arrested since Rouhani took office, in most cases by the intelligence branch of the IRGC.

Various forms of art face restrictions in Iran. All books must be approved by the Ministry of Culture in order to receive a publishing license. Scores of books have been banned, while authors have been accused of subversion, though there were reports in 2015 that book censorship had slightly eased and that some previously banned books were allowed to be published. Filmmakers also face censorship and official pressure. In June, artist and activist Atena Farghadani was sentenced to 12 years and nine months in prison for a cartoon that criticized members of parliament. It emerged in October that two poets, Fatemeh Ekhtesari and Mehdi Mousavi, had been sentenced to 11.5 and nine years in prison, respectively, as well as 99 lashes each, on charges that included “insulting sanctities.” Filmmaker Keywan Karimi was sentenced that month to six years in prison and 223 lashes on similar charges.

Iran is home to a majority Shiite Muslim population and Sunni, Baha’i, Christian, and Zoroastrian minorities. The constitution recognizes only Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians as religious minorities, and they are relatively free to worship. The regime cracks down on Muslims who are deemed to be at variance with the state ideology and interpretation of Islam. Popular spiritual leader Mohammad Ali Taheri was sentenced to death in June 2015 for “spreading corruption on earth,” but the Supreme Court rejected the sentence in December; Taheri, in detention since 2011, was already serving a five-year prison sentence on related charges. At least 30 of his followers have also been sentenced to prison. Sunni Muslims complain that they have been prevented from building mosques in major cities and face employment discrimination for government jobs. In recent years, there has been increased pressure on the Sufi Muslim order Nematollahi Gonabadi, including destruction of their places of worship and the jailing of some of their members.

The government also subjects some non-Muslim minorities to repressive policies and discrimination. Baha’is are systematically persecuted, sentenced to prison, and banned from access to higher education; some 70 Baha’is were in prison as of December 2015 due to their religious beliefs. The Baha’i International Community has also reported the destruction of cemeteries and the closure of Baha’i-owned businesses in recent years. There is an ongoing crackdown on Christian converts. In the past three years, a number of informal house churches have been raided and their pastors detained. Pastor Saeed Abedini, a dual Iranian-American national and a convert to Christianity, is among those in jail.

Academic freedom remains limited in Iran, despite attempts by Rouhani’s government to ease the harsh repression universities have experienced since 2009. In the past two years, about a dozen student associations that had been suspended under the previous administration were allowed to renew their work. Several new student groups also received permits to operate. However, Khamenei has warned that universities should not be turned into centers for political activities. Amnesty International estimates that hundreds of students have been prevented from continuing their studies for political reasons or because they belong to the Baha’i community.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12

The constitution states that public demonstrations may be held if they are not “detrimental to the fundamental principle of Islam.” In practice, only state-sanctioned demonstrations are typically permitted, while other gatherings have in recent years been forcibly dispersed by security personnel, who detain participants. In what appeared to be a softening of the government’s stance, police did not disrupt protests by animal rights activists in Shiraz in April 2015, or a months-long protest by prominent lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh against a decision to ban her from practicing law. Sotoudeh said she and her supporters received threats but were allowed to continue their picketing outside the Iranian Bar Association in Tehran.

Nongovernmental organizations that work on nonpolitical issues such as poverty and the environment are allowed to operate relatively freely. Reports suggest that their number has increased in the past two years. Other groups, especially those that have highlighted human rights violations, have been suppressed. They include the Center for Human Rights Defenders, which remains closed with several of its members in jail, and the Mourning Mothers of Iran (Mothers of Laleh Park), which had been gathering in a Tehran park to bring attention to human rights abuses. In May 2015, Narges Mohammadi of the Center for Human Rights Defenders was arrested, apparently to serve a six-year prison term handed down in 2011 that she had not been able to serve because of health problems. Also in May, anti-death penalty activist Atena Daemi was sentenced to 14 years in prison on charges that included “gathering and colluding against national security” and “spreading propaganda against the system,” partly due to her critical social-media posts.

Iran does not permit the creation of labor unions; only state-sponsored labor councils are allowed. Labor rights groups have come under pressure in recent years, and more than a dozen activists have been sentenced to prison. In April 2015, the secretary general of the Teachers Organization of Iran and five prominent members of Iran’s Teachers Association were detained for their union activities. Thousands of workers marched on May Day in Tehran and other cities for the first time in eight years, though a number of activists were reportedly detained in the days ahead of the event. Jailed trade unionist Shahrokh Zamani died in September, apparently of a stroke, while serving an 11-year prison sentence he received in 2011. His death renewed concern over the denial of proper medical care to prisoners.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16

The judicial system is used as a tool to silence critics and opposition members. The head of the judiciary is appointed by the supreme leader for a five-year term. Under the current head, Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani, human rights advocates and political activists have been subjected to unfair trials, and the security apparatus’s influence over judges has reportedly grown.

Iran, after China, carries out the largest number of executions in the world each year, and the annual total has increased under Larijani. Convicts can be executed for offenses other than murder, such as drug trafficking, and for crimes they committed when they were less than 18 years old. According to the UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran, at least 694 individuals were reportedly executed in the first seven months of 2015, compared with 753 for all of 2014. Others put the total for 2015 at nearly 1,000. As in previous years, Iran refused to allow a visit to the country by the UN special rapporteur.

Lawyers taking up sensitive political cases have been jailed and banned from practicing, including prominent human rights lawyer Abdolfatah Soltani. A number of lawyers have been forced to leave the country to escape prosecution.

Activists are routinely arrested without warrants, held indefinitely without formal charges, and denied access to legal counsel or any contact with the outside world. Many are later convicted on vague security charges in trials that sometimes last only a few minutes. Activists say they have been beaten during interrogation, forced into false confessions, and subjected to psychological pressure, including threats that their relatives will be arrested. In the past two years, the IRGC's intelligence unit appears to have increased its involvement in political repression. The unit reportedly controls a section of Tehran's Evin prison.

Security forces are seldom held responsible for human rights violations.

Ethnic minorities complain of various forms of discrimination, including restrictions on the use of their languages. Some provinces with large minority populations remain underdeveloped. Activists campaigning for more ethnic rights and greater autonomy have come under pressure from authorities, and some have been jailed. Kurdish activist Behrouz Alkhani was executed in August 2015 for alleged involvement in the 2010 killing of a prosecutor. Amnesty International called his trial "grossly unfair" and said he was put to death while his appeal was still before the Supreme Court.

The penal code criminalizes all sexual relations outside of traditional marriage, and Iran is among the few countries where individuals can be put to death for consensual same-sex conduct. Members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community face harassment and discrimination, though the problem is underreported due to the criminalized and hidden nature of these groups in Iran.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

Freedom of movement is restricted, particularly for women and perceived opponents of the regime. Women are banned from certain public places, such as sports stadiums, and can obtain a passport to travel abroad only with the permission of their fathers or husbands. Many journalists and activists have been prevented from leaving the country.

Iranians have the legal right to own property and establish private businesses. However, powerful institutions like the IRGC play a dominant role in the economy, and bribery is said to be widespread in the business environment, including for registration and obtaining business licenses.

The government interferes in most aspects of citizens' private lives. Home parties are often raided and citizens detained or fined for drinking alcohol or mingling with members of the opposite sex. Women are regularly harassed and detained by the police for not fully observing the obligatory Islamic dress code. An increasing number of women defy the state by wearing tight clothes and short coats. In September 2015, a police official in Tehran warned that women drivers could have their cars impounded if they are caught "poorly veiled" or without a veil. The authorities also attempt to restrict certain forms of dress or appearance among men, such as long hair or clothing deemed Western.

Women remain significantly underrepresented in politics and government, though Rouhani has appointed three women among his vice presidents. In addition, four women have been appointed as governors. Women are denied equal rights in divorce, child custody, and inheritance. A woman's testimony in court is given only half the weight of a man's, and the monetary compensation awarded to a female victim's family upon her death is half that owed to the family of a male victim.

The government provides no protection to women and children forced into sex trafficking, and both Iranians and foreign nationals are subject to forced labor and debt bondage. Officials have been complicit in sex trafficking, including some who operate shelters for runaway girls.

Iraq

Political Rights Rating: 5↑

Population: 37,056,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Baghdad

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ratings Change: Iraq's political rights rating improved from 6 to 5 due to a parliamentary vote that withdrew the prime minister's mandate to enact unilateral reforms, reasserting the parliament's constitutional powers and rebalancing a political system that had been skewed toward the executive under the previous government.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,6,NF	6,6,PF	6,6,NF	5,6,NF	5,6,NF	5,6,NF	6,6,NF	5,6,NF	6,6,NF	5,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

The Iraqi security forces and their allies in the fight against the Islamic State (IS) militant group made hard-won progress in 2015. IS lost control of significant towns and cities such as Tikrit, Sinjar, and Ramadi, the last of which had fallen to the militants in May but was mostly retaken by late December. However, IS retained control of important areas, including Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, and stepped up terrorist attacks in the capital and other government-held population centers. Civilians bore the brunt of the violence, targeted by both IS and some progovernment forces, including Shiite militias.

The election of Haidar al-Abadi as prime minister in 2014 seemed to offer Iraq an opportunity to heal sectarian divisions that were exacerbated by his predecessor, Nouri al-Maliki. Yet in 2015, Iraq appeared to inch closer to dissolution along ethno-sectarian lines. The autonomous Kurdish region in the north continued to lobby the international community to accept the idea of formal independence. The Shiite majority in the south openly discussed secession, a previously taboo topic. And while Sunni leaders pressed for fair inclusion or Sunni regional autonomy within a united Iraq, the pattern of IS occupation raised the possibility of an independent Sunni Arab state in parts of Iraq and Syria. These pressures increased the urgency of restoring government control over Iraqi territory without further alienating the Sunni population.

Emboldened by a protest movement that began in July, al-Abadi initiated reforms designed to overhaul Iraq's faltering public utilities and streamline a political system that was seen as bloated with sectarian patronage and corruption. However, the proposed reforms were neither transformational nor, in some cases, legal. By the end of the year the reform movement had largely collapsed as a result of declining political support and the parliament's assertion of its constitutional right to limit the power of the executive, which al-Abadi had improperly expanded.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 12 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 8 / 12

Under the constitution, parliamentary elections should be held at least every four years. Members of the 328-seat parliament, the Council of Representatives, are elected through

multimember open lists for each province. Once seated after elections, the parliament elects a president, who then appoints the member nominated by the largest parliamentary bloc as prime minister. The prime minister forms a government with parliamentary support and assumes most executive power. Iraqi governments have thus far been coalitions resulting from lengthy, contentious negotiations that uphold unwritten power-sharing agreements apportioning the top political positions among the country's religious and ethnic communities. The constitution envisions a Federal Council, an upper house designed to represent provincial interests, but it has never been formed. Iraq's 18 provinces also have governing councils elected every four years.

While parliamentary seats are allocated by province based on population, the estimates in use are disputed, as Iraq has not held a successful census covering the entire country since 1987. However, the borders of Iraq's provinces are generally agreed upon.

In the 2014 parliamentary elections, al-Maliki's Shiite-led State of Law coalition won 95 seats, making it the largest grouping. A Shiite bloc associated with populist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr placed second with 34 seats, followed by a third Shiite coalition, Al-Muwatin, with 31 seats. A Sunni-led bloc, Muttahidoon, took 28 seats; a secular nationalist coalition led by Ayad Allawi, Al-Wataniya, received 21; and the two leading Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), took 25 and 21 seats, respectively. The remainder was divided among several smaller parties.

The elections were considered successful given the challenge of political violence in the country, and the Independent High Electoral Commission responded aggressively to fraud after investigating complaints. The balloting was also monitored by political parties, foreign and domestic media outlets, Iraqi nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and international observers.

After tense and protracted negotiations, the new parliament eventually approved a government headed by al-Abadi. Al-Maliki's support within his own coalition had crumbled, as many domestic and international critics blamed his divisive rule for the rapid territorial gains of IS, and the U.S. government indicated that greater military assistance was effectively contingent on al-Maliki stepping down.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), comprising the three northern provinces of Erbil, Dohuk, and Sulaymaniyah, has its own flag, military, official language, and other institutions. The KRG's 111-seat parliament, the Kurdish National Assembly, is elected through closed party-list proportional representation in which the three provinces form one district. Kurdish voters also participate in national parliamentary elections and elect members of their own provincial councils. In the 2013 assembly elections, the KDP led with 38 seats, the Gorran (Change) Movement placed second with 24, and the PUK was third with 18. Smaller factions and minority representatives made up the remainder.

The KRG also elects its own president, typically every four years. The powerful Kurdish president controls several key institutions without parliamentary oversight. In June 2013, after serving eight years in the presidency, Masoud Barzani and his party, the KDP, made an agreement with the rival PUK to extend his term for two years. This extension expired in August 2015, but with no successor in place due to delays in election preparations, the main Kurdish parties were unable to agree on how or whether to remove Barzani from office. By October, the standoff had contributed to violent protests that resulted in at least five deaths. Barzani and the KDP were governing without support from Gorran and the PUK at year's end, and the parliament was effectively suspended, with its speaker, a Gorran member, barred from entering Erbil.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 5 / 16

The constitution guarantees the freedom to form and join political parties, apart from the Baath Party. Iraqis' freedom to run for office is limited by the operation of a de-Baathification commission and by a vague "good conduct" requirement in Iraqi electoral law. However, all recent Iraqi elections have been characterized by vigorous campaigning among large numbers of parties and candidates.

In August 2015, the parliament passed a comprehensive law regulating the activities of political parties in Iraq. Among other provisions, the law lays out requirements for establishing a new party, revamps official registration procedures, and regulates party funding, including through a ban on foreign financing and donations from state-funded enterprises. The law also prohibits parties from engaging in military action, though many consider this provision impossible to enforce, given the proliferation of party-affiliated militias in the country.

Citizens' free political choices have been impaired by violence and intimidation from a variety of state and nonstate actors, interference by foreign powers, sharp ethnic and sectarian divisions, de facto ethnic and sectarian apportionment of key offices, and corruption, among other factors.

Most of Iraq's religious and ethnic minorities are represented in the parliament through a system of reserved seats—five for Christians and one each for Yazidis, Sabeen Mandaeans, and Shabaks. The Kurdish legislature reserves five seats for Turkomans, five for Chaldean and Assyrian Christians, and one for Armenians. As Iraq's largest minority, many Sunni Arabs feel that Shiite dominance of the political system since 2003 has kept them out of positions of influence in government. Moreover, power-sharing arrangements among Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis serve to reinforce the political salience of ethnic identities and inhibit the formation of political movements based on other issues or priorities.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12 (+ 1)

Governance in Iraq is hampered by ongoing security crises, corruption, ethno-sectarian power sharing, and the state's limited administrative capacity. These factors render policy-making and implementation expensive, slow, and sometimes impossible. Nevertheless, in 2015 the parliament passed several significant pieces of legislation, including a budget for the current fiscal year, which it had not done in 2014.

Responding to a massive anticorruption protest movement that swept the country in July 2015, al-Abadi introduced a reform package in August that would significantly restructure Iraq's political and administrative apparatus. The reforms abolished the positions of the country's three vice presidents and three deputy prime ministers; reduced politicians' private security details, releasing some 20,000 men to join the fight against IS; and restructured and merged several ministries, eliminating a number of cabinet positions. The changes also established an anticorruption council, reopened some languishing corruption cases, and tasked a team of judges with investigating ongoing corruption allegations. Although initially popular, the reform package was later critiqued for not being comprehensive enough. In addition, while some measures were approved by the parliament, others, including a merger of ministries, came in the form of executive decrees that apparently exceeded the prime minister's legal powers. The elimination of vice presidential posts was challenged as unconstitutional, since the constitution called for at least one vice president. In November, the parliament voted to bar al-Abadi from adopting reforms without its approval, reasserting the legislature's constitutional powers and counteracting a pattern of executive dominance and unilateralism that had developed under al-Maliki.

Iraq was ranked 161 out of 168 countries and territories assessed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 3 / 0

In 2015 IS continued its efforts to deliberately change Iraq's religious demography. Shiites, Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Sabeans, and Kaka'i fled IS-controlled areas in the face of mass killings, discriminatory "taxation," forced conversions, and the enslavement of women and girls. The property of displaced groups was destroyed or confiscated, as were their mosques, shrines, and churches. Meanwhile, government units, Kurdish forces, and Shiite militias allegedly attacked and displaced Sunni Arab civilians in some areas in retaliation for perceived support for IS.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 15 / 60 (+2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16

Freedoms of expression and the media are guaranteed in Iraq's constitution, so long as they do not violate public order or morality. There are, however, few truly independent media outlets in Iraq, with most controlled by political parties or the state. In 2015, the official media's positive portrayal of the military campaign against IS clashed with the limited progress it actually made. Media freedom in Iraq generally, but especially in the KRG, also suffers from the threat of lawsuits or retaliation by powerful individuals. In February, a journalist in the KRG was arrested and charged under an antiterrorism law for suggesting that a Kurdish military commander should be removed from duty. He was later released, and the case was dropped. In August the KDP's intelligence organization detained a man for posting pictures online that were supportive of Barzani's political rivals.

The Committee to Protect Journalists found that at least five journalists were killed during 2015 in connection with their work, and many others received threats. Bloggers and others who disseminate information online are also at risk. Journalists in IS-held territory are regularly kidnapped, imprisoned, tortured, and forced to work in the group's media operations. IS has also occupied media buildings, sold or confiscated equipment, and established so-called "media points" throughout its territory where individuals may view and download IS propaganda.

Iraq's constitution guarantees freedom of belief. However, both within and outside IS-held areas, Iraqis are targeted for their religious identity. During 2015 IS killed large numbers of Shiites, whom it considers to be apostates, either in terrorist bombings or after capture. IS also continued its efforts to dominate Iraqi Christians and eradicate the country's Yazidi population. These minorities were subject to forced conversion, beheading, crucifixion, enslavement, massive theft of property, and rape throughout the year. Sunnis who resisted the group's interpretation of Islamic law were also executed. IS has similarly attempted to wipe out the practice of Sufism, killing Sufis and destroying shrines. Religious and cultural heritage sites of all kinds were vulnerable to destruction and looting in IS territory.

Shiite militias often took indiscriminate revenge for IS actions on Sunni civilians, destroying their mosques, killing their religious leaders, taking their property, and even massacring them, as when progovernment militias recaptured Tikrit in early 2015. In Sinjar, a Yazidi militia massacred 21 Sunni Arab villagers in January.

Some 160,000 Iraqi students' university educations had been halted and eight universities closed due to the IS occupation as of 2015. In areas under IS control, academics are tortured or killed for refusing to obey the group. As the militants do not permit the teaching

of music, history, literature, or art, only the faculties of engineering, medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and education remained open at the University of Mosul. In Anbar Province, IS burned papers, books, laboratories, and academics' houses. University buildings in IS areas have been taken over for use as courts, prisons, or housing for fighters.

IS maintains a large network of civilian informants and a sophisticated intelligence apparatus that it uses to identify and punish dissent in areas it controls. As a result, free and open discussion is heavily circumscribed, especially in public spaces, such as markets and cafes. Speech in other parts of Iraq is more open, though the threat of political or sectarian violence remains a deterrent.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12 (+ 2)

Iraqis have a constitutional right to freedom of assembly, but this right is frequently restricted in practice. In July 2015, protests erupted in southern Iraq in response to power outages and the mismanagement of public utilities. In Basra, police killed one man and injured four others during clashes with demonstrators. The protests spread to the capital weeks later, evolving into a broader campaign for reform of the political system. Thousands demonstrated in Baghdad, and security forces were ordered not to intervene. Although citizens were generally given space to continue assembling in the subsequent months, isolated clashes with police were reported.

NGOs enjoy a supportive legal environment—apart from a requirement to register with the government—and widespread acceptance within Iraqi society. However, in 2015 the government began requiring new NGOs to obtain approval from the de-Baathification commission in order to officially register, and the KRG began to require them to renew their registration annually. Although nearly 2,600 NGOs were registered in the country by the end of 2015, the poor security situation limits their ability to operate.

After a decade of lobbying by Iraqi workers, in August 2015 the parliament passed a new labor law that generally meets international standards. The law allows collective bargaining even by workers without a union, prohibits child labor, protects against discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, improves maternity and pregnancy leave and the rights of subcontractors and migrant workers, and allows workers to strike. However, the law does not apply to civil servants or security forces, and it remained to be seen how the new rules would be implemented after taking effect in early 2016. Some state officials and private employers reportedly discouraged union activity with threats, dismissals, and other deterrents during 2015.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The judiciary in Iraq is heavily influenced by political, tribal and religious forces, as well as by bribery. Judicial reform quickly became one of the principal demands of the 2015 protest movement. However, the Abadi government lacked political and legal authority to overhaul the judicial branch. Al-Abadi's anticorruption package mostly relied on promises that the judiciary would supervise its own reform, and observers expressed doubt that this would be effective.

Large numbers of detainees are held in government prisons without charge or in pretrial detention, with many arrested under the vaguely worded 2005 antiterrorism law. Iraqis in state detention face torture, forced confessions, overcrowding, the extensive use of solitary confinement, and long waits before trial. Families must pay bribes to see detainees and often struggle to determine where they are being held.

By the end of 2014 there were some 1,700 detainees on death row in Iraq, and lack of due process remains a concern. The July 2015 trial of 28 men for the 2014 massacre of

Shiite cadets at Camp Speicher was only two hours long; the defense was not allowed to present witnesses or evidence. Although four defendants were acquitted, 24 were sentenced to death. The Iraqi president must ratify death sentences, and President Fouad Massoum has a large backlog. There were approximately 82 people on death row in the KRG as of April 2014. In August 2015, the KRG carried out three executions, its first since a moratorium began in 2008.

Security in cities under central government control deteriorated during 2015. Waves of terrorist bombings targeting Shiite civilians and Iraqi security forces swept through Baghdad and other towns, causing hundreds of casualties. In areas under IS control, almost any act of real or perceived resistance can result in execution, with hundreds of killings reported in places like Ramadi and Nineveh Province in 2015.

Despite the government's efforts to bring them under control, many of the approximately 60,000 members of various Shiite militias, collectively known as the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), committed crimes with impunity. These included mass kidnapping, extortion, murder, destruction of property, and theft. For example, in January 2015, PMF fighters working with government forces massacred at least 56 Sunni men in Diyala Province. And after IS was routed from Tikrit in March, PMF forces kidnapped at least 200 Sunnis, including children, from a village south of the city. Most remained missing late in the year. Many militias receive training, financial support, and direction from Iran.

The combination of military conflict and general lawlessness kills thousands of civilians in Iraq each year. Monitors estimated that anywhere from 7,000 to 16,000 people were killed due to violence in 2015, with thousands more injured. These figures were somewhat lower than in 2014, but still far higher than in previous years.

Same-sex sexual relations are not illegal in Iraq, but LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people risk violence and ostracism if they organize or are open about their identity. In IS-controlled areas, those accused of being gay were reportedly executed during 2015.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

Freedom of movement, choice of residence, and property rights all suffered from the conflict with IS in 2015. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, the number of displaced Iraqis reached 4 million in mid-June, up from 3.5 million in December 2014. Many Iraqis were displaced for a second or even a third time as fighting moved across the country. The state adopted a policy requiring Sunni internally displaced persons (IDPs) to have a sponsor to enter Baghdad, which left many stranded. IDPs who returned to liberated areas sometimes found their homes destroyed. Iraqis were also among the flood of refugees arriving in Europe during 2015, making up about 10 percent of those who applied for asylum in European Union countries that year.

Iraqi women face problems including early marriage, domestic violence, and discrimination in matters of family law. In the south there has been a reported resurgence of forced marriages to settle tribal disputes. Prostitution and the trafficking of women as sex workers is also increasing, with government officials failing to assist victims and sometimes even playing an active role in the trade. IDPs are especially vulnerable to sex trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Women were, however, involved in the 2015 protest movement, and in February the prime minister appointed Zekra Alwach as Baghdad's first female mayor. At least one-fourth of the seats in the Iraqi parliament and 30 percent of the seats in the Kurdish parliament must go to women.

Women living under IS rule are subject to corporal punishment and execution if they violate severe restrictions on their movement, dress, and behavior. Women and girls are raped, enslaved, and forced into marriage by IS fighters.

In addition to those subjected to sexual exploitation, victims of human trafficking in Iraq include children engaged in forced begging and child soldiers recruited primarily by IS, though there were also some reports of children joining the PMF.

Ireland

Political Rights Rating : 1

Population: 4,630,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Dublin

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

The government agreed in 2015 to only 4 of the 38 recommendations made the previous year by Ireland's first Constitutional Convention, a body of citizens and political representatives tasked with debating and proposing changes to the country's constitution. A referendum on two of the recommendations took place in May: marriage equality for same-sex couples, which was endorsed, and lowering the minimum age for presidential candidates from 35 to 21 years, which was rejected. The government has also promised a referendum on the recommendation to remove the offense of blasphemy from the constitution, and has committed to establishing an electoral commission.

Sinn Féin's strong performance in both European Parliament (EP) and local elections in 2014 fueled speculation that the party was gaining momentum ahead of general elections scheduled for 2016, although a September 2015 poll showed a dip in its support.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 39 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The parliament (Oireachtas) in Ireland consists of a lower house (the Dáil), whose 166 members are elected by proportional representation for five-year terms, and an upper house (the Seanad, or Senate) with 60 members, 11 appointed and 49 elected by various interest groups. The Senate is mainly a consultative body, with members serving five-year terms. The prime minister, or taoiseach, is chosen by the parliament. The president, whose functions are largely ceremonial, is directly elected for a seven-year term. Elections in Ireland are free and fair.

The most recent parliamentary elections took place in 2011. The Fine Gael party won 76 seats in the lower house and, lacking a majority, entered into a coalition with the Labour Party, which took 37 seats. The Fianna Fáil party captured only 20 seats. Sinn Féin won 14 seats, while independents and two smaller parties took the remainder. The Green Party failed to capture seats. Enda Kenny of Fine Gael was elected prime minister.

Following the Constitutional Convention's 2014 recommendations concerning the electoral process, the government committed to establishing an electoral commission after the

next elections, but abandoned plans to hold a referendum on the recommendation to lower the voting age to 16. The government did not endorse recommendations to provide the Irish diaspora with greater voting rights or to adjust Dáil electoral procedures.

In EP elections held in May 2014, Fine Gael won four seats, while Sinn Féin followed with three, Fianna Fáil took one, and independents captured the remaining three. In local elections held on the same day, Sinn Féin won 159 of 949 contested seats, a gain of 105 seats since 2009. That put the party in third place behind Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, which remained the leading parties at the local level, while Labour came in fourth, sustaining heavy losses.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Ireland's two main parties—Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael—do not differ widely in ideology but represent the successors of opposing sides in the nation's 1922–23 civil war. Other key parties include the Labour Party, Sinn Féin, and the Green Party.

Fianna Fáil dominated politics after Ireland became independent, holding power for 61 out of 79 years before it was ousted in 2011 due to corruption scandals and mismanagement of the 2008 economic crisis. With two-thirds of the seats, Enda Kenny's Fine Gael–Labour coalition held the largest parliamentary majority in Ireland's history. A September 2015 poll showed a jump in support for Fine Gael and Labour and a decline for Sinn Féin.

Ethnic and other minorities are free to participate in politics, though a 2014 University College Dublin report found that political parties were putting less effort into attracting immigrant candidates than in previous election cycles.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12

Elected officials freely determine government policy. However, corruption—including cronyism, political patronage, and illegal donations—is a recurring problem. An anticorruption bill first proposed in 2012—the Criminal Justice (Corruption) Bill—had yet to be enacted as of 2015. Among other provisions, it would establish a new corporate offense of bribery, a new presumption of corrupt enrichment if public officials display a standard of living above that of their stated assets and interests, and increased penalties for politicians found guilty of corruption, including banning them from holding office for up to 10 years.

In late 2015, a commission investigating the illegal taping of telephone calls at police stations cleared the prime minister of allegations that he had unlawfully ordered the police commissioner to resign in 2014, but it criticized the government's failure to maintain proper records of its decision making.

The government has also been criticized for failing to consult meaningfully with civil society groups and all relevant stakeholders in the formulation of policy, particularly regarding Roma, Travelers, and persons with disabilities.

In accordance with the Regulation of Lobbying Act, adopted in March 2015, the government prepared a Transparency Code to require open records on the groups and individuals that advise public officials on policy. The public has broad access to official information under the 2014 Freedom of Information Act, though partial exemptions remain for the police and some other agencies.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 57 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Irish media are free and independent, and print media present a variety of viewpoints. The state may censor material deemed indecent or obscene. Many news outlets have closed

in recent years as a result of falling advertising revenue. In October 2014, the government announced plans to hold a referendum on removing the offense of blasphemy from the constitution and repealing the 2009 Defamation Act, which made blasphemy punishable by heavy fines. Internet access is unrestricted.

In January 2015, former *Independent* journalist Gemma O’Doherty received compensation and an apology after being fired in 2013 for her investigation of the police commissioner’s manipulation of penalty points on his driving license.

Freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed. Although the country is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic and religious oaths are still required from senior public officials, there is no state religion, and adherents of other faiths face few impediments to religious expression. In recent years, Ireland has faced a notable decline in religiosity following a series of sexual abuse scandals linked to clergy in the Catholic Church.

Academic freedom is respected. The Catholic Church operates approximately 90 percent of Ireland’s schools. Most schools include religious education, although parents may exempt their children from it. The constitution requires equal funding for schools run by different denominations. There has been increasing public opposition in recent years to religious education in Irish schools, particularly the power of state-funded Catholic schools to refuse admission to non-Catholic students.

There are no significant impediments to open and free private discussion, including in personal online communications.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The rights of public assembly and demonstration are respected. Protests against government austerity measures continued in 2015. In August, tens of thousands of protesters opposed to water fees demonstrated in Dublin.

Freedom of association is upheld, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can operate freely. Labor unions operate without hindrance, and collective bargaining is legal and unrestricted.

F. Rule of Law: 14 / 16 (– 1)

Ireland has an independent judiciary and a legal system based on common law. In 2014 the government established a new body—the Court of Appeal—to occupy a tier in the judicial system between the High Court and the Supreme Court. The new court is composed of a president and nine judges and aims to ease the Supreme Court’s backlog.

The Irish police service, known as An Garda Síochána (Garda), has endured a number of scandals in recent years. The Fennelly Commission, which published two interim reports in 2015, investigated 2014 allegations that some Garda stations had illegally taped telephone calls. The Garda were also accused of routinely wiping penalty points from driving licenses, including those belonging to police officers and Garda commissioner Martin Callinan, who resigned in March 2014. In March 2015, the Garda Síochána (Amendment) Act was passed to strengthen the independence and effectiveness of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission.

Irish prisons and detention facilities are reportedly dangerous, unsanitary, and overcrowded. In February 2015, the inspector of prisons announced a review of the culture of the Irish Prison Service to augment other ongoing reform efforts. In November, the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment published a report that criticized the continued lack of toilet access in some cells, as well as inadequate health care.

The Irish Travellers, a traditionally nomadic group of about 29,500 people, face discrimination in housing and hiring. There are concerns that people with disabilities are persistently institutionalized and have suffered a severe reduction of social benefits as a result of the government's austerity program. Irish law prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, but some social stigma against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people persists in Ireland. In December 2015, the parliament passed legislation to curtail an exemption that allowed health and educational institutions run by religious entities to practice employment discrimination on religious grounds, for example on the basis of sexual orientation.

The asylum application process is complex, and asylum seekers are housed for lengthy periods in poor living conditions. In December 2015, President Michael Higgins signed the International Protection Bill into law. The legislation aims to simplify and expedite asylum procedures, although there are concerns that it focuses on enabling deportations rather than properly identifying and processing asylum cases.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

There are no restrictions on travel or the ability to choose one's place of residence. Private businesses are free to operate, and property rights are generally respected.

Discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender is illegal in Ireland. However, gender inequality in wages persists. A 2012 law requires political parties to impose gender quotas in future elections, but women remain underrepresented in the public and private sectors. Domestic and sexual violence against women is a serious problem. There is no comprehensive data-collection system on violence against women, and access to support for victims is particularly difficult for marginalized and immigrant women.

Abortion is highly restricted in Ireland. A 2013 law granted limited abortion rights in cases where a woman's life is at risk, but abortion otherwise remains criminalized with a penalty of up to 14 years' imprisonment. The constitution acknowledges "the right to life of the unborn."

In May 2015, referendum voters approved the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples. The constitution was duly amended in August, and the Marriage Act, which provided for same-sex marriages, was signed in November. In April, the Children and Family Relationships Act extended adoption rights to same-sex as well as cohabiting couples. In July, the parliament passed the Gender Recognition Act, allowing transgender individuals to obtain legal recognition without medical or state intervention, and—for married transgender people—without divorcing.

A series of official inquiries in recent years have detailed decades of physical and emotional abuse—including forced labor—against women and children in state institutions and by Catholic priests and nuns, as well as collusion to hide the abuse. In January 2015, a commission began an investigation into abusive conditions in Mother and Baby Homes between 1922 and 1998.

Although the government works to combat human trafficking and protect victims, undocumented migrant workers remain at risk of trafficking and labor exploitation.

Israel

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 8,375,000

[*Note:* There are an estimated 371,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank, about 21,000 in the Golan Heights, and 212,000 in East Jerusalem.]

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Jerusalem

Freedom Rating: 1.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which are examined in separate reports.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F

INTRODUCTION

Early elections in March 2015 did little to change the balance of political power, despite suggestions in preelection polling that the center-left opposition bloc would prevail over the governing right-wing coalition. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party remained the largest single grouping with 30 seats, followed by the opposition Zionist Union, led by Isaac Herzog, with 24 seats.

The security situation deteriorated in the last third of the year amid a wave of stabbing, vehicular, and shooting attacks on Israeli civilians and security personnel across Israel and the West Bank. The attacks were typically carried out by individual Palestinians at security posts and other locations, and Israelis responded with deadly force. There were also frequent clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli soldiers and police, resulting in additional casualties. More than 20 Israelis and over 100 Palestinians were killed in the violence, though the majority of incidents took place in the West Bank. Israeli-Palestinian peace talks remained moribund in 2015.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 36 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

A largely ceremonial president is elected by the 120-seat parliament, the Knesset, for one seven-year term. In 2014, Reuven Rivlin of Likud was elected to replace outgoing president Shimon Peres, receiving 63 votes in a runoff against Meir Sheerit of the centrist Hatnuah party.

The prime minister is usually the leader of the largest faction in the Knesset, members of which are elected by party-list proportional representation for four-year terms. A low electoral threshold to win representation has led to unstable coalitions, though the threshold was raised in 2014 from 2 to 3.25 percent. Among other changes adopted in the same legislation, the no-confidence procedure was altered so that opponents hoping to oust a sitting government must simultaneously vote in a new one.

Israeli elections are free and fair. In the March 2015 Knesset elections, Netanyahu's Likud party led with 30 seats, followed by the center-left Zionist Union with 24. The Joint

List—a coalition of parties representing Arab citizens of Israel, who often identify as Palestinians—earned 13 seats; the centrist Yesh Atid (There Is a Future), 11; Kulanu, also centrist, 10; Habayit Hayehudi (Jewish Home), 8; the ultra-Orthodox parties Shas and United Torah Judaism, 7 and 6, respectively; the right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu, 6; and the left-wing Meretz party, 5. In May, after lengthy negotiations, Netanyahu formed a new coalition government made up of Likud, Kulanu, Jewish Home, Shas, and United Torah Judaism.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

Israel hosts a diverse and competitive multiparty system. However, parties or candidates that deny Israel's Jewish character, oppose democracy, or incite racism are prohibited.

Palestinian citizens of Israel enjoy equal rights in principle, as enshrined in Israel's Basic Law, but face some discrimination in practice, both legally and informally. The Joint List's representation in the Knesset falls short of Palestinians' roughly one-fifth share of Israel's population, though some Palestinian citizens of Israel vote or run as candidates for other parties. No Arab party has ever been formally included in a governing coalition, and Arabs generally do not serve in senior positions in government. Although Israeli identity cards issued since 2005 have not classified residents by ethnicity, Jewish Israelis can often be identified by the inclusion of their Hebrew birth date. Calls to impose a loyalty oath have alienated Israel's Palestinians, though such proposals have been rejected to date.

After Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, which has not been recognized internationally, Arab residents were issued Israeli identity cards and given the option of obtaining Israeli citizenship, though most declined for political reasons. These noncitizens can vote in municipal as well as Palestinian Authority elections, and remain eligible to apply for Israeli citizenship. However, Israeli law strips noncitizens of their Jerusalem residency if they are away for more than three months.

A 2003 law, renewed in 2013, denies citizenship and residency status to Palestinian residents of the West Bank or Gaza Strip who are married to Israeli citizens. While the measure was criticized as blatantly discriminatory, supporters cited evidence that a significant share of past suicide bombers had acquired Israeli identity cards via family reunification. A 2011 law allows the courts to revoke the citizenship of any Israeli convicted of spying, treason, or aiding the enemy.

Under the 1948 Law of Return, Jewish immigrants and their immediate families are granted Israeli citizenship and residence rights; other immigrants must apply for these rights.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Corruption scandals in recent years have implicated several senior officials. The most prominent example is that of Ehud Olmert, who resigned as prime minister in 2008 amid graft allegations. He was preparing to begin an 18-month prison sentence for bribery at the end of 2015 after the Supreme Court in December reduced his original 2014 sentence of six years. In May, Olmert was sentenced to eight months in prison for fraud and breach of trust in a separate case involving cash he accepted from an American businessman, Morris Talansky; an appeal on that matter was pending at year's end.

The relative frequency of high-level corruption investigations is coupled with a strong societal intolerance for graft. Israel was ranked 32 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 44 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16**

The Israeli media are vibrant and free to criticize government policy. However, the diversity and editorial independence of both print and broadcast media have been threatened in recent years by financial difficulties in the industry. All Israeli newspapers are privately owned, though ownership is concentrated among a small number of companies, some of which display a clear partisan bias. Internet access is widespread and unrestricted. The Israel Broadcasting Authority operates public radio and television services, and commercial broadcasts are widely available. Most Israelis subscribe to cable or satellite television. While the scope of permissible reporting is generally broad, print articles on security matters are subject to a military censor. The Government Press Office has occasionally withheld press cards from journalists, especially Palestinians, to restrict them from entering Israel, citing security considerations.

Legislation passed in 2011 requires the state to fine or withdraw funds from local authorities and other state-funded groups that hold events commemorating the 1948 displacement of Palestinians, known as Al-Nakba (The Catastrophe); that support armed resistance or “racism” against Israel; or that desecrate national symbols. Also in 2011, the Knesset passed the Boycott Law, which exposes Israeli individuals and groups to civil lawsuits if they advocate an economic, cultural, or academic boycott of the State of Israel or West Bank settlements. In April 2015, the High Court of Justice largely upheld the law, but struck down a provision allowing plaintiffs to bring cases without proving that they suffered financial damage from a boycott.

While Israel defines itself as a Jewish state, freedom of religion is largely respected. Christian, Muslim, and Baha’i communities have jurisdiction over their own members in matters of marriage, divorce, and burial. The Orthodox establishment governs personal status matters among Jews, drawing objections from many non-Orthodox and secular Israelis, though in 2012 a non-Orthodox rabbi won the right to receive state funding. In a milestone case in 2011, an Israeli Jew won the right to an identity card that excluded his Hebrew birth date. Nevertheless, in 2013 the Supreme Court ruled against an appeal that would have allowed individuals to declare their ethnic “nationality” in Israel’s population registry to be “Israeli” rather than “Jewish.”

Ultra-Orthodox Jews, or Haredim, were exempt from compulsory military service under the 2002 Tal Law, which expired in 2012 after the High Court of Justice ruled it unconstitutional. In 2014, the Knesset enacted a law to formally end the exemption, setting the goal of enlisting 5,200 Haredim per year by mid-2017. However, legislation adopted in November 2015 effectively postponed enforcement of the 2014 measure until 2023.

Although the law protects the religious sites of non-Jewish minorities, they face discrimination in the allocation of state resources, and a number of Christian and Muslim sites were attacked or vandalized in 2015, particularly during the broader increase in violence in the last third of the year. In September, the government agreed to increase funding for private Christian schools in Israel for the 2015–16 school year and reexamine their legal status and future funding after the schools, representing 33,000 students, carried out a month-long strike over their unequal treatment by the state. Citing security concerns, Israeli authorities have set limits on Muslim worshippers’ access to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem with increasing frequency in recent years. Clashes between Palestinians and Israeli police in the area in late 2015 were driven partly by rumors that Israel was planning to change the existing rules and allow Jews to pray in the Muslim compound, which the government strongly denied.

Primary and secondary education is universal, though divided into multiple public school systems (state, state-religious, Haredi, and Arab, the last of which uses the common curriculum but provides instruction in Arabic). School quality and per capita funding is generally lower in mostly non-Jewish communities. Israel's universities have long been centers for dissent and are open to all students based on merit, though security-related restrictions on movement limit access for West Bank and Gaza residents in practice.

Palestinians in Israel faced increased societal and other pressure in response to their remarks during a 2014 Israeli military campaign against Hamas militants in Gaza, Operation Protective Edge. Dozens were reportedly fired or disciplined by employers for views expressed on social media and elsewhere, dampening the country's generally open and free private discussion. Tensions persisted in 2015, particularly during the violence later in the year.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 10 / 12

Israel has an active civil society, and demonstrations are widely permitted and typically peaceful, though groups committed to the destruction of Israel are banned from demonstrating. In July 2015, a Haredi man—who had recently completed a prison term for a similar crime in 2005—stabbed six people at an annual LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) pride march in Jerusalem, killing one. Some Haredi community members complained of police profiling at checkpoints during subsequent demonstrations in support of the victim. Separately, between April and June, a series of antidiscrimination protests by Israelis of Ethiopian origin blocked roads and triggered clashes with police, leading to allegations of excessive force. The protests were sparked by a video of police beating an Ethiopian Israeli soldier.

A law that took effect in 2012 requires nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to submit financial reports four times a year on support received from foreign government sources. In December 2015, the cabinet approved the “Transparency Bill,” also known as the “NGO Bill,” meaning it would be taken up by the Knesset in 2016. The measure would require NGOs that receive more than half of their funding from foreign governments to disclose this fact publicly and in any written or oral communications with elected officials, and to wear a special badge when meeting in the Knesset.

In November, the government outlawed the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, along with its affiliated charitable and social-service organizations, on the grounds that it incited violence and had links to Hamas.

Workers may join unions and have the right to strike and bargain collectively. Most of the workforce either belongs to Histadrut, the national labor federation, or is covered by its social programs and bargaining agreements.

F. Rule of Law: 11 / 16

The judiciary is independent and regularly rules against the government. The Supreme Court hears direct petitions from citizens and Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the state generally adheres to court rulings.

The Emergency Powers (Detention) Law of 1979 provides for administrative detention without trial for renewable six-month terms. According to the human rights group B'Tselem, there were 584 Palestinians in administrative detention in Israel Prison Service facilities at the end of 2015, an increase of more than 100 from the previous year, with a sharp rise beginning in October. Such detention rarely lasts for more than two years. Under criminal law, individuals suspected of security offenses can be held for up to 96 hours

without judicial review under certain circumstances, compared with a maximum of 48 hours in other cases, and be denied access to an attorney for up to 21 days. Israel's High Court of Justice banned torture in a 1999 ruling, but said physical coercion might be permissible during interrogations in cases involving an imminent threat. Human rights organizations accuse the authorities of continuing to use some forms of physical abuse and other measures such as isolation, sleep deprivation, psychological threats and pressure, painful binding, and humiliation.

Hunger strikes by Palestinian detainees have become increasingly common. In August 2015, the High Court of Justice froze the administrative detention order of an Islamic Jihad member after finding that his 66-day hunger strike had caused him brain damage. He was released from a hospital in September, then returned to administrative detention until he finished his second six-month term in November.

According to Defence for Children International (DCI) Palestine, 422 Palestinian children (aged 12–17) from the occupied territories were being held in Israeli military detention as of December 2015 (up from 152 a year earlier), including 116 aged 12 to 15 (up from 10 a year earlier). Although Israeli law prohibits children younger than 12 from being detained, some occasionally are. Most Palestinian child detainees are serving sentences of several weeks or months—handed down by a special military court for minors created in 2009—for throwing stones or other projectiles at Israeli troops in the West Bank; acquittals on such charges are very rare. East Jerusalem Palestinian minors are tried in Israeli civilian juvenile courts.

The authorities took a number of steps to crack down on violent protests in 2015. In July, the Knesset passed legislation imposing harsher sentences for stone-throwing offenses under Israeli criminal law, with penalties of up to 20 years in prison for adults who throw objects at a vehicle with intent to harm the occupants. In September, the government authorized police to fire small-caliber bullets at stone throwers if a third party's life is threatened, not just when the officer's own life is in danger. In November, the Knesset approved three-year minimum prison sentences for stone-throwing offenses in Israel, as well as the suspension of social benefits for the parents of juvenile offenders. Meanwhile, human rights groups in late 2015 accused police of using deadly force against some perpetrators of stabbing and vehicular attacks when they did not pose a lethal threat.

In addition to the attacks by Palestinians on the ground during the year, Israeli civilians—particularly those living near border areas—faced occasional rocket and artillery fire from war-torn Syria and the Gaza Strip. However, the rate of fire was far lower than during the major Israel-Hamas conflicts of 2008–09, 2012, and 2014.

About 93 percent of the land in Israel is publicly owned, including some 12.5 percent owned by the Jewish National Fund (JNF-KKL). In 2005, the Supreme Court and attorney general ruled against the JNF-KKL's marketing property only to Jews, while the Knesset made several unsuccessful attempts to override those rulings. In practice, the JNF-KKL continues its Jewish-only land-leasing policy, partly as a result of a land-swap arrangement with the Israel Land Authority. In 2014 the Supreme Court upheld 2011 legislation that allows Jewish communities of up to 400 residents in the Negev and Galilee to exclude prospective residents based on "social suitability," meaning they could effectively bar non-Jews and other marginalized groups.

Palestinian citizens of Israel face de facto discrimination in education, social services, and access to housing and related permits. Aside from the Druze minority, Palestinian citizens of Israel are exempted from military conscription, though they may volunteer. Those who do not serve are ineligible for the associated benefits, including scholarships and housing loans. Many of Israel's roughly 200,000 Bedouin citizens live in towns and

villages not recognized by the state. Those in unrecognized villages cannot claim social services, are in some cases off the electricity grid, and have no official land rights, and the government routinely demolishes their unlicensed structures. A lack of bomb shelters puts them at additional risk from Gaza-based rocket fire.

Israelis of Ethiopian origin, numbering around 120,000, suffer from some discrimination and lag behind the general population economically despite government integration efforts. In June 2015, following demonstrations against police mistreatment of the Ethiopian minority, a joint committee of police and community representatives recommended a series of reforms to address the problem.

Israel has sought to block asylum seekers and migrants from Africa by erecting a fence along its border with Egypt. Individuals who enter the country irregularly, including asylum seekers, can be detained for up to a year under an August 2015 Supreme Court ruling, down from 20 months under the previous rules. Asylum applications, when fully processed, are nearly always rejected. Of some 60,000 African asylum seekers who have entered since 2005, mostly from Sudan and Eritrea, more than 10,000 have left under pressure, agreeing to be repatriated or deported to a third country such as Uganda or Rwanda.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 11 / 16

Security measures can sometimes present obstacles to freedom of movement, though military checkpoints are restricted to the West Bank. By law, all citizens must carry identification cards. Informal local rules that prevent driving on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays can also hamper free movement.

Women have achieved substantial parity at almost all levels of Israeli society. However, Palestinian women and religious Jewish women face some discrimination. Many ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities enforce gender separation. In 2012, the Supreme Court ruled against gender-segregated buses. Nevertheless, many women still sit at the rear of buses on certain lines, and there are occasionally violent Haredi attacks on buses where the practice is not observed, along with attacks against women and girls deemed to be dressed immodestly. Since religious courts oversee marriage rules, marriages between Jews and non-Jews are not recognized by the state unless conducted abroad, nor are marriages involving a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man. A law passed in 2010 permits nonreligious civil unions, but they are restricted to cases where the individuals have no religion, and they are seldom used. Two more comprehensive bills were rejected by the Knesset in 2015.

Israel has recognized same-sex marriages conducted abroad since 2006, and a Tel Aviv family court granted the first same-sex divorce in 2012. Nonbiological parents in same-sex partnerships are eligible for guardianship rights, and openly gay Israelis are permitted to serve in the military. The Israel Prison Service permits same-sex conjugal visits. Israel remains a destination for human-trafficking victims, and African migrants and asylum seekers residing in the country are especially vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking. The government works actively to combat trafficking and protect victims, though the U.S. State Department's *Trafficking in Persons Report* describes the penalties imposed by courts as inadequate.

Israel's roughly 75,000 legal foreign workers are formally protected from exploitation by employers, but these guarantees are poorly enforced. About 15,000 foreigners work in the country illegally, according to official data. Histadrut has opened membership to foreign workers and called on employers to grant them equal rights.

Italy

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 62,466,780

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Rome

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,1,F	2,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Several reforms promoted by Prime Minister Matteo Renzi passed or went into effect in 2015, affecting the labor, electoral, banking, and education sectors. Renzi continued to advocate for improvements to the judiciary as well as for an ambitious parliamentary reform plan, which the Senate approved in October.

The Renzi government continued to reduce spending and restructure the civil sector to counter the economic problems that had challenged its predecessors. In May, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) declared that Italy was slowly emerging from its recession, forecasting modest economic growth of 0.7 percent for the year. Italy's unemployment rate stood at just over 11 percent at year's end.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 36 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The bicameral Parliament consists of the 630-member Chamber of Deputies and the 322-member Senate; most members of both houses are popularly elected to five-year terms. Parliament and regional representatives elect the president, whose role is largely ceremonial but sometimes politically influential, for a seven-year term. The president may appoint up to five senators for life. The president also appoints the prime minister, who is often, but not always, the leader of the largest party in the Chamber of Deputies. The prime minister proposes a Council of Ministers that needs to be confirmed by Parliament. In January 2015, Sergio Mattarella, a former constitutional judge, was elected president in what was seen as a political victory for the Renzi government.

In general elections, most members of both houses are elected through closed party-list proportional systems, with thresholds that encourage political groups to form coalitions. A so-called majority bonus guarantees that whatever grouping emerges with the most votes at the national level will gain at least 340 of the seats in the lower house; in the upper house, victory in a given region ensures the winning party or coalition a 55 percent majority of that region's allotment of seats.

The most recent parliamentary elections took place in 2013. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) positively assessed the preelection environment, and observers considered the vote to be free and fair. The center-left Italy Common Good coalition, headed by Democratic Party (PD) leader Pier Luigi Bersani, won the most votes and claimed 345 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 112 of the 315 directly elected seats in the Senate.

Local elections took place in 7 of Italy's 20 regions in May 2015, and saw gains by the antiestablishment Five Star Movement, the regionalist Northern League, and the conservative Forza Italia, which is led by former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi.

Several changes to Italy's electoral laws and framework were ongoing during the year. In May, Parliament approved electoral legislation initiated by Renzi that included controversial provisions for fixed lists and higher electoral thresholds, ostensibly intended to enhance majorities and avoid postelection deadlock. The law will go into effect in July 2016. In October, the Senate approved a controversial draft plan to reform itself. Part of a package of overarching constitutional changes, the proposal aims to abolish perfect bicameralism by, among other things, reducing the size of the Senate to 100 members chosen by regional councilors, mayors, and the president, as well as by shifting most power of legislative approval to the Chamber of Deputies. Critics claimed that the plan would enhance the influence of regional governments, which are often corrupt and rule by factionalism. The proposals must be put to a referendum in order to be fully adopted.

The Renzi government has also supported a measure to replace elected provincial governments, long considered an excessive bureaucratic level, by dividing their responsibilities between local and regional governments. The proposal was approved in March 2014 through a confidence vote, but implementation was delayed in 2015 because of the reluctance of regional and local administrations to shoulder the associated costs.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

The Italian party system is characterized by a high level of pluralism and political competition. However, its structure is very unstable since political coalitions easily change their compositions, and new political parties are often created.

The threshold and runoff provisions in electoral legislation passed in May 2015 will enable single parties to gain seats more easily, and are likely to affect the dynamics of the party system ahead of the next legislative vote. Although critics allege that the new system will allow one party to gain excessive power, proponents argue that it will reduce the complexity of coalition-building and the potential for parliamentary gridlock.

Historically, the Vatican has held significant influence over politics in Italy, an overwhelmingly Catholic country. Ties between organized crime and public officials persist and fuel concerns about undue pressures on government.

In order to protect linguistic minorities, the electoral law stipulates that parties representing such groups can gain seats in the lower house if they obtain at least 20 percent of the vote in their constituencies. In 2015, the German-speaking South Tyrolean People's Party had four representatives in the Chamber of Deputies and three in the Senate. Issues of concern to ethnic minorities play only a marginal role in national and local political agendas, and some municipal policies aggravate the exclusion of Roma.

In December, the lower legislative house approved amendments to the country's citizenship law that, if adopted, would facilitate new pathways for minors to become citizens. The changes would give children born to immigrant parents the ability to become citizens if at least one parent has permanent resident status. Additionally, the law would make foreign-born children eligible for citizenship if they fulfill basic educational and residency requirements. The bill had not passed in the Senate at year's end, and faced opposition from Forza Italia and the Northern League.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Efforts to combat corruption continued in 2015. In May, Parliament passed stronger legislation against financial crimes, increasing penalties and broadening the scope of activity punishable under it. In March, police carried out additional arrests connected to the

suspected mishandling of procurement and construction contracts for the Milan Expo 2015 world's fair. In 2014, Renzi had appointed National Anticorruption Authority president Raffaele Cantone, a magistrate distinguished for investigating organized crime and corruption, to take charge of Expo 2015. The opening of the fair in May 2015 was marred by clashes between protesters and the police. Separately, in June, 44 people were arrested in Rome on suspicion of misusing public contracts to manage migrant reception centers. Rome's former mayor, Gianni Alemanno, was among those under investigation for his role in the scheme.

The government also continued to combat organized crime during the year. In July, authorities seized assets from and issued dozens of arrest warrants for members of gambling rings operated by the 'Ndrangheta, a syndicate active in the southern region of Calabria. Several antimafia advocates themselves came under suspicion in 2015 for possible links to organized crime, prompting investigations by a special parliamentary commission.

Since 2011, Italy has been an active member of the Open Government Partnership. In this context, a 2013 legislative decree established greater transparency of information within public administration. The government regularly complies with requests for information, though delayed responses have been reported.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Freedoms of expression and the press are constitutionally guaranteed. Despite the rapid growth of the online news industry, traditional media still play a large role in news consumption. There are more than 100 daily newspapers, most of them locally or regionally based, as well as political party papers, free papers, and weekly publications. Political party newspapers are supported by public funds. In February 2015, board of the state broadcaster, RAI, approved a plan to structurally reform the outlet in order to, among other things, reduce its vulnerability to political influence. The plan elicited strong opposition from Forza Italia and Berlusconi, who owns Mediaset, the largest private broadcaster in Italy. Concentration of media ownership remains a major concern, although it has improved since the administration of Berlusconi, who controlled up to 90 percent of the country's broadcast media through state-owned outlets and his own private media holdings.

In August, the parliamentary antimafia commission released a report that voiced concerns about the high number of attacks against journalists by organized crime groups. The report recorded 2,060 "acts of hostility" against journalists between 2006 and October 2014, and noted that at the time of publication, 20 journalists in Italy were living under the protection of armed guards.

Internet access is generally unrestricted. In July, Italian legislators proposed an international declaration of internet rights, which aims to strengthen restrictions on personal data collection and declare internet access a fundamental right.

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and respected in practice. Although Roman Catholicism is the dominant faith and the state grants some privileges to the Catholic Church, there is no official religion. Agreements between the government and a number of religious groups have been signed, but an omnibus religious freedom bill has yet to be passed.

The level of academic freedom in the country is fairly high. In July, Parliament adopted education reforms that, among other things, enhance the authority of head teachers, allow for merit-based raises, and provide tax breaks to private schools. Freedom of private discussion is respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Italian citizens are free to assemble, establish social and political associations, and organize demonstrations. The constitution recognizes the right to strike but places restrictions on strikes by employees of essential sectors like transportation, sanitation, and health, as well as on some self-employed individuals, including lawyers, doctors, and truck drivers. In 2014, Parliament passed the Jobs Act, a reform package meant to combat unemployment and create flexibility in Italy's rigid labor market. The final details of the legislation were approved by the cabinet in September 2015.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

The judicial system is undermined by long trial delays and the influence of organized crime. A March 2014 report by the European Commission showed that within the European Union (EU), Italy has a comparatively high number of pending civil cases in proportion to its population. Italy also has one of the lowest numbers of judges per capita in the EU. The Renzi government announced a plan for judicial reform in 2014, aiming to simplify civil law, improve management of judicial proceedings, and encourage the settlement of disputes outside of court, among other things.

In 2014, Parliament approved a law targeting prison overcrowding. The legislation introduced early-release programs and alternatives to imprisonment. Italian prisons remain overcrowded, with more than 52,400 detainees held in facilities built for about 49,600, according to an October 2015 report by the Ministry of Justice.

Despite legal prohibitions against torture, there have been reports of excessive use of force by police, particularly against illegal immigrants. Italy is a major entry point for undocumented immigrants trying to reach Europe, and the government has been criticized for holding illegal immigrants in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions and denying them access to lawyers. Italy faced increased migration by sea from the Middle East and North Africa during the year, with approximately 149,400 registered arrivals from January to mid-December. Immediate emergency services for arriving migrants, many of whom were asylum seekers, were routine and included medical treatment, food, water, and temporary shelter. However, the authorities struggled to provide long-term services such as housing and timely processing of asylum applications. A 2014 measure easing penalties for illegal entry into the country went into effect in 2015.

Although Italian law specifically bans discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, there is no legal recognition of same-sex relationships, and same-sex couples may not adopt children. In July 2015, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) condemned Italy for not granting same-sex unions legal status or protections. In September, the Senate resumed discussion of legislation that would recognize same-sex unions.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

Italian citizens enjoy a high level of personal autonomy as well as freedom of residence, movement, and work. The right to education is guaranteed by the constitution.

Despite some recent improvements, the Heritage Foundation rates Italy as a moderately free economy due to problems like corruption, limits on labor freedom, and mismanagement of public resources, which weaken access to economic opportunities and resources. Delays in court proceedings often undermine enforcement of protections for property rights.

Gender-based discrimination is prohibited by law. Women's political representation increased in 2013 in both the Chamber of Deputies (31 percent) and the Senate (28 percent). Female ministers comprise half of Renzi's cabinet. However, gender inequality remains

widespread. According to the 2015 Global Gender Gap report, Italian women face serious obstacles in both labor force participation and wage equality. Violence against women also continues to be a problem.

Human trafficking, particularly the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation, remained a major concern in 2015. Watchdogs and government agencies noted an increase in the reported number of trafficking cases during the year, most likely due to the influx of asylum seekers and other migrants, who are especially vulnerable to abuse.

Jamaica

Political Rights: 2

Population: 2,727,000

Civil Liberties: 3

Capital: Kingston

Freedom Ratings: 2.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Jamaica continued to grapple with persistent gang violence and abusive police practices, both of which are major deterrents to domestic commercial activity and foreign investment. However, a gradual strengthening of the legislative environment has led to improvements in recent years, as the government took steps to implement the Corruption Prevention Act, and the independent Commission of Investigations (INDECOM) intensified its efforts to hold police accountable for wrongdoing.

Nevertheless, Jamaica continues to struggle with a long backlog of court cases and a shortage of staff at all levels of the judicial system. The provisions of the Jury (Amendment) Act, passed by Parliament in December 2015, are intended to address these problems; among other things it expands the pool of potential jurors and allows for trials by a judge only, in certain cases where the prosecution and defense agree to permit such a procedure.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 34 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Jamaica’s bicameral Parliament consists of a 63-member House of Representatives, elected for five years, and a 21-member Senate, with 13 senators appointed on the advice of the prime minister and 8 on the advice of the opposition leader. Senators also serve five-year terms. The leader of the party or coalition holding a majority in the House of Representatives is appointed as prime minister by the governor general, who represents the British monarch as head of state. The governor general is nominated by the prime minister and approved by the monarch.

In September 2011, Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) leader and prime minister Bruce Golding abruptly announced his resignation, a move widely interpreted to have stemmed from his involvement with alleged drug trafficker Christopher “Dudus” Coke, which had caused

Golding to lose support within his own party and among the electorate. The following month, the JLP elected Minister of Education Andrew Holness to become Golding's successor as party leader and prime minister. Holness called for early general elections at the end of the year. In December 2011 elections, the People's National Party (PNP) captured 41 seats in Parliament, while the JLP took only 22. PNP chief Portia Simpson-Miller became prime minister in January 2012; she had previously held the position in 2006 and 2007.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

Since achieving independence from Britain in 1962, political power has alternated between the social democratic PNP and the more conservative JLP. In the 2007 elections, the JLP's majority victory in the House of Representatives ended the 18-year reign of the PNP, which subsequently returned to power in 2011. Although various smaller parties are active, politics at the national level is dominated by these two parties, and no other groups hold seats in the House of Representatives.

Powerful criminal gangs in some urban neighborhoods maintain influence over voter turnout in return for political favors, which has called into question the legitimacy of election results in those areas. None of the major political parties identify on religious, ethnic, or cultural grounds.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Corruption remains a serious problem in Jamaica. Long-standing relationships between officials and organized crime figures are thought to persist. Various government bodies continue to pursue corruption investigations, and cases frequently end in convictions. However, the public prosecutor has faced criticism in the media and from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for a reluctance to pursue some cases, and implementation of the 2000 Corruption Prevention Act remains problematic. Government whistleblowers who object to official acts of waste, fraud, or abuse of power are not well protected by Jamaican law, as is required under the Inter-American Convention against Corruption. In 2015, the legislature debated a new Integrity Commission Act which, among other steps, sought to create a single body to monitor corruption. The new legislation had not yet been passed at year's end.

An access to information law has been in effect in the country since 2004. In December 2015, the House of Representatives passed the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, which provides for the regulation of campaign finances in the country; the bill had yet to go before the Senate at year's end. Jamaica was ranked 69 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 41 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

The constitutional right to free expression is generally respected. Most newspapers are privately owned, and express a variety of views. Broadcast media are largely state-owned but are open to pluralistic points of view. Journalists occasionally face intimidation, especially in the run-up to elections, and both media workers and outlets occasionally face threats from state and nonstate actors. In August 2015, Everaldo Warmington, a lawmaker from the JLP, assaulted a female intern with the *Gleaner* newspaper, drawing condemnation from the Press Association of Jamaica (PAJ). Jamaica decriminalized defamation in 2013.

Freedom of religion is constitutionally protected and generally respected in practice. While laws banning Obeah—an Afro-Caribbean shamanistic religion—remain on the books, they are not actively enforced.

The government does not generally hinder academic freedom. Authorities do not restrict access to the internet and are not known to engage in unlawful online surveillance.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are generally respected. Jamaica has a small but robust civil society and active community groups. In August 2015, the Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals, and Gays (J-FLAG) organized a week-long gay pride celebration during the country's independence holidays, the first such public event in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Approximately 20 percent of the workforce is unionized. Labor unions are politically influential and have the right to strike.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16 (+ 1)

The judicial system is headed by the Supreme Court and includes a court of appeals and several magistrates' courts. The Trinidad-based Caribbean Court of Justice is the highest appellate court. A growing backlog of cases and a shortage of court staff at all levels continue to undermine the justice system. In December 2015, Parliament passed the Jury (Amendment) Act, designed to enhance the efficiency of the court system. Its provisions expand the pool of potential jurors, limit the number of peremptory challenges allowed, and permit trials by a judge only, in certain cases where the prosecution and defense agree to allow such a format.

Extrajudicial killings by police remain a serious problem in Jamaica, although they continued to decline in 2015. INDECOM has vigorously pursued cases of police violence. According to the body, 93 individuals were killed by security personnel in roughly the first 11 months of 2015, compared to a total of 150 people killed by security personnel in 2014. Several new human rights projects have been recently initiated for the rehabilitation of prison inmates, to reduce impunity among the country's security forces, and to provide legal assistance to people who were not accorded their rights.

A Commission of Enquiry was finally appointed and began deliberations in 2014 to provide an objective review of the state of emergency declared in 2010 in response to violence in the Tivoli Gardens neighborhood of Kingston. Its deliberations were ongoing at the end of 2015. During the state of emergency, more than 70 civilians were killed in an operation aimed at arresting Coke, who was extradited to the U.S. after his surrender in 2010 and in 2012 was sentenced by a U.S. court to 23 years in prison.

Gang and vigilante violence remains a common occurrence. Kingston's insular "garrison" communities remain the epicenter of most violence and serve as safe havens for gangs. Jamaica is a transit point for cocaine shipped from Colombia to U.S. markets, and much of the island's violence is the result of warfare between drug gangs. In 2014, the government of Jamaica passed antigang legislation that makes membership in such groups illegal and criminalizes certain gang-related activities, such as recruiting. By August 2015, nearly 170 persons had been charged under the law. Given the slow pace of judicial proceedings in Jamaica, none of those charged had yet been prosecuted by the year's end.

Harassment of and violence against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people remains a major concern and is frequently ignored by the police. Legislation against sodomy, which is punishable by 10 years in prison with hard labor, was challenged in court in 2014; however, the case was withdrawn that year after death threats were made against the claimant and his family. As a modest step forward, in 2014 the government added a

provision to the Offences Against the Person Act; the amendment criminalizes the production, recording, or distribution of any audio or visual materials that promote violence against any category of persons, including LGBT individuals.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Although there are constitutional guarantees of freedom of movement, political and communal violence frequently precludes the full enjoyment of this right.

Jamaica has an active private sector and a powerful pro-business lobby, the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica (PSOJ). Individuals are free to establish businesses subject to legal requirements, which are not onerous.

Legal protections for women are poorly enforced, and violence and discrimination remain widespread. Women are underrepresented in government, holding just seven seats in the House of Representatives.

Residents of neighborhoods where criminal groups are influential are at a heightened risk of becoming victims of human traffickers. Child sex tourism is present in some of Jamaica's resort areas, according to local NGOs.

Japan

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 126,866,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Tokyo

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

In September 2015, Prime Minister Shinzō Abe's governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) passed security legislation that permits the country's self-defense forces to aid allies that come under attack. The legislation, to take effect in 2016, ushered in a fundamental reinterpretation of Japan's constitution, which previously had been viewed as permitting the use of force only in cases of self-defense. The measure prompted significant opposition in the parliament and inspired mass protests. The parliamentary and public confrontation over the legislation unleashed an unexpected vibrancy in Japanese politics and civil society.

In December, Japan and South Korea agreed to resolve a highly sensitive dispute over "comfort women": the Korean and other women made to work in Japanese brothels during World War II. Japan apologized and pledged \$8.3 million to pay for the care of surviving victims.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40 (+1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Japan is a parliamentary democracy, with representative assemblies at the municipal, prefectural, and national levels. The national assembly, or Diet, has two chambers. The

more powerful lower house, or House of Representatives (HOR), is made up of 475 members, each elected to a four-year term, with half of its members up for reelection every two years. The upper house, the House of Councillors (HOC), has 242 members who serve six-year terms, half of whom are up for election every three years. The electoral systems are a mixture of single-seat constituencies and proportional representation for each house.

The HOR elects the prime minister, passes the budget and treaties, and holds the power to veto legislation passed by the HOC with a two-thirds majority. The HOR can be dissolved by the prime minister and his cabinet. Postelection, the cabinet is also dissolved, and the HOR is charged with reappointing the prime minister, who, in turn, creates a new cabinet. The HOR can also pass a no-confidence resolution forcing the resignation of the cabinet. Japan's emperor serves in a ceremonial capacity, exercising diplomatic duties.

Elections in Japan are free and fair. In 2013 elections for half of the HOC, the LDP captured control of the upper house, taking 65 of the 121 seats at stake for a new total of 135. Its coalition partner, New Kōmeitō (now Kōmeitō), won 11 seats for a total of 20. The leading opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), took only 17 seats, leaving it with 59 of its previous 86 total. Five smaller parties and two independents also won seats.

Prime Minister Abe called a controversial snap election of the HOR in December 2014. The LDP lost 3 seats but retained its two-thirds majority with a total of 291 seats. Abe was reelected. The DJP won 73 seats, the newly formed Japan Innovation Party took 41 seats, LDP ally Kōmeitō won 35, the Japanese Communist Party secured 21, and the remaining seats were divided among smaller parties. Political observers largely considered the elections an effort by Abe to renew the mandate for his increasingly unpopular economic reform policies, as well as to secure the next four years of power for the LDP.

There is a notable degree of malapportionment in both houses, to the benefit of the rural districts from which the LDP draws significant support. A handful of Supreme Court rulings in recent years seem intended to encourage the Diet to address the issue, but reforms so far have been minor.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16 (+1)

The LDP is a broad party whose members share a commitment to economic growth and free trade, but whose other political beliefs span from the center to the far right. It has dominated Japanese politics since its creation in 1955, with the exception of two brief periods in 1993–94 and 2009–12. The second strongest party has been the centrist DPJ, which is largely defined by its opposition to the status quo and the entrenched LDP.

Several other political parties hold seats in parliament, including the Japan Innovation Party, a 2014 merger of the Japan Restoration Party and the Unity Party; Kōmeitō or the Clean Government Party, which began as the political extension of a lay Buddhist movement and has been in coalition with the LDP since 1999; the Japanese Communist Party; the far-right Party for Future Generations, formed in 2014; the Social Democratic Party of Japan; and the environmental grassroots People's Life Party & Tarō Yamamoto and Friends.

People's political choices are free from domination by political interest or other groups. There are no legal barriers preventing ethnic and religious minorities from freely participating in the political process.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Japanese bureaucrats have a strong degree of control over policy. Japan has a low level of corruption in government as a whole, though observers have expressed concerns about cozy relationships between some government officials and business leaders. Retiring

bureaucrats often quickly secure high-paying positions with companies that receive significant government contracts. Petty bribery is very rare. Japan was ranked 18 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The 2013 Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets allows for nonclassified information to be automatically shared with the public. An October 2015 report by the free expression advocacy group Article 19 found that Japan's access to information legislation was not always implemented effectively, with requesters encountering high fees and lengthy waits.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 56 / 60 (+1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Japan has a free and highly competitive media landscape. Under the traditional *kisha* (reporters') club system, institutions such as government ministries and corporate organizations restricted the release of news to those journalists and media outlets with membership in their club, thus diluting coverage. In recent years, online media and weekly news magazines have begun challenging the daily papers' dominance of political reporting to reveal inside information.

Several incidents in 2015 were indicative of increased pressure on Japanese media by the LDP. In April, an LDP communications panel summoned executives from the public broadcaster and the private network TV Asahi over news it deemed unfounded; commentators said the move exceeded the administration's responsibility under the Broadcast Act to maintain impartiality in the news. In June and July, several LDP lawmakers as well as a popular novelist associated with Abe remarked that media outlets critical of the LDP should lose advertising contracts or be closed. Abe disavowed the comments, and the LDP issued a series of reprimands and one suspension in connection with them. Separately, in June, Britain's *Financial Times* reported that prominent Japanese media outlets including the state broadcaster had ignored an unusual incident in which a heckler had disrupted a speech Abe gave in Okinawa; critics viewed their silence as a reflection of Abe's influence over the country's media.

The 2013 passage of the Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets enacted strict punishments for leaking classified information. Although it was highly unpopular with the media, it does not seem to have had a general chilling effect. The government does not restrict access to the internet.

Freedom of religion is mandated in Japan's constitution, and there are no substantial barriers to religious expression. Aside from the traditional religions of Buddhism and Shintoism, Japan is home to small Christian and Muslim populations. There have been reports of significant state surveillance of Japan's Muslim community; officials have tacitly acknowledged some such programs, and defended them as within legal limits.

There are no restrictions on academic freedom in Japan, but education has long been a politically contested area and the focus of public debate. Japan has no national curriculum or single official textbook, but the Ministry of Education's screening process has approved textbooks that downplay Japan's history of imperialism and war atrocities, leading to controversy at home and abroad. The educational conservatism of the LDP and the Ministry of Education often clashes with the more left-leaning teachers' union. At the university level, there is wide diversity of views among faculty and active academic debate on a broad range of issues. The government does not restrict private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12 (+1)

Freedom of assembly is protected under the constitution. Protests, large and small, take place often. A number of demonstrations against Abe's security legislation took place ahead

of its eventual passage; the protest movement included a large contingent of young people and students, who are ordinarily viewed as being less engaged in politics. Protests against the U.S. military presence in Okinawa continue, with one May 2015 demonstration against the relocation of a U.S. military base drawing as many as 35,000 participants.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are legally recognized and protected under the 1999 Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities, and they continue to thrive. Labor unions have a long history in Japan, and the movement remains active. However, as most private sector unions are small and company-specific, the labor movement has never achieved the full political weight of its nationwide membership. While labor laws are generally adhered to, there are some restrictions on the ability to strike and bargain for those employed in certain essential sectors, including health care and transportation.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

Japan's judiciary is independent. There are several levels of courts, and suspects generally receive fair public trials by an impartial tribunal within three months of being detained. For serious criminal cases, a judicial panel composed of professional judges and *saiban-in* (lay-judges), selected from the general public, rule on defendants. Police may detain suspects for up to 23 days without charge in order to extract confessions. Foreign analysts have questioned the high rate at which they say warrants are issued, and have claimed that people are often detained on flimsy evidence, arrested multiple times for the same alleged crime, or interrogated for lengthy periods while subjected to abuse by officers. Observers have also claimed that trials often favor the prosecution.

There are frequent reports of substandard medical care in Japanese prisons. The government in August 2015 passed legislation aimed at addressing the problem. Prisoners facing death sentences or accused of crimes that could carry the death sentence are held in solitary confinement, sometimes for years at a time.

Organized crime is regarded as fairly prominent, particularly in the construction and nightlife industries. Japan's largest and most prominent criminal organization, the Yamaguchi-gumi, fractured in 2015, raising concerns about an increase in gang-related violence. Some observers attributed the split to the effective enforcement of measures designed to disrupt protection rackets and other sources of revenue.

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, creed, sex, or social status. Entrenched societal discrimination prevents Japan's estimated three million *burakumin*—descendants of feudal-era outcasts—and the indigenous Ainu minority from gaining equal access to housing and employment, though such forms of discrimination are slowly waning as traditional social distinctions weaken. Japan-born descendants of colonial subjects (particularly Korean and Chinese people) continue to suffer similar disadvantages.

Antidiscrimination laws do not cover sexual orientation or gender identity, and laws on rape and prostitution do not address same-sex activity. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people reportedly face social stigma and in some cases harassment.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

Japanese citizens enjoy broad personal autonomy in their choices of residence, profession, and education. Property rights are generally respected. People are free to establish private businesses, but can face financial and other obstacles in Japan's heavily regulated economy. The government reserves the right to screen foreign investment in certain economic sectors, including telecommunications and agriculture.

Although women enjoy legal equality, discrimination in employment and sexual harassment on the job are common. Violence against women often goes unreported due to concerns about family reputation and other social mores. Traffickers frequently bring foreign women into the country for forced sex work in brothels and clubs by arranging fraudulent marriages with Japanese men.

Jordan

Political Rights: 6

Population: 8,118,000

Civil Liberties: 5

Capital: Amman

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,PF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

The economic, social, and security implications of the conflict in neighboring Syria continued to take a toll on Jordan, straining state resources and public services. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there were close to 700,000 registered refugees in the country by year's end, in addition to hundreds of thousands of unregistered persons of concern. National security concerns remained prevalent during the year, and the government continued implementing stronger policies against terrorism, including by prosecuting militants upon return from fighting with extremist groups abroad. Some 2,000 Jordanians have left to fight with such groups, particularly the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Nusra Front.

In a small step toward reform, legislators discussed a draft electoral law that proposes abolishing Jordan's "one man, one vote" system. Separately, a new Law on Political Parties overhauled the framework for party formation and operation, including by forbidding the creation of parties based on ethnicity and religion, among other factors.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 11 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

King Abdullah II holds broad executive powers, appoints and dismisses the prime minister and cabinet, and may dissolve the bicameral National Assembly at his discretion. Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour and his cabinet were nominated by the parliament before their appointment. Legislative representatives in the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house, are elected through universal adult suffrage. The Senate is appointed by the king and constitutes the upper house. The central government appoints regional governors.

The 2012 Election Law granted voters two ballots in parliamentary elections: One vote is cast for a party list in which candidates are selected through proportional representation in a single nationwide constituency, competing for 27 seats. Another candidate is selected

through a single nontransferable vote system (SNTV) based on local electoral districts, competing for 108 seats. The remaining 15 seats are reserved for women. Political parties have long criticized the SNTV system for favoring progovernment tribal elites.

Elections to the lower house in 2013 were the first under the new law. The elections were carried by Transjordanian (East Bank) tribal elites and independent businessmen loyal to the regime. Twenty-two small parties won the 27 seats on the national level. The Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, boycotted the vote. International observers noted instances of vote buying and criticized the electoral framework as unfair.

In August 2015, legislators began discussing new electoral legislation that aims to create a completely proportional system. The proposal reduces the size of the lower house from 150 to 130 members but retains the use of quotas for ethnic and religious minorities as well as for women, with at least one female seat per district—a higher proportion of representation given the decreased number of seats. Opposition figures and groups had mixed reactions to the proposal, welcoming the abolishment of the SNTV but also criticizing the draft legislation for not going far enough in electoral reform; many of them called on legislators to vote against the proposal. The bill had not been adopted at year's end.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 6 / 16

The party system, consisting of just over 30 registered parties, is not robust. Although Jordanians are free to join political parties, votes are cast along nonpartisan and tribal lines in practice. In June 2015, the lower parliamentary house endorsed a bill on political parties that extensively changed the definition, registration, and supervision of parties; the king ratified the legislation in September. Among other things, the new Political Parties Law reduced the threshold of members required for registration from 500 to 150 and barred the founding of a party based on religion, ethnicity, race, or gender, stipulating that parties should be formed on the basis of citizenship and equality. The legislation granted authority to license and supervise parties to the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs, rather than the Ministry of Interior, at least nominally moving the process away from potential interference by security services. Islamist parties voiced fears that the restriction on foundational ideologies could be used against them, but officials made assurances that the provision would not retroactively apply to existing parties.

Flaws within the electoral law and gerrymandering in favor of East Bank tribal elites prevent genuine or competitive political process. The Chamber of Deputies is heavily imbalanced in favor of rural districts, whose residents are generally of East Bank origin. Urban areas, where Palestinian-Jordanians and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood are heavily concentrated, account for more than two-thirds of the population but less than one-third of deputies. The IAF boycotted both the 2010 and 2013 elections to protest inherent disadvantages in the system.

Electoral law guarantees nine seats in the Chamber of Deputies for Christians and a combined three seats for Circassian and Chechen minorities.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

Key powers and decision-making abilities are ultimately vested in the king. The Chamber of Deputies may approve, reject, or amend legislation proposed by the cabinet, but it cannot enact laws without the assent of the royally appointed Senate. King Abdullah is empowered to dismiss parliament as well as the prime minister and cabinet. The king can delay parliamentary elections for up to two years and may rule by royal decree during

periods in which parliament is not in session. Civil society groups have complained about a lack of inclusion in policymaking, particularly in deliberations over the amendments to the Press and Publications Law. Disputes between parliamentarians have resulted in physical scuffles in years past.

The government has undertaken some efforts to combat widespread corruption. Prime Minister Ensour launched a five-year anticorruption strategy in 2013. The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) is empowered to investigate allegations, while the Privatization Review Committee was formed in 2013 to review the privatization of state-run enterprises. The ACC stated in an October 2015 report that it had received 1,155 corruption complaints in 2014, investigated 151 cases, and recovered approximately \$24 million in funds and \$1 million in real estate. However, weak investigative journalism, limited access to information, and a lack of institutional checks and balances have prevented significant action. Jordan ranked 45 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Government officials are sometimes held accountable for their wrongdoings. In May 2015, the Interior Minister resigned and two police chiefs were forced into retirement over human rights abuses in prisons and a heavy-handed crackdown in the restive southern city of Ma'an.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 25 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 7 / 16

Freedom of expression is restricted by numerous laws that criminalize defamation, the denigration of government, and the incitement of sectarian strife. Journalists have been arrested for criticizing the king, exposing corruption, and violating a vague provision in the Press and Publications Law mandating media objectivity. The government engages in direct censorship and pressures editors to control content. Self-censorship is pervasive, particularly in reporting on the royal family, foreign leaders, and certain societal taboos.

While there are dozens of private newspapers and magazines, the government has broad powers to close them and often engages in prepublication censorship of news stories. Most broadcast news outlets remain under state control, but satellite dishes and the internet provide access to foreign media. Journalists continue to face intimidation, arrest, and even imprisonment for writing unfavorable articles, especially when reporting on national security matters. Among other cases in 2015, security forces arrested two editors from the online platform Saraya News in January in connection to an article that allegedly contained inaccurate information about a prisoner exchange between IS and the Jordanian government. They were charged with supporting terrorism and disseminating false news but released on bail in March.

The authorities restrict access to the internet and often pressure websites to remove content, particularly unfavorable coverage. The government blocked approximately 300 news websites in 2013 over failure to meet stringent new registration requirements. Almost all have since become accessible after obtaining the proper registration and licenses, but some continue to operate without a license by using alternative domains.

Citizens can face retribution for views shared on social media. In February 2015, the State Security Court (SSC) convicted a senior politician on the charge of harming relations with a foreign state, an offense under Jordan's antiterrorism law, in connection to a Facebook post criticizing the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The court sentenced him to 18 years in prison.

Islam is the state religion, but Christians are recognized as a religious minority and can worship freely. Baha'is and Druze are allowed to practice their faiths as well, though a lack

of state recognition has resulted in de facto discrimination. The government monitors sermons at mosques, and preachers cannot practice without written government permission. Only state-appointed councils may issue religious edicts, and it is illegal to criticize these rulings. Political, sectarian, and extremist speech are outlawed at mosques under the Preaching and Guidance law, and several imams have been banned for pro-IS sermons.

Academic freedom is generally respected, although there have been reports of a heavy intelligence presence on some university campuses. Jordanians openly discuss political developments within established red lines.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

Prior permission is not required to stage a public gathering. Allegations that the gendarmerie employed excessive force during a 2014 demonstration over the killing of a Jordanian-Palestinian judge have not been properly investigated.

While many international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are able to operate without significant hindrance, there are several restrictions on freedom of association. The Ministry of Social Development has the authority to deny registration as well as requests for foreign funding, and can disband organizations it finds objectionable. NGOs are prohibited from supporting political organizations. The Ministry of Social Development has broad supervisory powers over NGO operations and activities, and all board members must be vetted by state security. The law on associations includes penalties of up to 10,000 dinars (US\$14,000) for violations. Several NGOs reported being denied access to foreign funding in 2015.

Workers have collective bargaining rights but must receive government permission to strike. Labor legislation defines 17 sectors in which workers may form a union. In October 2015, security forces forcibly dispersed a sit-in by port workers in the governorate of Aqaba. A local labor rights NGO reported that more than 20 participants were arrested.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The judiciary is subject to executive influence through the Ministry of Justice and the Higher Judiciary Council, most of whose members are appointed by the king. Provincial governors can order administrative detention for up to one year under a 1954 Crime Prevention Law that leaves little room for appeal. Prison conditions are poor, and inmates reportedly undergo severe beatings and other abuse from guards. Torture allegations are rarely prosecuted or result only in minor disciplinary penalties.

While most trials in civilian courts are open and procedurally sound, the quasi-military SSC may close its proceedings to the public. In early 2014, the government limited the jurisdiction of the SSC to high crimes of espionage, drugs, terrorism, treason, and currency counterfeiting. However, 2014 amendments to the 2006 antiterrorism law broadened the law's scope to include nonviolent offenses, such as using information networks to support, promote, or fund terrorism, as well as acts to harm Jordan's relations with a foreign country, which is also an offense under the penal code. In 2015, the SSC continued to hear cases against individuals suspected of belonging to IS and other extremist groups. In February, after IS militants published a video showing the immolation of a captured Jordanian pilot, the authorities executed two Iraqi militants. IS had previously sought the release of one of the militants, failed suicide bomber Sajida al-Rishawi.

Jordanians of Palestinian origin are marginalized from jobs in the public sector and security forces, which are dominated by East Bank tribes. Discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people is also prevalent. Consensual same-sex

sexual activity is not accepted in Jordan's conservative society, though it is not prohibited by law. Activists fighting for LGBT rights face pressure from the secret police. In 2009, the Ministry of Social Development rejected an application to establish an NGO supporting LGBT rights on the basis that it would "violate the public morals and decency," and attempts to register others have failed since.

As of the end of 2015, UNHCR reported close to 700,000 registered refugees in Jordan, at least 630,000 of them from Syria alone. While Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention related to the status of refugees, the government adheres to an agreement with UNHCR by which refugees can remain in Jordan while the agency seeks more permanent solutions. Refugees are only legally permitted to work inside camps, although the majority live and work in cities. Poor living conditions and restrictions on freedom of movement led to violent riots at the Zaatari camp in 2014. Refugees have been turned away from public schools due to overcrowding, despite their right to free education. There have been reports of border authorities rejecting unmarried Syrian men of military age or refugees of Palestinian origin, which violates international norms on nonrefoulement. In some cases, Palestinians with Jordanian citizenship who reenter the country from Syria, having left in the 1970s, have been denied entry or stripped of their citizenship.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

Jordanians enjoy freedom of domestic movement and international travel. There have been reports of authorities denying refugees the right to travel and of employers confiscating the passports of foreign migrant workers. Under a 2013 law, women are no longer required to obtain their husbands' permission when applying for a passport.

Jordan was ranked 113 out of 189 economies in the World Bank's 2016 *Doing Business* report, which noted obstacles in obtaining credit, protecting minority investors, enforcing contracts, and resolving insolvency.

Women enjoy equal political rights but face legal discrimination in matters involving inheritance, divorce, and child custody, which fall under the jurisdiction of Sharia (Islamic law) courts. In the 2013 elections, women represented 13 percent of all candidates.

In 2014, the government announced that children of Jordanian mothers and foreign fathers will be able to access free public services such as education, private property ownership, and greater employment opportunities, but will still be barred from full citizenship. A woman who suffers domestic abuse is often placed in administrative detention and can only be released when a male member of her family gives assurances that she will not be harmed. Spousal rape is not illegal, and men who commit "honor crimes" against women receive lenient sentences. Women's rights activists have staged campaigns against honor killings and a penal code provision that allows alleged rapists to avoid prosecution by marrying their victims. According to a local NGO, at least a dozen honor killings took place in 2015, along with several attempts. Although the legal age of marriage is 18, girls as young as 15 years old can be married if a Sharia court allows it. A 2013 report by the Chief Islamic Justice Department showed that more than 10 percent of all marriages from 2000 to 2013 involved girls under the age of 18.

Labor rights organizations have raised concerns about poor working conditions, forced labor, and sexual abuse in Qualifying Industrial Zones, where mostly female and foreign factory workers process goods for export. Jordan is a destination and transit country for human trafficking for forced labor and, to a lesser extent, prostitution.

Kazakhstan

Political Rights Rating: 6

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 17,544,274

Capital: Astana

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

In April 2015, Nursultan Nazarbayev won a landslide victory in an early presidential election, securing a fifth term in office. Government corruption and the president's family remained taboo subjects in the press, social media, and academia, and official hostility toward discussion of two additional controversial topics, the conflict in Ukraine and the spread of the Islamic State (IS) militant group in Central Asia, further diminished space for freedom of expression. Authorities also continued imposing restrictions on freedoms of assembly and association during the year.

In a positive step, the Constitutional Court in May struck down a child protection bill that, among other things, would have restricted the dissemination of information about same-sex relations and orientation. Separately, Kazakhstan became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in June.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 6 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

The Kazakhstani constitution grants the president considerable control over the legislature, the judiciary, and local governments. Nazarbayev won an uncontested presidential election in December 1991, two weeks before Kazakhstan gained its independence from the Soviet Union, and has not left office since. In April 2015, Nazarbayev—nominated by his Nur Otan party—was reelected with 97.7 percent of the vote. His chief opponents were Turgun Syzdykov of the government-friendly Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan and Abulgazi Kusainov of Nur Otan; both candidates were virtually unknown before the election. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) noted several shortcomings in the election, including lack of a viable opposition, instances of fraud, vast advantages for the incumbent, and lack of transparency.

The upper house of the bicameral Parliament is the 47-member Senate, with 32 members chosen by directly elected regional councils and 15 appointed by the president. The senators serve six-year terms, with half of the 32 elected members up for election every three years. The lower house (Mazhilis) has 107 deputies, with 98 elected by proportional representation on party slates and 9 appointed by the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan, which represents the country's various ethnic groups. Members serve five-year terms.

Parties must clear a 7 percent vote threshold to enter the Mazhilis, and once elected, deputies must vote with their party. Parties are barred from forming electoral blocs. A 2009 amendment to the electoral law guarantees the second-ranked party at least two seats in the Mazhilis if only one party passes the 7 percent threshold.

In 2012 elections for the lower house, Nur Otan took 83 of the 107 seats, Ak Zhol won 8, and the Communist People's Party secured 7. OSCE monitors noted that the elections did not meet democratic norms. In 2014, Nur Otan took all the seats that were up for election in the Senate. Regional councils dominated by Nur Otan appointed the candidates.

Constitutional changes have consistently consolidated power for the president and the ruling party. Although Nazarbayev rejected a 2009 proposal to make him president for life, a 2010 constitutional amendment gave him immunity from prosecution and made his family's property effectively inviolable. Under the current constitutional rules, Nazarbayev may serve an indefinite number of five-year terms.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 3 / 16

Aside from Nur Otan, two parties—Ak Zhol and the Communist People's Party—won representation in the 2012 Mazhilis elections, each earning just over 7 percent of the vote. Neither is considered an opposition party because they exhibit loyalty to the president.

In order to register, a party must have 40,000 members. In 2012, a court invoked laws against "extremism" to ban the unregistered opposition Algha Party and the People's Front opposition movement. It also found Algha leader Vladimir Kozlov guilty of heading an illegal group, inciting social hatred, and calling for the violent overthrow of the constitutional order. He was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison.

Politics continue to be dominated by a small group of political elites led by the Nazarbayev family. Nazarbayev appointed his daughter Darigha Nazarbayeva to the post of deputy prime minister in September 2015; she had been elected deputy chair of the Mazhilis in 2014. Several opponents of the regime have fled the country in recent years in order to avoid persecution, and authorities continue to seek the extradition of former political and business leaders living in exile. Nazarbayeva's former husband, Rakhat Aliyev, had been appointed to prominent government and diplomatic positions while maintaining favorable relations with the Nazarbayev family, but declared his opposition to the regime in 2007. He died in February 2015 while in investigative custody in Austria in connection to the death of two bankers in Kazakhstan. In December, the Austrian justice ministry dismissed claims that Aliyev had been murdered.

Political parties based on ethnic origin, religion, or gender are prohibited. The Russian and Kazakh languages officially have equal status, but in 2011, newly rigorous Kazakh-language testing for candidacy in the presidential election eliminated many opposition candidates.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Corruption is widespread at all levels of government. Corruption cases are often prosecuted at local and regional government levels, but charges against high-ranking political and business elites are filed unevenly, usually only after an individual has fallen out of favor. Kazakhstan ranked 123 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In July 2015, the government announced that the residents of Berezovka, a village near the Karachaganak gas condensate field, would be resettled within two years in an operation funded by Karachaganak Petroleum Operating, in which the state-owned KazMunayGas holds a 10 percent stake. Berezovka residents as well as local and international environmental groups have appealed to the government for relocation since 2003, citing severe health concerns allegedly caused by emissions from the field. In 2014, several children and teachers in a Berezovka school fell severely ill in an episode that local residents attributed to

elevated emissions, and similar incidents continued in 2015. The government has publicly insisted that these incidents were not caused by extractive practices in the area.

Separately, Almaty's newly appointed mayor, Baurzhan Baybek, gained praise from local residents in 2015 for increasing the accountability and openness of the city's government, including through the use of social media to enhance officials' responsiveness to public problems and complaints.

Government officials remain opaque in their actions and decisions between elections. In May 2015, Nazarbayev announced a sweeping reform program focusing on five institutional issues: creating a more professional body of civil servants, strengthening the rule of law, increasing industrial and economic growth, promoting national unity, and enhancing transparency and accountability in government.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 18 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16

While the constitution provides for freedom of the press, the government has repeatedly harassed or shut down independent outlets. Members of the president's family and other powerful groups control most of the media sector, including publishing houses. Libel is a criminal offense, and the criminal code prohibits insulting the president. Self-censorship is common. Since 2011, when police used emergency powers to arrest or detain journalists attempting to cover unrest in Zhanaozen and neighboring cities, raids on independent media outlets and the harassment and detention of journalists have increased. New regulations in 2012 gave the Ministry of Culture and Information expanded powers to combat "unofficial or negative information" about any crisis. Since 2012, courts have shut down dozens of independent newspapers, television channels, and news websites on charges of "extremism."

Political and business elites frequently misuse the law to squelch dissent or criticism, and independent journalists frequently suffer attacks, arrests, and pressure from authorities. Yaroslav Golyshin, editor of a local newspaper in the province of Pavlodar, was arrested in May 2015 and charged with blackmail, extortion, and inciting a minor to commit a crime while investigating an incident of rape allegedly tied to the Pavlodar governor's son. Separately, in June, an Almaty court found the independent news portal Nakanune.kz guilty of libel in a case launched by Kazkommertsbank, which claimed that the outlet harmed its reputation in an article linking the bank to corruption in the construction industry. The defendant, Guzyal Baydalinova, a journalist for the outlet as well as its domain name owner, was ordered to pay 20 million tenge (\$98,000) and remove the article from the website. In December, security forces raided the Nakanune.kz office and the homes of several of its journalists as part of an investigation into claims that the outlet had deliberately published false information about Kazkommertsbank. Baydalinova was remanded in detention as part of the investigation and remained behind bars at year's end.

In February 2015, an Almaty appeals court upheld a 2014 closure order against *Adam Bol*, issued on the grounds that the magazine had included "war propaganda" in its reporting on the conflict in Ukraine. A successor, *Adam*, was established in March but suspended in August for failing to publish all content in both Russian and Kazakh. In 2015, authorities attempted to control media coverage of IS in relation to Kazakhstan. Sections of the website of the Kazakh service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) were blocked in March 2015, shortly after the outlet published information about recruitment calls by Kazakh IS members. The government continued to block entire websites as well as specific online content in 2015. The list of banned websites has expanded since 2012 to include

hundreds of outlets. After the European Court of Justice's May 2014 "right to be forgotten" ruling against Google and other search engines, legislators in Kazakhstan voiced interest in amending the country's information law to better protect individual privacy online, although critics claim that such a maneuver would be tailored to facilitate blocking of negative coverage of government officials and other elites.

The constitution guarantees freedom of worship, and some religious communities practice without state interference. However, laws passed in 2005 banned all activities by unregistered religious groups and gave the government great discretion in outlawing organizations it designates as "extremist." Local officials have harassed groups defined as "nontraditional," including Protestant Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Muslims. Several individuals were imprisoned during 2015 on charges of alleged membership in Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic movement banned on grounds of "extremism" since 2013.

Academic freedom is constrained by political sensitivities surrounding a number of topics, including the president and his inner circle. In August 2015, a Dutch lecturer at Nazarbayev University voiced allegations that his contract was terminated due to political reasons, citing the university's cancellation of a public event he had organized in 2014 to discuss confrontations between Russia and Ukraine. The university denied any pressure from the government on its decision-making. In a separate incident in September, the Ukrainian embassy in Astana demanded the recall of secondary school textbooks that showed Crimea as part of Russia. A week later, the Education Ministry of Kazakhstan ordered that the textbooks be recalled and revised, stating that the publisher had not "fully reflected the position of Kazakhstan or that of the international community" in its presentation of the territory.

Authorities are known to monitor communications on social media. Several social-media users were prosecuted in 2015 for the offenses of inciting ethnic hatred or unrest or calling for separatism, which can be punishable by imprisonment. In March, a court in Almaty sentenced one user to a four-year suspended sentence in connection to comments she had made that included ethnic slurs and calls for Kazakhstan to become a part of Russia.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 2 / 12

Despite constitutional guarantees, the government imposes restrictions on freedoms of association and assembly. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continue to operate but face government harassment surrounding politically sensitive issues. New criminal, criminal executive, and administrative codes went into effect in January and contained wide restrictions on the formation and operation of NGOs, including enhanced penalties for the leaders of organizations as well as general restrictions on activities not sanctioned by their organizations' charters. The legislation also contained restrictions on the ability of individuals to organize and hold public gatherings. Foreign citizens cannot found public associations, but can become members.

Police frequently break up unsanctioned opposition gatherings. In August 2015, police arrested activist Yermek Narymbayev on the charge of organizing an unsanctioned protest after he publicized plans to go to Astana's central square with a list of complaints to begin a dialogue with local officials, inviting others to join. He was sentenced to 15 days in prison for convening an unauthorized protest, even though no public assembly had taken place before his arrest, and an additional 5 days on a contempt of court charge.

Workers can form and join trade unions and participate in collective bargaining, though coopted unions and close links between the authorities and big business make for an uneven playing field. In November 2015, Nazarbayev approved a new labor code, which will allow

employers to more easily hire, transfer, and dismiss workers and will enforce cumbersome administrative requirements for bargaining, including a higher quota of workers needed for collective action. The code was framed by proponents as a liberalization of the labor market, but labor activists criticized it as a weakening of worker rights.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

The constitution makes the judiciary subservient to the executive branch. Judges are subject to political bias, and corruption is evident throughout the judicial system. Conditions in pretrial facilities and prisons are harsh. Police at times abuse detainees and threaten their families, often to obtain confessions, and arbitrary arrest and detention remain problems. In July 2015, the mother of a convict in eastern Kazakhstan announced plans to sue the prison where her son was being held, claiming that he sustained brain damage after being beaten while in custody. She reported that claims submitted to national authorities over the incident had been unanswered. A rare handful of convictions for police officers accused of torture were reported during the year.

Members of the sizable Russian-speaking minority have complained of discrimination in employment and education. Migrant workers from neighboring countries often face poor working conditions and a lack of legal protections.

Kazakhstan decriminalized same-sex sexual activity in 1998, but the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community continues to face societal discrimination, harassment, and violence. In May 2015, the Constitutional Court rejected legislation that would have criminalized disseminating “propaganda” of same-sex relations to minors. The move followed considerable international pressure connected to Kazakhstan’s bid to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, which was ultimately unsuccessful.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

Kazakhstani citizens can travel freely but must register their permanent residence with local authorities. In 2014, the government instituted a new system of fines for anyone living at an unregistered residence or renting to unregistered tenants. The right to choose institutions of higher education is formally protected but has been plagued by corruption, which the government is attempting to control.

While the rights of entrepreneurship and private property are formally protected, bureaucratic hurdles limit equality of opportunity. Clannish elites and government officials control large segments of the economy. Kazakhstan’s official accession into the WTO in 2015, which took place after twenty years of negotiations, was widely seen as a positive development that would increase commercial opportunities by providing entrepreneurs and businesses with access to foreign markets.

Traditional cultural practices and the country’s economic imbalances limit professional opportunities for women. Domestic violence often goes unpunished, as police are reluctant to intervene in what are regarded as internal family matters. Despite legal prohibitions, men, women, and children are vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of forced labor and prostitution.

Kenya

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 44,306,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Nairobi

Freedom Rating: 4.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,4,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

During 2015, the precarious domestic security situation in Kenya continued. In April, the Somali extremist group the Shabaab attacked Garissa University College in northeastern Kenya, killing 148 students and injuring more than 100. Following the siege, Cabinet Secretary for Interior Joseph Nkaissery said that, despite intelligence warnings of an attack, local security officials had done little to prepare. Nine regional officials were suspended over the response to the siege. The attack was the latest in a spate of violence by the Shabaab in retaliation for the Kenyan government's involvement in the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia.

Despite the attack, the Kenyan government continued cross-border air strikes as part of an ongoing military campaign against the Shabaab in Somalia and also pursued a controversial domestic counterterrorism campaign. The counterterrorism campaign includes both heavy-handed repression of suspect groups as well as continued heavy police and military deployments in some areas of the country, especially in the northeast. In September, the autonomous Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) released a preliminary report alleging 25 extrajudicial killings and more than 80 "enforced disappearances" at the hands of the Kenyan government as part of its counterterrorism campaign. The report also alleged the use of extended detentions, aggressive interrogation techniques, and several forms of torture.

In connection with its counterterrorism strategy, the Kenyan government continued its crackdown on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In October, the government's NGOs Coordination Board threatened to deregister more than 950 NGOs due to alleged financial mismanagement and noncompliance with government regulations, and said that some of the groups were suspected of money laundering and support for terrorist activity. The board also said that, in an audit of more than 10,000 groups, it had found more than 25 billion shillings (\$248 million) in donations unaccounted for. Many of the organizations refuted the allegations and some alleged that the government was targeting groups that criticized it. At first, the NGOs were given two weeks to refute the audit findings or be deregistered, but Cabinet Secretary for Devolution Anne Waiguru revoked the NGO Board's ruling, saying that the two-week timeline was unrealistic. This was the second time the government had threatened mass deregistration in as many years. In December 2014, the government deregistered over 500 NGOs, including 15 it accused of having ties to terrorism, for "noncompliance" after they failed to provide financial records. However, nearly 200 groups were reinstated within one week of the ban. Though the government has

walked back on civil society crackdowns in both 2014 and 2015, the situation remains uncertain.

In 2014, the International Criminal Court (ICC) had withdrawn its case against President Uhuru Kenyatta for crimes against humanity in connection with 2007–08 postelection violence, citing a lack of evidence and the Kenyan government’s failure to cooperate. In August 2015, an ICC appeals court reopened an inquiry into whether the government had actively blocked prosecutors in the case. The case against Deputy President William Ruto remains ongoing. In September, ICC prosecutors unsealed arrest warrants for two Kenyan men who had been arrested by Kenyan authorities in July; the warrants alleged that the men were involved in interfering with potential ICC witnesses.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 22 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 7 / 12

Under a constitution approved by voters in 2010, the president and deputy president, who can serve up to two five-year terms, are directly elected by majority vote; they are also required to win 25 percent of the votes in at least half of Kenya’s newly created 47 counties. The National Assembly consists of 349 elected members (290 directly elected, 47 special women representatives, and 12 nominated by each party according to their share of the assembly vote), plus 1 ex-officio member elected as speaker. The Senate, created under the 2010 constitution, consists of 67 elected members (47 directly elected, 16 special women representatives, 2 representing youth, and 2 representing people with disabilities), plus 1 ex-officio member elected as speaker.

The March 2013 elections were Kenya’s first held under the new constitution. There were 8 presidential candidates and over 20 parties competing for legislative seats, aligned into 4 main groupings—the Jubilee Coalition, the Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD), the Amani Coalition, and the EAGLE Alliance. Regional and international election observers noted a generally peaceful election period and important improvements compared with 2007, but also serious shortcomings. Some observers pointed to a harsher security environment and a large degree of self-censorship. The Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC) declared Kenyatta the winner of the presidential election with 50.07 percent of the vote, with his closest challenger—former prime minister Raila Odinga of CORD—taking 43.7 percent. Kenyatta’s Jubilee Coalition took 167 National Assembly seats, 30 Senate seats, and 18 gubernatorial races. CORD won 141 National Assembly seats, 28 Senate seats, and 23 governorships.

There were serious questions surrounding the tabulation of the results of the 2013 elections. The IEBC’s electronic transmission system failed, and the manual delivery of ballots was delayed and not transparent. Moreover, there was significant confusion initially over the total number of rejected or invalid ballots, as well as controversy over whether to include the rejected ballots in the total number of votes cast in the presidential vote.

The framework for the 2013 elections was guided by the requirements set forth in the 2010 constitution, but some aspects, such as campaign finance reform, were not implemented. The IEBC’s central members were appointed through a credible process with legislative oversight, yet the body’s effectiveness was hampered by ambiguity regarding its mandate and interference from the legislature. In January 2015, Ezra Chiloba Simiyu was appointed to be the board’s chief executive officer.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

Citizens are free to organize into political parties that represent a range of ideological, regional, and ethnic interests, but Kenyan parties are notoriously weak, often amalgamated

into coalitions designed only to contest elections. In 2015, the member parties of the ruling Jubilee coalition agreed to merge into a single party, but the merger had not taken place by year's end. At the same time, the more fragile CORD coalition rejected calls to merge its parties ahead of the 2017 elections.

Under the Political Parties Act, parties that receive at least 5 percent of the votes cast in a national election are eligible for public funds. In August 2014, the High Court upheld the right of three political parties—the National Alliance, the Orange Democratic Movement, and the United Republican Party—to collectively receive more than \$4 million based on the outcome of the 2013 elections. The Political Parties Act also established an independent Office of the Registrar of Political Parties, but an acting registrar has held the position since it was created in late 2011.

During the 2013 elections, there were impediments to political choice posed by domestic economic interests. There was pervasive use of unverified sums of money during campaigns due to the absence of an adequate campaign finance law and evidence of direct vote buying by candidates of both parties.

The 2010 constitution was intended to reduce the role of ethnicity in elections. Although the Political Parties Act requires each party to have at least 1,000 members in 24 of the 47 counties to ensure diversity, the major coalitions continue to reflect distinctive—though rarely exclusive—ethnic groupings. The stipulation that all voters must possess a National Identity Card impedes historically marginalized groups from obtaining greater access to the political process, particularly the nearly seven million pastoralists from the upper Rift Valley and North Eastern regions. In December 2015, the ODM accused the Kenyan government of slow distribution of ID cards in opposition strongholds. Security forces' ongoing harassment of Kenya's substantial ethnic Somali population diminishes their political engagement.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12

Corruption is a serious problem in Kenya. The country was ranked 139 of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. The government's Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) lacks prosecutorial authority, can only pass the results of its investigations to the office of the attorney general, and was plagued by political infighting in 2015. Investigation of the so-called Karen land-grabbing scandal by the EACC implicated several politicians and civil service employees. In June, Cabinet Secretary for Lands Charity Ngilu was suspended from her office, and the director of public prosecutions charged her with obstruction of EACC investigations into the issue. In July, Ngilu and Cabinet Secretary for Transport Michael Kamau—who was also suspended—successfully lodged cases before the High Court contesting the constitutionality of the EACC's powers to conduct investigations and recommend prosecution.

While the 2010 constitution includes measures for increased accountability and transparency, official prosecutions of corruption have yielded meager results, and no top officials have been successfully prosecuted. An auditor general's report released in July 2015 showed that approximately one-quarter of the spending in Kenya's 2013–14 federal budget had not been properly accounted for, causing a public uproar. The report described “persistent and disturbing problems in collection and accounting for revenue” across many departments and agencies. Shortly before the report's release, Kenyatta signed an agreement with U.S. president Barack Obama outlining U.S. technical support for the Kenyan government's fight against corruption, including curriculum development for a mandatory ethics training for all government employees.

Weak institutional capacity has undermined attempts to increase transparency on the budget-making process, procurement, and other government activities. There is little input from civil society. In August 2014, the government launched its Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS), a website that documents the procurement process—including the tender announcement, bids received, and contracts awarded—in order to increase efficiency and reduce direct interaction, and therefore opportunities for bribery, between businesspeople and government officials. In March 2015, Kenyatta issued an executive order requiring ministries to use the system. Later in the month, he made the fight against corruption a theme of his State of the Nation address, directing all officials named in an EACC report on corruption—including 12 governors and 5 cabinet officials—to step down. Two of the cabinet officials were later charged in connection with the report’s allegations. Also in 2015, Waiguru was at the center of a corruption scandal, after investigations indicated that the IFMIS system had been used to make or attempt to make some \$8,200,000 worth of illegal payments from the National Youth Service (NYS). In November, Waiguru—facing criticism even from some members of the Jubilee coalition—resigned, citing health issues.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 29 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16

The 2010 constitution strengthened protections for freedoms of speech and of the press, and there is a large, independent, and active media sector in Kenya. In practice, however, several laws restrict press freedom, and the government and security forces harass journalists, leading to self-censorship in some cases. Media outlets avoid reporting on issues such as official corruption or misconduct, counterterrorism operations, or the ICC proceedings, often under threat of reprisals.

In October 2015, the National Assembly passed the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Bill, which included controversial provisions restricting journalists’ ability to report on parliamentary proceedings and levying heavy penalties on journalists accused of maligning the legislature. However, the bill was never enacted. Meanwhile, Kenya’s High Court has yet to rule on the constitutionality of two highly controversial 2013 bills that provided for wide-ranging government control of the media sector, the Kenya Information and Communication (Amendment) Bill and the Media Council Bill. Under the bills, a new government-controlled board would have the authority to regulate all forms of journalism, including the power to impose potentially crippling fines on media houses and deregistration on individual journalists for alleged violations of a code of conduct, which would be drafted by legislators. In February 2015, the High Court annulled several controversial clauses in a separate bill, the December 2014 Security Laws (Amendment) Act, including significant restrictions on the media.

The government does not restrict access to the internet, but it does monitor websites and social media for alleged incitement to violence. The 2014 security law also includes clauses authorizing the National Intelligence Service to “obtain any information, material, record, document or thing” while conducting surveillance of communications. In July, WikiLeaks released a series of e-mails from recent months demonstrating that the Kenyan government had reached out to Hacking Team, a Milan-based surveillance company, to procure software “designed to attack, infect and monitor target PCs and Smartphones, in a stealth way.” In a May 2015 e-mail, an unidentified government representative requested that, as “proof of concept,” the Hacking Team “urgently bring down” a blog called Kahawa Tungu, which had been reporting on corruption in the Kenyan government; the e-mails show Hacking Team representatives refusing the request.

The authorities generally uphold freedom of religion on civil matters. The Islamic (*Kadhi*) court system, which adjudicates cases related to personal status, marriage, divorce, or inheritance for Muslims, is subordinate to the superior courts of Kenya. In January, the attorney general's office announced the proposed Religious Societies Compliance Rules, a series of regulations aimed at religious institutions and clergy, including requirements that they register with the government. Although Ruto in August mentioned plans to enact the laws, they were not adopted before the end of the year. Religious tension has risen in recent years due to terrorist attacks carried out by the Shabaab and the government's counterterrorism campaign, which has disproportionately targeted Kenyan Muslims and members of the Somali community, including for extrajudicial killings and harassment. In July 2015, Afrobarometer released the results of a survey conducted in late 2014 in which 51 percent of ethnic Somali respondents in Kenya reported that they "always" or "often" faced unfair treatment from the government."

For the most part, academic freedom remains secure in Kenya. However, the education system suffers from structural and funding problems. Increasing intimidation from the security forces and ethnically affiliated gangs such as the Mungiki has inhibited open and free private discussion in the country.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly. Local police must be notified in advance of any public meetings, and may prohibit them. The police responded to protests with a heavy hand in 2015, including using tear gas on schoolchildren protesting the sale of a playground to a private developer in January.

Kenya has an active NGO sector, but civil society groups have faced growing obstacles in recent years, particularly in light of the government's counterterrorism campaign and the related NGO crackdown. There are about 15,000 registered NGOs in Kenya.

In 2014, Waiguru, in her capacity as devolution secretary, appointed a taskforce composed of representatives from government and civil society to consider amendments to a 2013 law, the Public Benefits Organizations (PBO) Act, which had not yet been implemented. The task force produced a report in May 2015, drawing criticism from civil society groups, including those that had participated in the task force, who said several restrictive recommendations in the report did not reflect citizen input given at a series of public hearings. A controversial provision to the PBO Act that would have placed a 15 percent limit on all foreign funding for NGOs was dropped in the fall.

Trade unions are active in Kenya, with approximately 40 unions representing nearly two million workers. Most unions are affiliated with the sole approved national federation, the Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU). In 2014, public-sector workers created the Federation of Public Service Trade Unions of Kenya in the face of government attempts to curb wages. The 2007 Labor Relations Act establishes broad criteria for union registration, leaving authorities with limited grounds for suspending or refusing to register a union. The 2010 constitution affirmed the rights of unions to establish their own agendas, bargain collectively, and strike. In November, COTU called on its affiliates to demand higher wages to account for recent tax hikes. Earlier in the fall, Kenyan teachers' unions had undertaken a five-week strike over pay issues. Negotiations were ongoing in December.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

The 2010 constitution enhanced the independence of the judiciary. Chief Justice Willy Mutunga has built the judiciary's image as a trusted institution, and has overseen the creation of a new Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, and High Court. The Judicial Services

Commission handles the vetting and appointment of judges, and has been cited as a success. A major reshuffling of judiciary staff in April was rumored to be an attempt to dismantle corruption “cartels” within the judiciary.

Rule of law does not prevail in many civil and criminal matters. The police are among the most egregious violators of public trust. In July, the *Daily Nation* newspaper cited interviews with unidentified high-level police officials who claimed that the police service was plagued by tribalism and favoritism, and that bribery was rampant. In October, the National Police Service Commission announced that 63 top police officers had been dismissed for “corruption and integrity issues.”

There is little protection from political terror, especially for segments of the population that have been caught up in the Shabaab attacks and the counterinsurgency campaign in the traditionally marginalized, mostly Muslim coastal region. However, the Shabaab continued attacks in northeastern Kenya on government and other targets in 2015. In addition to the Garissa University attack, in July the Shabaab claimed responsibility for an attack on a compound of quarry workers in northeastern Kenya, in which 14 people were killed and 11 injured. In late December, heavy casualties were avoided when Muslims refused to be separated from Christian passengers during a Shabaab attack on a bus in Mandera.

Arbitrary arrests, beatings, and extrajudicial killings remained prevalent, with several high-profile cases reported in the coastal region. Police in Mombasa were criticized for detaining dozens of people in response to a series of attacks, including the killing of a senior officer in the police counterterrorism unit.

A ban on the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), a group that advocates for the secession of the coastal region, was overturned in 2012, but its leader, Omar Mwamnuadzi, is regularly arrested on various charges. In June, the government accused 14 people it had arrested in a poaching sting of participating in a scheme to sell elephant tusks to raise funds for the MRC.

Ethnic Somalis—both Kenyan citizens and refugees from neighboring Somalia—continue to be singled out in the wide-ranging roundups, detentions, and deportations in response to Shabaab attacks in 2015, and security forces have often subjected Somali detainees to torture and rape. In recent years, there has been increased social and political pressure to expel the more than 440,000 Somali refugees residing in Kenya, nearly 330,000 of whom live in the Dadaab camp complex. Heavy police surveillance and detentions were noted in Nairobi’s Somali-dominated Eastleigh neighborhood in the wake of the Garissa University attack.

Consensual same-sex sexual activity is criminalized under the penal code, with a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison. Members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community continued to face discrimination, abuse, and violent attacks in 2015. In May, Ruto declared while speaking at a church service in Nairobi that there was “no room for gays” in Kenya. In July, at a joint press conference with Obama in which the U.S. president urged an end to discrimination against LGBT people in Kenya, Kenyatta described human rights for LGBT people as a “non-issue” in his country, saying Kenya had more pressing concerns. In a significant legal victory for Kenya’s LGBT community, in April the Kenyan High Court ruled that the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC) could legally register as an NGO under the country’s Nongovernmental Organizations Coordination Board Act. The group had been prohibited from registering with the NGO Coordination Board in 2013. A three-judge panel of the High Court, which voted unanimously, called the prohibition unconstitutional.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

Citizens generally enjoy freedom of travel, residence, employment, and education, and have the right to establish private businesses. However, the prevalence of petty corruption inhibits these freedoms, as do discrimination based on gender and ethnicity and banditry in rural areas. Criminal networks and ethnic gangs frequently impede economic activity through extortion and threats. The curfew in Lamu County and the extensive security-force mobilization in other counties, notably Garissa and Mandera, restricted movement and harmed business activity in some areas in 2015.

Rape and domestic violence are reportedly common but rarely prosecuted, and spousal rape is not criminalized. Customary law often trumps statutory law, leaving women with few remedies for discriminatory customary practices. Underage marriage is illegal but still occurs. Female genital mutilation has declined among some groups but is widely practiced among the Somali and Kisii populations. Women remain underrepresented in politics. The constitution says the government must work toward “the principle that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender,” and the Political Parties Act prevents the distribution of public funds to parties whose elected officials are not at least one-third women. Nineteen percent of representatives in the National Assembly are women, as are some 26 percent of senators. Following a cabinet reshuffle in November 2015, five of 20 cabinet ministers were women.

According to the U.S. State Department’s 2016 *Trafficking in Persons* report, Kenya is a source, transit, and destination country for sex trafficking and forced labor. Refugees and asylum seekers from neighboring countries, particularly children, have been vulnerable to trafficking and forced labor in Kenya.

Kiribati

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 113,400

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Tarawa

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 36 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 55 / 60

On December 30, 2015, voters headed to the polls for the first round of national legislative elections. A second round was scheduled for January 7, 2016, and would be followed by a presidential election.

Kiribati, which consists of 33 atolls scattered across 811 square kilometers, continued to contend with limited opportunities for development, which is constrained by the country’s size, remote location, and lack of resources. The economy largely depends on interest

from a trust fund built on royalties from phosphate mining, remittances from workers overseas, and foreign assistance.

As with other Pacific island states, rising sea levels and other effects of climate change threaten Kiribati. A cyclone that struck in March 2015 caused severe damage on three southern islands, and high spring tides were also reported. President Anote Tong has been vocal in calling on the international community to curb global warming and assist with local mitigation efforts.

In January, a quadrennial UN human rights review found some progress, including the creation of a human rights task force and a ministry for women and youth, and new legislation to protect women and children. However, the review also noted that more needed to be done to fully address domestic violence, combat sex trafficking, and improve access to primary education, and that Kiribati had yet to ratify several key human rights conventions. In September, the parliament passed a law that created a separate court for juvenile offenders and set standards designed to prevent juveniles from being diverted to adult prisons.

Although freedom of speech is generally respected, journalists at state-owned outlets have been disciplined for coverage that displeases the government. Radio Kiribati editor Aneta Moote was fired in April for rebroadcasting a story from Radio New Zealand International that highlighted President Tong’s initial backing for a controversial bill to introduce the death penalty. Strong public opposition to the proposal had forced the government to withdraw support.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Kiribati, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Kosovo

Political Rights Rating: 3↑

Population: 1,802,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Priština

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ratings Change: Kosovo’s political rights rating improved 4 to 3 to reflect the functioning of a government formed in late 2014 following lengthy negotiations after that year’s elections, which had represented an improvement over previous balloting.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,4,PF	3,4,PF

European Union–mediated negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia on the normalization of relations played a major role in Kosovo’s politics in 2015. In August, the two governments agreed on the establishment of a new body, the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities, meant to allow greater autonomy for Kosovo’s ethnic Serb population. Kosovo’s opposition parties, led by the Movement for Self-Determination (Vetëvendosje), undertook a forceful protest campaign against the deal, arguing that its

implementation would compromise Kosovo's sovereignty and inflame ethnic tensions. Vetëvendosje led number of street protests in the capital, some of which turned violent; opposition politicians on several occasions also released tear gas in the legislative chamber, disrupting proceedings. In December, the Constitutional Court ruled that parts of the deal were unconstitutional.

Amid domestic political turmoil linked with the Serb municipalities deal, in late October the European Union (EU) and Kosovo signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), a key step toward eventual EU membership. The assembly ratified it in November, with the opposition boycotting the vote but also refraining from efforts to obstruct it.

Separately, in August the assembly voted to amend the constitution in order to establish a new war crimes tribunal to prosecute former fighters with the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 24 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

Members of the unicameral, 120-seat Assembly of Kosovo are elected to four-year terms. The assembly elects the president, who serves a five-year term. The president nominates the prime minister, who is then approved by the assembly.

Kosovo held elections in 2014. International election observers considered the polls to be relatively free and fair, and all observers noted the increased participation of ethnic Serbs. The Central Election Commission was judged to have fulfilled its responsibilities. The ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) won 37 seats, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) won 30 seats, Vetëvendosje won 16 seats, and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) won 11 seats. At the end of 2014, the PDK and LDK agreed to form a government whereby the incumbent prime minister Hashim Thaçi became deputy prime minister and foreign minister, and LDK chairman Isa Mustafa replaced him as prime minister.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

There is little difference in policy between the mainstream political parties. The exception is Vetëvendosje, which began as a grassroots youth opposition movement and has since grown into a party focused on defending Kosovo's national sovereignty. Given the power-sharing features enshrined in the Kosovo constitution, it is nearly impossible for a single political party to form a government on its own. A party or coalition needs at least 61 seats in the assembly to secure a governing majority.

The International Steering Group, a body representing 25 countries, ended its oversight of Kosovo in 2012. However, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) peacekeepers; the EU's rule of law mission to Kosovo, known as EULEX; and a scaled-back team from the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) continue to monitor conditions on the ground.

In addition to the Serb community, Kosovo's largest ethnic minority group, eight other ethnic minority groups are officially recognized and politically represented. Ten assembly seats are set aside for ethnic Serbs, and 10 more are reserved for representatives from smaller minorities. While several political parties represent the Serb minority, the population itself is not fully integrated into the electoral process or Kosovo's institutions. The Turkish community is politically well-organized and is represented by three parties. There are two parties representing the Ashkali community, while one party represents the Gorani community.

In recent years, Priština has made advances in the decentralization process granting self-rule to Serb enclaves in the southern part of Kosovo, weakening parallel structures in those areas. However, parallel structures endure in northern Kosovo's Serb enclaves. In August 2015, the EU helped broker an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia on the structure of an Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities, a body intended to promote the interests of Kosovo's ethnic Serbs, and which includes a legislature for the Serb community. Further negotiations are required in order to establish the body.

Three opposition political parties—Vetëvendosje, AAK, and the Initiative for Kosovo (Nisma)—strongly protested the EU-backed agreement. Vetëvendosje members in September hurled eggs at Prime Minister Mustafa as he gave an address in defense of the deal; additionally, opposition members on at least six occasions released tear gas in the parliament chamber, once forcing lawmakers to hold a vote on the 2016 budget in another room. In November, the Constitutional Court suspended the agreement's implementation pending a review; in December it ruled that an Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities could be legally established, but that it could not hold executive rights that are constitutionally reserved for the central government. The ruling likely requires the deal's renegotiation.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12 (+ 1)

Opposition protests against the deal to establish the Association/Community of Serb-majority Municipalities hampered policymaking in the second half of 2015. However, the governing PDK-LDK coalition that formed in late 2014, following that year's successful elections, held through the year's end.

Corruption remains a serious problem, and the institutional framework to combat it is weak. The mandates of Kosovo's four main anticorruption bodies overlap, and they have difficulty coordinating their efforts. Anticorruption legislation has not been effectively implemented. Political pressure on law enforcement agencies hinders investigations into graft and other financial misconduct, which remain widespread across many state institutions. A conflict-of-interest law requires amendments so that it would apply to all public officials and political advisors, and would restrict officials from holding multiple positions and functions. Transparency International ranked Kosovo 103 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in its 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In 2014, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini commissioned French law professor Jean Paul Jacqué to investigate corruption allegations against EULEX—in particular a whistleblower's allegations that senior staff members had accepted bribes in connection with murder and corruption cases, and that EULEX had concealed evidence of such activity. The so-called Jacqué Report, published in April 2015, criticized EULEX's internal handling of corruption allegations.

A wide range of government documents is available online. Civil society is consulted in the drafting of laws.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 28 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

The constitution protects freedoms of expression and the press, except speech that provokes ethnic hostility. A wide variety of print and television outlets operate, but the government and business interests exert undue influence on media outlets through threats to withdraw advertising. Journalists report frequent harassment and intimidation, and occasional physical attacks. In November 2015, an assailant who had stabbed Milot Hasimja,

the presenter of a satirical television show, at Hasimja's workplace in 2014 was sentenced to four years in prison and ordered to pay a 1,000 (\$1,100) fine in connection with the attack. Journalists investigating radical Islam have experienced online attacks, including death threats, and report that law enforcement responses to their complaints have been dismissive. There are no reports that the government censors or monitors the internet.

The constitution guarantees religious freedom. However, the Law on Freedom of Religion lacks a mechanism through which religious communities could gain official legal status, a designation that would allow them to more easily buy and rent property, establish bank accounts, and carry out other administrative activities. Two Serbian Orthodox cemeteries were desecrated in February 2015.

Kosovo authorities, under pressure from the United States and the EU, have reacted strongly to the threat of attacks by the Islamic State militant group and the radicalization of its citizens. In addition to targeting Islamic preachers who incite extremism, the Kosovo Police Force arrested more than 80 citizens in 2014 suspected of terrorist activity. While many were later released due to insufficient evidence against them, 32 of those arrested were charged with belonging to the Islamic State or another Sunni Muslim extremist group, Jabhat al-Nusra; their trials began in June 2015. The use of bulk arrests and heavy-handed tactics by Kosovo authorities have left some members of Kosovo's majority Muslim community fearing persecution.

Academic freedom has improved in recent years. More space has opened for private discussion of formerly sensitive topics such as the treatment of the Serb population, Roma communities, and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

The government, EULEX, and NATO peacekeepers generally respect legislative guarantees of freedom of assembly, though demonstrations have occasionally been restricted for security reasons. The constitution includes safeguards for public order and national security. Numerous antigovernment demonstrations took place in the capital in 2015. On several occasions, unruly participants caused property damage, and some protests ended with clashes between demonstrators and police.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) function freely, though the courts can ban groups that infringe on the constitutional order or encourage ethnic hatred. In June 2015, police raided five Shiite Muslim NGOs suspected of propagating extremist views, though it was unclear whether any of the groups subsequently faced legal charges. The constitution protects the right to establish and join trade unions. However, workers face intimidation, and private sector unions are nearly nonexistent.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

Authorities have continued efforts to strengthen Kosovo's judicial system. However, the judiciary remains susceptible to political interference and corruption; its effectiveness is also hampered by a lack of resources and qualified staff. In July 2015, the head of Kosovo's Appeals Court, Sali Mekaj, was arrested on corruption charges, in what was viewed as a major setback for the judiciary. Meanwhile, the assembly has been unable to appoint all of the members to the Kosovo Judicial Council, or to the Constitutional Court, where only seven of nine judges are seated. Separately, a dubious June 2015 decision by the Appellate Panel of the Special Chamber of the Kosovo Supreme Court reopened an ethnically sensitive dispute between the Serbian Orthodox Visoki Dečani monastery and Kosovo parties claiming ownership of adjoining property. In its ruling, which UNMIK head

Farid Zarif said relied on “highly questionable legal reasoning,” the court set aside its 2012 decision that had confirmed the monastery’s property ownership, opening the way for a lower court to rule on the issue again.

Courts in ethnic-Serb dominated areas in northern Kosovo are not fully integrated into the national system. In February 2015, the EU brokered an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia to integrate the Serb-run courts into Kosovo’s judicial system and to ensure that judicial and prosecutorial posts in Serb-run municipalities are ethnically balanced. There was little progress on the deal’s implementation at the year’s end.

In 2014, a EULEX investigative task force found evidence to substantiate allegations of KLA war crimes, including organ harvesting, made in a 2010 report issued by Council of Europe rapporteur Dick Marty. The Kosovo Assembly voted in August 2015 to amend the constitution and establish a new war crimes court to try accused former KLA members, many of whom now hold high-level positions in Kosovo political life. Opposition political parties requested that the Constitutional Court annul the amendments that enabled the new court to be established, saying they violated Kosovo’s sovereignty. The court rejected their petition in September. Separately, in May 2015 a EULEX-backed court in Mitrovica convicted former KLA members belonging to the so-called “Drenica group” of committing war crimes against Serbs; their prison sentences ranged from 3 to 12 years.

Ethnic Albanian officials rarely prosecute cases involving Albanian attacks on non-Albanians. In March 2015, the EU brokered an agreement between Kosovo and Serbia on disbanding the Serb “Civilna Zastita,” which operates as a security force in northern Kosovo; under the deal, its members would be integrated into the Kosovo Police Force.

The police are rated as the most trusted rule-of-law institution in Kosovo. Prison conditions meet international standards, but concerns include poor medical care for inmates.

The constitution prohibits discrimination, including based on sexual orientation. However, Kosovo’s Roma, Ashkali, Gorani, and other minority populations face discrimination and difficult socioeconomic conditions. LGBT people face pressure to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity. A low-key LGBT rights walk took place in May 2015; it was not publicized ahead of time due to security concerns.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16 (– 1)

Free movement into ethnic enclaves is sometimes restricted. Returning refugees face hostility and bleak economic prospects, and property reclamation by displaced persons remains a matter of concern.

Kosovo’s unemployment rate stands at roughly 31 percent, and estimates of the youth unemployment rate are above 50 percent. The gray economy accounts for a considerable share of economic activity.

Kosovo has the largest participation of women in its legislative and executive branches among Western Balkan countries, thanks to gender quotas enshrined in the constitution. However, patriarchal attitudes limit women’s ability to gain an education or secure employment. Many women in rural areas are disenfranchised through the practice of family voting, in which the male head of a household casts ballots for the entire family. There is significant family and social pressure on women to waive their inheritance rights, which are guaranteed by law. Domestic violence remains a problem.

In 2014, parliament passed a law guaranteeing financial compensation and other social-welfare benefits to the more than 20,000 people who were victims of sexual violence during the 1998–99 war. However, rape in general and war rape in particular remain taboo topics in Kosovo. Women are subject to abuse and abandonment by their husbands and families for admitting they were raped, discouraging them from applying for the new benefits.

Kosovo is a source, transit point, and destination for human trafficking, and corruption within the government enables perpetrators. Children are at particular risk of exploitation by traffickers, who can force them to beg or engage in sex work.

Kuwait

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 3,837,700

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Kuwait City

Freedom Ratings: 5.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5 PF

INTRODUCTION

While Kuwait's often contentious parliamentary politics remained stable in 2015, the government intensified its crackdown on opposition figures and those most critical of the regime. Prominent dissidents, including former parliamentarian Musallam al-Barak and activist Saleh al-Saeed, were sentenced to prison during the year over their criticism of the government. Others, such as legislator Abdulhamid Dahsti, were threatened with prosecution. The authorities also continued harassing critical media, including the newspaper *Al-Watan* and a number of associated entities.

In July, the Kuwaiti parliament approved a budget that would run a nearly \$30 billion deficit in the new fiscal year, a function of declining revenues amid a global fall in the price of oil. In October, the Finance Ministry announced plans to develop a taxation system for the country. In December, in conjunction with the other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Kuwaiti officials announced that the new system would include value-added tax.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 13 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

The emir, the hereditary head of state, appoints the prime minister and approves the cabinet that the prime minister appoints. The emir shares legislative power with the 50-member National Assembly, which is elected to four-year terms by popular vote. The emir has the authority to dissolve the National Assembly at will but must call elections within 60 days. The National Assembly can overturn decrees issued by the emir while it is not in session. It can veto the appointment of the prime minister, but it then must choose from among three alternatives of the emir's choosing. The National Assembly also has the power to remove government ministers with a majority vote. The electorate consists of men and women over 21 years of age who have been citizens for at least 20 years; most members of state security agencies are barred from voting.

Electoral changes promulgated by the emir in 2012 changed the system under which citizens voted for up to four legislators to a new system under which they only vote for one.

Opposition forces argued that this change decreased the likelihood of building parliamentary coalitions by making legislators unable to pledge the electoral support of their constituencies to other members in exchange for mutual support.

After the emir dissolved the National Assembly in December 2011, opposition candidates gained a majority of seats in February 2012 elections. However, the dissolution was later ruled unconstitutional by Kuwait's Constitutional Court, which nullified the electoral results. Tens of thousands of Kuwaitis responded by holding regular protests, which security forces met with force. The opposition boycotted the subsequent December 2012 elections, leading progovernment candidates to capture the majority of seats. In 2013, the Constitutional Court ordered the dissolution of the National Assembly after opposition challenges to the new electoral laws were dismissed, leading to new parliamentary elections in July 2013, which was also boycotted by the opposition.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 7 / 16

Formal political parties are banned, but groupings like parliamentary blocs have been allowed to emerge. Opposition members claim that the 2012 electoral changes were designed to limit their power. While opposition candidates have the right to run for office, the country's long-standing political crisis and boycotts of elections have left them under-represented in the National Assembly.

The royal family frequently interferes in the political process, including through the harassment of political and media figures, and the government impedes the activities of opposition parliamentary blocs. In March 2015, the leader of the Civil Democratic Movement, a liberal political group, was arrested for criticizing the government of Saudi Arabia on Twitter.

The government uses the stripping of citizenship as a political tool against opponents and dissidents. In 2014, about three dozen people, including journalists, activists, and clerics, were stripped of citizenship for criticizing the government.

In the 2013 elections, Shiites lost more than half of the seats they gained in December 2012, winning only 8 seats.

Kuwait's more than 100,000 stateless residents, known as *bidoon*, are considered illegal residents, do not have full citizenship rights, and often live in poor conditions. Efforts to grant citizenship to 4,000 of the country's stateless residents through a 2013 law have stalled. In 2014, the government announced that tens of thousands of bidoon would be offered a chance to apply for citizenship in Comoros, which would receive direct investment from the Kuwaiti government in exchange. Comoros passport holders could then receive Kuwaiti residence permits. However, bidoon and other human rights activists have rejected this process, calling it an attempt by the Kuwaiti government to relieve itself of its responsibilities, and noting that foreign nationals can be deported more easily than stateless residents. There was little progress on the measure in 2015. In November, the government announced that more than 7,000 bidoon had regularized their status between since 2011 by declaring a foreign national origin and receiving residency permits.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12 (– 1)

Charges of government corruption were at the heart of the 2012 political crisis. The opposition has repeatedly called for the government to address the problem, but authorities have continuously obstructed parliamentary efforts to investigate.

In March 2015, the government unveiled the implementing regulations for the Public Anti-Corruption Authority (PACA), allowing the body to begin its work. However, in

December, Constitutional Court ruled the 2012 decree that established PACA to be unconstitutional, finding that the decree was inappropriately rushed and issued without consultation with the National Assembly. Later that month, the cabinet approved legislation that would reestablish the body; the draft was under consideration by the National Assembly at year's end. Separately, in September, Electricity, Water, and Public Works Minister Ahmad al-Jassar and 14 other state officials were sentenced to two years in prison in connection with the secret acquisition of faulty electricity generators in 2007. Kuwait ranked 55 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Transparency in government spending and operations is inadequate and exacerbated by the weakness of rule of law.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 23 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 6 / 16

Authorities continue to limit press freedom. Kuwaiti law punishes the publication of material that insults Islam, criticizes the emir or the government, discloses secret or private information, or calls for the regime's overthrow.

More than 10 private daily and weekly Arabic newspapers and two private English-language dailies operate in Kuwait alongside a number of private broadcast outlets, including the satellite television station Al-Rai. The state owns four television stations and nine radio stations. Foreign media outlets generally operate relatively freely. Kuwaitis enjoy access to the internet, though the government has instructed internet service providers (ISPs) to block certain sites for political or moral reasons. In 2014, the National Assembly passed a new telecommunications law allowing authorities to monitor, block, and censor online material through a new body, the Commission for Mass Communications and Information Technology. Officials made a number of changes to the law in 2015; some amendments were aimed at regulating the commission members' relationships with the private sector, and others granted the commission greater technical powers to pursue its mandate.

Several journalists and media outlets faced harassment for their coverage of the regime in 2015. In January, the critical newspaper *Al-Watan* was forced to suspend printing after the government revoked the business license of its publishing house as well as the paper's own publishing license. In June, authorities canceled the licenses of three affiliated television stations. In November, the Court of Cassation—the highest court in Kuwait—upheld the government's decision to shutter the paper.

Freedom of expression is also frequently curtailed among critical internet users and rights activists. In January, the Court of Cassation sentenced Saqr al-Hashash to 20 months in jail for insulting the emir on Twitter. Also in January, authorities detained Saad bin Tefla, the country's former information minister and operator of the website *Alaan News*, and forced him to serve a one-week prison sentence issued in absentia in 2012 in connection to an article critical of government spending. In March, activist Nawaf al-Hendal was arrested and banned from traveling abroad after speaking about rights violations in Kuwait at a UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva.

Islam is the state religion, but religious minorities are generally permitted to practice their faiths in private. Shiite Muslims, who comprise about a third of the population, enjoy full political rights but have experienced increased harassment in recent years. In June, a suicide bombing by the Islamic State (IS) militant group at a Shiite mosque in Kuwait City killed 26 people and injured more than 200. In September, five men were sentenced to death and eight others to lengthy prison terms for involvement in the attack.

Academic freedom is impeded by self-censorship on politically sensitive topics as well as by larger restrictions on freedom of expression, including the illegality of offending the emir or challenging Islam. Traditional gatherings (*diwaniyat*) are venues for vibrant private discussion. However, they typically only include men and are likewise affected by restrictions on sensitive topics. The government has prosecuted individuals for views expressed on social-media platforms in the past.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed by law but constrained in practice. Kuwaitis must notify officials of a public meeting or protest, though some peaceful protests have been allowed without a permit. In 2012, the government declared public assemblies of more than 20 people to be illegal. In February 2015, a Kuwaiti court sentenced stateless activist Abdullah al-Enezi to five years in prison in absentia for his 2014 participation in demonstrations supporting the bidoon. Days earlier, six other stateless activists were sentenced to one year each for participating in unauthorized protests, with options granted to five of them to pay a fine and avoid imprisonment.

There were some opposition-led public protests in 2015. In March, police in Kuwait City forcibly dispersed more than 800 demonstrators protesting state abuses and detained more than a dozen, threatening them with criminal charges. In June, more than 50 people were fined for their participation in a high-profile protest march in 2012.

The government routinely restricts the registration and licensing of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), forcing dozens of groups to operate without legal standing or state assistance. Representatives of licensed NGOs must obtain government permission to attend foreign conferences, and critical groups may be subject to harassment. In June 2015, the government dismissed the directors on the board of the Kuwait chapter of Transparency International, replacing them with government appointees who subsequently dismantled the group's assets. The regime claims that it has increased monitoring of NGOs over concerns about financial support for extremist militants abroad.

Private sector workers who are citizens have the right to join labor unions and bargain collectively, but labor laws allow for only one union per occupational trade and one national union federation, the Kuwait Trade Union Federation. Noncitizen migrant workers do not enjoy these rights; however, hundreds of migrants participated in risky illegal labor actions in 2015 to protest nonpayment of wages and other abuses.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

Kuwait lacks an independent judiciary. The emir appoints all judges, and the executive branch approves judicial promotions.

Authorities may detain suspects for four days without charge. Detainees, especially bidoon, have been subjected to torture in the past. The government permits visits by human rights activists to prisons, where overcrowding remains a problem.

In July 2015, the National Assembly approved new counterterrorism legislation that requires all citizens and residents to provide genetic samples to the government, making it the only country in the world to institute such a universal obligation.

Migrant workers are subject to frequent abuse and exploitation. They are often confined to slums, lack access to public services, and are forced to work in dangerous conditions for inadequate pay. Inadequate safety measures plague many large construction projects and led to multiple worker deaths in 2015. In June, the National Assembly passed legislation expanding the rights of domestic workers, including by requiring mandatory leave and regular bonuses. However, critics decried the lack of enforcement mechanisms in the law.

Same-sex sexual activity is illegal and punishable by up to seven years in prison. In 2013, officials from the Health Ministry called for clinical tests to be held at Kuwait's ports of entry in an attempt to identify and bar LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people from entering Kuwait or any of the other Gulf Cooperation Council countries. A 2007 law criminalizes "imitating the opposite sex."

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

As of 2009, married women have the right to obtain passports and travel without their husband's permission. Migrant workers often face de facto restrictions on freedom of travel and residence.

The 1962 constitution provides men and women with equal rights, but this idea is not enforced in practice. Women comprise more than 60 percent of the student body at several leading universities, but the government enforces gender segregation in educational institutions. In December 2015, the Constitutional Court rejected a legal challenge to the policy. Kuwaiti women have the right to vote and hold public office. There are no elected female members in the National Assembly; the country's sole female minister, along with the rest of the prime minister's cabinet, serves as an ex officio member. Despite some legal protections from discrimination and abuse, women remain underrepresented in the workforce and face unequal treatment in several areas of law and society. They must have a male guardian in order to marry, are only permitted to seek a divorce when deserted or subjected to domestic violence, and are not treated equally in inheritance matters. Domestic abuse and sexual harassment are not specifically prohibited by law. Foreign domestic servants and migrant workers enjoy limited legal protections against mistreatment and remain particularly vulnerable to abuse and sexual assault.

Kyrgyzstan

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 5,951,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Bishkek

Freedom Rating: 5.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	6,5,NF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

In March 2015, Prime Minister Joomart Otorbayev and his government resigned after failing to negotiate a more advantageous agreement with the country's largest foreign investor, the Canadian mining firm Centerra Gold. The parliament confirmed Temir Sariyev as the new prime minister in May. He is a long-serving politician who is widely regarded as having close ties to Russia, which became even more significant as Kyrgyzstan officially joined the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union in August.

In September, the Central Election Commission announced that 14 political parties had met the requirements to participate in the October parliamentary elections. New parties had

formed during the year, mainly due to splits in existing parties. The elections were held on schedule and resulted in a peaceful transition to a new, six-party legislature. This was hailed as a significant accomplishment for Kyrgyzstan's nascent democracy, particularly because the party associated with the president, the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), failed to dominate the elections despite claims by opponents that it enjoyed administrative support.

Throughout 2015, nationalist and vigilante groups intensified harassment of minority populations that are perceived to be favored by Western countries. European and U.S. organizations faced similar intimidation as well as legal pressure. Although legislation modeled on Russia's "foreign agents" law continued to enjoy public support from President Almazbek Atambayev, it had yet to be adopted at the end of 2015.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 14 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12

Constitutional changes adopted in 2010 expanded the unicameral parliament from 90 to 120 deputies, with no party allowed to hold more than 65 seats. Parliamentary elections are to be held every five years. The president, who shares executive power with the prime minister, serves a single six-year term with no possibility of reelection and has the power to veto legislation.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) observers judged the 2011 presidential election to have been free and competitive, though marred by widespread problems with voter lists and numerous faults in the tabulation process. Atambayev, then the incumbent prime minister, defeated 15 other candidates and took 63 percent of the vote.

OSCE observers found that the October 2015 parliamentary elections were competitive and that the 14 registered parties offered voters a wide range of options. However, the monitoring group noted significant procedural problems, flaws in the rollout of a new biometric registration system, inadequate media coverage, and widespread allegations of vote buying. Civil society groups and media reports raised concerns that the SDPK had used state resources and pressure on public employees to enhance its position. Six parties cleared the 7 percent national threshold to secure representation. SDPK led the voting with 38 seats, followed by Respublika–Ata Jurt (28), the Kyrgyzstan party (18), Onuguu-Progress (13), Bir Bol (12), and Ata Meken (11).

In early November, the new parliament approved a broad coalition government under Prime Minister Sariyev, leaving only Respublika–Ata Jurt and Bir Bol in opposition.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 6 / 16

Kyrgyzstani citizens have the freedom to organize political parties and groupings, especially at the local level. However, in addition to the 7 percent national threshold, parties must win at least 0.7 percent of the vote in each of the country's nine regional divisions to secure seats in the parliament, which discourages locally organized groups from participating in national politics. Political parties are primarily vehicles for a handful of strong personalities, rather than mass organizations with clear ideologies and political platforms. Although the 2015 elections featured several new parties, almost all were the result of splits or mergers among the factions in the previous parliament, meaning that the actual roster of deputies changed very little. A small number of leading opposition figures, such as former Ata Jurt leader Kamchybek Tashiyev, lost their seats or were disqualified from running as a result of technicalities or pending criminal cases.

The 2010 constitutional reforms aimed to ensure political pluralism and prevent the reemergence of an authoritarian, superpresidential system. Since 2012, however, observers have noted signs that President Atambayev was reclaiming powers from the prime minister's office and using the executive branch to target political enemies. Opposition members and outside observers have accused the SDPK of attempting to improperly influence electoral and judicial outcomes, and opposition parties often react with protests that sometimes turn violent.

Although a variety of opposition groups held peaceful rallies during 2015, participants frequently complained of interference and pressure from local and national authorities as well as from counterprotesters. The rise of ultranationalist vigilante groups like Kyrk Choro (40 Knights)—which enjoys official support from security agencies—and Kalys (Justice) threatened political activity by opposition and particularly ethnic minority politicians and groups. Throughout the year, ultranationalist organizations engaged in protests and intimidation against perceived opponents.

Ethnic minority groups face additional forms of political marginalization. During the brief period of official campaigning in September 2015, several parties were criticized in the press for producing campaign materials in the Uzbek language, and the Kyrgyzstan party was accused of “meeting with Uzbek separatists”—leaders of the Uzbek business and social community in the south. The editor of the paper that initiated the latter claim subsequently admitted that it was a false public-relations stunt created as paid political advertising.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12

The 2010 constitution's division of power between the president, prime minister, and parliament left some issues unresolved. From 2011 through 2015, a series of prime ministers have clashed with Atambayev over their respective roles, contributing to the instability of coalition governments.

Corruption is pervasive in Kyrgyzstani society. Despite multiple rounds of constitutional and statutory changes, the country has long been trapped in a cycle in which predatory political elites use government resources to reward clients—including organized crime figures—and punish opponents. The nepotistic practices of former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, whose sons and brothers held powerful positions in business and government, were a significant factor leading to his ouster amid antigovernment protests in 2010. The subsequent government charged some members of the Bakiyev regime with corruption, but the results in the largely unreformed courts have been inconclusive.

A new anticorruption office within the State Committee of National Security (GKNB) was formed in 2012. The office has primarily been used to target the administration's political enemies in the parliament and city governments. In July 2015, the notorious former mayor of Osh, Melis Myrzakmatov, was sentenced in absentia to seven years in prison for abuse of office involving a construction project. In May, police had arrested his brother Kenesh and other associates on charges of taking bribes for new apartments that were meant for people who lost their property in the 2010 ethnic violence. Despite these events, the Ata Meken party initially listed Melis Myrzakmatov near the top of its candidate list for the parliamentary elections in an attempt to attract supporters of his southern regional Uluttar Birimdigi party.

Kyrgyzstan was ranked 123 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. An opinion survey conducted in early 2015 by the International Republican Institute found that 42 percent of Kyrgyzstanis

believe that their parliament is “very corrupt,” and another 37 percent consider it “somewhat corrupt.”

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 2 / 0

Southern Kyrgyzstan has yet to fully recover from the ethnic upheaval of June 2010, which included numerous documented instances of government involvement or connivance in violence against ethnic Uzbeks in the region, with the aim of tipping the political and economic balance in favor of the Kyrgyz elite. Though some initial steps have been taken to restore Uzbek-language media, the political economy of the south remains deeply altered.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 24 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

The media landscape remained bifurcated along ethnic lines in 2015, with improved conditions for Kyrgyz-language media since 2010 and continuing challenges for both Uzbek-language outlets and critical Russian-language media. Independent Uzbek-language media virtually ceased to exist in southern Kyrgyzstan after the 2010 ethnic violence, as major Uzbek television and radio outlets were closed down. Although some outlets have opened since then, Uzbek media representation is extremely limited, and the workers of remaining outlets continue to be persecuted. Prosecutions for inciting hatred have focused exclusively on minority writers despite the prevalence of openly racist and anti-Semitic articles in Kyrgyz-language media. A 2014 law criminalized the publication of “false information relating to a crime or offense” in the media, which international monitors saw as a contradiction of the country’s 2011 decriminalization of defamation. The law assigns penalties of up to three years in prison, or five years if the claim serves the interests of organized crime or is linked to the fabrication of evidence. News websites, blogs, and online forums are increasingly important alternative sources of information for those with access.

All religious organizations must register with the authorities, a process that is often cumbersome and arbitrary. The 2009 Law on Religion deems all unregistered groups illegal and bans proselytizing, private religious education, and the wearing of headscarves in schools. The government monitors and restricts Islamist groups that it regards as a threat to national security, particularly Hizb ut-Tahrir—a nonviolent international movement that calls for the creation of a caliphate and also functions in Kyrgyzstan as a religious mutual-assistance society in rural areas with scarce state services. While private discussion is generally free in the country, state and local authorities regularly raid private homes where they believe Hizb ut-Tahrir members or certain religious minorities, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, are meeting to discuss their beliefs.

Rashod Kamalov, a highly influential ethnic Uzbek imam based in Kara-Suu, was sentenced to five years in prison in October 2015 on charges of “inciting religious hatred” and “propagating extremist materials.” The penalty was increased to 10 years by a higher court in November. Little evidence was presented at trial to support the charges, according to observers, and the judge refused to admit exculpatory evidence presented by the defense.

The government does not formally restrict academic freedom.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

Tight official restrictions on freedom of assembly have not been altered since the Bakiyev era, but enforcement has been eased considerably in practice. A 2012 law allows peaceful assembly, and small protests and civil disobedience actions, such as roadblocking, take place regularly. Nevertheless, domestic and international watchdogs remain concerned

about police violations of the right to demonstrate, including arrests and other forms of interference. Intimidation by counterprotesters has also emerged as a problem in recent years.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) participate actively in civic and political life, and public advisory councils were established in the parliament and most ministries in 2011, permitting improved monitoring and advocacy by NGOs. However, rising nationalism continues to affect both ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbek NGO activists. Human rights workers who support Uzbek abuse victims face threats, harassment, and physical attacks. Throughout 2015, ultranationalists increasingly adopted the anti-Western themes propagated by Russian state media and far-right groups, stepping up harassment of U.S. and European NGOs as well as domestic counterparts that were perceived to be favored by Western actors.

Nationalist organizations and sympathetic legislators continued to support a bill emulating a Russian law that requires NGOs to register as “foreign agents” if they receive foreign funding. However, the measure had yet to win passage by year’s end.

Kyrgyzstani law provides for the formation of trade unions, which are generally able to operate without obstruction. However, strikes are prohibited in many sectors. Legal enforcement of union rights is weak, and employers do not always respect collective-bargaining agreements.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

The judiciary is not independent and remains dominated by the executive branch. Corruption among judges is widespread. Defendants’ rights, including the presumption of innocence, are not always respected, and there are credible reports of torture during arrest and interrogation.

The long-running trials of the Bakiyev family and their accomplices, including for the alleged killing of 86 demonstrators in 2010, have been marred by numerous procedural violations and threats against lawyers in the courtroom.

The widespread and extensively documented violence against the Uzbek community in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010 cast a harsh light on the plight of ethnic minorities, and few perpetrators have been brought to justice. Uzbeks, who make up nearly half of the population in Osh, have long demanded more political and cultural rights, including greater representation in government, more Uzbek-language schools, and official status for the Uzbek language. Ethnic minorities continue to face discrimination on economic, security, and other matters.

Same-sex sexual activity is not illegal, but discrimination against and abuse of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people at the hands of police are pervasive. In May 2015, ultranationalist groups threatened and attacked participants in a private event marking the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia in Bishkek. In June, legislation similar to Russia’s ban on “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations” passed its second reading in the parliament; final adoption was pending at year’s end.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

The government generally respects the right of unrestricted travel to and from Kyrgyzstan. However, barriers to internal migration include a requirement that citizens obtain permits to work and settle in particular areas of the country.

Personal connections, corruption, organized crime, and widespread poverty limit business competition and equality of opportunity. Companies that had belonged to the Bakiyev

family were nationalized in 2010 pending a new process of privatization. That year’s ethnic violence affected property rights in the south, as many businesses, mainly owned by ethnic Uzbeks, were destroyed or seized.

Despite achieving notable leadership positions, women remain underrepresented at higher levels of government and business. Cultural traditions and apathy among law enforcement officials discourage victims of domestic violence and rape from contacting the authorities. The practice of bride abduction persists despite the strengthening of legal penalties in 2013, and few perpetrators are prosecuted. In 2015, the government continued its review of draft legislation aimed at improving safeguards against domestic violence.

The trafficking of women and girls into forced prostitution abroad is a serious problem. Police have been accused of complicity in the trafficking and exploitation of victims. Kyrgyzstani men are especially vulnerable to trafficking for forced labor abroad.

Laos

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 6,903,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Vientiane

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

The Lao government in 2015 continued to pursue an economic opening while tightening its control over political space. Although the country has achieved high growth rates overall, inequality is growing sharply as well, fueling public discontent.

The authorities appeared increasingly attentive to criticism on social media during the year. Officials detained citizens for contentious posts and seemed concerned about the country’s image ahead of its 2016 chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Laos refused to host a meeting of ASEAN civil society groups as part of its chairmanship.

No information was released during 2015 on the whereabouts of Laos’s most prominent activist, Sombath Somphone, who disappeared in 2012. Another high-profile case, the suspicious death of a Canadian man at Vientiane’s airport in January, remained unsolved at year’s end.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 1 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

The National Assembly is elected every five years, and its members choose the president and prime minister. However, the 61-member Central Committee and 11-member Politburo of the ruling Lao People’s Revolutionary Party (LPRP) make all major decisions. The party vets all candidates for the elections, which international observers are not permitted to monitor. In the 2011 polls, the legislature increased in size from 115 members to

132. The LPRP won 128 seats, with the remainder going to independents. Choummaly Sayasone, the general secretary of the LPRP, was chosen for a second term as president, and Thongsing Thammavong, the prime minister since 2010, was confirmed in his post. The next party congress and national elections were set for 2016.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

The 1991 constitution makes the ruling LPRP the sole legal political party and grants it a leading role at all levels of government. National Assembly candidates are not required to be members of the LPRP, but all candidates have to be approved by assembly-appointed committees; in practice, almost all are members of the party.

Ethnic minorities are represented in the Politburo, Central Committee, and National Assembly, but they are unable to engage in independent political activity.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

The National Assembly has grown slightly more responsive to the public in recent years. The 2012 Law on Making Legislation increases legislative transparency by requiring bills proposed at the central and provincial levels to be published for comment for 60 days and, once passed, to be posted for 15 days before coming into force. The government is increasingly using laws, rather than decrees, to govern, though there is still little room for the public to influence policy.

Corruption by government officials is widespread. Senior officials in government and the military are sometimes involved in logging, mining, and other extractive enterprises. Laws aimed at curbing graft are rarely enforced, and government regulation of virtually every facet of life provides many opportunities for bribery. According to a state auditor who spoke anonymously to foreign media in 2015, high-ranking government officials have profited from “ghost projects” in which companies received public funds for construction plans that were never implemented. In May and June, the state-run *Vientiane Times* published articles highlighting the punishment of lower-level officials for graft.

Laos was ranked 139 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 11 / 40

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16

Self-censorship is extremely common, as authorities use legal restrictions and intimidation tactics against critics of the state. The state owns nearly all media, though some non-governmental outlets, primarily Chinese entertainment magazines, have appeared in recent years, as have a few independent local-interest radio shows. Journalists who criticize the government or discuss controversial issues risk punishment under the criminal code. Some Lao can access Radio Free Asia and other foreign broadcasts.

Internet access and use of social media have expanded in recent years, with an estimated 18 percent of the population going online in 2015 and more than half a million people accessing Facebook. In response, the government enacted a restrictive cybercrime law in September 2014 that criminalizes the posting of vaguely defined types of content, including criticism of the LPRP and information that “distorts the truth.” The law also prohibits the use of anonymous social-media accounts and requires internet service providers to terminate access for users who violate official decrees. In addition, the government must be provided with user information upon request.

The government has begun detaining people who disseminate critical information online. In May 2015, police arrested a woman who took photos of officers allegedly trying to extort money from her brother during a traffic stop; the photos had been posted to Facebook by a friend, sparking criticism of the police by other users. The woman was fined and released in August. In June, police detained a state employee who posted information on her Facebook account that raised questions about plans to develop land around the Khouangxi waterfalls, a popular tourist attraction. She was released in August but apparently lost her job.

Religious freedom is constrained. The religious practice of the majority Buddhist population is somewhat restricted through the LPRP's control of clergy training and supervision of temples. Other religious organizations are tightly regulated, and discrimination against non-Buddhists does occur. There have been multiple cases in recent years of Christians being briefly detained or sentenced to jail for unauthorized religious activities, or pressured by authorities to renounce their faith.

University professors cannot teach or write about politically sensitive topics, though Laos has invited select foreign academics to teach courses in the country, and some young people go overseas for university education.

Government surveillance of the population has been scaled back over time, but security agencies and LPRP-backed mass organizations continue to monitor the public for dissent, curbing open and free private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

The government severely restricts freedom of assembly, prohibiting participation in organizations that engage in demonstrations or public protests. Protests are rare, and violators can receive sentences of up to five years in prison. Two democracy activists arrested in 1999 for participating in a peaceful protest remained behind bars in 2015, having been convicted of treason.

In addition to LPRP-affiliated mass organizations and foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), there are some domestic welfare and professional groups, but they are prohibited from pursuing political agendas. Registration and regulatory mechanisms for NGOs are onerous and allow for arbitrary state interference. Two draft decrees that would reportedly impose new financial reporting requirements were awaiting approval at the end of 2015. Despite international pressure, the 2012 disappearance of prominent antipoverty activist Sombath Somphone remained unsolved in 2015 and continued to exert a chilling effect on civil society. The government reportedly pressured Lao civil society groups planning to attend an ASEAN forum in Malaysia in April not to discuss any topics deemed politically sensitive.

Most unions belong to the LPRP's Lao Federation of Trade Unions. Strikes are not expressly prohibited, but workers rarely stage walkouts; some disputes are reportedly resolved through informal negotiations. After a March 2015 protest by workers at a potash plant owned by a Chinese-Lao joint venture, managers and local officials agreed to some of the workers' demands regarding back pay.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

The courts are generally corrupt and controlled by the LPRP. Long procedural delays are common, particularly for cases dealing with public grievances. Security forces often illegally detain suspects. Torture of prisoners is occasionally reported, and prisoners must

bribe officials to obtain better food, medicine, family visits, and more humane treatment. Criminal cases often go unresolved. In January 2015, a Canadian traveler died of multiple stab wounds at a Vientiane airport under suspicious circumstances, but authorities claimed he had committed suicide.

Discrimination against members of ethnic minority tribes is common. The Hmong, who fielded a guerrilla army allied with U.S. forces during the Vietnam War, are particularly distrusted by the government and face harsh treatment. Although some Hmong who are loyal to the LPRP have been elected to the national legislature, poorer and more rural Hmong have been forced off their land to make way for extractive industries.

While same-sex sexual acts are legal and violence against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people is rare, no legislation provides explicit protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

All land is owned by the state, though citizens have rights to use it. On some occasions, the government has awarded land to citizens with government connections, money, or links to foreign companies. Dam construction, industrial expansion, and other development projects have often displaced residents without proper compensation, stoking public resentment. In June 2015, government officials reportedly threatened a group of residents in the capital with detention if they did not accept a settlement and leave their land to make way for a politically connected development firm.

Marriage to foreign citizens requires approval by the government. Although laws guarantee women many of the same rights as men, gender-based discrimination and abuse are widespread. Village-level leaders are responsible for many of the decisions affecting daily life, and nearly all village chiefs are men. Discriminatory traditions and religious practices have contributed to women's inferior access to education, employment opportunities, and worker benefits.

Trafficking in persons, especially to Thailand, is common, and Lao migrants often face forced labor abroad. Prosecutions for trafficking-related offenses declined in 2015, and enforcement is hindered by a lack of transparency and weak rule of law, but the National Assembly passed Laos's first specific antitrafficking law in December. Also during the year, international media reports noted the presence of Lao men among those working in slavery-like conditions in the region's fishing industry.

Latvia

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 1,978,096

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Riga

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

In December 2015, Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma of the Unity party resigned, following serious internal strife among the parties that comprised Latvia's governing coalition. At the year's end, the governing parties had not nominated a new prime minister. Separately, in June the Latvian parliament elected a new president, Raimonds Vējonis, of the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS). He previously served as defense minister and environment minister.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine continued to exacerbate the existing social and political divide between the country's ethnic Latvians and its sizable ethnic Russian minority. The division was also aggravated by resilient socioeconomic inequality between the groups, with unemployment higher among ethnic Russians than ethnic Latvians.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 35 / 40 (+ 1)**A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12**

The Latvian constitution provides for a unicameral, 100-seat parliament, whose members are elected to four-year terms. The parliament elects the president in a secret-ballot vote; the president serves up to two four-year terms. The prime minister is nominated by the president and approved by the parliament. Recent parliamentary elections have generally been considered free and fair. However, there were reports of vote buying during the 2014 parliamentary elections, resulting in the initiation of seven criminal investigations; at least five people were subsequently convicted in the fall of 2015.

The 2014 parliamentary elections saw a victory by the ruling, conservative coalition, which is comprised of the Unity party, ZZS, and the nationalist National Alliance. Together the three parties took 58 percent of the vote. Harmony Center, which represents the interests of Latvia's ethnic Russians as an alliance of the Socialist Party (LSP) and the Social Democratic Party (TSP), took 23 percent of the vote, compared to 28 percent in 2010. However, it still won more votes than any other single party, with one more seat in the legislature than second-place finisher Unity. Harmony is chaired by Riga's mayor, Nils Ušakovs.

Straujuma, of Unity, was confirmed as prime minister in early 2014 and remained in the post following parliamentary elections later that year. However, in December 2015, she announced her resignation, due to disagreements among coalition partners and a lack of support from Unity. Her successor had not been nominated at year's end.

In June 2015, ZZS, backed by Unity, nominated defense minister and former environment minister Vējonis to the presidency. (The incumbent, Andris Bērziņš of ZZS, had announced in April that he would not seek another term.) Voting lasted five rounds and tested the stability of the coalition government, as Vējonis's main competitor, Egils Levits, a judge for the European Court of Justice, was nominated by the National Alliance.

There has been ongoing debate on electoral reforms. In late 2014, parliament gave its initial support for direct presidential elections, referring the proposal to a parliamentary committee for further discussion. The change would require a constitutional amendment, a procedure requiring the support of two-thirds of the parliament. In February 2015, lawmakers dismissed a proposed amendment to hold presidential elections through open balloting in the parliament, rather than via the current secret ballot procedure.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

Latvia's political parties organize and compete freely. Latvian political candidates cannot run as independents, and those who belonged to communist or pro-Soviet organizations

after 1991 may not hold public office. Harmony Center and its predecessors, mostly supported by Latvia's Russian-speaking population, have never been invited to participate in a coalition government.

Residents who do not hold Latvian citizenship may not vote (including in local elections), hold public office, work in government offices, or establish political parties. Approximately 12 percent of Latvia's residents are noncitizens; most are ethnic Russians.

Under 2013 changes to Latvia's citizenship law, Latvian nationals and their descendants who emigrated to other current European Union (EU) member states due to Nazi or Soviet occupation can have dual citizenship if they can speak the Latvian language and prove that they or their ancestors lived in Latvia. Another amendment states that children of noncitizens born after August 1991 can gain Latvian citizenship if they reside in Latvia permanently and have never acquired citizenship in another state.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12 (+ 1)

Corruption remains a problem. Latvia's Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB) is tasked with fighting corruption, and it and other authorities pursued several high-profile cases in 2015. In August, Uģis Magonis, head of the state-owned Latvian railway company, was detained in connection with an alleged bribery scheme worth nearly 500,000 (\$560,000), involving a train-construction contract. In October, the Latvian Economic Police requested that the prosecutor's office begin an investigation against the Riga port authority chief, Leonīds Loginovs, as well as his deputy, for abusing their positions. In December, KNAB issued a fine against Health Minister Guntis Belēvičs for ruling in a disciplinary case in which he had a conflict of interest. Long running criminal corruption proceedings against the so-called oligarchs Aivars Lembergs and Ainārs Šlesers have stalled; in September, the general prosecutor referred the case against them back to the KNAB for further investigation. The effectiveness of KNAB itself, especially in dealing with foreign bribery, was questioned in an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report released in October, which raised "serious concerns" about the bureau's operations. The report also noted long-standing suspicions of money laundering in Latvia's financial sector.

Levels of administrative corruption have declined somewhat in recent years. Public transparency and accountability has also improved. Reforms enacted in 2012 introduced state funding of political parties and restrictions on overall party and preelection spending. In addition to these measures, in 2012, parliament amended the process to appoint judges, the prosecutor general, the KNAB director, and other positions, introducing an open vote. In 2013, the public procurement system was made more open and centralized. Latvia was ranked 40 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 51 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

The constitution protects freedom of the press. While Latvian media outlets publicize a wide range of political views in both Latvian and Russian, government offices and courts sometimes interfere with media outlets' and reporters' work. Libel remains a criminal offense. Past attacks against journalists, including the 2010 murder of Grigorijs Nēmcovs—the publisher of *Million*, a Russian-language newspaper focusing on political corruption—remain unsolved.

Financial pressures have prompted changes in ownership or in senior editorial staff at numerous media outlets in recent years. Some outlets have been forced to merge or dramatically cut costs. In recent year, the media sector has seen the increased influence of private and state-controlled Russian media. In July 2015, parliament dismissed Ainārs Dimants, the head of the National Electronic Mass Media Council (NEMMC), which both regulates broadcasting and runs public broadcasting. The move was criticized by President Vējonis, representatives of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and other actors as a politically motivated attempt to interfere with the autonomy of the NEMMC. A court overturned Dimants's dismissal in December.

Legislation introduced in 2013 banned the display of Soviet and Nazi symbols at public events. The government does not restrict the internet or monitor private online communications without obtaining the proper legal authority.

Freedom of religion is generally respected. However, in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis, social pressure on Muslims has increased. Some politicians have suggested that Latvia should not accept Muslim refugees because perceived differences in values will prevent them from integrating into Latvian society. In September, the Riga police interfered with a group of Muslims praying in one of city's courtyards, and fined the Latvian Islamic Cultural Center for holding an event without permission from the relevant authorities.

In June 2015, parliament adopted a law, initiated by Harmony Center, mandating that schools provide children a "moral education" that coincides with the values of the constitution, including traditional views of marriage and family life.

Academic freedom is generally respected. Private discussion is open and free.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are protected by law, and the government generally respects these rights in practice. The government does not restrict the activities of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Workers may establish trade unions, strike, and engage in collective bargaining.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

While judicial independence is generally respected, inefficiency, politicization, and corruption continue to be problems, and many citizens distrust both the police and the courts, according to recent polling by Transparency International. Lengthy pretrial detention remains a concern, and law enforcement officials have allegedly abused prisoners. Prisons continue to suffer from overcrowding, and many detainees have poor access to health care.

Roma face discrimination, as do LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. Latvian laws do not offer protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. In March 2015, several dozen people held a protest in Riga against a planned LGBT pride event. Under heavy security, the event took place peacefully in June.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16

Citizens and noncitizens may travel freely within the country and internationally. Latvia in recent years has implemented some reforms to improve the environment for businesses and workers, though corruption represents a major impediment to many business activities.

Women enjoy the same legal rights as men, but often face employment and wage discrimination. Domestic violence is not frequently reported, and police do not always take meaningful action when it is. Same-sex marriage was banned in 2005.

Income inequality in Latvia is high, and the welfare system is inadequate. According to Eurostat, around 31 percent of Latvia's population was at risk of social exclusion or poverty

in 2015, one of the highest rates in the EU. Unemployment is higher among ethnic Russians than ethnic Latvians. Poor economic conditions and high unemployment have prompted many young, highly educated people to leave Latvia. While the country's 2011 census showed that Latvia lost some 13 percent of its population between 2000 and 2011, emigration has slowed somewhat in recent years.

The U.S. State Department has praised Latvia for prosecuting cases of sham marriages that leave women vulnerable to sex or labor trafficking, saying its efforts helped raise awareness of the issue across Europe. However, the department found efforts to prevent other forms of human trafficking lacking, noting that there has not been a labor trafficking investigation in Latvia since 2009, nor were there any sex trafficking convictions in Latvia in 2015.

Lebanon

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 6,185,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Beirut

Freedom Rating: 4.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

The Lebanese political system remained paralyzed in 2015, with the presidency vacant since the last incumbent's term expired in May 2014 and the National Assembly's term extended twice since 2013. The two main political coalitions were unable to agree on a new president during the year, and under the legislature's 2014 term extension, National Assembly elections were not expected until 2017. A unity cabinet headed by Prime Minister Tammam Salam managed the country's affairs.

Popular frustration with the government's dysfunction was galvanized by a garbage crisis that began in July 2015, when authorities closed Beirut's main landfill without having prepared a replacement site. The accumulation of trash in the capital led to months of cross-sectarian protests that were largely organized online via new grassroots groups, the most prominent of which were "You Stink" and "We Want Accountability."

The Syrian conflict and a surge of terrorist activity in the region continued to reverberate in Lebanon in 2015. The country hosted more than a million registered Syrian refugees, straining already overburdened infrastructure and basic services. The Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah remained heavily involved in the war in support of the Syrian regime, and has lost a large number of combatants and commanders in the fighting. In January, an Israeli helicopter strike in the Syrian-held portion of the Golan Heights killed several Hezbollah members, including the son of Imad Mughniyeh, a senior militant who had been assassinated in Damascus in 2008. Hezbollah retaliated with a cross-border attack from Lebanon that killed two Israeli soldiers. However, the exchange of fire did not escalate into a wider conflict. Observers noted that Hezbollah's losses in Syria had depleted its ranks to

the point that it has been forced to deploy poorly trained fighters, including some teenaged recruits.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 13 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

The president is selected every six years by the 128-member National Assembly, which in turn is elected for four-year terms. The president and parliament nominate the prime minister, who, along with the president, chooses the cabinet, subject to parliamentary approval. The unwritten National Pact of 1943 stipulates that the president must be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the National Assembly a Shiite Muslim. Parliamentary seats are divided among major sects under a constitutional formula that does not reflect their current demographic weight. No official census has been conducted since the 1930s. The sectarian political balance has been periodically reaffirmed and occasionally modified by foreign-brokered agreements.

The most recent parliamentary elections were held in June 2009. The March 14 coalition, headed by Sunni Muslim parties, won 71 seats, while the rival March 8 coalition, backed by Shiite Hezbollah, took 57 seats. Although the elections were conducted peacefully and judged to be free and fair in some respects, vote buying was reported to be rampant, and the electoral framework retained a number of fundamental structural flaws linked to the country's sectarian political system. New elections were due in June 2013, but disagreement over electoral reforms led the parliament to extend its own term until late 2014. However, citing security concerns associated with the Syrian conflict, lawmakers that year extended their mandate again, this time until June 2017.

The presidential term of Michel Suleiman expired in May 2014, and the National Assembly was unable to agree on a replacement, leaving the presidency vacant through the end of 2015. Prime Minister Salam and his national unity government, formed in February 2014, remained in place during the year. The previous two governments had collapsed in 2011 and 2013, due in part to shifting factional alliances and rising sectarian tensions linked to the Syrian war.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 9 / 16

Two major factions, each comprising more than a dozen political parties, have dominated Lebanese politics since 2005: the March 8 coalition, of which Hezbollah is the most powerful member and which is seen as aligned with the Syrian regime, Iran, and Russia; and the March 14 bloc, which is headed by Sunni Muslims, generally supportive of the Syrian opposition, and associated with Saudi Arabia, Europe, and the United States. Christian factions are divided between the two blocs, and a predominantly Druze party has adopted positions that straddle the political divide.

Although the political system features a variety of competing parties, their activities are inhibited by periodic violence, intimidation, and entrenched patronage networks—in some cases linked to foreign funding—that make it difficult for new groups to emerge or existing groups to modify their positions or policies. Lebanese voters' political choices are also restricted by the sectarian electoral system, which discourages the rise of multiconfessional or secularist parties. The established sectarian parties are often headed by prominent families, with key positions effectively handed down from one generation to the next.

The rigid formula for allocation of elected positions ensures that nearly all recognized confessional groups are represented, but does not reflect their actual shares of the population. Refugees, including large, decades-old Palestinian communities, are not eligible for citizenship and have no political rights.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12 (-1)

Sectarian and political divisions, exacerbated by foreign interference and more recently the Syrian civil war, have frequently prevented Lebanese governments from forming and operating effectively and independently after elections. The ongoing presidential vacancy and the National Assembly's lack of an electoral mandate further undermined the government's legitimacy in 2015. The authority of the government is also limited in practice by the power of autonomous militant groups, such as Hezbollah.

The sectarian political system and the powerful role of foreign patrons effectively limit the accountability of elected officials to the public at large. Political and bureaucratic corruption is widespread, businesses routinely pay bribes and cultivate ties with politicians to win contracts, and anticorruption laws are loosely enforced. In August 2015, when the cabinet met to address the garbage crisis, it initially awarded contracts to companies with alleged links to major political leaders, leading to a public outcry and a reversal of the decision. No solution had been implemented by year's end; the government said in December that it was planning to have the waste removed by sea.

Corruption has also extended to contracts for aid to refugees. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have allegedly siphoned off funds from international agencies, with cooperation from corrupt Lebanese officials, or wasted resources on excessive salaries and benefits for senior employees. Donor concerns about corruption were believed to be one factor behind growing shortfalls in aid for Syrian refugees.

Lebanon was ranked 123 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 30 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16**

Freedom of expression and freedom of the press are guaranteed by law. However, the same laws protect the president and religious leaders from insult. The media are among the most open in the region, but nearly all outlets have ties to sectarian leaders or groups, and consequently practice self-censorship and maintain a specific, often partisan, editorial line. Censorship of books, movies, plays, and other artistic work is common, especially when the work involves politics, religion, sex, or Israel. In 2015, three comic-book editors were found guilty of insulting religion and inciting sectarian strife and fined more than \$6,000 each.

Several journalists were assaulted by police or antigovernment protesters during clashes between the two sides in August 2015. In January, prosecutors issued a warrant for the arrest of Faisal al-Qassem, host of a news program on Qatar's Al-Jazeera television network, over his alleged insults against the army and promotion of sectarian strife. In May, a journalist's mother received threats in response to her daughter's online comments criticizing the jail sentence of former information minister Michel Samaha. In September, the Hague-based UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) convicted Lebanese journalist Karma Khayat of Al-Jadeed TV on contempt-of-court charges for failing to remove reports on confidential witnesses from her station's website.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed in the constitution and protected in practice. Every group manages its own family and personal-status laws, and has its own religious courts to adjudicate such matters. Proselytizing, while not punishable by law, is strongly discouraged by religious leaders and communities, sometimes with the threat of violence. Blasphemy is a criminal offense that carries up to one year in prison.

Political strife between religious groups has persisted to some extent since the 1975–90 civil war, and such differences—particularly between Sunnis and Shiites—have again been exacerbated by the civil war in Syria. However, in June 2015, the venerable Beirut-based Sunni philanthropic organization Al-Makassed issued the Beirut Declaration on Religious Freedom. The declaration, responding to anti-Christian violence in the region by the Islamic State (IS) militant group and other extremists, reiterated Christians’ right to religious freedom and noted that no one should be forced to convert or be persecuted for their beliefs.

Academic freedom is generally unimpaired, though defamation and blasphemy laws could deter open debate. Private discussion is similarly uninhibited. However, the government reportedly monitors social media, and users occasionally face arrests, short detentions, or fines for their remarks. In October 2015, political activist Michel Douaihy was detained for nine days and fined \$200 for Facebook comments that were deemed defamatory, and journalist Mohammed Nazzal was sentenced in absentia to six months in jail and fined over \$650 for criticizing the judiciary, also on Facebook.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12

The constitution guarantees the freedoms of assembly and association, and the government generally respects these rights, though police have cracked down in the past on demonstrations against the government or the Syrian regime. The garbage-related protests between August and October 2015 featured clashes between police and demonstrators. Demonstrators were also assaulted on some occasions by supporters of the political leaders they criticized. One protester reportedly died in August, and hundreds were injured. All of those arrested during the protests were released by year’s end, though an unknown number still faced possible charges. The movement gradually subsided amid disagreement over its goals and tactics.

Civil society organizations have long operated openly in Lebanon, with some constraints. All NGOs must be registered with the Interior Ministry. The ministry may force an NGO to undergo an approval process and investigate its founders, and representatives of the ministry must be invited to observe voting on bylaws and boards of directors.

Trade unions are often tightly linked to political organizations, and in recent years they have been subordinate to their political partners. The Palestinian population of Lebanon, estimated at about 400,000, is not permitted to participate in trade unions. Foreign and Lebanese household workers, who are not protected by the labor code, have been trying to establish a union, but the move was denounced as illegal by the country’s labor minister in early 2015.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

Political forces hold sway in practice over the formally independent judiciary. The Supreme Judicial Council is composed of 10 judges, eight of whom are nominated by the president and the cabinet. Other judges are nominated by the council, approved by the Justice Ministry, and vetted by opposition and government parties.

While the regular judiciary generally follows international standards of criminal procedure, these standards are not followed in the military courts, which have been tasked with cases against Islamist militants, human rights activists, and alleged Israeli spies. Some detainees have been held without trial since 2007 in overcrowded prisons. Videos posted on social media in June 2015 showed guards beating inmates in Roumieh prison, prompting protests by inmates’ relatives and supporters. Also during the year, Roumieh prison suffered from security crackdowns and riots by prisoners calling for better living conditions.

Security threats and militant activity related to the Syrian civil war persisted in 2015. Among other violent incidents during the year, suicide bombings claimed by the Qaeda-affiliated Syrian militant group Jabhat al-Nusra killed nine people in an Alawite-populated area of Tripoli in January. In April, police killed two militants with alleged links to Jabhat al-Nusra during the arrest of a radical cleric, also in Tripoli. Another fugitive Sunni extremist cleric, Ahmed al-Assir, was arrested in Beirut in August. A bombing attributed to IS killed several Sunni clerics in the town of Aarsal who helped negotiate a prisoner exchange between the government and Jabhat al-Nusra, which went forward in December. Suicide bombings claimed by IS later in November killed more than 40 people in a Shiite area of Beirut.

The roughly 400,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon are denied citizenship rights and also face certain restrictions on economic activity. Most Iraqi and Sudanese refugees do not enjoy official refugee status and thus face arbitrary detention, deportation, harassment, and abuse. In January 2015, the Directorate of General Security published elaborate criteria regulating the entry of Syrian nationals into Lebanon and imposed visa restrictions for the first time in an attempt to sharply reduce the number of incoming Syrian refugees. Most Syrian refugees live in extreme poverty; there are no formal camps for Syrians in Lebanon.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face both official and societal discrimination and harassment. The penal code prescribes up to one year in prison for “sexual intercourse against nature,” though this is rarely enforced. NGOs work to uphold the human rights of LGBT people, and social acceptance is more common in urban and cosmopolitan areas, particularly in Beirut.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

Impediments to freedom of movement include de facto sectarian boundaries in some areas and curfews on Syrian refugees in many municipalities. Palestinian refugees face restrictions on employment and property ownership. A 2010 law allowed them access to social security benefits, end-of-service compensation, and the right to bring complaints before labor courts, but closed off access to skilled professions.

Women are granted equal rights in the constitution, but they are disadvantaged under the sectarian personal-status laws on issues such as divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Under a 1925 law, women cannot pass their nationality to non-Lebanese husbands or children. A 2014 law that criminalized domestic violence failed to criminalize spousal rape.

Both Lebanese and foreign nationals are subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking in Lebanon. Refugees and foreign household workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation. Authorities often arrest victims of trafficking for crimes committed as a result of their being trafficked.

Lesotho

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 1,924,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Maseru

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Status Change, Ratings Change: Lesotho's political rights rating declined from 2 to 3, and its status declined from Free to Partly Free, due to continued instability stemming from a failed coup attempt in 2014.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

The political and security environments deteriorated in Lesotho in 2015, which was marked by the killing of a former army commander amid a Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) operation, and the flight to South Africa of prominent opposition members who claimed that elements within the LDF were plotting to kill them. The crisis emerged in August 2014, when then prime minister Thomas Thabane replaced LDF lieutenant general Tlali Kamoli with Maaparankoe Mahao. On the same day, General Kamoli attempted to oust Thabane, the head of the All Basotho Convention (ABC), in a failed coup. In an attempt to bring stability to the country, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) assisted in organizing February 2015 parliamentary elections, following which Pakalitha Mosisili of the Democratic Congress (DC) became the new prime minister. In May, former prime minister Thabane; leader of the Basotho National Party (BNP) Thesele 'Maseribane; and the leader of the Reformed Congress of Lesotho (RCL), Keketso Rantšo, fled to South Africa, alleging that elements within the LDF were plotting to kill them.

After Mosisili, Thabane's predecessor, retook leadership, he reinstated General Kamoli, who he had initially appointed head of the LDF in 2012, after demoting Mahao. In June 2015, Mahao was killed in what the LDF called an arrest operation. Opposition leaders and civil society label the killing an assassination ordered by Kamoli in retaliation for allegedly plotting a mutiny.

Lesotho is one of the world's largest per capita recipients of overseas development aid, with 11 percent of national income derived from aid. Ongoing political instability in the country threatens the continuance of aid from the United States, Lesotho's top donor.

The Lesotho government declared a state of emergency in December 2015 after two consecutive crop failures left an estimated 650,000 people, according to authorities, at risk of severe hunger. Lesotho has an adult HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of approximately one in four, higher than only Swaziland, with more than half of those infected being women. The government offers free HIV testing, and 23 percent of those infected are on antiretroviral treatment.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 28 / 40 (-2)

A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12

Lesotho is a constitutional monarchy. King Letsie III serves as ceremonial head of state. The lower house of Parliament, the National Assembly, has 120 seats; 80 are filled

through first-past-the-post constituency votes, and the remaining 40 through proportional representation. Members serve five-year terms, and the leader of the majority party becomes the prime minister. The Senate—the upper house of Parliament—consists of 22 principal chiefs who wield considerable authority in rural areas and whose membership is hereditary, along with 11 other members appointed by the king and acting on the advice of the Council of State.

International and local observers praised the conduct of the snap parliamentary election held in February 2015, saying poll workers and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) had been well-prepared, and that the election was free and had taken place peacefully. However, observers expressed some concern about voter registration processes and the credibility of voter rolls.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 12 / 16

Lesotho is a multiparty democracy in which political parties frequently create coalitions to form a government. However, the ongoing crisis has severely disrupted political life.

The February 2015 snap elections were closely contested, with the DC taking 47 seats to the ABC's 46. The Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) won 12 seats; the BNP won 7, and the remaining seats went to smaller parties. The DC formed a government with the support of smaller coalition partners, and Mosisili became prime minister. In May 2015, Thabane fled to South Africa, claiming that members of the LDF sought to kill him. BNP leader Thesele Maseribane, and the leader of the RCL, Keketso Rantšo, also fled, saying they feared for their lives due to a crackdown on opposition by Mosisili. Remaining opposition members were boycotting the parliament at the year's end, demanding Kamoli's removal and the safe return of opposition leaders to the country.

No laws prevent minorities from serving in the government, but in 2015 there were no member of minority groups serving in either legislative chamber or in the cabinet.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12 (–2)

Lesotho remained in crisis in 2015, with politics entangled in disputes among factions of the security forces. Opposition leaders remained in self-imposed exile at the year's end, while opposition lawmakers who had stayed in Lesotho were boycotting the parliament.

According to the African Peer Review Mechanism, corruption is rife in all sectors of government and public services, and cronyism is prevalent in state bidding procedures. Since 2012, all government officials must declare their financial interests as a condition of office, though implementation remains a challenge. In a positive development, in August 2015, it emerged that Lesotho's anticorruption agency was probing the circumstances surrounding the exorbitant salary paid to Masupha Sole, a close acquaintance of the king, who had been reappointed as an adviser to the Lesotho Highlands Water Project after serving nine years in prison for corruption in the same project.

Authorities are not accountable to the electorate. The ruling coalition in 2015 governed without input from the opposition. Factions of the military have great influence over political structures. Lesotho was ranked 61 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 39 / 60 (–2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

Freedoms of speech and the press are generally respected, and independent newspapers and radio stations routinely criticize the government. However, two journalists fled Lesotho

in July 2015, citing threats from LDF members; the country's communications minister claimed that the journalists fled because the opposition was using them to sow instability in the country, and that they feared being arrested. Despite the fact that state-owned print and broadcast media tend to reflect the views of the ruling party, Lesotho has seen a significant amount of media coverage of corrupt officials. Two of the three main newspapers in the country are owned by the same person. The government does not restrict internet access, though only a small fraction of residents have access due to infrastructure and socioeconomic constraints. During the attempted coup, radio and television stations were temporarily jammed.

Lesotho is a predominantly Christian country, and freedom of religion is widely observed. The government does not restrict academic freedom.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are generally respected, though demonstrations are sometimes broken up violently. Local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate without restrictions. While labor rights are constitutionally guaranteed, the union movement is weak and fragmented. Many employers in the textile sector—Lesotho's largest formal employer—face obstacles when trying to join unions.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16 (–2)

Courts are nominally independent, but higher courts are subject to outside influence. The large backlog of cases often leads to trial delays and lengthy pretrial detention. In 2014 the courts were temporarily suspended following the coup attempt, though they were once again operating in 2015.

Mahao's death during an LDF operation and officials' subsequent reluctance to cooperate with a SADC investigation of the events underscored the deterioration of the rule of law in Lesotho in 2015. In July 2015, the SADC Double Troika, a body comprised of officials from Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, Malawi, and Lesotho, created an independent commission of inquiry in order to investigate the death of Mahao, as well as Prime Minister Mosisili's promotion of General Kamoli following his demotion by former prime minister Thabane. The head of the commission, Judge Mphaphi Phumaphi of Botswana, announced in October 2015 that he would complete his inquiry early, after Mosisili and army officials proved generally uncooperative. For example, General Kamoli refused to publicly answer the commission's questions, citing national security grounds, while Mosisili attempted to expand the terms of the probe to include the actions Thabane had taken during his tenure as prime minister. Moreover, government representatives criticized the commission for hearing testimony from opposition figures, including Thabane. Some opposition members who testified before the commission did so from South Africa, evidently still reluctant to return to Lesotho out of concern for their safety.

The SADC had yet to publish the probe's results at the year's end. In December 2015, the government initiated a legal challenge of the commission's report, arguing interviews with self-exiled opposition figures conducted in South Africa were outside of the commission's jurisdiction, and that the country's Public Inquiries Act obliged the SADC to submit the results directly to Prime Minister Mosisili. Observers expressed concern that if the report were not released publicly, parts of it could be censored by the government before being introduced to the parliament.

In a related development, in October 2015, the High Court ruled that 23 soldiers who had been court-martialed by the LDF after Mahao's dismissal in connection with the alleged

mutiny plot be released on military bail and allowed to collaborate with the SADC commission. In December 2015, after preliminary arguments, the court martial was postponed to February 2016.

Opposition figures, journalists, and lawyers fled the country in 2015, citing fear for their lives amid a crackdown by Kamoli on any perceived support for Thabane. There have been reports that the soldiers held in connection with the alleged mutiny plot were tortured while in LDF custody. Mistreatment of civilians by security forces reportedly continues. Prisons are dilapidated, severely overcrowded, and lack essential health services. An independent ombudsman's office is tasked with protecting citizens' rights, but its enforcement powers are weak. The death penalty, although not used since 1995, is still legal in Lesotho for crimes of rape, murder, and treason. The 23 soldiers arrested on mutiny charges could be sentenced to death if found guilty.

While female same-sex sexual activity is allowed, male same-sex "sodomy" is illegal; reportedly the law has never been enforced. Still, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals face societal discrimination, and individuals experiencing discrimination as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity are not protected under the constitution. In recent years, a local gay rights advocacy group has organized a gay pride march through Maseru, the capital.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

The constitution protects free movement within Lesotho and the freedom to leave the country.

Many women have taken on senior political and economic positions, including in government and senior management. The constitution of Lesotho guarantees the right to equality and nondiscrimination on the basis of gender, but customary practice and law still restricts women's rights in areas such as property, inheritance, and marriage and divorce.

The trafficking of men, women, and children for the purpose of forced labor or prostitution remains a problem, though authorities made some efforts to better prosecute trafficking cases in 2015. Antitrafficking efforts are underfunded, and most victim assistance programs are operated by NGOs.

Liberia

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 4,503,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Monrovia

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Following a severe 2014 outbreak of the Ebola virus in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, the World Health Organization declared Liberia free of Ebola virus transmission in

May 2015. The announcement followed a change in government strategy in late 2014 that favored community engagement over coercive tactics in combatting the virus. The success of government-led community engagement is widely credited with Ebola's early decline in Liberia, compared to neighboring countries. As flare-ups continued through the end of 2015, communities remained vigilant and cooperative.

Personal autonomy and individual rights improved in 2015 following the cessation of the Ebola crisis and the lifting of restrictions imposed under an associated state of emergency, including border closures, a curfew, and bans on gatherings. Recent rulings by the nation's highest court reflected increased judicial independence and courts' increased willingness to intervene to protect people's rights. However, petty corruption and a lack of capacity within the justice and security sectors remained major impediments to the rule of law.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 28 / 40 (+ 2)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

The bicameral legislature consists of a 30-member Senate and a 73-member House of Representatives; senators are elected to nine-year terms, and representatives to six-year terms. Staggered senatorial elections were introduced in 2011. The president can serve up to two six-year terms.

In the 2011 parliamentary elections, incumbent president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Unity Party (UP) secured a plurality of 24 seats in the House and 4 of the 15 seats at stake in the Senate. The opposition Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) placed second with 11 House seats and 2 Senate seats. Several smaller parties and independents divided the remainder. In the concurrent presidential race, Sirleaf captured 44 percent of the vote, while the CDC's Winston Tubman took 32 percent, and Prince Johnson of the National Union for Democratic Progress secured 12 percent. Sirleaf was reelected after winning 91 percent of the vote in a runoff, leaving Tubman with only 9 percent. Although opposition members alleged fraud and corruption, international and local observers found that the elections had been comparatively free, fair, and peaceful, with isolated incidents of violence before and after the voting. The government briefly shut down radio and television stations with perceived pro-CDC biases before the vote.

Elections to 15 of Liberia's 30 Senate seats were held in December 2014 after several months of delay due to the Ebola crisis. Despite the presence of strict health protocols for voters, turnout was depressed by fears of Ebola. The election resulted in major losses for incumbent politicians in general and the UP in particular, attributed to widespread discontent with the government's past handling of the Ebola crisis. The UP held just 8 seats in the body after the polls. The CDC and NPP were left with 4 Senate seats each after votes were tabulated, with the remainder of seats held by smaller parties or independents, except for a single seat that was left vacant.

Although beset with restrictions under the state of emergency, the 2014 Senate elections were deemed "free, fair, credible, and transparent" by an observer mission from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Following the election, some losing candidates filed fraud complaints, but all such claims were resolved through National Electoral Commission procedures or by the Supreme Court.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 12 / 16 (+ 1)

Political parties do not face undue legal or practical obstacles that prevent them from operating. Opposition parties hold significant support among the population and, in the

2014 Senate elections, demonstrated the ability to convert this support into political power. Allegations of undue influence or pressure on voters by powerful groups are rare.

Ethnic and religious minority groups generally enjoy full political rights and electoral opportunities, though some minorities—especially the Mandingo and Fulani peoples—continue to be stigmatized as outsiders. Candidates occasionally exploit these biases to rally their constituents. Additionally, members of Lebanese and Asian minority groups whose families have lived in Liberia for several generations are denied citizenship, and therefore may not vote or participate in the political process.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12 (+ 1)

Once elected, winning candidates are duly installed in office. Elected legislators generally operate without interference from nonstate actors, foreign governments, or unelected officials.

Liberia boasts a number of institutions devoted to fighting corruption—including the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC), the General Auditing Commission, and the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission—but they lack the resources and capacity to function effectively, and corruption remains pervasive. According to a November 2015 report by Transparency International, perceptions of corruption in Liberia are among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. Widespread government distrust is thought to have contributed to the spread of Ebola in 2014, as there was low support for government-backed control policies and preventative measures.

President Sirleaf has been repeatedly accused of nepotism when filling lucrative bureaucratic posts within her administration. Charles Sirleaf, one of her sons, holds a senior position at the central bank, while Fumba Sirleaf, another son, remains in place as head of the National Security Agency. In 2014, the LACC launched an investigation into claims that the National Oil Company of Liberia (NOCAL), under the leadership of Robert Sirleaf, a third son, had bribed government officials to ensure passage of favorable legislation. (Robert Sirleaf had resigned from the NOCAL chairmanship in 2013.) While the government has taken steps to address corruption at NOCAL, which was nearing bankruptcy in 2015, progress has been slow.

Liberia was the first African state to comply with Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) rules governing natural-resource extraction, and in 2015 it remained EITI compliant.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 33 / 60 (+ 3)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 10 / 16

Liberia hosts a variety of newspapers, which publish mainly in the capital; numerous radio stations operate across the country. The government does not restrict internet access, but poor infrastructure and high costs limit usage to a small fraction of the population. The Freedom of Information Act is rarely used, and government responsiveness to requests tends to be slow. Liberia has long been criticized for its onerous criminal and civil libel laws, which are used to harass and intimidate journalists; in recent years, journalists and outlets have been financially crippled by large damage awards stemming from civil libel suits.

In August 2015, the Supreme Court ordered authorities to lift a ban on the *National Chronicle* newspaper, which was implemented in 2014 after it had published conspiracy theories about the Ebola virus. The government had said the ban was a necessary security measure, but the court ruled that its continued closure “long after the state of emergency is a violation of the [journalists’] rights not supported by the laws.”

Media workers risk intimidation and physical attacks. In August 2015, the Press Union of Liberia condemned two separate instances in which police officers had rough-handled journalists covering events in Monrovia and Kakata, resulting in minor injuries. Although these instances appear to reflect misconduct by low-level officers rather than any deliberate government policy of suppressing freedom of expression, they are nonetheless concerning.

Religious freedom is protected in the constitution, and there is no official religion. Liberia is, however, a de facto Christian state, and the Muslim minority frequently reports discrimination. In 2015, a proposal to amend the constitution in order to establish Christianity as the official state religion was decried by Muslim leaders and contributed to interreligious tensions. The proposal appears to have support of numerous lawmakers, though President Sirleaf has indicated that she will not back it.

The government does not restrict academic freedom, though educational quality and infrastructure remain grossly inadequate. The government reopened schools in February 2015, after being closed for six months due to the Ebola crisis.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12 (+ 1)

Freedom of association improved in 2015 following the cessation of the Ebola crisis and the lifting of restrictions imposed under the state of emergency, including the ban on gatherings, curfew, and border closures.

Outside of crisis, freedom of association is constitutionally guaranteed and largely respected. Numerous civil society groups, including human rights organizations, operate in the country. The rights of workers to strike, organize, and bargain collectively are recognized, but labor laws remain in need of reform. Labor disputes often turn violent, particularly at the country's various mines and rubber plantations. In May 2015, local workers and villagers demonstrated against the Golden Veroleum oil palm developer in Sinoe County to protest poor working conditions and land scarcity. The demonstration escalated into violence when protestors broke through the company gates, resulting in nearly \$740,000 in property damage and serious injuries to several administrators.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16 (+ 1)

Constitutional provisions guarantee an independent judiciary. Although petty corruption and backlogs remain major impediments to justice, recent rulings by the nation's highest court point to increased judicial independence and increased willingness to intervene to protect people's rights. In December 2014, the Supreme Court ruled the president's ban on political rallies unconstitutional; in August 2015, it overruled the government's controversial ban on the *National Chronicle*; and in December 2015, the Court issued a stay against demolitions in Monrovia by the mayor's controversial "Beautification Taskforce." (The stay order was lifted 8 days after it was implemented, with Justice in Chambers Kabineh Ja'neh warning officials against demolishing property during the cleanup process.) The Supreme Court adjudicated allegations of fraud in the 2014 Senate elections without allegations of political interference.

Lower-level courts, however, continue to struggle to provide justice to ordinary citizens. Corruption remains rampant, judges are subject to interference, and courts are hamstrung by case backlogs. In addition, lack of discipline, absenteeism, and corruption continue to plague the police and armed forces, hampering their ability to enforce laws and bring justice to those who have been the victims of crimes. As a result, many in Liberia turn to extrajudicial means of justice. In late September 2015, angry residents in Ganta, Nimba County, attacked a local police station and other buildings in the wake of several

unsolved murders widely believed to have been ritual killings; a suspected perpetrator of one of the murders was reportedly killed in the unrest. In March, businesses and homes in the town of Zorzor belonging to members of the Mandingo ethnic group were damaged by rioters, following the murder in Zorzor of a woman from nearby Fissibu, an ethnically Lorma town.

Prisons are notorious for inadequate medical care, food, and sanitation; lax security; and prolonged pretrial detentions. One man detained in aftermath of the May 2015 unrest at the Golden Veroleum palm tree nursery died while in detention, under unclear circumstances.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face social stigma and the threat of violence and harassment. Under the penal code, “voluntary sodomy” is a misdemeanor offense that can carry up to a year in prison. At the end of 2015, two people were being held on sodomy allegations, one of whom had been in pretrial detention for more than three years, according to the U.S. State Department.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16 (+ 1)

Personal autonomy and individual rights improved in 2015 following the cessation of the Ebola crisis and the lifting of restrictions imposed under the state of emergency, including the ban on gatherings, curfew, and border closures. The lifting of restrictions coincided with a shift in strategy toward community engagement and persuasion that is widely credited with Ebola’s early decline in Liberia relative to neighboring countries.

Conflicts over land access and ownership remain pervasive. Many of these conflicts originated in the civil wars and subsequent internal migration, displacement, and resettlement. Others are the result of opaque concession agreements granting foreign corporations access to lands for production of tropical timber, palm oil, and other products. A 2012 estimate by Global Witness suggested that as much as a quarter of the country’s land mass had been granted to logging companies over the previous two years through licenses that allowed the companies to bypass environmental and social safeguards. A 2015 report by Global Witness criticized the government for helping the palm oil company Golden Veroleum pressure local communities to enter into concession agreements with little understanding of their terms and conditions. In addition, mechanisms for compensating local communities in concession areas remain inadequate and have led to violent protests.

Women are underrepresented in government, comprising only 11 percent of the House of Representatives and 7 percent of the Senate, though an electoral law passed in 2014 mandates that neither men nor women can comprise more than 70 percent of the candidates listed by any political party. While men and women enjoy equal legal rights under civil law, customary law remains dominant in many parts of the country, especially in rural areas, creating gender discrepancies in access to land, custody of children, and impartial adjudication of disputes.

Violence against women and children, particularly rape, is a pervasive problem. A 2013 UN Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report found that two-thirds of Liberian women have undergone female genital mutilation, and a 2014 report by the Overseas Development Institute described rates of sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia as “extremely high.”

Human trafficking for the purpose of forced labor and prostitution remains a problem in Liberia, with most victims trafficked from Liberia’s rural areas to its cities. Many trafficking victims are children, who can be found working in diamond mines, agricultural operations, or as domestic laborers, or engaged in forced begging or prostitution.

Libya

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 6,317,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Tripoli

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,6,NF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

Four years since the downfall of longtime dictator Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi, Libya remained embroiled in political stalemate and a civil war involving hundreds of rival armed groups in 2015. Over 1,000 people were killed in fighting across the country during the year. Important infrastructure has been damaged during the conflict, and more than 400,000 residents of affected cities and towns have been displaced since mid-2014. Amid the security vacuum and a breakdown in law and order, the Islamic State (IS) militant group steadily gained ground, and consolidated a hub in Sirte.

Two competing governments, each with their own parliaments and allied military forces, claim legitimacy: the House of Representatives (HoR), which is based in the eastern city of Tubruk and enjoys widespread international recognition, and the Tripoli-based General National Congress (GNC). Beginning in January 2015, the United Nations led a political dialogue process aimed at establishing a government of national accord; the negotiations involve members of the competing governments, political party representatives, civil society and women's rights activists, and local council members. In November, GNC and HoR figures opposed to the UN-backed talks spearheaded a parallel, so-called Libyan-Libyan dialogue. In December, representatives from the GNC and HoR signed a UN-brokered agreement that outlined the formation of a national unity government under the leadership of Prime Minister Fayez Serraj, a GNC member. Under the agreement, the HoR would act as a primary legislature, while GNC members would comprise most of a new State Council, a secondary consultative body. The agreement is meant to be in effect until the adoption of a constitution and the subsequent holding of new parliamentary elections. However, neither the HoR nor the GNC had voted to approve the deal at the year's end, with hardliners on both sides deeming its terms unacceptable. Meanwhile, the United Nations has been unable to facilitate a security agreement between the warring parties.

Meanwhile, Libya's Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA), which is based in Al-Bayda and appears to enjoy the recognition of both the GNC and HoR, released a preliminary draft constitution in October.

Oil production, the main source of revenue, has declined massively amid sustained unrest, and the financial situation is deteriorating. The Central Bank and state-owned National Oil Company, both headquartered in Tripoli, remained contested, with attempts to set up parallel institutions in eastern Libya.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 6 / 40 (–2)

A. Electoral Process: 4 / 12 (–1)

An August 2011 constitutional declaration, issued by an unelected National Transitional Council, serves as the governing document for the ongoing transitional period between the

revolution and the adoption of a permanent constitution. The first national legislative elections, in 2012, established the 200-member GNC, which approved a prime minister and cabinet and was tasked with appointing a body that would draft a new constitution. In February 2013, the GNC decided that the drafting panel would be directly elected instead, and in July of that year it passed an electoral law for the 60-member Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA), with equal representation for Libya's three historic regions: Fazzan in the south, Tripolitania in the west, and Cyrenaica in the east. The High National Election Commission (HNEC), established as a permanent body by the GNC, carried out the constitutional committee elections in 2014. Only 1.1 million Libyans registered to vote, compared with 2.8 million for the 2012 GNC elections, reflecting mounting frustrations with insecurity, government performance, and the pace of the political transition. Moreover, the Amazigh (Berber) minority boycotted the vote on the grounds of unfair representation, and security problems prevented polling stations from operating in many other districts. As a result, 13 of the 60 seats could not be filled.

In March 2014, the GNC approved the seventh amendment to the 2011 constitutional declaration to allow for the election of a new Libyan parliament, the HoR. Despite a military campaign launched by General Khalifa Haftar and his Operation Dignity coalition that May, the HNEC announced that the HoR elections would take place in June, leaving less than a month to prepare for voter education and campaigning. Only 630,000 Libyans cast votes, and security problems in some areas meant that 12 of the 200 seats remained vacant. All candidates were required to run as independents. While the amendment to the constitutional declaration indicated that the HoR would meet in the second-largest city of Benghazi, ongoing fighting there led elected members to relocate to Tubruk, the headquarters of Operation Dignity. Of the 188 members, 158 attended the inaugural session in August 2014, and most foreign governments endorsed the newly elected HoR as the GNC's replacement.

Meanwhile, the 30 members who boycotted the Tubruk session filed a case with the constitutional circuit of the Libyan Supreme Court to challenge the validity of the new legislature. A rump GNC dominated by Islamist members, meeting in Tripoli in August 2014, appointed Omar al-Hassi as the prime minister of a national salvation government, while the HoR reappointed Abdullah al-Thinni that September. In November 2014, the Supreme Court struck down the seventh amendment of the constitutional declaration, which opponents of the HoR took to mean that the new parliament was invalid, and the GNC remained in office.

Much of 2015 was characterized by the political deadlock between the competing GNC and HoR governments and their security coalitions, with each side also reeling from its own internal divisions and grappling with the role and influence of armed groups. The number of representatives attending the GNC and HoR sessions was difficult to ascertain in 2015, as neither body took great efforts to ensure transparency on governance and decision-making. In March, a GNC spokesperson announced that the GNC had voted to dismiss al-Hassi, with some media reports suggesting that he had lied to GNC representatives about government revenues. The GNC then appointed Khalifa al-Ghwell as the new prime minister. In December, the GNC approved a cabinet reshuffle that saw the number of ministers fall from 24 to 12 plus Prime Minister Ghwell. Meanwhile, in the east, there were reports of tensions between General Haftar and HoR prime minister al-Thinni. In October, two weeks before its mandate was to expire, the HoR voted to extend its constitutional term for six months. At the end of 2015, both governments refused to approve the UN-brokered Libyan political agreement that representatives from each had signed on December 17.

Throughout 2015 both sides appeared to recognize the legitimacy of the al-Bayda-based CDA, which in October released a draft constitution. However, at year's end the charter had yet to be approved by all CDA members.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16 (– 1)

More than 100 parties or lists spanning the political spectrum, from socialists to Islamists, organized to participate in the 2012 GNC elections, marking a clear departure from the Qadhafi era, during which political parties were illegal and all independent political activity was banned. However, the legitimacy and integrity of the new parties steadily eroded, and all candidates in the 2014 elections were required to run as independents. Civilian politics and public participation were further marginalized by and subordinated to armed groups, as the two opposing military coalitions fought for control of the country and against extremist forces, including IS, which rejects both sides and has established a presence in some areas.

Throughout 2015, political life in Libya was suspended in the gridlock of competing eastern and western governments trapped in zero-sum politics. However, representatives from a number of political parties participated in the UN-facilitated dialogue process. Former Qadhafi regime members were notably absent from the talks.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

Neither of the country's rival political and military camps constituted an effective national government in 2015. Even before the rift between the HoR and GNC opened in 2014, the authority of elected officials was limited due to underdeveloped state institutions and the presence of autonomous regional armed groups, which by some counts number more than 1,700.

Corruption has long been pervasive in both the private sector and the government. Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Libya at 161 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed. The fall of the Qadhafi regime initially raised hopes that the level of graft would decline, but oil interests, foreign governments, smuggling syndicates, and armed groups still wield undue influence, especially in the south, and opportunities for corruption abound in the absence of effective fiscal, judicial, and commercial institutions.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 14 / 60 (– 1)**D. Freedom of Expression: 6 / 16**

The fall of the Qadhafi regime lifted restrictions on the long-repressed media sector. Citizen journalism became more common, and media outlets ranging from satellite television and radio stations to print publications multiplied in number. However, media freedom is increasingly limited by political and criminal violence that has made objective reporting more dangerous. Many journalists and media outlets have censored themselves or ceased operations to avoid retribution by armed groups. Threats and violent reprisals for reporting have prompted a growing number of journalists to flee the country.

Post-Qadhafi authorities have sometimes sought to curb free expression. While the Supreme Court in 2012 struck down a law that would have restricted any speech deemed insulting to the country's people and institutions, in 2014 the GNC promulgated legislation that criminalized "harming" the 2011 revolution. Authorities are not known to monitor the internet, but the GNC has in the past directed a state internet service provider to turn over certain data, and to ban access to websites that hosted content dealing with Christianity or atheism, or which were deemed pornographic.

Nearly all Libyans are Sunni Muslims, but Christians form a small minority, with most hailing from neighboring countries. Some Salafi Muslim groups, whose beliefs reject the veneration of saints, have destroyed or vandalized Sufi Muslim shrines. Coptic Christian

communities have been targeted by armed groups, including IS. The International Commission of Jurists in a December 2015 report said the draft constitution released in October failed to protect the rights of all religious groups.

Close state supervision of education ended along with Qadhafi's regime. However, laws guaranteeing academic freedom have not yet been passed, and many school schedules have been disrupted due to a breakdown in the rule of law. Benghazi schools closed in mid-2014, for example, though some had reopened by the end of 2015.

Although open and free private discussion improved dramatically after 2011, the ongoing hostilities have taken their toll, with many Libyans withdrawing from political life or avoiding criticism of powerful actors.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

A 2012 law on freedom of assembly is generally compatible with international human rights principles, and a number of protests have taken place in recent years. However, fighting and related disorder seriously deter peaceful assemblies in many areas. In 2015, there was a wave of politicized demonstrations against the UN-led talks, including an October protest in Benghazi at which at least five people were killed when unidentified attackers fired mortar rounds at the crowd. In June, gunmen shot and killed seven people at a protest in the eastern city of Derna against the presence of IS and foreign fighters who had traveled to Libya to join it. In August, several dozen Qadhafi supporters staged a rally in Benghazi, which was broken up when opponents fired guns at the crowd.

A multitude of domestic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) formed after the 2011 revolution. However, the number of active NGOs has since declined due to both the increased threat against activists and the departure of international donors. Armed groups with varying political, tribal, and geographic affiliations have targeted civil society activists with impunity. Many NGO workers have fled abroad or ceased their activism in the wake of grave threats to themselves or their families.

Trade unions, previously outlawed, have made small strides since 2011, but they are in their organizational infancy and have received little recognition.

F. Rule of Law: 1 / 16

The role of the judiciary remains unclear without a permanent constitution. Its functioning is severely hampered by ongoing fighting and insecurity, as well as by politicization. Criminal justice mechanisms are fragmented or nonoperational, leaving victims with few avenues for recourse. In some cases, nonstate dispute mechanisms have filled the void. Judges, prosecutors, and police officers have faced threats and attacks.

Investigations into a large number of cases involving torture and extrajudicial executions before and during the 2011 revolution, including the killing of Qadhafi, have made little progress. Thousands of individuals remain in the custody of militia or government groups despite the absence of any formal trial or sentencing. In July 2015, a Tripoli court ruled on cases against 37 senior Qadhafi regime officials charged with involvement in crimes committed during the 2011 conflict. The former dictator's son Saif al-Islam Qadhafi, former intelligence chief Abdullah al-Senussi, former prime minister Baghdadi al-Mahmoudi, and six other defendants were sentenced to death by firing squad. Eight additional defendants were sentenced to life in prison, while other officials found guilty received sentences of between 5 and 12 years in prison; 4 people were acquitted. The United Nations and human rights groups expressed concern over the proceedings' conduct, saying that those charged were not guaranteed the right to an adequate defense, that some had made

confessions under torture, and that defendants were convicted without the prosecution producing documents or calling any witnesses.

Libya's warring militias operate with little regard for civilian lives. The war's main battleground has been Benghazi, though fighting has taken place across the country. Both the HoR and GNC's claims to power depend on the maintenance of tenuous local alliances, and neither is able to provide security for residents. According to a November 2015 report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), IS has carried out summary executions on the basis of political and religious beliefs. The report added that all parties fighting in Libya may be violating international humanitarian law through actions such as the indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas, abduction of citizens, torture, executions, and the destruction of property. In November, rival ethnic tribes from southern Libya signed a cease-fire agreement in Qatar following yearlong fighting in the southern city of Awbari.

Libyans from certain tribes and communities—often those perceived as pro-Qadhafi—have faced discrimination, violence, and displacement since 2011. Migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa have also been subject to discrimination and mistreatment, particularly at the hands of armed groups. There are reports of discrimination against the Tebu and Tuareg minorities in the south, particularly in employment, housing, education, and other services.

Under Libya's penal code, sexual activity between members of the same sex is punishable by up to five years in prison. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face severe discrimination and harassment, and have been targeted by militant groups. In May 2015 there were reports that three men accused of being gay had been executed in Derna by IS.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16 (–1)

The 2011 constitutional declaration guarantees freedom of movement, but violence has disrupted normal activity in major cities. Airports in Benghazi, Tripoli, Sabha, and Misrata have been attacked and destroyed, severely limiting access to air travel. As of September 2015, UNHCR estimated that 435,000 people were internally displaced in Libya, and hundreds of thousands have reportedly sought safety in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt. Government and militia checkpoints also restrict movement within Libya, while poor security conditions more generally affect movement as well as access to work and education.

While Libyans have the right to own property and can start businesses, regulations and protections are not upheld in practice. The World Bank's 2015 *Doing Business* report ranked Libya 188 out of 189 economies surveyed. Businesses and homes have been confiscated by militants, particularly in Libya's eastern regions and in Benghazi.

Threats and harassment against women, especially female activists, are reportedly increasing. The GNC has made limited efforts to address gender inequality, but formal legal changes have yet to be enacted.

Forced labor and sexual exploitation are widespread among trafficking victims from sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere. Libya lacks comprehensive laws criminalizing human trafficking, and the authorities have been either incapable of enforcing existing bans or complicit in trafficking activity. Traffickers have taken advantage of civil unrest to establish enterprises in which refugees and migrants are loaded into overcrowded boats that are abandoned in the Mediterranean Sea, where passengers hope to be rescued and taken to Europe. The voyages are often deadly.

Liechtenstein

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 37,600

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Vaduz

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 39 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 59 / 60

In 2015, the government of Liechtenstein continued to combat the country's reputation as a tax haven and to increase transparency in banking. In October, Liechtenstein entered an information-sharing agreement with the European Union (EU), part of a wider effort to reduce tax evasion within the bloc. Under the agreement, EU member states will be able to access information about bank accounts held by their citizens in Liechtenstein banks. The country had already reached a similar agreement with the United States in 2014. The press continues to play a role in illuminating secrecy practices and fraudulent financial activity. Local media are largely independent, and international outlets are also accessible.

A third of the population is foreign-born. Some native citizens have expressed concern over the growing number of immigrants from non-German-speaking countries, such as Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Officials responded by creating formal integration programs to teach recent immigrants the language and culture of Liechtenstein. In 2015, the government agreed to participate in a plan for the distribution of refugees across the European Union, and also continued resettlement through mechanisms provided by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Women are underrepresented in politics and business, and a gender pay gap persists. Abortion is legal in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy if the mother's life is in danger or if she was under the age of 14 at the time of conception. The government has signaled some intentions to decriminalize abortion in recent years, and in March 2015, legislators announced that they would amend legislation that criminalizes obtaining abortions abroad. The law recognizes same-sex civil unions.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Liechtenstein, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Lithuania

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 2,911,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Vilnius

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Tensions stemming from Russia's invasion of Crimea have been influencing developments in Lithuania since 2014. With President Dalia Grybauskaitė citing security concerns, in March 2015 the parliament approved the reintroduction of military conscription. Meanwhile, authorities continued to scrutinize broadcasts of Russian television channels. In July, the European Commission backed Lithuanian authorities' move weeks earlier to ban the Russian television channel RTR Planeta for three months; Lithuanian officials had said its programming incited hatred.

In March 2015, Lithuania held local elections. For the first time, residents were able to directly elect mayors of their municipalities. Separately, in January 2015, Lithuania adopted the euro currency, and in April it was invited to open formal accession talks with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Lithuania's 1992 constitution established a unicameral, 141-seat Parliament (Seimas), with 71 members elected in single-mandate constituencies and 70 chosen by proportional representation, all for four-year terms. The prime minister is named by the president, but is subject to confirmation by the parliament. The president is directly elected and may serve up to two five-year terms.

In 2012 parliamentary elections, the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (LSDP) finished first with 38 seats; the Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) captured 33 seats; the Labor Party (DP) took 29 seats; the Order and Justice Party (TT) won 11 seats; the Liberal Movement (LRLS) captured 10 seats; and the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (LLRA) won 8 seats. LSDP leader Algirdas Butkevičius became the prime minister and assembled a four-party coalition comprising the LSDP, the DP, the TT, and the LLRA. In 2014, the LLRA left the coalition after *Grybauskaitė* fired Energy Minister Jaroslav Neverovič, the only Polish minister in the government.

In 2014, incumbent president Dalia Grybauskaitė won the presidential run-off against Zigmantas Balčytis, a member of the LSDP. Grybauskaitė became the first Lithuanian president elected to two consecutive terms.

In March 2015, local elections were held. For the first time, voters were able to directly elect their mayors. Due to numerous irregularities, elections in three municipalities were annulled and had to be reorganized; the election commission assessed the reruns, which took place in June, as fair.

In September 2015, the Lithuanian parliament gave its initial backing to a constitutional amendment that would have allowed former president Rolandas Paksas, who was impeached and removed from office in 2004, to run for president and for a seat in the parliament. (In 2014, the Lithuanian Central Electoral Commission had refused to register Paksas for the presidential election because of a previous Constitutional Court ruling holding that persons removed from office by impeachment for having violated a constitutional oath can no longer assume positions necessitating the swearing of an oath.) However, the parliament ultimately rejected the amendment during the second required vote, held in December 2015.

An October 2015 Constitutional Court ruling found existing disparities in the number of voters per constituency unconstitutional. The parliament is subsequently expected to debate several electoral reforms that could address the ruling.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Lithuania's political parties generally operate freely, although the Communist Party is banned. Lithuanian politics have been characterized by shifting coalitions among several different parties. The two largest minority groups, Polish (6.6 percent of the population) and Russian (5.8 percent), are represented by the LLRA and the Russian Alliance parties. The two minority parties formed a coalition for local elections in 2015, and won two mayoralties. Due to pressure from the European Union (EU), citizens of other EU member states who do not belong to political organizations of foreign countries and who have lived in Lithuania for at least five years were made eligible to become members of Lithuanian political parties in 2015. However, they cannot found political parties.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Corruption remains an issue in Lithuania. While the EU has acknowledged a strong legal framework for combatting corruption and the government's commitment to anticorruption efforts, it has also noted room for improvement, especially in the area of procurement.

In September 2015, it was revealed that Butkevičius had failed to disclose his son-in-law's ownership stake in a public relations company, as required by the law. Opposition members in the parliament threatened to launch an inquiry into the affair, but it did not appear that one had been initiated at the year's end.

Lithuanian law grants the public the right to request information, and the government generally complies with information requests. Lithuania ranked 32 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

The government generally respects freedoms of speech and the press. Privately owned newspapers and independent broadcasters express a wide variety of views. Political parties are banned from directly owning news media outlets. While individual party members are excluded from the ban, they are obligated to disclose ownership; however, regulations on the disclosure of media ownership are not always enforced. A number of both ruling-coalition and opposition politicians control news media outlets. The government does not restrict internet access.

Amendments to the Law on Public Information approved in May 2015 established penalties for media outlets that spread war propaganda, call for violently changing the constitutional order, or challenge the country's sovereignty or territorial integrity. In 2014, the

parliament also reformed the media self-regulation body by establishing that it would consist of media representatives only.

During 2014 and 2015, several Russian television channels including NTV Mir, RTR Planeta, Ren TV Baltic, and PBK Lithuania were fined or saw broadcasts temporarily banned for providing misleading and derogatory information or inciting public discord. In July 2015, the EC backed a move by Lithuanian authorities weeks earlier to ban channel RTR Planeta for three months on grounds that its programming incited hatred.

After the adoption of the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information in 2010, which banned exposing minors to any materials that “agitate for homosexual, bisexual, and polygamous relations,” there have been several cases in which public information about rights for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people has been restricted.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by law and largely upheld in practice. However, nine so-called traditional religious communities, including the Roman Catholic Church, enjoy certain government benefits, including annual subsidies that are not granted to other groups. There are few mosques in Lithuania, and none in Vilnius. Both the prime minister and the mayor of Vilnius stated in 2015 that constructing a mosque in the capital is not a priority, even as Lithuania prepares to accept a number of refugees under EU quotas, many of whom are likely to be Muslim.

Academic freedom is respected. There are no restrictions on private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are generally observed. However, individuals and groups must notify authorities before staging protests of more than 10 people. Nongovernmental organizations may register without facing serious obstacles, and operate without restrictions. Workers may form and join trade unions, strike, and engage in collective bargaining, though there have been reports of employees being punished for attempting to organize.

F. Rule of Law: 13 / 16

The constitution guarantees judicial independence, which is largely respected in practice. Defendants generally enjoy due process rights, including the presumption of innocence and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, but detained suspects are not always granted timely access to an attorney. Police abuse of detainees and lengthy pretrial detentions are lingering issues. In 2014, a UN committee found that Lithuania’s prisons continued to suffer from a number of problems, including overcrowding, substandard living conditions, and lack of access to essential services such as health care and sanitation facilities.

Discrimination against ethnic minorities, who comprise about 16 percent of the population, remains a problem. The Polish minority has demanded the right to spell their names in their original form and to use bilingual location signs in areas with large Polish populations. However, Lithuanian law indicates that public signs must be written only in Lithuanian.

Members of the LGBT community face discrimination. A proposal to ban sex reassignment surgery stalled in 2012, but these procedures are still not possible under the Civil Code. While the code theoretically allows for such surgery in the case of unmarried adults, it stipulates that certain medical regulations must first be enacted by law. A bill that would have done so was voted down in 2014.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Lithuanian residents may travel freely within the country and internationally. They generally enjoy economic freedom.

Men and women enjoy the same legal rights, though women generally earn less than men per hour worked. Lithuania's constitution defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

In March 2015, the parliament voted overwhelmingly to reintroduce conscription due to increasing geopolitical tensions in the region and insufficient reserve forces. The National Defense Ministry plans to annually draft 3,000 to 5,000 men between the ages of 19 and 26 for nine months of service.

In 2015, the government initiated a number of programs aimed at better adjudicating cases of human trafficking and identifying trafficking victims. Boys and girls living in orphanages are at risk of sex trafficking. Lithuanian children and adults have been forced to engage in criminal activity including shoplifting and drug-selling in other parts of Europe.

Luxembourg

Political Rights Rating: 1

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 569,200

Capital: Luxembourg

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 60 / 60

The European Commission (EC) continued to investigate allegations that Luxembourg had given multinational corporations favorable tax arrangements that violated European Union (EU) regulations. EC president Jean-Claude Juncker, who was the country's prime minister from 1995 to 2013, faced scrutiny in the investigations, with critics raising questions about his awareness of the arrangements. In October 2015, the EC found that Luxembourg had given Italian automaker Fiat illegal tax advantages, ordering the recovery of close to 30 million (\$34 million). Separately, in April, a local court charged French journalist Edouard Perrin for his role in the so-called "LuxLeaks" affair, which in 2014 revealed secret tax breaks for multinational firms. The court charged Perrin with abetting the violation of professional secrecy laws as well as possessing and distributing confidential papers; two former PricewaterhouseCoopers employees who leaked the documents also faced similar offenses. The cases were ongoing at year's end.

Social reforms initiated by Prime Minister Xavier Bettel—who leads a coalition government composed of the Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party, the Democratic Party, and the Greens—continued in 2015. In January, officials reached an agreement with the Catholic

Church to change its longstanding relationship with the state. Under the agreement, state funds will no longer be used to pay priests' salaries, an ethics class will replace religious instruction in schools, and subsidies for the Catholic Church will be drastically cut. In addition, the state will begin to provide subsidies to Luxembourg's Muslim community. The legalization of same-sex marriage, also a prominent goal of the Bettel administration, took effect in January.

Some of the government's reform efforts have faced popular resistance. In a June referendum, voters overwhelmingly rejected proposals to place a 10-year limit on ministerial mandates, to lower the voting age from 18 to 16, and to grant voting rights to foreigners if they have resided in Luxembourg for at least 10 years and previously voted in a local or EU election.

Under a plan to resettle the unprecedented number of asylum seekers who reached the EU during the year, Luxembourg agreed to accept 751 individuals over a period of two years. The first refugees began arriving in the country in November.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Luxembourg, see Freedom in the World 2015.

↓ Macedonia

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 2,070,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Skopje

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Trend Arrow: Macedonia received a downward trend arrow due to further revelations about the grave shortcomings of the 2014 elections, which caused an opposition legislative boycott; the new information formed part of a related scandal over widespread government surveillance of political and religious leaders, journalists, and private citizens.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

The political and security situation in Macedonia declined markedly in 2015. In February, Zoran Zaev, head of the opposition Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), alleged that the government of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski had sponsored an enormous wiretapping program carried out by the country's secret service. Under the program, more than 20,000 people may have had their private conversations illegally recorded. The leaked contents of some of the wiretaps, which Zaev released periodically, suggested among other things that members of the governing Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) had engaged in significant vote-rigging schemes during the 2013 local and 2014 parliamentary elections. The

scandal led to the resignations in May of the interior and transportation ministers, as well as the country's intelligence chief.

Major clashes took place in April and May between government security forces and what officials said were ethnic Albanian militants. In April, police said a border post near Kosovo had been overrun by an Albanian militia, while in May, 14 gunmen and 8 Macedonian security officers were killed when the officers raided part of an ethnic Albanian neighborhood in Kumanovo; the government characterized the operation's targets as ethnic Albanian terrorists. Critics of the government, including Zaev, accused the VMRO-DPMNE of orchestrating the incidents to distract attention from the wiretapping scandal.

A June political agreement brokered by the European Union (EU) called for early elections by April 2016 and the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate the wiretapping scandal. However, tensions between the government and opposition remained high at year's end, and full implementation of the agreement was in doubt.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 22 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12 (– 1)

Members of the unicameral, 123-seat Assembly are elected to four-year terms by proportional representation. The Assembly elects the prime minister, who holds most executive power. The president is elected to a five-year term through a direct popular vote. Most postindependence elections have met international standards.

Both presidential and early parliamentary elections took place in 2014. The bloc led by the VMRO-DPMNE won 61 parliamentary seats, followed by the SDSM with 34 seats. The ethnic Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI)—the VMRO-DPMNE's coalition partner—won 19 seats, the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) won 7 seats, and two minor parties took one seat each. Gruevski retained his post as prime minister, and in the presidential election, incumbent Gjorge Ivanov of the VMRO-DPMNE was reelected. The SDSM rejected the election results, claiming that the ruling party had manipulated the vote. After months of opposition boycotts and growing political deadlock, in June 2015 the EU brokered an agreement calling for new elections by April 2016.

The 2014 elections were criticized by international observers for a number of shortcomings, most of them regarding the campaign period. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe noted that while the elections were “efficiently administered,” the separation between party and state in the campaign was not always sufficient or clear, and several instances of alleged voter intimidation were reported.

Some of the wiretapped conversations released by the opposition in 2015 appeared to indicate that senior VMRO-DPMNE figures had engaged in election fraud during both the 2013 local and 2014 parliamentary elections. The opposition also voiced concern about the snap elections to be held in 2016, claiming that the voter rolls were riddled with the names of nonexistent voters.

The parliament adopted a number of changes to the electoral code in November 2015 as part of the EU-backed political agreement, addressing key opposition concerns. However, the quality of implementation, particularly regarding an audit of the voter list, remained unclear at year's end.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

The constitution protects the right to establish and join political parties. The center-right VMRO-DPMNE has won every parliamentary election since 2006, ruling in coalition

with a number of parties representing ethnic minorities. The left-leaning SDSM held power through much of the 1990s and early 2000s, and is currently the leading opposition party.

Ethnic Albanians make up about 25 percent of the population. One of the two main political parties representing Albanians has sat in each ruling coalition, and certain types of legislation must pass with a majority of legislators from both major ethnic groups in the Assembly. Macedonians living abroad can elect up to three Assembly members.

Politically fraught violence between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians continues to erupt periodically. However, following the May 2015 violence in Kumanovo—which some opposition figures attributed to a government plot to fray interethnic relations in order to distract from the wiretapping scandal—thousands of ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians protested together against Gruevski’s administration.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

Following the 2014 elections, the SDSM refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new government and commenced a parliamentary boycott. Even after the EU-brokered political agreement in June 2015, strained relations between the government and opposition hampered the regular operation of state institutions. It remained unclear at the end of the year whether the deal would be successful in resolving the crisis.

Corruption is a serious problem in Macedonia. While anticorruption legislation is in place, and measures to clarify party funding and prevent conflicts of interest have been strengthened, implementation is weak. Graft and misconduct are widespread in public procurement. The judiciary lacks experience handling high-level corruption cases, and greater interagency cooperation is needed to identify problem areas in anticorruption efforts, according to the European Commission (EC). The Public Prosecutor’s Office for Organized Crime and Corruption suffers from low administrative capacity. Macedonia was ranked 66 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 35 / 60 (–2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 10 / 16 (–1)

The constitution provides for freedom of the press. However, Macedonian media are subject to political pressure and harassment, resulting in self-censorship. Media outlets are divided along ethnic lines. Wiretap recordings released by the opposition in 2015 appeared to reveal conversations between high-level government functionaries and the staff of several major television stations—including the public broadcaster and Sitel, a private, progovernment television station with national reach—indicating that the government was directly influencing editorial policies. The government in October introduced draft legislation that would prohibit the release and republication of content from the wiretaps, drawing sharp criticism from independent observers and the opposition. Internet access is unrestricted.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion. A long-standing dispute between the breakaway Macedonian Orthodox Church and the canonically recognized Serbian Orthodox Church remains unresolved. Islamophobia is present in the rhetoric of politicians and in public discourse.

Although academic freedom is generally unrestricted, the education system is weak by European standards. Textbooks barely cover the postindependence period, primarily because ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians interpret the 2001 civil conflict differently. Increasingly, schools are becoming ethnically segregated.

Space for free private discussion contracted in the wake of the opposition's credible allegations of widespread government wiretapping and monitoring of private citizens, journalists, politicians, and religious leaders.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

Constitutional guarantees of freedoms of assembly and association are generally respected. Student and opposition protests that began in 2014 continued in 2015. Largely peaceful, student-led demonstrations against the VMRO-DPMNE held early in the year were replaced by violent clashes in May between opposition groups and the police, which, combined with the violence in Kumanovo, prompted the EU to step in and help broker the agreement reached in June. Despite the agreement, a sense among much of the Macedonian opposition that the Gruevski government was illegitimate fueled calls for extraparliamentary activism. A group on the progovernment side, the Citizens' Movement to Defend Macedonia, hosted its own events at which the opposition was typically accused of being backed by foreign interests seeking Gruevski's ouster.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate freely but are often polarized along political lines. A lack of resources for Macedonia's Government Unit for NGO Cooperation has hampered a strategy to promote cooperation between the government and civil society, according to the EC.

Workers may organize and bargain collectively, though trade unions lack stable financing and skilled managers, and journalists have reportedly been fired for their union activities. Macedonia's largest public-sector union, the Workers' Union of Education, Science, and Culture, reported that its members were pressured by government officials as well as progovernment media and unions while striking in January 2015.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16 (-1)

Improving judicial independence, impartiality, and efficiency remains a priority for Macedonia, which has been carrying out comprehensive reforms of the judiciary over the past decade. However, fundamental problems remain, including concerns over the weak independence of the Constitutional Court. The EC in its 2015 report noted recent "backsliding" on previous years' progress, which it attributed to "actual and potential political interference" in the judiciary's work. The ability of the special prosecutor investigating the wiretapping scandal to work freely in the coming year was seen as a crucial indicator of the justice system's effectiveness.

In April, police said several dozen masked gunmen wearing insignia of a disbanded ethnic Albanian paramilitary group had temporarily seized a border post near Kosovo, during which time they detained four Macedonian security officers. In May, 14 gunmen and 8 Macedonian security officers were killed when police raided a mostly Albanian neighborhood in Kumanovo, a town in the country's north; the government characterized the gunmen as ethnic Albanian terrorists. While the events prompted some unease over the potential for communal violence in Macedonia, many experts downplayed such concerns, noting the multiethnic nature of the antigovernment protest movement. Critics of the government claimed that the ruling party had orchestrated the incidents to fan ethnic tensions and distract from the wiretapping scandal.

In 2015, Macedonia emerged as a major transit country for hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing violence in the Middle East and elsewhere as they sought to reach more receptive European countries to the north. Rights groups and others condemned Macedonian police for numerous instances of violence against the refugees.

Roma, ethnic Albanians, and other vulnerable groups face discrimination. Minority groups have criticized the ongoing Skopje 2014 urban development plan, arguing that its themes ignore their heritage and present a monoethnic image of the country.

A 2010 antidiscrimination law does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, and anti-LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) sentiment is widespread.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Travel and movement are generally unrestricted. Membership in a party within the ruling coalition is often an informal precondition for employment in the public sector. While the government has streamlined procedures to launch a business, licensing fees can be prohibitively expensive. Unemployment has been estimated at about 27 percent, but the actual figure may be smaller given Macedonia's sizeable shadow economy.

In 2014, the VMRO-DPMNE proposed a constitutional amendment that would narrow the definition of marriage, making it applicable only to a relationship between a man and a woman. The parliament voted to approve the amendment in January 2015, and took further steps to complicate the possibility of future civil-union legislation being enacted.

While women in Macedonia enjoy the same legal rights as men, societal attitudes limit their participation in nontraditional roles, and women rarely participate in local politics. In Albanian Muslim areas, many women are subject to proxy voting by male relatives. Forty women were elected to the 123-seat legislature in 2014. Despite the ongoing implementation of a strategy against domestic violence, it remains a serious problem, as does the trafficking of women for forced labor and sex work.

Madagascar

Political Rights Rating: 3↑

Population: 23,047,400

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Antananarivo

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Rating Change: Madagascar's political rights rating improved from 4 to 3 due to competitive local elections in July and greater transparency in the drafting of legislation.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,4,PF	3,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Madagascar continued its progress toward democratic consolidation in 2015. Competitive elections for local government positions in July and the Senate in December completed the return to democratic government after Andry Rajoelina's 2009 military-backed coup. The National Assembly voted to impeach President Hery Rajaonarimampianina in May 2015, citing his failure to uphold the constitution, but a court ruling struck down the attempt.

Madagascar launched the “Fahalemana 2015” operation in August 2015 to combat widespread insecurity in the south from organized groups of cattle thieves. The state has only nominal control over the south of the country, where local security forces are often viewed to be complacent or cooperative with armed groups. Eight members of the army were killed in an ambush in August 2015. Human rights groups have highlighted security forces’ abuses of citizens, including summary executions.

International funding has resumed since the 2009 coup and ensuing political crisis, but the fall in global commodities prices has undercut the mining sector, which serves as the main source of foreign investment. Large demonstrations took place in the coastal city of Toamasina in December 2014 and January 2015 over persistent outages from the power company, Jirama, and citizen perceptions of widespread corruption in the energy sector.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 24 / 40 (+2)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

The president and the lower house of parliament, the National Assembly, are directly elected to five-year terms. The 151 seats in the National Assembly are filled through a mix of party-list voting in multimember constituencies and majoritarian contests in single-member districts. The National Assembly nominates the prime minister and the president appoints the nominee. While the 2010 constitution calls for the establishment of a Senate, no members were chosen until December 2015. The president appoints one-third of the 33-member Senate while the remaining two-thirds are indirectly elected from each of the 22 districts of Madagascar. President Rajaonarimampianina’s party, Hery Vaovao Madagasi-kara (HVM), won 65 percent of the vote. The formation of the Senate will mark the first time that the full executive and legislative bodies of Madagascar will fully function since Rajoelina ousted then-President Ravalomanana in a 2009 military coup.

Elections for the National Assembly took place in 2013 alongside the country’s presidential elections. The parliamentary elections were deemed free and fair by international observers, though several hundred thousand people were left off the voter rolls during the election’s first round. The With Andry Rajoelina (MAPAR) party won 49 of 151 parliamentary seats, the Ravalomanana Movement took 20, the Vondrona Politika Miara-Dia-Malagasy Miara-Miainga (VPM-MMM) party won 13, and various other parties and independent candidates took the remainder. For the presidency, Rajaonarimampianina—a former finance minister backed by Rajoelina—was elected with 54 percent of the vote. After taking office, Rajaonarimampianina broke from Rajoelina’s influence.

In January 2015, opposition dissatisfaction led to the resignation of the prime minister. Continued dissatisfaction among opposition factions led to the new prime minister narrowly escaping a no-confidence vote in July. Meanwhile, the required two-thirds of the National Assembly voted in May 2015 to impeach President Rajaonarimampianina, citing his deliberate mixing of religion and politics and his failure to uphold the constitution. The High Constitutional Court ruled against the National Assembly’s decision in June, calling the attempt unfounded. Rajoelina and members of his party, MAPAR, continued to call for the president to step down and for early elections to be held.

In July 2015 regional and municipal elections, Rajaonarimampianina’s HVM won more than half the races. Though the electoral process was free and fair, there were accusations of inaccurate voter rolls and use of state resources for campaigning. Confusion over the electoral rules prior to the municipal elections advantaged state campaigns over smaller parties. The mandate of the transitional electoral management body ended after the municipal elections, and the government established a new independent body.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16 (+1)

Despite restrictions on opposition political activity during the transitional period under Rajoelina, political parties were generally able to operate ahead of the national elections in 2013, when 33 candidates ran for president. Rajaonarimampianina established his own party leading up to the presidential elections. In 2015 local elections, multiple opposition parties competed, many of which have advanced policies and platforms against the government.

The return of former president Marc Ravalomanana from exile in 2014, and his release from house arrest in May 2015, destabilized parliamentary alliances as he worked to reestablish his nascent political party structure. Ravalomanana was sentenced in 2010 in absentia to life in prison with hard labor for allegedly ordering the killing of at least 30 opposition protesters in 2009. He has not received amnesty for the conviction. In a test of his party's return to politics, Ravalomanana's wife, Lalao, won the mayoralty in Antananarivo in 2015.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12 (+1)

Elected officials are susceptible to outside influence; the large number of independent candidates in the National Assembly, as well as Rajaonarimampianina's constantly shifting coalition, have facilitated opportunities for vote buying among legislators.

Though Rajaonarimampianina has committed to reducing corruption, the independent anticorruption bureau released a report in September 2015 stating that corrupt activity has stayed level or worsened since the president took office. Funding for the bureau decreased for 2015. Madagascar was ranked 123 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Despite a 2010 decree that prohibited the logging, transport, trading, and export of precious woods, the illegal trade continues. In 2014, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) lifted its three-year suspension of Madagascar, citing the commitments of the newly elected government to EITI standards. Illegally harvested rosewood and other precious timbers continue to be smuggled offshore with low levels of government intervention and occasional official complicity in the practice. Finance budgets are open to the public and introduced in parliament. The government has added civil society positions to lawmaking panels.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 30 / 60 (+2)**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief:** 10 / 16 (+1)

The constitution provides for freedoms of speech and of the press. While Rajoelina's transitional government routinely ignored press freedom, the current government has demonstrated greater respect for media freedom and freedom of expression. Government censorship and intimidation of journalists continue, though at lower levels. There are a variety of newspaper, radio, and television outlets available to citizens, though political leaders own or operate several of the papers as a means to promote their party and personal interests. The state-run radio and television stations favor the government. The government occasionally interferes with the media, including in 2015 radio and television stations owned by Ravalomanana and Rajoelina. In August 2015, unknown assailants ransacked and destroyed a MAPAR-backed television station in the city of Fianarantsoa following its criticism of municipal election results. However, violence against journalists has generally decreased.

A 2014 cybercrime law punishes online defamation of state officials with up to five years' imprisonment.

The Malagasy people have traditionally enjoyed religious freedom. In April 2015, the government relaxed limitations on a Protestant church closely associated with Ravalomanana, which was subject to frequent government intervention during the transition period. Academic freedom is generally respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

Rajaonarimampiana's administration has eased the freedom of assembly restrictions imposed after the 2009 coup. Repression of political gatherings has generally declined in the past two years and political rallies in the lead-up to the 2015 elections were rarely prevented. Nevertheless, political demonstrators are still occasionally subject to violence from security forces or restrictions on assembly.

Freedom of association is generally respected, and hundreds of nongovernmental organizations, including human rights groups, are active. Workers have the right to join unions, engage in collective bargaining, and strike. However, more than 80 percent of workers are engaged in agriculture, fishing, and forestry at a subsistence level and therefore have no access to unions.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The judiciary remains susceptible to corruption and executive influence. In 2014, Rajaonarimampiana appointed a new president and three additional new members to the High Constitutional Court (HCC). Although legal, the new appointments were in the president's interests and raised concerns about the separation of powers. In June 2015, the HCC ruled against the National Assembly's vote to impeach the president. Judges evaluating the hundreds of complaints submitted over the 2015 electoral process were largely seen to be impartial, though they reportedly received a number of unspecified threats. The executive continues to exert pressure on judges through reassigning magistrates to different locations.

A lack of training, resources, and personnel hampers judicial effectiveness, and case backlogs are lengthy. More than half of the people held in the country's prisons are pretrial detainees, and prisoners suffer from harsh and sometimes life-threatening conditions due to overcrowding and substandard hygiene and health care. Parliament unanimously voted to abolish the death penalty in 2014. Customary-law courts in rural areas continue to lack due process guarantees and regularly issue summary and severe punishments.

The army and security forces demonstrated neutrality during the 2015 impeachment attempt and the municipal elections, though loyalty in the security forces is historically fractured between different political movements. The police and military are unable to assert authority over the entirety of Madagascar. In addition, cattle thieves, known as *dahalo*, exist in portions of the south and often collude with security officials. In August 2015, the government launched a large security operation against the *dahalos*, leading to reports of military involvement in a number of civilian deaths and summary executions of suspected thieves.

A political cleavage has traditionally existed between the coastal *côtier* and the highland Merina peoples, of continental African and Southeast Asian origins, respectively. Due to past military conquest and longstanding political dominance, the Merina tend to have higher status than the *côtier*. Ethnicity, caste, and regional solidarity often lead to discrimination. Same-sex sexual relations are not criminalized, but LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people still face discrimination from some segments of the state and society.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16 (+ 1)

Despite decentralized village patrols and the escalation of government operations, dahalo groups hamper the free movement of citizens in certain regions. Security patrols cease operations after dark. Dahalo raids have led to an uptick in internally displaced people.

Madagascar’s legal structure provides protections for private property rights, and secured interests in property are recognized though not entirely enforced. The vast majority of farmers do not hold the official rights to their land. Foreigners are prohibited from owning land. Citizens, companies, and foreign entities are able to buy and sell property, though corruption impedes proper functioning of the system.

The proportion of women in parliament increased from 17.5 percent to 20.5 percent after the 2013 elections. Women still face societal discrimination and enjoy fewer opportunities than men for higher education and employment. Though women are legally allowed to own land, when a couple applies for certification it will appear, at least 80 percent of the time, in only the man’s name. According to the U.S. State Department’s 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Madagascar has improved its efforts to reduce trafficking of men, women, and children into forced labor and sex work at home and abroad. The government created a human trafficking bureau in March 2015 and began a nationwide awareness campaign in July.

Malawi

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 17,174,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3↑

Capital: Lilongwe

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ratings Change: Malawi’s civil liberties rating improved from 4 to 3 due to a gradual improvement in the climate for freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in recent years.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,3,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

The so-called Cashgate corruption scandal continued to reverberate in Malawi in 2015. The results of a national audit, released in June, revealed that the equivalent of \$800 million had been looted from public coffers between 2009 and 2014. Prosecutions of those involved in the scandal have been slow, and President Peter Mutharika’s administration has struggled to regain the confidence of international donors who cut off budget support in its wake.

In his first year and a half in office, Mutharika has not reintroduced the antidemocratic policies of his late brother. However, relations between the presidency and civil society and the independent media deteriorated during 2015.

Malawi made progress on the protection of women’s rights through the passage of comprehensive marriage legislation, which raised the minimum marriage age to 18 years

and provided legal protection to women on a range of other issues. However, the same law effectively banned same-sex marriage.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 27 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 8 / 12

The president is directly elected for five-year terms and exercises considerable executive authority. The unicameral National Assembly is composed of 193 members elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms.

In May 2014, Malawi undertook tripartite elections at the presidential, parliamentary, and local levels. The polls were marred by logistical problems and postelection controversy, but were largely regarded as credible by local and international observers. Polling stations opened late due to a lack of voting materials, and technical problems with electronic tabulation systems delayed the vote counting. Voting was thus extended for two extra days in some areas. In certain districts, evidence suggested there were more votes cast than the number of registered voters, though this was in part attributed to people voting in districts other than those they were registered in. After preliminary results indicated that Mutharika was in the lead, then president Joyce Banda called for a national recount, citing concerns about vote-rigging.

Two days later, Banda announced that she was nullifying the elections, and ordered a new round be held within 90 days, in which she would not compete. However, Banda's order was declared unconstitutional by the High Court. The Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and Banda then requested a period of 30 days to recount all four million votes and address electoral complaints before declaring a winner. Mutharika and the Democratic People's Party (DPP) demanded that the results be announced within the required eight days after the end of voting. At the end of May 2014, the High Court decided that while the MEC could in theory recount the ballots, it still must announce the results within the eight-day period, essentially forcing the MEC to rely on its original count.

Immediately after the court's decision, Mutharika of the DPP was declared the winner with 36 percent of the vote. Lazarus Chakwera of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) placed second, with 28 percent. Banda won 20 percent, and Atupele Muluzi of the United Democratic Front (UDF) won 14 percent. In the parliamentary elections, the DPP took 50 seats, the MCP took 48, the People's Party (PP) claimed 26, and the UDF captured 14. Independents won an unprecedented 52 seats. The Malawi Electoral Support Network (MESN)—a coalition of civil society groups—sent out 800 parallel observers on polling day and found almost identical final counts as those released by the MEC.

International analysts found the electoral framework to be generally fair and in line with basic democratic standards. However, they called for requiring political parties to disclose their sources of financing and to report on campaign spending. They also suggested setting clearer prohibitions on the use of state resources to benefit the incumbent party, along with enforcement mechanisms. The MEC was generally described as impartial but underresourced and unprepared.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 12 / 16

The main political parties are the ruling DPP, the PP, the MCP—which ruled Malawi for nearly three decades after independence in 1963—and the UDF. New political parties are allowed to register unhindered, and political parties were able to campaign freely throughout the country ahead of the 2014 polls. Opposition parties were more competitive in the 2014 elections than in the past, and won greater representation in the legislature.

Politicians frequently move between parties or break away to form their own parties. Indeed, the DPP is a breakaway of the UDF, and the PP a breakaway of the DPP.

The UDF has formed a working alliance with the ruling DPP. UDF president Muluzi is the only member of the opposition in cabinet. (Muluzi is the son of former president Bakili Muluzi with whom Mutharika's brother, former president Bingu wa Mutharika, fell out in 2005, resulting in the formation of DPP.) In May 2015, most of the UDF's legislators—though not the party's leader—moved to the ruling parties benches in Parliament. The move prompted a petition from a civil society leader to the speaker of the National Assembly, Richard Msowoya, of the opposition MCP, to declare the UDF lawmakers' seats vacant, as the constitution prohibits members of parliament from defecting to another party. However, the attorney general advised the speaker that the provision was not applicable as the UDF lawmakers had not actually changed parties. The MCP expressed fears that the DPP-led parliamentary coalition was seeking to impeach the speaker, but the DPP said it had no such intention.

Mutharika has made good on his promise to meet with opposition leaders to discuss matters of concern for the whole nation. However, he has been criticized for selecting cabinet ministers mostly from the southern region of the country and from his own ethnic group.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Corruption is endemic in Malawi. The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has estimated that 30 percent of the annual budget is lost to corruption each year, and the true percentage may be much higher. The ACB, which is in charge of investigating and prosecuting official malfeasance, is considered to be competent but underfunded.

In June 2015, a German-funded national audit conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers was made public. The audit report revealed that 577 billion kwacha (\$800 million) in public funds had gone missing between the beginning of 2009 and the end of 2014, and recommended further investigations. Arrests and prosecutions of those implicated in the scandal, which first emerged in 2013 and is known informally as Cashgate, continued in 2015. In September, Oswald Lutepo, a former PP senior official, was convicted on charges of money laundering and theft of 4.1 billion kwacha (\$8.5 million), and received an 11-year sentence. Lutepo insisted that the corruption was carried out on behalf of former president Banda, a claim she disputes.

Although no criminal charges were brought against Banda in connection with the scandal, she left Malawi for a United Nations summit in 2014 and had yet to return to Malawi at the end of 2015. The scandal has had serious financial and administrative implications for the country; international donors in February 2015 cut off \$150 million in budget support.

Laws require high-level public officials to declare their assets and other financial interests while in public service. In March 2015, Mutharika declared assets valued at nearly \$10 million. Malawi was ranked 112 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 37 / 60 (+3)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 13 / 16 (+2)

Freedom of the press is legally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. The independent media is often critical of the government, and although journalists have faced threats and harassment in the past, no serious instances of this were reported in 2015. However, in October, after receiving harsh criticism from media outlets concerning the

large size of his delegation to the UN General Assembly, President Mutharika claimed that the press was acting irresponsibly and on behalf of the opposition. The incident prompted a rebuke from the Malawi chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa.

Libel remains both a criminal and civil offense. Mutharika has not yet signed the Declaration of Table Mountain, which calls on African governments to abolish criminal defamation laws, despite telling journalists and press freedom activists that he would consider doing so after a meeting with them in 2014. Malawi lacks a freedom of information (FOI) law. Despite previous pledges of support for one, Mutharika dismissed a FOI bill in a November 2015 cabinet meeting, claiming it contained “many inconsistencies.”

The government-controlled Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) and TV Malawi—the dominant outlets—display bias in favor of the government. There are no government restrictions on the internet, but just 9 percent of the population used the medium in 2015.

The constitution upholds freedom of religion, and this right is respected in practice. Academic freedom is generally respected. However, Mutharika was criticized for remarking in May 2015 that university professors should focus on academic publications rather than commenting on public matters in the media. But in October, he reassured academics of the government’s commitment to academic freedom.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12 (+ 1)

Freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed in the constitution and by law. The government generally respects people’s rights to protest peacefully, and there were several peaceful protests in 2015 against issues including inadequate health care services, poor leadership and financial mismanagement by the government, and xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Many South African–owned business remained closed for a day during the antixenophobia protests, which called for the boycotting of South African products and businesses. Mutharika has apologized on several occasions for the slaying of about 20 protesters by his brother’s administration in 2011. On the anniversary of the killings in July 2015, a presidential spokesperson acknowledged that the protesters were not “thieves” as originally claimed.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate without interference from the government. However, certain legal provisions regarding registration and fees for NGOs are considered onerous, and the government has been accused of harassing groups doing politically sensitive work. In October 2015, a group of civil society organizations called on the president to resign on the grounds that he has failed to address the governance and economic challenges facing the country. Although no reprisals were reported, a cabinet minister in June 2015 threatened that “noisy” NGOs would be banned if they failed to register with the NGO Board. In November, a group of regional NGOs called for the depoliticization of Malawi’s NGO Board, saying it strategically funded pro-government groups whose activities in large part included defending the government against corruption and other allegations levied by “bonafide” NGOs.

The rights to organize labor unions and to strike are legally protected, with notice and mediation requirements for workers in essential services. Unions are active and collective bargaining is practiced, but in the past workers have faced harassment and occasional violence during strikes. Since only a small percentage of the workforce is formally employed, union membership is low. Strikes are common among Malawi’s public sector workers, who often experience delays in their already low pay. In 2015, strike actions occurred among judicial workers, public health care workers, teachers, and parliamentary support workers.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16

Judicial independence is generally respected. However, the overburdened and inefficient court system lacks resources, personnel, and training. A backlog of cases and commonly exorbitant bail terms mean that most defendants spend months or even years in pretrial detention. Poverty and a lack of state resources result in the vast majority of defendants navigating their cases without legal representation. The police force is likewise poorly trained and often ineffective. As a result, recent years have seen an increase in vigilantism that undermines the rule of law.

Police brutality is common, as are arbitrary arrests and detentions. In June 2015, a police station in Blantyre was set on fire by residents following the death of a person allegedly tortured by the police. In July, a police officer was convicted of the 2012 murder of a student who was being held in police custody.

Prison conditions are dire, characterized by overcrowding and extremely poor health conditions; many inmates die from AIDS and other diseases. Hundreds of migrants from various African countries trying to reach South Africa are detained in Malawi on charges of entering the country illegally. Many have remained in detention even after finishing their sentences because Malawi cannot afford to return them to their home countries.

There has been a recent upsurge in criminal activity by members of the police force, including armed robberies and break-ins, which has eroded the credibility of law enforcement. Police officers cite low pay and promotions based on tribalism and political affiliation as some of the reasons for discontent in their ranks.

Consensual sexual activity between same-sex couples remains illegal and punishable by up to 14 years in prison. However, the application of the law has been suspended pending a High Court decision on its constitutionality, and in December 2015 the government dropped charges against two men who had been charged under its provisions. A new marriage law that took effect in April 2015 defined marriage as between a man and a women, ruling out the possibility of same-sex marriages.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

The constitution establishes freedom of internal movement and foreign travel, which are generally respected in practice. However, refugees are under an encampment policy in which the government periodically rounds them up and returns them to camps.

Property rights do not receive adequate protection, and starting a business can be a cumbersome process. Business is also impeded by corruption in the various customs, tax, and procurement agencies. In November 2015, Malawi's land minister issued a warning that unused land owned by developers would be repossessed by the government unless the developers started to use it.

Women won about 17 percent of parliamentary seats in the 2014 elections, down from 22 percent in the 2009 vote. Despite constitutional guarantees of equal protection, customary practices perpetuate discrimination against women in education, employment, business, and inheritance and property rights. Violence against women is prevalent. Child marriage remains pervasive, with around half of girls marrying before their 18th birthday. The new marriage law that took effect in April 2015 raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 years. In June, a chief in Dezda District annulled 330 child marriages. However, the constitution, which provides that children above the age of 15 years may marry with parental consent, has yet to be amended. The 2015 marriage law also has provisions intended to protect women from being deprived of property after the death of their husbands, and from domestic violence and marital rape.

Trafficking in women and children, both within the country and to locations abroad, is a problem. Penalties for the few successfully prosecuted traffickers have been cited as too lenient, and the U.S. State Department has criticized the government's efforts to protect victims and prevent trafficking as inadequate.

Malaysia

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 30,789,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Kuala Lumpur

Freedom Rating: 4.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Prime Minister Najib Razak struggled during 2015 to suppress mounting criticism over mismanagement of and possible embezzlement from the state-owned development fund IMDB. Najib denied any wrongdoing and took steps to remove potential threats within the ruling party, in part through a reorganization of his cabinet.

A coalition of civil society organizations and opposition parties known as Bersih (Clean) organized a multicity protest in August, calling for Najib's resignation as well as electoral reforms and anticorruption measures. Bersih leaders were subsequently charged for organizing what the authorities said was an illegal demonstration, and government supporters responded in September with a pro-Najib, "Malay pride" rally in which participants chanted anti-Chinese slogans; the opposition enjoys significant support among the ethnic Chinese minority. In December, Parliament adopted a law that allows the National Security Council, headed by the prime minister, to declare security zones in which police would have enhanced powers.

The authorities continued to enforce conservative social norms regarding women's clothing as well as gender identity, and an October court ruling reversed a 2014 judgment that struck down laws used to prosecute transgender women.

Also during 2015, the government faced renewed scrutiny of its refugee policies after the discovery of multiple camps along the Thailand-Malaysia border that were apparently used by human traffickers to hold and extort money from migrants and refugees. The Malaysian government was also criticized for initially refusing to aid a large group of migrants and refugees whose boats had been abandoned at sea in nearby waters.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 18 / 40 (−1)

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12

The paramount ruler, the monarch and titular head of state, is elected for five-year terms by fellow hereditary rulers from 9 of Malaysia's 13 states. King Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah was elected to the post in 2011. The role of the king is largely ceremonial.

Executive power is vested in the prime minister and cabinet. The leader of the coalition that wins a plurality of seats in legislative elections becomes the prime minister. The upper house of the bicameral Parliament, the Senate, consists of 44 members appointed by the king and 26 members elected by the 13 state legislatures, serving three-year terms. The House of Representatives, or Dewan Rakyat, has 222 seats; its members are elected by popular vote at least every five years.

The ruling National Front (BN) coalition won the 2013 parliamentary elections, capturing 133 seats in the lower house despite receiving only 47 percent of the overall popular vote. Among the main opposition parties, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) took 38 seats, the People's Justice Party (PKR) took 30, and the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) won 21. The opposition and observers accused the BN of electoral fraud, citing irregularities like phantom voting and power outages that occurred in vote-tallying centers in a number of constituencies that opposition parties hoped to win. Malapportioned voting districts and other structural flaws in the electoral system also favored the ruling coalition. Following the elections, a People's Tribunal was held to record individuals' accounts of electoral problems. The resulting report, issued in March 2014, concluded that electoral irregularities contributed to the BN's victory.

The Election Commission (EC) is frequently accused of manipulating electoral rolls and gerrymandering districts to aid the ruling coalition, and the Registrar of Societies arbitrarily decides which parties can participate in politics. The first-past-the-post voting system also increases the power of the largest grouping. In 2012, a government committee issued recommendations for electoral reforms, many of which had been called for by the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (Bersih). However, there is continuing skepticism over the EC's effective implementation of all recommended changes. One change implemented for the 2013 elections was the use of indelible ink to mark voters who had already cast their ballots; voters and electoral watchdogs charged that the ink was easily removed. Watchdogs have also voiced concerns about the EC's opaque handling of electoral delineations, which the Electoral Integrity Project assessed as a major cause of the low integrity of the 2013 elections. In December 2015, federal lawmakers approved a redelineation of districts in the state of Sarawak despite opposition complaints that it heavily favored the BN's traditional voting blocs. The courts had rejected an attempt to challenge the constitutionality of the plan earlier in the year.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 7 / 16

The BN and its pre-1973 predecessor organization have governed Malaysia since 1957. Most of its constituent parties have an ethnic or regional base, including the dominant United Malays National Organization (UMNO) and the United Traditional Bumiputera Party, whose stronghold is in Sarawak. The delineation of electoral districts gives uneven voting power to ethnic Malays and other indigenous groups, especially those in rural areas, at the expense of groups considered more likely to vote for the opposition, such as city dwellers and ethnic minorities.

In addition to the skewed electoral system, opposition parties face obstacles such as unequal access to the media, restrictions on campaigning and freedom of assembly, and politicized prosecutions. In recent years, politicians and political activists have increasingly been charged with sedition and other criminal offenses for criticizing the government or organizing demonstrations. PKR leader Anwar Ibrahim has been dogged by claims that he "sodomized" a male aide in 2008, a charge seen as politically motivated. He was acquitted in 2012, but the Court of Appeal reversed that verdict and sentenced him to five years in

prison in 2014. The Federal Court, Malaysia's highest court, confirmed the sentence in February 2015. Anwar's daughter, lawmaker Nurul Izzah Anwar, was arrested on sedition charges and temporarily detained in March after she criticized the judiciary in Parliament for its handling of her father's case. At least two members of Parliament were formally charged with sedition later in the year for making similar remarks.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12 (– 1)

Elected officials determine and implement government policy, but the unfair electoral framework weakens their legitimacy, and corruption provides a strong incentive to serve partisan patronage networks rather than the public interest.

Government favoritism and blurred distinctions between public and private enterprises create conditions conducive to corruption. Officials regularly move back and forth between the private and public sectors, fostering opportunities for collusion and graft. Political parties are allowed to own or have financial holdings in corporate enterprises. The Whistleblower Protection Act, which took effect in 2010, has not significantly improved accountability. Malaysia was ranked 54 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In July 2015, it was reported that officials investigating mismanagement at the state-owned 1MDB development fund suspected the diversion of some \$700 million into Prime Minister Najib's private bank accounts ahead of the 2013 elections. Najib denied any wrongdoing, and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission stated in August that the money in question had come from a donation and not from 1MDB, providing little detail. Multiple investigations, including by foreign agencies examining possible money laundering in their jurisdictions, were ongoing at year's end.

Meanwhile, Najib worked to suppress scrutiny within the government and his own party. In July, he replaced the attorney general and fired cabinet ministers, including Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, who had been critical of Najib's handling of the scandal. Najib then promoted four members of a parliamentary committee investigating 1MDB to his cabinet, temporarily halting the committee's work. In September, authorities detained UMNO member Khairuddin Abu Hassan under a security law to prevent him from traveling to the United States and assisting a U.S. investigation of 1MDB money transfers. Muhyiddin and other Najib critics were barred from speaking at an annual UMNO meeting in December.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 27 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 7 / 16

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed but restricted in practice. The 1984 Printing Presses and Publications Act was amended in 2012, retaining the home minister's authority to suspend or revoke publishing licenses but allowing judicial review of such decisions. In July 2015, the *Edge* newspaper received a three-month suspension over its coverage of the 1MDB scandal; a court lifted the suspension in September.

Most private publications are controlled by parties or businesses allied with the BN, as are most private television stations, which generally censor programming according to government guidelines. State outlets reflect government views. Books and films are directly censored or banned for profanity, violence, and political and religious content. Publications often face harassment from the government; police raided the offices of two online newspapers in November 2015 over alleged defamation in their corruption coverage.

The internet has emerged as a primary outlet for free discussion and the exposure of political corruption, but the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission monitors websites and can order the removal of material considered provocative or subversive. A 2012 amendment to the 1950 Evidence Act holds owners and editors of websites, providers of web-hosting services, and owners of computers or mobile devices accountable for information published through their services or property. The government engages in legal harassment of bloggers, activists, academics, students, lawyers, and journalists who post critical content, charging them under defamation laws, the Official Secrets Act, and the Sedition Act, all of which include imprisonment as a possible penalty. At least 91 people were arrested, charged, or investigated for sedition during 2015, according to Amnesty International. In one prominent case, the political cartoonist Zulkiflee Anwar Haque (Zunar) was charged in April for his criticism of the Anwar sodomy conviction on social media.

While some members of the BN government continue to articulate the need for a tolerant and inclusive form of Islam in Malaysia, religious freedom is restricted. Ethnic Malays are defined under the constitution as Muslims. Practicing a version of Islam other than Sunni Islam is prohibited, and Shiites face discrimination. Muslim children and civil servants are required to receive religious education using government-approved curriculums and instructors. Proselytizing among Muslims by other religious groups is prohibited, and a 2007 ruling by the Federal Court effectively made it impossible for Muslims to have their conversions to other faiths recognized by the state. Non-Muslims are not able to build houses of worship as easily as Muslims, and the state retains the right to demolish unregistered religious statues and houses of worship. In 2014, the Federal Court upheld the reinstatement of a ban on non-Muslims using the word “Allah” to refer to God. Malay-speaking Christians had widely used the word in their scriptures, including Christian bibles, and in daily life.

Teachers and students espousing antigovernment views or engaging in political activity are subject to disciplinary action under the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) of 1971. Following a 2011 court finding that the constitution protected students’ involvement in political campaigns, Parliament amended the UUCA in 2012 to allow students to take part in political activities off campus, but those activities are closely monitored.

Open and free private discussion has been undermined in recent years by increasing use of sedition and other charges to suppress critical speech, the ban on non-Muslims’ use of the word “Allah,” and growing state enforcement of conservative social norms.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are limited on the grounds of maintaining security and public order. The 2011 Peaceful Assembly Act lifted a rule requiring police permits for nearly all public gatherings, but other restrictions remain, including a prohibition on street protests and excessive fines for noncompliance. The law delineates 21 public places where assemblies cannot be held—including within 50 meters of houses of worship, schools, and hospitals—and prohibits persons under the age of 15 from attending any public assembly.

In August 2015, Bersih organized mass demonstrations to call for Najib’s resignation and electoral and anticorruption reforms in the wake of the 1MDB scandal. The government declared the protests illegal and banned the Bersih movement’s distinctive yellow shirts. Two Bersih leaders and two Sarawak DAP lawmakers were later charged with violating the Peaceful Assembly Act. A progovernment, UMNO-backed rally that was allowed to go

forward in September featured expressions of anti-Chinese hostility by its mostly ethnic Malay participants.

The Societies Act of 1996 defines a society as any association of seven or more people, excluding schools, businesses, and trade unions. Societies must be approved and registered by the government, which has refused or revoked registrations for political reasons. Numerous nongovernmental organizations operate in Malaysia, but some international human rights organizations are forbidden from forming local branches.

Most Malaysian workers can join trade unions, but the law contravenes international guidelines by restricting unions to representing workers in a single or similar trade. The director general of trade unions can refuse or withdraw registration arbitrarily. Collective bargaining is limited, as is the right to strike. Amendments to the Employment Act in 2011 weakened the responsibilities of employers to workers by allowing for the greater use of subcontractors.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

Judicial independence is compromised by extensive executive influence. Arbitrary or politically motivated verdicts are common, as seen in the convictions of Anwar Ibrahim in 1999, 2000, and 2014 on charges of corruption and sodomy. Malaysia's secular legal system is based on English common law. However, Muslims are subject to Sharia (Islamic law), the interpretation of which varies regionally, and the constitution's Article 121 stipulates that all matters related to Islam should be heard in Sharia courts. This results in vastly different treatment of Muslims and non-Muslims regarding "moral" and family law issues.

Allegations of torture and abuse, including deaths, in police custody continue to be reported, and a number of criminal offenses can be punished with caning. The 2012 Security Offences (Special Measures) Act allows police to detain anyone for up to 28 days without judicial review for broadly defined "security offenses," and suspects may be held for 48 hours before being granted access to a lawyer. A 2013 amendment to the Prevention of Crime Act (PCA), a law ostensibly aimed at combating organized crime, allows a five-member board to order the detention of individuals listed by the Home Ministry for renewable two-year terms without trial or legal representation. In December 2015, Parliament approved the National Security Council Act, which gives the National Security Council—led by the prime minister—the authority to declare security zones in which police can impose curfews and conduct searches and arrests without a warrant, among other special powers.

Although the constitution provides for equal treatment of all citizens, it grants a "special position" to ethnic Malays and other indigenous people, known collectively as *bumiputera*. The government maintains programs intended to boost the economic status of *bumiputera*, who receive preferential treatment in areas including property ownership, higher education, civil service jobs, business affairs, and government contracts.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) Malaysians face widespread discrimination and harassment. Same-sex sexual relations are punishable by up to 20 years in prison under the penal code, and some states apply their own penalties to Muslims under Sharia statutes. The Ministries of Health and Education conduct campaigns to "prevent, overcome, and correct" symptoms of homosexuality in children, while the Ministry of Information has banned television and radio shows depicting gay characters. The Malaysian Islamic Development Department operates camps to "rehabilitate" transgender Muslims. In October 2015, citing procedural flaws, the Federal Court overturned the Court of Appeal's 2014 finding that Sharia statutes in most states banning "a male person posing as a woman" were

unconstitutional. The laws have been used to sentence transgender women to fines and short jail terms, and arrests and harassment reportedly increased after the latest ruling. Three states similarly prohibit “a woman posing as a man.” Enforcement of these laws is often accompanied by physical and sexual abuse.

Malaysia is home to about 150,000 refugees and asylum seekers, including some 45,000 members of Myanmar’s persecuted Rohingya minority. However, the country does not formally grant permanent asylum or accept refugees for settlement, and refugees are not legally permitted to work. In May 2015, the authorities discovered a network of camps along the Thailand-Malaysia border where human traffickers allegedly held migrants and refugees in deplorable conditions while demanding money from their relatives. Mass graves were found at the sites, and authorities on both sides of the border were accused of complicity in the traffickers’ criminal activity. Also in May, the Malaysian government initially refused to rescue hundreds of migrants and refugees who were stranded at sea after being abandoned by traffickers. Malaysia subsequently took in 1,100 of the survivors; while Bangladeshi nationals were repatriated, most of those identified as Rohingya refugees remained in detention pending third-country resettlement at year’s end.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

Citizens are generally free to travel within and outside of Malaysia, as well as to change residence and employment. Malaysia is recognized as having a vibrant private business sector. However, professional and business opportunities and access to higher education are affected by regulations and practices favoring ethnic Malays and those with connections to political elites.

Women are underrepresented in politics, the civil service, and professional fields such as law, medicine, banking, and business. Violence against women remains a serious problem. Muslim women are legally disadvantaged because their family grievances are heard in Sharia courts, where men are favored in matters including inheritance and divorce, and women’s testimony is not given equal weight. Enforcement of conservative dress codes for government buildings was reportedly stepped up in 2015, with women denied entry if their clothing was deemed too revealing.

Foreign household workers are often subject to exploitation and abuse by employers. An estimated two million foreigners work illegally in various industries and are vulnerable to forced labor and sexual abuse. If arrested and found guilty of immigration offenses, they can be caned and detained indefinitely pending deportation. Legislation passed in July 2015 granted greater rights and protections to human trafficking victims, but it had yet to be fully implemented at year’s end. Enforcement of antitrafficking laws is considered weak given the scale of the problem, and no prosecutions of allegedly complicit officials were reported in connection with the migrant camps discovered in May.

↓ Maldives

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 346,946

Civil Liberties Rating: 5↓

Capital: Malé

Freedom Rating: 4.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ratings Change, Trend Arrow: Maldives's civil liberties rating declined from 4 to 5 and it received a downward trend arrow due to the arrest and detention of hundreds of opposition demonstrators, a politically motivated Supreme Court case against the national human rights commission in connection with its submissions to UN human rights monitors, failure to implement critical gender-equality protections, and renewed enforcement of laws against same-sex sexual activity.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	4,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

Despite recent presidential and parliamentary elections, the functioning of democratic institutions in 2015 was weakened by a lack of progress in the implementation of critical reforms. The widely condemned arrest of former president and opposition leader Mohamed Nasheed in February and ongoing persecution of other opposition politicians raised concerns about the deterioration of rule of law and the openness of the political arena. The forced disbandment of a series of opposition-led demonstrations, during which hundreds of participants were arrested and detained, jeopardized an already restricted space for civil society, while politicized actions by the Supreme Court against Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM) led to widespread concern about judicial independence and protective mechanisms for human rights. Protections for women remained thin, and there appeared to be a resurgence in the enforcement of prohibitions on same-sex sexual activity during the year.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 19 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 7 / 12

Under Maldives's 2008 constitution, the president is directly elected for up to two five-year terms. The unicameral People's Majlis is composed of 85 seats, with members elected from individual districts to serve five-year terms.

In tumultuous presidential elections in 2013, President Abdulla Yameen, a half-brother of former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and leader of the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM), won the run-off against Nasheed of the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). The Supreme Court halted the voting process three times, including to order a new first-round vote, and designated the police to play a substantive role in handling logistics for the election. The final process was nevertheless deemed free and fair by both local and international monitors.

Parliamentary elections held in 2014 were largely transparent and competitive. Yameen's PPM won 33 of 85 seats, while the MDP captured 26. The Jumhoore Party won

15 seats, the Maldives Development Alliance won 5, and independents took an additional 5. The Adhaalath Party won the remaining seat. Turnout was almost 77 percent, and both local and international monitors deemed the process free and fair.

Two weeks before the 2014 elections, the Supreme Court removed two of the four members of the Election Commission (EC), one of whom was the commission's head, claiming they had not properly followed election guidelines. It also sentenced all four members to six-month suspended prison sentences. The move was widely criticized as unconstitutional. Members of the EC had criticized the court's rulings on the presidential election the previous year. The main opposition party considered boycotting the 2014 elections, though it ultimately participated. One day prior to the elections, the head of the Jumhoore Party requested the Supreme Court to delay the voting because the EC was not complete, but the Supreme Court denied the request. Extensive preparations allowed the EC to carry out the process despite losing half its members, and international observers lauded the commission's performance during the elections and in overcoming the setbacks.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 6 / 16 (– 1)

Following several decades of rule by Gayoom, Maldives's first multiparty presidential election was held in 2008, and Nasheed, a former political prisoner, triumphed over the incumbent. A number of political parties operate despite administrative obstacles and harassment by authorities. The 2013 Political Parties Act restricted parties from registering and accessing official funds unless they have more than 10,000 members. As a result, 11 of Maldives's 16 parties were dissolved when the law came into force.

In 2015, the political landscape was shaken by the arrest, trial, and eventual conviction and imprisonment of Nasheed on terrorism-related charges. These developments prompted widespread condemnation by critics, who saw them as an attempt by the PPM government to suppress opposition. Following a trial that was widely criticized by international monitors for violating due process, Nasheed was sentenced in March to 13 years in prison. Later that month, the PPM-led People's Majlis amended the 2013 Prisons and Parole Act to ban inmates from membership in political parties. The move effectively ousted Nasheed from the MDP and jeopardized political opportunities for many others. In October, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that Nasheed's sentence resulted directly from the exercise of his rights as a political opposition leader to express views contrary to the government, to associate with his own and other political parties, and to participate in public life. Separately, several opposition politicians were among those arrested for participating in demonstrations during the year.

The Maldivian constitution and legal framework grant the right to vote and opportunity to contest elections only to Muslim citizens and specifically to adherents of Sunni Islam, thus excluding the Christian minority and other religious groups.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

The government appeared to be functioning more coherently in 2015 following the previous year's parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, political polarization and uncertainty continued to limit elected officials' effectiveness in crafting policy and passing legislation. For instance, long-delayed draft laws intended to strengthen rule of law and judicial independence remained stalled in 2015.

An Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), established in 2008, is empowered to investigate corruption by officials, but its work is hampered by inadequate legislation and lacking resources, and the vast majority of cases do not result in convictions.

The Right to Information Act grants the public access to government information, but enforcement remained unclear in 2015.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 24 / 60 (–4)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 6 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression provided it is exercised in a manner “not contrary to any tenet of Islam.” This clause may be interpreted widely, leading to restraint and censorship by journalists and avoidance of critical reporting on religious issues. In April 2015, legislators passed the Public Service Media Act, which called for an extensive overhaul of public broadcasting. Press freedom advocates criticized the move, calling it a government attempt to institute control over the national public broadcaster and transform it into a mouthpiece for the ruling party.

Harassment and intimidation of journalists restricts the space for freedom of the press. In March, three journalists covering opposition-led demonstrations were arrested for “obstructing police duties” and detained for five days without charge. Separately, the August 2014 disappearance of prominent journalist Ahmed Rilwan Abdulla remained unsolved. In 2015, Rilwan’s family and supporters—who have persistently criticized the government’s failure to provide information about the case—reported being intimidated and harassed by police. Security forces also prevented a press conference about the disappearance from taking place in July; the organizers had intended to use the event as a push for investigations. In December, President Yameen announced that an inquiry into the case would be launched.

Freedom of religion remains severely restricted. Islam is the state religion, and all citizens are required to be Muslims. Imams must use government-approved sermons. Non-Muslim foreigners are allowed to observe their religions only in private. In recent years, the rise of conservative strands of Islam has led to more rigid interpretations of rules for behavior and dress, particularly for women, as well as an increase in rhetoric—and occasional physical attacks—against other religions and those who espouse more tolerant versions of Islam.

There are no reports of direct restrictions on academic freedom, but many scholars engage in self-censorship.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12 (–2)

The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, but a restrictive 2012 law limited the ability to protest outside of designated areas, required the media to have accreditation to cover protests, and defined “gatherings” as a group of more than one person. Preemptive detention is sometimes used to deter citizens from participating in protests. In the weeks following Nasheed’s arrest in February 2015, opposition supporters organized a series of demonstrations but were met with force by police, who disbanded the gatherings and arrested hundreds of participants, including prominent politicians and activists. Nearly 200 were arrested during a mass May Day protest in Malé calling for the release of detained opposition figures, which turned violent and led to clashes with security forces. A number of participants remained in detention at year’s end, some of them facing charges of assaulting police officers during the clashes. Separately, during a protest in November, some participants were reportedly hospitalized after police used pepper spray to disperse crowds.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also faced setbacks during the year, particular in regard to their ability to operate freely and comment on human rights, among other sensitive issues. In June, the Supreme Court issued a ruling against the HRCM, which

since September 2014 had faced accusations of treason and “undermining the constitution” following its submission to the UN Human Rights Council for Maldives’ 2015 Universal Periodic Review. The Supreme Court found the submission—which highlighted legitimate concerns that the judicial system was unduly influenced by a politicized Supreme Court—to be unlawful, and accused the HRCM of encouraging terrorism and undermining judicial independence. Independent watchdogs widely denounced the proceedings for undermining the HRCM’s impartiality as a human rights monitor and discouraging local organizations from engaging with international bodies.

The constitution and the 2008 Employment Act allow workers to form trade unions and to strike, and a labor tribunal enforces the act. Strikes do occur, though workers can sometimes face repercussions for industrial action.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16 (– 1)

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and a Judicial Services Commission (JSC) was established in 2009 to separate the judicial branch from the executive. In practice, however, judicial bodies act with limited transparency and are subject to influence from the executive and legislative branches. In 2013, UN special rapporteur Gabriela Knaul raised concerns about transparency and politicization in the judiciary, particularly the JSC. In March 2015, Knaul noted a serious deterioration in the independence of the justice system since her initial investigation. Knaul highlighted the lack of due process in the Nasheed case as a sign of judicial degradation and dysfunction. Given the magnitude of violations in the high-profile proceedings, the potential consequences for rule of law could be substantial. In December, Nasheed’s lawyers announced their intent to appeal his conviction and sentence.

The constitution bans arbitrary arrest, torture, and prolonged detention without adequate judicial review. The abuse of individuals in custody remains a problem. While the HRCM investigates some cases of maltreatment, its independence and capacity have been substantially threatened by the Supreme Court case.

Civil law is used in most cases, but it is subordinate to Sharia (Islamic law), which is applied in matters not covered by civil law and in cases involving divorce or adultery. As a result, the testimony of two women is equal to that of one man, and punishments such as internal exile and flogging continue to be carried out. Access to justice remains difficult for the substantial number of migrant workers in the country. A small percentage of religious minorities do not enjoy equal protection under the law, as the constitution and legal framework favor Sunni Muslims.

While same-sex sexual acts are prohibited by law and can draw draconian penalties, private consensual conduct has gone largely unregulated in recent years. However, in August, police made arrests for the first time since 2013 for same-sex sexual activity, prompting fears that there would be efforts to enforce the criminal prohibitions.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16 (– 1)

Freedom of movement is provided for by law and generally allowed in practice. Property rights are weak, with most land owned by the government and leased to private owners or developers.

During its 2015 analysis of the government’s implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the review committee noted a significant lack of progress in the implementation of national laws designed to ensure equal treatment of women. In particular, given the widespread prevalence of gender-based

violence in Maldives, the committee expressed concern that the government had not yet implemented or enforced the 2012 Domestic Violence Prevention Act or the 2013 Prevention of Human Trafficking Act. Moreover, although the authorities took a positive step in 2013 by issuing a strategic action plan on gender equality, the deteriorating political landscape in recent years has significantly worsened the government's institutional capacity to develop and execute gender equality policies.

Efforts to address human trafficking have been sporadic and largely ineffective, and the exploitation of migrant workers, who comprise an estimated quarter of the country's population, is widespread. Maldives appeared in the Tier 2 watch list in the U.S. State Department's 2016 *Trafficking in Humans Report* due to a lack of new efforts by the government to combat trafficking and prosecute perpetrators.

Mali

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 16,749,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Bamako

Freedom Rating: 4.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	7,5,NF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

In January 2015, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta named Modibo Keïta as the country's new prime minister to replace Moussa Mara, who resigned along with his cabinet. The change was attributed to the apparent unwillingness and inability of the Mara government to combat corruption, and to the slow progress of peace talks to end the Tuareg-led rebellion in the north. The appointment of a new cabinet held the promise of resolving the conflict, as the new prime minister had been a top government negotiator in the peace talks during 2014.

Rebel groups signed a final peace agreement with the government in June. The deal, negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations and Algeria, called for the creation of regional elected bodies but stopped short of establishing federalism for northern Mali, which was the main demand of the rebels. Although the agreement was an important step, there was little progress during the year on the disarmament of the various groups operating in the region, including multiple Islamist militant factions that were not involved in the peace process. Insecurity and limited access continued to hinder efforts to provide basic services and ensure respect for the rule of law in northern Mali.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 17 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12

According to the constitution, the president, who appoints the prime minister, is elected by popular vote and can serve up to two five-year terms. Members of the 160-seat unicameral National Assembly serve five-year terms, with 13 seats reserved to represent Malians living abroad.

The constitution was suspended after a 2012 military coup, but it was eventually restored, leading to elections in 2013. In a two-round presidential election in July and August, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, a former prime minister known by his initials, IBK, defeated Soumaïla Cissé, a former finance minister, garnering 40 percent of the vote in the first round and nearly 78 percent in the runoff. IBK's Rally for Mali (RPM) party won 66 seats in legislative elections held in November and December 2013, and its allies took an additional 49 seats. Cissé's Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD) won 17 seats, and the third-largest party, the Alliance for Democracy (ADEMA), won 16. Sixteen smaller parties and four independents took the remainder.

International observers found that both elections were relatively well conducted in light of the fragile security situation, which led to very low turnout in parts of the north. They determined that the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), which supervises the election process and ensures compliance with the law, and the Constitutional Court, which must certify all results before they become official, had each properly discharged its duties. A new electoral framework, which had been prepared for elections that were canceled due to the 2012 coup, as well as new biometric voter lists streamlined the process. However, hundreds of thousands of potential voters were likely unable to participate due to factors including conflict-related displacement, delays in the distribution of electoral identity cards, and a voter registry that was based on a 2009 census and had not been updated to include citizens who subsequently turned 18.

In September 2015, the government announced that regional and municipal elections originally scheduled for October would be postponed, without specifying a new date. The elections had already been pushed back twice since March 2014. Opposition parties supported the delay, however, citing insecurity, a lack of administrative staff in the north that has held up the revision of voter lists, and the piecemeal return of refugees, most of whom were still living in neighboring countries.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 7 / 16

The creation and the functioning of political parties are determined by a legal framework known as the Political Parties Charter, which is generally considered fair. There are more than 100 registered political parties in Mali, though only about 20 are active.

Electoral competition is open to opposition forces. The 2013 defeat of an Islamist insurgency in the north and the removal of the military junta in the south led to circumstances in which political pluralism could return and parties could campaign for that year's elections on a fairly equal footing. A 2014 law institutionalized specific privileges for opposition parties in the parliament, such as the ability to choose an official leader of the opposition who must be informed and consulted by the president and prime minister on matters of national import.

No single ethnic group dominates the government or security forces. However, long-standing tensions between the more populous nonpastoralist ethnic groups and the Moor and Tuareg pastoralist groups in the north have fueled instability over the decades, with the northerners often occupying a marginal position in national political life and expressing frustration with government neglect or domination. The 2012 northern rebellion was complicated by the involvement of Islamist militants, who were eventually driven out of population centers with international assistance; the Tuareg separatist component of the insurgency later entered peace talks with the government. Precarious security conditions continue to limit political activity and participation in parts of the north.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12

The restoration of civilian rule with an electoral mandate in 2013 has improved the governance situation somewhat. However, state authority in parts of the north is still tenuous, and corruption remains a problem in government, public procurement, and both public and private contracting.

An influx of foreign assistance since 2013 may be crucial for economic development and stability, but it could have a corrosive effect on transparency. Despite public pronouncements that he intends to fight corruption, IBK has been accused of indulging in lavish and unnecessary expenses during his tenure as prime minister from 1994 to 2000. More recently, IBK has been criticized for appointing family members to key posts. His son, Karim Keïta, is a parliamentary deputy and president of the parliamentary defense committee. Karim's father-in-law, Issiaka Sidibé, is president of the National Assembly. Both men were accused in the Malian press of inexperience and incompetence during 2015.

Mali was ranked 95 out of 168 countries and territories assessed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 28 / 60 (+1)**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16 (+1)**

Mali's media were considered among the freest in Africa before the 2012 rebellion and coup. An unprecedented number of journalists were illegally detained and tortured by the military and Islamist militants during 2012, and two French journalists were abducted and killed in the northern town of Kidal in 2013. Reporting on the situation in the north remains dangerous; in August 2015, an Islamist militant group issued a series of threats to foreign journalists working in the region. However, overall conditions for the media have improved over the past two years.

The capital and the rest of the south are once again a relatively open media environment, with sporadic reports of censorship and self-censorship. In March 2015, the authorities blocked an issue of the newsmagazine *Le Reporter* from being printed after its staff refused a government request to remove two articles that were critical of a cabinet minister and Karim Keïta. Internet penetration, though growing, remains low at 7 percent; news websites are popular with the educated elite.

Mali's population is predominantly Sunni Muslim, and Sufism plays a role in the beliefs of most residents. Although the state is secular and religious minorities are protected by law, the High Islamic Council has a significant influence over politics, especially through support for political candidates and parties. In the wake of a November 2015 terrorist attack on a Bamako hotel, Prosecutor General Daniel Tessougué accused the head of the High Islamic Council, Mahmoud Dicko, of condoning terrorism during a media interview. Tessougué also called for a crackdown on religious extremism in Mali, in part through greater scrutiny of mosques' financing. After a public outcry, the prosecutor general was removed from office in late December.

Academic freedom has partly recovered since 2012, when it was harshly suppressed in areas held by Islamist militants and other armed groups. Private discussion has similarly grown more open and free as violence and political instability have ebbed.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly. While conditions have improved in practice since 2013, the risk of violence during public gatherings persists. In January 2015,

protests erupted against the presence of UN peacekeepers in the northern city of Gao. The demonstration turned violent, and UN troops fired on protesters, killing three and injuring four others. A UN inquiry found in April that the troops had “used unauthorized and excessive force.” Following the November terrorist attack in Bamako, the government declared a state of emergency, which allows it to ban public gatherings. The measure was extended twice and remained in force at the end of the year, though there were no reports that it was used to block protests.

Many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in Mali without state interference. However, observers have noted the prominent role of large, established NGOs with ties to the political elite, which can overshadow smaller and more innovative groups, particularly in the competition for funding. Ongoing lack of security in some parts of the country also limits NGO activity.

The constitution guarantees workers the right to form unions and to strike, with some limitations regarding essential services and compulsory arbitration. The government has broad discretionary power over the registration of unions and their recognition for sectoral collective bargaining, and the authorities do not effectively enforce laws against antiunion discrimination.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The judiciary is beholden to the executive, despite the fact that the constitution guarantees judicial independence. Judges are appointed by the president, while the minister of justice supervises both law enforcement and judicial functions. The president, as head of the High Judicial Council, replaced Prosecutor General Tessougué after his public clash with the head of the High Islamic Council in December 2015. Tessougué had also been known for his aggressive pursuit of cases related to corruption and the former military junta.

The overall efficiency of the judicial system remains low. Traditional authorities settle the majority of disputes in rural areas. Detainees are not always charged within the 48-hour period set by law, and police brutality has been reported.

In a sign of relative judicial independence from military control, the 2012 coup leader, Amadou Sanogo, was arrested in November 2013. Sanogo was initially charged only with kidnapping, but the charge was changed to conspiracy to murder following the discovery of approximately 21 bodies in mass graves; the dead were believed to be mutinous soldiers who had opposed Sanogo and were summarily executed in 2012. As of December 2015, Sanogo remained in detention pending trial.

However, the justice system—which was already out of reach to many ordinary Malians—has largely failed to address grave crimes committed during the political unrest and conflict of 2012–13, and the United Nations and other groups have continued to report human rights abuses by security forces and militants in the north, where sporadic violence persisted even after the June 2015 peace agreement. The year’s most dramatic attack occurred in the south in November, when Islamist militants stormed a luxury hotel in Bamako, took scores of hostages, and killed some 20 people—most of them foreigners—before dying as government forces recaptured the building.

Members of a northern caste known as black Tamasheqs face societal discrimination, including slavery-like treatment and hereditary servitude. Authorities sometimes deny them official documents or discriminate against them in housing, schooling, and police protection.

Same-sex sexual acts are legal, but LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face discrimination, including cases of violence with the aim of changing their sexual orientation or gender identity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

Freedom of movement and choice of residence remain affected by insecurity. During the intense fighting of 2012 and 2013, there was a significant increase in Malian refugees fleeing into neighboring countries. Despite a somewhat improved security situation in 2015, conditions in northern Mali left many refugees unable or unwilling to return. According to the United Nations, there were more than 130,000 Malian refugees outside the country and 60,000 people displaced inside the country as of December 2015.

Mali's economy has a large informal sector. Citizens have the right to own property and conduct business activity. Nonetheless, the economy remained weak in 2015.

Women are underrepresented in senior positions in business and politics, with just 13 seats in the National Assembly. A woman served as prime minister for the first time in 2011–12. In November 2015, the National Assembly passed a bill mandating that the number of executive appointments to government positions for either gender must not be less than 30 percent, and that the representation of either gender must not exceed 70 percent on party lists for legislative elections.

The law discriminates against women in matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Rape and domestic violence against women are widespread, and most such crimes go unreported due to societal pressure. Female genital mutilation or cutting is legal and commonly practiced in the country.

Although trafficking in persons is a criminal offense, prosecutions are infrequent. Mali remains a source, destination, and transit country for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Traditional forms of slavery and debt bondage persist, particularly in the north, with thousands of people estimated to be living in such conditions.

Child labor is a significant concern, especially in the artisanal gold-mining sector. Regulation is challenging because of the decentralized nature of the mining.

Malta

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 431,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Valletta

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 39 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 57 / 60 (– 1)

In May 2015, a report from the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants found that migrants have difficulty integrating into Malta's economy and society. It noted the prevalence of labor exploitation and weak enforcement of laws against such abuses. Also that month, the Migrant Integration Policy Index ranked Malta 33 out of 38 countries,

underscoring problems in areas such as labor-market mobility, education, and access to permanent residence.

The parliament passed a new party financing law in July, stipulating that parties must adhere to international auditing standards, that they cannot accept donations from any government entity, that no donations should be accepted from trusts or foundations with unknown beneficiaries, that all donations over 7,000 (\$7,800) must be published online, and that any individual donation cannot exceed 25,000 (\$28,000).

Separately during 2015, officials continued to investigate corruption scandals involving the state-owned energy company Enemalta. In May, the company’s former chief projects officer was acquitted of charges that he had accepted bribes from an oil trader.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Malta, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Marshall Islands

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 1
Freedom Rating: 1.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 55,000
Capital: Majuro

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2 014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40 (+ 1)

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 55 / 60

Parliamentary elections held in November 2015 featured significant turnover, with 14 of 33 seats in the unicameral legislature changing hands. The results were a blow to the government of President Chris Loeak, who saw about half of his cabinet members voted out of office. While the incumbent government was supported by the Aelon Kein Ad (AKA) party and the Kien Eo Am (KEA) group was in opposition, elections are officially nonpartisan, and lawmakers are free to form alliances and change affiliations. The new legislature was set to hold a presidential election in January 2016.

There were no reports of violence or complaints of fraud or irregularities. Voter turnout was lower than usual at 46 percent, though some observers suggested that the list of registered voters was inflated with deceased citizens, making the turnout figure artificially low. Naturalized citizens were allowed to run as candidates under a February court ruling, which found that a 1980 law requiring parliamentary candidates to have at least one Marshallese parent and traditional land rights was unconstitutional.

Corruption and lack of transparency remained problems in 2015. In August, the auditor general reported to the parliament that national and local government officials were obstructing his work, forcing him to use subpoenas to obtain meetings and routine documents.

A 2015 UN human rights review called on the Marshall Islands to form a national human rights commission and step up efforts to address domestic violence, child abuse, and discrimination against women. In October, the country adopted a law prohibiting the domestic and transnational trafficking of children. Local and foreign women and children are vulnerable to forced prostitution in a trade serving the crews of visiting foreign vessels, and the government rarely investigates or prosecutes cases.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands has close relations with the United States under a 1986 Compact of Free Association, which allows the U.S. military to operate in the country in exchange for defense guarantees and development assistance. A component of the compact in force through 2023 calls for the United States to provide about \$70 million in annual aid, including contributions to a trust fund for the country.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in the Marshall Islands, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Mauritania

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 3,641,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Nouakchott

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,PF	4,4,PF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

The political climate in Mauritania remained tense in 2015. Major opposition parties, which boycotted the 2014 elections, continued to denounce President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz as illegitimate even as they attempted to negotiate with the government on the terms of their reentry into the political process. Among their demands were the release of political prisoners, greater respect for civil liberties and the rule of law, and a reduction in the power of the security services. New rounds of dialogue between the government and opposition took place in April and May, but they failed to achieve concrete results.

The government also continued its pattern of passing legislation meant to appease international partners while undermining personal freedoms and civil liberties in practice. Though Mauritania adopted new laws that ostensibly addressed abuses such as slavery and torture, authorities also jailed antislavery activists and harassed journalists who reported on politically sensitive topics.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 9 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

Under the 1991 constitution, the president has the power to appoint and dismiss the prime minister and cabinet. A 2006 amendment imposed a limit of two five-year terms on the presidency.

President Abdel Aziz first came to power through a military coup in 2008. A coalition of four political parties that supported ousted president Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdal-lahi formed the National Front for the Defense of Democracy (FNDU) and refused to participate in the junta-led government.

After winning the presidential election in 2009, Abdel Aziz won a second term in June 2014, taking 82 percent of the vote. The FNDU, currently comprising about a dozen opposition groups, boycotted the election, claiming that Abdel Aziz would not engage in meaningful dialogue to resolve governance and electoral issues. The antislavery activist Biram Dah Abeid ran as an independent and captured 9 percent of the vote. His allegations of misconduct and fraud were dismissed by the authorities, and the international community deemed the election satisfactory. Turnout lagged at 56 percent, which opposition parties cited as a sign of their boycott's success.

Mauritania's bicameral legislature consists of a 147-seat National Assembly, elected by popular vote to five-year terms, and a 56-seat Senate, with 53 members elected by mayors and municipal councils and 3 members chosen by the chamber to represent Mauritians living abroad. One-third of the Senate is meant to be elected on a rotating basis every two years, but voting has been repeatedly postponed in recent years amid opposition boycott threats. After repeated delays, Mauritania held a first round of National Assembly and municipal elections in November 2013, and a second round in December. The president's Union for the Republic (UPR) party won 76 seats, and about a dozen allied parties gave the governing majority a total of 108 seats. Most major opposition parties boycotted the elections, claiming the results were predetermined and the process nontransparent. An exception was the Islamist party Tawassoul, which is associated with North Africa's Muslim Brotherhood and won 16 seats.

Under a 2005 law, party lists for the National Assembly elections must include district-based quotas for female candidates, and 20 percent of all municipal council seats are reserved for women.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16

Political parties are free to operate, but Mauritania's party system is poorly developed, and clan and ethnic loyalties, as well as the military, strongly influence the country's politics. Most opposition parties boycotted the 2014 presidential and 2013 parliamentary elections, citing a system dominated by the president and the UPR—both of which won by large margins.

Although Haratin make up about 40 percent and Afro-Mauritians about 30 percent of the country's population, Bidhan Mauritians dominate the political sphere and occupy most elite government and military positions. According to a November 2014 report by the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement in Mauritania (IRA Mauritania), they held 30 of 35 ministerial, 52 of 54 prefectural, and 12 of 13 gubernatorial posts.

The most recent legislative and presidential elections were conducted before the completion of the national census. As a result, Mauritians without a newly issued identity card were unable to vote. Though the government was forced to implement reforms in 2012 in response to protests over extraordinary obstacles faced by Haratin and Afro-Mauritians when trying to enroll in the census and register to vote, critics cite ongoing discrimination against these groups in the electoral process.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12

Corruption and lack of fiscal transparency are serious problems, especially in bank loans, fishing licenses, land distribution, government contracts, and tax payments. Mauritania has been compliant with the standards of the Extractive Industries Transparency

Initiative (EITI) since 2012, and EITI officials have made headway in improving transparency in some areas of the country's mining and hydrocarbon industries. Nevertheless, abuses persist. In October 2015, it was reported that the U.S. government was investigating allegations of corruption involving the Canadian mining corporation Kinross and Mauritanian government officials. Mauritania was ranked 112 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 21 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16 (– 1)

Despite constitutional guarantees of press freedom, journalists practice self-censorship, and private newspapers face closure for publishing material considered offensive to Islam or threatening to the state. In 2011, the government ended a 51-year monopoly on broadcast media, allowing the formation of private outlets. Defamation was decriminalized in 2011, though fines can still be levied. No civil defamation suits against journalists have been reported since 2013. The government does not restrict internet access; about 15 percent of the population used the medium in 2015.

Journalists and other writers can still face criminal charges and harassment for their work. In December 2014, a court in Nouadhibou sentenced Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed M'Kheitar, a 28-year-old independent blogger, to death for apostasy in an expedited judicial process. In an anonymous online article published on the news website Aqlame in January of that year, Ould M'Kheitar had criticized the unequal social order in Mauritania and the prophet Muhammad. He appealed the sentence, but his court-appointed lawyers resigned in February 2015 for fear of reprisal from religious conservatives who had vocally denounced their client. Ould M'Kheitar remained in prison at year's end pending his appeal.

Several journalists were summoned for questioning by the authorities during the year. In April 2015, for example, the editor of the online newspaper *Al-Bayan El-Souhoufi* was summoned to a police station and interrogated after he published an article on the strained relations between Mauritania and Morocco. In December, a journalist with the website *Mushahid* received death threats and was interrogated by authorities after he reported on corrupt dealings between a member of parliament and a businessman connected to the ruling party.

The 1991 constitution identifies Mauritania as an Islamic republic. Proselytizing by non-Muslims is banned, non-Muslims cannot be citizens, and those who convert from Islam lose their citizenship. In practice, however, the small non-Muslim communities have not been targeted for persecution. Individuals perceived as anti-Islamic are frequently threatened by leading religious figures. Combined with the government's hostility toward independent antislavery activism, such threats have increasingly hampered Mauritanians' ability to address sensitive topics in free and open private discussion. Academic freedom is largely respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

While the constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, organizers are required to obtain consent from the authorities for large gatherings, and such permission is often denied. Gatherings of individuals seen as opposed to the government are sometimes subject to surveillance.

The environment for civil society groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) is often marked by intimidation, violence, and repression. In January 2015, a court sentenced two leaders of IRA Mauritania, Biram Dah Abeid and Brahim Bilal Ramdhane, and

the leader of a similar organization, Kawtal, to two years in prison on charges related to their participation in antislavery demonstrations in 2014. Protests demanding the release of the activists following their conviction were violently dispersed by police, leading to at least four injuries. Their sentences were upheld on appeal in August, though the Kawtal president, Djiby Sow, was released on medical grounds in June.

Workers have the legal right to unionize, but unions require approval from the public prosecutor and often face hostility from employers. Although only about a quarter of Mauritians are formally employed, about 90 percent of workers in the industrial and commercial sectors are unionized. Nevertheless, workers are often wrongfully terminated, and organized workers are sometimes subject to pressure to withdraw their union membership or forgo legal processes. The right to strike is limited by notice requirements and bans on certain forms of strike action. In late January 2015, mineworkers in Zouerat went on strike over the state-owned mining company's failure to deliver on promised pay increases. The action ended in April after the company agreed to reinstate fired strikers, pay back wages to cover the strike period, and hold negotiations on wages, though management was still resisting a pay increase as of late 2015.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

The government heavily influences the judicial system. Many decisions are based on Sharia (Islamic law), especially in family and civil matters, which discriminates against women. Suspects are routinely held for long periods of pretrial detention, and security forces suspected of human rights abuses operate with impunity. Prison conditions are harsh, torture is prevalent, and children are sometimes held with the adult prison population. In August 2015, the National Assembly adopted a law that would establish a commission to monitor prisons, border crossings, medical facilities, and other installations to prevent torture and other state abuses, though it was unclear at year's end how effective this body would be.

Members of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have carried out a number of terrorist attacks in Mauritania in recent years. In December 2015, AQIM released a video showing the execution of a Mauritanian man and two Malian men whom it accused of spying for Mauritania and France. A 2010 antiterrorism law removed previous restrictions on wiretaps and searches, allowed for individuals under age 18 to be charged, and granted immunity to terrorists who inform the authorities of a plot. The U.S. and European governments view President Abdel Aziz as a crucial partner in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region.

Racial and ethnic bias persists in all spheres of political and economic life, with discrimination almost exclusively targeting Afro-Mauritians and Haratin.

Same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Mauritania and punishable by death for men. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals generally hide their sexual orientation or gender identity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

While the Bidhan population is relatively free to make personal decisions about residence, employment, and education, the choices of Afro-Mauritians and Haratin are often constrained by racial and caste-based discrimination.

Discrimination against women persists. Under Sharia, which is widely applied, a woman's testimony is given only half the weight of a man's. Legal protections regarding property and pay equity for women are rarely respected in practice. Female genital mutilation is illegal but common. Abortion is legal only when the life of the mother is in danger.

Despite a 1981 law banning slavery, significant numbers of black Mauritians are believed to live in hereditary slavery-like conditions, and many more suffer from some degree of continuing labor exploitation or economic deprivation as a legacy of past slavery. The government's official stance is to deny the existence of slavery within its borders. In August 2015, the National Assembly passed a law that doubled prison sentences for those convicted of practicing slavery to 20 years, and expanded the definition of slavery to include other forms of servitude, such as forced marriage. While the measure also allows NGOs to file complaints on behalf of slavery victims, they must first be registered for at least five years, effectively disqualifying groups for which the government has denied registration, including IRA Mauritania. Victims often lack awareness of their legal rights, and both investigating agencies and courts are seen as biased against victims. No successful prosecutions for slavery had occurred by the end of 2015.

Mauritius

Political Rights Rating: 1

Civil Liberties Rating:

Freedom Rating: 1.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 1,263,000

Capital: Port Louis

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 52 / 60

The new Alliance Lepep government consolidated its political power in 2015, taking all 120 seats contested in June's local elections. The polls were conducted following electoral reforms that increased the number of councilors to 4 per district, from 3 previously. Alliance Lepep's sweep of the local polls followed its surprise victory over the ruling coalition of Navinchandra Ramgoolam in general elections held in late 2014.

The implementation of a 2012 gender quota for local elections resulted in women's representation in local government increasing to 34 percent following the June 2015 polls, from 26 percent previously. Additionally, after the 2014 polls, the new National Assembly elected a woman to be speaker of the assembly, and in June 2015 it unanimously elected the first woman president. However, there are only 8 women in the 70-seat National Assembly, and women hold just 3 positions in the 24-member cabinet. Separately, at the year's end, the country had yet to complete reforms to address a 2013 UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) ruling that a law requiring political candidates to declare their ethnic and religious status constituted a human rights violation.

The country's generally positive reputation for transparency and accountability was damaged by multiple corruption scandals in 2015, including the arrest in February of former prime minister Ramgoolam on allegations of conspiracy and money laundering, in connection with the discovery of \$6.4 million in cash at his residence. The inquiry later widened to include the former Bank of Mauritius governor. Separately, Pravind Jugnauth, a former

finance minister and technology minister and the son of Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth, was convicted in June 2015 of a conflict of interest offense related to the government’s use of public funds to buy a private hospital; the case was under appeal at the year’s end.

In December 2015, the national assembly passed a good governance bill that expanded the number of public officials required to disclose their assets to the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC).

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Mauritius, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Mexico

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 127,017,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Mexico City

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

President Enrique Peña Nieto reached the halfway point of his six-year term in 2015 facing increasing questions about governmental commitment to good governance and human rights issues. The Peña Nieto administration began its term with a promising set of reforms accompanied by slowing homicide rates, generating optimism about Mexico’s economic and social direction. However, starting in 2014 the government’s narrative of progress was undermined by corruption scandals and rights abuses. The problems continued in 2015, with an increase in homicide rates, the escape of drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzmán from a high-security federal prison, and ongoing repercussions of the September 2014 disappearance of 43 college students in Iguala, Guerrero, who had engaged in political protests. Peña Nieto’s Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)–led coalition maintained its majority following midterm elections in June, but the elections also signaled party fragmentation and the emergence of independent candidates as a new political force.

The Iguala disappearances loomed large throughout the year. Judicial processes continued against scores of local police, drug gang members, and the mayor of the city and his wife, but as of year’s end no convictions had been achieved. In September 2015, a group of experts from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) released a report that assailed investigative and procedural lapses in the government’s investigation and cast doubt on the government’s November 2014 conclusion that the students’ charred remains had been burned in a municipal dump. Although the state agreed to reopen the disappeared students’ case, its response to criticisms by the IACHR was highly defensive.

The government’s denial of the IACHR experts’ request to interview soldiers stationed in Iguala kept rights watchers’ eyes trained on the military, as did the slow pace of judicial

proceedings against soldiers in connection with a June 2014 confrontation between criminals and an army unit in the State of Mexico that left 22 people dead. The spotlight also shone on the federal police following two confrontations in Michoacán. The first, in January 2015, left 8 civilians dead, while a raid in May resulted in the deaths of 42 alleged gangsters and a police officer. In October, Human Rights Watch accused the federal police of committing extrajudicial executions in each incident. Also that month, the United States announced it was withholding a small portion of pledged military assistance due to the lack of progress on rights improvements. Meanwhile, the escape of El Chapo in July embarrassed the government, and a number of high officials were subsequently fired or arrested for corruption and incompetence.

The results of the June midterm elections offered the government some relief, as the ruling PRI continued to hold a majority in the lower house of Congress (with the help of its close allies the Green Party and the New Alliance Party). The elections also offered the first signs of potentially seismic changes in Mexican politics: the left fractured badly, and for the first time candidates were permitted to run as independents, resulting in the election of an outsider governor in the important northern state of Nuevo León.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 28 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

The president is elected to a six-year term and cannot be reelected. The bicameral Congress consists of the 128-member Senate and the 500-member Chamber of Deputies. Senators are elected for six-year terms through a mix of direct voting and proportional representation, with at least two parties represented in each state's delegation. In the Chamber of Deputies, 300 members are elected through direct representation and 200 through proportional representation, each for three-year terms. Under a December 2013 electoral reform, current members of Congress are no longer barred from reelection. As of 2018, elected senators will be eligible to serve up to two six-year terms; deputies will be permitted to serve up to four three-year terms. In Mexico's federal system, the elected governor and legislature in each of the 31 states have significant governing responsibility, including oversight of the majority of the country's beleaguered police forces.

Peña Nieto won the July 2012 presidential election with 38 percent of the vote, followed by veteran Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador with 31 percent. Although López Obrador initially refused to accept the results, alleging infractions such as widespread vote buying, overspending, and media bias, the Federal Electoral Tribunal found insufficient evidence to invalidate the election. In June 2015, the PRI and allied parties overcame poor government approval ratings to garner a 260-seat majority in the lower chamber. The right-wing National Action Party (PAN) won 108 seats, while left-wing parties (the PRD, the López Obrador-led National Regeneration Movement [MORENA], and the Citizens' Movement) won 120. No coalition commands a majority in the Senate, where the PRI-Green Party alliance won 61 seats in 2012, the PAN took 38, and the PRD won 22.

Mexico's National Electoral Institute (INE, known until 2014 as the Federal Electoral Institute) supervises elections and enforces political party laws, including strict regulations on campaign financing and the content of political advertising—although control is weaker in practice. Both the 2012 and 2015 elections were generally considered free and fair, but complaints persisted. The primary accusations in 2012—which concerned alleged instances of vote buying and collusion between the PRI and dominant broadcaster Televisa—were instrumental in sparking a significant anti-PRI student movement. At the state level, allegations of misuse of public resources to favor specific gubernatorial candidates are frequent.

The 2013 political reform broadened the INE's power to include oversight of state elections, and the agency was generally considered to have managed the 2015 balloting competently. However, political analysts faulted the INE's unwillingness to adequately punish violations during the campaign, particularly repeated flouting of electoral rules by the Green Party.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 12 / 16

Mexico's multiparty system features few official restrictions on political organization and activity. Power has changed hands twice at the national level since 2000, and opposition parties are also competitive in many states. However, in states with lower levels of multi-party contestation, locally dominant political actors often govern in a highly opaque manner that limits political activity and citizen participation and opens the door to corruption and organized crime.

The PRI returned to national government in 2012 after losing two consecutive presidential races to the right-leaning PAN. The PRI ruled Mexico without interruption from 1929 to 2000, and many Mexicans still question its commitment to full democracy. Its ally the Green Party is viewed as a particularly feckless seeker of control over public funds. The left, which had previously been dominated by the PRD, fragmented prior to the 2015 mid-terms, with López Obrador forming his own party, MORENA. In addition to independent Jaime "El Bronco" Rodríguez's victory in Nuevo León, the most prominent independent wins were one federal deputy and a state legislator in Jalisco.

Politicians and municipal governments have been subject to significant pressure from criminal groups in recent years, with more than 300 attempted or successful assassinations of local officials registered between 2008 and 2013. There were at least 19 killings linked to the 2015 electoral process.

Indigenous Mexicans are not blocked from participating in the political process, and federal and state laws prescribe procedures for the integration of traditional community customs. However, indigenous groups remain underrepresented in formal political institutions.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Organized crime and related violence have limited the effective governing authority of elected officials in some areas of the country. Members of organized crime have persisted in their attempts to infiltrate local governments in order to ensure their own impunity. The mass student disappearance that occurred in Iguala in September 2014 was linked to a deeply corrupt local government working in conjunction with a drug gang. In the most violent regions, the provision of public services has become more difficult as public-sector employees such as teachers increasingly face extortion.

Official corruption remains a serious problem. Billions of dollars in illegal drug money—as well as large quantities of powerful firearms—enter the country each year from the United States, and such funds affect politics, particularly at the state and local levels. Attempts to prosecute officials for alleged involvement in corrupt or criminal activity have often failed due to the weakness of the cases brought by the state, prompting an attempt to purge the federal prosecutorial agency in 2015. Punitive measures have generally focused on low- and mid-level officials, hundreds of whom have been dismissed or charged with links to drug traffickers. Pressure for reform intensified during 2014 after it was revealed that the president's wife and the finance minister had purchased houses from an active government contractor in a conflict-of-interest scandal. In August 2015, all were cleared of wrongdoing following a widely derided investigation into the so-called mansion scandal.

However, civil society outcry about lack of progress contributed to the April passage of constitutional amendments creating a new National Anticorruption System that grants more autonomy to auditors and prosecutors. Mexico was ranked 95 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Despite some limitations, a 2002 freedom of information law has successfully strengthened transparency at the federal level, though implementation has slowed and many states lag far behind. A new and more extensive transparency law passed in April 2015 was mostly praised by good governance advocates, although controversies over denial of access to files pertaining to abuses by state security forces persisted.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 37 / 60 (+1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 13 / 16 (+1)

Legal and constitutional guarantees of free speech have been improving gradually, but the security environment for journalists remains highly problematic. While some major media outlets have reduced or eliminated their dependence on the government for advertising and subsidies, investigative reporting is scarce and the distribution of government advertising still affects coverage, particularly at the local level. Broadcast media are dominated by a corporate duopoly composed of Televisa and TV Azteca, which together control approximately 95 percent of the free-to-air market. Televisa has faced accusations of supporting specific politicians over the years, usually from the PRI. A 2013 telecommunications law established a new telecommunications regulator, strengthened the Federal Economic Competition Commission, and resulted in the creation of two new free-to-air channels. However, civil society groups have criticized the limited scope of the reforms, and the winners of the auctioned airwaves—one of which subsequently was stripped of its frequency for nonpayment—were not considered likely to offer significant new competition.

A major controversy emerged in March 2015, when famed investigative reporter Carmen Aristegui, whose team broke the presidential mansion story, was fired by MVS Radio. Aristegui accused the station of bowing to political pressures, while the station's owners accused her of repeated insubordination.

Reporters probing police issues, drug trafficking, and official corruption have faced an increasingly high risk of physical harm since 2006, when violence spiked. At least four journalists were killed in connection with their work during 2015. Two of the killings occurred in Oaxaca, and one in Veracruz; another Veracruz-based journalist, Rubén Espinosa, was murdered along with four other people in Mexico City in July after threats in his home state prompted him to flee. Given the broader context of impunity and lack of state protection, the government's rapid dismissal of a professional motive in the Espinosa shooting left Mexican journalists indignant. Self-censorship has increased, with many newspapers in violent areas avoiding publication of stories concerning organized crime. Press watchdog groups hailed the 2012 federalization of crimes against journalists as well as an August 2015 law in Mexico City aimed at protecting journalists and human rights defenders, but they have decried the slow pace of the federal government's special prosecutor for crimes against freedom of expression since the office gained authority in May 2013. Despite improvements in legal status, community radio stations continue to face occasional harassment from criminals and state authorities.

Mexico has been at the forefront of citizen-led efforts to ensure internet access. The government amended Article 6 of the constitution in 2013 to make access to the internet a civil right. However, gangs have targeted bloggers and online journalists who report on organized crime, issuing threats and periodically murdering online writers.

Religious freedom is protected by the constitution and is generally respected in practice. The government does not restrict academic freedom, though university students are sometimes threatened for their political activism. While there are no formal impediments to free and open discussion, fear of criminal monitoring restricts citizens' willingness to converse publicly about crime issues in some areas of the country.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

Constitutional guarantees regarding free assembly and association are largely upheld, but political and civic expression is restricted in some regions. Protest activity slowed in 2015 compared to 2014's highly-publicized mobilizations in Guerrero and Mexico City related to the student disappearances.

Although highly active, nongovernmental organizations sometimes face violent resistance, including threats and murders. Activists representing indigenous groups contesting large-scale infrastructure projects have been particularly vulnerable. In 2012, civil society pressure prompted the government to create a Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, which has offered protection to several hundred people but has been critiqued by rights groups as slow and suffering from insufficient governmental commitment.

Trade unions, long a pillar of the PRI, have diminished significantly, but independent unions still face interference from the government. Informal, nontransparent negotiations between employers and politically connected union leaders often result in "protection contracts" that govern employee rights but are never seen by workers. Several large unions are considered opaque and antagonistic to necessary policy reforms. Longtime teachers' union leader Elba Esther Gordillo—widely perceived as extremely corrupt—was arrested in February 2013 and charged with embezzling more than \$150 million; she remained in prison throughout 2015.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

Mexico's justice system is plagued by delays, unpredictability, and corruption, leading to pervasive impunity. A 2008 constitutional reform replaced the civil-inquisitorial trial system with an oral-adversarial one. Although it was expected to strengthen due process while increasing efficiency and impartiality, human rights groups raised concerns about the weak protections it affords to those suspected of involvement in organized crime. Implementation of the new system is expected to take eight years; in 2015, civil society groups noted progress in some states but significant delays in many others.

Abuses during criminal investigations are rife; in March, a UN special rapporteur released a report characterizing torture as "generalized" within Mexican police forces, generating a diplomatic spat. The government has also faced domestic and international pressure to confront the problem of forced disappearance, which may have affected up to 24,000 Mexicans, although figures remain murky. In December, the government submitted a law to end the statute of limitations for both disappearances and torture and create a system of registering the disappeared and coordinating the state's response.

Coordination among Mexico's many federal, state, and local law enforcement entities has long been problematic, and the Peña Nieto administration has pursued streamlined chains of command. In zones plagued by crime, federal troops have temporarily replaced local police forces. Critics contend that federal intervention decreases incentives for governors to undertake systemic reforms, and in practice implementation of such reforms at the local level has been largely unsuccessful. Despite a 2009 law ordering all members of the

police to be vetted, thousands of police who failed to meet requirements have remained on the job.

Lower courts—and law enforcement in general—are undermined by widespread bribery and suffer from limited capacity. According to a government survey released in September 2015, nearly 93 percent of crimes committed in 2014 went unreported because the underpaid police are viewed as either inept or in league with criminals. Even when investigations are conducted, only a handful of crimes end in convictions. Prisons are violent and overcrowded, and it is not uncommon for prisoners to continue criminal activity while incarcerated. El Chapo's escape led to the arrest of 34 people. The National Human Rights Commission, long maligned due to its perceived passivity in the face of rampant rights abuses, began to regain some credibility following the appointment of a new director in November 2014.

Presidential authority over the armed forces is extensive, but the military has historically operated beyond public scrutiny. Human rights advocates have long complained about a lack of accountability for rights abuses including torture, forced disappearances, and extrajudicial executions. Military personnel are generally tried in military courts, but a bill passed in April 2014 shifted the venue of trials for violations of civilians' rights to civilian courts. Of the seven soldiers indicted for the 2014 State of Mexico massacre, four had charges dismissed in October 2015, while three remained in custody pending trial.

The number of deaths attributed to organized crime rose sharply each year between 2007 and 2011, declined from 2012 to 2014, but ticked upward again in 2015. Violence was particularly acute in Guerrero, and also rose sharply in Mexico City. In March and April 2015, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel carried out a series of attacks that killed more than 20 police in Jalisco. Gang murders often feature extreme brutality designed to maximize the psychological impact on civilians, authorities, and rival groups.

In recent years, the government has taken a number of steps to curb violence and ease popular frustration. These include engaging in consultations with civic leaders, the continued deployment of troops, the reformation of the federal police and development of the National Gendarmerie, and the decriminalization of possession of small quantities of drugs. The Peña Nieto administration has been less vocal on matters of public safety than its predecessor, but it has maintained many of the former administration's strategies, including use of the military. However, after three straight years of declines, the murder rate increased by more than 8 percent in 2015.

Mexican law bans discrimination based on ethnic origin, gender, age, religion, and sexual orientation. Nevertheless, the large indigenous population has been subject to social and economic discrimination, with many groups relegated to extreme poverty in rural villages that lack essential services. Southern states with high concentrations of indigenous residents suffer from particularly deficient services. Indigenous groups have been harmed by criminal violence; in recent years, a series of communities in Guerrero and Michoacán have formed self-defense groups, some of which were subsequently legalized. In addition, disputes over land issues within indigenous groups have occasionally become violent, particularly in the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Criminals have impeded freedom of movement by blocking major roads in several states in recent years, and ordinary citizens avoid roads in many rural areas after dark. Rights groups frequently detail the persecution and criminal predation faced by migrants from Central America, many of whom move through Mexico to reach the United States. Despite government initiatives to improve protections, pressure from the United States to crack down on migrants generated increasing accusations of abuses against migrants in 2015.

Property rights in Mexico are protected by a modern legal framework, but the weakness of the judicial system, frequent solicitation of bribes by bureaucrats and officials, and the high incidence of criminal extortion harm security of property for many individuals and businesses. A series of demonstrations in March 2015 drew attention to brutal working conditions endured by many indigenous Mexicans working in northern agricultural fields.

Women play a prominent role in social and political life, and female representatives increased their share of seats in the Chamber of Deputies to 42 percent in the 2015 elections. However, sexual abuse and domestic violence against women are common. According to a 2012 study, 46 percent of women have suffered some form of violence, and perpetrators are rarely punished. Implementation of a 2007 law designed to protect women from such crimes remains halting, particularly at the state level, and impunity is the norm for the killers of hundreds of women each year. In July 2015, authorities in the State of Mexico issued a “gender alert,” thereby triggering greater scrutiny and an influx of resources to combat an epidemic of violence against women; women’s rights advocates expressed hope it would serve as a precedent for other similarly afflicted regions. Abortion has been a contentious issue in recent years, with many states reacting to Mexico City’s 2007 liberalization of abortion laws by strengthening their own criminal bans on the procedure.

Mexico took significant steps toward LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) equality in 2015, courtesy of the Supreme Court. In June, the chamber struck down as discriminatory a state law stating that the purpose of marriage is procreation, and in August, it extended protections to include adoption of minors by same-sex couples. However, implementing the jurisprudence in all Mexican states will take time, as the court’s rulings do not apply in blanket form to all states that have yet to legalize same-sex marriage.

Mexico is a major source, transit, and destination country for trafficking in persons, including women and children, many of whom are subject to forced labor and sexual exploitation. Organized criminal gangs are heavily involved in human trafficking in Mexico and into the United States. Government corruption is a significant concern as many officials are bribed by or aide traffickers.

Micronesia

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 1
Freedom Rating: 1.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 103,000
Capital: Palikir

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 56 / 60

The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) held general elections in March 2015, resulting in a new Congress of 14 members, all of whom ran as independents. In May, Congress

named Peter Christian, the at-large senator representing the state of Pohnpei, as president and Yosiwo George, the at-large senator for Kosrae, as vice president.

There were no reports of fraud or irregularities in the March polls. No female candidates participated, and the FSM remained one of the few countries in the world with no women in the legislature. Voters in Chuuk, the federation's most populous state, were to decide in a concurrent referendum whether to seek independence, but the Chuuk governor postponed the plebiscite indefinitely in February on the grounds that more consultation was needed before such an important vote.

The FSM relies on economic and defense assistance from the United States under a 1986 Compact of Free Association. The current terms of the compact call for more than \$130 million in annual aid through 2023, in addition to funding from applicable U.S. federal programs, though the compact itself does not expire.

Ties with China have deepened in recent years, with increased Chinese aid and more Chinese tourist arrivals. In April 2015, China pledged \$500,000 in disaster assistance after a typhoon struck the states of Chuuk and Yap. In September, the Chinese government agreed to provide a \$10 million grant for various transportation projects.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Micronesia, see Freedom in the World 2015.

↓ Moldova

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 4,109,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Chişinău

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Trend Arrow: Moldova received a downward trend arrow due to new evidence of government dysfunction, including revelations of mass fraud and corruption, and the enormous influence of powerful businessmen on politics and governance.

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Transnistria, which is examined in a separate report.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	4,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

Moldova experienced a significant political crisis in 2015, as the aftershock of a banking scandal and discord among parliamentary parties and prominent officials caused deep government dysfunction and stalled ongoing reform efforts. Details about a major fraud scheme involving three Moldovan banks continued to emerge during the year, implicating high-ranking public figures and leading to mass protests. The tense climate complicated the process of government formation, contributing to disagreements among the parties that had

won seats in the November 2014 parliamentary elections. After multiple transfers of power, the year ended in a political impasse, with parties unable to form a new governing coalition.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 25 / 40 (–3)

A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12

Voters elect the 101-seat unicameral parliament by proportional representation for four-year terms. Parliament elects the president, who serves up to two four-year terms, with a three-fifths supermajority. Parliament must approve the prime minister, who holds most of the executive power. Nicolae Timofti was elected president in 2012, filling a post that had been vacant since 2009 due to partisan gridlock. The next presidential election is scheduled for 2016.

In the 2014 parliamentary elections, the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), a hard-line Russophile faction, emerged as the largest single parliamentary party with 25 seats, while the more moderate Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) took 21. Among the pro-European parties, the reformist and center-right Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PLDM) won 23 seats, the center-left Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM) took 19, and the pro-Romanian Liberal Party (PL) secured 13.

Although observers praised the 2014 elections as genuinely competitive and generally well administered, there were some significant deficiencies. The pro-Russian Patria Party was disqualified days before the vote on the grounds that it received campaign funds from abroad. Meanwhile, a party whose name and symbols closely resembled those of the PCRM was allowed to participate, potentially confusing voters. The distribution of overseas polling places favored residents of European Union (EU) countries over those living in Russia. Nevertheless, the Constitutional Court approved the election results, rejecting challenges by opposition parties.

Post-election complications, including disagreement among parties and the repercussions of the banking scandal, led to multiple changes of government in 2015. In February, following lengthy negotiations, the PLDM and the PDM formed a minority government, with PLDM candidate Chiril Gaburici as prime minister. The coalition parties were unable to reach an agreement with the PL, their former ally, relying instead on support from the PCRM to reach a majority. Gaburici resigned in June amid accusations that he had falsified his academic records. The PLDM, PDM, and PL agreed to form a new coalition in July, and Valeriu Streleț of the PLDM took the office of the prime minister. In October, as the fraud scandal deepened and led to the arrest of PLDM leader and former prime minister Vlad Filat for alleged involvement, parliament supported a no-confidence motion against Streleț. Parliamentary parties failed to agree on a new candidate after the dissolution of the government, leading President Timofti to nominate businessman and former prime minister Ion Sturza in December. Sturza faced significant opposition from legislators, and no government had been formed at year's end.

Local elections took place in June 2015, days after Gaburici's resignation. According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), they were "efficiently administered and offered the electorate a diverse choice." Pro-European parties secured a majority in most municipalities, including Chișinău. Controversial businessman Renato Usatîi's pro-Russian Our Party won in Moldova's second-largest city, Bălți. Business magnate Ilan Shor, who was among those embroiled in the banking scandal, was elected mayor of Orhei, a town north of Chișinău.

Elections for *bashkan* (governor) of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, the principal home of the country's ethnic Gagauz minority, took place in March. Independent

candidate Irina Vlah, backed by the PSRM and running on a platform of closer ties with Russia, won the position.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16 (– 1)

Moldova's multiparty system features rivalry and diversity within the loosely defined pro-European camp, which advocates for integration into the EU, and the pro-Russian camp, which favors closer ties with Russia. The crisis in neighboring Ukraine has exacerbated this division, and the deepening of the banking scandal in 2015 facilitated further discord among parties. In December, 14 PCRM parliamentarians announced that they would defect to form a separate platform, ostensibly to end the deadlock by supporting the PDM. Dignity and Truth, a civic movement that emerged in February as a platform for demanding government accountability, submitted a request to register as a political party in December.

Russia periodically threatens and imposes economic penalties on Moldova for its moves toward European integration, although according to Moscow, these actions were taken for health or safety reasons. A Russian ban on imports of Moldovan wine has been in place since 2013, and separate bans on Moldovan fruit and meat imports were announced in 2014. In 2015, Russia selectively lifted sanctions against some enterprises, mainly from Gagauzia.

In a landmark event, two Roma women who ran in the June local elections were elected to municipal councils. The Gagauz, a Turkic minority concentrated in the country's south, enjoy regional autonomy, but their leaders allege that their interests are not well represented at the national level. They and Moldova's various Slavic minorities tend to look to leftist parties and Russia for political support, mainly due to the lack of an integration strategy for minorities. In April 2015, the government submitted a draft strategy for the integration of minorities for public consultation.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12 (– 2)

The banking scandal, multiple changes of government, disagreement among parties, and friction among Moldova's politically connected business magnates, or oligarchs, led to government dysfunction and deadlock, causing several reform efforts to stall. The banking scandal in particular emphasized the depth of influence wielded by the country's business elites on the political process, and underlined the extent of corruption at all levels of government. The scandal first emerged in late 2014, after the Moldovan Central Bank took control of three troubled financial institutions, including Banca de Economii. An initial investigation by the private consulting firm Kroll concluded that \$1 billion had disappeared from the banks in a fraudulent borrowing scheme. The audit report, produced in April 2015 and leaked by the parliamentary speaker in May, suggested that many of the entities involved in the scheme were linked to Shor, who had bought into the ownership of Banca de Economii in 2013. In October, after Shor publicly accused Filat of involvement in the affair, Parliament stripped the PLDM leader of his parliamentary immunity. Filat was arrested on the same day on charges of bribery and abuse of power; he later claimed that his arrest was a politically motivated ouster orchestrated by PDM power broker and business tycoon Vlad Plahotniuc. Shor was placed under temporary house arrest in May. Subsequent investigations into the exact sum and perpetrators involved in the coordinated theft were ongoing at year's end.

The scandal had serious financial consequences for the country, contributing to the devaluation of the leu, inflation, and the suspension of assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and EU. Moldova was ranked 103 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 35 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16**

The overall media landscape remains polarized, with outlets often used to advance the political or commercial interests of their owners or affiliates. A number of legislative problems hinder the development of press freedom, including weak enforcement of protections for journalists and a regulatory framework that is open to government influence. In 2015, media watchdogs voiced concern about increasing government attempts to limit journalistic access to public information and events of public interest, including legislative proceedings. On several occasions during the year, the authorities denied entry to journalists from Russian news outlets.

Internet penetration has reached almost 50 percent of the population, and the government does not censor online content. Some new private broadcast and online outlets have entered the market in recent years, adding to the diversity of news coverage. In a positive step, in March 2015, the parliament amended the broadcasting code to require media outlets to disclose information about their owners. Longstanding assumptions about the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few politicians and business leaders were verified after the measure took effect in November; Plahotniuc, for example, was shown to own four of the country's five national television outlets. Critics noted that the law did not require disclosure of information about beneficiaries registered offshore.

Although the constitution guarantees religious freedom, Moldovan law recognizes the "special significance and primary role" of the Orthodox Church. The country's small religious minorities continue to encounter discrimination and hostility from local authorities, Orthodox clergy, and residents in some areas.

Moldovan officials do not restrict academic freedom, although the Gagauz community has complained of exclusion from the mainstream higher education system, as most Gagauz are more fluent in Russian than in Romanian, the official language in Moldova. The freedom to engage in private discussions is generally unhindered, and the government is not known to engage in extralegal surveillance of private communications.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

The government upholds freedom of assembly. Opposition parties and civic groups, particularly the Dignity and Truth platform, organized several antigovernment and anticorruption protests during 2015 without obstruction from the authorities. In May, a group of activists held a march in Chişinău for the rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people; although some counterdemonstrators harassed participants, the event concluded without reports of significant violence.

The constitution provides for freedom of association, and state relations with civil society groups have improved since 2009, despite some wariness or hostility toward nongovernmental organization (NGOs) from leading politicians. Civil society organizations and leaders played a central role in mobilizing public reactions to the banking scandal in 2015.

Enforcement of trade union rights and labor standards is weak, with employers rarely punished for violations. The authorities do not always uphold collective bargaining rights.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

Although the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, judicial and law enforcement officials have a reputation for being corrupt and under the influence of ruling officials. Key positions are parceled out among the ruling parties, and appointment processes lack transparency. Lawmakers have been considering reforms in these sectors for

several years. In May 2015, a proposal for prosecutorial reform—aiming, among other things, to limit prosecutorial power and implement a less partisan process for appointing the prosecutor general—passed in first reading; the legislation was pending full parliamentary approval at year’s end.

Ill-treatment in police custody, extended pretrial detention, and poor prison conditions persist despite some improvements in recent years. Abuse of military conscripts remains a concern.

Although legislators advanced a draft proposal for the integration of national minorities in 2015, no definitive policy or action plan were adopted by year’s end. Roma face discrimination in housing, education, and employment, and have been targets of police violence. LGBT people are subject to harassment. While discrimination based on sexual orientation is not explicitly banned by the main article of the 2012 Law on Ensuring Equality, it is understood to be covered under a reference to discrimination on “any other similar grounds.” The law prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation, though not gender identity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

The law protects freedom of internal movement and foreign travel, and the government generally respects these rights. There are no formal restrictions on the right to choose one’s place of employment or education, but bribery is not uncommon in educational institutions. Private business activity is hampered by factors such as corruption and the role of powerful businessmen who use political connections for personal gain.

Women are underrepresented in public life; just 19 were elected to parliament in 2014. Orders of protection for victims of domestic violence are inadequately enforced. Moldova is a source for women and girls trafficked abroad for forced prostitution.

Hundreds of thousands of Moldovans work abroad, and remittances accounted for approximately 25 percent of gross domestic product in 2015. More than two-thirds of remittances reportedly come from workers in Russia, and Moscow’s warnings against EU integration include threats to close the Russian labor market to Moldovan migrant workers or restrict access.

Monaco

Political Rights Rating: 2
Civil Liberties Rating: 1
Freedom Rating: 1.5
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 38,100
Capital: Monaco

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 31 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 57 / 60

In March 2015, Monaco inaugurated its first national human rights body, the High Commission for the Protection of Rights, Liberties and for Mediation. The commission

released its first annual report in July, emphasizing a need for stronger protections against discrimination in the workplace and at sporting events. In March, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released a report about the overall state of human rights in Monaco. The office expressed concern about inadequate definitions of torture in Monegasque and excessive surveillance, and recommended modifying legislation on torture, examining the incidence of discrimination based on race and nationality, and reviewing the use of closed-circuit cameras by security forces.

Secrecy laws and inadequate financial record keeping have traditionally made the country's level of corruption difficult to measure. In March, Monaco signed an agreement with Italy that will allow Italian tax authorities to access information about the financial activities of Italian taxpayers in the principality's banks. The agreement aims to fight tax evasion, money laundering, financing of terrorism, and other offenses.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Monaco, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Mongolia

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 2
Freedom Rating: 1.5
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 3,029,000
Capital: Ulaanbaatar

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F

INTRODUCTION

President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj was in the middle of his second four-year term in 2015 after winning the 2013 presidential election. Prime Minister Chimed Saikhanbileg of the Democratic Party (DP), who took office in 2014, remained at the helm of a coalition government. In August, six cabinet members from the coalition's other major party, the Mongolian People's Party (MPP), were discharged from their positions as part of preparations for the 2016 national elections.

Mongolia continued to experience economic difficulties including growing public debt and reduced foreign investment. Corruption, the alignment of politicians and powerful business interests, and politicization of the media remained key challenges to freedom and democracy.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 36 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

Under the 1992 constitution, the president and the 76-member parliament (the State Great Khural) are both directly elected for four-year terms. The prime minister, who holds

most executive power, is nominated by the party or coalition with the most seats in the parliament and approved by the parliament with the agreement of the president. The president is head of state and of the armed forces, and can veto legislation, subject to a two-thirds parliamentary override.

Parliamentary balloting has varied from election to election between multimember and single-member districts. In 2012, 48 of the parliament's 76 seats were awarded through majoritarian voting in single-member districts, while the remaining 28 were allocated through a proportional system according to parties' share of the national vote. The DP won 33 seats, the MPP captured 25, and the Justice Coalition—comprising the revived Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) and the Mongolian National Democratic Party (MNDP)—took 11, with 3 seats going to independents and 2 to the Civil Will–Green Party. From 2012 until November 2014, Norov Altankhuyag of the DP led a coalition of the DP, the Justice Coalition, and the Civil Will–Green Party; he was then replaced as prime minister by Saikhanbileg, who gathered a “super coalition” of all members of parliament with the exception of the three independents.

Six MPP members of the cabinet were forced to resign in August 2015 after the passage of a bill, introduced by Saikhanbileg, to discharge them. The move allowed for competition between the country's two major parties, the DP and MPP, in the 2016 national elections; maintaining the coalition would have made election campaigns difficult to wage, especially given the extensive policy similarities between the MPP and the DP.

In the 2013 presidential election, DP-backed Elbegdorj garnered just over 50 percent of the votes, winning the presidency outright in the first round.

For the 2012 parliamentary and 2013 presidential elections, the General Election Commission introduced new practices, including electronic vote counting, fingerprint scanners to identify voters, and free mobile-phone credits as a reward for voting. Following Mongolia's accession to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2012, a large observation mission provided systematic monitoring of the 2013 presidential election. Despite various challenges, including the widespread appointment of DP officials as election administrators and lack of media transparency, the mission declared that the election “respected fundamental freedoms.”

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Mongolia features a vibrant multiparty system. The MPRP, which had ruled the country since the early 20th century, legalized opposition parties in 1990, and competitive elections have led to several peaceful transfers of power. In 2010, the MPRP rebranded itself as the MPP, but a faction led by former president Nambaryn Enkhbayar broke off the following year and formed a new MPRP.

The DP and the MPP command a large share of votes and dominate the parliament, but smaller parties continue to be represented and remain viable. Political parties are largely built around patronage networks rather than political ideologies. Representatives of large business groups play an important role in funding and directing the large parties.

A new reform party, led by a group of young, foreign-educated technocrats, took over the name of a preexisting party, the National Labour Party (HUN) in 2015 and appeared to be planning to field candidates in the 2016 elections. It indicated support for reducing economic regulation while maintaining the government's role in providing education, health care, and other social services.

Ethnic and religious minorities enjoy full political rights in law and practice.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Corruption remains a serious problem in Mongolia and is viewed as pervasive. The Independent Authority against Corruption (IAAC) actively investigates corruption allegations. In August 2015, the parliament, in the absence of opposition lawmakers, passed a controversial amnesty law that applied to individuals currently under investigation by the IAAC. The law would also clear criminal records for numerous politicians, including Enkhbayar, allowing him to run for parliament in 2016 despite a prior conviction. Transparency advocates criticized the law for undermining the credibility of anticorruption efforts, and the president issued a veto, returning the legislation to the parliament. In October, lawmakers adopted amendments that excluded cases of corruption, abuse of authority, abuse of the state budget, and illegal acquisition of capital from the amnesty.

Although the government operates with limited transparency, some progress has been made in recent years. Citizens' Halls, forums established since 2009 to encourage civic participation in the legislative process, were given budgetary authority for the first time in 2013 through the disbursement of Local Development Funds, and they have now been established in all administrative units in the country. The 2014 Budget Transparency Law obliges state bodies and state-funded organizations to publicly disclose budgetary information.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 50 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

While the government generally respects press freedom, many journalists and independent publications practice a degree of self-censorship to avoid legal action under libel laws that place the burden of proof on the defendant. Journalists have been charged in defamation suits by members of parliament and businesspeople; in many cases, the charges have been dropped.

There are hundreds of privately owned print and broadcast outlets, but the main source of news in the vast countryside is the state-owned Mongolian National Broadcaster. Some international media operations have moved into the Mongolian market in recent years. The government does not generally interfere with internet access and is a member of the Freedom Online Coalition, a group of countries committed to upholding human rights in the online sphere. The organization's annual conference was held in Ulaanbaatar in May 2015. However, there is a blacklist of banned terms, and numerous websites have been blocked for alleged copyright violations or, in at least one recent case, criticism of government officials.

Political parties and their members have purchased media outlets, particularly television stations, in recent years. In its 2013 presidential election observation mission, the OSCE found that political actors regularly exert influence on coverage through ownership or payments, and that media ownership is not properly disclosed. However, most Mongolians are aware of the political positions of different media outlets.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution. The fall of communism led to an influx of Christian missionaries to Mongolia and a revival of the country's traditional Buddhism and shamanism. Some Christian groups have reported registration obstacles and instances of harassment by local authorities. The Kazakh Muslim minority generally enjoys freedom of religion.

Academic freedom is respected, and there are no significant impediments to free and open private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are observed in law and in practice. Numerous environmental, human rights, and social welfare groups operate without government restriction. Trade unions are independent and active, and the government generally respects their rights. Collective bargaining is legal. However, labor rights are restricted for certain groups, such as foreign and temporary workers, and some employers unlawfully disrupt union activity.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

The judiciary is independent, but corruption among judges persists. The police force has been accused of making arbitrary arrests and traffic stops, holding detainees for long periods, and beating prisoners. Prison deaths continue to be reported, as insufficient nutrition, heat, and medical care remain problems. President Elbegdorj issued a moratorium on the death penalty in 2010, and in December 2015 lawmakers passed a new criminal code that abolished capital punishment; the legislation would take effect in 2016.

Xenophobic nationalist groups occasionally attack or intimidate foreign nationals. In March 2015, nationalists accosted and verbally abused a group of Chinese citizens, and images of the incident were posted online. The Mongolian government subsequently issued an apology.

Antidiscrimination laws do not address sexual orientation or gender identity, and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face societal bias, cases of assault, and mistreatment by police.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16

While the law protects the freedom of both internal movement and foreign travel, foreign citizens require exit visas to leave Mongolia, which can be denied on various grounds, including involvement in commercial disputes or civil complaints.

The rights to own property and to establish private businesses are legally protected but sometimes constrained by bureaucratic obstacles or weak enforcement of laws. In recent years, the government has simplified requirements and procedures for the establishment and operation of businesses.

While women comprise roughly 60 percent of all university students as well as 60 percent of all judges, they held only 9 parliamentary seats after the 2012 elections despite a 20 percent quota on female candidates. Spousal abuse is prohibited by law, but social and cultural norms continue to discourage victims from reporting such crimes, and the incidence—particularly in connection with alcohol abuse—remains high.

Women and girls, especially those from poor or rural areas, are subjected to sex trafficking within the country, and Mongolian citizens seeking work abroad are vulnerable to sex trafficking or forced labor. Forced labor is also reportedly a problem among North Korean and Chinese workers in Mongolia. The government has continued efforts to eliminate trafficking, though funding for such programs has been inadequate, and victim protection is limited.

Although Mongolia's mining boom has led to high economic growth since 2011, the country also suffers from high levels of poverty, particularly in rural areas. Rural migrants to the capital have settled on the city's outskirts, where there is often poor access to sanitation, employment, and education. Moreover, underdeveloped fiscal policies and the mismanagement of resource revenues have limited the impact of the economic boom on human development.

↓ Montenegro

Political Rights Rating: 3

Civil Liberties Rating: 3↓

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 622,000

Capital: Podgorica

Status Change, Ratings Change, Trend Arrow: Montenegro’s civil liberties rating declined from 2 to 3, its status declined from Free to Partly Free, and it received a downward trend arrow due to restrictions on the freedom of peaceful assembly, including clashes between police and opposition demonstrators and the repeated postponement of an LGBT pride parade, in the context of years of harassment and discrimination against LGBT people.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

Police took efforts to limit antigovernment demonstrations that erupted in the fall of 2015. Protests were banned in 14 towns, while in the capital a number of people were injured in clashes between antigovernment demonstrators and police. Separately, an LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) group reported that authorities in Nikšić banned a local pride march three times over the course of the year, citing security considerations each time.

Despite the ongoing concerns of the European Commission (EC) about the independence of the judiciary and the public broadcaster, as well as numerous failures to effectively prosecute past attacks against media workers, Montenegro is steadily progressing toward European Union (EU) membership. In December 2015, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) formally extended a membership offer to Montenegro, with accession talks set to open in 2016.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 27 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

Members of the unicameral, 81-seat Parliament—the Skupština—are directly elected for four-year terms. The president, directly elected for up to two five-year terms, nominates the prime minister, who requires legislative approval. International observers have deemed past national elections generally free and fair.

In 2012, legislators dissolved the Skupština and called early elections to allow the government to begin talks with the EU with a fresh mandate. A coalition led by Prime Minister Milo Đukanović’s Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) won the polls with a simple majority of 46 percent, or 39 seats. The Democratic Front (DF) took 20 seats, followed by the Socialist People’s Party with 9, Positive Montenegro with 7, and the Bosniak Party with 3. The Croat Citizens’ Initiative and two Albanian parties won 1 seat each. The DPS-led coalition took power with support from Albanian and Croatian minority parties, and Đukanović, who has served as Montenegro’s prime minister or president for most of the last two decades, was elected to his seventh term as prime minister.

In 2013, President Filip Vujanović was reelected with 51 percent of the vote. Miodrag Lekić of the Democratic Front followed with 49 percent. Numerous violations were reported during local elections in May 2014, prompting reruns in some locations. The EC noted a lack of trust in the electoral process among voters in its progress report that year. Ultimately, DPS won the majority of seats in 11 of Montenegro's 12 municipalities. A caretaker government administered Podgorica until a coalition between the DPS and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was struck in September 2014.

The conduct of elections in Montenegro is facilitated by a comprehensive legal and administrative framework.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16

Numerous political parties compete for power, though the opposition is weak. The DF, Montenegro's biggest opposition faction, comprises the reform-minded Movement for Changes and the New Serb Democracy. The current coalition government includes the DPS, its ally, the SDP, and a handful of lawmakers from parties that represent Montenegro's ethnic minorities. The Roma ethnic minority is underrepresented in politics.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Corruption remains a widespread problem. Legislative frameworks to improve transparency in party financing and public procurement, among other anticorruption efforts, are in place, but implementation is mixed. A new anticorruption agency is scheduled to open in 2016, but local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have complained that its framework fails to include adequate protections for whistleblowers or effective requirements that public servants disclose assets. Graft and misconduct remain widespread in areas including health care and public procurement. Organized crime groups have significant influence in both the public and private sectors.

Law enforcement traditionally has not taken an active approach toward corruption investigations, particularly those involving top officials. However, several high-profile arrests took place in 2015. The former mayors of Bar and Budva were indicted on corruption-related charges toward the year's end, and the former president of the now-defunct state union of Serbia and Montenegro was arrested on similar grounds in December. The developments were widely described as a response to EU pressure, but some observers suggested that they were just as much a product of infighting within the DPS. Montenegro was ranked 61 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Civil society participates in state and local government, though the EC has urged closer cooperation.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 43 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

A variety of independent media operate in Montenegro. The government does not explicitly censor media outlets, and libel was decriminalized in 2011, but indirect censorship exists. Journalists who are critical of Đukanović or the governing party have faced costly civil defamation suits. Attacks against journalists continued in 2015, but the number of such instances decreased compared to 2014. Investigative journalist Zorica Bulatović's car was severely damaged by an unknown attacker in May 2015; at the time, she was writing an article on corruption in local government. A commission devoted to investigating violence committed against journalists, established by the government in 2013, continued

to operate in 2015. Investigations have thus far led to some arrests amid growing international concern about a culture of impunity.

The DPS-led government frequently denies opposition media outlets advertising contracts from publicly owned or controlled entities. The public broadcaster is under reform but still lacks sustainable funding, and favors the government; it offered limited coverage of the antigovernment protest movement that emerged in the fall of 2015. Internet access is unrestricted.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religious belief. However, the canonically recognized Serbian Orthodox Church and a self-proclaimed Montenegrin Orthodox Church continue to clash over the ownership of church properties and other issues. Academic freedom is guaranteed by law, and private discussion is open and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12 (– 1)

While citizens generally enjoy freedoms of association and assembly, in 2015 authorities took efforts to limit opposition protests organized by the DF that began in September. In October, authorities banned antigovernment protests in more than a dozen towns, saying organizers had filed their applications late and that the paperwork was incomplete. The protests went forward in any case; officials threatened legal action but it was unclear at the year's end whether they had followed through. At times, antigovernment demonstrators in Podgorica clashed with police who tried to disperse them, with police on one occasion firing tear gas and stun grenades at protesters demonstrating in front of the Skupština. Separately, organizers of an LGBT pride parade in Nikšić said police banned the event three times over the course of the year on security grounds.

NGOs that investigate corruption or criticize the government face pressure, and NGOs critical of the Đukanović administration risk having their online activities monitored. In April 2015, the Podgorica high court ruled that employees of one such group, the Network for Affirmation of the NGO Sector (MANS), be compensated 500 (\$550) each over illegal police surveillance of their online activities. MANS, which in 2014 publicized information implicating Đukanović and the DPS in electoral violations, has faced pressure from the government and harassment in the press.

Most formally employed workers belong to unions, and the right to strike is generally protected. However, trade union members sometimes face discrimination, and dismissals of striking workers have been reported.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16

The EC cited some progress on judicial reform in its 2015 progress report on Montenegro, but nevertheless continued to express concern about the implementation of programs designed to ensure judicial independence. The country's intelligence service has faced sustained criticism from international observers for a perceived lack of professionalism. Legal proceedings are lengthy and often highly bureaucratic, particularly when involving business dealings. Prison conditions do not meet international standards for education or health care.

Approximately 16,000 refugees, most of them displaced in the 1990s Balkan conflicts, live in Montenegro, but only about 1,000 have gained full citizenship. Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, LGBT people, and other minority groups face discrimination.

An LGBT pride parade took place peacefully in Podgorica in December 2015, though the event took place two months later than originally scheduled in the wake of the fall opposition protests. About 300 people participated in the march, which due to security concerns followed a different route than in previous years.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16

The freedom of movement and the right of citizens to choose their residence, employment, and institution of higher education are generally respected in practice. The state sector dominates much of Montenegro's economy, though the tourism industry has thrived, with significant foreign investment to develop coastal towns. Official unemployment has hovered between roughly 15 and 19 percent in recent years. However, many workers officially counted as unemployed work in Montenegro's sizeable gray economy.

Women in Montenegro are legally entitled to equal pay for equal work, but patriarchal attitudes often limit their salary levels and educational opportunities. Women are underrepresented in government and business. Reforms to the electoral law in 2011 aimed to increase gender equality and minority representation in the Skupština. Among them was a 30 percent electoral gender quota, which was implemented for the first time in 2012. The quota yielded a greater percentage of woman candidates, but due to a loophole regarding the placement of names on party lists, only 15 percent of Skupština members are women. Domestic violence remains problematic. Although gender-selective abortion was outlawed in 2009, it has been a growing trend over the past dozen years. Same-sex marriage is constitutionally banned.

Trafficking in persons for the purposes of prostitution and forced labor remains a problem, but the government has taken steps to address the issue, adopting an antitrafficking strategy through 2018. Authorities provide some services for victims of trafficking, who include Roma children subjected to forced begging, and women and girls from Montenegro and other countries in the region who are forced into sex work.

Morocco

Political Rights Rating: 5**Population:** 34,121,000**Civil Liberties Rating:** 4**Capital:** Rabat**Freedom Rating:** 4.5**Freedom Status:** Partly Free**Electoral Democracy:** No

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Western Sahara, which is examined in a separate report.

Ratings Timeline**(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)**

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

In September 2015, Morocco held regional and municipal elections for the first time under the constitutional framework established in 2011. The results were widely perceived as a victory for the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD), the largest party in parliament, which won the most individual seats at the regional level and majorities on the municipal councils of all of Morocco's major urban areas.

The government continued its pattern of ostensibly pursuing a technocratic governance agenda palatable to Western allies while stifling personal freedoms and discussion of sensitive issues. This included crackdowns on journalists, stiff fines and jail sentences for reporters, and deportation of foreign correspondents for attempting to cover politically sensitive topics. Authorities also harassed several prominent civil society leaders and organizations. At least five men were sentenced to prison terms for violating the country's prohibition against same-sex sexual relations, and two women were tried for indecency after wearing short skirts in public.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 15 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 5 / 12

King Mohammed VI and his close advisers, often referred to as the *Makhzen*, hold political, social, and economic power in Morocco. While the palace has engineered a series of constitutional reforms since the first constitution in 1962, the 2011 constitutional referendum was significant as it required the monarch to appoint the prime minister from the party that wins the most seats in parliamentary elections and to consult the prime minister before dissolving parliament. The reform also gave official status to the Tamazight (Berber) language, called for gender equality, and emphasized respect for human rights, though it preserved existing powers for the king. The monarch can dissolve Parliament, rule by decree, and dismiss or appoint cabinet members. He sets national and foreign policy, commands the armed forces and intelligence services, and presides over the judicial system. One of the king's constitutional titles is "commander of the faithful," giving his authority a claim to religious legitimacy.

The lower house of Parliament, the Chamber of Representatives, has 395 directly elected members who serve for five-year terms. Of these, 60 seats are reserved for women and 30 for men under age 40. Members of the 120-seat upper house, the Chamber of Counselors, are chosen by an electoral college to serve six-year terms. Under a rule that took effect in 2009, women are guaranteed 12 percent of the seats in local elections.

Parliamentary elections held after the constitutional reform in 2011 resulted in a victory for the PJD of Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane. The PJD formed a coalition with Istiqlal, the Popular Movement, and was joined by the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS) in early 2012. The government held office until July 2013, when Istiqlal withdrew in protest against the PJD's handling of the economy. A new government took office in October of that year, with the National Rally of Independents (RNI) joining the coalition.

In September 2015, Morocco held its first regional and municipal elections since the adoption of the new constitution. The PJD came in first at the regional level, winning 26 percent of all available seats; the pro-monarchy Party of Authenticity and Modernity (PAM) won 19 percent of available seats, while Istiqlal took 18 percent. Due to the geographic distribution of the seats won, the PAM won five out of the country's 12 regional councils, while the PJD won just two. At the municipal level, PAM came in first with 21 percent of all available seats, while the PJD and Istiqlal each took 16 percent. However, the PJD won majorities on the councils of Casablanca, Tangier, Fes, Rabat, and Marrakech.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 7 / 16

Morocco has a multiparty system, but the parties are fragmented and generally unable to assert themselves. The PJD was a vocal opposition Islamist party before 2011, even as it remained respectful of the monarchy. The Islamist Justice and Charity Movement is illegal, and therefore cannot participate in the electoral process, though other activities are tolerated

by the authorities. Other Islamist groups face official harassment and are not permitted to participate in the political process. Parties emerge and disappear periodically depending on reformation and fractures as well as individual politicians' careerist maneuvers. In the 2015 local elections, over 30 political parties contested seats across the country.

For decades, Rif, Tamazight, and Chleuh peoples—grouped together under the term Berber—have had an uneasy relationship to the Makhzen. Prominent Berber elites enjoy access to the monarchy and also have their interests represented in Parliament by so-called Berber parties, but the bulk of the ethnically indigenous population are marginalized. A legacy of complicated ethnic and identity politics persists.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

While elected officials are duly installed in government, their power to shape policy is sharply constrained as the king and his advisers control most of the levers of power.

Corruption is rife throughout the economy. Morocco was ranked 88 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Despite the government's rhetoric on combating corruption, it has displayed a mixed record in this regard. In February 2015, cabinet officials defeated a parliamentary proposal to strengthen the powers of the main anticorruption body, the Central Authority for the Prevention of Corruption (ICPC). However, in May, the ICPC received the authority from parliament to force government bodies to cooperate with corruption investigations. In June, authorities established a specialized hotline for citizens to report corrupt activity. The ICPC adopted a comprehensive anticorruption strategy in December designed to be implemented across nearly a dozen sectors over the course of 10 years. According to the ICPC chief, the plan has the necessary backing and budget from the government.

For the past several years, the government has published the country's annual budget and other financial information online and has proactively discussed such matters with the press. However, transparency is limited as the Makhzen play an outsize role in the economy and the king is the majority stakeholder in a vast array of private and public sector firms.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 26 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 8 / 16

The state dominates the broadcast media, but people have access to foreign satellite television channels. Although the independent press enjoys a significant degree of freedom when reporting on economic and social policies, the authorities use an array of financial and legal mechanisms to punish critical journalists, particularly those who focus on the king, his family, the status of Western Sahara, or Islam. The monarchy has instructed businesses not to buy ads in publications that have criticized the government. The authorities also occasionally disrupt websites and internet platforms, and bloggers and other internet users are sometimes arrested for posting content that offends the monarchy.

Numerous journalists were subject to legal harassment in 2015. In March, Hicham Mansouri, a project manager with the journalism nongovernmental organization (NGO) Moroccan Association of Investigative Journalism (AMJI), was arrested and charged with committing adultery. He received a prison sentence of 10 months and was fined about \$4,100. The AMJI, which is an advocate for investigative journalism, was harassed by authorities several times in the past year. Several journalists also faced civil and criminal defamation charges related to their reporting. In June, the private news website *Goud* was fined more than \$50,000 for publishing a story accusing the king's private secretary of corruption. The same month, another journalist was given a four-month suspended prison

sentence and \$10,000 fine on criminal defamation charges over his reporting on a story about the death of a Moroccan activist in police custody and claims that he had endured custodial torture.

The government also censored critical and investigative reporting in 2015. In January, a news crew with the television station France 24 was disrupted by security forces while filming a segment in Rabat; they were forced to stop filming and their video footage was confiscated, though it was returned the next day. In February, two French journalists were deported and their footage was seized while they were investigating social and economic developments in the country following the 2011 reforms.

Nearly all Moroccans are Muslims. While the small Jewish community is permitted to practice its faith without government interference, Moroccan authorities are growing increasingly intolerant of social and religious diversity. Moreover, the government exercises strict controls over religious institutions in the name of countering extremism and radicalization. All imams preaching in mosques are required to obtain state certification, and mosques and sermons are regularly monitored by the authorities. The government also operates a large and well-financed training program for imams and female religious counselors tasked with promoting a state-sanctioned version of Islam, which some critics charge is also intended to promote political quiescence.

While university campuses generally provide a space for open discussion, professors practice self-censorship when dealing with sensitive topics like Western Sahara, the monarchy, and Islam.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12 (– 1)

Freedom of assembly is not always respected, though frequent demonstrations by unemployed graduates and unions are generally tolerated. Although such protests often occur without incident, activists say they are harassed outside of public events.

Civil society organizations are quite active, but the authorities monitor Islamist groups and arrest suspected extremists. In 2015, authorities increased pressure on civil society organizations critical of the government, banning a number of their activities, demonstrations, and other projects. By July, a coalition of rights groups had identified 150 violations of their right to peaceful assembly that had taken place since January 2014. In September 2015, the prominent Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) said that 37 of its 97 local branches were being prevented from renewing their registration, and that the government had stopped dozens of its projects and activities from moving forward over the previous year. Other NGO leaders reported legal harassment, travel restrictions, and additional impediments to their work. In contrast, the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Human Rights Abuses Committed by the Moroccan State was registered as an NGO in August, nearly a decade after a 2006 court ruling ordered the government to issue the Western Sahara advocacy group a license.

Workers are permitted to form and join independent trade unions, and the 2004 labor law prevents employers from punishing workers who do so. However, the authorities have forcibly broken up labor actions that involve criticism of the government. In late 2015, Morocco's largest trade unions called for a general strike of public sector workers to demand an increase in wages and the repeal of a penal code provision for the imprisonment of those convicted of using subversive tactics to organize labor actions.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

The judiciary is not independent of the palace, and the courts are regularly used to punish government opponents. A draft law on judicial reform, under parliamentary review

in 2015, was criticized by observers as seriously flawed. Arbitrary arrest and torture still occur. Investigations by rights advocates in 2015 revealed that torture remains widespread among Moroccan security forces, especially against advocates for the independence of Western Sahara, leftists, Islamists, and other government critics.

Efforts by migrants to reach the European Union (EU) by breaching the fences to Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla continue apace. Human rights abuses against the migrant population are extensive, and the European Union turns a blind eye to Moroccan officials' abuses. In December, two Cameroonian migrants were killed by asphyxiation near the border with Ceuta after Moroccan police lit a fire in the entrance to a cave in which they were hiding.

The Moroccan LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community faces harsh discrimination. Same-sex sexual relations are illegal, though they are generally tolerated in tourist areas. In May 2015, three men were sentenced to three years in jail for allegedly engaging in same-sex sexual acts. In June, two other men were convicted for a photograph in which they were holding each other; they were sentenced to four months in jail. According to rights groups, the latter were subject to abuse while in custody, and protesters harassed their families after the Moroccan government revealed their identities publicly.

Arab culture dominates in Morocco. The government has made some efforts to rectify past practice of Arabizing school curricula and society, though inequalities persist. The 2011 constitutional reforms made Berber an official language, and the Amazigh language and culture have been promoted in schools.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

Freedoms of movement, employment, and education are guaranteed by law in Morocco, but poor economic conditions and corruption limit these freedoms in practice. Widespread bribery, nepotism, and misconduct within the educational sector constrain merit-based advancement.

Morocco ranked 75 out of 189 countries in the World Bank's 2016 *Doing Business* report and 85 out of 178 countries on the 2016 *Index of Economic Freedom*, indicating a mixed legal environment for the smooth operation of enterprise. Although starting a business is a relatively quick and simple process, regulatory and market hurdles create difficulties.

The majority of residents are employed as laborers, almost half in the agricultural sector. Nearly 50 percent of Morocco's land is held collectively by tribes, which allocate its use based on the needs of the community, while smallholders and a few larger agricultural outfits hold almost one-third. Most agricultural land is administered according to religious and customary law, which generally respects the ownership and usage rights of its residents and laborers.

Women continue to face significant discrimination at the societal level. However, by Arab standards, Moroccan authorities have a relatively progressive view on gender equality, which is recognized in the 2011 constitution. The 2004 family code has been lauded for granting women increased rights in the areas of marriage, divorce, and child custody, and various other laws aim to protect women's interests. Nevertheless, official abuses persist. In June 2015, two women were arrested and charged with indecency for wearing short skirts in public; both were acquitted in July.

Child laborers, especially girls working as domestic helpers, are denied basic rights. In October, parliament debated legislation concerning rural girls trafficked to cities by middlemen. Local NGOs are urging the establishment of a minimum working age of 18.

Mozambique

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 25,736,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4↓

Capital: Maput

Freedom Rating: 4.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ratings Change: Mozambique's civil liberties rating declined from 3 to 4 due to an increasingly restricted media environment, including more attacks on journalists and a steep rise in the cost of internet access.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,4,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Filipe Nyusi of the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) took office as president in January 2015 after winning the October 2014 election. FRELIMO had signed a cease-fire accord with the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO)—the country's former rebel movement and main opposition party—ahead of the elections, ensuring a peaceful environment for the balloting. However, tensions rose again during 2015, both between the two parties and within FRELIMO itself.

Violent skirmishes between FRELIMO and RENAMO forces erupted over the course of the year. After RENAMO's efforts to secure regional autonomy through a constitutional amendment failed in November, party leader Afonso Dhlakama promised to take control of six northern and central provinces by force if necessary.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 22 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12

The president, who appoints the prime minister, is elected by popular vote for up to two five-year terms. Members of the 250-seat, unicameral Assembly of the Republic are also elected for five-year terms. The national government appoints the governors of the 10 provinces and Maputo City. Despite the existence of municipal governments and, since 2009, elected provincial assemblies, power remains highly centralized, particularly in the hands of the president.

Acceding to RENAMO demands, the Assembly of the Republic passed several amendments to electoral legislation in February 2014, enabling greater participation by opposition parties and civil society representatives on national, provincial, and district-level election commissions. Nevertheless, during the October 2014 general elections, in which 29 parties participated, members of several small parties accused the national election commission of favoring candidates from the three largest parties: FRELIMO, RENAMO, and the Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM). Despite these complaints, and incidents of reported ballot stuffing and other irregularities in some precincts, international observers agreed that the elections were credible. RENAMO denounced the results as fraudulent and called for new elections. After conducting an investigation, the national election commission concluded that the elections were valid, and that annulling the results would violate the law.

According to the official results, Nyusi won the presidential contest with 57 percent of the vote. FRELIMO candidates won 144 parliamentary seats, while RENAMO took 89, and MDM won 17. Despite winning the majority of races, FRELIMO lost 47 seats and its previous two-thirds majority in the assembly. At the provincial level, FRELIMO suffered a net loss of 219 seats, and RENAMO won some provinces decisively.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

A 1992 peace agreement ended the 16-year civil war between FRELIMO, the former guerrilla group that had fought to win Mozambique's independence from Portugal, and RENAMO, a rebel group that was supported first by Rhodesia, then by apartheid-era South Africa. Multiparty elections followed the peace accord, with FRELIMO emerging as the winner. The party has won every election since, and RENAMO has always placed second. In 2009, several RENAMO politicians broke with the party to establish MDM, which has rapidly established itself as a viable political force. Political parties are expressly prohibited from identifying exclusively with any religious or ethnic group.

The first months of 2015 were marred by a power struggle between outgoing president Armando Guebuza, who remained FRELIMO's party leader after completing his term as head of state, and Nyusi, who took office as president in January. However, in April Guebuza was forced to resign as party leader, clearing the way for Nyusi to take the helm of both the state and the party, like all previous presidents.

RENAMO boycotted the first sessions of the newly elected assembly, demanding power over the provinces where it had won majorities in the 2014 elections. The party's 89 elected representatives only took their seats in February, after Nyusi met with Dhlakama and promised that the FRELIMO-dominated legislature would give serious consideration to the opposition leader's proposal for provincial autonomy. In the months that followed, however, RENAMO and MDM jointly submitted several motions for votes of no-confidence against the FRELIMO government and its officials, while FRELIMO consistently challenged legislation proposed by the opposition parties. FRELIMO blocked a bill on provincial autonomy as unconstitutional, then defeated a measure in which RENAMO sought to achieve the same goal by amending the constitution in November.

Given FRELIMO's refusal to allow provincial autonomy, Dhlakama accused Nyusi of reneging on their February agreement. In September, he went into hiding after his motorcade was attacked by police in Manica Province, leaving 25 of his supporters dead. Police claimed that Dhlakama and his convoy were accidentally caught in the crossfire of an unrelated operation. However, when the RENAMO leader emerged from hiding in early October, he was briefly placed under house arrest. Clashes between government forces and RENAMO fighters followed, and Dhlakama returned to hiding.

On November 30, Dhlakama made a speech in which he declared that his party would take control, "without bloodshed," of the six northern and central provinces where RENAMO had won the majority of votes in the 2014 presidential election. Insisting that he did not want to go back to war, Dhlakama nevertheless declared that he was ready to "destroy everything" if government forces attempted to interfere with the plan. Recordings of the speech began circulating in December, leading to increased conflict between government forces and RENAMO supporters.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12 (- 1)

FRELIMO's unbroken incumbency has allowed the party to acquire significant control over state institutions, and the failure of the main parties to work out their differences

through normal democratic procedures continued to erode the country's political system in 2015.

Corruption has been subject to increased public censure following the 2012 enactment of an anticorruption law and the delegation of new powers to the Central Office for Combating Corruption (GCCC). Nevertheless, corruption in government and business remains pervasive. Police officers and judicial authorities frequently fail to follow up on some of the most glaring instances of corruption. For example, in 2015 the Attorney General's Office did not investigate allegations of corruption and influence peddling involving former president Guebuza and the Italian oil and gas company ENI, despite well-reported evidence gathered by Italian prosecutors in a related investigation in Milan.

Mozambique was ranked 112 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 34 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16 (– 1)

Press freedom is legally protected, but reporters are often censored in practice, or self-censor in response to threats and other pressure. The government controls the daily *Notícias* and its own news agency, radio stations, and television broadcaster. Independent media include the privately owned papers *O País* and *Diário de Moçambique*, several weeklies, a number of private radio stations, and multiple news websites. In 2015, the limits to freedom of expression were reinforced by the violent murders of two well-known figures: journalist Paulo Machava, founder of the daily news website *Diário de Notícias*, and the renowned constitutional lawyer Gilles Cistac. Although the assailants in both cases were unidentified and the motives unclear, Machavo had reported on crime, and Cistac had endorsed the constitutionality of provincial autonomy.

There are no official government restrictions on internet use, but opposition leaders have claimed that government intelligence services monitor online communications. In 2015, the cost of internet access rose significantly following the government's decision to cut telecommunications subsidies by 75 percent. Critics argued that the government was attempting to limit access to information.

Religious freedom is well respected, and hundreds of religious groups are registered with the Ministry of Justice. Academic freedom is sometimes restricted. While private discussion is generally open and free, online surveillance and the threat of violence may inhibit expression on sensitive topics.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are broadly guaranteed, but with substantial regulations. By law, the right to assemble is subject to notification and timing restrictions, and in practice it is a matter of governmental discretion. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate openly but face bureaucratic hurdles in registering with the government, as required by law.

Workers have the right to form and join unions and to strike, but there are a number of procedural barriers to legal strikes. In April 2015, 50 workers at the Pepsi-Cola factory in Matola went on strike to demand a wage increase; while the Ministry of Labor declared the action illegal, it continued to mediate negotiations. Workers of the Municipal Public Transportation Company in Maputo went on strike in June and again in September over

back wages, delays in approved pay increases, and a lack of promotions in the past five years.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

The Assembly of the Republic passed a new penal code in July 2014, despite criticism from the minister of justice, the attorney general, local civil society, and Amnesty International based on a number of shortcomings. President Guebuza vetoed the measure, but the assembly overrode the veto, and Guebuza signed the code into law in December 2014. The new penal code became effective in July 2015. Implementation will require an overhaul of the criminal procedure code; in October, the assembly directed the relevant parliamentary committee to revise that code by December 2016.

Judicial independence remains limited due to scarce resources, poor training, a large backlog of cases, and fear of violent retaliation. Corruption also negatively affects the performance of the judicial system.

Prison overcrowding is a chronic problem, with many inmates held in pretrial detention for longer than authorized by law. In December 2015, President Nyusi announced that he would pardon 1,000 prisoners on compassionate grounds, which would help ease overcrowding.

The crime rate continued to increase in 2015, with 1,754 murders and a total of 46,530 crimes reported, up from 1,223 and 42,622 in 2014, respectively. In May 2015, Nyusi denounced police involvement in criminal activity, including murders, drug trafficking, and poaching. He called for improvements in the hiring, selection, and training of police officers, and solicited cooperation from the Southern Africa Development Community in combating transnational crimes. Poaching has become a very serious issue, leading to a significant decline in the elephant population. In 2014–15, at least 434 people were arrested in Mozambique for poaching, and dozens of Mozambicans are reportedly killed each year while poaching across the border in South Africa's Kruger National Park.

Armed clashes involving FRELIMO-backed security forces and RENAMO fighters continued to occur in 2015. In June, RENAMO was reported to have conducted three attacks in Tete Province. The government accused RENAMO of attacking five police and civilian targets in Tete over a two-week period in August. In September the violence shifted to Manica Province, where the attacks on Dhlakama's convoy led him to go into hiding. Even after he returned to hiding following his de facto house arrest in October, the unrest continued to rise, with several confirmed skirmishes in Morrumbala and Sofala as government forces tried to dismantle RENAMO bases and force the disarmament of RENAMO supporters. The demilitarization and reintegration of RENAMO fighters had been a key element of the September 2014 peace accord, but what was supposed to be a voluntary process remained stalled for months, leading government forces to pursue compulsory disarmament.

Mozambican police reportedly discriminate against minorities in the country, including Zimbabwean, Somali, and Chinese immigrants. For years, albinos in Mozambique have been kidnapped and killed due to superstitions about the magical properties of their body parts, but recently the situation has deteriorated: at least 15 albinos were kidnapped and killed in 2015 alone.

The 2014 penal code decriminalized same-sex sexual activity, and antidiscrimination laws bar employment discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. However, the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) advocacy group Lambda has yet

to secure legal registration as an NGO after more than seven years of attempts. Lambda reports that LGBT people are not targeted with violent acts as in some other African countries, but that they still face discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

Movement within Mozambique is hampered by the presence of checkpoints manned by corrupt police officials, who often harass and demand bribes from travelers.

The law does not recognize private property; citizens obtain land-use rights from the government. Most citizens are uninformed about the land law and fail to properly register their traditional holdings. The government must approve all formal transfers of use rights, an often opaque and protracted process. For these reasons, most land transactions occur on an extralegal market.

Mozambique has laws and national plans of action to reduce gender-based discrimination and violence against women, and the country benefits from UN assistance on the issue, but offenses still occur. The International Center for Research on Women reports that 56 percent of girls marry before reaching 18. According to the Ministry of Women and Social Action, at least 54 percent of women will endure some form of physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives.

Women’s participation in politics is rising. In 2015, 39 percent of the parliament’s 250 members were women, including the body’s president. In addition, 28 percent of ministers, 20 percent of vice ministers, 54 percent of permanent secretaries, and 41 percent of provincial governors were women in 2015. Women also play a significant role in the justice system, accounting for 30.5 percent of judges and 44 percent of assistant prosecutors. Attorney General Beatriz Buchili is the first woman to occupy her position.

Since 2012, human trafficking has been on the rise. Children are exploited for labor in agriculture, mining, and other sectors, while women and girls from rural areas are drawn into sex trafficking and domestic servitude. In November 2015, government institutions and civil society came together to establish a working group to actively fight against human trafficking, though the number of prosecutions and convictions reportedly fell compared with 2014.

↑ Myanmar

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 52,147,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5↑

Capital: Nay Pyi Taw

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ratings Change, Trend Arrow: Myanmar’s civil liberties rating improved from 6 to 5 and it received an upward trend arrow after the opposition National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in parliamentary elections that were seen as largely free and fair, notwithstanding the disenfranchisement of the Rohingya minority.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,6,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

Opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won an overwhelming victory in November 2015 parliamentary elections, and the ruling Union and Solidarity Development Party (USDP) accepted the results, setting the stage for the peaceful formation of a new government in early 2016. However, military appointees would retain 25 percent of the seats in both houses, and as many as 1 million people—most of them from the ethnic Rohingya minority—were disenfranchised, having been excluded from the voter list ahead of the elections.

Offensives by the military against various ethnic rebel groups and the government's unwillingness to engage in a comprehensive political dialogue continued to hamper the prospect of a nationwide cease-fire agreement in 2015. Despite strong reporting before and during the elections, infringements on media freedoms persisted. Freedom of assembly was also under threat, as student protests were violently quelled.

The spread of anti-Muslim discrimination continued. Political parties actively avoided fielding Muslim political candidates, and the parliament adopted four measures—dubbed the Protection of Race and Religion Bills—that restricted polygamy, religious conversion, interfaith marriages, and birth rates in designated regions.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 11 / 40 (+2)**A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12**

Under the 2008 constitution, whose drafting was controlled by the military, the bicameral Assembly of the Union consists of the 440-seat House of Representatives, or lower house, and the 224-seat House of Nationalities, or upper house. Representatives serve five-year terms. A quarter of the seats in both houses are reserved for the military and filled through appointment by the commander in chief, an officer with broad powers who is selected by the military-dominated National Defense and Security Council (NDSC). The legislature elects the president. Military members have the right to nominate one of the three presidential candidates, and the elected members of each chamber nominate the other two. The candidate with the largest number of votes in a combined parliamentary vote wins the presidency; the other two candidates become vice presidents.

Unlike in the 2010 elections, international electoral observers concluded that the 2015 electoral process was generally credible and the outcome reflected the will of the people, despite a campaign period marked by anti-Muslim rhetoric, the exclusion of Muslim candidates, and the disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, most of whom are Muslim. The NLD won 135 of the 168 elected seats in the upper house, 255 of 330 elected seats in the lower house, and 496 of 659 seats across 14 state and regional legislatures. The government-backed USDP placed second with 30 seats in the lower house, 12 in the upper house, and 76 in the states and regions. The remaining seats were captured by ethnic minority and other parties as well as independents. While ethnic parties fared poorly overall, the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) and the Arakan National Party (ANP) performed well in their respective states.

After the elections, commander in chief Min Aung Hlaing, former military ruler Than Shwe, and outgoing president Thein Sein each met with Aung San Suu Kyi and agreed to support a smooth transition. However, constitutional provisions barred the NLD leader from becoming president due to the foreign nationality of her immediate family members. Changes to the constitution require a three-quarters parliamentary supermajority, meaning military support would be required in practice.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 8 / 16 (+2)

New political parties were generally allowed to register and compete in the 2015 elections, which featured fewer restrictions on party organization and voter mobilization than the 2010 vote. Only sporadic interference from government officials was reported. Ninety-one parties competed in the elections, and many of them, including the NLD, convened meetings and large rallies throughout the country.

The government has allowed members of the parliament to speak about democratic rights since 2011. While the legislators' time to speak has often been severely limited, many of their speeches receive coverage in the domestic media. Since winning a seat in 2012 by-elections, Aung San Suu Kyi has gained political influence, as demonstrated by the NLD's dramatic 2015 electoral victory. However, critics argue that she has failed to strongly challenge incumbent interests or alter state policy. She and her aides notably downplayed the plight of the Rohingya minority during 2015.

The military retains considerable power over political affairs, though the 2015 results and subsequent transition talks suggested a waning ability or determination to influence electoral outcomes. The 2008 constitution allows the military to dissolve the civilian government and parliament and rule directly if the president declares a state of emergency. The military has the right to administer its own affairs, and members of the former military government received blanket immunity for all official acts.

Minority groups face restrictions on their political rights and electoral opportunities. A 2014 amendment to the Political Parties Registration Law prohibited residents without full citizenship from forming political parties or contesting elections. The measure effectively curbed political participation by Rohingya, who were rendered stateless by a 1982 law and lack full citizenship documents. A sitting Rohingya lawmaker from the USDP was barred from running in 2015. In February, under pressure from Buddhist nationalists, the president issued a decree revoking the temporary identification cards, or "white cards," that had allowed Rohingya to vote in previous elections. A Constitutional Tribunal ruling in May then found that voting by white-card holders was unconstitutional. Nearly all Rohingya were consequently left off the voter rolls for the November elections. Other Muslims with citizenship documents were able to vote, but of more than 6,000 candidates on the final list, only about 28 were Muslim. A total of 75 candidates were disqualified by election officials, including a number of Rohingyas and other Muslims.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

The military remains a dominant force in policymaking, particularly through its constitutional control over the defense, home affairs, and border affairs ministries. The military effectively controls at least six seats on the powerful 11-member NDSC. Over one-fifth of the total budget is devoted to the military. Although the military budget remains opaque and the 2011 Special Funds Law allows the military to circumvent parliamentary oversight to access additional funds, details on part of the budget were shared publicly for the first time in 2015 and faced limited parliamentary scrutiny.

Corruption is rampant at both the national and local levels. Myanmar was ranked 147 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. While the budget process has become more open, the government does not take significant steps to curb corruption. There are widespread allegations that economic reforms have benefited family members and associates of senior officials, and the government has ignored tax evasion by the country's wealthiest companies and individuals. A 2015 report by Global Witness found that the military, senior officers' families, and other elites controlled the poorly regulated, multibillion-dollar jade trade.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 3 / 0

The government has long used violence, displacement, and other tactics to alter the demographics of states with ethnic unrest or insurgencies. The Rohingya in Rakhine State have faced particularly harsh restrictions for decades, including limits on family size and the ability and right to marry. Hundreds of Rohingya remain imprisoned for dubious offenses such as marrying an unapproved spouse. Children born to unrecognized couples or beyond the two-child limit are often denied legal status and services.

In 2015, the revocation and confiscation of hundreds of thousands of temporary identification cards, held mainly by Rohingya, contributed to what became Southeast Asia's largest refugee crisis in decades, as thousands of people fled to seek asylum in neighboring countries. Former white-card holders were offered new temporary "green" cards, though these carried no voting or citizenship rights.

Human rights experts have labeled the treatment of the Rohingya as crimes against humanity, and in 2015 some analysts argued that it constituted either genocide or a precursor to genocide.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 17 / 60 (+ 1)**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 7 / 16 (+ 1)**

The media played an important role during the 2015 election campaign, with several newspapers, online outlets, and foreign or expatriate-based broadcasters providing robust coverage of the competing parties, candidates, and issues at stake. However, domestic television and radio, the principle sources of information for the majority of the population, remained in the control of the military, the USDP government, or their allies in 2015, and state-media coverage favored the incumbents.

In May, media access to the parliament was severely restricted after the publication of photos that showed lawmakers sleeping during sessions or voting for absent colleagues. In June, writer and NLD member Htin Linn Oo was sentenced to two years in prison with hard labor for insulting religion through a 2014 speech that challenged the Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion (known by the Burmese acronym Ma Ba Tha), a hard-line Buddhist nationalist group, and asserted the incompatibility of Buddhism with extreme nationalism. In July, two men armed with slingshots and metal projectiles attacked the vehicle of the head of Eleven Media Group, one of the country's most outspoken and critical news editors; he was not harmed in the assault.

Previous constraints on internet access have largely unraveled, and the proliferation of smartphones has rapidly increased usage, but internet activity is still subject to criminal punishment under broadly worded legal provisions. In 2013 the penalties under the Electronic Transactions Law, which is routinely used to criminalize political activism on the internet, were reduced to fines or prison terms of 3 to 7 years (down from 7 to 15 years) for "any act detrimental to" state security, law and order, community peace and tranquility, national solidarity, the national economy, or national culture—including "receiving or sending" related information. Journalists and others have faced cyberattacks and attempts to infiltrate their e-mail accounts by both state and nonstate actors. In 2015, a series of arrests apparently marked the first use of defamation laws against social-media users. At least four people were detained beginning in October for Facebook posts deemed insulting to the military or Aung San Suu Kyi, and one was sentenced in December to six months in prison.

The 2008 constitution provides for freedom of religion. It distinguishes Buddhism as the majority religion, but also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and animism. The government occasionally interferes with religious assemblies and attempts to control the

Buddhist clergy. Authorities have also discriminated against minority religious groups, refusing to grant them permission to hold gatherings and restricting educational activities, proselytizing, and construction of houses of worship. In January 2015, state officials ordered the removal of a large Christian cross on a hilltop near the Chin State capital of Hakha.

Anti-Muslim hate speech and discrimination continued to spread during the year. Social media and some state institutions and mainstream news websites amplified communal tensions. Ma Ba Tha agitated for the protection of Buddhist privileges, urged boycotts against Muslim-run businesses, and disseminated anti-Muslim propaganda. In September, Muslims in some areas faced restrictions on traditional animal slaughter associated with the Eid al-Adha holiday after local officials gave in to demands from Ma Ba Tha. An investigative media report the same month found that Ma Ba Tha members had succeeded in closing down multiple Muslim-owned businesses, especially slaughterhouses, with assistance from local authorities. The group has also been accused of instigating violence, which political leaders have done little to stop.

Between May and August, the president signed the so-called Protection of Race and Religion Bills, which were seen as advancing an anti-Muslim, Buddhist nationalist agenda. They included penalties for polygamy, special boards to approve religious conversions, obstacles to the marriage of Buddhist women to non-Buddhist men, and a mechanism allowing the government to restrict birth rates in certain regions based on vague development criteria.

In June, the parliament approved a revised version of a controversial education law, initially passed in September 2014, that failed to meet student demands concerning decentralization, access to instruction in local languages, curriculum reform, and a clear role for student unions in setting education policy, among other issues. Opponents of the new law said it perpetuated the country's authoritarian approach to academic freedom, and student leaders pledged to continue pressing their demands.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

Under the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law, as revised in 2014, holding a demonstration without government "consent" is punishable with up to six months in prison; a variety of other vaguely worded violations can draw lesser penalties. While election-related assemblies were common in many areas during 2015, authorities continued to use the law to arrest demonstrators. In March, police attacked students protesting the new education law, arresting 127 and charging them with offenses including unlawful assembly and rioting. Other student activists were detained later in the year. In September, a conference on the sensitive topic of development projects' socioeconomic impact on communities in Karen State was closed down after state authorities claimed that the organizers did not seek the proper permissions.

The 2014 Association Registration Law features simple, voluntary registration procedures for local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and no restrictions or criminal punishments for noncompliance. Although the law was seen as a positive development, in June 2015 the Home Affairs Ministry issued implementing regulations, or "by-laws," that required NGOs to obtain government approval prior to registration, drawing sharp criticism from civil society leaders.

Independent trade unions were banned until 2011, and union organizers continue to face retaliation for their work. In recent years, garment workers have held strikes in Yangon with fewer repercussions than in the past, though arrests persisted in 2015. A 2013 law allowed for a minimum wage, and in 2015, after two years of heated negotiations, the figure was set at \$2.80 per day.

F. Rule of Law: 1 / 16

The judiciary is not independent. Judges are appointed or approved by the government and adjudicate cases according to its decrees. Administrative detention laws allow individuals to be held without charge, trial, or access to legal counsel for up to five years if deemed a threat to state security or sovereignty. According to a report by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), 127 political prisoners were incarcerated as of early December 2015, and 472 were awaiting trial, a notable increase from a year earlier on both counts.

Some of the country's worst human rights abuses, commonly committed by government troops, are against ethnic minorities, especially the Kachin, Shan, Chin, Karen, and Rohingya. Riots and mob violence against Rohingya and other Muslims have killed hundreds of people, displaced thousands of residents, and destroyed hundreds of properties, including religious sites, since 2012, though such attacks reportedly declined in 2015. The government's failure to protect victims, conduct investigations, and punish perpetrators is well documented. The anti-Muslim Ma Ba Tha and the similar 969 movement have been accused of stoking outbreaks of violence with inflammatory sermons, leaflets, and other materials.

The government continued to negotiate with armed ethnic minority groups in 2015, but a comprehensive agreement regarding federalism and adherence to the 2008 constitution remained elusive. Discussions were hampered by persistent fighting in some regions, including continued offensives in Kachin State and in the Kokang portions of Shan State.

A number of laws create a hostile environment for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. Same-sex sexual conduct is criminalized, and police subject LGBT people to harassment, extortion, and physical and sexual abuse. In Mandalay in August 2015, a division-level minister publicly urged police to arrest and "educate" gay and transgender people.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Freedom of internal travel is generally respected outside of conflict zones. Numerous exiled activists who returned to the country have experienced substantial delays and evasion from government authorities when attempting to renew visas and residency permits, despite the president's call for exiles to return to work for the country's development. Illegal toll collection by state and nonstate actors has been a problem in some areas. Police continue to enforce a colonial-era loitering law and a houseguest registration law, which particularly affect low-income people and create opportunities for harassment, extortion, and invasions of privacy.

Contentious disputes over land grabbing and business projects that violate human rights continued in 2015. Instances of forced eviction and displacement, lack of sufficient compensation, and direct violence by state security officials abound. As of June 2015, the parliament's Farmland Investigation Commission reported that it had heard about 20,000 of the 30,000 cases submitted since 2013, and decided in favor of compensation for claimants in only 4 percent of the cases heard—a number that activists generally view as much too low.

Women of some classes have traditionally enjoyed high social and economic status, but women remain underrepresented in the government and civil service. Notwithstanding the prominence of Aung San Suu Kyi, whose father led Myanmar's independence struggle, few women have achieved recognition in politics. Sixty-four women were elected to the new parliament in 2015, up from 28 in the outgoing body.

Laws protecting women from violence and exploitation are inadequate. Growing anti-Muslim sentiment has affected the women's rights movement. In 2014, after a group of Buddhist women activists, part of a coalition of 97 civil society organizations, denounced

the Protection of Race and Religion Bills, they received threats to their lives and safety. The army has a record of using rape as a weapon of war against ethnic minority women. Security personnel typically enjoy impunity for sexual violence, and new cases in ethnic minority areas continued to be reported during 2015. Human trafficking is also a concern; women and girls in displacement or refugee camps are at a higher risk of sexual violence and exploitation by traffickers.

Child labor is endemic in Myanmar. The United Nations estimates that one-third of children ages 7 to 16 are working due to poverty and conflict. To address international concerns and improve childhood development, the government in July 2014 announced plans for a policy to end child labor. Various commercial and other interests continue to use forced labor despite a formal ban on the practice since 2000.

Namibia

Political Rights Rating: 2
Civil Liberties Rating: 2
Freedom Rating: 2.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 2,482,000
Capital: Windhoek

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

The ruling South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO) posted a dominant performance in the November 2015 regional and municipal elections. Regional legislatures subsequently appointed representatives to Namibia’s upper house of parliament, the National Council, leaving SWAPO with 40 of 42 seats in that body. Despite the government’s stated commitment to gender equality in national politics, only 10 of the National Council seats went to women. Of 121 regional councillorships, only 16 percent were held by women following the polls.

In 2015, Namibia experienced one of the worst droughts in recent history. A government assessment, released in October, found that more than half a million people were likely to be reliant on food aid through March 2016.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 30 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12

In 2014, the Third Constitutional Amendment was passed, increasing the number of members in Namibia’s bicameral legislature by 40 percent. The amendment also introduced the post of vice president and granted the ruling party the ability to appoint regional governors. The upper house, the National Council, is now comprised of 42 seats (from 26), with members appointed by regional councils for five-year terms. The National Assembly is comprised of 96 seats (from 72), filled by popular election for five-year terms using party-list proportional representation. The new amendment also allows the president to appoint 8

additional nonvoting members to the National Assembly. The president, who is directly elected for a five-year term (and eligible for a second term) appoints the prime minister and cabinet.

The 2014 National Assembly and presidential elections were considered free and fair despite some controversy surrounding the electronic voting systems. SWAPO won 80 percent of the vote, giving it 77 National Assembly seats. The closest opposition, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance of Namibia (DTA), won 4.8 percent of the vote for 5 seats, and eight additional parties won the remaining seats. Then prime minister Hage Geingob defeated numerous rivals for the presidency, winning 87 percent of the vote.

SWAPO dominated regional and municipal elections held in November 2015. After regional legislatures appointed representatives to the National Council, SWAPO held 40 of 42 seats in that body; it had voluntarily offered the remaining two seats to the DTA and the National Unity Democratic Organization (Nudo). Following the 2015 elections, SWAPO held 112 of 121 regional council seats and controlled 54 of 57 local authorities. There were no reports of serious electoral violations in 2015.

Before the 2014 elections, SWAPO initiated a “zebra” system, in which the party committed to including one man and one woman as minister and deputy in each ministry, and to strive to make the National Assembly 50 percent female. Currently, 41 percent of National Assembly representatives are women.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16

SWAPO has dominated the political landscape since Namibia gained independence in 1990. Namibia’s weak opposition parties include the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), the DTA, Nudo, and the United Democratic Front (UDF).

Signaling greater political inclusion, Geingob—who is from the minority Damara community—is the first Namibian president who does not hail from the Oshiwambo-speaking majority.

President Geingob appointed a number of DTA leaders to advisory posts in the new government under a stated policy of inclusivity. Critics have suggested that the policy is instead intended to cement the strength of SWAPO and further weaken the opposition.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Corruption remains a problem and investigations of major cases proceed slowly. The Anti-Corruption Commission has considerable autonomy, reporting only to the National Assembly, though it lacks prosecutorial authority. While corruption cases are regular topics in the media, prosecutors are often hampered by lack of evidence. SWAPO’s dominance of the political space has resulted in a conflation between party and state, somewhat hampering anticorruption efforts.

Officials have been accused of inventing large-scale infrastructure projects including the Neckartal dam, office complexes, and railway and road extensions in order to enrich themselves through kickbacks. Separately, the first president following Namibia’s independence, Sam Nujoma, has allegedly received a house worth more than N\$20 million (US\$1.3 million) paid for with state funds. The state also recently presented former president Hifikepunye Pohamba a retirement house valued at over N\$35 million (US\$2.3 million).

Namibia was ranked 45 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index, and 5 out of 54 countries evaluated in the 2015 Ibrahim Index of African Governance.

There is no access to information law in Namibia, despite government pledges to introduce the law and a strong civil society campaign backing it. The government often errs on

the side of secrecy and confidentiality in matters of governance. The 2014 constitutional amendments were passed without public consultation; Geingob stated that the mandate for the changes was given when SWAPO won the 2009 elections.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 47 / 60 (+1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

The constitution guarantees free speech and the Namibian media generally enjoys an open environment. Many private publications and websites are critical of the government. However, government and party leaders at times issue harsh criticism and even threats against the independent press, usually in the wake of unflattering stories. While many insist that the state-owned Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) is free to criticize the government, concerns have arisen about excessive government influence over its programming and personnel.

The 2009 Communications Act allows the government to monitor telephone calls, e-mail, and internet usage without a warrant. Use of the internet is not restricted; however, infrastructure limits penetration to about 15 percent.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed and respected in practice. The government has in the past been accused of pressuring academics to withhold criticism of SWAPO, but there were no such reports in 2015.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are guaranteed by law and permitted in practice, except in situations of national emergency. Human rights groups generally operate without interference, though government ministers have, in the past, threatened and harassed non-governmental organizations and their leadership.

Constitutionally guaranteed union rights are respected. However, essential public-sector workers do not have the right to strike. Collective bargaining is not widely practiced outside the mining, construction, agriculture, and public-service industries. The main umbrella union, the National Union of Namibian Workers, is affiliated with SWAPO and plays a role in selecting party leaders.

F. Rule of Law: 11 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the separation of powers is observed in practice. Access to justice, however, is obstructed by economic and geographic barriers, a shortage of public defenders, and delays and backlogs that can last up to a decade. Traditional courts in rural areas have often ignored constitutional procedures, although legislation to create greater uniformity in traditional court operations and better connect them to the formal judicial system was implemented in 2009. The 2014 constitutional amendment provided for the creation of tribunals to investigate misconduct of judges and the prosecutor general.

Allegations of police brutality persist. The trial of three police officers accused of killing a 17-year-old in 2013 had yet to open by the year's end. Conditions in prisons are improving, though overcrowding in certain facilities remains a problem.

Secessionist fighting in Namibia's Caprivi region between 1998 and 1999 led some 2,400 refugees to flee to neighboring Botswana. Treason trials for more than 100 alleged secessionists began in 2003. The case against the last of those defendants was settled in the High Court in 2015, with 35 people acquitted and 30 found guilty of treason and other crimes. Those convicted received prison sentences of between 10 and 18 years.

Minority ethnic groups have claimed that the government favors the majority Ovambo—which dominates SWAPO—in allocating funding and services. The nomadic San people of Namibia are among the poorest and most marginalized groups in the country. Attempts to allow equal rights to the San indigenous group are progressing gradually. The government continues to drag its feet in addressing illegal grazing and fences on San land.

A colonial-era law that criminalizes sodomy remains in place, though there were no recorded prosecutions under it in 2015. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals continue to face harassment and other forms of discrimination. There have been reports of “corrective rape” of lesbian women.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16 (+ 1)

The government respects constitutionally guaranteed rights to freedom of movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation. The small white minority owns just under half of Namibia’s arable land, and redistribution of property has been slow despite efforts to accelerate the process. In July 2015, frustrated young people belonging to the radical Affirmative Repositioning movement (AR) called on citizens to embark on land grabs; with Namibia’s youth unemployment rate hovering at around 40 percent, the movement’s members argue that the government has failed them in its inability to make affordable land available. In recent years, several leading members of the SWAPO’s youth wing have been expelled from the party in connection with the AR movement. Separately, in September 2015, lawmakers introduced a bill to restrict foreign ownership of land in Namibia’s settlement areas, or land that regional councils designate for future development, often as a preliminary step before its incorporation into a local authority. The constitution protects the right to freely conduct business activities. In practice, corruption can hamper such activities, and women face employment discrimination.

Women also continue to face discrimination in customary law and other traditional societal practices. While the Namibian Supreme Court in 2014 upheld a ruling against health-care workers who had coerced three HIV-positive women to undergo sterilization, human rights advocates have criticized the government for failing to implement policies aimed at ending the practice of sterilizing women living with HIV/AIDS without their informed consent. There are no legal barriers to women’s access to land in Namibia. However, in practice women’s access is limited due to customary norms regarding inheritance procedures and property rights, and there is limited implementation and awareness of existing laws and rights.

Violence against women is widespread, and rights groups have criticized the government’s failure to enforce the country’s progressive domestic violence laws. More than 500 rapes were reported in the first six months of 2015, and many more go unreported. Rape cases typically see few convictions.

According to the U.S. State Department’s 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Namibia remains a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking for forced labor and prostitution. The report criticized authorities for failing to live up to previous pledges to address the problem.

Nauru

Political Rights Rating: 2↓

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 10,860

Capital: Yaren

Ratings Change: Nauru's political rights rating declined from 1 to 2 due to the suspension of lawmakers who have spoken out against the government's asylum policy and the lack of transparency surrounding the conditions in which asylum seekers are kept.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

The government continued to propagate measures designed to suppress criticism of the processing center it hosts for migrants seeking asylum in Australia; the facility, operated by private contractors hired by the Australian government, houses hundreds of people in conditions activists have called inhumane. After the visa application fee for foreign journalists was increased to \$8,000 in 2014—a measure widely described as a means of deterring foreign news coverage of the processing center—a reporter from the *Australian* newspaper became the first foreign journalist granted entry to Nauru in October 2015. In May 2015, the government blocked access to Facebook and other sites and amended the criminal code to allow the prosecution of those deemed to threaten public safety.

In October 2015, the government announced that it would permit asylum seekers held at the processing center free movement across the island.

The government has also taken steps to sideline political opponents. The suspension of five lawmakers in 2014 effectively removed meaningful opposition from the parliament. Meanwhile, emails leaked in June 2015 suggested that the president and justice minister had accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes from an Australian phosphate company. In September, New Zealand suspended justice-sector aid to Nauru, citing concerns about the rule of law.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 35 / 40 (–2)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Nauru's 19-member unicameral Parliament is popularly elected from eight constituencies for three-year terms. Parliament chooses the president and vice president from among its members.

Intense political rivalries and the use of no-confidence votes have been a source of political instability. Several changes of government occurred between 2007 and 2011, the shortest lasting only days. Following general elections in 2013, Parliament elected Baron Waqa to serve as president.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16 (–1)

Although political parties are allowed, most candidates run as independents. Political parties include the Nauru First Party, the Democratic Party, and the Center Party. Alliances frequently shift.

In 2014, five lawmakers were suspended from the legislature, allegedly for unruly behavior and for making remarks to foreign media that were critical of the government. Their departures left little real opposition in Parliament. Two of the suspended lawmakers were arrested after an antigovernment protest in June 2015, and another had his passport revoked, also in June, preventing him from traveling to his family in New Zealand.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12 (– 1)

Corruption is a serious problem. In 2015, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), reported that the contents of leaked e-mails suggested that President Waqa and Justice Minister David Adeang had accepted bribes worth hundreds of thousands of dollars from an Australian phosphate company in 2009 and 2010. In 2013, Nauru's police commissioner, Australian federal policeman Richard Britten, who had been investigating the bribery charges, was dismissed; some observers suggested that his dismissal was related to the investigation.

Nauru lacks a law on access to public information, but the Government Information Office releases some material on budgetary and other matters. There is a concerning lack of transparency surrounding operations and conditions at the processing center for asylum seekers.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 49 / 60 (– 2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 13 / 16 (– 1)

There are several local weekly and monthly publications, and foreign dailies, mostly in English, are available. The government publishes occasional bulletins, and the opposition publishes its own newsletters. Radio Nauru and Nauru TV are owned and operated by the government. Broadcast content comes from Australia, New Zealand, and other countries.

The government appears determined to silence criticism of conditions faced by asylum seekers and refugees through a series of restrictions on free expression and on media workers. In what foreign media outlets widely characterized as a means of deterring reporting on the Australian processing center for asylum seekers, the visa application fee for foreign journalists was raised to \$8,000 in 2014, up from \$400. In October 2015, Chris Kenny of the *Australian* became the first foreign journalist granted a visa in 18 months.

In another move observers linked to government sensitivity toward coverage of the processing center for asylum seekers, in April 2015, authorities ordered internet service providers to block access to Facebook and several other sites, allegedly to protect users from obscene and pornographic content. Separately, in May, the criminal code was amended to make illegal any comment deemed to cause a person emotional distress or threaten public safety, order, or health; violations carry a prison sentence of up to seven years. Authorities are not known to illegally monitor private online communications.

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, which the government generally respects in practice. There were no reports of suppression of academic freedom in 2015.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 10 / 12 (– 1)

The constitution upholds the right to assemble peacefully, but this right is not always respected in practice. In March 2015, nearly 200 refugees, including children, were arrested during a peaceful protest; the arrests came in the wake of statements from the police chief that assemblies of larger than three people would be dispersed. Several hundred people participated in protests in June at which they demanded the resignation of the government over its crackdown on freedom of expression, and the bribery allegations against Waqa and

Adeang. Three opposition lawmakers, among the five suspended since 2014, participated in the demonstration and were arrested days later. Mathew Batsiua was detained only for two nights, but Sprent Dabwido and Squire Jeremiah were held in custody for nearly a month before being released on bail in July.

There are no legal restrictions on the formation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Nauru. However, authorities have interfered with the operations of activists seeking to improve the treatment of asylum seekers. In October 2015, police twice raided the offices of a Nauru-based branch of the NGO Save the Children. Employees were accused of leaking emails with information about the Australian processing center to the media and breaching the country's Cyber Crime Act. In 2014, the immigration department had deported nine Save the Children employees for allegedly encouraging asylum seekers to commit self-harm so that they would be evacuated to Australia. Save the Children ended its operations in Nauru at the end of October 2015, saying the Australian government had awarded its welfare contract to a for-profit business.

There are several advocacy groups for women, as well as development-focused and religious organizations. There are no trade unions or labor protection laws, partly because there is little large-scale, private employment.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

The Supreme Court is the highest authority on constitutional issues. Appeals in civil and criminal cases are heard in the high court of Australia. Traditional reconciliation mechanisms are frequently used instead of the formal legal process. In July 2015, new court facilities opened, as part of a plan to increase the capacity of the justice sector and reduce the backlog of asylum cases.

In August 2015, the Court of Appeal overturned the convictions of two asylum seekers for unlawful assembly and rioting in 2013 protests at the Australian processing center. The court cited serious concerns with the investigation—which was carried out by a private contractor rather than the Nauruan police—and the conduct of the trial's magistrate. In September, New Zealand suspended justice-sector aid to Nauru, citing concerns about the rule of law.

The Australian offshore processing facility for asylum seekers based in Nauru has generated extensive international criticism for poor living conditions and long processing delays. Government officials have decried the criticism inaccurate and politically motivated. The case of a 23-year-old female Somali refugee, known by the pseudonym Abyan, became the latest flashpoint in the controversy in 2015. According to her lawyers, in October, she was flown to Australia to receive an abortion after she was raped at the processing center and became pregnant. (Abortion is illegal in Nauru.) She then returned within the month without having had the procedure. While the Australian government claimed that she changed her mind, her lawyers say she was sent back to Nauru in anticipation of a court injunction that could have allowed her to remain in Australia.

Civilian authorities control the small police force. There have been reported cases of abuse in the past. Nauru has no armed forces; Australia provides defense assistance under an informal agreement.

Same-sex sexual activity is a criminal offense punishable by up to 14 years of hard labor.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

Phosphate mining, the main source of revenue, is in decline. With few economic alternatives, Nauru relies heavily on foreign loans and international assistance, and a \$40 million

deal with Australia to host asylum seekers. In October, the government announced that it would permit asylum seekers held at Australia's regional processing center free movement across the island.

Societal pressures limit women's ability to exercise their legal rights. Domestic violence is a problem, and frequently associated with alcohol abuse.

Nepal

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 28,039,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Kathmandu

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,NF	5,4,NF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Nepal ratified its first democratic constitution on September 20, 2015, establishing a bicameral parliament with the prime minister as chief executive, and organizing the state into seven new provinces. It was approved with 507 out of 601 votes by the Nepalese Constituent Assembly (CA), with most dissent coming from pro-Hindu opponents of secularization or representatives of ethnic minorities concerned that the new provincial boundaries will weaken their political influence. The constitution is a major step forward for Nepal's stability and democracy, although several provisions potentially limit rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and movement through undefined "reasonable restrictions" on acts that may undermine national unity, sovereignty, or other national interests. In October, the moderate Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) candidates Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli and Bidhya Devi Bhandari were elected with broad support as prime minister and president, respectively.

In August and September, at least 50 people died in violent protests against the new constitution, largely in the Terai region. Protests continued through the end of the year.

On April 25, a devastating earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 struck northwest of Kathmandu, killing and injuring thousands and razing homes and villages. The impact on communities was aggravated at the end of the year by a months-long blockade along the Nepal-India border that prevented supplies and fuel from reaching the country.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 25 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12 (+ 1)

After a decade-long civil war between the government and Maoist rebels and an interim constitution in place since 2007, Nepal's new constitution was approved in September 2015 with the support of 90 percent of the 601-member CA. Under the new constitution, the CA was transformed into Nepal's parliament, with a term ending in January 2018. At that point, the CA parliament will be replaced by a bicameral legislature consisting of a 275-seat House

of Representatives and a 59-seat National Assembly. Members of the House of Representatives are to be elected through a combination of direct vote (165 seats) and proportional representation (110 seats). In the National Assembly, 56 members are to be elected through an electoral college system that requires representation of at least three women, one Dalit, and one person with a disability or other minority. The remaining three members, including an additional woman, will be nominated by the president on the recommendation of the government. The constitution further requires that either the president or vice president be a woman, and that women should account for at least one-third of the members elected from each party in parliament. The president's duties under the new constitution are largely ceremonial. The parliamentary leader of the political party with a majority in the House of Representatives will become prime minister.

CA elections in 2013 were deemed generally free and fair by international monitors, despite violent incidents and bomb attacks in the preelection period. Some Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (UCPN (M)) leaders alleged that fraud had been committed during the election, a contention disputed by all international monitors. The allied Nepali Congress (NC) and CPN-UML won 196 and 175 seats, respectively. The Maoists placed third with 80 seats, followed by more than two dozen smaller parties.

Political disagreements repeatedly stalled the constitution drafting process. After the April 2015 earthquake, however, the leaders of Nepal's major political parties, including the main opposition party UCPN (M), were able to sign an agreement on June 9 for moving forward. The 2015 constitution identifies a federal structure with seven provinces—a major point of contention—but leaves the names and borders to be decided by a newly formed federal commission and the provincial legislatures.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16

A diverse and competitive array of political parties operates in Nepal. The 2013 elections, which resulted in the NC and CPN-UML dominating the CA, reduced instability caused by the civil war and the country's subsequent struggles to establish a democratic and inclusive government. The Maoists' decision to join the constitution drafting process further improved stability, with fewer attacks on members of other parties.

The new constitution provides for allocations and reservations for Madhesis, Dalits, and other minority groups in the legislature, and their numbers in the legislature should also be improved through the proportional representation voting system. Ethnic minorities expressed concern that the new federal structure under the constitution could weaken their political influence. Separately, a 2007 civil service law reserves 45 percent of posts for women, minorities, and Dalits, though their representation in state institutions remains inadequate, particularly at the highest levels of government.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12

The second CA, elected in 2013, is now transformed under the new constitution into the country's first functioning elected parliament since a series of unstable, short-lived, or caretaker governments following Nepal's 2008 elections. A cabinet formed in early 2014 allowed Nepal to achieve greater stability in economic affairs, foreign policy, and other areas. Elections of President Bhandari and Prime Minister Oli in 2015 further improved political stability. The two leaders received broad support despite ongoing protests over the adoption of the constitution and concerns from ethnic minority groups over how provincial boundaries will be drawn.

Corruption is endemic in Nepali politics and government. Nepal's Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) is active, and many lawmakers have been

accused or convicted of corruption in the past, but high-level officials are rarely prosecuted. Graft is particularly prevalent in the judiciary—with frequent payoffs to judges for favorable rulings—and in the police force, which has been accused of extensive involvement in organized crime. In Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index, Nepal ranked 130 of 168 countries and territories.

In 2015, concerns arose over poor governance and the use, or lack thereof, of the approximately \$4.1 billion donated by governments and aid agencies in the aftermath of the devastating April earthquake.

The Constitution Drafting Committee issued a draft constitution for public consultation and comment on July 9. Some groups protested that the open comment period for the draft constitution was too short.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 26 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

The 2015 constitution provides for freedom of expression and prohibits prior restraints on press freedom, though these rules can be suspended in cases of national emergency. The constitution also states that the prohibition against prior restraint does not forbid restraints on the press that impose reasonable restrictions relating to national security. In practice, media workers have frequently faced physical attacks, death threats, and harassment by armed groups, security personnel, and political cadres, and the perpetrators typically go unpunished.

There are a variety of independent radio and print outlets in Nepal. Internet usage and internet media are unrestricted, and their growth has provided unprecedented access to information and public space for debate. Concerns over interference by major parties in radio and print media remain. In 2015, threats to journalist safety increased amid violent protests over the drafting and passage of the constitution, during which protesters and police were both seen attacking journalists for their attempts to cover the protests.

Like the interim constitution before it, the 2015 constitution identifies Nepal as a secular state, signaling a break with the Hindu monarchy that was toppled as part of the resolution of the civil war in 2006 (it was formally abolished in 2008). Religious freedom is protected under the new constitution, and tolerance is broadly practiced, but members of some religious minorities occasionally report official harassment. Christian groups face considerable difficulty registering as religious organizations, leaving them unable to own land. Proselytizing is prohibited.

The government does not restrict academic freedom, and much scholarly activity takes place freely, including on political topics. However, Maoist strikes have repeatedly threatened the school system. Minorities, including Hindi- and Urdu-speaking Madhesi groups, have complained that Nepali is enforced as the language of education in government schools.

Nepali security forces reportedly have spied on Tibetans inside Nepal and passed information back to Chinese intelligence.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12 (– 1)

Freedom of assembly is guaranteed under the 2015 constitution, but the language allows for reasonable restrictions on acts that undermine nationality, sovereignty, independence, and the indivisibility of Nepal, or that jeopardize public law and order. In the 2015 protests over the new constitution, groups were allowed to demonstrate in some cases, but were violently dispersed in others. Police clashed with protesters, and more than 50 people died

in the demonstrations in the Terai region that began in August and continued through the end of the year. Testimonies included descriptions of security forces firing into crowds, and in one case a witness reported seeing an official shooting at a hospital. According to Human Rights Watch, eyewitnesses reported police breaking into homes and beating individuals, using threats and racial slurs, and taking part in unprovoked beatings in communities opposed to the new constitution. At least three of the reported deaths that occurred at the hands of police were of children.

While security forces have allowed large protests by Maoists and other political parties, Tibetan protests have been violently suppressed in the past. In certain cases, authorities detained Tibetan and Nepali monks and pressured them to sign pledges not to participate in future demonstrations.

Although the new constitution allows nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to form and operate within the country, legal restrictions have made this difficult in practice. The District Administration Office (DAO), which is in charge of registering NGOs and associations, is often understaffed and lacks essential resources. Foreign NGOs must enter project-specific agreements with the Nepalese government.

The 2015 constitution provides for the right to form trade unions. Labor laws protect the freedom to bargain collectively, and unions generally operate without state interference. Workers in a broad range of “essential” industries cannot stage strikes. A majority of a union’s membership must vote in favor of a strike, and 30 days’ notice must be given. Several unions linked to the Maoists have been accused of using violence to threaten employers and government officials to comply with union demands during bargaining processes.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

The 2015 constitution provides for an independent judiciary. Most courts suffer from endemic corruption, and in practice many Nepalese have only limited access to justice. Because of heavy case backlogs and a slow appeals process, suspects are frequently kept in pretrial detention for periods longer than the sentences they would face if tried and convicted.

Prison conditions fail to meet international standards and suffer from overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and medical care, and often a lack of separate housing for women and minors. The government has generally refused to conduct thorough investigations or take serious disciplinary measures against police officers accused of brutality or torture. The UN Committee Against Torture found that torture is widespread for suspects in police custody. Amnesty International has reported that torture extends to women and children.

Human rights advocates have criticized Nepal for failing to punish human rights abuses and war crimes committed during the civil war from 1996 to 2006. In 2014, the Supreme Court ruled the Ordinance on Truth, Reconciliation and Disappearances bill for enacting transitional justice as unconstitutional and in violation of international human rights law. Nevertheless, the legislature passed the law without significant changes. The law grants the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances power to recommend amnesty for all alleged perpetrators of disappearances committed during the civil war. In February 2015, the Supreme Court again struck down the amnesty provision and required that consent of the victims be mandatory for reconciliation. The Supreme Court also noted that only the courts, and not the commissions established by the law, have the power to determine matters of criminality. The government has said that it will adhere to the decision of the court. Two additional commissions were established in February to investigate allegations of war crimes and disappearances.

The South Asia Terrorism Portal reported no fatalities due to Maoist activity in 2014 and 2015, though it noted unrest and vandalism caused by opposition members of the CA in January 2015.

The 2015 constitution declares Nepal to be a multicasite, multilingual, and multicultural country committed to eliminating discrimination. However, members of the Hindu upper castes dominate government and business, and low-caste Hindus, ethnic minorities, and Christians face discrimination in the civil service and courts. Despite constitutional protections and the 2012 Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offense and Punishment) Act—which prohibits discrimination against Dalits and increases punishments for public officials found responsible for discrimination—Dalits continue to be subjected to exploitation, violence, and social exclusion. Madhesis—plains-dwelling people with close connections to groups across the border in India—receive comparatively little economic support from the government, and are often discriminated against socially and in the labor market.

The 2015 constitution enshrines rights for sexual minorities. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people reportedly face harassment by the authorities and other citizens, particularly in rural areas. Although the Supreme Court ordered the government to abolish all laws that discriminate against LGBT people in 2007, and gave its consent to same-sex marriage the following year, the government has yet to implement these rulings. The first passport on which the holder was permitted to select a third gender was issued in August 2015.

Although the new constitution outlines implementation of major international human rights provisions, and includes civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, the language of the constitution frames these rights for Nepali citizens only. This potentially leaves equal rights of noncitizens, including migrants and people who cannot prove citizenship, unprotected.

Tibetans in Nepal face difficulty achieving formal refugee status due to Chinese pressure on the Nepalese government. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 15,000 to 20,000 Tibetan refugees live in Nepal, but only about half are documented. Nepal does not recognize any Tibetan immigrants who arrived after 1989 as refugees. NGOs working on Tibetan issues continue to struggle under mounting pressure from the Nepali government, on behalf of Beijing, to repatriate Tibetan refugees to China before they can register with UN officials in Kathmandu or transit to India.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

Citizens generally enjoy freedom to travel throughout Nepal, though Tibetan migrants are frequently harassed by police and prevented from moving around the country. Citizens also generally enjoy choice of residence, though bribery is common in the housing market, as well as to gain admittance to universities.

Although citizens have the right to own private businesses, starting a business in Nepal often requires bribes to a wide range of local and national-level officials. Licensing and other red tape can be extremely onerous. Women face widespread discrimination when starting businesses, and customs and border police are notoriously corrupt in dealing with cross-border trade.

In 2015, the border blockade of trade routes from India caused acute shortages of essential goods. A severe fuel crisis in particular has increased unrest in the south and posed additional difficulties to earthquake recovery and access to humanitarian aid. Nepal accused India of imposing the blockade for political reasons, but the Indian government maintains

that vehicles have been held at the borders because of unrest, stating that protesters have also blocked their routes.

Bhandari is Nepal's first female president. Women rarely receive the same educational and employment opportunities as men, and gender-based violence against women such as domestic violence, rape, and dowry violence continue to be major problems. The 2009 Domestic Violence Act provides for monetary compensation and psychological treatment for victims, but authorities generally do not prosecute domestic violence cases. The National Women's Commission, charged with providing reparations to women subjected to gender-based violence, has been severely criticized for failure to implement its mandate and for politicized distribution of resources. Underage marriage of girls is widespread, particularly among lower-status groups.

Trafficking of children and women from Nepal for prostitution in India is common. According to some estimates, as many as 15,000 girls are trafficked across the India-Nepal border each year. UNICEF also reported a spike in child trafficking following the April 2015 earthquake. Police rarely intervene in the kidnappings. Human Rights Watch has reported that kidnapping gangs, who abduct children to obtain small ransoms, have become rampant in recent years.

Bonded labor is illegal but remains a serious problem throughout Nepal. The legal minimum age for employment is 14 years, but 1.6 million underage children, more girls than boys, are believed to be engaged in various forms of labor, often under hazardous conditions.

Netherlands

Political Rights Rating: 1

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 16,942,373

Capital: Amsterdam

Ten-Year Ratings Time-line For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Migration and asylum policy continued to dominate the political discourse in the Netherlands in 2015. In April, the Council of Europe (CoE) reaffirmed its 2014 decision that the country was in violation of the European Social Charter for its failure to meet humanitarian obligations toward asylum applicants. The two-party coalition government has struggled to find common ground on this issue, but managed to agree in April to put in place tougher policies against rejected applicants who do not agree to return to their home countries. Hate speech against immigrants has been on the rise. Prominent far-right politician Geert Wilders was put under investigation in July for statements he made against Islam in 2014.

In provincial elections in March, the center-left Labor Party (PvdA) suffered the greatest losses while the other half of the governing coalition, the center-right People's Party for

Freedom and Democracy (VVD), remained the largest party. The provincial councils voted for members of the Senate in May.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The Netherlands has a parliamentary system, with a monarchy whose function is largely ceremonial. The monarch appoints the prime minister, usually the leader of the majority party or coalition, as well as the Council of Ministers (cabinet) and the governor of each province on the recommendation of a majority in parliament. The lower house of parliament, or House of Representatives, counts 150 representatives who are elected for four-year terms by proportional representation. The 75 members of the upper house, or Senate, are elected for four-year terms by the country's provincial councils, which in turn are directly elected every four years.

In 2012 general elections, the VVD won 41 seats and formed a coalition government with the PvdA, which took 38 seats. Mark Rutte of the VVD remained prime minister. Wilders's far-right, anti-immigration Party for Freedom (PVV) dropped from 24 seats to 15. In total, 11 parties are represented in the House of Representatives.

Provincial elections were held in March 2015. The VVD won the largest share of the vote, but the center-right Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and left-liberal Democrats 66 (D66) had strong showings. Provincial councilors voted for members of the Senate in May. The VVD remained the largest party with 13 seats, while the PvdA dropped from 14 seats to 8; the CDA increased its share to 12 seats, and the D66 to 10.

Mayors are appointed from a list of candidates submitted by the municipal councils, which are directly elected every four years. Foreigners who have resided in the country for at least five years are eligible to vote in local elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Political parties operate freely and regularly rotate in and out of power. The PVV has won parliamentary representation since 2006 on the basis of an anti-immigration and Euroskeptic platform. After the 2010 elections it became the third-largest party and provided external support to a minority coalition government of the VVD and CDA. When Wilders withdrew his support in 2012, protesting budget cuts aimed at meeting EU deficit limits, the government collapsed and new elections were called. In June 2015, Wilders formed a far-right bloc in the European Parliament with France's National Front and representatives of parties in five other member states. Minority groups participate freely in the political process, and political parties represent their interests.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

The Netherlands is generally free from corruption. The country ranked 5 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. However, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) criticized the Netherlands in 2013 for its failure to adequately enforce laws against bribery by Dutch individuals and companies doing business abroad. A May 2015 report from the OECD notes that the Netherlands has made significant process on this front, although several recommendations have not yet been implemented.

Laws are in place recognizing the right to access information. These laws do not extend to legislative and judicial bodies.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 59 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16**

The news media are free and independent. The Netherlands has had *lèse majesté* laws in place since 1881. Although these laws are rarely enforced, in May, prosecutors initiated proceedings against antiracism activist Abulkasim al-Jaberi. Jaberi had used profane language against King Willem-Alexander during a 2014 tirade against the popular folkloric character Black Pete, who often appears as an accomplice to St. Nicholas. There has been widespread disagreement on the racist nature of the character, with many analysts contending that the use of blackface represents chimney soot. In an August 2015 news conference, Prime Minister Rutte stated that the issue is a societal one and outside of the government's sphere.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and the Netherlands has a reputation as a tolerant society. However, rising anti-immigrant sentiment in recent years has been accompanied by more open expression of anti-Islamic views. The PVV is vocal in its criticism of Islam. In July 2015, Austrian prosecutors announced that they are investigating Wilders for alleged incitement of hatred. At a political event in Vienna in March, Wilders reportedly compared the Koran to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and demanded its banning. In December 2014, Dutch prosecutors said that Wilders would be charged with "insulting a specific group based on race and inciting discrimination and hatred" as a result of his anti-Moroccan remarks during a campaign rally the previous March. Wilders will go on trial in 2016. In June 2015, Minister of Social Affairs and Employment Lodewijk Asscher said that he is considering a proposal that would give foreign imams the opportunity to take a course on Dutch language and culture before they move to the Netherlands. Under existing regulations, imams and other spiritual leaders recruited from Muslim countries must take a one-year integration course, like other immigrants, before practicing in the Netherlands.

In May 2015, the cabinet approved a ban on clothing that covers the face in public settings, including schools, hospitals, public transportation, and government buildings, which had been called for in the 2012 VVD-PvdA coalition agreement. Violators can be fined up to 405 (\$448). Both legislative chambers must approve the law before it will enter into force.

Academic freedom is well protected. Private discussion is not restricted, and the government does not limit internet access or censor online content. In March 2015, a judge in ruled that Dutch laws on data retention by telephone companies and internet providers violated users' right to privacy.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are respected in law and in practice. National and international human rights organizations operate freely without government intervention. Workers' rights to organize, bargain collectively, and strike are protected.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and the rule of law prevails in civil and criminal matters. The right to a fair trial is in place and is enforced effectively. The police are under civilian control, and prison conditions meet international standards.

The constitution expressly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, political opinion, race, and sex, and the population is generally treated equally under the law. The law also prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, although the constitution does not enshrine this protection. Foreigners from outside the European Economic Area,

Switzerland, and Turkey are required to pass a basic integration exam before relocating to the Netherlands.

The country's asylum policies have attracted considerable criticism for being unduly harsh and violating international standards. Under Dutch guidelines, authorities are not allowed to detain asylum seekers for longer than three months. However, the national ombudsman and nongovernmental organizations such as Amnesty International have claimed that these guidelines have been violated. In 2013, the Conference of European Churches submitted a complaint against the Netherlands for violating the country's obligations under the European Social Charter to provide everyone living in the country with shelter, health care, food, and clothing. In 2014, the CoE found the Netherlands in violation of the charter and, in April 2015, reaffirmed that decision.

An August decision to deport all four members of an Angolan-Dutch family, who had been in the Netherlands for 15 years despite a rejected asylum application, caused considerable controversy. As a former soldier in the Angolan army, the father is a potential war criminal and thus not eligible for refugee status; his children are also not covered by the amnesty law. However, after facing widespread criticism from child rights advocates and lawmakers, the Justice Ministry allowed all family members except the father to stay.

Asylum policy has proven a point of contention within the coalition government. The VVD has argued that municipalities should refrain from providing services to asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected. The PvdA contends that the country has a humanitarian obligation to all within its borders, and that failure to uphold this duty violates the CoE's April 2015 decision. In a compromise leaving both sides dissatisfied, the parties announced in April that fewer shelters will be made available to rejected asylum seekers, and only to those who can demonstrate that they are trying to leave the country.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 16 / 16

Residents generally enjoy freedom of movement and choice of residence, employment, and institution of higher education. Property rights are upheld.

The government vigorously enforces legal protections for women, including in employment and family law. Women hold 58 of 150 seats in the House of Representatives and 26 of 75 seats in the Senate. The Netherlands was the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage, in 2001.

While the Netherlands is a source country, destination, and transit point for human trafficking, the government makes strong efforts to combat it through prosecutions, trainings, and other measures.

New Zealand

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 4,598,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Wellington

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

The ruling coalition led by Prime Minister John Key, leader of the center-right National Party, governed with relative stability during the year. Concerns remained about de facto discrimination against New Zealand's Maori people, although the government has made significant efforts in recent years to enhance representation of their interests.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

New Zealand's political system is patterned largely on the British Westminster model. Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state, represented by Governor General Jerry Mateparae, a former military and intelligence chief. The prime minister is the head of government and leader of the popularly elected majority party or coalition, and is officially appointed by the governor general.

The unicameral House of Representatives has 121 members serving three-year terms. A mixed-member electoral system combines voting in geographic districts with proportional representation balloting. Key led the National Party to a third term in general elections held in 2014, forming a coalition government with the Maori Party, United Future, and ACT New Zealand. The National Party won 60 parliamentary seats, while its coalition partners provided an additional four. The Labor Party won 32 seats, the Green Party took 14, and New Zealand First captured 11.

The law stipulates universal suffrage for men and women of at least 18 years of age who are New Zealand citizens or permanent residents, though only citizens may serve in parliamentary positions.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16 (+ 1)

The law protects people's rights to form and join political parties and to freely express, promote, pursue, and defend common interests. The two main political parties are the center-left Labor Party and the center-right National Party. Other key groups include the ACT, which focuses on free markets; the environmentalist Green Party; the nationalist New Zealand First Party; United Future, which maintains a platform devoted to family values; the Maori Party, which focuses on representation of indigenous interests; and the Mana Movement, which is dedicated particularly to socio-economic indigenous rights.

Seven of the parliament's constituency seats are reserved for representatives of the Maori population, though Maori can also vote or run in general electoral districts. Mateparae is the second individual of Maori descent to hold the position of governor general.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

New Zealand is one of the least corrupt countries in the world. It was ranked 4 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. In recent years, the government has initiated several policies to strengthen anticorruption measures to bring New Zealand into line with international best practices. The country participates in the Open Government Partnership international initiative, and authorities have implemented mechanisms to prevent overseas entities from using New Zealand's commercial registration systems to create fraudulent shell companies. Cases of corruption and misuse of office are routinely investigated in New Zealand, and several convictions were made in 2015.

The law guarantees public access to information, and government agencies are responsive to requests. The government upholds transparency in budgetary procedures, and the

law requires members of the House of Representatives to submit annual financial disclosure statements.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 58 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Media in New Zealand are free and competitive. Newspapers are published nationally and locally in English, and several foreign-language publications serve the growing immigrant population. Television outlets include the state-run Television New Zealand, three private channels, and a Maori-language public network. There is also a Maori-language radio station. The government does not control or restrict internet access, and competitive pricing promotes large-scale diffusion.

Freedom of religion is protected by law and respected in practice. Only religious organizations that collect donations need to register with the government. Academic freedom prevails at all levels of instruction.

Two laws passed in 2013 granted the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB)—New Zealand’s main intelligence agency—increased surveillance authority over phone and electronic communications, drawing criticism from civil rights and legal scholars. GCSB previously could conduct only foreign surveillance, but the new legislation empowered the body to collect data on residents and citizens in New Zealand. During the 2014 election campaign, GCSB came under close scrutiny, especially after investigative journalists claimed the agency had illegally monitored the communications of up to 80 residents and citizens. In March 2015, the *New Zealand Herald* published leaked documents, provided by whistleblower Edward Snowden, showing that the GCSB was engaged in indiscriminately collecting telecommunications data from neighboring island nations. The documents also suggested that authorities shared the information with Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which together with New Zealand form the Five Eyes intelligence alliance.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The government respects freedoms of assembly and association. A number of demonstrations, including some focused on political and economic issues, took place in 2015 without undue interference from state actors. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are active throughout the country, and many receive considerable financial support from the government.

The 2000 Employment Relations Act allows workers to organize, strike, and bargain collectively, with the exception of uniformed personnel, who are not allowed to strike but can bargain collectively. There are numerous trade unions, and many are affiliated with the Council of Trade Unions. As of 2015, approximately 18 percent of the workforce was unionized.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

New Zealand’s social, political, and economic policies are based on well-established rule of law. The judiciary is independent, and the criminal justice system generally meets or surpasses international standards. Maori, who make up roughly 15 percent of the national population, are disproportionately represented in the penal system—they account for half of the male prison population and two-thirds of the female prison population.

In 2015, the national police continued an open campaign to recruit more officers of Maori, Pacific Islander, and Asian descent, aimed at enhancing cultural and racial sensitivity within the force and combating profiling and discrimination.

Discrimination on the basis of race, color, gender, origin, sexual orientation, and a number of other factors is illegal. However, most Maori and other Pacific Islanders continue to lag behind the European-descended majority in social and economic status. The Maori population has become more assertive in its claims for land, resources, and compensation from the government, including rights to fisheries, water, and minerals.

A more open immigration policy and an end to preferential treatment for migrants from Europe in the past two decades have fundamentally changed the demographics of the country. In the 2013 national census, one in four New Zealand residents were identified as foreign born.

In September 2015, officials announced that in an emergency step, they would resettle 600 additional refugees from Syria over the next two and a half years. This plan will supplement New Zealand's annual acceptance of 750 refugees, of which 150 are to be Syrian. Separately, in July, New Zealand's highest court denied asylum to Ioane Teitiota, an applicant from Kiribati who had lodged a claim based on environmental threats to his island home. The court determined that the applicant and his family would not face serious harm in Kiribati, and that climate change did not qualify as a basis for refugee status in the case. Authorities deported Teitiota and his family in September.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

The government respects freedom of movement, and neither state nor nonstate actors interfere with the rights of individuals to choose their residence, employment, or institutions of higher education. The country's legal and regulatory frameworks provide strong protections and mechanisms for the establishment and operation of private businesses, which are widely free from government interference. New Zealand maintains a free market economy, and ranked third in the 2015 Index of Economic Freedom, which noted improvements in the management of government spending, monetary freedom, and labor freedom over the past year.

According to a December 2015 government report, close to 29 percent of children in New Zealand lived below the poverty line in 2014, with children of Maori and Pacific Islander descent being particularly vulnerable. Moreover, violence against women and children remains a critical problem in these communities; Maori and Pacific Islanders are disproportionately represented as both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.

Same-sex marriage was legalized in 2013, and same-sex couples can jointly adopt children. The government enforces strong legislation protecting the rights of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals.

Migrants in New Zealand are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked for forced labor or sexual exploitation. In November, legislators approved an omnibus bill that, among other things, aims to strengthen existing antitrafficking provisions. The draft redefines trafficking to base the crime on exploitation, rather than on cross-border movement.

Nicaragua

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 6,262,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Managua

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the dominance of the ruling Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) continued to be a point of contention with the opposition, which has found itself increasingly marginalized in recent years. Tensions have increased ahead of the 2016 national elections, as opposition protesters demanded electoral reforms. Meanwhile, President Daniel Ortega still enjoyed high approval ratings, largely as a result of his handling of the economy and popular social programs.

The controversial 2014 family code, which explicitly defines a family as a union between a man and a woman, went into effect in 2015. While proponents pointed to enhanced protections for children and other groups, critics argued that the law discriminates against same-sex couples.

Protests against plans to dig a transoceanic canal continued in 2015, though the ultimate fate of the recently inaugurated project remained uncertain. Land conflicts erupted in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) as outside settlers began encroaching on indigenous lands, sometimes with links to black-market trading of timber. As a result of the violence, hundreds of members of the Miskito indigenous community have fled, some into neighboring Honduras.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 19 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12

The constitution provides for a directly elected president and a 92-member unicameral National Assembly. Two seats in the legislature are reserved for the previous president and the runner-up in the most recent presidential election. Presidential and legislative elections are both held every five years. Constitutional reforms that went into effect in 2014 eliminated the minimum vote percentage required for a first-round presidential victory. Presidents will now be elected with a simple plurality of the vote. The reforms also eliminated term limits and mandated that half of all candidates for elected office be women.

President Ortega was reelected in 2011 with almost 63 percent of the vote. Fabio Gadea Mantilla of the Nicaraguan Unity for Hope (UNE) coalition won 31 percent and former president Arnoldo Alemán of the Conservative Party–Liberal Constitutionalist Party (PLC) alliance won almost 6 percent. In the legislative elections, the FSLN won 63 seats in the National Assembly, followed by the Independent Liberal Party (PLI) with 27 and the PLC with 2. Although international observation teams noted irregularities and a lack of transparency, there was no conclusive evidence of fraud.

In 2012, the National Assembly approved numerous changes to the municipal electoral law, including a provision allowing mayors to run for reelection and instating a requirement that half of each party's candidates for mayoralties and council seats be women.

Nicaragua's RAAN and South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) have regional councils, for which elections were held in 2014. The FSLN won 52 percent of the votes in the RAAN, followed by the majority-indigenous YATAMA party with 21 percent; the PLI and the PLC won the remainder. In the RAAS, the FSLN garnered 48 percent of the vote; the PLC, the PLI, YATAMA, and the Multi-Ethnic Indigenous Party each won small portions. YATAMA supporters organized minor protests following the vote.

The selection of Judith Silva, who had been nominated by President Ortega, to fill the vacant position for Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) magistrate in 2015 renewed concerns about the institution's independence. Over the following months, members of the opposition held regular protest rallies in front of CSE locations throughout the country demanding electoral reforms in advance of the 2016 national elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 7 / 16

The formerly dominant PLC has experienced a sharp decline in its voter base since 1999, while the FSLN's backing has increased. Public opinion polls consistently reveal high levels of popularity for Ortega and the FSLN. A September 2015 poll found that combined support for all opposition parties was less than 10 percent.

The FSLN's majority in the National Assembly enables it to pass laws without requiring support from opposition parties. As a result of the 2014 constitutional reforms, legislators who do not vote with their party may lose their seats in the legislature. In 2014, the PLI and PLC signed a pact in hopes of launching a unified opposition for the 2016 elections.

Minority groups, especially the indigenous inhabitants of Nicaragua's eastern and Caribbean regions, frequently complain that they are politically underrepresented and that the government and the FSLN largely ignore their grievances.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

The FSLN dominates most public institutions, working closely with labor and private business in a tripartite alliance (COSEP) that is recognized in Article 98 of the constitution. Constitutional reforms passed in 2014 include the ability of the president to issue binding decrees, to appoint active military personnel to executive-level positions previously designated for civilians, and to direct changes in tax policy without legislative approval.

Nicaragua was ranked 130 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Corruption charges against high-ranking government officials are rare except in the most egregious cases, and corruption cases against opposition figures are often criticized for being politically motivated. Ortega's sons and daughters have been appointed to prominent positions such as ambassador and presidential adviser, and First Lady Rosario Murillo serves as communications minister and government spokesperson.

The 2007 Law on Access to Public Information requires public entities and private companies doing business with the state to disclose certain information. However, it preserves the government's right to protect information related to state security. Concerns about the transparency of aid from the Venezuela-led Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, of which Nicaragua is a member, persisted in 2015.

Significant concerns have also been raised over the lack of transparency and consultation in the project to dig the interoceanic canal across Nicaragua, which was approved

quickly and with little public debate. Results of environmental studies detailing the human and environmental toll have been kept from the public.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 35 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

The constitution calls for a free press but allows some censorship. Radio remains the main source of information in Nicaragua. Six television networks, including a state-owned network, are based in the capital, many of which favor particular political factions. Three national newspapers cover a variety of political viewpoints, though coverage is polarized. Access to the internet is unrestricted.

The press has faced increased political and judicial harassment since 2007, and the Ortega administration engages in systematic efforts to obstruct and discredit media critics. Journalists, including several reporters with the newspaper *El Nuevo Diario*, have received death threats. In 2015, reporters faced harassment from police and some were detained while they were covering protests related to the opposition's push for electoral reforms, as well as demonstrations against the canal project. Members of the ruling elite have acquired stakes in media outlets and have used their influence as owners to sideline independent journalists. The Communications and Citizenry Council, which oversees the government's press relations and which is directed by First Lady Murillo, has been accused of limiting access to information and censoring the opposition.

Religious and academic freedoms are generally respected, although some university-level academics refrain from open criticism of the government.

Private discussion is generally free, though there are increasing reports of self-censorship. Both private citizens and government employees have complained of retaliation for opposing the interoceanic canal project.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

Nicaraguan law recognizes freedoms of assembly and association, but in practice respect for these rights has been problematic. While public demonstrations are generally permitted, members of the opposition have accused the police of failing to protect demonstrators and of engaging in partisan behavior. Gangs with tacit government support have reportedly attacked antigovernment protesters. In December 2014, numerous demonstrators in the proposed canal zone were injured and arrested during altercations with police officers, some of whom were also harmed in the protests. Human rights groups have claimed that some of those arrested were beaten or otherwise mistreated while in police custody. In November 2015, police clashed with protesters in a labor dispute at El Limón mine, resulting in injuries to both sides and the death of one police officer.

Although nongovernmental organizations are active, they have faced harassment and occasional violence in recent years. They have also been weakened by the system of Citizens' Power Councils (CPCs), which operate from the neighborhood to the federal level. Critics say they blur the line between state and party institutions, and that they are highly politicized.

The FSLN controls many of the country's labor unions, and the legal rights of non-FSLN unions are not fully guaranteed. Although the law recognizes the right to strike, unions must clear a number of hurdles, and approval from the Ministry of Labor is almost never granted. Employers sometimes form their own unions to avoid recognizing legitimate organizations. Employees have reportedly been dismissed for union activities, and citizens have no effective recourse when those in power violate labor laws.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

The judiciary remains dominated by FSLN and PLC appointees, and the Supreme Court is a largely politicized body controlled by Sandinista judges. The court system also suffers from corruption, long delays, a large backlog of cases, and a severe shortage of public defenders. Access to justice is especially deficient in rural areas and on the Caribbean coast.

Despite long-term improvements, the security forces remain understaffed and poorly funded, and human rights abuses still occur. Forced confessions and arbitrary arrests continue. Although Nicaragua has generally been spared the high rates of crime and gang violence that plague its neighbors to the north, the country—specifically the Caribbean coast—is an important transshipment point for South American drugs. The police have been active in combating trafficking and organized crime. Though generally considered to be the most professionalized in the region, the police have come under increasing criticism for skirmishes with civilians. In July 2015, Nicaraguan police killed three members of one family, including two children, during a botched antidrug operation. Nine police officers were sentenced to 11 years in prison after being convicted on various charges related to the incident. In November, police and military allegedly used tear gas and rubber bullets to turn back a group of Cuban migrants seeking to reach the United States by traveling through Nicaragua from Costa Rica.

Prison conditions are poor and overcrowding is a problem. In 2014, the Nicaraguan government used more than \$6 million of seized drug money to open three new prison facilities.

Changes to the military code in 2014 gave the army a role in internal security at the discretion of the president, further concentrating power under the executive. Critics suggested that it opened the military to manipulation by the president. A 2014 law that restructured the National Police allows the president to appoint and extend the terms of the body's director, increases service eligibility, and permits members of the National Police to engage in political campaigning and political party activity. In December 2015, the National Assembly passed the Sovereign Security Law as a replacement for the current Democratic Security Law. Critics argued that the new law blurred the line between public safety and national security by potentially militarizing civilian agencies, and that the threats it combats are defined too broadly.

The constitution and laws nominally recognize the rights of indigenous communities, but those rights have not been respected in practice. Approximately 5 percent of the population is indigenous and lives mostly in the RAAN and the RAAS. In 2012, the Nicaraguan constitution was translated into Miskito and Mayangna, the languages most commonly spoken in these areas.

Same-sex marriage and civil unions remain barred in Nicaragua, and the country's LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) population is subject to intermittent threats and discriminatory treatment. In April 2015, the family code passed in 2014 went into effect. LGBT activists blasted the new law for defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman and, as such, depriving same-sex couples the right to adopt children or the ability to receive fertility treatment. A resolution approved in 2014 prohibits discrimination in health service provision based on sexual identity, though few steps have been taken toward implementation.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Governmental and nonstate actors generally respect travel, residence, and employment choices. Property rights are protected on paper but can be tenuous in practice. Titles are

often contested, and individuals with connections to the FSLN sometimes enjoy an advantage during property disputes. In August 2015, the U.S. government ended its 20-year-old waiver requirement for Nicaragua to access international credit, citing progress in resolving the remaining property claims that led to the original restrictions.

Property owners in the construction zone for the new canal have complained that they have felt intimidated, sometimes with violence, by surveyors with the backing of the army and police. Indigenous groups and farmers have raised concerns that they will be negatively impacted by the digging of the canal. Protests against the project continued into 2015.

In 2015, land conflicts in the RAAN resulted in forced displacements and clashes between indigenous groups, settlers, and police, as disputes over indigenous lands turned violent. Dozens were injured and at least nine were killed in September alone, with YATAMA leader Mario Lemans among the deceased. Hundreds of members of the Miskito community sought refuge in Honduras from the violence. Residents and human rights groups claimed that the Nicaraguan government, regional government, and the police had done little to stop the violence or to protect the property rights of indigenous communities. In September, the National Assembly stripped deputy YATAMA leader Brooklyn Rivera of his immunity in response to allegations that he and those close to him were illegally selling indigenous land.

In 2015, Nicaragua was ranked 12 out of 145 countries surveyed in the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report*, indicating that its gender-based disparities are among the smallest in the world. However, violence against women and children, including sexual and domestic abuse, remains widespread and underreported; few cases are ever prosecuted. The 2012 Comprehensive Law Against Violence toward Women addresses both physical and structural forms of violence, and recognizes violence against women as a matter of public health and safety. The legislation—which codified femicide as a crime in which there is a relationship between the perpetrator and the victim—also establishes sentencing guidelines for physical and psychological abuses against women. A 2013 reform to the law allows mediation between the victim and accuser, despite concerns from rights groups. The new family code includes protections for pregnant minors, the elderly, and ethnic minorities; establishes equal duties of mothers and fathers; and prohibits physical punishment of children.

Abortion is illegal and punishable by imprisonment, even when performed to save the mother's life or in cases of rape or incest. Scores of deaths stemming from the ban have been reported in recent years.

Human trafficking is a significant issue in Nicaragua, which serves as a source country for women and children forced into prostitution. A 2010 law classifies human trafficking as a form of organized crime. Adults and children are also vulnerable to forced labor in some sectors. In 2015, the U.S. State Department's *Trafficking in Persons Report* noted inadequate protections for victims and the vulnerability of women on the Atlantic Coast, where institutions are weaker and crime is more prevalent. The National Assembly's passage of a law in January 2015 meant to address human trafficking is a sign of some progress. The law establishes prison terms of up to 20 years, creates a databank to track cases, and enables the confiscation of property gained through human trafficking.

Niger

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 18,884,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Niamey

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

In December 2015, President Mahamadou Issoufou announced that his government had foiled a coup attempt that was organized by high-ranking military officers, including a former army chief of staff; the commander of an air force base in the capital, Niamey; and several counterterrorism chiefs. The announcement came in the context of high political tension due to alleged government attempts to disrupt the organization of the opposition ahead of elections set for 2016, and the November arrest and imprisonment of Hama Amadou, a former prime minister and president of the National Assembly and one of Issoufou’s most serious challengers in the presidential race. Tensions mounted against a backdrop of a deteriorating security situation in the region where Islamic insurgent groups continue to perpetrate violence in nearby countries while threatening to encroach on Niger.

Although Niger has so far managed to maintain a precarious stability, it has undermined civil liberties in the process. The fight against the militant group Boko Haram has led the government to declare states of emergency in the Diffa region near the border with Nigeria, allowing the army to engage in mass arrests and detain those suspected of links with terrorist organizations.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 24 / 40 (–2)

A. Electoral Process: 8 / 12 (–1)

A 2010 military coup that removed increasingly authoritarian president Mamadou Tandja from power led to the adoption of a new constitution that year. Drafted in broad consultation with civil society, the charter reinstated executive term limits, curbed executive power, and provided amnesty for the coup leaders. Under the constitution, the president is elected by popular vote for up to two five-year terms. Members of the 171-seat, unicameral National Assembly, who also serve five-year terms, are elected through party-list voting in eight multimember regional constituencies, eight single-member constituencies reserved for ethnic minorities, and five constituencies to represent Nigeriens living abroad.

The last presidential, legislative, and municipal elections were held in January 2011. The Party for Democracy and Socialism (PNDS), headed by Issoufou, won 37 legislative seats. The National Movement for a Developing Society (MNSD)—led by former prime minister Seini Oumarou—placed second with 26 seats, while Amadou’s Nigerien Democratic Movement for an African Federation took 25. Five smaller parties divided the remainder. In the first round of the presidential election, Issoufou and Oumarou emerged as the top two candidates; Issoufou then claimed victory with 58 percent of the vote in a March

runoff election. Both the presidential and legislative elections were declared free and fair by international observers, despite minor irregularities. The PNDS and MNSD won the majority of positions across the country in local elections.

Presidential, legislative, and local elections are scheduled to take place in 2016, but the opposition has raised concerns over the electoral process in advance of the polls. In January 2015, opposition parties cast doubt over the independence and impartiality of the Constitutional Court, which approves the list of candidates and validates the election results. These parties staged a protest in November 2015 to demand a reconfiguring of the court, an international audit of the electoral list, and the rescheduling of the local elections, threatening a boycott if their grievances went unaddressed. In December, the Electoral Commission requested an independent audit of the candidate lists from an international monitor in an effort to address one of the opposition's demands.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 9 / 16 (– 1)

Since assuming power in 2011, Issoufou has appointed former opponents and members of civil society to high positions in government to foster inclusivity, and a reshuffling of the government in 2013 continued this pattern, though it left most key posts in the hands of Issoufou's allies.

As the 2016 elections approach, tensions between the opposition and the government have increased. In April 2015, reports indicated that the government had instigated high-profile defections from the major opposition parties and replaced opposition party representatives in national political bodies with opposition dissidents who had been enticed to support the regime. In November 2015, Amadou was arrested upon his return from exile and accused of involvement in a human trafficking scandal involving newborn babies from Nigeria.

The constitution reserves eight special constituency seats to ensure ethnic minorities' representation in the National Assembly. Such minorities, including the nomadic population, continue to have poor access to government services. A law adopted in 2014 created five parliamentary seats for the representation of Nigeriens living in the diaspora. Under the same law, political parties must allocate enough seats on their electoral lists to ensure at least 15 percent of their winning representatives are women.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Corruption remains a serious problem in Niger, and observers have raised concerns regarding uranium-mining contracts. In recent years, Chinese corporations have played an increasing role in the country's uranium-mining industry, and locals have accused them of flouting regulations and exploiting Nigerien resources and labor while the government reinvests almost none of the profits in the local economy. The 2010 constitution provides for greater transparency in government reporting of revenues from the extractive industries as well as for the declaration of personal assets by government officials, including the president; nevertheless, accusations of graft persist. In November 2015, the opposition introduced a measure in parliament to impeach Issoufou for inappropriately profiting from mining concessions, though it was defeated by the president's allies. In 2011, the government created the High Authority to Combat Corruption and opened an anticorruption hotline.

In October 2014, former president Tandja was stripped of his legal immunity and charged with corruption, as authorities began investigating the disappearance of nearly 400 billion francs (\$800 million) of public money that Tandja had claimed were in the state treasury when he was overthrown.

Niger was ranked 99 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 28 / 60 (–2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16

In 2010, the National Assembly adopted a new press law that eliminated prison terms for media offenses and reduced the threat of libel cases that journalists had faced under Tandja. In 2011, Issoufou became the first head of state to sign the Table Mountain Declaration, which calls on African governments to promote press freedom. Journalists sometimes face police violence while covering protests, as well as sanctions for critical or controversial reporting. In January 2015, demonstrations against the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* erupted in Niamey after it published a cartoon of the prophet Mohammed following an attack on the magazine's Paris offices by gunmen claiming affiliation with Islamic extremists. During the protests, police stormed the offices of pro-opposition media outlets, assaulting at least eight journalists and disrupting their coverage of the events. Between October and November 2015, 10 journalists were temporarily detained and their recording materials confiscated by the police. In December, 20 private radio and television stations shut down their programs for two hours to protest recurring violations against journalists during the year.

Censorship of the internet and social media has emerged as a mean to restrict the growing critiques of Issoufou's regime. In January 2015, the government blocked access to Facebook, Twitter, and SMS messaging services in an attempt to curb criticism of Issoufou's participation in a memorial commemorating the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in Paris and his statements of support for the publication. While the block was intended to last several days, the government later reversed course and restored access after just a few hours.

Freedom of religion is generally respected in this overwhelmingly Muslim country. However, the anti-*Charlie Hebdo* protests in January 2015 also resulted in rare instances of intercommunal violence between Muslims and Niger's small Christian minority, who generally coexist peacefully. At least 45 churches were set on fire, as well as Christian schools and orphanages, leading to at least 10 fatalities.

Academic freedom is guaranteed but not always observed in practice.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12 (–2)

Constitutional guarantees of freedoms of assembly and association are largely upheld, though the government has used force to break up demonstrations in the past. During 2015, the government refused to authorize several public protests, citing security concerns due to the increased threat from militant groups. Opposition and civil society protests are met with police brutality and tear gas. In October 2015, at least 79 people were arrested at a student-led protest in Niamey, where students were demanding better conditions in high schools and universities. Police used tear gas to disperse the crowds.

The government does not generally restrict the operations of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), though a lack of security in the north impedes their functioning in the region. In May 2015, two civil society activists who denounced military abuses perpetrated during the state of emergency in Diffa were arrested and accused of complicity with Boko Haram.

While the constitution and other laws guarantee workers the right to join unions and bargain for wages, a large portion of the workforce is employed in subsistence agriculture

and small trading. In April 2015, hundreds of workers at a uranium mine launched a three-day strike demanding full payment of a promised bonus; the enforcement of regulations and respect for labor rights in the mines are notoriously weak. Union and civil society activism has declined due to the cooptation of their leader by Issoufou's government, although recently new leaders have started to emerge.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and courts have shown some autonomy in the past, though the judicial system has at times been subject to executive interference. The Ministry of Justice supervises public prosecutors, and the president has the power to appoint judges. Judicial corruption is fueled partly by low salaries and inadequate training. Prolonged pretrial detention is common, and police forces are underfunded and poorly trained. Prisons are characterized by overcrowding and poor health conditions.

Insecurity continues to plague many parts of the country. Recently, Boko Haram has intensified its assaults on the Diffa region. In February 2015, the group attacked two border towns in the area, leading to heavy clashes with Nigerien security forces. In June, another attack killed at least 38 people. By October, some 60 attacks by Boko Haram had been carried out since the beginning of the year, in addition to other abductions and explosions.

The crises in neighboring countries have led to a massive influx of refugees fleeing violence by Islamist militants. By December 2015, there were 68,000 Nigerian refugees and 56,000 Malian refugees present in the country. This influx has raised pressure on food supplies.

While two ethnic groups, Hausa and Djerma, still dominate many government and economic positions, minority groups are represented and their rights are protected by law. Same-sex sexual activity is not illegal in Niger, but same-sex relationships are highly stigmatized, and there is no protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of movement and property rights and these are generally respected throughout the country, though bribery remains an issue for both.

Although the 2010 constitution prohibits gender discrimination, women suffer discrimination in practice. Family law gives women inferior status in property disputes, inheritance rights, and divorce. Sexual and domestic violence are reportedly widespread. Female genital mutilation was criminalized in 2003 and has declined, but it continues in a small percentage of the population.

While slavery was criminalized in 2003 and banned in the 2010 constitution, it remains a problem in Niger, with up to 44,000 individuals still in slavery. Niger remains a source, transit point, and destination for human trafficking, and was downgraded to Tier 2 Watch List status in the U.S. State Department's 2016 *Trafficking in Persons Report* due to its declining efforts to assist increasing numbers of trafficking victims.

↑ Nigeria

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 181,839,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Abuja

Freedom Rating: 4.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Trend Arrow: Nigeria received an upward trend arrow due to improvements in the quality of the 2015 executive and legislative elections, which featured the first-ever opposition victory at the national level and a peaceful rotation of power, as well as the new government's initial efforts to combat corruption.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

After 16 years in power, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) lost the 2015 presidential election and its majority in the National Assembly to the opposition All Progressives Congress (APC). The polls, which observers regarded as competitive and generally well conducted, represented a milestone in the country's democratic development, marking the first time that the opposition gained power at the national level through elections. On assuming office in May, President Muhammadu Buhari identified combatting corruption, defeating the militant Islamist group Boko Haram, and boosting the living standards of Nigerians as his main policy priorities.

The new administration implemented reforms to increase the effectiveness of the Nigerian military in its counterinsurgency efforts. By December, the government had recaptured a significant amount of territory, and Buhari announced that the military had "technically" defeated Boko Haram, saying the group could no longer mount full-scale attacks on security forces or population centers. The government's gains were attributed in part to an offensive launched in mid-February by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which includes soldiers from Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and Benin.

Nevertheless, the security situation in northeastern Nigeria remained grave throughout 2015, as Boko Haram carried out guerilla-style attacks and suicide bombings against civilian and government targets. In addition, reports from domestic and international advocacy groups indicated that government forces continued to commit gross human rights violations with impunity, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary mass arrests, illegal detentions, and torture of civilians.

To fulfill his anticorruption pledges, Buhari initiated a series of reforms, including the reorganization of the notoriously opaque state oil company. Nigeria's main anticorruption agencies launched investigations into several high-profile politicians, including the Senate president and top officials from former president Goodluck Jonathan's administration.

Nigeria's economy, the largest in Africa, grew by 3.2 percent in 2015, significantly below its average of around 6 percent for the previous decade. The lower growth rate was due in large part to a significant decline in the global price of oil, which accounts for 95 percent of the country's export revenue and as much as 80 percent of government revenue.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 23 / 40 (+5)**A. Electoral Process:** 9 / 12 (+3)

The president is elected by popular vote for no more than two four-year terms. Members of the bicameral National Assembly, consisting of the 109-seat Senate and the 360-seat House of Representatives, are elected for four-year terms. While elections that followed Nigeria's return to a multiparty system in 1999 were marred by gross irregularities, the 2011 polls marked the beginning of a departure from this trend.

The March 2015 presidential and legislative elections were regarded as competitive and generally well conducted by local and international observer organizations. Although the voting had been postponed by approximately six weeks, with officials citing insecurity in the northeast, the delay did not adversely affect the integrity of the process. Instead it appeared to have given the Independent National Electoral Commission more time to improve the distribution of permanent voter cards, pilot a new electronic voter-identification system, and fine-tune its election machinery. However, hundreds of thousands of Nigerians were still prevented from voting, either because they were internally displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency, or because they failed to receive their permanent voter cards in time. Election-related deaths were far less numerous than the roughly 1,200 reported during the 2011 election cycle, but more than 160 people were killed in election-related violence between January and April.

Buhari, the APC's candidate, won the presidential contest, defeating Jonathan of the PDP, 54 percent to 45 percent. Jonathan quickly conceded defeat, helping to ensure a peaceful and orderly rotation of power. APC candidates also won a majority in the legislative elections. In the House of Representatives, the APC took 212 of 360 seats, while the PDP won 140, and smaller parties captured the remaining 8. In the Senate, the APC won 60 of 109 seats, while the PDP secured 49. At the state level, the APC captured a majority of the contested governorships.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16 (+1)

Nigeria's multiparty system provides an opportunity for opposition parties to gain power through elections, as demonstrated by the APC's sweeping victory in 2015. Buhari's defeat of Jonathan represented the first time that a sitting Nigerian president was democratically replaced. The vote appeared to reflect the ethnic and religious fault lines of the country, with Buhari, a northern Muslim, winning primarily in the northern states, and Jonathan, a Christian from the southern Niger Delta region, gaining an overwhelming majority in the south. However, Buhari's ability to gain support from many non-northern and non-Muslim voters was a significant factor in his success.

Despite the improved elections and peaceful rotation of power, citizens' political choices remained impaired or undermined to some degree in 2015 by vote buying and intimidation, the influence of powerful domestic and international economic interests on policymaking, and the local domination of either the Nigerian military or Boko Haram militants in regions affected by the insurgency.

In 2014, the 36 state legislatures approved proposed amendments to the 1999 constitution that would allow independent candidacy in Nigerian elections, among other changes. In February 2015, the National Assembly submitted the amendment bill to then president Jonathan, but he did not sign it before leaving office. As of December, Buhari had not assented to the amendment bill, despite overtures from the National Assembly.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12 (+1)

Corruption remains pervasive, particularly in the oil sector. However, the Buhari administration undertook a series of reforms aimed at reducing graft and improving transparency,

among them a restructuring of the state-owned Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. Buhari also assumed ministerial responsibility for the petroleum portfolio, prompting some concern that he aimed to keep Nigeria's oil industry under his personal control.

Separately, corruption charges were brought against several high-ranking politicians in 2015. In September, newly elected Senate president Bukola Saraki was charged by Nigeria's Code of Conduct Tribunal with concealing assets and other offenses allegedly committed during his 2003–11 tenure as governor of Kwara State. At year's end the case had been suspended while Saraki appealed the charges at the Supreme Court. In December, former national security adviser Sambo Dasuki was arrested in connection with claims that \$2.1 billion in federal funds earmarked for the military had gone missing. Dasuki pleaded not guilty to embezzlement charges and alleged that some of the missing funds were used to pay for Jonathan's reelection campaign. Several other officials implicated in the scandal were also arrested, and the case remained open at year's end.

Despite the passage of the 2011 Freedom of Information Act, which guarantees the right to access public records, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have criticized government agencies for routinely refusing to release information sought through the law. According to Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index, Nigeria was ranked 136 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 1 / 0

Boko Haram has been accused of attempting to alter the religious and ethnic composition of the northeast, particularly in the states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe, though in 2015 its operations and control over territory were curtailed by Nigerian and allied regional military forces. The militant group has targeted Christians and moderate Muslims through mass killings, kidnappings, and other human rights abuses; used captive women and children to carry out attacks, including suicide bombings; imposed a crude form of Sharia (Islamic law); and sought to eradicate any sources of secular education. The conflict has killed thousands of people annually in recent years, and the National Emergency Management Agency reported in December 2015 that nearly 2.1 million people were internally displaced in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimated in July that there were as many as 129,000 Nigerian refugees in Niger, Cameroon, and Chad.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 25 / 40

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

Freedom of speech, expression, and the press are constitutionally guaranteed. However, these rights are limited by laws on sedition, criminal defamation, and publication of false news. Sharia statutes in 12 northern states impose severe penalties for alleged press offenses. Government officials also restrict press freedom by publicly criticizing, harassing, and arresting journalists, especially when they cover corruption scandals, human rights violations, or separatist and communal violence. In December 2015, the Senate sparked public outrage by proposing a measure, known as the "social media bill," that would impose a two-year prison term on anyone found guilty of making false statements on electronic media. The bill's sponsors were pursuing its passage at year's end, though Buhari indicated that he would veto it should it reach his desk.

The military made a number of attempts to punish critical reporting in 2015. In March, soldiers detained and confiscated the equipment of two Al-Jazeera journalists covering the

conflict with Boko Haram in Borno State. The two were released in April after a Lagos-based human rights lawyer filed a suit on their behalf. Local and international journalists also criticized the government and political parties for attempting to restrict the coverage of the 2015 elections. In February, officials with the State Security Service searched the home of a Reuters correspondent, confiscated his equipment, and detained him for several days on suspicion of espionage. Journalists and media entities have also been attacked and intimidated by nonstate actors, including Boko Haram. A reporter for Channels TV was stabbed during a live broadcast at an APC rally in Rivers State in February. An investigation was launched, but no arrests were reported by year's end. After publishing an article critical of Boko Haram in May, an editor at the independent daily *ThisDay* received death threats via e-mail, apparently from Boko Haram. There were no reports that the government restricted access to the internet in 2015.

Religious freedom is constitutionally and legally protected and is generally respected by the government in practice. Nevertheless, in some instances state and local governments have placed limits on religious activities and endorsed a dominant faith. In June 2015, the Sharia Court of Appeal in Kano State reportedly sentenced nine people to death for making blasphemous statements against the prophet Muhammad. Nonstate actors have also attempted to limit religious freedom. Boko Haram has explicitly targeted Christians and moderate Muslims, and their respective houses of worship. During the month of Ramadan, Boko Haram launched a series of attacks on churches and mosques in Nigeria's northeastern and so-called Middle Belt states. In July, suspected Boko Haram militants burned 32 churches and killed five people in Borno State, and attacked a crowded mosque in the city of Jos, killing 44 people. Periodic communal clashes between Muslims and Christians have broken out for decades in the states of Kaduna and Plateau, especially around Jos, often killing hundreds of people and displacing thousands at a time.

The federal government generally respects academic freedom. However, some state governments mandate religious instruction in elementary and secondary curriculums, and student admission and faculty hiring policies are subject to political interference. Boko Haram's assault on secular education has included the destruction of numerous primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions; the intimidation, injury, and killing of schoolchildren and teachers; and the forced closure of schools throughout the northeast. The government has been unable to locate more than 200 girls whom Boko Haram abducted from a school in the town of Chibok in 2014.

The U.S. State Department has received reports of authorities monitoring electronic communications between private citizens, particularly as election campaigning takes place. In February 2015, the APC alleged that the Jonathan administration was hacking the phones of party leaders.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12

The rights to peaceful assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. However, federal and state governments frequently ban public events perceived as threatening national security, including those that could incite political, ethnic, or religious tension.

Nigeria has a broad and vibrant civil society. NGOs operating in regions affected by the Boko Haram insurgency experienced difficulties in carrying out their work in 2015. Members of some organizations faced intimidation and physical harm for speaking out against Boko Haram, or encountered obstacles when investigating alleged human rights abuses committed by the military against Boko Haram suspects. Groups operating in the restive Niger Delta region face similar impediments.

Under the constitution, workers have the right to form and join trade unions, engage in collective bargaining, and conduct strikes. Nevertheless, the government forbids strike action in a number of essential services, including public transportation and security.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

Judicial independence is constitutionally and legally enshrined. The judiciary has achieved some degree of independence and professionalism in practice, but political interference, corruption, and a lack of funding, equipment, and training remain important problems. Certain departments, particularly the Court of Appeals, have frequently rejected election challenges or allegations of corruption against powerful elites, raising doubts about their impartiality. In January 2015, the Judiciary Staff Union of Nigeria held a three-week strike, shutting down all state and federal courts to protest the federal government's unwillingness to guarantee the financial independence of the judiciary.

Despite pressure from international human rights groups, torture has yet to be criminalized. There were numerous allegations of torture, extortion, bribe taking, and embezzlement within the police force in 2015. In June, the inspector general of police, in collaboration with an NGO specializing in security-sector reform, launched a social-media platform that allowed citizens to report police abuse and bribe taking.

The military has also been widely criticized for pervasive corruption and human rights abuses. In June 2015, Amnesty International (AI) published a report that called for the investigation of top military commanders for war crimes and crimes against humanity in relation to extrajudicial killings and other abuses, including acts of torture, carried out during counterinsurgency efforts in the northeast. AI alleged that since March 2011, approximately 7,000 men and boys had died in military detention, while between 2013 and 2014 the military and other affiliated groups executed 1,200 people. In December 2015, local and international rights groups condemned the military for allegedly killing scores of Shiite Muslim protesters in Zaria, a major city in Kaduna State. The National Human Rights Commission began an investigation into the incident, which remained open at year's end.

After assuming office, Buhari sought to revive the military's counterinsurgency efforts by replacing the armed forces' leadership, relocating the military command center from Abuja to Maiduguri, and forging closer partnerships with Chad, Niger, and Cameroon to combat Boko Haram and redevelop the affected region. The multinational offensive against Boko Haram that began in February was instrumental in recapturing major towns and other territory from the group, rescuing thousands of civilians and hostages, and inflicting significant losses on the militants themselves. However, Boko Haram continued to launch deadly attacks against civilian targets in the northeast, and conducted raids and other operations in neighboring countries. In March, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau reportedly pledged the group's allegiance to the Syria-based Islamic State (IS) militant group, and the offer was subsequently accepted, according to an IS spokesperson.

Violent crime in certain areas of Nigeria is a serious problem, as is the trafficking of drugs and small arms. Abductions are common in the Niger Delta and the southeastern states of Abia, Imo, and Anambra. Political figures, the wealthy, and foreigners are most frequently targeted. In September 2015, Olu Falae, a former government minister, was abducted and held for ransom in Ondo State. Police rescued him and later arrested several suspects.

Despite constitutional safeguards against ethnic discrimination, many ethnic minorities experience bias by state governments and other societal groups in areas including employment, education, and housing. The government and society continue to discriminate against

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. According to a June 2015 report by the rights group PEN Nigeria, the implementation of the 2014 Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act—which imposes sentences of up to 10 years in prison for supporting or publicly expressing same-sex relationships, among other provisions—has substantially restricted freedom of expression and assembly for LGBT Nigerians, and encouraged anti-LGBT violence and discrimination. In northern states, same-sex relationships can be punished by death under Sharia statutes. In January 2015, Sharia police arrested 12 men in Kano State for allegedly being involved in a gay marriage; the men were eventually released.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Freedom of internal movement and foreign travel are legally guaranteed. However, security officials frequently impose dusk-to-dawn curfews in areas affected by communal violence or the Islamist insurgency.

Nigeria's largely unregulated property rights system hinders citizens and private business from engaging in the efficient and legal purchase or sale of land and other types of property. According to the World Bank's Doing Business Report for 2016, Nigeria ranked 169 out of 189 countries; the country showed improvements in protections for minority investors, but continued to rank near the bottom of the index with respect to property registration, construction permits, and access to electricity.

Women's representation in government worsened following the 2015 elections. Women maintained 8 of 109 Senate seats, but in the House of Representatives women currently hold 18 of 360 seats, compared with 24 following the 2011 elections. Several civil society groups have criticized the Buhari administration for marginalizing women in its ministerial appointments. Of the 37 ministers announced in September, only 6 are women. This amounted to 16 percent female representation in the cabinet, compared with 31 percent in the previous administration.

Many families choose to send sons to school while daughters become street vendors or domestic workers. Women experience discrimination in employment and are often relegated to inferior positions. Gender discrimination is significant in the states governed by Sharia statutes, and this has been exacerbated by the Boko Haram insurgency. Women belonging to certain ethnic groups are often denied equal rights to inherit property due to customary laws and practices. Despite the existence of strict laws against rape, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and child marriage, these offenses remain widespread, with low rates of reporting and prosecution.

Nigerian organized crime groups are heavily involved in human trafficking. Boko Haram has subjected children to forced labor and sex slavery. Both Boko Haram and a civilian vigilante group that opposes the militants have forcibly recruited child soldiers, according to the U.S. State Department. In March 2015, then president Jonathan signed the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act, which imposes stiff penalties for those convicted of human trafficking or the exploitation of children for sex or labor. The law also provides a mechanism for cooperation among government and civil society groups to combat human trafficking.

North Korea

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 24,983,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Capital: Pyongyang

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

In October 2015, North Korea celebrated the 70th anniversary of the ruling Korean Workers' Party (KWP) with a large military parade in Pyongyang and a speech by leader Kim Jong-un. Kim reportedly granted amnesty to thousands of prisoners in the run-up to the event, though political prisoners were apparently excluded. Also in October, state media announced plans to convene a seventh congress of the KWP in May 2016, which would be the first party congress since 1980.

In August, weeks before planned U.S.–South Korean military exercises, two South Korean soldiers were seriously injured by landmines while patrolling near the border. The mines were thought to be newly placed by the North Koreans, not left over from the Korean War. In retaliation, South Korea resumed propaganda broadcasts via loudspeakers along the border, a practice that had been suspended for 11 years. North Korea then resumed its own loudspeaker broadcasts and declared a “semi–state of war.” After a brief exchange of artillery fire between the two sides, negotiations were held to deescalate the situation. The North expressed regret for the landmine incident, the loudspeaker broadcasts were halted, and both sides agreed to resume family reunions and hold more talks on increasing cultural, sports, and other exchanges. In October, North Korea duly hosted a new round of reunions of family members separated by the Korean War at its Mount Kumgang resort.

In March 2015, North Korea lifted travel restrictions it had imposed the previous year to prevent transmission of the Ebola virus. Although some West African countries had suffered major outbreaks, there had been no reported Ebola cases in Asia. The North Korean restrictions barred nonessential travel and imposed a 21-day quarantine on all foreigners entering North Korea, later expanded to include all North Koreans returning from abroad. The rules essentially halted diplomatic exchanges, tourism, business trips, and visits related to humanitarian and development programs.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 0 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

Kim Jong-un became the country's supreme leader after the death of his father, Kim Jong-il, in December 2011. The elder Kim had led North Korea since the 1994 death of his own father, Kim Il-sung, to whom the office of president was permanently dedicated in a 1998 constitutional revision. Kim Jong-un's titles as of 2015 included first secretary of the KWP, first chairman of the National Defense Commission (the highest state body), and supreme commander of the Korean People's Army.

North Korea's parliament, the 687-seat Supreme People's Assembly, is a rubber-stamp institution elected to five-year terms. All candidates for office, who run unopposed, are preselected by and from the KWP and a handful of subordinate parties and organizations. Kim Jong-un was among those who won seats in the most recent national elections, held in March 2014. The official voter turnout was 99.97 percent.

In July 2015, for the first time since 2011, North Korea held elections for 28,452 provincial, city, and county people's assembly members. Voter turnout was again reported to be 99.97 percent, with all candidates preselected by the KWP and running unopposed.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

North Korea functions as a single-party state under a dynastic totalitarian dictatorship. Although a small number of minor parties and organizations exist legally, all are members of the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland, a KWP-led umbrella group that selects all candidates for elected office. The ruling party has been dominated by the Kim family since its founding. Kim Jong-un serves as first secretary of the KWP, with the late Kim Jong-il dubbed the "eternal general secretary" after his death.

Any political dissent or opposition is harshly punished, and even the KWP is subject to regular purges aimed at reinforcing the leader's personal authority. Various sources reported a number of high-level dismissals and executions during 2015, though independent confirmation was often unavailable. In April, for example, Defense Minister Hyon Yong-chol was reportedly removed from office and put to death.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

The North Korean government is neither transparent in its operations nor accountable to the public. Information about the functioning of state institutions is tightly controlled for both domestic and external audiences. Most observers must glean evidence from state media, defector testimony, or secret informants inside the country, and the accuracy and reliability of these sources varies considerably.

Corruption is believed to be endemic at every level of the state and economy, and bribery is pervasive. North Korea was ranked 167 out of 168 countries and territories assessed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 3 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 0 / 16

All domestic media outlets are run by the state. Televisions and radios are permanently fixed to state channels, and all publications are subject to strict supervision and censorship. In recent years, four foreign news agencies have established bureau offices in Pyongyang: the U.S.-based Associated Press, Russia's Sputnik International (formerly RIA Novosti), Japan's Kyodo, and China's Xinhua. In November 2015, Agence France-Presse (AFP) announced plans to open a bureau office in Pyongyang in the coming months.

Access to the global internet is restricted to a small number of people in the government and academia, and others have access to a national intranet on which foreign websites are blocked. The black market provides alternative information sources, including mobile telephones, pirated recordings of South Korean dramas, and radios capable of receiving foreign programs. Mobile-phone service was launched in 2008, and there were more than 3 million subscriptions as of 2015, though phone calls and text messages are generally recorded and transcribed for monitoring purposes. Foreigners, who operate on a separate

network, have been allowed to bring mobile phones into the country and have access to 3G service, enabling live social-media feeds out of North Korea.

Although freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution, it does not exist in practice. State-sanctioned churches maintain a token presence in Pyongyang, and some North Koreans who live near the Chinese border are known to practice their faiths furtively. However, intense state indoctrination and repression preclude free exercise of religion.

There is no academic freedom. The state must approve all curriculums, including those of educational programs led by foreigners. Although some North Koreans are permitted to study abroad, at both universities and short-term educational training programs, those granted such opportunities are subject to monitoring and reprisals for perceived disloyalty.

Nearly all forms of private communication are monitored by a huge network of informants.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Freedom of assembly is not recognized, and there are no known associations or organizations other than those created by the state. Strikes, collective bargaining, and other organized labor activities are illegal.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

North Korea does not have an independent judiciary. The UN General Assembly has recognized and condemned the country's severe human rights violations, including torture, public executions, extrajudicial and arbitrary detention, and forced labor by detainees; the absence of due process and the rule of law; and death sentences for political offenses. A UN commission of inquiry into the human rights situation in North Korea found these violations to be widespread, grave, and systematic, rising to the level of crimes against humanity, and in December 2014 the issue was taken up by the UN Security Council for the first time. In June 2015, the UN high commissioner for human rights opened a new office in Seoul, South Korea, intended to support the efforts of the UN special rapporteur on human rights in North Korea.

It is estimated that 80,000 to 120,000 political prisoners are held in detention camps in the country. Inmates face brutal conditions, and collective or familial punishment for suspected dissent by an individual is common practice. In October 2015, amnesty was granted to several thousand prisoners as part of events marking the 70th anniversary of the KWP; most of those released were reportedly elderly or gravely ill, and political prisoners were apparently excluded. Ignoring international objections, the Chinese government continues to return refugees and defectors to North Korea, where they are subject to torture, harsh imprisonment, or execution. North Korean authorities regularly detain foreign citizens on various charges, obtaining coerced confessions, sometimes imposing harsh prison terms, and typically using the detainees as diplomatic leverage before eventually granting their release.

North Korea is ethnically homogeneous; the most prevalent form of discrimination is based on perceived political and ideological nonconformity rather than ethnicity. All citizens are classified according to their family's level of loyalty and proximity to the leadership under a semiheditary caste-like system known as *songbun*.

Laws do not prohibit same-sex sexual activity, but the government maintains that the practice does not exist in North Korea.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 3 / 16

There is no freedom of movement, and forced internal resettlement is routine. Emigration is illegal, but many North Koreans have escaped via China. Access to Pyongyang,

where the availability of food, housing, and health care is somewhat better than in the rest of the country, is tightly restricted. Recently, this disparity has increased, with the capital featuring more luxuries for a growing middle class. A person's *songbun* classification affects his or her place of residence as well as employment and educational opportunities, access to medical facilities, and even access to stores.

The economy remains both centrally planned and grossly mismanaged. Development is also hobbled by a lack of infrastructure, a scarcity of energy and raw materials, an inability to borrow on world markets or from multilateral banks because of sanctions, lingering foreign debt, and ideological isolationism. However, the expanding black market and ad hoc service industries have provided many North Koreans with a growing field of activity that is comparatively free from government control, if not from bribery and extortion; some have managed to engage in cross-border trade with China. In addition, a greater emphasis on building special economic zones (SEZs) has led to conditions more conducive to foreign investment. Local officials have had some authority in the management of these zones and over small-scale experiments with economic policies.

Women have formal equality, but they face rigid discrimination in practice and are poorly represented at high levels of government and in public employment. Although they have fewer opportunities in the formal sector, women are economically active outside the socialist system, exposing them to arbitrary state restrictions.

UN bodies have noted the use of forced abortions and infanticide against pregnant women who are forcibly repatriated from China. There have been widespread reports of trafficked women and girls among the tens of thousands of North Koreans who have recently crossed into China. Prostitution is rampant in ordinary residential areas.

Forced labor is common in prison camps, mass mobilization programs, and state-run contracting arrangements in which North Korean workers are sent abroad.

Norway

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 5,194,411

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Oslo

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

In local elections held in September 2015, the ruling Conservative Party and the right-wing Progress Party lost a significant share of votes. The polls were held amid contested discussion of immigration and asylum, as Norway—along with other European countries—confronted an influx of refugees and other migrants during the year. Separately, in a landmark case against bribery in foreign business transactions, a court in July found former executives of the fertilizer company Yara guilty of corruption.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40**A. Electoral Process:** 12 / 12

Norway's unicameral parliament, the Storting, has 169 members who are directly elected for four-year terms through a system of proportional representation. The constitutional monarch, currently King Harald V, appoints the prime minister, who is the leader of the majority party or coalition in the Storting. While the monarch is officially the head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces, his duties are largely ceremonial.

The Conservative Party gained the most ground in the 2013 parliamentary elections, winning 48 seats—an increase of 18 seats over the 2009 election. The Progress Party lost 12 seats, but retained 29, which helped it enter into a ruling coalition with the Conservatives. The Labor Party remains the largest party in the parliament with 55 seats, though its loss of 9 seats prompted it to form a coalition with opposition members for the first time in eight years. Conservative Party leader Erna Solberg became prime minister.

In local elections in September 2015, the Labor Party took 33 percent of the vote, a gain of 1 percent from polls in 2011. The Conservative Party's share of the vote dropped from 28 percent to 23.2 percent in 2015. The Conservatives lost the mayoralties of Bergen and Oslo, the most populous cities in Norway. The nationalist and anti-immigration Progress Party gained only 9.5 percent of the vote, down from 11.4 percent in 2011. These results stood out in a regional context, as right-wing parties in several neighboring states have seen surging voter support amid growing concerns about immigration and security.

Elections are regulated by the constitution and the Representation of the People Act of 2002. The king elects members of the National Electoral Committee, which oversees the conduct of elections with the support of county-level committees.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

A range of political parties operate freely in Norway. Generally, political power has alternated between the Labor Party and Conservative-led coalitions.

The indigenous Sami population, in addition to participating in the national political process, has its own legislature, the Sameting, which has worked to protect the group's language and cultural rights and to influence the national government's decisions about Sami land and resources. The Sameting is comprised of 39 representatives who are elected for four-year terms. The national government has a deputy minister charged specifically with handling Sami issues. The Sami are the only group in Scandinavia recognized as an indigenous people by international conventions.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Norway remains one of the least corrupt countries in the world, and was ranked 5 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Isolated incidents of bribery and misconduct have occurred, and Norway's role in the international energy and mining industries has been subject to particular scrutiny. In July 2015, a Norwegian court found four former executives of the Oslo-based fertilizer producer Yara guilty of paying bribes to officials in Libya and India, giving them prison sentences ranging from two to three years. Officials fined Yara, in which the Norwegian government owns a 36.2 percent stake, 295 million Norwegian kroner (\$48 million) in 2014—roughly four times the amount that the company paid in bribes. The case was lauded as an important step toward boosting accountability and enforcing foreign bribery laws.

In 2014, senior police superintendent Eirik Jensen was arrested and charged with gross corruption and complicity in narcotics-related crimes. Jensen allegedly helped smuggle

thousands of pounds of cannabis into Norway and accepted bribes from criminal elements in the process. The Norwegian Bureau for the Investigation of Police Affairs launched an inquiry into the case, which was ongoing in 2015.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 60 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed and respected in practice. In an effort to promote political pluralism, the state subsidizes many newspapers, the majority of which are privately owned and openly partisan. The government does not impede internet access.

Freedom of religion is protected by the constitution and respected in practice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway counts 75 percent of Norwegians as members. A 2012 constitutional amendment separated church and state, placing the Lutheran Church on par with all other denominations in Norway, and absolving the requirement that half of cabinet be members of the Lutheran Church. All religious groups must register with the state to receive financial support, which is determined by size of membership. Students must take a course on religion and ethics focusing on Christianity.

Ubaydullah Hussain, former spokesperson for the Prophet's Umma, a radical Norwegian religious group, was convicted of threatening journalists and committing hate speech in February 2014 and sentenced to 120 days in prison; half of his sentence was suspended, and he was released after the trial due to time served in pretrial detention. In a separate case, Hussain was charged with incitement to violence by the Oslo District Court in July 2014, but acquitted in October 2014. A higher court upheld both rulings in June 2015. Hussain was arrested again in December and charged with recruiting fighters for the Islamic State (IS) militant group.

While official statistics do not distinguish among different religious groups that are targeted in religion-based hate crimes, anecdotal evidence indicates a rise in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim violence and harassment. A new special police unit in Oslo was founded in 2014 to strengthen efforts against hate crimes; the first convictions as a result of its work occurred in March 2015. In 2015, Oslo police reviewed 143 hate crimes, roughly double the number in 2014. The actual number is assumed to be significantly higher, as many incidents are not reported or are miscategorized by police. Norway still lacks a comprehensive national approach to hate crime, for which it received criticism from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in August 2015.

Academic freedom is respected, and private discussion is free and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedoms of assembly and association. In February 2015, following a terrorist attack on a synagogue in Copenhagen, about 1,000 Norwegians assembled to view a "ring of peace" around an Oslo synagogue organized by local Muslim youth to show solidarity with the Jewish community. Separately, in May, hundreds of demonstrators marched in Oslo to protest perceived abuses by Norway's child welfare agency, accusing the body of mishandling removals of children—particularly of immigrant families—from parental care.

Norwegians are very active in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which are able to form and operate without undue restrictions.

Labor unions play an important role in consulting with the government on social and economic issues, and just over half of the workforce is unionized. The right to strike is

legally guaranteed, except for members of the military and senior civil servants, and is generally practiced without restriction. All workers have the right to bargain collectively. In March 2015, 700 members of the Norwegian Pilots' Union went on strike, affecting roughly 35,000 passengers; the strike was resolved within 11 days.

F. Rule of Law: 16 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and the court system, headed by the Supreme Court, operates fairly at the local and national levels. The king appoints judges on the advice of the Judicial Appointments Board, which is composed of legal and judicial professionals as well as representatives of the public. The police are under civilian control, and human rights abuses by law enforcement authorities are rare. Prison conditions generally meet international standards and, in many cases, exceed them. However, capacity has not been sufficient, with more than 1,000 prisoners waiting to serve their sentences in recent years. In March 2015, Norwegian authorities signed a controversial deal with the Netherlands to allow Norwegian prisoners to serve their time in Dutch prisons. Norway's recidivism rate of 20 percent is one of the lowest in the world.

Security threats, primarily linked to IS extremists, remained a concern in 2015. In July 2014, in response to intelligence about a planned attack by the militant group, Norwegian authorities acutely increased national security measures, including by closing airspace, tightening border controls, and bolstering the presence of armed police in public spaces. No similar incidents were reported in 2015.

Immigration to Norway has increased fivefold since the 1970s, and 13 percent of Norway's population in 2015 was foreign-born. Like other European countries, Norway has struggled to cope with the recent surge in arrivals of asylum seekers and other migrants. Authorities have experienced difficulties in providing shelter and other services. Volunteers have helped fill some shortfalls, particularly by assisting in the distribution of food and other necessities. In 2015, Norway received asylum applications from 31,000 people, primarily from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan; this was a significant increase from the 11,000 applications received in 2014. The controversial practice of refoulement continued in 2015, affecting more than 1,000 people by the end of October.

The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman is responsible for covering all forms of discrimination and for enforcing the country's Gender Equality Act, the Anti-Discrimination Act, and other laws against discrimination. The national government supports Sami-language instruction, broadcast programs, and subsidized newspapers in Sami regions.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 16 / 16

Although Norway is not a member of the European Union (EU), citizens within the European Economic Area (which includes all EU states as well as Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein) do not need a residence permit to work in Norway.

The Gender Equality Act provides equal rights for men and women. A 2013 law that took effect in 2015 mandates gender-neutral conscription for the armed forces, making Norway the first North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member to include women in the draft. In 2013, women won nearly 40 percent of seats in the parliament.

A gender-neutral marriage act passed in 2009 granted Norwegian same-sex couples identical rights as opposite-sex couples, including in adoption and assisted pregnancies.

Norway is a destination country for human trafficking for the purposes of labor and sexual exploitation. According to the U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons*

report, the country complies with international antitrafficking standards and offers victims a range of services and protections; however, the report noted that prosecution of trafficking crimes remains weak.

Oman

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 4,201,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Muscat

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

The authorities intensified their efforts to suppress criticism of corruption and the government in 2015, arresting several human rights and political activists. Meanwhile, falling global oil prices put pressure on Oman's economy and the state's ability to maintain social benefits. The government reported a budget deficit of roughly \$11.6 billion for the year, despite having reduced its food and fuel subsidies.

Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said returned to Oman in March from Germany, where he had been receiving medical treatment since the previous July. Although Qaboos, who has no children or brothers, is known to be ill, a successor has yet to be publicly designated.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 8 / 40 (–1)

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

Sultan Qaboos has ruled Oman since seizing power from his father, Sultan Said bin Taimur, in 1970. The 1996 basic law, promulgated by decree, created a bicameral body consisting of an appointed Council of State (Majlis al-Dawla) and a wholly elected Consultative Council (Majlis al-Shura). Citizens elect the Consultative Council for four-year terms, but the chamber has no legislative powers and can only recommend changes to new laws. The sultan, who issues laws by decree, also serves as the country's prime minister; heads the ministries of defense, foreign affairs, and finance; and is the governor of Oman's central bank.

Consultative Council elections were held in October 2015, with 590 nonpartisan candidates competing for the council's 85 seats. Authorities reported a turnout of nearly 57 percent. One woman won a seat. Separately, in November, the sultan appointed the 85 members of the Council of State for a new four-year term, including 13 women.

Oman held its first-ever municipal elections in 2012. About half of the eligible voters participated, choosing among 1,475 candidates for seats on 192 local councils. Four women won seats in the municipal elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16

Political parties are not permitted, and no meaningful, organized political opposition exists.

Although all Omani citizens over the age of 21 are eligible to vote, noncitizens represent about 44 percent of the population, and citizenship is difficult to obtain for those with non-Omani fathers. A 2014 law allows the revocation of citizenship for Omanis who join organizations deemed harmful to national interests.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

Oman's legal code does not provide an effective framework for prosecuting corruption, nor does it include freedom of information provisions. However, after anticorruption protests in 2011, Sultan Qaboos issued a decree mandating the State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution to increase transparency and efficiency within government ministries while reducing conflicts of interest. Government officials are required by law to declare their assets and sources of wealth. Oman was ranked 60 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Several high-profile corruption cases involving government officials and executives from Oman's oil industry resulted in convictions and prison terms in 2014. In July 2015, six individuals linked to a state-owned company received prison terms of between three and five years for their role in a scheme to smuggle subsidized diesel fuel for sale outside the country.

Discretionary Political Rights Question A: 2 / 4 (-1)

Mechanisms exist for citizens to petition the government through local officials, and certain citizens are afforded limited opportunities to petition the sultan in direct meetings. However, the government's growing sensitivity to criticism and Qaboos's health-related absences may impede the effectiveness of such channels.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 17 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16

Freedom of expression is limited, and criticism of the sultan is prohibited. The 2004 Private Radio and Television Companies Law allows for the establishment of private broadcast media outlets. The government permits private print publications, but many of these accept government subsidies, practice self-censorship, or face punishment for crossing political redlines. Omanis have access to the internet through the national telecommunications company, and the government censors politically sensitive and pornographic content. A 2008 decree expanded government oversight and regulation of electronic communications, including on personal blogs.

As in 2014, several activists and bloggers were detained for their online writings during 2015. In January, well-known writer Ali al-Rawahi was released after four days of detention for discussing corruption on social media. Later that month, Saeed Jaddad, a human and political rights activist who was a leader of 2011 antigovernment protests in Dhofar, was arrested after writing an open letter to U.S. president Barack Obama about human rights violations in Oman. He faced at least two criminal cases during the year and received one- and three-year prison sentences related to his online activities. Mohammed al-Fazari, a political reform activist and chief editor of the news site *Mowatin Magazine*, fled the country in July in defiance of a travel ban imposed the previous year; his brother, Mahmoud al-Fazari, was then detained for two weeks and questioned about Mohammed's escape. Five other bloggers and activists were arrested in August for their criticism of the government.

Islam is the state religion. Non-Muslims have the right to worship, but they are banned from proselytizing. Non-Muslim religious organizations must register with the government.

The Ministry of Awqaf (religious charitable bequests) and Religious Affairs distributes standardized texts for mosque sermons, and imams are expected to stay within the outlines of these texts.

The government restricts academic freedom by preventing the publication of material on politically sensitive topics. The authorities reportedly monitor personal communications, and the growing number of arrests, interrogations, and jail terms related to criticism of the government on social media has encouraged self-censorship among ordinary citizens in recent years.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

The right to peaceful assembly within limits is provided for by the basic law. However, all public gatherings require official permission, and the government has the authority to prevent organized public meetings without any appeals process. The authorities have continued to monitor, arrest, and prosecute individuals involved in protests that called for economic and political reforms in 2011 and 2012, including Saeed Jaddad.

The basic law allows the formation of nongovernmental organizations, but civic life remains limited. The government has not permitted the establishment of independent human rights organizations and generally uses the registration and licensing process to block the formation of groups that are seen as a threat to stability.

Omani workers are legally able to organize and form unions, bargain collectively, and strike. However, there is only one authorized trade union federation, and neither government employees nor household workers are permitted to join unions. Strikes are reportedly rare in practice.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

The judiciary is not independent and remains subordinate to the sultan and the Ministry of Justice. Sharia (Islamic law) is the source of all legislation, and Sharia court departments within the civil court system are responsible for family-law matters, such as divorce and inheritance. In less populated areas, tribal laws and customs are frequently used to adjudicate disputes.

The penal code assigns prison terms for vaguely defined national security offenses, and security forces do not always adhere to existing rules on arrest and pretrial detention. Prisons are not accessible in practice to independent monitors, but former detainees have reported beatings and other abuse, including during interrogation.

The 1996 basic law banned discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, ethnicity, and social class. However, Omani law does not protect noncitizens from discrimination.

Same-sex sexual activity is punishable with up to three years in prison, and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face discrimination in policy and practice.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Most Omani citizens enjoy freedom of movement, but travel bans are often imposed on political dissidents, and foreign workers cannot leave the country without permission from their employer.

State-owned companies and the ruling family are dominant forces in the economy, limiting the role and autonomy of small and other private businesses.

Although the basic law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, women suffer from legal and social discrimination. Oman's personal status law, based on Sharia, favors the rights of men over those of women in marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody.

Only about a third of women participate in the labor force, but the figure has steadily increased in recent years.

Oman's labor policies put migrant workers at a severe disadvantage and effectively encourage exploitation. Such workers risk deportation if they abandon their contracts without documentation releasing them from their previous employment agreement, meaning employers can often keep them in abusive conditions. The government has pursued an "Omanization" process in order to replace foreign workers with native Omanis. Among other tactics, temporary visa bans for foreign workers in various professions have been issued or extended since 2013. In 2015, the authorities offered amnesty to tens of thousands of foreign workers who had overstayed their visas, allowing them to return home without penalties. Despite a 2008 antitrafficking law, the authorities do not actively identify or protect human trafficking victims, and prosecutions are relatively rare.

Pakistan

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 199,047,300

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Islamabad

Freedom Rating: 4.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, which is examined in a separate report.

Ten-Year Ratings Time-line For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan was relatively stable in 2015. Terrorist violence decreased by one-third from 2014 levels, though it caused 3,682 fatalities. The decrease was consistent with the widely held impression that the terrorist threat in Pakistan has passed its peak.

The government began implementing a 20-point National Action Plan (NAP) during the year, announced by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in December 2014. The plan included a range of counterterrorist measures including clamping down on terrorist financing, countering incitement to violence, reforming madrassahs, repatriating Afghan refugees, and reforming the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The government made periodic announcements during the year regarding progress in these areas, including the arrest of suspicious persons, inspections of madrassahs, and restricted media coverage of prohibited organizations. In November, the military criticized the civilian government for moving too slowly in implementing the plan.

In August, the paramilitary Rangers completed the first stage of a nearly two-year security operation in Karachi that involved targeting high-profile terrorists and criminals. The army continued its operation in North Waziristan, but made little progress in the militant-controlled Shawal Valley.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 20 / 40**A. Electoral Process: 7 / 12**

Pakistan consists of four provinces (Baluchistan, Punjab, Sindhi, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, or KPK) and two federal territories (the Federally Administered Tribal Areas [FATA] and the Islamabad Capital Territory). The Parliament (Majlis-i-Shoora) is bicameral, with a 342-member National Assembly (NA) and a 104-member Senate. The constitution provides for a parliamentary system of government headed by a prime minister. An electoral college of the Senate, the NA, and the provincial assemblies elects the president for up to two five-year terms.

The Senate provides equal representation to all units of the federation. Each provincial assembly chooses 23 members, NA members representing the FATA elect 8, and 4 are chosen by the NA to represent the capital territory. Senators serve six-year terms, with half of the seats up for election every three years.

Members of the NA are elected for five years. Of the 342 seats, 272 are filled through direct elections in single-member districts, 60 are reserved for women, and 10 are reserved for non-Muslim minorities. The reserved seats are filled through a proportional representation system with closed party lists. The seats for women are allocated in proportion to the number of general seats a party gains in each of the provinces. The provincial assemblies employ a similar electoral system.

Prominent international and domestic election observers judged the 2013 elections favorably, citing active competition and campaigning, and voter turnout of 55 percent. The Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) overtook the incumbent Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) at the federal level, winning 126 of the directly elected seats in the NA. The PPP won 31 seats and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) took 28. Various smaller parties won less than 20 directly elected seats each. The PML-N formed a governing majority with the help of allied independents, and Sharif became prime minister.

Lingering controversies around the conduct of the elections were settled in 2015. A national judicial inquiry commission reported in July that the elections had largely been conducted fairly and according to the law, and that irregularities did not distort the popular mandate. It did note, however, that the administration of the elections was at times chaotic and poorly documented. The opposition PTI petitioned election tribunals in constituencies where it claimed there had been egregious abuses. In two 2015 by-elections ordered by these tribunals, PML-N and PTI each one a seat originally taken by PML-N.

The 18th constitutional amendment, adopted in 2010, significantly decentralized power from the federal level to the provinces. Under this arrangement, the provincial assemblies and governments have legislative and executive responsibilities, including in health, education, and local government. The 2013 provincial elections left a different party in government in each of the four provinces: PML-N in Punjab, PPP in Sindhi, a PTI-led coalition in KPK, and a National Party/PML-N coalition in Baluchistan.

For the first time in 10 years, local government elections were completed in the four provinces and Islamabad in stages from May through December 2015.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 8 / 16

Pakistan has a thriving and competitive multiparty system that allows both voters and candidates a wide choice of parties. Examples of the recent dynamics of party competition have included the successful mobilization of a youth vote by PTI that enabled it to win power at the provincial level in KPK, and PML-N’s 2013 defeat of the incumbent PPP at the federal level. However, parties lack internal democracy and financial transparency.

Disproportionate influence is exercised by an elite of traditional political families, dubbed “electables,” who are courted as candidates by all the leading parties.

There is a history of use of accountability mechanisms against national politicians, some of which has been selective and discriminatory. In 2013, the Supreme Court ordered the arrest of the sitting PPP prime minister, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf. In August 2015, the PPP protested the detention of another of their former ministers, Asim Hussain, on corruption and terrorism charges. A history of links between political parties and violent gangs in Karachi has stymied political competition there.

Terrorism over the past decade concentrated in the north of the country has periodically targeted democratic, secular-leaning politicians, including former prime minister Benazir Bhutto (assassinated after an election meeting in 2007) and multiple representatives of the Awami National Party. The decline of terrorist violence in 2015, however, has reduced the impact on the political opposition.

Since 2002, a joint electorate system has allowed members of minorities to participate in the general vote while also being represented by reserved seats in the national and provincial assemblies through the party-list system. However, the participation of non-Muslims in the political system continues to be marginal. Political parties nominate members to legislative seats reserved for non-Muslim minorities, leaving non-Muslim voters with little say in selecting the parliamentarians who supposedly represent them. Ahmadis, members of a heterodox Muslim sect, face political discrimination and are registered on a separate voter roll.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12

The military and civilian leaderships avoided any visible clash during 2015, although this harmony was achieved in large part by the prime minister’s accommodation of the military’s preferences on foreign policy and defense. Terrorists, including Islamist extremists, continued to try to intimidate elected governments, most directly with the assassination of the Punjab home minister in a suicide bombing in August. Fear of violence and agitation remained a significant constraint on any moves to review or reform Islamist laws and their application, such as the blasphemy law.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) is Pakistan’s premier anticorruption body. During 2015, NAB registered cases against politicians of all major parties, including the prime minister. However, there were few signs of progress toward reducing endemic public-sector corruption.

Civil society was able to contribute to the debate over legislation in 2015, particularly with a proposed Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill. The current ordinance granting access to information, put in place in 2002, remains poorly implemented and underfunded. A 2012 draft Freedom of Information law has earned praise from international watchdogs but remained pending at year’s end. Key aspects of the national security strategy shaped by the military remained opaque and shielded from debate.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 21 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16

Pakistan has a vibrant media sector that presents a range of news and opinions and hosts lively debates on current affairs. There are about 90 television channels, 160 radio stations, and over 200 daily newspapers. However, there is a history of violence and intimidation selectively directed against media figures by both intelligence agencies and violent extremist groups. Four Pakistani journalists were killed in terrorist incidents targeting the

media in 2015. Prominent television journalist Hamid Mir of the Geo Network continues to receive death threats after surviving a 2014 assassination attempt. The lack of independent access for journalists to insurgency-affected parts of Baluchistan and the FATA further restrict reporting.

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) awards radio and television licenses, maintains a code of conduct, and exercises the power to suspend operators. PEMRA has been accused of taking politically motivated actions. During 2015 PEMRA strengthened its code of conduct to ban hate speech and issued instructions to operators to refrain from giving coverage to prohibited organizations. The Committee to Protect Journalists expressed concern at the broad scope of the guidelines and the fact that they were developed without media-industry input.

More than 200,000 websites are banned in the country because of their allegedly anti-Islamic, pornographic, or blasphemous content, including YouTube. Civil society groups criticized the Electronic Crimes Prevention Bill, drafted in January and amended in September, for being overly broad and being promoted without adequate public debate. At the end of the year the National Assembly was considering a law that contained a broad and vague definition of objectionable content, allowed censorship without judicial oversight, and provided for mass data retention without safeguards. Meanwhile the authorities continued to invest in mass surveillance capacity and the compulsory registration of SIM cards and data devices, prompting concerns about infringement of privacy.

Constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion and protection of minorities have not provided effective checks to discriminatory legislation, social prejudice, and sectarian violence. Members of the Hindu community have complained of vulnerability to kidnapping and forced conversions, and some continue to migrate to India, where they are housed in refugee camps. High-profile blasphemy cases and mob violence have affected the Christian community and others. The most specific discriminatory legislation has been directed at the Ahmadi community, who are prohibited from asserting themselves as Muslims. Sectarian groups continued to attack Shiite Muslims during 2015, including an attack on the annual Moharram commemorations in Jacobabad in which 22 people were killed, and an explosion in a bazaar in Kurram in December that killed more than 20 people. A string of mass shootings targeted the Hazara Shia minority in Quetta, Baluchistan. Many of these attacks were claimed by or attributed to the Lashkar I Jhangvi group.

Pakistan has a long history of using education to portray Hindus and other non-Muslims negatively and to rationalize enmity between Pakistan and India. Attempts to modernize education and introduce tolerance into school textbooks have proven slow and controversial. In May, a senior educator involved in textbook reform was forced to leave the country after receiving death threats.

Blackberry, a mobile phone manufacturer, withdrew from the Pakistani market in November after the government insisted on having unlimited access to its customers' private data. The threat of accusations of blasphemy or reprisals from the military obliges ordinary Pakistanis to self-censor on topics of religion and security.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12 (- 1)

The constitution guarantees the rights to associate, demonstrate, and organize, but the government sporadically imposes arbitrary restrictions to temporarily ban gatherings or any activity designated a threat to public order. In 2015, the space for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to function was significantly reduced when the Federal Interior Ministry announced its intention to adopt new registration procedures for both national and

international organizations, restricting them to pre-assigned areas of activity. Some NGOs, including the Norwegian Refugee Council, were ordered to leave, while 20 international NGOs were placed under investigation, moves that ensured that NGOs operated in a climate of suspicion and uncertainty. The interior ministry also announced a ban on the aid agency Save the Children, though this was later rescinded. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan publicly voiced concern that NGOs were involved in antistate activities such as espionage and financing terrorism. In April, gunmen shot dead human rights activist Sabeen Mahmud in Karachi.

The rights of workers to organize and form trade unions are recognized in law, and the constitution grants unions the rights to collective bargaining and to strike. However, many categories of workers are excluded from these protections, accounting for approximately 60 percent of the formal-sector workforce. The procedures that need to be followed for a strike to be legal are onerous. Nevertheless, strikes are organized regularly. Roughly 70 percent of the workforce is employed in the informal sector where there is limited unionization.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

Over the last decade, executive interference in the higher judiciary has decreased, and the judiciary in some cases holds the executive to account. However, the broader justice system is marred by endemic problems including corruption, intimidation, a large backlog of cases, insecurity, and low conviction rates for serious crimes.

A separate Federal Sharia Court is empowered to determine whether a provision of law goes against Islamic injunctions. Some communities resort to informal forms of justice, leading to decisions outside formal safeguards.

The government appointed a new National Human Rights Commission in 2015 that is tasked with investigating human rights abuses and suggesting improvements to the government. Some civil society groups have criticized the new commission for not having power over the security forces.

In January, the National Assembly passed a constitutional amendment establishing military courts to try terrorist cases and impose death sentences. In March, the government ended its moratorium on capital punishment. During the year, 303 executions were carried out.

The FATA are governed by the president and federal administration. They are subject to the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) and lie outside the jurisdiction of the Pakistan Supreme Court. The FCR authorizes the government's political agent and tribal leaders to apply customary law and provides for collective punishment. In November, the government announced a new committee to consider options for reforming the FATA that would improve safety in the region and potentially fold them into one of Pakistan's other provinces.

The military and the intelligence services enjoy impunity for indiscriminate use of force. Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and other abuses are common. Terrorism suspects, Balochi and Sindhi nationalists, journalists, researchers, and social workers have all been victims of alleged disappearance.

Two major insurgencies, in the FATA and Baluchistan, and a major security operation in Karachi continued in 2015. Although violence in the FATA decreased somewhat in 2015, militant extremists of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its offshoots continued to threaten and extort from the civilian population while also launching periodic raids against government targets from their bases along the Afghan border. In September, militants attacked the Badaber air base outside Peshawar, reportedly killing 29 people.

Pakistan hosts some 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees, with approximately one million more unregistered. A generation of refugees has been born and raised in Pakistan,

but the community remains subject to chronic insecurity and uncertainty. The first quarter of 2015 saw forced deportations and the closure of businesses in a crackdown on undocumented Afghan refugees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab provinces. The UN Refugee Agency and Pakistani authorities periodically negotiate extensions to refugees' authorized stays. Refugees with inadequate documentation are subject to harassment, threat of arrest, and deportation. They are deprived of access to banking and SIM cards.

Members of the transgender and intersex community are authorized to register for official documents under a "third gender" classification recognized by the Supreme Court in 2009. In a ruling in 2011, the court granted them the right to vote, enabling them to participate in the 2013 elections. Nonetheless, the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community are subject to societal and legal discrimination. The penal code prescribes prison terms for consensual sex "against the order of nature." Although prosecutions are rare, such laws deter LGBT people from acknowledging their orientation or reporting abuses. Transgender and intersex people face de facto discrimination in housing and employment. They are also refused inheritance rights. Many are forced into prostitution or to beg in order to survive.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

There are few legal limitations on citizens' travel or their choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher learning. The main tool for restricting foreign travel is the Exit Control List, which blocks named individuals from using official exit points from the country. The list is meant to include those who pose a security threat and those facing court proceedings, but on occasion it has been used against civil society activists who have worked on issues embarrassing to officials. In November, the Interior Ministry removed almost 10,000 names from the list and stated it would apply greater scrutiny before adding new names.

Pakistan's rampant corruption, weak regulatory environment, and ineffective legal system undermine property rights and economic freedom. In May, the Federal Investigative Agency arrested the head of the Axt company after the *New York Times* exposed a scheme to market fake degrees and invest the profits into a proposed big-budget television station.

A number of reforms have been enacted in recent years to improve conditions for women. However, the implementation of protective laws has been weak, and violence against women continues unabated. In addition to acid attacks, domestic violence, rape, and so-called honor crimes, women face restrictions on voting and education, especially in KPK, the FATA, and Baluchistan. Political parties maintain women's wings that are active during elections. However, currently no women hold posts in the federal cabinet or at the helm of mainstream political parties.

Exploitative forms of labor remain common, in particular in the brick kiln industry, where owners have significant political influence that protects them from prosecution. Though bonded and child labor are outlawed, they are widespread in practice.

Palau

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 1
Freedom Rating: 1.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 18,000
Capital: Melekeok

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 55 / 60

The economy of Palau depends heavily on tourism, foreign assistance, and remittances from workers overseas. Growing tourism from China in particular has created jobs but also raised the cost of living, and some locals regard the presence of Chinese businesses and foreign residents with hostility. The government has sought to license a tourist casino to bring in additional revenue, but the Senate rejected legislation to that end in January 2015.

Foreign workers, who account for about a third of the population, remain vulnerable to sexual exploitation and forced labor. In September, several women from the Philippines alleged human trafficking and forced prostitution at bars that were partly owned by Taiwanese nationals.

High-ranking public officials have faced corruption charges in recent years, and several have been convicted. In March and June, respectively, a House delegate and a former vice president were charged with official misconduct. In August, the Office of the Ombudsman asked for a clearer legal mandate with greater independence, as it currently operates as part of the president’s office under an executive order.

Palau’s Compact of Free Association with the United States—which obliges Washington to provide for the country’s defense through 2044—has been in effect since 1994. A scheduled 15-year review of the compact resulted in a 2010 agreement on development aid and other benefits to last until the next review in 2024, but legislation to implement that agreement remained stalled in the U.S. Congress as of 2015. In the meantime, Congress continued to appropriate basic aid funds on an annual basis.

The last of six ethnic Uighurs from China who had been transferred to Palau from the U.S. detention center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in 2009 reportedly left the country in March 2015 to resettle elsewhere. The U.S. government had promised to pay for their settlement in Palau, but the funding expired in 2013; the decision to accept the Uighurs and the handling of the funds had been the subject of political and legal disputes in Palau.

The country’s next national elections were scheduled for late 2016.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Palau, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Panama

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 3,980,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Panama City

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

Panama continued to struggle with corruption and insecurity in 2015. However, authorities opened a series of corruption investigations against former president Ricardo Martinelli and his associates, leading to the arrest of numerous former government officials. While perceived insecurity remains high, the homicide rate declined by more than 20 percent during the first nine months of the year, compared to the same time period in 2014.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 35 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The president and deputies of the 71-seat unicameral National Assembly are elected by popular vote for five-year terms. In 2014, amid an electoral turnout of 75 percent, Juan Carlos Varela of the Panameñista Party (PP) won the presidency with 39 percent of the national vote; former housing minister José Domingo Arias of Democratic Change (CD) won 31 percent, and former Panama City mayor Juan Carlos Navarro of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) won 28 percent, with four other candidates splitting the remaining votes. In concurrent National Assembly elections, the United for More Change alliance—formed by the CD and the Nationalist Republican Liberal Movement (MOLIRENA)—won 32 seats, the PRD took 25, the PP won 10, and the Popular Party took 3; one independent candidate also won representation. Both elections were considered free and fair by international observers. However, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) criticized the interference of the executive branch in the electoral process, including through the misuse of public resources. Both the OAS and IRI also noted that campaign financing is poorly regulated, with no limits on campaign donations or expenses.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

High rates of voter participation and electoral competition between political parties characterize Panamanian politics. Turnover between government and opposition parties has been the norm since the return to democracy in 1989. People's political choices are free from domination by organized domestic and international groups.

There are no legal barriers to the political participation of indigenous groups, but their interests remain underrepresented.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Corruption is widespread. However, authorities in 2015 moved forward with investigations into alleged corruption by former president Martinelli and his associates, prompting a

flurry of arrests. Martinelli, who served as president from 2009 to 2014, has been implicated in corruption schemes related to the ballooning costs of infrastructure, security, and other projects undertaken during his term; he also stands accused of illegally wiretapping the communications of his political opponents. In January, Martinelli fled the country days before the Supreme Court voted to open a wide-ranging corruption investigation into his activities, and was thought to be in Florida at the year's end. The electoral tribunal lifted Martinelli's immunity from prosecution in April, and in December, the Supreme Court ordered his detention for failing to attend his trial on spying charges.

Over the course of 2015, a number of Martinelli's associates were arrested in connection with various investigations, including his former social development and finance ministers, as well as two former directors of the National Security Council. In August, the Supreme Court cancelled a \$120 million radar system contract Martinelli had signed with an Italian company, due to concerns that the deal had involved bribes and kickbacks. Former minister of public safety José Mulino was arrested in October for his involvement in the radar scandal. In September, Ignacio Fábrega, the former director of the country's securities regulatory agency, was sentenced to five years in prison after pleading guilty to corruption charges; Fábrega told the court he had illegally shared information from his office's investigation of the brokerage firm Financial Pacific with Martinelli, and had then dismissed the probe. Separately, former vice president Felipe Virzi, who served from 1994 to 1999 and is considered an ally of Martinelli, was arrested on money laundering charges in June; he was under house arrest at the year's end. Martinelli's nephew was arrested in late December in Colombia, on an Interpol notice, in connection with millions of dollars' worth of inconsistencies in public works contracts.

After having been appointed to a ten-year term by Martinelli in 2009, Supreme Court justice Alejandro Moncada Luna was suspended in 2014 after allegations surfaced that he had paid some \$1.7 million in cash for several apartments, without being able to explain the funds' source. Moncada Luna pleaded guilty to charges of illicit enrichment and falsifying documents, and was sentenced to five years in prison in March 2015. Supreme Court justice Victor Benavides resigned in June following allegations of engaging in sexual misconduct with minors and of receiving illegal payoffs, among other claims.

Panama is thought to be among the top money-laundering hubs in Latin America. While authorities have designed an action plan to deal with the problem, the Financial Action Task Force, an intergovernmental body that promotes policies to deter money laundering, has placed Panama on its "gray list" of countries that are failing to effectively combat the problem.

Panama was ranked 72 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 48 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Panama's constitution protects freedoms of speech and of the press, though these rights are not consistently upheld in practice. Libel is a criminal offense. Independent or critical journalists and outlets face pressure from the government. Panamanian journalists had expressed concern about a draft law that would have tightened accreditation procedures, but it was withdrawn from consideration in October 2015. Martinelli is being investigated for the purchase of surveillance equipment that his Security Office of the Presidency allegedly used to spy on political opponents, public figures, diplomats, businessmen, and the media.

The country's media outlets are privately owned, with the exceptions of the state-owned television network and a network operated by the Roman Catholic Church. Martinelli has holdings in the print, radio, and television markets. Internet access is unrestricted.

Freedom of religion is respected, and academic freedom is generally honored by the government. Private discussion is free and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Freedom of assembly is generally respected in Panama. However, altercations between government forces and protesters take place occasionally. In July 2015, police clashed with indigenous protesters opposed to a hydroelectric dam project backed by Varela's administration. NGOs are free to operate.

Although only about 10 percent of the labor force is organized, unions are cohesive and powerful. In 2014, the International Transport Workers' Federation and four Panamanian unions accused the Panama Canal Authority of failing to provide decent pay and working conditions for workers in the canal zone. Workers continued to voice such allegations in 2015, and at least one major strike was held.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16 (+ 1)

The judicial system remains overburdened, inefficient, politicized, and prone to corruption. The prison system is marked by violent disturbances in decrepit, overcrowded facilities. In July 2015, Panamanian ombudsman Lilia Herrera criticized the operations of the Punta Coco maximum security prison and recommended its closure, citing "inhumane and degrading" conditions. The United Nations followed suit in August.

The police and other security forces are poorly disciplined and corrupt. The government's militarization of the Panamanian Public Forces has prompted concern from human rights advocates. Many allegations of criminal activity committed by police officers go uninvestigated.

While perceptions of insecurity have increased, the murder rate decreased by more than 20 percent in the first nine months of 2015, compared to the same time period in 2014; officials attributed the decline in part to the success of a program offering gang members amnesty in exchange for attending a resocialization program that includes vocational training. However, the country's growing importance as a regional transport center makes it appealing to drug traffickers and money launderers. Intelligence sources have claimed that Mexico-based narcotics organizations the Sinaloa Cartel, the Juarez Cartel, the Zetas, and the Beltran Leyva Organization all operate in Panama. Although not to the extent of some of its Central American neighbors, Panama struggles with criminal street gangs.

Refugees from Colombia have faced difficulty obtaining work permits and other forms of legal recognition. Since 2010, Panama's "Melting Pot" policy has offered legal residency to more than 48,000 foreigners; the policy has been criticized by labor unions who fear that legalizing their status hurts job security for Panamanian workers.

Discrimination against darker-skinned Panamanians is common, and the country's Asian, Middle Eastern, and indigenous populations are similarly singled out. While no laws prohibit same-sex sexual relationships, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals face societal discrimination and harassment. Additions to the Code of Private International Law prohibiting same-sex marriage and any recognition of such marriages performed in other countries took effect in 2014. Congress received a draft law in August 2015 that prescribed up to a year in jail and a fine of between \$500 and \$5,000 for perpetrators of hate crimes against LGBT individuals. The legislation's status was unclear at the year's end.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16

The government generally respects freedom of internal movement and foreign travel. Indigenous communities enjoy a degree of autonomy and self-government, but a significant

portion of Panama’s indigenous population lives in poverty. Since 1993, indigenous groups have protested the encroachment of illegal settlers on their lands and government delays in formal land demarcations. According to a 2014 report produced by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Panama has an “advanced legal framework” in place to protect the rights of the indigenous. However, laws face implementation challenges, especially in resource-rich regions where companies seek to launch large-scale investment projects.

Violence against women, including domestic violence, is widespread and common. A 2013 law punishes femicide with up to 30 years in prison.

Panama is a source, destination, and transit country for human trafficking. The government has worked with the International Labor Organization on information campaigns addressing the issue and has created a special unit to investigate cases of trafficking for the purpose of prostitution. However, law enforcement is weak, the penal code does not prohibit trafficking for forced labor, and the government provides inadequate assistance to victims.

Papua New Guinea

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 7,745,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Port Moresby

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2 009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	3,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, corruption allegations levied against Prime Minister Peter O’Neill continued to roil politics in Papua New Guinea. In 2014, an anticorruption body known as Taskforce Sweep brought allegations of wrongdoing against O’Neill, involving \$28 million in government fees paid to a private law firm. An arrest warrant for O’Neill was issued that year, but police commissioner Geoffrey Vaki refused to execute it. Throughout 2015, O’Neill continued to fight a referral to a leadership tribunal to answer charges of wrongdoing.

In June 2015, Vaki was found guilty of contempt for obstructing the 2014 arrest warrant against O’Neill, and was later sentenced to three years in jail. A series of subsequent arrests and dismissals during the second half of 2015 targeted police and other officials who had been involved in the corruption case against O’Neill. The government officially defunded Taskforce Sweep in November.

Meanwhile, controversy persisted over the country’s agreement with Australia regarding asylum seekers, under which migrants and refugees from third-party countries that reach Australia are sent to an Australian-run detention center on Manus Island, where their asylum applications are processed. In September 2015, authorities removed asylum seekers’ right to appeal decisions on their asylum applications. The move came as advocates for asylum seekers were seeking a permanent injunction against the government’s ability to repatriate them.

In July, O'Neill banned the hiring of foreign advisors to the government, with exemptions for the police, defense force, universities, and state-owned enterprises. O'Neill said the measure was necessary to protect against spies and to ensure that policies were made in the country's best interest. The ban will take effect beginning in 2016.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 23 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

Voters elect a unicameral, 111-member National Parliament to serve five-year terms. A limited preferential voting system allows voters to choose up to three preferred candidates on their ballots. The governor-general, who represents the United Kingdom's monarch as head of state, formally appoints the prime minister, who leads the majority party or coalition in the legislature.

The 2012 parliamentary elections were generally considered free and fair. The People's National Congress Party (PNC) won 27 seats, independents won 16 seats, the Triumph Heritage Empowerment Party (THE) won 12 seats, and 19 small parties shared the remainder. O'Neill, head of the PNC, was elected prime minister. His PNC-led coalition gives him commanding control of the National Parliament, allowing him to fight off several opposition attempts to unseat him with no-confidence motions.

In September 2015, the Supreme Court overturned a 2013 law, which had been backed by O'Neill's PNC, that prohibited parliamentary no-confidence motions for 30 months following an election, up from 18 months previously.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

There are numerous political parties, but political loyalties are mostly driven by tribal, linguistic, geographic, and personal ties. Many candidates run as independents, and align with parties after they are elected. Lawmakers frequently switch affiliations and alliances.

A 2005 agreement ended a civil war in Bougainville and provided for an independence referendum to be held between 2015 and 2020. The Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) launched its own civil service in 2014 in preparation for the possibility of becoming an independent nation. Incomplete or outdated voter rolls marred voting at several locations in the May 2015 elections for ABG president, but there were no reports of violence. President John Momis was re-elected. Momis has proposed that the independence referendum be held in 2019.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12

Pervasive corruption is the biggest hindrance to development. The country's anticorruption bureaucracies are subject to political interference. In November 2015, the parliament passed legislation that established a new Independent Commission Against Corruption to replace the Taskforce Sweep, which was officially defunded in the country's 2016 budget, passed the same month. In previous months, Taskforce Sweep's officials had claimed that the government was not providing it with funding that had been set aside for it.

In February 2015, officials launched a new national identification system intended to clean up voter rolls and inform development and funding of economic and social programs. Papua New Guinea ranks 139 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 36 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

Freedom of speech is generally respected. Local media provide independent coverage of controversial issues such as alleged police abuse, official corruption, and opposition

views. However, the government and politicians have occasionally used media laws and defamation lawsuits to restrict critical reporting. The government also restricts media access to the detention center for asylum seekers on Manus Island. Internet use is growing, but high costs and lack of infrastructure limit its spread outside urban centers. The Office of Censorship was established by the 1989 Classification of Publication (Censorship) Act, and is tasked with monitoring and regulating information traffic. In January 2015, the office said it would spend \$1.5 million on technology to block access to pornographic websites. In October, the government proposed cybercrime legislation requiring the registration of all mobile phones and their users. The bill is expected to pass in the 2016 legislative session.

There were no reports of suppressions against religious freedom. Academic freedom is generally respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12

The constitution provides for freedoms of assembly and association. Marches and demonstrations require 14 days' notice and police approval. Many civil society groups provide social services and advocate for women's rights, the environment, and other causes. The government recognizes workers' rights to strike, organize, and engage in collective bargaining. The government has frequently imposed arbitration in labor disputes to avert strikes. In July 2015, port workers went on a 24-hour strike to demand higher wages.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

The judiciary is generally independent, but successive governments have exerted political pressure on the court system. The Supreme Court is the final court of appeal and has jurisdiction on constitutional matters. A shortage of trained judicial personnel is a key cause of lengthy detentions and trial delays. Laypeople sit on village courts to adjudicate minor offenses under customary and statutory law.

Law enforcement officials have been implicated in corruption, unlawful killings, extortion, rape, theft, and brutality, in addition to being largely ineffective in curbing mob violence, tribal warfare, and other crimes. In January 2015, the country's former military commander called the police force incompetent, while the police association's head in February called for the termination of the entire police leadership. In November, ten soldiers attacked a police station in connection with a dispute between the two forces. Separately, in July, three Australian guards at the Manus detention center were accused of raping local women. They were subsequently flown to Australia; O'Neill called on Canberra to return them to Papua New Guinea to stand trial.

Prison conditions are poor, and the correctional service is understaffed. Prison breaks are common. Capital punishment was reinstated in 2013 in an effort to curb violent crime. In 2014, the government approved lethal injection, firing squad, and hanging as permissible methods of execution. But with no infrastructure for execution, 13 prisoners remained on death row. In May 2015, O'Neill said capital punishment would be reviewed after he saw that executions of foreign nationals in Indonesia brought notoriety to and caused diplomatic tensions for Jakarta.

Lack of economic opportunities exacerbates tribal rivalries, frequently resulting in violent clashes, injuries, and deaths. Resentment toward the rapid spread of Chinese-owned businesses and their import of Chinese workers has resulted in many violent attacks. In July 2015, a march against a proposed industrial zone in Madang Province turned violent, resulting in the death of one person and significant looting of foreign-owned businesses.

Controversy persists over the country's agreement with Australia regarding asylum seekers, in which a number of migrants from third-party countries that reach Australia

are sent to an Australian-run detention center in Papua New Guinea, where their asylum applications are processed. Those granted refugee status could choose to settle in Papua New Guinea or return to their home countries. Opposition lawmakers have challenged the legality of the arrangement, and while local authorities and communities have demanded a bigger share of funds from Australia. Detainees complain about abuse and poor living conditions in the facilities, as well as of delays in immigration processing. In January 2015, many detainees went on hunger strike to protest poor conditions, but the strike reportedly ended after its leaders were arrested. Detainees and their advocates have used the courts to petition against Canberra's hard-line policies and gain entry to Australia. In September, authorities removed asylum seekers' right to appeal decisions on their asylum applications. The move came as advocates for asylum seekers were seeking a permanent injunction against the government's ability to repatriate them.

Same-sex sexual relations are a criminal offense, but the relevant laws are rarely enforced. No laws protect against discrimination or hate crimes.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

Natural-resource exploitation provides the bulk of government revenue, making the country's economy vulnerable to fluctuations in mineral and energy prices. The sharing of revenue is a key source of tension between the national government and local landowners and authorities. The government created a sovereign wealth fund in July 2015 that will receive revenues from mineral and petroleum resource development.

Laws to fight family violence and protect victims are ineffective and are hardly enforced. Discrimination and violence against women and children are widespread. Victims rarely file reports and convictions are even more rare. A 2013 UN survey found that 61 percent of men in Papua New Guinea surveyed self-reported to have raped someone at least once. Allegations of sorcery—rooted in superstitions or used as an excuse for personal vendettas—have made women targets of violence.

Rapid population growth, widespread poverty, low literacy, and poor governance help to explain concerning rates of HIV and tuberculosis infection. In 2015, the O'Neill government had made some meaningful improvements, including better enforcement of the minimum legal age for marriage for women, a new policy to slow population growth, and a new child welfare law.

The government does not actively prosecute human traffickers, and efforts to identify victims are inadequate. Women and girls are at risk of being trafficked for the purpose of forced labor and prostitution. Boys and men can be found engaged in forced labor in the fishing and mining sectors. Traditional practices among some populations permit young girls to be sold into marriage in order to settle debts.

Paraguay

Political Rights Rating: 3

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 7,020,000

Capital: Asunción

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

President Horacio Cartes of the Colorado Party vowed to root out corruption following his election in 2013, but little appeared to have changed in 2015. The drug trade continued to flourish, particularly in the border areas, and critical journalists were subject to violent retaliation. A major protest in October, led by campesinos, called for the president's resignation due to corruption and unfair land policies.

Cartes also drew international attention in 2015 for his handling of a high-profile case in which a 10-year-old girl became pregnant after being raped by her stepfather. Authorities refused to ease the country's strict abortion ban, and the girl was forced to give birth despite the high-risk nature of pregnancy in such a young child.

The government continued a military and publicity offensive against the Paraguayan People's Army (EPP), a nationalist guerrilla group that murdered three farmers and abducted and killed a German couple, among other attacks during the year.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 27 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12

The 1992 constitution provides for a president, a vice president, and a bicameral Congress consisting of a 45-member Senate and an 80-member Chamber of Deputies, all elected for five-year terms. The president is elected by a simple majority vote, and reelection is prohibited. Congress is elected by proportional representation.

The 2013 presidential election brought Cartes to office with 46 percent of the vote, against 37 percent for his principal opponent, Efraín Alegre of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (PLRA). In concurrent legislative elections, Cartes's Colorado Party captured 19 Senate seats and 44 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, while the PLRA won 12 and 27 seats in the respective bodies. Several small parties also hold a handful of seats. The elections were marred by allegations of vote buying.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 12 / 16

Paraguay's system is generally open to the rise and fall of different political parties, although before President Fernando Lugo and the Patriotic Alliance for Change (APC) came to power in 2008, the center-right Colorado Party had ruled Paraguay for over 60 years. The left-leaning Lugo was abruptly impeached by Congress in 2012, and the Colorados returned to power in 2013. The liberal PLRA is now the main opposition party and has the second-highest number of representatives in Congress. Smaller parties include the National

Union of Ethical Citizens and the National Encounter Party. The constitution bans active-duty military personnel from engaging in politics.

Indigenous people and ethnic minorities are legally able to participate in politics, but in practice very few members of such groups hold positions in Congress or the administration.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12

Although elected officials determine government policy, decision making and implementation are compromised by organized crime and widespread corruption. Corruption cases languish for years in the courts without resolution, and offenses often go unpunished due to political influence in the judiciary. During a July 2015 visit to Paraguay, Pope Francis specifically denounced these problems. Corruption is particularly acute in the eastern part of the country around Ciudad del Este, where politicians and government officials are accused of colluding with drug traffickers.

In 2014, Paraguay passed the Access to Public Information and Transparency Law, guaranteeing public access to the financial records of all branches of government and state-owned companies. The government issued implementing regulations for the law in September 2015. Paraguay was ranked 130 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 37 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

The constitution provides for freedoms of expression and the press, but these rights are undermined in practice. Direct pressure by criminal groups and corrupt authorities leads journalists to censor themselves, especially in remote border areas. Threats against journalists are common. The government does not restrict access to the internet.

Throughout 2015, journalists in Paraguay continued to work under dangerous conditions. In March, Paraguayan broadcast journalist Gerardo Ceferino Serván Coronel was killed on the Brazilian side of the two countries' border. Serván likely became a target because of his condemnation of corrupt politicians and drug traffickers. Perpetrators often enjoy impunity for such attacks.

The government generally respects freedom of religion and academic freedom. Citizens can for the most part engage in free and open private discussion, though the presence of armed groups in some areas may serve as a deterrent.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedoms of association and assembly, and these rights are respected in practice. While some nongovernmental organizations involved in human rights work have faced harassment and threats, there are few formal restrictions on such activity. In September 2015, the National Federation of Campesinos protested the Cartes government's land distribution policies, which the organization criticized for benefitting agribusiness rather than workers. Also that month, students launched a protest against corruption at the Universidad Nacional de Asunción, leading to an extended occupation of the president's office. Cartes supported the students, despite the fact that many of the university administrators were members of his Colorado Party.

There are a number of trade unions operating in the country, and they are legally permitted to bargain collectively and strike. However, registration procedures are cumbersome, and the government often fails to protect workers from antiunion retaliation and other abuses by employers. The Cartes administration has generally been hostile to unions; after

a bus company fired workers who attempted form a union in June, the Labor Ministry backed the employer's right to do so. At a related August protest by union members, more than two dozen protesters were injured in clashes with police.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

The judiciary is nominally independent, but in practice corruption contributes to trial delays and extended pretrial detention. Illegal detention by police and torture during incarceration still occur, particularly in rural areas. Overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and mistreatment of inmates are serious problems in the country's prisons.

The trial of a dozen campesinos for their alleged role in a deadly 2012 clash with police continued to encounter delays in 2015. The landless farmers had been occupying private land when they were confronted by police; six officers and 11 campesinos were killed. While the defendants were charged with the police deaths, authorities never investigated the deaths of the protesting farmers.

Paraguay is a regional hub for money laundering, drug trafficking, and organized crime. The government continued to clash with the EPP—an armed leftist guerilla group—in 2015. Over the past two years, the EPP has killed at least 25 people and used tactics such as kidnapping and attacks on electrical towers. Meanwhile, the government has deployed a task force of police officers and soldiers to counter the group.

In March 2015, the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture expressed concern about human rights violations taking place in Paraguay, particularly with respect to the task force's tactics against the EPP. Cartes subsequently fired the head of the task force, Ramón Benítez. The subcommittee also criticized the case of three minors who had been accused of terrorism, arrested, and held for six months without trial.

The constitution provides Paraguay's more than 100,000 indigenous people with the right to participate in the economic, social, and political life of the country. In 2014, after a 20-year legal battle, Cartes signed a law that returned more than 55 square miles of land to the traditionally marginalized Sawhoyamaza people. The Supreme Court upheld the law in June 2015, after a challenge by a company using the land for cattle grazing. Despite these advances, a UN report released in August noted that while Paraguay has a "solid legal framework" to ensure the rights of indigenous peoples, in practice they often lack control over their land and resources, as well as access to justice and adequate social services.

While same-sex sexual activity is legal, members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community face legal and de facto discrimination. However, the LGBT organization SomosGay participated in a July 2015 meeting between Pope Francis and representatives from various civil society organizations. Many in the community hoped the meeting might spur renewed efforts to pass an antidiscrimination law that addresses sexual orientation and gender identity. Violence against the LGBT community continues to be high.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16 (– 1)

The law protects freedoms of movement and travel, which are generally respected in practice. Although there are few major restrictions on private business activity and property rights, land disputes—often involving wealthy landowners, corporations, or the government on the one hand and local residents, campesinos, or indigenous people on the other—remain a problem. False or overlapping land titles are reportedly common.

Sexual and domestic abuse of women continues to be a serious problem. The country's strict legal ban on abortion—which is allowed only when the mother's life is at risk—drew

criticism in 2015 when a 10-year-old girl was impregnated by her stepfather. International organizations called on Paraguay to amend its abortion laws and for the girl to be granted access to the procedure as requested by her mother. However, the government refused, and the baby was born in August. The government's stance contravened the positions of UN agencies and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

The Paraguayan government has worked to combat the worst forms of child labor, but children continue to work in agriculture, domestic service, and other fields. Children, women, and indigenous people are especially vulnerable to human trafficking and sexual or labor exploitation. Corrupt government officials reportedly abet human trafficking.

Peru

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 31,152,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Lima

Freedom Rating: 2.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F	2,3,F

INTRODUCTION

Political instability and corruption scandals characterized President Ollanta Humala's final full year in office. The opposition-dominated Congress forced Prime Minister Ana Jara to resign in March over allegations of spying on prominent private citizens and public officials, heightening perceptions of fractured leadership and intensifying political polarization. A number of high-profile corruption cases dominated Peru's political debate in 2015, several of which were linked to ongoing questions regarding the role and influence of First Lady Nadine Heredia.

Peru's high level of social conflict continued to pose one of the main threats to the country's political stability in 2015. Inequality and the exclusion of marginalized populations from decision-making processes exacerbate existing local conflicts, over half of which involve environmental exploitation related to extractive industries, particularly mining. Although the Humala administration has made notable progress in social inclusion, huge inequalities persist across the country, and Peru's regions have uneven access to basic services and limited opportunity for socioeconomic advancement. Despite a significant decline in poverty rates, nearly half the rural population remains in poverty, compared to 15 percent in urban areas. Overall, patience among the electorate is running thin: only 16 percent of Peruvians approved of Humala's performance in December 2015.

As the 2016 general elections approached, surveys late in the year showed Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of imprisoned former president Alberto Fujimori, with an early advantage. She was followed by former economy minister Pedro Pablo Kuczynski and former Trujillo mayor César Acuña.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 30 / 40**A. Electoral Process:** 10 / 12

The president and the 130-member unicameral Congress are elected for five-year terms. Congressional balloting employs an open-list, region-based system of proportional representation, with a 5-percent vote hurdle for a party to enter the legislature.

Although the 2011 elections were sharply polarized, they were deemed generally free and fair by international observers. However, shortcomings included lack of enforcement of campaign finance norms and pressure on media outlets by powerful economic interests in support of losing presidential candidate Keiko Fujimori. With various candidates dividing the center, the leftist Humala and right-wing Fujimori entered a runoff in June, which Humala won, 51.5 percent to 48.5 percent.

In the concurrent legislative elections, an alliance led by Humala's Peruvian Nationalist Party (PNP) captured 47 of the 130 seats, followed by Fujimori's Force 2011 grouping with 38 seats, and former president Alejandro Toledo's Perú Posible with 21 seats. Since the elections, however, Humala's Nationalist Party bloc has dwindled to 27 seats due a series of expulsions and resignations, including that of Vice President Marisol Espinoza, who left the party in October 2015.

Local and regional elections in October 2014 followed the pattern of previous cycles, with the vast majority of elected officials representing regional movements rather than Peru's fragmented national parties. In Lima, home to one-third of the country's population, the election returned former mayor Luis Castañeda to office despite controversies related to his previous term in office, from 2003–10. Accusations of collusion between local candidates and criminals are common; in the aftermath of the elections, 227 contributors to political parties were linked by the electoral authorities to various illicit activities.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

Peruvian parties, while competitive, are both highly fragmented and extremely personalized. In the December 2015 National Corruption Survey, solicited by local anticorruption group Proética, 64 percent of Peruvians described the performance of political parties as bad or very bad. Moves toward decentralization over the last decade have strengthened the role and influence of regional presidents, though they have often been accused of corruption and other misdeeds.

The concerns of ethnic and cultural minorities, especially in remote mountain or jungle zones, remain inadequately addressed among parties with national scope, which contributes to regular episodes of acute social conflict in the provinces. The 2011 Law of Prior Consultation has fostered increased recognition and encouragement of indigenous participation and consultation rights, but analysts agree that there is still ample room to improve the Peruvian state's integration of indigenous political agendas into mainstream national debate.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Corruption remains a critical problem and serious challenge for Peru. According to the 2015 National Corruption Survey, nearly 80 percent of Peruvians think corruption increased under the Humala government, and 85 percent view the central government as "little" or "not at all" effective in fighting corruption. Checks on political parties' campaign financing are weak, especially at the subnational level, where drug trafficking activity flourishes. Peru was ranked 88 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Corruption scandals blossomed throughout 2015 at multiple levels of government. Wilfredo Ocorima, president of the Ayacucho region, was convicted on corruption charges

and removed from office in June. Gregorio Santos, the former president of Cajamarca who won the 2014 regional election, has been unable to take office since being placed under preventive arrest pending trial on corruption charges.

At the national level, the publication in August of four day planners allegedly owned by First Lady Nadine Heredia shocked public opinion by providing a detailed register of large-scale contributions of dubious origin to Humala's PNP. In addition, Martín Belaúnde Lossio, a former campaign adviser to Humala who maintained close ties to the first couple, was extradited from Bolivia in May to face trial on multiple corruption charges involving government contracts. In 2014, a congressional commission charged with investigating corruption cases during the second Alan García administration (2006–11) released a series of reports unveiling many irregularities, most notably the sale of presidential pardons benefiting convicted narcotics traffickers. In November 2015, however, a judge invalidated the reports, citing due process violations.

Some government agencies have made progress on transparency, but much information related to defense and security policies remains classified under a 2012 law.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 41 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Peru's dynamic press is mostly privately owned. The 2013 purchase of the EPENSA newspaper group by the *El Comercio* conglomerate—which now controls nearly 80 percent of the market—ignited an intense debate over the concentration of media ownership that remained alive throughout 2015. As of year's end the Constitutional Tribunal (TC) had yet to rule on an injunction filed in 2013 claiming that the merger infringed on a constitutional article barring the “cornering” of the media market.

Attacks against journalists in response to negative media coverage are common, especially at the subnational level. Reporters often receive threats when reporting on corruption, while many of the physical attacks in 2015 occurred in the context of protests over resource extraction issues. Low pay leaves reporters susceptible to bribery, and media outlets remain dependent on advertising by large retailers and the state. Defamation is criminalized, and journalists are regularly convicted under such charges, though their sentences are usually suspended.

The Peruvian constitution guarantees freedom of religion and belief, rights that are generally respected by the government. The Roman Catholic Church nevertheless receives preferential treatment from the state, and an influential bloc of Catholic congressional representatives helps limit potential changes on social issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion.

The government restricts neither academic freedom nor access to the internet, which had a penetration rate of 41 percent in 2015.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

The authorities generally recognize and respect the constitutionally guaranteed right to peaceful assembly. However, the government has also frequently resorted to declarations of states of emergency and done little to prevent excessive use of force by security personnel confronting protests. At least 51 Peruvians were killed in protests between the start of Humala's term and October 2015. Very few members of the police or military have faced charges for protest-related incidents in recent years. Several decrees and laws since 2010 have limited police and military responsibility in the event of injury or death during demonstrations. In 2015, the TC ruled unconstitutional a provision broadening military jurisdiction

in cases when the security forces are involved in civilian deaths, but upheld the executive's capacity to deploy the armed forces in a variety of social conflict situations.

Despite substantial efforts by the state ombudsman and the recently created National Office of Dialogue, the governmental approach to local grievances typically eschews mediation and early intervention in favor of reactive repression. The trial of more than 50 community members involved in the 2009 Bagua protests, which left 10 protesters and 23 police officers dead, remained ongoing at year's end.

Freedom of association is generally respected. In recent years, however, antimining activists have been subject to arbitrary arrest or questionable legal charges, while several nongovernmental organizations have experienced various forms of intimidation. Hitler Ananías Rojas, a leader of community groups opposing the construction of hydroelectric dams on the Marañón river, was killed in December.

Peruvian law recognizes the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. Strikes are legal with advance notification to the Ministry of Labor, but few strikers abide by this regulation. Less than 10 percent of the formal-sector workforce is unionized.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16

The judiciary is perceived as the most corrupt institution in the country. A controversial set of appointments in 2013—later rescinded in the wake of public protests—greatly undermined the credibility of the relatively independent TC. Attention by civil society organizations in 2015 also focused on the National Judiciary Council, which appoints judges and prosecutors and monitors alleged cases of judicial corruption. In November, one of the council's ministers, Alfredo Quispe Pariona, was forced to resign over allegations of sexual harassment and corruption.

The situation in Peruvian jails is extremely poor. The average population is 75,000 inmates—230 percent of capacity—more than half of whom are in pretrial detention. Since 2006, an adversarial justice system designed to improve the speed and fairness of judicial proceedings has slowly been implemented. Many indigenous Peruvians pass through the justice system without sufficient Spanish to adequately understand their cases or fully exercise their rights, and the state fails to provide sufficient translation services.

According to the 2014 Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey, Peru had the highest crime victimization rate of 28 countries in the Americas, and local polls often confirm crime as Peruvians' principal concern. In this context, Peru experienced a troubling rise in vigilante justice in 2015, due in part to organized initiatives such as *chapa tu choro* (hunt your thief), a Facebook campaign that urged citizens to attack alleged criminals rather than turn them over to the police. Numerous individuals were subsequently assaulted—some of whom were later proven innocent—and at least four killed.

Since the 2003 publication of Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report on the internal conflict against Shining Path guerrillas—which took 69,000 lives in the 1980s and 1990s—justice has been served in some significant cases. Most notable is the conviction of former president Alberto Fujimori for overseeing death-squad killings and two kidnappings. The García government made almost no efforts to prioritize justice for cases of human rights abuse by state actors during the 1980s and 1990s, and the Humala administration has remained similarly passive. The military continues to obstruct those investigating past violations. However, in November 2015 the government declared the reparation of victims of forced sterilizations during Fujimori's government a matter of “national interest” and created a victims' registry to better target their legal assistance and health and psychological needs.

Remnants of the Shining Path involved in the drug trade continue to clash with security forces in the Apurimac-Ene River Valley (VRAE) and Upper Huallaga zones. Coca eradication efforts and economic development programs in other regions have failed to reverse a trend toward increased coca production.

Native Quechua speakers and Afro-Peruvians are subject to discrimination. Peru is a particularly hostile country toward the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) population. Many cases of discrimination and violence are reported each year; in a survey conducted in 2014, nearly 90 percent of Lima's LGBT residents reported being the victim of physical violence due to their sexual preference. The Humala administration removed any mention of targeted LGBT policies from the National Plan of Human Rights (2014–16).

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Peru does not place formal restrictions on movement, but the frequency of protests can disrupt travel in certain areas, occasionally for prolonged periods. Discrimination against indigenous populations remains pervasive with regard to land use and property rights. Afro-Peruvians remain especially vulnerable and invisible to public policy. Humala's government nonetheless instituted some programs and initiatives to better ensure the exercise of indigenous rights. The Prior Consultation Law is a notable example: despite some criticism by activists, the law is widely accepted, even by the extractive sector, and has resulted in positive outcomes for communities that have taken part in consultation processes.

Domestic violence is epidemic in Peru, with more than half of Peruvian women reporting instances of physical or emotional abuse. In recent years, women have advanced into leadership roles in various companies and government agencies, but there are still no specific gender policies to ensure equal rights between men and women. In March 2015, a bill to recognize civil unions for same-sex partners was rejected in Congress and will not be considered until the next legislative term.

Peruvian women and girls—especially from the indigenous community—fall victim to sex trafficking within the country, including near mining facilities. Men, women, and children are subject to forced labor in the mines, in related industries, and in the informal economy. According to the U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, government enforcement of an anti-trafficking law has been "uneven."

Philippines

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 102,965,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Manila

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

A deadly gun battle in January, combined with technical legal challenges, derailed progress in 2015 on congressional ratification of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BLL), under

which a new self-governing region, Bangsamoro, would replace and add territory to the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The BLL was the next step outlined in a landmark 2014 peace treaty between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the country's largest rebel group. The agreement, which could end more than 40 years of separatist violence among Moros, as the region's Muslim population is known, must be approved by Congress and in a referendum in Mindanao before going into effect.

President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino's popularity suffered during the year due to his role in the January violence—in which about 70 police, rebels, and civilians were killed—and ongoing corruption. Presidential and legislative elections were scheduled for 2016.

In October, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, the Netherlands, ruled that it had jurisdiction to hear a case filed by the Philippines regarding its dispute with China over territory in the South China Sea, despite objections from China.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 27 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

The Philippines' directly elected president is limited to a single six-year term. The vice president is directly elected on a separate ticket and may serve up to two successive six-year terms. Aquino won the 2010 presidential election with 42 percent of the vote, followed by former president Joseph Estrada with 26 percent; several other candidates also competed.

The next presidential election was set for May 2016. The leading candidates as of late 2015 included Vice President Jejomar Binay, Manuel Roxas of Aquino's Liberal Party, and independent senators Grace Poe and Miriam Santiago. The candidacy of Poe, who had built a following by distancing herself from entrenched interests and dynastic politics, was challenged based on claims that she did not meet the 10-year residency requirement and was not a natural-born citizen. The case was before the Supreme Court at year's end.

In the bicameral Congress, the 24 members of the Senate are elected on a nationwide ballot and serve six-year terms, with half of the seats up for election every three years. The 290 members of the House of Representatives serve three-year terms, with 234 elected in single-member constituencies and the remainder elected through party-list voting. In 2013 congressional elections, a coalition led by Aquino's Liberal Party (LP) took 9 of the 12 contested Senate seats, giving the president's allies a total of 13 seats in the upper house (the LP itself held 4 seats). The remainder went to the United Nationalist Alliance (UNA), led by Estrada. The LP captured 110 seats in the lower house, followed by three allied parties with a combined 44 seats, giving the administration a clear majority in that chamber as well.

While open and competitive, elections in the Philippines are typically marred by fraud, intimidation, and political violence, though conditions have improved in recent years. The 2013 congressional, provincial, municipal, and village-level ("barangay") elections were largely peaceful, with about 80 election-related deaths, down from 130 reported in the 2010 elections. Other persistent problems included media bias, which tends to favor wealthier candidates, and vote buying.

The president appoints the Commission on Elections (Comelec). Although discredited in past scandals, Comelec's performance faced less criticism in the 2013 elections. Registration requirements for the approximately 900,000 overseas voters were eased in 2013. Appointments or promotions in government offices are banned in the period surrounding elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16 (+ 1)

The Philippines has a strong record of open competition among multiple parties, as demonstrated during 2015 in the preliminary campaigning and other preparations for 2016 elections. However, candidates and political parties typically have weak ideological identities. Legislative coalitions are exceptionally fluid, and members of Congress often change party affiliation.

Distribution of power is heavily affected by kinship networks. Political dynasties are particularly prevalent at the provincial and municipal levels, and those that vie for national office often draw on a regional base of support. The nature of election-related funding contributes to the concentration of power: Almost half of the funds for the 2013 Senate campaigns came from less than 4 percent of donors.

The activities of armed rebel groups continue to affect political activity in the country. In areas dominated by the leftist New People's Army (NPA), for example, candidates face demands for money in exchange for a rebel "permit" to campaign.

The Roman Catholic Church has historically played a significant role in politics. In 2013, several dioceses publicly opposed the reelection of specific senators and House members who voted in support of the 2012 Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act (RH Law).

In 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that the party-list portion of electoral framework for the House of Representatives, traditionally meant to represent marginalized or underrepresented demographic groups, could also be open to other groups, including national political parties, provided that they do not stand in the single-member constituency contests. Critics of the decision warned that it would allow the wealthy and powerful to gain more congressional seats at the expense of marginalized groups. Evidence suggests that a number of party-list groups gained seats in 2013 not by representing national sectors or interests as intended, but through substantial support from single geographic regions.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Elected government officials and legislative representatives determine state policies, but corruption and cronyism are rife, including in business. A few dozen leading families continue to hold a disproportionate share of land, corporate wealth, and political authority. Local "bosses" often control their respective areas, limiting accountability and committing abuses of power.

High-level corruption also abounds among national officeholders. In October 2015, Vice President Binay, his son, and several others were indicted for suspected involvement in rigged procurements; graft allegations mounted against Binay after he declared that he would run for president. Separately, Customs Commissioner John Sevilla resigned in April, citing political interference with his anticorruption efforts, and the director general of the Philippine National Police (PNP), Alan Purisima, was dismissed along with 10 other PNP officers in June for graft related to a 2011 government contract.

Investigations and trials over lawmakers' misuse of local development funds were ongoing at the end of 2015; the program in question, which allowed discretionary allocations by members of Congress, was discontinued in 2013 after an audit found widespread abuses. The Philippines was ranked 95 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

A culture of impunity, stemming in part from backlogs in the judicial system, hampers the fight against corruption. The country's official anticorruption agencies, the Office of the

Ombudsman and the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission (PAGC), have mixed records. The PAGC lacks enforcement capabilities. The current ombudsman has focused on major cases against senior government officials and those involving large sums of money, but cases often take several years to be resolved in the special anticorruption court. As of September 2015, the court had a backlog of more than 3,000 cases.

President Aquino came to power on a reform agenda and has made some progress on transparency. The International Budget Partnership's 2015 Open Budget Survey indicated significant improvements since the report's 2012 edition. Local governments have been required to post procurement and budget data on their websites, and in 2012 the national government began participatory budgeting at various levels. Both houses of Congress passed versions of a long-awaited freedom of information bill in 2014, but final adoption was not expected before the 2016 elections.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 38 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

The constitution provides for freedoms of expression and the press. The private media are vibrant and outspoken, although content often consists more of innuendo and sensationalism than substantive investigative reporting. The country's many state-owned television and radio stations cover controversial topics and criticize the government, but they too lack strict journalistic ethics. While the censorship board has broad powers to edit or ban content, government censorship is generally not a serious problem in practice.

Potential legal obstacles to press freedom include Executive Order 608, which established a National Security Clearance System to protect classified information, and the Human Security Act, which allows journalists to be wiretapped based on suspicion of involvement in terrorism. Libel is a criminal offense, and libel cases have been used frequently to quiet criticism of public officials.

The internet is widely available. However, rights groups have expressed concern about censorship of anonymous online criticism and the criminalization of libelous posts. In 2014, the Supreme Court upheld the libel provisions of the 2012 Cybercrime Prevention Act, but limited liability for online libel to the original author, meaning those who react to or repost libelous comments will not be penalized. The court also ruled that clauses authorizing the government to record phone or internet data in real time and to block websites without a warrant were unconstitutional. Implementing regulations for the act were adopted in August 2015.

The Philippines remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported seven murders during 2015, though it could not confirm that the victims were killed in connection with their work. CPJ also ranked the Philippines as the fourth-worst country in the world on its 2015 Impunity Index, noting dozens of unresolved murder cases over the past decade. In February, Eric Vargas was sentenced to life in prison for carrying out the 2010 murder of radio reporter Miguel Belen, but another suspect remained at large, and the organizer of the assassination had yet to be identified. In September, Thai authorities arrested and deported a former Filipino governor and his brother, a former mayor, who had fled the Philippines in 2012 after being accused of ordering the 2011 murder of environmental journalist and activist Gerardo Ortega. They were awaiting trial at year's end.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed under the constitution and generally respected in practice. Academic freedom is also generally respected, and there are no significant impediments to free and open private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12 (+1)

Citizen activism is robust, and demonstrations are common. However, permits are required for rallies, and police sometimes use violence to disperse antigovernment protests.

Various labor rights and farmers' organizations that are dedicated to ending extrajudicial killings and helping families of the disappeared face serious threats, and their offices have occasionally been raided by authorities. Nevertheless, the Philippines hosts many active human rights and social welfare groups, and the civil society sector as a whole has grown more robust in recent years.

Trade unions are independent, but in order to register, a union must represent at least 20 percent of a given bargaining unit. Large firms are increasingly using contract workers, who are prohibited from joining unions. Less than 10 percent of the labor force is unionized. Collective bargaining is common, and strikes may be called, though unions must provide notice and obtain majority approval from their members. Violence against labor leaders has been part of the broader trend of extrajudicial killings over the past decade.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

Judicial independence has traditionally been strong, particularly in the Supreme Court. The efforts of the judiciary are stymied, however, by inefficiency, low pay, intimidation, corruption, and high vacancy rates, all of which have contributed to excessive delays and a backlog of hundreds of thousands of cases. Judges and lawyers often depend on local power holders for basic resources and salaries, which can lead to compromised verdicts. At least 12 judges have been killed since 1999, and there have been no convictions for the attacks.

The trial for alleged perpetrators of the 2009 Maguindanao massacre, in which 58 civilians—including 32 journalists—were killed to stop the registration of a local political candidate, continued in 2015. The process has featured witness intimidation and flawed forensic investigations, and only a portion of the 197 suspects have been arraigned. At least eight witnesses and witnesses' relatives have been killed since 2009. The media have complained of limited access to court proceedings. In December 2015, the National Police Commission dismissed 21 officers for grave misconduct and serious neglect of duty for their role in the massacre.

Arbitrary detention, disappearances, kidnappings, and abuse of suspects continue. The police and military have been implicated in corruption, extortion, torture of detainees, extrajudicial killings, and involvement in local rackets. Lack of effective witness protection has been a key obstacle to investigations against members of the security forces. Convictions for extrajudicial killings and other such crimes are extremely rare. In 2014, retired general and former congressman Jovito Palparan was arrested for his alleged role in the kidnapping and illegal detention of two students in 2006. Despite being in jail with his case ongoing, Palparan registered as a candidate for the 2016 Senate race.

A 2014 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report revealed evidence of a death squad in Mindanao that was allegedly formed to combat crime and target political opponents. The squad is also alleged to have been hired out for other politically motivated assassinations, including those of a judge, a journalist, and a tribal leader. After pursuing the HRW findings, the National Bureau of Investigation recommended in March 2015 that 29 individuals be charged with the murder of almost 300 people.

Kidnappings for ransom remain common in the south, perpetrated in large part by the Islamist militant group Abu Sayyaf; victims whose ransoms are not paid have been beheaded, including a village chief in August 2015 and a Malaysian businessman in November. Several new foreign hostages were kidnapped during the year. Abu Sayyaf also regularly carries out bombings and other attacks. In September 2015, a regional trial court

approved a petition by the Department of Justice to declare Abu Sayyaf a terrorist group, making it the first group to be so labeled under the 2007 Human Security Act. In November, seven Abu Sayyaf bandits and a senior leader and financier were sentenced to life in prison for kidnappings in 2008 and 2011.

The government has engaged in peace negotiations with the Communist Party of the Philippines–New People’s Army–National Democratic Front of the Philippines (CPP-NPA-NDFP). Deadly clashes between the leftist group’s militarized wing (NPA) and the Philippine army continue to occur regularly, though the violence has declined under President Aquino. Since the 2014 capture of NPA leader Benito Tiamzon and his wife, a senior CPP official, additional high-ranking members of the organization have been arrested, and multiple trials were pending at the end of 2015.

Perceptions of relative socioeconomic deprivation and political disenfranchisement, along with resentment toward Christian settlements in traditionally Muslim areas, have played a central role in the Philippines’ Muslim separatist movements. The related conflict has caused severe hardship on Mindanao and nearby islands, and has resulted in more than 120,000 deaths since it erupted in 1972. Both government and rebel forces have committed summary killings and other human rights abuses. Several peace deals have fallen through as a result of the failure to effectively disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate former rebels, but a landmark comprehensive agreement was reached in 2014 with the MILF, paving the way for a new legal and governing framework for the region.

In 2015, Congress postponed deliberations on legislation (the BLL) to carry out the peace agreement after a botched police raid in January—aimed at capturing Malaysian terrorism suspect Zulkifli Abdhir, known as Marwan—resulted in the deaths of not only Marwan himself and two other suspected terrorists, but also 44 elite police officers, 18 members of the MILF, 5 members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF, a splinter faction that opposes the peace process), and several civilians. The gun battle was the first violent clash between the government and the MILF since a 2011 cease-fire took hold. In March, the United Nations reported that more than 120,000 people were internally displaced as a result of the confrontation and ongoing violence in the region, particularly between the government and the BIFF.

Also in March, a Senate committee and a police board of inquiry concluded that President Aquino, PNP chief Purisima, and PNP special action force commander Getulio Napeñas had violated regulations in connection with the operation, as Purisima had been formally suspended due to graft charges and yet planned and managed the police action with the complicity of Aquino and Napeñas. The MILF submitted its own report that month, finding that its fighters had acted in self-defense and that the police had violated the cease-fire agreement. Nevertheless, 90 members of the MILF, BIFF and other armed groups were charged in September for their roles in the confrontation; prosecutors denied that police had violated the cease-fire, noting that they were seeking a terrorism suspect and not MILF members. No action had been taken against Aquino by the end of year, but Napeñas was suspended shortly after the operation and later retired, and Purisima was dismissed over the graft charges. Although the BLL was stalled in Congress, other aspects of the peace agreement moved forward, including the decommissioning of some MILF fighters beginning in June.

Indigenous rights are generally upheld, but land disputes and local development projects regularly cause friction and sometimes lead to violence. In February 2015, an environmental activist and defender of indigenous people’s rights was murdered in northern Mindanao. Indigenous people often live in conflict areas and are targeted by combatants for their perceived loyalties. Villages and schools of the indigenous Lumad community were

attacked by anti-NPA paramilitary groups during the year, resulting in multiple deaths and the displacement of many residents.

National law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, though some local protections are in place. The Philippines' largest city, Quezon, adopted an ordinance banning discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people in 2014. LGBT people reportedly face bias in employment, education, and other services, as well as societal discrimination. In December 2015, a U.S. marine was convicted of killing a woman in 2014 after discovering that she was transgender.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Outside of conflict zones, citizens enjoy freedom of travel and choice of residence. Private business activity is often dependent on the support of local power brokers in the complex patronage system that extends through the country's social, political, and economic spheres.

Although more women than men now enter high schools and universities, women face some discrimination in private-sector employment, and those in Mindanao enjoy considerably fewer rights in practice. Divorce is illegal in the Philippines, though annulments are allowed under specified circumstances; Muslims may divorce via Sharia (Islamic law) courts. A 2009 law included provisions calling for women to fill half of third-level government positions, requiring that each barangay open an office to handle cases of violence against women, and recognizing women's rights as human rights. Enforcement of these measures has been uneven. Violence against women continues to be a significant problem, and while spousal rape is a crime, very few cases are prosecuted. A 2015 report by the World Bank noted some legal differences in the treatment of men and women in the Philippines, such as unequal tax status and access to certain government services.

In 2014, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the landmark RH Law, which provides state funding for contraceptives in public clinics, reproductive health care, and sex education in schools. However, health workers may deny services in non-life-threatening circumstances if they have moral or religious misgivings, minors must obtain parental consent, and spousal consent is necessary for circumstances that are not life threatening.

The Philippines is a source country for human trafficking, which is a growing problem, though tighter restrictions were adopted in a 2013 law. The country's various insurgent groups have been accused of using child soldiers. In a bid to combat another form of exploitation, the 2013 Domestic Workers Act granted household workers a minimum wage, paid leave, and insurance, among other protections.

Poland

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 38,478,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Warsaw

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Andrzej Duda of the opposition Law and Justice (PiS) party won the second round of Poland's May 2015 presidential election with 52 percent of the vote, beating out popular incumbent Bronislaw Komorowski, whose defeat had not been anticipated. Duda's victory was interpreted by many as a protest vote against the ruling Civil Platform (PO), which had led Poland's government since 2007. Komorowski himself left PO upon taking office in 2010, but remains associated with the party.

Under PO leadership, Poland maintained relatively consistent economic growth, even at the peak of the European economic crisis. However, corruption accusations, an embarrassing wiretapping scandal, and a number of unpopular austerity-oriented reforms dented the party's popularity. PiS swept parliamentary elections held in October 2015, winning enough seats to rule alone.

The socially conservative PiS had campaigned on a Euroskeptic platform that embraced economic interventionism. Within two months of taking office, the new parliament had set in motion major reforms aimed at tightening the ruling party's grip over the Constitutional Court (TK) and public media.

During and after the elections, PiS capitalized on public hostility to Middle Eastern, North African, and other migrants by vocally denouncing European Union (EU) schemes for refugee resettlement across member states. Before the elections, the PO government had reluctantly agreed to accept several thousand migrants under one such scheme. While in opposition, PiS leaders made questionable claims that Poland was already too swamped with asylum applicants from Ukraine to consider additional cases. After the November terrorist attacks in Paris, the PiS government used the threat of terrorism to justify renegeing on the previous administration's commitments to accept refugees.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 38 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The president of Poland is directly elected for up to two five-year terms, and members of the bicameral National Assembly are elected for four-year terms. The president's appointment of a prime minister must be confirmed by the 460-seat Sejm, the National Assembly's lower house, which is elected by proportional representation. The 100 members of the Senate (upper house) can delay and amend legislation, but have few other powers. While the prime minister is responsible for most government policy, the president also has influence, particularly over defense and foreign policy matters. Komorowski of PO was

elected president in 2010. He ran for reelection in May 2015 but lost in the second round to Duda. Second runner-up in the first round of the election was independent candidate Pawel Kukiz, a former rock musician, whose right-wing, antiestablishment campaign resonated with many voters, especially younger people who feel that their economic opportunities are being stifled by entrenched networks of vested interests.

Votes in the May 2015 presidential election were counted by hand and calculator, as the electronic tabulation system was not yet considered reliable. An information technology system failure significantly delayed publishing of the results of the last local elections in 2014.

Favored to win, Komorowski ran a lackluster campaign, promoting himself as “a safe pair of hands.” By contrast, Duda’s populist campaign challenged the status quo with a number of controversial promises, including new taxes on foreign-owned banks and supermarkets, and a strong reassertion of Polish national interests within the EU.

Following Komorowski’s surprise defeat in the presidential race, PO sprang into action with a referendum apparently intended to win over Kukiz supporters ahead of the October parliamentary elections. The referendum, held in early September, polled voters on several electoral reform questions emphasized during Kukiz’s presidential campaign, including party-funding rules and the introduction of single-member electoral constituencies to the Sejm. The referendum saw voter turnout hit a record low of 7.8 percent. In order for a poll to be legally binding, turnout must be greater than 50 percent.

From the beginning, PiS had insisted that the referendum should be expanded to include issues of importance to “ordinary Poles,” such as the reversal of the retirement-age increase passed in 2012 under Prime Minister Donald Tusk of PO. When these questions were not included, the opposition pressed for another referendum, to be held simultaneously with the general elections. The Senate voted against pairing the two votes, but in late September President Duda signed a bill to restore the pre-2013 retirement ages; the bill was still under consideration by the parliament at year’s end.

PiS won a landslide victory of 37.5 percent in the October parliamentary elections, increasing its representation in the Sejm to a total of 235. The former opposition party is the first in post-Communist Poland’s history to win an absolute parliamentary majority, allowing it to rule without coalition partners. Beata Szydlo was elected prime minister, though her role was soon eclipsed by that of PiS’s combative chairman, onetime prime minister Jaroslaw Kaczyński. PO came in second in the election with slightly more than 24 percent of the vote and 138 seats. Third and fourth place wins both went to new parties: Pawel Kukiz’s party, Kukiz’15, which took 42 seats; and the pro-business party Modern (N) led by economist Ryszard Petru, which won 28. The agrarian Polish People’s Party (PSL) won 5.13 percent of the vote and 16 mandates. A representative of the ethnic German minority received the remaining seat. In the Senate, PiS took 61 seats, PO 34, and PSL 1.

Several changes introduced to electoral legislation in 2014 came into effect in 2015. The right to cast ballots by mail in parliamentary and presidential elections, previously limited to citizens living abroad and the disabled, was extended to all registered voters. Another amendment softened the rules for reporting financial statements to the national electoral commission, lessening the impact of minor accounting mistakes.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Poland’s political parties organize and operate freely. PO and PiS have dominated the political scene since 2005, with relations between the two main parties becoming increasingly polarized.

PiS won a narrow parliamentary majority in 2015, so there is some speculation that the party will ally with some of the most socially conservative parties in parliament in order to push through constitutional changes requiring the approval of a two-thirds majority. Following the United Left (ZL) alliance's failure to cross the electoral threshold in October, there are now no left-leaning parties represented in the parliament.

Ethnic, religious, and other minority groups enjoy full political rights and electoral opportunities. Their political parties are not subject to the minimum vote threshold of 5 percent to achieve parliamentary representation.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Anticorruption laws are not always effectively implemented, and corruption within the government remains a problem, particularly in public procurement.

In 2014, the weekly magazine *Wprost* published a series of secretly recorded conversations between high-level politicians that journalist Piotr Nisztor claimed to have received in anonymous emails. The recordings embarrassed a number of high-level PO officials and appointees, including then-foreign minister Radoslaw Sikorski, who later resigned from his post. In mid-2015, the scandal reemerged when someone at the state prosecutor's office leaked confidential documents from the ensuing investigation. This time, Sikorski resigned as Sejm speaker; three government ministers whose reputations had been similarly tarnished by the leaked material also left office. In July 2015, an amendment to the penal code came into effect that prohibits the use of illegally obtained evidence—including wiretaps—in a court of law.

In March 2015, a Warsaw district court found former Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (CBA) head Mariusz Kamiński guilty of abusing his powers during a major CBA sting in 2007. Kamiński, now the deputy chairman of PiS, was given a three-year prison sentence and a 10-year ban on holding public office. However, in mid-November, Duda sparked controversy by granting Kamiński a full pardon.

In mid-October, CBA agents searched the premises of the Warsaw Stock Exchange and of the Treasury Ministry in connection with alleged irregularities in the 2014 sale of a major state-run chemical company to businessman Jan Kulczyk, the richest man in Poland. Kulczyk died of complications from a routine heart surgery at the end of July.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 55 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression and forbids censorship. Libel remains a criminal offense, though a 2009 amendment to the criminal code eased penalties. Poland's print media are diverse and mostly privately owned. The government does not restrict internet access.

In mid-November 2015, newly appointed minister of culture Piotr Gliński instructed the governor of the Lower Silesia region to shut down a theater production containing a simulated sex scene, on the grounds that a publicly funded theater should not host what the government considered to be pornography. His directive, interpreted by many as a move toward censorship, was ignored. On the play's opening night, theatergoers clashed with skinheads from the National Resurrection of Poland movement, resulting in a dozen arrests. In an interview the next day with Karolina Lewicka, a talk-show host and reporter with the public broadcaster TVP, Gliński refused to answer questions about his attempt to stop the theater production, calling the television program "propaganda" typical of what TVP had been producing in recent years. "But this will stop," the minister warned. Soon after the

interview, Lewicka was suspended by the president of TVP, who found that both parties had acted unprofessionally. Lewicka appealed her punishment before TVP's ethics committee, which ruled that she had not violated company codes, and she was reinstated.

Ignoring a letter of concern from the EU, PiS parliamentary deputies in the Sejm voted on the final day of 2015 to pass an amendment to Poland's media law that would give the government the authority to hire and fire managers at state-owned media. The ruling party defended the move as an attempt to depoliticize the airwaves. The new legislation will severely curtail the powers of the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT), which is still dominated by the PO and has faced regular accusations of bias in its dealings with ultraconservative media connected to PiS. PiS has blamed bias in Polish media on the dominance of German-owned outlets across Europe. In July 2015, KRRiT initiated a procedure to suspend the broadcasting license of the Warsaw-based station Radio Hobby, which rebroadcasts Polish-language programming produced by the Russian government-funded Radio Sputnik. Previously, KRRiT had resisted calls from politicians to crack down on Radio Sputnik broadcasts of what was characterized as Russian propaganda, citing the principle of free speech.

Separately, the businessman-blogger who obtained and released sealed materials that sparked the 2014 scandal involving recordings of top government officials was arrested in June 2015 on charges of illegal publishing classified documents.

The state respects freedom of religion. Religious groups are not required to register with the authorities but receive tax benefits if they do. A person may be found guilty of blasphemy, punishable by a fine of 5,000 zloty (\$1,660) or up to two years in prison, even if it was unintentional. In 2002, Poland's new defense minister, Antoni Macierewicz, remarked that he had read the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a fabricated, anti-Semitic text first published in 1903 that purports to describe a Jewish plan for global domination, and claimed that some of its text was accurate.

Academic freedom is respected. People are free to engage in private discussions without fear of harassment or detention by the authorities.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedom of association is generally respected in law and in practice. Residents of Poland hold public demonstrations with some regularity. Local authorities can limit demonstrations in their districts on grounds of maintaining public order. The November 2015 Independence Day marches once again drew nationalist demonstrations, though with less violence than in previous years. Some of the banners carried by extremists read "Poland for the Polish" and "Stop Islamization."

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate without government interference. Poland has a robust labor movement, though certain groups—including the self-employed, private contractors, and those in essential services—cannot join unions. Complicated legal procedures hinder workers' ability to strike.

F. Rule of Law: 13 / 16

The judiciary is independent, but the courts are notorious for delays in adjudicating cases. Prosecutors' slow action on corruption investigations has prompted concerns that they are subject to political pressure. Pretrial detention periods can be lengthy, and prison conditions are poor by European standards.

A few weeks before the October 2015 parliamentary elections, the incumbent PO-led Sejm appointed five new judges to the 15-member TK. Duda refused to swear them in

immediately, and the post-election Sejm controlled by PiS rejected the appointments on the grounds that PO had violated constitutional law by appointing five judges, instead of the usual three, including the replacement of two judges whose terms would not expire until December. Upon taking office in November, Sejm deputies from PiS and Kukiz amended the law on the TK to mandate the appointment of five new judges. Four replacement judges were sworn into office in a midnight ceremony on December 2, and the fifth was sworn in on December 9. On December 3, the original TK ruled that three of the five appointments made under PO in October had been valid, but President Duda refused to swear in any of the previous government's appointees to the court. Government leadership asserts that the TK ruling is invalid because it was made by fewer than the legally required number of TK judges. Throughout the controversy—which sparked weeks of marches by supporters of both sides—PiS politicians insisted that their goal was to introduce an “element of pluralism” into the PO-dominated TK. In late December, PiS's Sejm deputies voted through legislation requiring the TK to approve most verdicts by a two-thirds margin. Critics say the provision will cripple the court's ability to review legislation. The European Commission expressed reservations about the new legislation, which it indicated it would formally assess in 2016.

Ethnic minorities generally enjoy generous legal rights and protections. Some groups, particularly the Roma, experience employment and housing discrimination, racially motivated insults, and occasional physical attacks. Members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community continue to face discrimination.

In October 2015, the TK ruled that Poland's current level of standardized tax deduction was unconstitutional, because it is not based on an indexation mechanism that would prevent low-income earners from being pushed below the poverty line by paying taxes. In November, President Duda submitted a bill that would more than double the amount of the deduction.

In February 2015, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) upheld an earlier ruling that had found the Polish state liable for the 2002–03 torture carried out by U.S. agents with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) against two detainees being held at a Polish base as part of a then-secret program between the U.S. and Poland.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

Citizens enjoy freedom of travel and choice of residence, employment, and institution of higher education. Citizens have the right to own property and establish private businesses.

Women hold senior positions in government and the private sector, including about 27 percent of the seats in the Sejm. Both PO and PiS fielded female candidates for the position of prime minister in the 2015 elections.

Under Polish law, abortion is permissible only if a woman's life or health are jeopardized by the continuation of a pregnancy, if the pregnancy is a result of a criminal act such as rape, or if the fetus is seriously malformed. Women who undergo illegal abortions do not face criminal charges, but those who assist in the procedures, including medical staff, can face up to two years in prison. The so-called conscience clause in Poland's abortion legislation permits Catholic doctors to refuse an abortion to a qualifying patient provided they refer her to another clinic. In early October 2015, the TK ruled that doctors could not, in fact, be forced to refer patients to another clinic for pregnancy termination.

PiS has often promised to ban abortion altogether, but Prime Minister Szydło stated in late 2015 that this was not the moment to undertake reforms of an “ideological” nature.

However, the government did announce plans to suspend state subsidies for in-vitro fertilization, a practice denounced by the Catholic Church.

In a 2015 survey conducted by the Polish Center for Public Opinion Research (CBOS), nearly 66 percent of respondents said they find it distasteful for same-sex couples to show affection in public, with even more than that saying they are opposed to same-sex marriage and about 90 percent indicating that they were against allowing same-sex couples to adopt children.

Domestic violence against women remains a serious concern, as does trafficking in women and girls for the purpose of prostitution. The U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report* noted an uptick in labor trafficking throughout Poland, with Roma children in particular being subjected to forced begging.

Portugal

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 10,249,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Lisbon

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Portugal held general elections in October 2015, after which Pedro Passos Coelho of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) returned to the prime ministerial office to head a minority conservative government. In November, the Passos Coelho government fell after an alliance of leftist parties blocked the passage of its legislative program. Socialist Party (PS) leader António Costa took office as the new head of government that month.

In spite of efforts to curb corruption, Portugal continued to face scandal in 2015, including suspected malfeasance surrounding a program for granting residence permits—so-called “golden visas”—to wealthy foreign investors.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 39 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The 230 members of the unicameral Assembly of the Republic are directly elected every four years using a system of proportional representation. The president can serve up to two consecutive five-year terms. While the position is largely ceremonial, the president can delay legislation through a veto, dissolve the assembly to trigger early elections, and declare war as the commander in chief of the armed forces. The legislature nominates the prime minister, who is then confirmed by the president. The constitution was amended in 1997 to allow Portuguese citizens living abroad to vote in presidential and legislative elections, as well as in national referendums. Elections in Portugal are free and fair.

Portugal held general elections in October 2015. The governing Portugal Ahead coalition, comprised of the PSD and the Democratic Social Center–People's Party (CDS-PP),

won 107 of the 230 seats. The coalition failed to secure a majority and suffered losses compared with the 2011 elections, in which it took 132 seats, but remained the largest political force in the parliament despite its history of support for unpopular austerity measures. The PS won 86 seats; the Left Bloc (BE) took 19; the Democratic Unity Coalition, composed of the Communist Party (PCP) and the Greens (PEV), took 17; and the Party for People, Animals, and Nature (PAN) captured 1. Passos Coelho took office once again as prime minister, heading a minority government.

In November, leftist opposition legislators joined forces to block passage of the conservative government's legislative program, leading the Passos Coelho administration to step down. President Aníbal Cavaco Silva tasked António Costa of the PS with forming a new government, and Costa took office later that month as head of a government consisting of the PS, the BE, and the PCP-PEV coalition.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Political parties operate freely. The main political parties are the center-left PS, the center-right PSD, and the Christian-democratic CDS-PP. Many smaller parties represent a range of social, political, and economic ideologies. The autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira—two island groups in the Atlantic—have their own political structures with legislative and executive powers.

Citizens are able to make political choices without undue interference, and vote in elections based on universal and equal suffrage. Voter turnout hit a record low in the October 2015 elections, with only 57 percent of registered voters casting ballots.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12

In April 2015, legislators strengthened several anticorruption laws to comply with recommendations from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), but the country continued to struggle with corruption scandals during the year. Portugal was ranked 28 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In 2014, police carried out a series of raids across the country as part of an investigation into corrupt practices in the handling of a program that grants residence permits to foreign investors. The raids led to the arrest of 11 officials, including the heads of the Portuguese border agency and notary institute, based on evidence that they facilitated the issuing of permits in return for personal enrichment. In July 2015, authorities suspended the program as a stricter immigration law went into effect, but a decree passed later that month reinstated it. Also in July, prosecutors announced that they would pursue charges against former interior minister Miguel Macedo, who along with the former head of Portugal's border police faced allegations of money laundering involving the immigration program.

Investigations into former prime minister José Sócrates, arrested in 2014 for suspected tax fraud and money laundering, were ongoing in 2015. His case marked the first time in Portugal's history that a former prime minister was detained. After nine months in prison, Sócrates was moved to house arrest in September 2015 but released the following month—with some restrictions, including a ban on international travel without prior permission—to await trial. Investigations into Ricardo Salgado, former president of Banco Espírito Santo, also continued during the year. In July, he was placed under house arrest on suspicion of fraud, corruption, and money laundering in connection to the bank's collapse in 2014. Salgado was released from house arrest—also with a travel restriction—on \$3.4 million bail in October, and his case was ongoing at year's end.

Portuguese law provides for public access to government information, and state agencies generally respect this right. In an October 2014 report, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) stated that Portugal had significantly improved its fiscal transparency practices since the onset of the country's financial crisis in 2010.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 58 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed. Public broadcasting channels are poorly funded and face serious competition from commercial television outlets, which provide a wide range of information and viewpoints. Internet access is not restricted.

Portugal remains one of the few countries in Europe where defamation is still a criminal offense, and although prosecutions are uncommon, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has regularly criticized Portugal for prohibiting freedom of expression through criminal defamation convictions. In June 2015, the International Press Institute released a report urging the Portuguese government to repeal several articles of the criminal code that curb free expression, to reform electoral law in order to facilitate televised debates, to repeal a religious insult law, and to revise right-of-reply legislation. In April, in a high-profile defamation case, a Lisbon judge ordered former police inspector Gonalo Amaral to pay over 500,000 (\$540,000) in damages to the parents of Madeleine McCann, who went missing from a Portuguese resort town in 2007, due to claims in his book that McCann's parents were involved in her disappearance. Amaral planned to appeal the decision.

Media workers protested against a law on election coverage passed in June over its renewal of requirements that journalists submit schedules and plans for coverage to a special committee. Media rights groups also decried an injunction issued in October barring outlets owned by the Cofina Media from reporting on the investigation into Socrates.

Media watchdogs have expressed concern about Angola's influence over Portuguese media, noting that it has increased in recent years as media owners have sought investments from the wealthy former Portuguese colony amid the economic slowdown. Powerful Angolans, for example, hold shares in Newshold, a media group that controls *Sol*—Portugal's third largest weekly—and other major publications. There have also been repercussions for journalists who critique Angola, which has encouraged self-censorship.

Although Portugal is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, the constitution guarantees freedom of religion and forbids religious discrimination. The Religious Freedom Act provides benefits for religions that have been established in the country for at least 30 years (or recognized internationally for at least 60 years), including tax exemptions, legal recognition of marriages, and respect for traditional holidays. Academic freedom is respected, and private discussion is open and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are honored, and national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including human rights groups, operate in the country without interference. Fewer demonstrations took place in Portugal in 2015 than in previous years, although thousands of demonstrators gathered in Lisbon in March to protest austerity measures. The protest followed allegations published in local media that Passos Coelho had failed to make timely social security and tax payments in the past; the prime minister confirmed the accusations, but asserted that he had paid his debts and appropriate penalties.

Workers enjoy the right to organize, bargain collectively, and strike. Only 19 percent of the workforce is unionized. The 2012 labor code included changes making it easier for

employees to dismiss workers. Although legislators revised the code in 2014 after a 2013 Constitutional Court ruling found certain provisions regarding dismissals unconstitutional, trade unions maintained that the code allowed excessive room for unfair hiring and termination practices. Unions have organized a large number of strikes in the wake of Portugal's financial crisis as well as in reaction to recent austerity measures.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, though staff shortages and inefficiency have contributed to a considerable backlog of pending trials. Human rights groups have expressed concern over unlawful police conduct toward detainees, particularly abuse and excessive use of force.

A 2012 investigation of Portugal's prisons and detention centers by the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) found many cases of alleged ill-treatment of prisoners, including physical assaults, failure to give prisoners access to lawyers, poor conditions in detention cells, overcrowding, lack of programmed activities to reduce extended confinement, long periods of solitary confinement, accommodation of juveniles with adults, and inadequate numbers of staff. A CPT follow-up visit in 2013 found little improvement. Overcrowding in prisons remains a major problem, as do mortality rates, which are higher than the European average, according to the Council of Europe.

Equal treatment under the law is guaranteed by the constitution and various laws, which prohibit discrimination based on factors including sex, race, disability, gender identity, and sexual orientation. The government makes efforts to combat racism, including through initiatives to promote the integration of immigrants and Roma. Societal discrimination against certain sectors of the population, including the Roma minority, nevertheless persists.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Freedom of movement and the right to choose one's residence are protected by the constitution and laws, and the government respects these rights in practice. The government does not interfere with the rights to own property, establish private businesses, and engage in commercial activity.

Portugal legalized same-sex marriage in 2010, and in November 2015, legislators approved a law extending adoption rights to same-sex couples. Domestic violence against women and children remains a problem, and the government continued efforts in 2015 to raise awareness of the issue and encourage victims to report abuse. Employment discrimination against women also persists. Women hold 61 of the 230 seats in the legislature.

Portugal is a destination and transit point for victims of human trafficking, particularly women from Eastern Europe and former Portuguese colonies in South America and Africa. In 2014, the government began implementing two three-year plans to combat human trafficking and sexual violence. Although forced labor is prohibited by law, there have been some reports of the practice, especially in the agriculture, hospitality, and construction sectors. Immigrant workers are especially vulnerable to economic exploitation.

Qatar

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 2,395,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Doha

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

The government of Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, Qatar's emir since 2013, became less assertive in foreign policy during 2015 as domestic challenges—arising from low oil and gas prices and a related slowdown in public spending—took priority. Relations with fellow Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states improved markedly, and Qatar supported the Saudi-led military operation in Yemen.

Large numbers of migrant workers continued to face abusive conditions and in some cases forced labor, despite increased attention from the media and human rights groups in the run-up to soccer's 2022 World Cup, which will be held in Doha.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 9 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

The head of state is the emir, whose family holds a monopoly on political power. The emir appoints the prime minister and cabinet, and also selects an heir-apparent after consulting with the ruling family and other notables. In 2013, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani abdicated after serving as emir since 1995. His successor, Sheikh Tamim, was his fourth-born son. Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani, the former head of state security and a member of the ruling family, became prime minister as well as interior minister.

The constitution, approved in a 2003 referendum, stipulates that 30 of the 45 seats of the Advisory Council (Majlis al-Shura) should be filled through elections every four years; the emir would appoint the other 15 members. However, elections have yet to take place, so all members are currently appointed. Elections scheduled for 2013 were postponed, ostensibly due to the transfer of power to Tamim.

The country held its first nonpartisan elections in 1999 for a 29-member Central Municipal Council, a body designed to advise the minister for municipal affairs. Its members serve four-year terms. In the most recent council elections, held in May 2015, five of the 130 candidates were women, and two of them won seats, up from one in the previous council. Although turnout rose substantially to 70 percent of registered voters, from 43 percent in 2011, the actual number registered fell by 40 percent to a record low of 21,735, out of roughly 150,000 eligible voters.

All Qatari citizens over the age of 18 are eligible to vote, with the exception of those in the military or those working for the Interior Ministry. However, more than 80 percent of the country's population is composed of foreign nationals, who are not eligible to vote.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16

The government does not permit the existence of political parties. The system is dominated by the ruling family. While some members of the noncitizen majority work as senior government employees and judges, they have no political rights.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

Decision-making authority is concentrated in the hands of the emir and his family. Critics continue to complain of a lack of transparency in state procurement, which allegedly depends on personal connections. Qatar has been accused of corrupt practices in its bid to host the 2022 World Cup. Official information in general is very tightly controlled. Nevertheless, the authorities regularly punish lower-level public officials for bribery and embezzlement, and Qatar was ranked 22 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Discretionary Political Rights Question A: 2 / 4 (- 1)

Citizens can petition elected local government representatives who have limited powers over municipal services; these representatives report to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Urban Planning. However, the record low rate of registration for the 2015 municipal council elections suggested waning public confidence in the ability of existing institutions to communicate citizens' concerns, particularly in light of the continued failure to hold Advisory Council elections.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 18 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 8 / 16

Although the constitution guarantees freedom of expression, both print and broadcast media are influenced by leading families and subject to state censorship. The top five daily newspapers are privately owned, but their owners and boards include members of the ruling family. In 1996, the emir permitted the creation of Al-Jazeera, a television network that has achieved a global reach. Although it is privately held, the government has reportedly paid for the network's operating costs since its inception. Al-Jazeera generally does not cover Qatari politics. All journalists in Qatar practice a high degree of self-censorship and face possible jail sentences for defamation and other press offenses.

Foreign journalists encountered official interference during 2015. In March, a German public broadcasting news crew that was filming a documentary on World Cup corruption was detained by authorities for 14 hours. In May, a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) news crew was detained for two days while investigating conditions for migrant workers. Both teams were subjected to travel bans lasting several days and had their equipment confiscated.

A 2014 law on cybercrimes prescribes up to three years in prison for a range of vaguely worded offenses, including online dissemination of "false news" or content that undermines "general order." Publishing personal or family information can draw prison time and fines even if the content is accurate. The government censors online content and blocks access to websites that are deemed pornographic or politically sensitive.

Islam is the official religion, though the constitution explicitly provides for freedom of worship. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs regulates clerical matters and the construction of mosques. Several churches have been built for Qatar's growing Christian community. The constitution guarantees freedom of opinion and academic research, but scholars often self-censor on politically sensitive topics. Several foreign universities have established branches in Qatar under a program to strengthen the country's educational institutions.

While residents enjoy some freedom of private discussion, security forces reportedly monitor personal communications, and noncitizens often self-censor to avoid jeopardizing their work and residency status.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 2 / 12

While the constitution grants freedoms of assembly and association, these rights are limited in practice. Protests are rare, with the government restricting the public's ability to organize demonstrations. All nongovernmental organizations need state permission to operate, and the government closely monitors their activities. There are no independent human rights organizations, though a government-appointed National Human Rights Committee, which includes members of civil society and government ministries, investigates alleged abuses.

A 2005 labor law expanded some worker protections, but the rights to form unions and to strike remain restricted. The only trade union allowed to operate is the General Union of Workers of Qatar, which prohibits membership for noncitizens, government employees, and household workers. Onerous administrative and financial requirements deter the formation of professional associations.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

Despite constitutional guarantees, the judiciary is not independent in practice. The majority of Qatar's judges are foreign nationals who are appointed and removed by the emir. The judicial system consists of Sharia (Islamic law) courts, which have jurisdiction over a narrow range of issues including family law, and civil law courts, which have jurisdiction over criminal, commercial, and civil cases.

Although the constitution protects individuals from arbitrary arrest and detention and bans torture, a 2002 law allows the suspension of these guarantees for the "protection of society." The law empowers the interior minister to detain a defendant for crimes related to national security on the recommendation of the director general of public security.

The integrity of Qatar's judicial system became the focus of attention in October 2015, when the Court of Appeal overturned convictions of involuntary manslaughter for several people, including a member of the ruling family, in connection with the 2012 Villaggio Mall fire, which killed 19 people. Qatar's attorney general announced plans to appeal the decision, which critics said reflected bias in favor of the defendants.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face legal and societal discrimination. Vague wording in the penal code can be interpreted to criminalize same-sex sexual activity, and Sharia, which applies only to Muslims, prohibits any sexual acts outside of heterosexual marriage. Same-sex relationships must be hidden in practice.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

Qataris face no apparent restrictions on freedom of movement within Qatar or on type or place of employment. Such freedoms, however, are not extended to noncitizens and foreign workers. Unlike citizens, noncitizens must pay for services including education and utilities, and face discrimination in housing and other areas. Qataris are permitted to own property and start private businesses, although the process of obtaining necessary commercial permits can be cumbersome. Noncitizens are generally barred from owning property.

While the constitution treats women as full and equal persons, and gender-based discrimination is banned, women face de facto discrimination in the workforce. In 2006, Qatar implemented a codified family law to regulate issues such as inheritance, child custody,

marriage, and divorce. While the law expanded protections for women, they continue to face disadvantages, including societal discrimination, and have few effective legal mechanisms to contest incidents of bias.

Domestic violence is not specifically criminalized, though the 2011–16 National Development Strategy included plans for laws against domestic violence, increased legal protections for victims, and robust social support services. The Qatar Foundation for Child and Women Protection operates a shelter for abused women and children and, in cooperation with the public prosecutor’s office, facilitates the legal response to cases of abuse. However, it is unclear how many domestic abuse charges were filed in 2015.

Many foreign nationals, who make up over 90 percent of the workforce, face economic abuses including the withholding of salaries, contract manipulation, poor living conditions, and excessive working hours. However, fear of job loss and deportation often prevents them from asserting their limited rights. Female household workers are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Migrants building the infrastructure for the 2022 World Cup continued to work in harsh conditions. There have been reports of workers not receiving wages for more than a year and being stranded in Qatar after the collapse of the contracting companies that employed them.

A modest reform law signed in October 2015, once implemented in late 2016, would ease foreign workers’ ability to change employers at the end of a contract and leave the country without an employer’s permission. Separately, a system requiring employers to pay workers electronically began functioning in November.

Romania

Political Rights Rating: 2

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 19,839,000

Capital: Bucharest

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

The National Liberal Party (PNL) initiated two no-confidence votes against Prime Minister Victor Ponta and his cabinet in 2015, but neither won enough support to bring down his administration. However, Ponta resigned in November 2015 after dozens of people were killed in a fire at a Bucharest nightclub, an incident that prompted mass demonstrations against corruption and officials’ perceived disregard for safety regulations. Klaus Iohannis, Romania’s centrist president, tapped former European Union (EU) agriculture commissioner Dacian Cioloș to name a technocratic cabinet, and the parliament subsequently approved the new caretaker administration in late November.

The National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) indicted a number of high-ranking officials in 2015. Among them was Ponta, who was charged with engaging in tax evasion

and money laundering during his time as lawyer in 2007 and 2008, a period during which he was also serving as a member of Parliament.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 34 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

The president is directly elected for up to two five-year terms and appoints the prime minister with the approval of the parliament. Elections since 1991 have been considered generally free and fair.

In the 2012 parliamentary elections, the Social Liberal Union (USL), a coalition of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the PNL, took 273 of 412 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 122 of 176 seats in the Senate. The Right Romania Alliance placed a distant second with 56 lower-house seats and 24 upper-house seats, followed by the People's Party–Dan Diaconescu with 47 and 21 seats, respectively, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) with 18 and 9 seats, respectively, and various national minority representatives with a total of 18 seats in the lower house. International observers assessed the elections positively.

In 2014, the structure of the ruling party and the opposition in the parliament changed fundamentally. The PNL left the USL and formed an alliance with the other center-right Romanian party, the Liberal Democratic Party (PDL), prompting the selection of Iohannis of the PNL as the opposition's nominee for the presidency. The People's Party–Dan Diaconescu broke up in 2015 after its leader, television mogul Dan Diaconescu, was sentenced to five and a half years in prison for blackmail. Its members migrated to other parties.

President Iohannis and Prime Minister Ponta—opponents during the previous presidential election—maintained a cordial cohabitation in 2015. However, Ponta was weakened by accusations that he knowingly obstructed the right to vote of Romanians living abroad during the 2014 presidential election, followed in 2015 by a wave of corruption allegations, as well as accusations that his administration failed to properly respond to a nightclub fire that led to the deaths of as many as 61 people. Following a protest movement that emerged in the wake of the nightclub fire, including one event in Bucharest that drew as many as 20,000 people, Ponta resigned in November 2015. Iohannis then tapped Cioloș to lead a technocratic government, which received the support of both the majority coalition and the opposition.

A new electoral law was signed into law by President Iohannis in 2015, pursuant to which the number of parliament members, beginning after the 2016 elections, will decrease from 588 to 466. The uninominal system, applied in 2008 and 2012, will be replaced by a closed party-list proportional system. The members of the bicameral Parliament, consisting of a 136-seat Senate and a 330-seat Chamber of Deputies, will continue to be elected for four-year terms. A 5 percent electoral threshold for parties will be maintained, while a new threshold of 8 to 10 percent will be introduced for alliances. Another 2015 reform granted Romanian citizens living abroad the right to vote by mail; previously, voters living outside Romania were required to appear at embassies or consulates in order to vote.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16

Romania's multiparty system features healthy competition between rival blocs. No single force has been able to dominate both the executive and legislative branches since 2012, although the lack of strength and coordination of the opposition often empowers the ruling coalition. Some parties display little ideological consistency and tend to seek coalitions that will advance their leaders' personal or business interests. After December 2014, when the

cabinet passed an emergency ordinance allowing party switching at the local level, 1,500 party members migrated to other constituencies, typically for personal or political advantage. The Constitutional Court subsequently ruled that the emergency ordinance was unconstitutional.

Romania's constitution grants one lower house seat to each non-Hungarian national minority whose representative party or organization fails to win any seats under the normal rules, and 18 such seats will be allotted to minority representatives according to the 2015 electoral law. The UDMR represents ethnic Hungarians. Iohannis, an ethnic German and a Lutheran, became the country's first president from either minority group. Roma, who make up over 3 percent of the population, are underrepresented in politics.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Romania, which joined the EU in 2007, has struggled to meet the bloc's anticorruption requirements amid resistance from politicians. However, the DNA has been increasingly active, and the country has seen growing numbers of investigations, indictments, and convictions of high-ranking officials. In May 2015, the High Court of Cassation found PSD chairman and regional development minister Liviu Dragnea guilty of committing electoral fraud in a controversial 2012 referendum on the impeachment of former president Traian Băsescu. He received a one-year suspended sentence, during which time he is banned from politics. In July, the DNA charged Ponta with fraud, tax evasion, and money laundering allegedly committed while he was a lawyer in 2007 and 2008, a period during which he also served as a member of Parliament.

Numerous other high-profile figures were indicted on corruption charges in 2015. In March, Horia Georgescu, the head of the National Integrity Agency, a body tasked with monitoring public figures' asset declarations for conflicts of interest, was arrested in connection with an alleged property scam and subsequently resigned. In April, Elena Udrea was charged with abuse of office and accepting bribes during her tenure as regional development minister from 2010 to 2012. In June, Andrei Chiliman, the mayor of Bucharest's District 1, was charged with involvement in organized crime and influence peddling. Sorin Oprescu, the general mayor of Bucharest, was arrested in September for allegedly taking kickbacks from companies working for the municipal government. And in October, Alina Bica, the former chief prosecutor of the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism, and Șerban Pop, the former director of the National Agency for Tax Administration, were charged with bribery.

Separately, in an effort to increase transparency, the National Agency for the Management of Seized Assets was created in December 2015. Romania was ranked 58 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 49 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

While Romania's constitution protects freedom of expression and of the press, violations sometimes occur. The media environment is pluralistic, though a number of important media outlets are controlled by wealthy Romanian businessmen. Financially hobbled public media remain dependent on the state budget and vulnerable to political influence. In the wake of the nightclub fire, media freedom advocates expressed concern about a surveillance operation targeting an investigative journalist who led a team that had published reports about the incident. Also in 2015, the DNA opened an investigation into whether Laura

Georgescu, the president of the National Audiovisual Council, had forged documents whose contents had eventually prompted sanctions against seven television stations. In July, a measure aimed at discouraging online gambling took effect; its provisions permit authorities to restrict access to certain websites.

Religious freedom is generally respected, but the Romanian Orthodox Church remains dominant and politically powerful. The government formally recognizes 18 religions, each of which is eligible for proportional state support. As about 85 percent of the population identifies as Orthodox Christian, the Orthodox Church receives the bulk of state funds. Although significant progress has been made in supporting religious minorities, Romania's government has not yet ensured the full restitution of religious properties seized by former Fascist and Communist regimes. Religious minorities report discrimination by some local officials and hostility from Orthodox priests.

The government does not restrict academic freedom, though the education system is weakened by widespread corruption and by the increased power of local and national government officials in the election and approval of heads of schools and academic institutions. Private discussion is generally unrestricted. However, in 2015 the U.S. State Department noted reports that authorities had improperly monitored private online communications.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Romania's constitution guarantees freedoms of assembly and association, and the government respects these rights in practice. Numerous public demonstrations were held throughout 2015, including a mass national protest against deforestation that took place in May. The parliament subsequently amended the forestry law in June to enhance environmental protections and limit certain land transfer practices. The nightclub fire prompted a series of mass demonstrations against government corruption and the poor emergency response to the accident; one such event in Bucharest reportedly drew as many as 20,000 people. The mass outcry combined with existing pressure from corruption charges precipitated Ponta's resignation.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate freely and have increasing influence, though they suffer from funding shortages, often rely on foreign donors, and sometimes face hostility from politicians. Workers have the right to form unions and a limited right to strike and bargain collectively. Enforcement of union and labor protections is weak.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

The country's courts and law enforcement authorities continue to suffer from chronic problems including corruption, political influence, staffing shortages, and inefficient resource allocation. Many officials and lawmakers retain their positions following criminal indictments or convictions.

In 2014, prosecutors started proceedings against former commanders of communist-era prison camps for their roles in the deaths of hundreds of political prisoners, and in July 2015 former prison commander Alexandru Vişinescu was convicted of crimes against humanity. His conviction marked the first punishment for communist-era crimes committed by senior officials since the execution of Nicolae Ceauşescu in 1989. In October 2015, Ion Iliescu, a former president of Romania, appeared in court on charges of committing crimes against humanity during a bloody antigovernment protest in 1990.

Conditions in prisons remain poor, though overcrowding has eased in recent years.

Roma, people with disabilities, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people, and HIV-positive children and adults continue to face discrimination in education, employment, and other areas.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16

People living in Romania generally face no significant restrictions on the freedom of movement, whether for internal or external travel. Citizens are also free to change residence and employment, though bribery can play a role in access to higher education.

A large proportion of business activity in Romania takes place in the so-called gray economy and is exposed to criminal influences and practices. The underdevelopment of infrastructure, chronic corruption, limited access to funding, lack of transparency, and frequent changes in tax policy undermine businesses.

The constitution guarantees women equal rights, but gender discrimination is a problem. Women hold less than 12 percent of the seats in the parliament, and only 4 out of 22 government ministers are women. According to the National Institute of Statistics, women are paid about 8 percent less on average than their male counterparts. Only 20 percent of firms have female top managers, according to the World Economic Forum.

Same-sex marriage is not permitted, and proposed constitutional amendments have included a provision that would define marriage to exclude same-sex relationships.

In February 2015, the government approved reforms to the Criminal Code that introduced penalties for child prostitution, and added language to articles on rape and sexual assault that allow greater penalties for offenses committed against minors. Human trafficking for the purpose of forced labor and prostitution remains a serious problem. A significant portion of men and women trafficked across the European continent are Romanian. Within the country, women and children from the Roma minority are particularly susceptible to traffickers.

Russia

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 144,302,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Moscow

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

Russia’s economy continued to deteriorate in 2015, and the Kremlin worked to preempt potential domestic discontent through the distraction of foreign interventions. With the conflict in eastern Ukraine settling into a stalemate, President Vladimir Putin sent Russian aircraft to Syria in September and began bombing the opponents of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, directly engaging the Russian military outside the former Soviet Union for the first time since Soviet troops left Afghanistan.

At home, the Kremlin continued a crackdown on civil society, ramping up pressure on domestic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and branding the U.S.-based National Endowment for Democracy and two groups backed by billionaire philanthropist George Soros as “undesirable organizations.” The regime also intensified its tight grip on the media,

saturating the information landscape with nationalist propaganda while suppressing the most popular alternative voices. In the annual round of regional and local elections, serious opposition candidates were again prevented from competing.

The murder of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov not far from the Kremlin in February marked the first assassination of a prominent political figure since Putin came to power in 2000, though it followed a string of journalist deaths and beatings. The regime also continued to imprison the brother of anticorruption campaigner and politician Aleksey Navalny in what appeared to be an unsuccessful bid to curb Navalny's activism. In December, Navalny published extensive information implicating Russia's prosecutor general in a web of corruption.

The economy shrank by approximately 4 percent over the course of the year due to structural problems, falling oil prices, Ukraine-related sanctions, and the Kremlin's own countersanctions on European imports. In another sign that the country's aggressive foreign policy was increasing its international isolation, the government imposed new sanctions on a variety of Turkish goods and companies after a Turkish fighter jet shot down a Russian warplane over Syria in November.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 7 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12

The 1993 constitution established a strong presidency with the power to dismiss and appoint, pending parliamentary confirmation, the prime minister. Putin served two four-year presidential terms from 2000 to 2008, and remained the de facto paramount leader while working as prime minister until 2012, violating the spirit if not the letter of the constitution's two-term limit. In the March 2012 presidential election, Putin benefited from advantages including preferential media treatment, numerous abuses of incumbency, and procedural irregularities during the vote count. He won an official 63.6 percent of the vote against a field of weak, hand-chosen opponents, led by Communist Party leader Gennadiy Zyuganov with 17.2 percent. Under a 2008 constitutional amendment, Putin is now serving a six-year term, and will be eligible for another in 2018.

The Federal Assembly consists of the 450-seat State Duma and an upper chamber, the 170-seat Federation Council. (Four new Federation Council seats were added in 2014 to represent the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories of Crimea and Sevastopol, whose annexation is not internationally recognized.) The 2008 constitutional amendment extended Duma terms from four to five years. The deeply flawed 2011 Duma elections were marked by a "convergence of the state and the governing party, limited political competition and a lack of fairness," according to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, but many voters used the opportunity to protest against the status quo. The ruling United Russia party captured just 238 seats, a significant drop from the 315 seats won in 2007. The Communist Party placed second with 92 seats, followed by A Just Russia with 64 and LDPR (formerly known as the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) with 56. Registration and other obstacles ensured that truly independent opposition parties could not compete.

Since the 2007 elections, all Duma deputies have been elected on the basis of party-list proportional representation, but a 2014 law—set to take effect with the 2016 elections—restored a system in which half of Duma members are elected by proportional representation and half in single-member districts. Half the members of the upper chamber are appointed by governors and half by regional legislatures, usually with strong federal input. In July 2015, Putin signed a law moving the 2016 Duma elections from December to September, which analysts said would give progovernment forces an advantage because fewer

voters pay attention to politics during the summer months. Since 2011, only locally elected politicians have been eligible to serve in the Federation Council; the change was designed to benefit United Russia, as most local officeholders are party members.

A 2012 law restored gubernatorial elections, ending a system of presidential appointments that dated to 2004. The new rules allowed federal and regional officials to screen the candidates for governor, and United Russia has won almost every subsequent election. In a rare exception, Communist Party candidate Sergey Levchenko won the Irkutsk gubernatorial election in a runoff vote in September 2015. In the other regional and local races, as in previous years, the authorities blocked serious opposition candidates and ensured victory for the Kremlin-backed contenders. The election-monitoring NGO Golos documented 1,736 violations, including multiple voting, by 11 p.m. on election night, nearly twice as many as in 2014.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 3 / 16

Legislation enacted in 2012 liberalized party registration rules, allowing the creation of hundreds of new parties. However, none posed a significant threat to the authorities, and many seemed designed to encourage division and confusion among the opposition.

Opposition politicians and activists are frequently targeted with fabricated criminal cases and other forms of administrative harassment. Navalny's brother was sentenced to three and a half years in prison on trumped-up fraud charges in 2014, and he remained behind bars in 2015 in an apparent attempt to limit Navalny's activities. Also during the year, the Justice Ministry and courts continued to reject attempts by Navalny's Progress Party to meet the requirements to register and participate in elections. Separately, four Chechen men were charged with Nemtsov's murder in December, and investigators claimed that a member of Chechnya's security forces ordered the crime; Nemtsov's family argued that higher-ranking officials were likely involved.

The formation of parties based on ethnicity or religion is not permitted by law. In practice, many ethnic minority regions are carefully monitored and controlled by federal authorities. Most republics in the restive North Caucasus area and some autonomous districts in energy-rich western Siberia have opted out of direct gubernatorial elections; instead, their legislatures choose a governor from candidates proposed by the president.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

There is little transparency and accountability in the day-to-day workings of the government. Decisions are adopted behind closed doors by a small group of individuals—led by Putin—whose identities are not often clear, and announced to the population after the fact. Corruption in the government and business world is pervasive, and a growing lack of accountability enables bureaucrats to act with impunity. Many analysts have argued that the political system is essentially a kleptocracy, in which ruling elites plunder public wealth to enrich themselves.

In December 2015, Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation released a video showing evidence of extensive corruption surrounding Prosecutor General Yuriy Chayka. The foundation claimed that Chayka's son illegally took over a shipping company in Irkutsk and used the funds to build a luxury hotel in Greece and purchase a villa in Switzerland. The research also showed that Olga Lopatina, the former wife of the deputy general prosecutor, had business dealings with wives of members of the Tsapok organized crime group, which was responsible for the murder of 12 people, including four children, on a farm in Kushchevskaya, Krasnodar Krai, in 2010. The authorities failed to address the allegations. Separately, although former Defense Ministry official Yevgeniya Vasileva, who was romantically

linked to former defense minister Anatoliy Serdyukov, had been sentenced to five years in prison on corruption charges in May, she was released on parole in August, and it was unclear whether she had actually served any of her jail term.

In some cases, the Kremlin appeared to signal to officials that corruption needed to be scaled down given Russia's growing economic difficulties. Vladimir Yakunin, a powerful member of Putin's inner circle, resigned under pressure as head of Russian Railways in August, with some reports saying that corruption was a factor. The move was seen as significant because control over key state companies provides favored individuals with access to considerable funds. Over the course of 2015, federal authorities arrested a number of regional officials in Komi and Sakhalin on corruption charges.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 15 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 3 / 16 (– 1)

Although the constitution provides for freedom of speech, vague laws on extremism grant the authorities great discretion to crack down on any speech, organization, or activity that lacks official support. The government controls, directly or through state-owned companies and friendly business magnates, all of the national television networks and many radio and print outlets, as well as most of the media advertising market. These media effectively serve as vehicles for Kremlin propaganda, which vociferously backs Putin's actions in Ukraine and Syria and denounces foreign and domestic opponents. TV Dozhd (Rain), the only politically independent television station, was dropped by multiple cable and satellite providers in early 2014 after angering officials with its reporting, though it survived on the internet with the help of viewer subscription fees. A wave of legal and regulatory inspections at the end of 2015 exerted further pressure on the broadcaster.

Only a small and shrinking number of radio stations and print outlets with limited reach offer a diverse range of viewpoints. A 2014 law will force foreign owners of Russian media outlets to sell all shares above a 20 percent stake by early 2017. Aleksandr Fedotov, owner of Artcom Media, bought the Russian edition of *Forbes* from Germany's Axel Springer group in September 2015 and announced that the magazine would reduce its political content and focus more on "economics and business." Another Russian businessman and media executive, Demyan Kudryavtsev, bought the stake in the newspapers *Vedomosti* and the *Moscow Times* owned by Finland's Sanoma in April. The chief editor of the *Moscow Times* resigned in October, citing conflicts with the new owner.

Putin decreed in May that it was illegal to publish information about "personnel losses" during "the conduct of special operations during peacetime." Existing rules had considered only wartime losses a state secret. The new measure made it difficult for investigative journalists and others to report on the deaths of Russian soldiers in Ukraine, where the Kremlin denies that active-duty military personnel are operating.

Russian journalists continue to face physical danger in the course of their work. In October, journalist Oleg Kashin, who was beaten almost to death in 2010, argued in an open letter to Russia's leaders that Pskov governor Andrey Turchak ordered the attack but that the authorities refused to charge him because of his connections to Putin. In September, the authorities had released Aleksandr Gorbunov from pretrial detention; Kashin claims that Gorbunov personally hired the men who attacked him.

Pervasive, hyperpatriotic propaganda and political repression over the past two years have had a cumulative impact on open and free private discussion, and the chilling effect is exacerbated by growing state efforts to control expression on the internet. More than 70 percent of Russians have internet access, and penetration continues to increase. Discussion

on the internet had been largely unrestricted until 2012, but following large antigovernment demonstrations in 2011 and 2012, the Kremlin adopted a series of laws that gave it more power to shut down critical websites. At the end of 2015, Russia was blocking access to roughly 20,000 websites, according to the independent group Roskomsvoboda. The Kremlin also employs numerous “trolls” to disrupt online discussions and intimidate users.

A law signed by Putin in 2014, requiring that data of Russian citizens be stored on servers located in Russia, took effect in September 2015. The measure could facilitate authorities’ surveillance of Russians’ internet activity. Companies that fail to comply can be fined and have their sites blocked by the telecommunications regulator, Roskomnadzor.

Freedom of religion is respected unevenly. A 1997 law on religion gives the state extensive control and makes it difficult for new or independent groups to operate. The Russian Orthodox Church has a privileged position, working closely with the government on foreign and domestic policy priorities, and in 2009, the president authorized religious instruction in public schools. Regional authorities continue to harass nontraditional groups, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons.

The education system is marred by bureaucratic interference, international isolation, and increasing pressure to toe the Kremlin line on politically sensitive topics, though some academics continue to express dissenting views. The Dynasty Foundation, which sponsored Russian scientists and mathematicians, shut down in July 2015 after being designated a “foreign agent.” It was deemed to receive foreign funding because its Russian founder’s bank accounts were located abroad.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12 (– 1)

The government has consistently reduced the space for freedoms of assembly and association. Overwhelming police responses, the use of force, routine arrests, and harsh fines and prison sentences have discouraged unsanctioned protests, though pro-Kremlin groups are able to demonstrate freely.

The authorities intensified their campaign against NGOs in 2015. By the end of the year, the Justice Ministry had included 111 Russian organizations on its list of “foreign agents.” While the designation does not formally close an organization, the label makes it nearly impossible for the groups to pursue their objectives, such as defending human rights. In May, Putin signed a law allowing the prosecutor general, in agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to declare a foreign firm or NGO “undesirable,” after which the group must close its offices in Russia. By year’s end, the authorities had declared the U.S.-based National Endowment for Democracy and two groups affiliated with George Soros as “undesirable organizations,” and banned Russian groups from working with them. Undesirable entities may also have their accounts frozen, and individuals who violate a ban can face administrative and criminal prosecution, with penalties of up to six years in prison.

While trade union rights are legally protected, they are limited in practice. Strikes and worker protests have occurred in prominent industries, such as automobile manufacturing, but antiunion discrimination and reprisals for strikes are not uncommon, and employers often ignore collective-bargaining rights. The largest labor federation works in close cooperation with the Kremlin, though independent unions are active in some industrial sectors and regions. In November and December 2015, long-haul truckers mounted strikes and protests to oppose a new tax that would be collected by a private contractor; the company is controlled by the son of a close Putin associate.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

The judiciary lacks independence from the executive branch, and career advancement is effectively tied to compliance with Kremlin preferences. A 2014 law merged the Supreme

Arbitration Court, which headed the system of courts handling commercial disputes, into the Supreme Court, which oversees courts of general jurisdiction and will now also supervise the arbitration courts. The Supreme Arbitration Court had been widely respected as one of the most independent of Russia's courts.

In July 2015, the Constitutional Court ruled that Russia could comply selectively with the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to avoid violating the Russian constitution. Putin then signed a law in December that allowed the government to refer rulings issued under international treaties to the Constitutional Court. Critics pointed out that this violated Article 15.4 of the Russian constitution, which states that international treaties take precedence over Russian law. Meanwhile, the ECHR found in September that Russia violated the rights of three of the individuals arrested on Moscow's Bolotnaya Square during 2012 protests against Putin's inauguration to a third term as president. The court found that Russia denied their rights to a timely trial and, for one defendant, the right to a speedy judicial review of his pretrial detention. Despite the ruling, a Moscow court sentenced another protester, Ivan Nepomnyashchikh, to two and a half years in prison for participating in the demonstrations and supposedly attacking police with an umbrella. The NGO Memorial declared Nepomnyashchikh one of 49 people on its list of political prisoners.

Parts of the country, especially the North Caucasus area, suffer from high levels of violence. Hundreds of officials, insurgents, and civilians die each year in bombings, gun battles, and assassinations. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov imposes tight control over his republic with the support of his militia and a flow of generous subsidies from Moscow. The result is a superficial peace and prosperity that masks personalized and arbitrary rule, fierce repression and intimidation, economic inequality, and impunity for abuses.

Immigrants and ethnic minorities—particularly those who appear to be from the Caucasus or Central Asia—face governmental and societal discrimination and harassment. Groups linked to countries antagonized by Moscow's foreign policy, such as Ukrainians and Turks, have also encountered harassment.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people are subject to considerable discrimination. A 2013 law banned dissemination of information promoting "nontraditional sexual relationships," putting legal pressure on LGBT activists and encouraging violent attacks. In late 2015, the parliament was considering a bill that would penalize people merely for publicly expressing or demonstrating "nontraditional sexual orientations."

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16 (+ 1)

The government places some restrictions on freedom of movement and residence. Adults must carry internal passports while traveling and to obtain many government services. Some regional authorities impose registration rules that limit the right of citizens to choose their place of residence, typically targeting ethnic minorities and migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia. More than four million employees tied to the military and security services were banned from traveling abroad under rules issued during 2014. In 2015, the authorities banned flights to Egypt after an alleged terrorist attack destroyed an airliner there, and restricted package tours to Turkey after the downing of the Russian warplane over Syria. Nevertheless, the constitution grants citizens the right to freely leave and return to Russia, and most Russians remained able to exercise this right in practice during the year.

State takeovers of key industries and large tax penalties imposed on select companies have illustrated the precarious nature of property rights in the country, especially when political interests are involved.

Women are underrepresented in politics and government. They hold less than 14 percent of the Duma’s seats and about 17 percent of the seats in the Federation Council. Only 2 of 31 cabinet members are women. Domestic violence against women continues to be a serious problem, and police are often reluctant to intervene in what they regard as internal family matters.

Migrant workers are often exposed to exploitative labor conditions. Both Russians facing economic hardship and migrants to Russia from neighboring countries are subject to sex and labor trafficking.

↓ Rwanda

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 11,331,300

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Kigali

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Trend Arrow: Rwanda received a downward trend arrow due to the approval of a constitutional amendment that would allow President Paul Kagame to run for three additional terms.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,N

INTRODUCTION

In December 2015, a slate of constitutional amendments that, among other provisions, would allow current president Paul Kagame to run for three additional terms was approved in a constitutional referendum. Parliament had passed the amendments in the fall, citing overwhelming public support for the proposal and 3.7 million signatures calling for Kagame to stay in office, although reports circulated of citizens being pressured to sign the petition. The referendum was able to proceed after the Supreme Court dismissed a lawsuit brought by the opposition Democratic Green Party (DGPR) in October.

Beginning in spring 2015, Rwanda accepted more than 70,000 refugees fleeing an electoral crisis and subsequent unrest in Burundi. A December 2015 report by Refugees International cited evidence that Burundian refugees in Rwanda had been recruited by Burundian and Rwandan nationals to join nonstate armed groups operating in Burundi, and that the recruitment may have occurred with the knowledge or participation of Rwandan officials. The Rwandan government denied that recruitment was occurring in its refugee camps.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 8 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

Rwanda’s 2003 constitution, which marked the end of a transition from the nation’s postgenocide political period, grants broad powers to the president, who has the authority to appoint the prime minister and dissolve the bicameral Parliament. The amendments passed in 2015 retained two-term limits for the presidency and shortened terms from seven to five years. They also explicitly state, however, that the current president is eligible for a seven-year term following his current term, after which he may run for two five-year terms.

The 26-seat Senate, the upper house, consists of 12 members elected by regional councils, 8 appointed by the president, 4 chosen by a forum of political parties, and 2 elected representatives of universities, all serving eight-year terms. The 80-seat Chamber of Deputies, the lower house, includes 53 directly elected members, 24 women chosen by local councils, 2 members from the National Youth Council, and 1 member from the Federation of Associations of the Disabled, all serving five-year terms. Parliament generally lacks independence, merely endorsing presidential initiatives. The 2003 constitution requires women to occupy at least 30 percent of the seats in each chamber of Parliament.

The 2010 presidential election was regarded as administratively acceptable. With no serious challengers, Kagame won reelection with 93 percent of the vote. In parliamentary elections in 2013, the coalition led by the ruling Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) took more than 76 percent of the vote and 40 out of 53 elected seats in the lower house. Independent observers found the elections to be peaceful, free, and fair, though an African Union observer mission noted that the ballot-counting process was not fully transparent at some polling stations. East African Community observers noted an absence of opposition agents at most polling stations, increasing the election's susceptibility to manipulation, but did not observe any abnormalities.

According to Parliament, the petition initiating the 2015 constitutional changes was signed by more than 70 percent of the electoral rolls; legislators conducting a national consultation on the issue identified only "about ten" individuals opposed to the proposal. Rights groups and news organizations cited reports that some signatures on the petition were not given voluntarily. Following the Supreme Court's dismissal of the DGPR's challenge to the amendments, the referendum passed in December 2015, with 98 percent of voters endorsing the amendments, according to the National Electoral Commission. The government limited the political activities of groups opposed to the amendments and the referendum was not monitored by any independent international observer groups.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16 (– 1)

The constitution permits political parties to exist but under strict controls, and its emphasis on "national unity" effectively limits political pluralism. Parties closely identified with the 1994 genocide are banned, as are parties based on ethnicity or religion. Though the RPF is still dominated by Tutsis, these restrictions have been used to ban other political parties that might challenge the RPF.

Parliament authorized the Rwanda Governance Board to register political parties in 2013, while also banning foreign funding to political organizations. In advance of the 2013 parliamentary elections, 11 political parties were registered, five of which were part of the RPF's ruling coalition. In the run-up to the 2010 presidential poll, the government prevented new political parties from registering and arrested the leaders of several existing parties, effectively preventing them from fielding candidates. Victoire Ingabiré Umuhoya, the leader of the United Democratic Forces–Inkingi (FDU–Inkingi) and one of Kagame's strongest challengers, was arrested twice in 2010, including before the election, and convicted in 2012 of engaging in terrorist activities. She received an increased prison sentence from the Supreme Court in 2013 upon appeal, a move that critics have seen as politically motivated. In 2014, the African Union's African Court of People's and Human Rights agreed to hear Umuhoya's case on appeal of the increased sentence. Umuhoya is currently in prison.

In 2013, Frank Habineza, the founder and chairman of the DGPR, alleged that the government was plotting to replace him with someone more closely aligned with the RPF. A similar tactic against the opposition Social Party–Imberakuri was reported in 2010.

Opposition critics residing outside of Rwanda have also been increasingly threatened, attacked, forcibly disappeared, or killed. Former members of the Rwandan security forces living in exile have gone missing in previous years, while others have been targeted for assassination. In 2014, Patrick Karegeya, the former head of external intelligence services and a public figure known for criticism of Kagame's government, was found dead in South Africa. To date, no arrests have been made.

The passage of the 2015 constitutional changes was evidence of the RPF's complete domination of the political arena.

Although the constitution calls on the president to ensure "representation of historically marginalized communities" in the Senate through his appointees, claiming ethnic identity in politics is banned, so representation is undocumented.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12

Government countermeasures have helped limit corruption, but graft remains a problem. Rwanda was ranked 44 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index, one of the best scores of any African country. However, few independent organizations and media outlets investigate or report on corruption issues out of fear of government reprisals. In 2013, Gustave Makonene, an anticorruption campaigner working for Transparency International Rwanda, was found murdered in northwestern Rwanda. In January 2015, two police corporals were convicted and sentenced to 20 years in jail for killing Makonene because he had information on their smuggling operation. Transparency International Rwanda decried the relatively short sentence, which the presiding judge said was justified because the men had confessed to the crime and cooperated with authorities.

A 2013 law provides comprehensive access to information, but implementation has been weak. In February 2015, Rwandan nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working with the Office of the Ombudsman launched a web portal called Sobanukirwa to make the process of requesting access to government documents easier. The portal was used to make 75 requests in 2015, of which 10 were successful or partially successful, 3 were unsuccessful, and 62 remained unresolved at year's end.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 16 / 40

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16

The government imposes legal restrictions and informal controls on freedoms of the press and expression. A 2013 media law, at first lauded for expanding the rights of journalists and recognizing freedom for online communications, threatened to limit press freedom, including through the creation of a government body with the power to set conditions for both local and foreign media outlets to operate. More often, journalists are tried on other charges. In February 2015, journalist Cassien Ntamuhanga, the director of a Christian radio station, was convicted on charges related to a conspiracy to overthrow the government alongside singer Kizito Mihigo. Ntamuhanga was sentenced to 25 years in prison and Mihigo to 10; a third codefendant received a 30-year sentence and a fourth was acquitted. The prosecution had reportedly introduced private electronic communications as evidence in the trial.

In May 2015, the regulatory authority made permanent a 2014 suspension of the BBC Kinyarwanda language service. The service had broadcast a television documentary about the 1994 genocide that argues that the number of Hutus killed was higher than the Rwandan government recognizes. After the original suspension, the Rwanda Media Commission, a

self-regulatory body, declared the suspension illegal. This prompted a wave of intimidation attacks against the body and its president, who resigned and left Rwanda in May 2015. Rwanda's repressive media environment has led many journalists to work in exile.

The government has increasingly censored online content in recent years. In 2014 and 2015, a number of independent online news outlets and opposition blogs were intermittently inaccessible.

Religious freedom is generally respected. Relations between religious leaders and the government are sometimes tense, in part because of the involvement of clergy in the 1994 genocide.

Fear among teachers and students of being labeled "divisionist" restrains academic freedom. Numerous students and teachers were expelled or dismissed without due process following parliamentary commission reports on divisionism from 2004 and 2008.

The space for free and private discussion remained constrained in 2015 amid indications that the government monitors e-mail and other private communications. The Law Relating to the Interception of Communications, enacted in 2013, authorizes high-ranking security officials to monitor e-mail and telephone conversations of individuals considered potential threats to what the government considers public security. Social media is thought to be monitored, and the law allows for government hacking of telecommunications networks.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 2 / 12

Although the constitution codifies freedoms of assembly and association, these rights are limited in practice. Fear of arrest often leads individuals and organizations to refrain from exercising their right to peaceful assembly. Registration and reporting requirements for both domestic and foreign NGOs are lengthy and onerous, and activities that the government defines as divisive are prohibited. Several organizations have been banned in recent years, leading others to self-censor, though civil society organizations that do not focus on democracy or human rights are able to function without direct government interference. The government has been accused of employing infiltration tactics against human rights organizations similar to those used against opposition political parties.

The constitution provides for the rights to form trade unions, engage in collective bargaining, and strike. Public workers are not allowed to unionize, and employees of the many "essential services" are not allowed to strike.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16

Recent improvements in the judicial system include an increased presence of defense lawyers at trials, better training for court staff, and revisions to the legal code. However, the judiciary has yet to secure full independence from the executive. The DGPR alleged that government pressure led several lawyers to withdraw from representing it in the party's challenge to the 2015 constitutional amendments. Individuals and NGOs have been allowed to take cases before the African Court on Human and People's Rights since 2013.

Community-based *gacaca* courts completed their prosecution in 2012 of people involved in the genocide. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) formally ended its operations in December 2015, after indicting 93 individuals, of whom it sentenced 61 and acquitted 14.

Police officers sometimes use excessive force, and local officials periodically ignore due process. The construction of new prisons during the past decade has improved prison conditions, even as the *gacaca* trials increased the inmate population. Alleged dissidents

have been increasingly subject to unlawful imprisonment, torture, and ill-treatment in secret military detention centers. A September 2015 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report accused the Rwandan government of illegally detaining people from the streets of Kigali—including sex workers, street children, homeless people, and suspected petty criminals—at the Gikondo Transit Center in the Kigali suburbs, where the report said numerous human rights abuses occurred.

In 2014, more than a dozen Rwandans had reportedly gone missing or were forcibly disappeared, with many indications of involvement by state agents, according to HRW. In 2015, the U.S. State Department reported no instances of political disappearances.

Equal treatment for all citizens under the law is guaranteed, and legal protections are in place against discrimination. However, the Tutsi minority group is often accused of receiving preferential treatment for high-ranking jobs and university scholarships under the pretext of an affirmative action program for “genocide survivors.” Additional preferences are afforded to those who returned from exile communities, particularly in Uganda.

Same-sex sexual activity is not criminalized in Rwanda, though social stigma still exists for sexual minorities. No laws specifically provide protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

A national identity card, which is easily attainable, is required to move within the country. All government officials must be approved by the president or prime minister’s office before traveling for personal or professional reasons. There are no restrictions on property rights, freedom of travel, or choice of employment, residence, or institution of higher education, although Hutus often face unofficial discrimination when seeking public employment or government scholarships.

Rwanda was ranked 62 out of 189 countries in the World Bank’s 2016 *Doing Business* report, placing second in sub-Saharan Africa. The country ranked third in sub-Saharan Africa, and 58 out of 140 economies, in the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016, indicating relatively well-functioning institutions and a low level of direct government control over the economy.

Women currently fill 10 of the 26 Senate seats and 51 of the 80 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. De facto discrimination against women continues. Domestic violence is illegal but remains widespread.

Most human trafficking in Rwanda is of children forced into domestic service. The government makes some efforts to combat it, but officials have also been complicit in trafficking crimes.

Saint Kitts and Nevis

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 46,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Basseterre

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ratings Change: Saint Kitts and Nevis's political rights rating declined from 1 to 2 due to problems with the 2015 elections, including unequal access to the media and financial resources, final determination of a number of constituency boundaries only a few days before the polling, and refusal of the supervisor of elections to publish the results on schedule.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	2,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 35 / 40 (–2)

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60

In general elections held in February 2015, the opposition Team Unity defeated the Labor Party (SKNLP), which had been in government for two decades. Team Unity, an alliance of three parties led by former foreign minister Timothy Harris, took seven of the 11 directly elected seats in the National Assembly, while the SKNLP and an ally won the remainder. Although the vote was generally considered to be free and fair, a number of factors caused concerns about its quality. Opposition candidates as well as observers criticized the lack of campaign finance legislation, and the Organization of American States (OAS) noted that the difference between state resources and SKNLP financing was not always clear. Some observers also noted that the government enjoyed disproportionate access to state-owned media for campaign purposes. Additionally, a delay in reporting results led to questions about the independence of the election commission.

The lead-up to the vote featured uncertainty surrounding boundary delineation, with the SKNLP government advocating for the use of new electoral boundaries in February. The government introduced the changes in January, eliciting strong criticism from the opposition, which claimed that the changes did not follow constitutional procedure and unfairly favored incumbents. Opposition politicians initiated a legal challenge to the new boundaries, but local courts dismissed their claims. The plaintiffs took the case to the Privy Council in London, the highest court of appeal for Saint Kitts and Nevis. The judicial committee of the Privy Council overturned the decision to use new boundaries on February 12, four days before the elections.

The country continued to grapple with a high incidence of violent crime in 2015. In July, the national police force unveiled a six-part plan for combatting crime and improving public safety. The plan calls for more proactive policing of public spaces, engagement with communities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and closer cooperation with other government agencies, among other things.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Saint Kitts and Nevis, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Saint Lucia

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 1
Freedom Rating: 1.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 175,000
Capital: Castries

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 39 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60

In August 2015, Parliament began debating a report authored by the Constitutional Reform Commission that was introduced in 2013 after years of consultation and development. The report contains more than 100 recommendations for the reform of Saint Lucia’s 1979 constitution, including on same-sex marriage, capital punishment, and term limits for the prime minister.

Police brutality remains a significant problem. In 2013, the United States cut aid to the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force (RSLPF) due to credible allegations of gross human rights violations related to 12 extrajudicial killings that took place between 2009 and 2011. In response, the government of Saint Lucia invited a team of Jamaican investigators to study the circumstances surrounding the killings. In findings released in March 2015, the Jamaican team concluded that that police officers had planted weapons at the scene of each of the 12 shootings, which officers had then reported as having been carried out by unidentified persons; the investigators also confirmed the rumored existence of a RSLPF “death list” of suspected criminals to be targeted. Saint Lucia’s Director of Public Prosecutions had yet to charge anyone in connection with the killings at the year’s end.

In October 2015, police released figures showing a 16 percent decrease in the rate of homicides for the first nine months of 2015, compared to the same period in 2014. However, the rate remained relatively high, with 21 homicides, including one categorized as a police shooting.

Discrimination, harassment, and attacks against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people continued in 2015. Violent crimes committed against LGBT individuals have gone unprosecuted. Same-sex sexual relations are illegal and punishable by up to 10 years in prison. However, civil society voices have begun to demand changes in legislation in recent years.

Women are underrepresented in politics and other professions; there are currently three women serving in Parliament. Domestic violence is a serious concern and often goes unreported.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Saint Lucia, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 110,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Kingstown

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40 (+ 1)

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 54 / 60

In December 2015, the social-democratic Unity Labour Party (ULP) won its fourth consecutive victory in parliamentary elections, taking 8 seats in a narrow victory over the conservative New Democratic Party (NDP), which won the remaining 7. The Commonwealth Election Observer Team noted irregularities in the voting, but said they were not significant enough to discredit the elections.

However, the NDP, alleging electoral fraud, refused to accept the results and staged a series of public protests, including one in which demonstrators unsuccessfully attempted to prevent incumbent prime minister Ralph Gonsalves from taking office by blocking the road to the government building where he was to be sworn in. The arrest amid unclear circumstances of opposition member Ben Exeter in late December additionally inflamed tensions. An opposition boycott of the parliament was in effect at the year's end, as protests continued.

The constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and of the press, but these protections are not always enforced, and many media outlets are openly partisan. Shortly after the December elections, Douglas De Freitas, the owner and operator of Nice Radio, was arrested on allegations of inciting violence after he claimed on the air that the ULP planned to tamper with ballot boxes. He was released shortly afterward, but an investigation against him was continuing at the year's end. An access to information law makes public information available to residents, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) assist with such requests. The Public Accounts Committee occasionally raises public awareness of government irregularities.

Domestic violence remains a serious problem. While not itself a criminal offense, instances of domestic violence can be prosecuted under existing laws prohibiting assault or battery; however, police do not always act when such instances are reported. In April 2015, the government approved a law that provided greater protections for victims; broadened the definition of domestic violence to include stalking, intimidation, and psychological abuse, among other things; and obligated certain medical workers to report instances of domestic abuse. The law also required medical professionals to report instances in which minors have become pregnant or have given birth.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Samoa

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 194,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Apia

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 31 / 40 (–1)

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 49 / 60

During 2015, the legislature considered various updates to the electoral law ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for March 2016. Those elections would be the first to apply a 2013 constitutional amendment requiring at least 10 percent of the seats in Parliament to be held by women.

Lawmakers also passed the Citizenship Investment Act, which allows foreign nationals to obtain permanent residency or citizenship in exchange for a large investment in the country. Opponents argued that citizenship should not be sold, and some expressed fear that the law would expand Chinese domination of the economy, which was already a source of social tension.

Official corruption is a major cause of public discontent. In January, an associate minister was found guilty of forgery and later resigned from Parliament. A 2014 parliamentary report found instances of corruption and mismanagement in government agencies, but in early 2015 the government dismissed the majority of its findings and recommendations.

In June, Parliament passed legislation that establishes a Media Council to enforce a code of media ethics and investigate public complaints. Journalist groups and the community will select representatives to sit on the council. Journalists and media outlets were divided on the law, with some opposing it and others arguing that it could improve the profession.

In August, the Ombudsman's Office submitted its first human rights report to Parliament, calling for better safeguards for equality and respect for women, children, persons with disabilities, and prisoners. Domestic violence against women and children is a serious problem. The Crimes Act of 2013 made spousal rape a crime, and the Family Safety Act of 2013 empowers the police, public health officials, and educators to assist victims and families. Nevertheless, some women still do not report abuses due to social stigma and fear of reprisal. Women also face discrimination in employment and other aspects of life. The first woman was appointed to the Supreme Court in 2015.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Samoa, see Freedom in the World 2015.

San Marino

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 33,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: San Marino

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 60 / 60

There is little abuse of office by public officials in San Marino, but financial misconduct has prompted the government to increase financial transparency. After an investigation into a money laundering scheme at the Commercial Bank of San Marino led to the arrest of former captain regent Claudio Podeschi and former secretary of state for foreign affairs Fiorenzo Stolfi in 2014, Stolfi and Podeschi were released in 2015 but remained under investigation. The Council of Europe's committee on money laundering noted in an April 2015 report that San Marino has satisfactorily addressed its recommendations to combat the practice.

In July 2015, the government passed a law recognizing same-sex couples married abroad and granting residence permits to partners under certain circumstances.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Tuvalu, see Freedom in the World 2015.

São Tomé and Príncipe

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 196,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: São Tomé

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 34 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 47 / 60

São Tomé and Príncipe remained stable in 2015 after the Independent Democratic Action party (ADI) defeated the governing Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and

Príncipe–Social Democratic Party (MLSTP-PSD) in last year’s parliamentary elections. In anticipation of the 2016 presidential election, officials began work on a new voter registration system in 2015. In March, the government declared that all Cape Verdean emigrants who were living in São Tomé and Príncipe at the time of its 1975 independence would be able to secure São Toméan nationality at no cost through the end of 2015; those who take advantage will have the opportunity to participate in future elections.

Government corruption remains a problem. In May 2015, the Court of Auditors announced that it had found numerous irregularities in public contracts awarded in 2014, adding that it had discovered similar issues in previous years and that the country lacked mechanisms to hold offenders accountable. Investigators in late 2015 were probing corruption allegations against former members of the Cantagalo municipal government, pertaining to illegal land sales and the issuing of fake documents, including passports. Separately, in a May session of the National Assembly, the opposition MLSTP-PSD claimed that Prime Minister Patrice Trovoada had been involved in a corrupt real estate deal involving the public acquisition of a new Supreme Court building. In August, MLSTP-PSD members accused Trovoada of politicizing the central bank after he dismissed three of its directors, two of whom were MLSTP-PSD members.

Members of the security forces have been known to commit violent acts against civilians. Justino Lima, head of the armed forces, was dismissed in early 2015 after the emergence of a video clip that apparently depicted him and other military officials beating a man suspected of theft. A new military chief was appointed in July, a few weeks after a military patrol had killed a young man accused of illegally extracting sand.

São Tomé and Príncipe remains heavily dependent on international aid, with the majority of its budget financed by donors. The trafficking of people and narcotics on ships in São Toméan waters continued in 2015. The government has actively sought international assistance to address the problem, and in December inaugurated a new maritime surveillance system.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in São Tomé and Príncipe, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Saudi Arabia

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 31,565,109

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Capital: Riyadh

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia confronted a number of domestic and regional challenges in 2015. King Abdullah died in late January and was succeeded by his brother Salman bin Abdulaziz, who

began his reign with far-reaching changes to the line of succession and the cabinet that, among other things, empowered younger members of the royal family. Municipal elections held in December were the first in which women were eligible to vote and run for office. The government continued to exercise restrictions on dissent and freedom of expression, however, targeting a number of writers, activists, and dissidents. According to international watchdogs, Saudi Arabia carried out the highest number of executions since 1995, with estimates surpassing 150.

Beginning in March, Saudi Arabia led a coalition of Arab states in a military intervention in neighboring Yemen, where groups loyal to besieged President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi remained embroiled in a civil war against Houthi forces and other rebel factions. Although the intervention followed a request for help from President Hadi, the campaign was also influenced by Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia's relations with Shiite-ruled Iran, whom the Saudi government has accused of aiding Houthi forces.

In December, amid growing fears about regional security, Saudi leaders announced the creation of a 34-country coalition against terrorism. Individuals with affiliations to terrorist organizations, including the Islamic State (IS) militant group, carried out a number of attacks in Saudi Arabia throughout the year, particularly targeting members of the country's Shiite minority. The declining price of oil, straining the financial health of Saudi Arabia and a number of its neighbors, also contributed to regional concerns. The kingdom recorded its largest budget deficit in 2015—approximately \$98 billion—and in December, officials announced plans to reduce subsidies.

Two separate incidents in September resulted in high civilian fatalities. During the hajj, the annual Islamic pilgrimage, a stampede on the outskirts of Mecca resulted in a high number of fatalities, with estimates reaching as high as 2,400. Earlier in the month, the collapse of a construction crane in Mecca led to more than 100 deaths.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 3 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

The 1992 Basic Law declares that the Koran and the Sunna (the guidance set by the deeds and sayings of the prophet Muhammad) are the country's constitution. The cabinet, which is appointed by the king, passes legislation that becomes law once ratified by royal decree. The king also appoints the 150 members of the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council), who serve in an advisory capacity, for four-year terms. Limited elections for advisory councils at the municipal level were introduced in 2005. In municipal elections held in December 2015, women were able to vote and stand as candidates for the first time—a right granted by a 2011 royal decree. Two-thirds of the seats on the 284 councils were open to voting, while the minister of municipal and rural affairs held responsibility for filling the remainder through appointment. Women won approximately 1 percent of contested seats.

In April, King Salman changed the line of succession, relieving his brother Muqrin bin Abdulaziz of the position of crown prince and appointing his nephew Muhammad bin Nayef instead—the first time that a grandson, rather than a son, of the kingdom's founder was given the title. King Salman's son Muhammad bin Salman was appointed deputy crown prince.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

Political parties are forbidden, and organized political opposition exists only outside the country. Political dissent is criminalized. Activists who challenge the kingdom's record on political inclusion or call for constitutional changes are treated harshly. Raef Badawi, a

human rights activist and founder of the website Liberal Saudi Network, remained behind bars in 2015 on charges of “insulting Islam,” serving a sentence of 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes. Badawi was subjected to a first round of flogging in January. Subsequent flogging was delayed following international criticism of the verdict. Although the Saudi Supreme Court upheld Badawi’s punishment in June, reports emerged in August that the case was again under review. The kingdom’s crackdown on one of the country’s most prominent political rights organizations, the Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association (ACPRA), continued in 2015. Muhammad al-Bajadi, one of the founders of ACPRA, was sentenced to 10 years in prison in March, with five of them suspended; al-Bajadi faced a variety of charges, among them acquiring banned books and organizing protests by the families of prisoners. Several other ACPRA members remained imprisoned in 2015.

In 2014, authorities designated the Muslim Brotherhood and Hezbollah as terrorist organizations, a move that reflected official concerns about the domestic popularity of both organizations, which are considered threats to the regime.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Corruption remains a significant problem, despite some earlier moves to hold certain officials accountable, and there is low transparency in the functioning of government. Following the stampede during the hajj in September 2015, amid international criticism of the infrastructure and safety measures provided by Saudi authorities, officials ordered an investigation into the incident. The death toll from the stampede remained contested at the end of the year—while Saudi officials claimed that there had been 769 fatalities, estimates compiled by international news organizations reached as high as 2,400.

The Saudi state remains notably opaque in its financial practices. Although the government generates massive revenue from the sale of oil, which it redistributes through social welfare programs and as patronage, little is known about its accounting or the various direct ways in which the state’s wealth becomes a source of private privilege for the royal family and its clients. Due to the financial strain caused by declining oil prices in 2015, the state was forced to draw on reserves and issue bonds, and in October, reports emerged that officials planned to take cost-cutting measures. In December, authorities announced plans to privatize several state-owned entities and gradually reduce subsidies for fuel, water, and electricity.

Discretionary Political Rights Question A: 2 / 4

In addition to drawing advice from the Consultative Council, the monarchy has a tradition of consulting with select members of Saudi society. However, the process is not equally open to all citizens. From the king to local governors, royal family officials periodically host meetings for citizens to air grievances and seek access to money or power. These meetings are irregular, and while they afford some citizens rare opportunities to meet with the powerful, the outcomes reinforce the personalized nature of authority.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 7 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 3 / 16

The government tightly controls domestic media content and dominates regional print and satellite-television coverage, with members of the royal family owning major stakes in news outlets in multiple countries. Government officials have banned journalists and editors who publish articles deemed offensive to the religious establishment or the ruling authorities. A 2011 royal decree amended the press law to criminalize, among other things, any

criticism of the country's grand mufti, the Council of Senior Religious Scholars, or government officials; violations can result in fines and forced closure of media outlets.

The regime has taken steps to limit the influence of new media, blocking access to more than 400,000 websites that are considered immoral or politically sensitive. A 2011 law requires all blogs and websites, or anyone posting news or commentary online, to have a license from the Ministry of Information or face fines and possible closure of the website. In 2014, the General Commission for Audiovisual Media declared its intent to restrict all non-state-run YouTube programming.

Authorities continue to target writers and activists who use the internet to express their views. Prominent writer Zuhair Kutbi, a regular contributor to online news and informational platforms, was detained in July 2015 following a guest appearance on a talk show during which he discussed political reform in Saudi Arabia. Also in July, authorities arrested Waleed al-Hussein al-Dood, founder of a news website known for its criticism of the Sudanese government. A Sudanese citizen and longtime resident of Saudi Arabia, al-Dood remained in detention without charge as of late 2015.

Islam is the official religion, and all Saudis are required by law to be Muslims. A 2014 royal decree punishes atheism with up to 20 years in prison. The government prohibits the public practice of any religion other than Islam and restricts the religious practices of the Shiite and Sufi Muslim minority sects. Although the government recognizes the right of non-Muslims to worship in private, it does not always respect this right in practice. The building of Shiite mosques is banned.

In February 2015, a Saudi court sentenced a man to death for renouncing Islam and defacing a copy of the Koran in a video he published online. In November, Palestinian poet Ashraf Fayadh was sentenced to death in a retrial on charges of committing blasphemy and renouncing Islam. Fayadh had originally been sentenced to four years in prison and 800 lashes in 2014.

Academic freedom is restricted, and informers monitor classrooms for compliance with curriculum rules, such as a ban on teaching secular philosophy and religions other than Islam. Despite changes to textbooks in recent years, intolerance in the classroom remains a significant problem, as some educators continue to espouse discriminatory and hateful views of non-Muslims and Muslim minority sects.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are not upheld. The government frequently detains political activists who stage demonstrations or engage in other civic advocacy. While no large-scale protests have taken place in the kingdom, smaller demonstrations have become more common. The largest of these take place in the mainly Shiite Eastern Province. Authorities have responded by issuing a most-wanted list of activists and violently dispersing demonstrations. The prominent Shiite cleric and political dissident Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, who was arrested in 2012 for leading protests critical of the regime and calling for an end to sectarian discrimination, was sentenced to death in 2014 and remained in prison in 2015. His nephew Ali al-Nimr, arrested at age 17 in 2012 for participating in protests, also remained behind bars. He had received a sentence of execution and crucifixion in 2014 on charges of participating in antigovernment demonstrations, possessing weapons, and attacking security forces.

Saudi Arabia has no associations law and has historically approved licenses only for charitable organizations. No laws protect the rights to form independent labor unions, bargain collectively, or engage in strikes. Workers who engage in union activity are subject to dismissal or imprisonment.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

The judiciary, which must coordinate its decisions with the executive branch, is not independent. A special commission of judicial experts writes law that serves as the foundation for verdicts in the court system, which is grounded in Sharia (Islamic law). While Saudi courts have historically relied on the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, the commission incorporates all four Sunni Muslim legal schools in drafting new guidelines.

Defendants' rights are poorly protected by law and not respected in practice. Detainees are often denied access to legal counsel during interrogation, and lengthy pretrial detention and detention without charge are common. Capital punishment, usually carried out by beheading, is applied to a wide range of crimes; juveniles are not exempt from the penalty. According to international watchdogs, Saudi authorities carried out upward of 150 executions in 2015. A sweeping new antiterrorism law, which includes lengthy prison sentences for criticizing the monarchy or the government, went into effect in 2014. It also expanded the power of police to conduct raids against suspected antigovernment activity without judicial approval. The penal code bans torture, but allegations of torture by police and prison officials are common, and access to prisoners by independent human rights and legal organizations is strictly limited.

Security concerns grew in 2015 amid a number of terrorist attacks. Local IS affiliates claimed responsibility for an explosion at a mosque in August that resulted in at least 15 deaths; the mosque, located near the border with Yemen, was frequented by members of the Saudi security forces.

Substantial prejudice against ethnic, religious, and national minorities prevails. Shiites, who make up 10 to 15 percent of the population, are underrepresented in major government positions, and Shiite activism has faced repression by security forces. Shiites have also been subject to physical assaults by both state and nonstate actors. In May 2015, individuals affiliated with IS claimed responsibility for two deadly attacks against Shiite mosques that killed at least 25 people.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 2 / 16

Freedom of movement is restricted in some cases. The government punishes activists and critics by limiting their ability to travel outside the country, and reform advocates are routinely stripped of their passports.

While a great deal of business activity is connected to members of the government, the ruling family, or other elite families, officials have given assurances that special industrial and commercial zones are free from interference by the royal family.

Women are not treated as equal members of society, and many laws discriminate against them. They are not permitted to drive cars and must obtain permission from a male guardian in order to travel within or outside of the country. According to interpretations of Sharia in Saudi Arabia, daughters generally receive half the inheritance awarded to their brothers, and the testimony of one man is equal to that of two women. Moreover, Saudi women seeking access to the courts must be represented by a male. The religious police enforce a strict policy of gender segregation and often harass women, using physical punishment to ensure compliance with conservative standards of dress in public. Same-sex marriage is not legal. All sexual activity outside of marriage, including same-sex activity, is criminalized, and the death penalty can be applied in certain circumstances. A 2013 law defines and criminalizes domestic abuse, prescribing fines and up to a year in prison for perpetrators. However, according to analysis by Human Rights Watch, the law lacks clarity on enforcement mechanisms.

Education and economic rights for Saudi women have improved somewhat in recent years. More than half of the country's university students are now female, although they do not enjoy equal access to classes and facilities. Women gained the right to hold commercial licenses in 2004. In 2008, the Saudi Human Rights Commission established a women's branch to investigate cases of human rights violations against women and children, but it has not consistently carried out serious investigations or brought cases against violators.

Saudi women continued to agitate for the right to drive in 2015. In February, authorities released Loujain al-Hathloul, who was arrested in 2014 by Saudi officials for attempting to drive into the country from the United Arab Emirates, and Maysaa al-Amoudi, who was detained after arriving at the border to support Hathloul.

A 2005 labor law that extended various protections and benefits to previously unregulated categories of workers also banned child labor and established a 75 percent quota for Saudi citizens in each company's workforce. Foreign workers—of whom there are more than six million in the country—have historically enjoyed virtually no legal protections and remain vulnerable to trafficking and forced labor, primarily through the exploitation of the visa-sponsorship system. In a small victory, in 2014, the Ministry of Labor ruled that expatriate workers who are not paid their salaries for more than three consecutive months are free to switch their work sponsors without approval. A number of amendments to the labor law that went into effect in October 2015 contain broader rights and protections for workers in the private sector, although implementation remained unclear at year's end. The amendments do not apply to domestic workers, who remain particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Senegal

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 14,690,400

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Dakar

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,3,PF	2,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	2,3,F	2,2,F	2,2 F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

Despite Senegal's high levels of political pluralism and competition, a number of institutional challenges to political rights arose in 2015. In an internal rule change in June that generated criticism as well as accusations of fraud in the recording of votes, the National Assembly increased requirements for forming opposition parliamentary groups. Macky Sall, who won the presidency in 2012 after making a campaign promise to reduce the presidential term limit from seven years to five, proposed in March that a referendum be held in 2016 on whether to implement the reform, which would eschew arguably faster legislative channels. Also in March, the Court of Repression of Illicit Enrichment (CREI) concluded the controversial trial of Karim Wade—former government minister, son of former president Abdoulaye Wade, and himself a presidential aspirant—and found him guilty

of illicit enrichment. Several domestic and international watchdogs have criticized the proceedings, calling Wade's prolonged pretrial detention arbitrary.

Civil liberties were generally protected in 2015. However, the arrests of a number of journalists challenged standards for freedom of expression. Same-sex sexual activity remained a criminal offense, and several individuals were prosecuted for it during the year.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 33 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

Members of Senegal's 150-seat National Assembly are elected to five-year terms; the president serves seven-year terms with a two-term limit. The president appoints the prime minister. The National Commission for the Reform of Institutions (CNRI), an outgrowth of a consultative body that engaged citizens about reforms in 2008–2009, proposed several reforms in 2014, including an immutable five-year presidential term limit. The term length had not been changed by the end of 2015, despite the fact that Sall came to power in 2012 after campaigning to reduce it. However, in March 2015, Sall proposed to hold a referendum in 2016 on the term-length reduction. Following that vote, presidential elections would happen in either 2017 or 2019.

The most recent presidential election took place in February 2012. In January of that year, Abdoulaye Wade's candidacy for a third presidential term was validated by the Constitutional Council, whose members he had appointed. The presidential campaign period featured significant violence and intimidation, but the election resulted in a peaceful transfer of power. After placing second in the first round, Sall—a former member of Wade's Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) who previously served as his prime minister and campaign director, as well as president of the National Assembly—won a March runoff with 66 percent of the vote. Wade conceded defeat.

In the July 2012 parliamentary elections, Sall's United in Hope coalition, which included his Alliance for the Republic party, captured 119 of 150 seats, followed by the PDS with 12. About a dozen parties divided the remainder. Both the presidential and National Assembly elections were declared free and fair by international observers.

The National Autonomous Electoral Commission (CENA) monitors elections. Although the body is nominally independent, members are appointed by the president on the advice of other public figures, and it is financially dependent on the government. The Interior Ministry organizes the elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

People are able to form political parties without undue interference or cumbersome requirements, and parties representing a wide range of views and objectives—including religious ones—operate generally freely.

There is a significant opposition vote, and the opposition has viable opportunities to win presidential, legislative, and local offices. The 2012 presidential election marked the second victory by an opposition candidate in 12 years. Some members of Sall's coalition criticized the timeline of the referendum on presidential term length, noting that if the vote resulted in an early presidential election in 2017, other parties within the coalition would face difficulties preparing.

A modification to the internal rules of the National Assembly passed by the body in June 2015 attracted criticism and accusations of vote fraud within the legislature. Members approved three new rules: an expansion of the term of the president of the National Assembly from one year to five, an increase in the number of deputies needed to form a parliamentary bloc from 10 to 15, and a reform that prevents deputies who leave their initial bloc

from joining a new group within the same legislative term. Opponents claimed that the second and third reforms were designed to inhibit parties in Sall's current parliamentary coalition from breaking away and fielding challengers in the presidential race. Some legislators also accused the National Assembly leadership of vote-counting irregularities, claiming that votes were recorded for 100 percent of legislators despite several absences from the chamber. In August, the Constitutional Council rejected a challenge to the changes pertaining to parliamentary blocs that was brought by a group of 19 legislators, including some from Sall's United in Hope coalition.

The opposition still faces major inequalities in financial resources when competing with incumbents. There is no public financing of political parties, and international funding of parties is illegal. The ruling party can deploy a vast set of state resources to garner support, whereas opposition party leaders must often rely on personal wealth.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Despite initial international praise of Sall's use of the CREI and the National Anti-Corruption Commission (OFNAC) to monitor corruption in the government, the selection of cases is not always viewed as objective. The trial of Karim Wade, who was imprisoned and awaiting proceedings since April 2013, began at the CREI in July 2014. In March 2015, the court found Wade guilty of illicit enrichment, sentencing him to 6 years in prison and ordering him to pay a \$229 million fine. Wade had hoped to challenge Sall in the next presidential election, and denied all charges against him; his lawyers called his prosecution politically motivated. Domestic and international human rights organizations criticized the CREI proceedings for violating due process, particularly by holding Wade in prolonged detention. Wade appealed the CREI's decision to Senegal's Supreme Court, which affirmed the original verdict in August.

Senegal was ranked 61 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 45 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and expression. There are many independent media outlets, one state television channel, and a number of radio stations and newspapers that are controlled by or affiliated with the state. Several privately owned newspapers have existed for decades and are widely read. In 2015, the National Assembly continued to refuse to vote on a new press code that, among other things, would decriminalize violations of press laws; the code has been contested since its introduction in 2011. Access to the internet is not restricted.

Blasphemy, security, and criminal defamation laws are in place but generally not used to silence independent voices. However, on one day in July 2015, authorities summoned three newspaper publishers and one reporter for questioning about their sources for three separate reports. Alioune Badara Fall, publisher of *L'Observateur*, and Mamadou Seck, one of the paper's reporters, were arrested and charged with "violating defense secrecy" in connection to an article on the deployment of Senegalese troops to Saudi Arabia's campaign in Yemen. They were held for three days along with Mouhamed Guèye, publisher of *Le Quotidien*, who was detained in connection to reporting on a celebrity money-laundering trial. Mamadou Wane, publisher of *L'Enquête*, was briefly held and questioned over a report on military appointments. Following public criticism of the detentions, sources close to Sall

were cited in news stories claiming that the prosecutor of Dakar had ordered them without the president's knowledge.

There is no state religion, and freedom of worship is constitutionally protected and respected in practice. Muslims constitute 94 percent of the population, and the country's Muslim brotherhoods are influential, including in politics. Academic freedom is legally guaranteed and generally respected. Private discussion is open and free.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 10 / 12

Freedom of assembly is constitutionally guaranteed and respected in practice. The Interior Ministry must approve opposition leaders' requests to lead protests and demonstrations, can dictate the hours and locations of such activities, and can deploy security forces to monitor them. Freedom of assembly was generally respected in 2015, although in February eight PDS members were charged with participation in an unauthorized assembly, and in August the PDS was denied authorization for an assembly in Dakar. Protesters gathered outside the Dakar courthouse where Karim Wade's verdict was read in March; police maintained a heavy presence in the city to prevent riots.

Freedom of association is legally guaranteed. The leaders of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), unions, and political parties must register their organizations with the Interior Ministry. Workers, with the exception of security employees, have legal rights to organize, bargain collectively, and strike.

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16

The law guarantees fair public trials and defendants' rights. The judiciary is formally independent, but inadequate pay and lack of tenure expose judges to external influences and prevent the courts from providing a proper check on the other branches of government. The president controls appointments to the Constitutional Council. Sall has promised to shift power away from the executive, and the CNRI has requested a more powerful Constitutional Court, but no major changes were made in 2015. Geographic, educational, bureaucratic, and financial hurdles hinder public access to the courts.

In 2014, the International Federation of Human Rights, the African Assembly on Human Rights, the Senegalese League of Human Rights, and the National Organization for Human Rights criticized the CREI for not guaranteeing a fair trial, as the court's assumption of guilt places the burden of proof on the accused. In June 2015, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared that Karim Wade was being detained arbitrarily and that he should be compensated. Sall's administration criticized the working group for interfering in a domestic legal dispute.

In July, the trial of former Chadian president Hissene Habré began at the Extraordinary African Chambers, a special court established by the African Union and Senegal. Habré, who was arrested in Dakar in 2013, faced charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The trial marked the first use of universal jurisdiction in Africa. After Habré's lawyers refused to participate in the trial, which they called illegitimate, the court assigned Habré new defense lawyers. However, he refused to cooperate and was forcibly brought into the courtroom on the first day of hearings.

Senegalese prisons are overcrowded. The Dakar-based NGO Tostan has noted poor living conditions, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to medical care for prisoners.

The low-level separatist conflict in Senegal's southern Casamance region remained unresolved in 2015, though rebel leader Salif Sadio had announced a unilateral ceasefire in 2014.

Individuals of lower castes in Senegalese society are sometimes subject to discrimination. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face discrimination, physical attacks, and police harassment, and same-sex sexual activity remains a crime punishable by up to five years in prison and a fine of up to \$2,600. In August, seven men were sentenced to six months in prison and 18 months of a suspended sentence after being arrested without warrant for consensual same-sex sexual activity. A Human Rights Watch report released that month raised serious concerns about the fairness of the trial. In December, 11 men were arrested while attending the wedding of a same-sex couple; they were released five days later.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Citizens generally enjoy the freedom of movement and the right to choose their own residence. The civil code facilitates the ownership of private property, and the government usually provides compensation when it expropriates land. The U.S. Department of State reported in its 2015 Investment Climate Statement on Senegal that the country's property title and land registration protocols are not consistently applied in rural areas.

Human rights organizations note persisting difficulties for women in the country. Female genital mutilation continues to be practiced illegally throughout Senegal. Rape and domestic abuse also persist, and abortions for medical reasons are difficult to obtain. Women cannot obtain credit as easily as men, and early marriage remains an issue. Elements of Islamic and local customary law, particularly regarding inheritance and marital relations, discriminate against women. A gender parity law has resulted in women holding 64 seats in the 150-seat legislature.

A Senegalese Justice Ministry survey released in September 2014 estimated that over 30,000 of the 54,837 children attending *daaras* (Koranic schools) in Dakar are required to beg in the streets. Other forms of forced labor, child labor, and sex trafficking also remain concerns, and government efforts to combat such abuses are marginal.

Serbia

Political Rights Rating: 2

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 7,097,000

Capital: Belgrade

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) continued to govern with an absolute majority in the Serbian National Assembly. The SNS, a center-right party with a mandate focused on economic and social reform, has implemented an austerity program meant to revitalize the Serbian economy. In 2015, pensions were lowered and public-sector salaries were cut under new reform policies.

During the year, an influx of refugees and migrants fleeing sectarian violence and instability in North Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere reached Serbia. The crisis placed a significant humanitarian and financial strain on Balkan countries, and contributed to tensions between them. In the fall, Croatian and Serbian officials traded insults, and Serbia implemented restrictions on Croatian goods while Croatia closed a number of its border crossings with Serbia. The row was eventually calmed by officials from the European Union (EU).

While disagreements over the status of Kosovo have slowed Serbia's path to EU membership, progress was registered in 2015. The first EU negotiation chapters, including one involving the normalization of relations with Kosovo, were opened in December. In 2015, the Serbian and Kosovo governments also reached an agreement on the status of ethnic Serbs in northern Kosovo, a step seen as the biggest move forward since the 2013 Brussels Agreement.

On a number of occasions in 2015, government officials including Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić verbally harassed critical journalists and outlets. Several journalists experienced physical attacks during the year.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 30 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12

The Serbian National Assembly is a unicameral, 250-seat legislature, with deputies elected to four-year terms according to closed party lists in a proportional representation vote. The assembly elects the prime minister. The president, a largely ceremonial post, is popularly elected for up to two five-year terms. In 2012, Tomislav Nikolić, a former SNS leader, defeated incumbent president and Democratic Party (DS) leader Boris Tadić in a presidential runoff with 51 percent of the vote.

Early legislative elections took place in 2014 following a request from the SNS, which cited a need for a stronger mandate to implement political and economic reforms that would hasten the EU accession process. Critics claimed that the SNS rushed elections to capitalize on its lead in public opinion polls. In a field of 19 competing electoral lists, a five-party alliance led by the SNS won by a landslide, with 48 percent of the vote. The victory gave the SNS-led alliance 158 seats in the 250-seat National Assembly and propelled Vučić to the post of prime minister. Outgoing prime minister Ivica Dačić's Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and its junior partners took 44 seats, the DS won 19 seats, and a new party led by former president Tadić—the New Democratic Party—captured 18 seats. Three parties representing ethnic minorities took the remaining 11 seats. The elections were considered free and fair by international monitors.

In 2015, local elections took place in a number of smaller municipalities. General elections are scheduled for 2018. However, Prime Minister Vučić announced in August 2015 that elections could be called earlier.

The Republic Electoral Commission administers elections. Political parties must submit candidate lists to the commission at least fifteen days ahead of a scheduled election, and the body has the right to return lists if they are not in compliance with electoral rules.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16 (– 1)

Since the ouster of authoritarian leader Slobodan Milošević in 2000, Serbian politics have witnessed a healthy rotation of power between left-wing and right-wing parties. In 2014, the landslide victory of the SNS bloc gave the party control of the executive and

legislative branches of government—a rare occurrence in the usually contested political sphere.

The strength of the political opposition has waned since 2012, with the fragmentation of the once-ruling DS a significant factor in the decline. New parties are able to form without restriction. Serbian voters can generally vote for the party they prefer without facing intimidation or coercion.

The country's five-percent electoral threshold does not apply to parties representing ethnic minorities. Parties representing the Albanian, Bosniak, and Hungarian ethnic groups won seats in the 2014 elections. Nevertheless, ethnic minorities have a relatively muted voice in Serbian politics in practice.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Corruption remains a problem in many sectors, including the security, education, housing, and labor sectors as well as in privatization processes and the judiciary. The Anti-Corruption Council, made up of six members, was established in 2001 to handle corruption complaints. Other agencies that combat corruption include the Anti-Corruption Agency and the ombudsman, known as the Protector of Citizens of Serbia. In December 2015, 80 people were arrested on corruption charges, including a former cabinet minister accused of abuse of office. Some saw the arrests, which took place after Serbia opened an EU negotiation chapter on financial control, as part of a general push to deal with pervasive corruption and meet criteria for EU membership. Others suggested that political motivations prompted the sweep, as many of those arrested were members of opposition parties. Serbia was ranked 71 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

An initiative called Open Parliament launched a website in 2012 that documents parliamentary debates and legislative drafts, and aims to inform the public about legislation affecting people's lives. An Open Parliament report released in September 2015 said that less than a third of survey respondents were interested in politics, or believed in the effectiveness of civic engagement.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 48 / 60 (–1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16 (–1)

There has been growing government hostility toward independent and critical media in recent years. The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), a regional media organization partly funded by foreign grants, came under attack by Prime Minister Vučić and other officials on several occasions in 2015 after it published reports critical of the government. There were a number of instances in which journalists were physically attacked in 2015. Most such attacks go unprosecuted. Self-censorship is a worsening phenomenon that journalists attribute not only to harassment that can follow critical or investigative reporting, but also to economic pressures, such as the risk of losing advertising contracts, in connection with such reports.

While there is no official censorship in Serbia, media outlets are thought to be aligned with specific political parties, and the public broadcaster Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) remains subject to strong government influence. Changes to the criminal code in 2012 removed defamation as a criminal offense, though the code retains provisions criminalizing insult. Funds for media advertising are controlled by a few economic and political actors. Media ownership is not fully transparent, and ownership of large, influential print media outlets in Serbia is often unclear.

The Serbian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, which is generally respected in practice. However, given the legacy of socialism, many people remain secular. Relations between factions within the Muslim community in the largely Bosniak region of Sandžak—and between one of the factions and the Serbian government—have deteriorated in recent years.

Academic freedom is generally respected and opposing views are tolerated. However, accusations that politicians had plagiarized academic documents they claimed to have written themselves have raised questions about the quality and integrity of the Serbian education system. Additionally, in 2014, two academics were attacked outside their homes, in separate incidents that were each considered politically motivated or otherwise connected to their work. Private discussion is free and vibrant, and many Serbs take strong, personal positions toward politics.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Citizens enjoy freedoms of assembly and association. The government once again permitted a parade in support of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) rights in September 2015—the second consecutive year that the LGBT community was given explicit permission for the event, following three years of denials. Around 300 people, including government officials such as Belgrade mayor Siniša Mali and Jadranka Joksimović, the minister responsible for EU integration, participated. The marchers were protected by riot police, and no violent incidents took place.

Foreign and domestic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate freely, and many of them take openly critical stances toward the government. Many such organizations receive international funding.

Workers may join unions, engage in collective bargaining, and strike, but the International Confederation of Trade Unions has reported that organizing efforts and strikes are substantially restricted in practice. There are numerous professional associations in Serbia, such as the Journalist Association of Serbia (UNS) and the Judges Association of Serbia (JAS).

F. Rule of Law: 10 / 16

The judiciary in Serbia operates independently but endemic problems continue to plague the judicial system. A February 2015 World Bank report criticized lengthy trials and pervasive corruption, and noted that Serbian courts are inaccessible to some citizens due to high fees and attorney costs, as well as due to the lack of uniformly available legal aid.

Prisons generally meet international standards, though overcrowding is an issue, and health care facilities are often inadequate.

Radical right-wing organizations and violent sports fans who target certain ethnic groups remain a serious concern. Ethnic minorities are underrepresented in government. The country's main minority groups are the Bosniaks, concentrated in the Sandžak region; and the Hungarian community, concentrated in Vojvodina. Serbia is also home to Roma, Albanian, Croat, Montenegrin, and other communities.

In 2015, Serbia became a transit country for refugees and migrants trying to gain entry to the EU. In general, Serbia was praised for its handling of a difficult situation, but the burden on the country increased after Hungary closed its border with Serbia in the fall.

The treatment of LGBT people remains problematic. While the attitude toward the LGBT community is changing as more and more LGBT people decide to live openly, Serbian society still remains somewhat traditional. Increasingly tolerant actions by the government appear to be influencing those holding more conservative views.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Serbian citizens are free to choose their employment and education, and have the right to travel. Many of these choices are constrained by socioeconomic factors, such as slow economic growth and high unemployment rates (officially around 20 percent, but in reality higher). Serbian citizens can enter the Schengen area of the EU without a visa since 2010.

In general, property rights are respected, but dispute arbitration is slow. Serbian citizens can start their own business, although bureaucratic obstacles make the process difficult. There are instances of nepotism in higher education and employment.

Women enjoy legal equality with men as indicated in the Serbian constitution. There are several antidiscrimination and gender equality laws in place. According to electoral regulations, women must account for at least 33 percent of a party's candidate list, and women currently hold 34 percent of seats in the parliament. However, women face challenges on the job market, and those of childbearing age are often illegally asked if they plan to start a family.

Domestic violence remains a problem. A recent report by the UN Development Programme found that more than 50 percent of women in Central Serbia surveyed said they had experienced domestic violence in their lives. Domestic violence was criminalized in 2000, and since then several NGOs and safe houses have been established to deal with the problem.

Serbia has made efforts to address human trafficking, but those efforts tapered off somewhat in 2015. Migrants and refugees passing through the country are particularly susceptible to traffickers, as are Roma children.

Seychelles

Political Rights Rating: 3

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 93,000

Capital: Victoria

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

In October 2015, President James Michel announced that the presidential election would be held early, in December, rather than in the first half of 2016. In a first for Seychelles, the opposition parties performed well enough in the first round to force a runoff election. Michel won the runoff by a narrow margin, leading opposition leader Wavel Ramkalawan to challenge the results in court. The case was pending at year's end.

Seychelles took several steps to improve its legal framework in 2015, including revisions of its electoral code and Public Order Act. Though the media environment is relatively free, there are few nonpartisan sources of information. Corruption, drug trafficking, and money laundering remain problems in the country.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 26 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12 (+ 1)

The president and the unicameral National Assembly are elected by universal adult suffrage for five-year terms. The president serves as head of government and appoints the cabinet.

The opposition Seychelles National Party (SNP) boycotted the last parliamentary elections in 2011 after alleged misconduct by the ruling Parti Lepep (PL) in that year's presidential vote and the failure of the president to implement electoral reforms. The PL consequently won 33 of the 34 National Assembly seats, and the Popular Democratic Movement (PDM) took the remaining seat.

The Forum for Electoral Reform, comprising representatives from every registered political party, was established by the Electoral Commission (EC) following the 2011 parliamentary elections to review the electoral framework. Acting on recommendations from the forum and the EC, the National Assembly adopted a new election law in late 2014 that was promulgated in May 2015. Key changes included the introduction of year-round voter registration, greater transparency surrounding the register itself, and a provision for voting by citizens living abroad.

With the new electoral law in place, the SNP decided to participate in the 2015 presidential election, which became the most competitive in the country's history. None of the six candidates won a majority in the first round of voting. As a result, the opposition coalesced behind Ramkalawan of the SNP in a runoff against the two-term incumbent, Michel of the PL. Michel was reelected for a third term by a margin of just 193 votes. Ramkalawan and the SNP challenged the outcome, alleging irregularities on election day and errors in the final vote tabulation; they submitted petitions to the Constitutional Court that were pending at year's end. International observers, while generally positive in their assessments, reported some concerns over allegations of vote buying and withheld their final reports until the postelection processes could be completed.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

The ruling PL—formerly the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF)—remains the dominant party, having held power continuously since 1977. The leftist SPPF was the only legal party until a 1992 constitutional amendment legalized opposition parties. In 2015, former foreign minister Patrick Pillay led the creation of the first splinter party from the PL, the Lalyans Selselwa (Seychellois Alliance). Further new additions to the political landscape brought the number of presidential candidates to a record high of six.

Prior to the December election, some opposition parties claimed that the government was engaged in systematic harassment and intimidation of candidates. A government-aligned newspaper accused Pillay of human trafficking for his alleged abuse of a Sri Lankan employee; Pillay was later questioned and released. The first woman candidate for president, Alexia Amesbury of the Seychelles Party for Social Justice and Democracy (SPSJD), complained of regular intimidation at her home. In the past, the SNP has claimed that its sympathizers face job discrimination in the public sector and harassment by police.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Concerns over government corruption have focused on a lack of transparency in the privatization and allocation of government-owned land, as well as Seychelles' facilitation of international financial transactions. A 2011 report released by the auditor general revealed nearly two decades of dysfunction in government finances, including unprofessional record-keeping, illegal procedures, and embezzlement. The government and senior

political leaders are alleged to provide regulatory cover for foreign individuals and businesses seeking to hide or protect assets from their home governments and conduct illicit financial transfers. Seychelles was ranked 40 out of 168 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 42 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16

The government controls much of the nation's media sector, including the daily *Seychelles Nation* newspaper, the online resource Seychelles News Agency, and the only broadcast television station. Strict libel laws are in place, though they have not been used against journalists in several years. In 2013, the first private commercial radio station, Pure FM, began broadcasting. Several newspapers are in circulation, but most have partisan ties or are government-run. The government can restrict the broadcast of material considered to be objectionable. The board of directors of the officially nonpartisan Seychelles Broadcasting Corporation includes several non-PL members, though coverage is biased in favor of the ruling party. A political activist who hosted an online television show reported receiving death threats in 2015.

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and largely respected in practice. Churches in this predominantly Roman Catholic country have been strong voices for human rights and democratization, and they generally function without government interference. Smaller religious groups are afforded fewer broadcast opportunities on state radio, and non-Catholic students can be discriminated against in school.

Academic freedom is respected, though PL loyalists are reportedly favored in high-level academic appointments. There are few constraints on open and free private discussion. However, in the past individuals have sometimes been threatened, attacked, or briefly detained for posting antigovernment comments on blogs and social media.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12

Despite constitutional protections, the freedoms of assembly and association are somewhat restricted in practice. The government occasionally impedes opposition gatherings. In July 2015, the Constitutional Court found that many sections of the 2013 Public Order Act were unconstitutional, including tight restrictions on public assemblies, the president's authority to impose curfews, and a provision allowing police to seize camera footage of law enforcement activities. The National Assembly replaced the law with a new Public Assembly Act in October. Although less restrictive, the revised legislation requires five days' notice to police before public gatherings, and allows the police commissioner to impose conditions on the venue or timing and to halt an assembly in the interest of defense, public safety, public morality, or public health. Organizers can appeal such decisions to the chief justice.

Human rights groups and other nongovernmental organizations operate in the country. Workers have the right to strike, but only if all other arbitration procedures have been exhausted; foreign workers who go on strike are subject to deportation. Collective bargaining is rare in practice.

F. Rule of Law: 11 / 16

The judiciary is generally independent, but judges sometimes face interference in cases involving major commercial or political interests. Due to the low number of legal professionals in Seychelles, the country brings in expatriate judges to serve fixed-term contracts

on the Supreme Court. Contract renewal has the potential to compromise the impartiality of the non-Seychellois magistrates. In August 2015, a Seychellois citizen took office as chief justice of the Supreme Court, replacing a Ugandan national who had served for five years.

Security forces have at times been accused of excessive force and other abuses, including torture and arbitrary detention. Prolonged pretrial detention and overcrowding in prisons are common, though the British Commonwealth is assisting with case backlogs, and the government in May 2015 announced a fast-track mechanism to deal with traffic and environmental offenses. Pretrial detainees account for approximately 15 percent of the prison population.

In 2011, the country modified its laws to allow pirates captured anywhere in the world to be prosecuted in Seychelles. For several years, the European Union (EU) has transferred suspected Somali pirates to the country for prosecution, leading to a number of high-profile sentences. This process continued in 2015, though not all cases resulted in conviction.

Sexual relations between men remained illegal at the end of 2015. However, a 2006 amendment to the Employment Act prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, and Seychelles pledged in 2011 that it would decriminalize same-sex sexual activity. The issue was still under consideration in 2015.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 11 / 16

The government does not restrict domestic travel but may deny passports for unspecified reasons based on “national interest.” While property rights are generally respected, the country’s economic life has historically been dominated by people of European and South Asian origin.

Seychelles, which has no gender quota system, has one of the world’s highest percentages of female lawmakers: 14 women were elected to the legislature in 2011, and 25 percent of the cabinet consists of women. Gender discrimination in employment is illegal, and women hold more than half of public service positions. Inheritance laws do not discriminate against women. However, rape and domestic violence remain significant problems, with most incidents apparently going unreported or unpunished.

Seychellois children and some foreign migrants are vulnerable to sex trafficking in the country. Foreign workers, who make up about a fifth of the workforce, can face exploitative conditions in the construction and fishing industries. The government does not actively enforce antitrafficking laws.

Sierra Leone

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 6,502,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Freetown

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	2,3,F	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leone experienced significant strain related to the Ebola epidemic in 2015. The government continued to employ aggressive tactics to control the spread of the disease, including lockdowns, curfews, and collective quarantines. Independent observers expressed concern about the effects of such tactics on civil liberties as well as on communities' trust in and cooperation with the government.

Corruption remained a prevalent problem despite some efforts to combat abuses by public officials. The Sierra Leone Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has been criticized for its poor prosecutorial record, especially in trials involving President Ernest Bai Koroma's friends, family, and political allies. The commission did, however, initiate a number of investigations into high-level corruption in 2015, particularly into malfeasance in public procurement.

The Koroma administration continued to suppress media freedoms through onerous libel and sedition laws during the year. Some critics allege that the government has used state of emergency powers to suppress dissent during the public health crisis.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 28 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12

Of the unicameral Parliament's 124 members, 112 are chosen by popular vote, and 12 seats are reserved for indirectly elected paramount chiefs. Parliamentary and presidential elections are held every five years, and presidents may seek a second term. Koroma, the candidate of the All People's Congress (APC) party, was reelected with 59 percent of the vote in 2012; the opposition candidate of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), former military ruler Julius Maada Bio, secured 37 percent. In concurrent parliamentary elections, the APC increased its majority from 59 to 67 seats, and the SLPP won 42 seats; three seats were left vacant and filled in later by-elections.

The SLPP refused to accept the results of the 2012 elections and filed a petition alleging numerous voting irregularities. Koroma and Bio later issued a joint statement recognizing the APC's victory, and reversing the SLPP's earlier threat of a government boycott. International observers determined that both the presidential and parliamentary elections were free and fair, and they were widely considered a milestone for the consolidation of peace in the country.

Since the 1991–2002 civil war, Sierra Leone has progressed toward increasing fairness and transparency in its electoral process. Sierra Leone implemented its first biometric voter registration system in advance of the 2012 polls. The Political Parties Registration Commission, created in 2002, trained and deployed monitors throughout the country and publicized violations of electoral laws committed by both the APC and SLPP.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16

The APC and SLPP are the main political parties. Minor players include the People's Movement for Democratic Change, the National Democratic Alliance, and the United Democratic Movement. The All Political Parties Women's Association and the All Political Parties Youth Association, which became operational in 2011, play important roles in promoting peaceful electoral campaigning, dialogue, and participation.

Cohesion within the SLPP has deteriorated since the 2012 elections. As of 2015, the party consisted of two main camps, with the majority of partisans supporting the party's executive council, and a minority supporting Bio. Division within the SLPP has benefited

the APC, which achieved overwhelming victories in parliamentary bye-elections in 2015, including in districts traditionally considered SLPP strongholds.

Since its electoral victory in 2012, the ruling APC has steadily centralized power within its ranks. In March, Koroma removed Samuel Sam-Sumana from the post of vice president amid allegations by the APC leadership that Sam-Sumana instigated political unrest in his home district of Kono and was attempting to form a new political party. Victor Bockarie Foh, former diplomat and a party loyalist, replaced him. In April, Sam-Sumana challenged the constitutionality of his dismissal, which many critics viewed as a move by Koroma to consolidate power. The Supreme Court upheld the president's decision in September.

Tensions between opposition forces and state security continued to escalate in 2015. In April, police stormed the SLPP office in Kenema, reportedly in the interest of suppressing an antigovernment protest. Similar incidents had occurred in 2014. In June of that year, police stormed SLPP offices in Freetown, destroying property and beating party members. The following September, a confrontation between police officers and the SLPP chairman in the district of Kailahun escalated into a riot, which police dispersed with tear gas.

Ethnic and religious minorities typically enjoy full political rights and electoral opportunities.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Corruption remains a pervasive problem at every level of government. Sierra Leone ranked 119 out of 168 countries and territories in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. In November 2015, Transparency International released the latest Africa edition of its Global Corruption Barometer, noting that perceptions of corruption in Sierra Leone are among the highest on the continent.

High-level corruption falls under the purview of the ACC and the office of the auditor general. In February, the auditor general reported that the government could not account for a large portion of funds allocated to combatting Ebola, prompting the ACC to launch an investigation within days. Over the course of the year, the ACC initiated additional inquiries into government procurement practices and several ministries over other suspected abuses. The media widely publicized these investigations, which some perceived as a signal of the ACC's ability to function independently. However, the commission has faced criticism for botched investigations and unsuccessful prosecutions, especially in trials involving the president's friends, family, and allies.

Sierra Leone was suspended from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2013 for failure to account for royalty and tax irregularities in its contracts with international mining companies. The government subsequently took steps to increase transparency in these areas, including by reviewing and making public all mining and lease agreements. Sierra Leone was deemed compliant with EITI standards in April 2014, and retained this designation in 2015.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 37 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

Freedoms of speech and the press are constitutionally guaranteed but sometimes violated in practice. The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) was officially launched as the independent national broadcaster in 2010. Numerous independent newspapers circulate freely, and there are dozens of public and private radio and television outlets. The government does not restrict access to the internet, though penetration remains low.

Public officials continue to employ the country's antiquated libel and sedition laws to target journalists, activists, and members of the general public. In April 2015, police arrested a private individual on defamation charges for forwarding a message on the WhatsApp platform that contained a negative comment about Koroma. Also in April, another individual was sentenced to six months in prison for allegedly insulting the president in public. Similar abuses had also occurred in 2014. In August of that year, police arrested a journalist working for the biweekly *Politico* on contempt charges. The arrest was connected to an article in the newspaper that criticized the judiciary for delaying the trial of soldiers accused of mutiny. The journalist was released the next day. In November, police detained a well-known local radio journalist due to his call for open and critical discussion of the government's handling of the Ebola epidemic.

Critics allege that the government has used its state of emergency powers to suppress dissent during the public health crisis. In a statement released in April 2015, the Sierra Leone Human Rights Commission accused the police of allowing some groups to assemble and express their views while prohibiting others.

Freedom of religion is protected by the constitution and respected in practice, and Sierra Leone has been praised by the United Nations and other organizations for its culture of tolerance across ethnic and religious divides. Interreligious marriage is common, and many Sierra Leoneans practice Christianity and Islam simultaneously. Koroma, a Christian, was elected by an electorate that is roughly 70 percent Muslim. Religious leaders were among the many groups in Sierra Leone to criticize the administration's slow response to the Ebola crisis, but there is no evidence that the denunciations provoked a government backlash.

Academic freedom is generally upheld, and private discussion is largely open.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed and generally observed. However, these freedoms have been restricted under a protracted state of emergency. Human rights groups have expressed concern about politically motivated and discriminatory enforcement of emergency provisions, particularly of a ban on public gatherings. In April 2015, police used tear gas to disperse a group in Kenema that was peacefully protesting Sam-Sumana's dismissal. According to a report released by Amnesty International in November 2015, police forces fired teargas directly into the crowd and used canes to beat participants. Also in April, at least 10 SLPP supporters were arrested for violating the ban on public gatherings following a peaceful march outside the U.S. embassy in Freetown. Civil liberty activists accused the police of turning a blind eye to ruling party supporters, who organized public meetings and marches without interference in 2015. Separately, in August, public discontent with the government's failure to combat sexual and gender-based violence sparked protests in Freetown.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civic groups operate freely, though a 2008 law requires NGOs to submit annual activity reports and renew registration every two years. While workers have the right to join independent trade unions, violations of labor standards occur regularly. Protests are common, as workers have limited means to pursue redress through the judicial process. They frequently escalate into violence at the hands of the police.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16

The judiciary has demonstrated a degree of independence and professional conduct in recent years. However, corruption, poor salaries, a lack of resources, police unprofessionalism, and prison overcrowding continue to impede judicial effectiveness. In a public opinion

survey conducted by the ACC and released in July 2014, 60 percent of respondents ranked the police as the most corrupt institution in the country.

The police have been accused of politically motivated arrests. In December 2015, officers arrested Alie Kabba, an outspoken opposition politician expected to run for the presidency in 2017, and charged him with bigamy following allegations from his former wife, a government minister. Critics noted that many Sierra Leoneans view polygamy as culturally acceptable, and alleged that Kabba was arrested for political reasons.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone, a hybrid international and domestic war crimes tribunal, has been working since 2004 to convict those responsible for large-scale human rights abuses during the civil war. In 2012, the court convicted former Liberian president Charles Taylor on 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, sentencing him to 50 years in prison in the United Kingdom (UK). Taylor had been accused of fostering an insurgency in Sierra Leone and supporting rebel groups that committed grave human rights abuses.

While Sierra Leone's laws increasingly recognize the rights of minority groups, members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community face discrimination and violence. LGBT people are often denied medical services, and there are no laws against hate crimes based on sexual orientation.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

Personal freedoms remained restricted in 2015 under the state of emergency enacted the previous year to curb the spread of Ebola. Most notably, the protracted state of emergency banned public gatherings and imposed a curfew throughout the country, including in regions with no recent cases of Ebola. In April, the government imposed a three-day countrywide lockdown—the third since the start of the epidemic. In addition, authorities continued to implement quarantines of entire communities. Although these measures were intended to control the epidemic, many watchdogs denounced some as excessive, noting that lockdowns and curfews could undermine the wellbeing of many Sierra Leoneans, including by restricting their access to food and other necessities. Critics also warned that expansive restrictions on personal freedoms could fuel distrust and undermine cooperation with authorities.

As the epidemic finally subsided in August, President Koroma lifted many restrictions, including the ban on gatherings and the curfew, but quickly moved to extend the state of emergency. The maneuver was denounced by opposition politicians, who worried the extension would allow security forces to continue to harass critics.

Sierra Leone has attracted an increasing number of international investors in recent years, but has often failed to regulate their activities, exacerbating threats to freedom of residence and property rights. This problem has been especially severe in the lucrative natural resource sector, where reports of economic exploitation are common. In February 2014, Human Rights Watch released a report documenting the forcible relocation of hundreds of families by government officials and the London-based mining company African Minerals; the report detailed police abuses, including assault and the use of live ammunition, against individuals who resisted. In November 2015, a high court in the UK began hearing a claim against the company filed by more than 140 individuals affected by the evictions.

Laws passed in 2007 prohibit domestic violence, grant women the right to inherit property, and outlaw forced marriage. Despite these laws and constitutionally guaranteed equality, gender discrimination remains widespread, and female genital mutilation and child

marriage are common. Recent policies in the education sector risk reinforcing norms of gender discrimination and threaten equality of opportunity. In April 2015, the government banned “visibly pregnant” girls from attending school, claiming that their presence would exert a negative influence on their cohort. Reports of sexual and gender-based violence rarely result in conviction, and the police unit responsible for investigating and prosecuting these crimes remains underfunded and understaffed.

Singapore

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 5,541,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Singapore

Freedom Rating: 4.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

General elections held in September 2015 were fully contested, with opposition parties putting forward candidates for all available parliamentary seats for the first time since Singapore’s independence. Social media were an important part of the campaign, but television and other traditional media, which are mostly aligned with the ruling People’s Action Party (PAP), remained more important in shaping voters’ views. Aided by this and other advantages, the PAP won a significant victory, capturing 93 percent of the seats and 70 percent of the popular vote.

Also during the year, the authorities stepped up efforts to suppress critical voices online. Bloggers and website editors faced charges including sedition, defamation, and “wounding religious feelings.”

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 19 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 4 / 12

The president, whose role is largely ceremonial, is elected by popular vote for six-year terms, and a special committee is empowered to vet candidates. The prime minister and cabinet are appointed by the president. The first contested presidential election since 1993 was held in 2011, with all candidates running as independents, in accordance with the constitution. Former deputy prime minister Tony Tan, the PAP-backed candidate, won the race with 35.2 percent of the vote, narrowly defeating three opponents.

The unicameral Parliament elected in 2015 includes 13 members from single-member constituencies and 76 members from Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs), a mechanism intended to foster ethnic minority representation. The top-polling party in each GRC wins all of its three to six seats, which has historically bolstered the majority of the dominant PAP. In recent years, critics—including civil society organizations—have questioned whether the GRC system is really achieving its ostensible aim of ensuring representation

for minorities. As many as 9 additional, nonpartisan members can be appointed to Parliament by the president, and another 9 can come from a national compensatory list meant to ensure a minimum of opposition representation. Members serve five-year terms, with the exception of appointed members, who serve for two and a half years.

Elections are free from irregularities and vote rigging, but the country lacks an independent election authority, and the PAP dominates the political process in practice. It uses legal harassment to deter opposition leaders from seeking office, as well as the redrawing of district boundaries to minimize support for the opposition; the new electoral districts for 2015 were announced just seven weeks before the elections.

As with the most recent elections in 2011, the 2015 campaign featured vigorous, coordinated efforts by opposition parties. In this case, the opposition put forward candidates for all 89 directly elected seats, a first since independence. The largest opposition group, the Workers' Party (WP), ultimately retained the six directly elected seats it had won in 2011, but lost a seat it won in a 2013 by-election. Three compensatory seats were awarded to the opposition to achieve the minimum of nine. The PAP, whose candidates vastly outspent their rivals, took the remaining 83 elected seats, managing to win a higher percentage of the popular vote than in 2011.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 8 / 16

Although opposition parties had been gaining ground until the 2015 elections, their campaigns and activities are constrained by a ban on political films and television programs, the threat of defamation suits, strict regulations on political associations, and the PAP's influence on the media and the courts. In 2015, the registration of a new party—the People's Power Party—was accepted by the authorities. In addition to the WP, other officially recognized parties include the Singapore People's Party (SPP), the Singaporeans First, the Singapore Democratic Party, the National Solidarity Party, the Reform Party, and the Singapore Democratic Alliance.

The PAP has governed without interruption since the British colony of Singapore obtained home rule in 1959, entered the Malaysian Federation in 1963, and gained full independence in 1965. Moreover, the country has had only three prime ministers: Lee Kuan Yew from 1959 to 1990, Goh Chok Tong from 1990 to 2004, and Lee's son Lee Hsien Loong from 2004 to the present. The elder Lee remained influential as "senior minister" during Goh's rule and as "minister mentor" from 2004 to 2011; he was also active as a parliamentarian in 2014 before his death in 2015.

Electoral rules, as well as regulations aimed at preventing ethnic or religious conflict, make it difficult for parties based on ethnic or religious interests to garner support.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Elected officials determine the policies of the government, but the PAP's political and institutional dominance ensures its victory at the polls, and the party leadership maintains discipline among its members. The constitution stipulates that lawmakers lose their seats if they resign or are expelled from the party for which they stood in elections.

Singapore has been lauded for its lack of corruption. The country was ranked 8 out of 168 countries and territories assessed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. However, transparency and accountability remain concerns. Ministers in the government can serve in several capacities simultaneously. Legislators are allowed to and often do serve on the boards of private companies, including as chairpersons, which

creates conflicts of interest. Singapore was the fifth-worst-ranked country in the *Economist's* 2014 “crony-capitalism index,” which aims to measure the degree to which accumulation of private wealth depends on political connections.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 32 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

The government maintains that racial sensitivities and the threat of terrorism justify draconian restrictions on freedoms of speech, but such rules have been used to silence criticism of the authorities. All domestic newspapers, radio stations, and television channels are owned by companies linked to the government. Editorials and news coverage generally support state policies, and self-censorship is common, though newspapers occasionally publish critical content. The Sedition Act, in effect since the colonial period, outlaws seditious speech, the distribution of seditious materials, and acts with “seditious tendency.” Popular videos, music, and books that reference sex, violence, or drugs are also subject to censorship. Foreign broadcasters and periodicals can be restricted for engaging in domestic politics, and all foreign publications must appoint legal representatives and provide significant financial deposits.

The internet is widely accessible, but authorities monitor online material and block some content through directives to licensed service providers. Singaporeans’ increasing use of social media has sparked interest in social activism and opposition parties, contributing to opposition electoral gains. The Media Development Authority requires news websites to apply for individual licenses that are subject to annual renewal, post a financial bond with the regulator, and respond to removal orders within 24 hours. Major websites are prohibited from “advocating homosexuality or lesbianism.”

Bloggers increasingly risk civil suits or criminal charges in connection with their work. Among other cases during 2015, prominent blogger Roy Ngerng Yi Ling was ordered to pay S\$150,000 (US\$111,000) in defamation damages to Prime Minister Lee, as well as at least S\$29,000 in legal fees, after alleging corruption in the management of Singapore’s retirement savings plan in 2014. Another well-known blogger, Alex Au, was fined S\$8,000 (US\$5,800) for contempt of court in connection with 2013 posts that questioned the judiciary’s handling of cases challenging Singapore’s law against sex between men. Blogger Amos Yee, 16, was sentenced in July to four weeks in jail for uploading an allegedly obscene image and making remarks deemed insulting to religion in a video he posted. He was released, having spent more than 50 days in jail before sentencing, but was then ordered to undergo weeks of mental health testing. Two editors of the website The Real Singapore (TRS) were charged with sedition in April over articles that allegedly promoted interethnic hostility; the website was shut down, and the two defendants, Australian national Ai Takagi and her Singaporean husband, Yang Kaiheng, were awaiting trial at year’s end.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion as long as its practice does not violate any other regulations, and most groups worship freely. However, religious actions perceived as threats to racial or religious harmony are not tolerated, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Unification Church are banned. Religious groups are required to register with the government under the 1966 Societies Act. The government forbids the wearing of headscarves (*tudong* in Malay) by women who hold public-sector jobs that require a uniform, though the right of Muslim women to wear headscarves in the workplace more broadly remained a subject of public debate in 2015.

All public universities and political research institutions have direct government links that enable at least some political influence. Academics engage in political debate, but their publications rarely deviate from the government line on matters related to Singapore.

Although private discussion is generally open and free, residents' speech is sometimes impeded—including online—due to the legal restrictions on topics such as race and religion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

Public assemblies, including events involving just one person, must be approved by police. Permits are not needed for indoor gatherings as long as topics of discussion do not relate to race or religion or involve a foreign speaker.

The Societies Act restricts freedom of association by requiring most organizations of more than 10 people to register with the government, and the government enjoys full discretion to register or dissolve such groups. Only registered parties and associations may engage in organized political activity, and political speeches are tightly regulated.

Unions are granted broad rights under the Trade Unions Act, though restrictions include a ban on government employees joining unions. Union members are prohibited from voting on collective agreements negotiated by union representatives and employers. Strikes must be approved by a majority of members, as opposed to the internationally accepted standard of at least 50 percent of the members who vote. In practice, many restrictions are not applied. Nearly all unions are affiliated with the National Trade Union Congress, which is openly allied with the PAP. Workers in essential services are required to give 14 days' notice to an employer before striking.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

The government's overwhelming success in court cases raises questions about judicial independence, particularly because lawsuits against government opponents often drive them into bankruptcy. Defendants in criminal cases enjoy most due process rights. Prisons generally meet international standards.

The Internal Security Act (ISA) and Criminal Law Act (CLA) allow warrantless searches and arrests to preserve national security, order, and the public interest. The ISA, previously aimed at communist threats, is now used against suspected Islamist terrorists. Suspects can be detained without charge or trial for an unlimited number of two-year periods. Over the past two years, Singapore has actively detained individuals accused of planning to travel abroad to join the Islamic State (IS) militant group. A 1989 constitutional amendment prohibits judicial review of the substantive grounds for detention under the ISA and of the constitutionality of the law itself. The CLA is mainly used to detain organized crime suspects; it allows preventive detention for an extendable one-year period.

The Misuse of Drugs Act empowers authorities to commit suspected drug users, without trial, to rehabilitation centers for up to three years. The death penalty applies to drug trafficking as well as murder, although judges may use discretion to impose lighter sentences under some circumstances. The penal code mandates caning, in addition to imprisonment, for about 30 offenses, but the punishment is applied inconsistently. Singapore's highest court, the Court of Appeal, upheld the constitutionality of caning in a March 2015 ruling.

There is no racial discrimination under the law, although ethnic Malays reportedly face de facto discrimination in both private- and public-sector employment. The LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community in Singapore faces significant legal obstacles. Section 377A of the penal code criminalizes consensual sex between adult men, setting a penalty of up to two years in prison. The law is not actively enforced, but the Court of Appeal upheld its constitutionality in 2014. The Pink Dot parade, held annually in support of equal rights for LGBT people since 2009, reportedly drew a record-high attendance of some 28,000 in 2015.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16

Citizens enjoy freedom of movement, though opposition politicians have been denied the right to travel in the past. The government occasionally enforces its policy of ethnic balance in public housing, in which most Singaporeans live.

Women enjoy the same legal rights as men on most issues, and many are well-educated professionals. There are no explicit constitutional guarantees of equal rights for women. Women do not have legal protections against spousal rape except under special circumstances. No laws protect against discrimination on the basis of gender in employment, and few women hold top positions in government or the private sector. A total of 21 women won directly elected seats in the 2015 parliamentary elections.

Singapore's more than 200,000 household workers are excluded from the Employment Act and are regularly exploited. Several high-profile trials of employers in recent years have drawn public attention to the physical abuse of such workers. A 2006 standard contract for foreign household workers addresses the problem of food deprivation and entitles replaced workers to seek other employment in Singapore, but it fails to provide other basic protections and benefits, such as vacation days. A 2013 law requires that new contracts grant household workers one day off per week but allows employers to offer compensation in place of the day off if the worker agrees.

Foreign workers are also vulnerable to exploitation and debt bondage in the sex trade or industries including construction and manufacturing. Withholding of pay and passport confiscation are common methods of coercion. A new law that took effect in March 2015 bans all forms of human trafficking, but the authorities had yet to establish a record of convictions during the year.

Slovakia

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 5,424,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Bratislava

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Slovakia's prime minister, Robert Fico, joined a number of other Central European leaders who responded to Europe's refugee crisis by pushing back against the mandatory resettlement quotas prescribed by the European Union (EU). In December, Slovakia filed a lawsuit with the European Court of Justice, challenging the refugee redistribution scheme.

Domestically, the ruling Direction–Social Democracy (Smer-SD) party maintained its single-party majority in 2015, with opinion polls showing its popularity rising in the latter half of the year as the standoff with the EU continued.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 36 / 40 (– 1)**A. Electoral Process:** 12 / 12

Voters elect the president for up to two five-year terms. Members of the 150-seat, unicameral National Council are elected for four-year terms through nationwide proportional representation. Parties must obtain at least 5 percent of the vote to win seats. The prime minister is appointed by the president but must have majority support in the parliament to govern. The presidency is mostly ceremonial, though the president has the power to name judges to the Constitutional Court, appoints 3 of the Judicial Council's 18 members, may veto legislation, and approves any proposal by the prime minister to recall a member of the government.

Early parliamentary elections in 2012 resulted in a landslide victory for Fico's Smer-SD, which won 83 seats. The two main parties in the outgoing center-right government, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) and the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union–Democratic Party (SDKÚ–DS) captured 16 and 11 seats, respectively. Most-Híd (Bridge), which advocates for better cooperation between the country's ethnic Hungarian minority and ethnic Slovak majority, took 13 seats, and the Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) party won 11 seats. A new party composed of former SaS members, the Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO), secured 16 seats.

Andrej Kiska—an independent candidate without previous political experience—won the presidency in 2014, beating his primary competitor, Fico, by a significant margin.

New electoral legislation came into effect in July 2015 that unified voting procedures across the country, set new campaign spending limits and finance regulations, and prescribed fines for violating election rules. The changes also included a moratorium on campaigning for two days before an election and a ban on publishing opinion poll results for two weeks before the first round of voting. A 14-member committee, appointed with input from political parties and members of the judiciary, will now oversee elections and campaigning.

Slovakia's next parliamentary elections will take place in March 2016.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Slovakia is home to a competitive multiparty system. Since the country joined the European Union in 2004, power has shifted between center-left and center-right coalitions. The left-leaning Smer-SD, then in opposition, won the 2012 parliamentary elections by a margin large enough to form Slovakia's first-ever single-party government.

Relations between Smer-SD and the opposition center-right parties remained confrontational throughout 2015, with the opposition accusing Smer-SD of using its majority to rush through legislation or block other factions' proposals. Analysts interpreted Kiska's landslide victory in the 2014 presidential election as a reflection of growing concern that Fico and Smer-SD—which controls more than half of seats in Slovakia's National Assembly—are developing a monopoly on political power in the country. However, both Fico and his party remained popular throughout 2015. Meanwhile, the popularity of the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS) rose.

Oligarchs, some of whom have ties to the political class in Slovakia, have seen their influence grow in recent years through purchases of large media companies.

Slovakia's first-ever Romany representative, Peter Pollak, was elected to the legislature in 2012 and later became the plenipotentiary for Romany communities, the government's top policy coordinator for the Roma.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12 (– 1)

Corruption remains a problem, most notably in public procurement and the health sector. In late 2014, Pavol Paška resigned as parliamentary speaker over allegations that he had helped to rig public contracts in the health care sector. Paška denies wrongdoing and he appears unlikely to face charges, but most anticorruption groups believe such practices are widespread. In late 2015, a contract worth 25 million (\$27.6 million) for managing ferry transport across the Danube River came under scrutiny over questions about the transparency and fairness of the bidding process.

A full decade since the emergence of the so-called “Gorilla file”—a leaked document concerning government surveillance of allegedly corrupt relationships between politicians and prominent businessmen—prosecutors are still reluctant to confirm the authenticity of the transcripts. In May 2015, special prosecutor Dušan Kováčik twice refused to attend parliamentary committee hearings where he was meant to update deputies on the status of the investigation.

Controversial revisions to Slovakia’s public-procurement rules, adopted in 2013, introduced an electronic marketplace designed to increase competition and transparency in procurements, but included exemptions that would allow ministries and offices to award contracts without a tender process. A nine-member council was established to serve as an appeal body for the Public Procurement Office (ÚVO) to accelerate appeal proceedings and unify ÚVO decision making. The council is headed by the chair and vice chair of ÚVO. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) will nominate candidates to serve as the remaining seven members, who are appointed by the cabinet.

In the wake of a health care procurement scandal involving Paška, the parliament drafted more revisions to the public-procurement law in 2014 and 2015 intended to bar shell companies from involvement in the public procurement process. Critics in the opposition claimed that the legislation is still too easy for such companies to circumvent. In December, Kiska returned the bill to parliament for further consideration.

Legislation is frequently passed with little opportunity for public discussion. Statements and recommendations of Slovakia’s human rights ombudswoman, Jana Dubovcová, rarely receive close consideration by the government; fewer than a dozen parliamentary deputies attended the presentation of her 2014 annual report. Her November 2015 report about unlawful police practices was not approved by a parliamentary committee on human rights and ethnic minorities.

According to Transparency International, many state-owned companies still do not publish even basic information, such as annual reports. Slovakia was ranked 50 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16**

Freedoms of speech and the press are protected by the constitution, but media outlets sometimes face political interference. Journalists continue to encounter verbal attacks and libel suits by public officials. In general, government relations with the independent and opposition media are tense. In May 2015, opposition-oriented daily *Denník N* ran an appendix of cartoon stickers that lampooned Prime Minister Fico and portrayed him as a thief. In retaliation, the prime minister’s entire cabinet declared that they would no longer respond to questions from *Denník N* journalists. The same week, two *Denník N* reporters who were

supposed to have traveled to Russia with Fico had their accreditations revoked by the cabinet.

Under the criminal code, persons convicted of libel can face up to eight years in prison. Though no journalists have been imprisoned in recent years, courts have awarded inappropriately high compensations to public officials in such suits. In early 2015, Milan Kňažko, who unsuccessfully ran for mayor of Bratislava in 2014, launched a defamation suit against the publisher of the *Týždeň* weekly, demanding an apology and 100,000 (\$112,000) in damages over a pair of critical articles the paper had published ahead of the election. Separately, recent years have seen a number of media buyouts by prominent Slovak individuals and firms. The government does not restrict internet access.

The government respects religious freedom in this largely Roman Catholic country. Registered religious organizations are eligible for tax exemptions and government subsidies. However, religious groups must have at least 20,000 members to register, effectively preventing the small Muslim community and other groups from claiming government benefits. Academic freedom is respected. Outside of restrictions on what the government deems to be extremist speech, people are free to engage in private discussions without fear of punishment.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Authorities uphold freedom of assembly and association. NGOs generally operate without government interference. Labor unions are active, and organized workers freely exercise their right to strike.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary. However, the court system continues to suffer from corruption and a significant backlog, and public trust in the judiciary is low.

In 2014, then-Supreme Court chairman and Judicial Council head Štefan Harabin, an ally of Smer-SD, lost reelection to his dual post, but stayed on as a judge on the high court. Throughout his tenure, he had been accused of cronyism and intimidation in the selection and appointment of judges. In 2015, Supreme Court President Daniela Švecová sought Harabin's ouster, in her third attempt to bring disciplinary action against him, but the panel of judges assigned with evaluating the charges did not rule on his dismissal in the allotted time.

A 2014 constitutional amendment introduced new screening procedures for judges, including background checks conducted by the National Security Office (NBÚ) with Judicial Council oversight. Critics denounced the new procedure as a potential channel for political influence on the selection of judges and a threat to their public accountability. In the second half of 2015, the first two rounds of judicial candidates screened by the NBÚ were submitted to the Judicial Council for approval.

Prison conditions in Slovakia meet most international standards, but overcrowding remains a concern. NGOs and members of the Romany community report that Romany suspects are often mistreated by police during arrest and in custody.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people continue to report discrimination. A 2014 constitutional amendment defines marriage as a union of a man and a woman, effectively banning same-sex unions and adoptions. In February 2015, a referendum intended to cement these changes was held as a result of an energetic campaign by the Alliance for Family, an umbrella organization linked to over 100 conservative and religious

groups. More than 90 percent of referendum participants voted in favor of constitutionally limiting marriage and adoption to heterosexual couples, but turnout was so low that the referendum failed. Slovakia does not allow same-sex couples to register as partners.

Minority groups in Slovakia—including sizable Hungarian and Romany populations—have the right to develop their own culture, the right to information and education in their mother tongue, and the right to use their language in official communication. Nevertheless, some groups—most notably the Roma—experience widespread discrimination. The Roma have reported forced evictions and de facto segregation of Romany children in schools. A 2015 report by the United Nations Committee against Torture (UNCAT) expressed concern about cases of excessive use of force by police against Roma, including minors, noting that investigations into allegations of such ill-treatment are carried out by a department within the Interior Ministry—the same body that employs and supervises the alleged perpetrators. The UNCAT report noted that no charges have been brought against the police officers who participated in a violent 2013 raid on a Roma settlement in the Košice region.

In February 2015, policemen accused of physically abusing six Roma juveniles in Košice in 2009 were acquitted after a district court refused to admit as evidence a video appearing to show the incriminating acts.

The governor of the Banská Bystrica self-governing region, Marian Kotleba, is the head of the extremist People's Party—Our Slovakia (L'SNS). When the Ministry of Foreign Affairs allocated about 7,000 (\$1,100) in 2015 to a local theater project aimed at educating high school students in tolerance of minorities, Kotleba refused to accept the allocation. The project ultimately received funding from other sources, but the governor still insisted that it should be rescheduled outside of school hours to make time for a regional beauty pageant. In November, L'SNS filed a criminal complaint against a World War II remembrance organization for publishing the memoirs of a woman who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust. The woman was a member of a Jewish defense organization founded by Zionists; Zionism, says L'SNS, is an ideology that suppresses human rights.

In a televised debate in November, Prime Minister Fico blamed recent terrorist attacks in Paris on Europe's ongoing refugee crisis, characterizing the influx of Muslim migrants as a threat to European security. Fico added that Slovak citizens' security is more important than the rights of migrants and that his government will "monitor every single Muslim in Slovakia." Slovak police searched several hotels and guesthouses that month, apparently looking for illegal migrants. A September 2015 report from the ombudswoman's office criticized police for conducting violent searches of refugees earlier that month at the Medvedov refugee camp. Also in September, L'SNS organized a protest against the placement of asylum seekers in Gabčíkovo, a town on Slovakia's Hungarian border, where a local referendum had been held on the issue. In the vote, 97 percent of participating residents had backed keeping the migrants out. Police broke up the demonstration.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

The government respects the freedom of movement and does not arbitrarily interfere with citizens' rights to own property, establish private businesses, or freely choose their residence, employment, and educational institution.

Although women enjoy the same legal rights as men, they continue to be underrepresented in senior-level government and business positions. Currently, 20 percent of parliamentary deputies are women. Domestic violence is punishable by imprisonment but remains widespread. The U.S. State Department's 2015 Human Trafficking Report found

that the Slovak government complies with international standards for combatting human trafficking, but noted that certain populations, including the Romany community, were particularly vulnerable to trafficking in Slovakia.

Slovenia

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 2,064,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Ljubljana

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,

INTRODUCTION

In April 2015, the Constitutional Court ruled that the trial of former prime minister Janez Janša, who in 2013 was convicted of accepting bribes from the Finnish defense company Patria, had been unfair and ordered a retrial. In September, the court announced that the statute of limitations for the case had expired. Janša, who had spent several months in jail, appealed, reportedly seeking a new trial so that he could seek damages for wrongful imprisonment. Legal proceedings against journalist Anuška Delić, who had faced allegations of disclosing classified information in a case that had prompted condemnation from media freedom advocates, were dropped in April. Separately, in December, 63 percent of voters rejected a measure that would have permitted same-sex marriage and adoptions.

A two-decade border dispute with Croatia—which concerns the delineation of the countries' maritime border in the Bay of Piran and parts of their common territorial border—made headlines in July when the Croatian newspaper *Večerni list* published claims that a Slovenian member of an international arbitration panel on the issue had shared information about the panel's private discussions with a representative of the Slovenian foreign ministry. The Slovenian side initially denied involvement in the so-called Pirangate affair, but conceded after *Večerni list* published a transcript of a conversation between the parties. Croatia subsequently withdrew from the arbitration agreement, but the process resumed later in the year under newly appointed arbiters.

Slovenia was heavily impacted by Europe's 2015 refugee crisis, and became a transit country after Hungary closed its border with Croatia in October. In November, amid concerns that Austria might close its borders, Slovenia began building a barbed-wire fence on its border with Croatia to limit the flow of refugees and migrants, prompting protests.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 39 / 40 (+1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Slovenia has a bicameral legislature. Members of the 90-seat National Assembly (Državni Zbor) are elected to four-year terms and have the power to elect the prime minister.

Members of the 40-seat National Council (Državni Svet), a largely advisory body representing professional groups and local interests, are elected to five-year terms. The president is directly elected for up to two five-year terms.

In early parliamentary elections held in 2014, Stranka Mira Cerarja (SMC) won with 35 percent of the vote, taking 36 seats. The center-right Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), led by Janša, took 21 seats, making it the leading opposition party. The Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS) took 10 seats, the United Left Alliance (ZL) and the Social Democrats (SD) each captured 6, New Slovenia–Christian Democrats (NSi) took 5, and the Alliance of Alenka Bratušek (ZaAB) took 4. Two seats were allocated to representatives of ethnic minorities. Following the polls, the parliament approved a three-party coalition comprised of the governing SMC, DeSUS, and SD.

In a presidential runoff in 2012, the former prime minister and head of the SD party Borut Pahor defeated incumbent Danilo Türk with 67 percent of the vote to Türk's 33 percent.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16 (+ 1)

A number of political parties compete for power in Slovenia. In the 2014 parliamentary elections, 17 parties took part, including several that had formed that year. In addition to the SMC, the newcomers included the ZL, ZaAB, Verjamem, and the Slovenian Pirate Party (PSS). Meanwhile, the former majority Positive Slovenia (PS) lost all 28 of its seats in the legislature.

All citizens enjoy full political rights and electoral opportunities. In the National Assembly, one seat each is reserved for Slovenia's Hungarian and Italian minorities. Roma are automatically given seats on 20 municipal councils.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12

Corruption is less prevalent in Slovenia than in many of its neighbors, and it usually takes the form of conflicts of interest involving contracts between government officials and private businesses. Proceedings surrounding one high-profile case, involving claims that former prime minister Janša had accepted bribes from the Finnish defense company Patria, continued in 2015. Janša had been found guilty in 2013 of having accepting the alleged bribes in a 2006 arms deal with Patria, during his first term as prime minister. He began serving a two-year sentence in 2014 but was granted a temporary injunction that December. In April 2015, the Constitutional Court reversed a previous judgment in the Patria case, saying Janša had not received a fair trial, and ordered a retrial. In September, a court announced that the statute of limitations for the case had expired, following which Janša—who reportedly sought a retrial so that he might later claim damages for wrongful imprisonment—appealed. There have yet to be any convictions in the long-running Patria case.

Slovenia was ranked 35 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

Freedoms of speech and the press are constitutionally guaranteed, but journalists can be legally compelled to reveal their sources, and hate speech is outlawed. Defamation remains a criminal offense, though a July 2015 law amended the defamation statute so that so that officials may no longer bring defamation cases through the state prosecutor, and

instead must pursue such claims as private citizens. The government maintains stakes in a number of media outlets and has been known to interfere in the operations of the public broadcaster, Radio Televizija Slovenija. Internet access is unrestricted.

Delić, a journalist for the daily *Delo*, was indicted in 2013 for disseminating information classified by the Slovenian intelligence services in connection with 2011 articles in which she alleged links between the SDS and a neo-Nazi organization. The public prosecutor announced in April 2015 that the charges against her were dropped, but at the same time claimed that Delić was nevertheless guilty.

The Slovenian constitution guarantees freedom of religion and contains provisions that prohibit inciting religious intolerance or discrimination. Most residents of Slovenia are Christian. About 2 percent are Muslim; there were no major cases of interfaith conflict in 2015. After a decades-long struggle to build a mosque in Ljubljana, a groundbreaking ceremony was held in 2013; the project was ongoing in 2015.

There were no reports of government restrictions on academic freedom during the year.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The government respects freedoms of assembly and association. Numerous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate freely and play a role in policymaking.

Workers may establish and join trade unions, strike, and bargain collectively. The Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia has some 300,000 members and controls the four trade union seats in the National Council.

F. Rule of Law: 14 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the government respects it in practice. Although court backlogs have decreased, they remain a problem. Prison conditions meet international standards, though overcrowding has been reported.

In 2014, the country began a national compensation scheme of approximately 19.7 million (\$22.4 million) for the so-called “erased.” This group is comprised of more 25,000 non-Slovene citizens, mostly from other constituent republics within the former Yugoslavia, who remained in Slovenia after independence and were removed from official records after they failed to apply for citizenship or permanent residency during a brief window in 1992. In 2012, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that the “erasures” were human rights violations and ordered Slovenia to pay compensation to the victims. Thousands of cases have since been approved for payment. In 2009, Pahor’s government began enforcing a 2003 Constitutional Court ruling intended to provide retroactive permanent residency status to those who had been erased. Legislation adopted in 2010 reinstated the legal status of those erased in 1992, but implementation has been problematic.

Roma face widespread poverty and societal marginalization. While there are legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation, discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people is common.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Citizens enjoy the right to choose their residence, employment, and institution of higher education. Slovenia does not limit citizens’ freedom to move domestically or internationally. However, in November 2015, amid concerns that Austria might close its borders, Slovenia began building a barbed-wire fence on its border with Croatia to limit the flow of refugees and migrants into the country. The move prompted protests from civil society.

According to official statistics, the unemployment rate is around 12 percent. Much of the economy remains state controlled.

Women hold the same legal rights as men, but they are underrepresented in political life and face discrimination in the workplace. Following the 2014 parliamentary elections, there were 32 women in the National Assembly and 3 in the National Council. In a December 2015 referendum, 63 percent of voters rejected a proposal that would have permitted same-sex couples to marry and adopt children. Voter turnout was low, at about 36 percent.

Domestic violence is illegal, but remains a concern in practice. Prostitution has been decriminalized in Slovenia. Men from other countries in Central and Eastern Europe can be found engaged in forced begging in Slovenia. Women and children from Slovenia and elsewhere are subject to forced prostitution. However, authorities actively prosecute suspected human traffickers and work to identify victims.

Solomon Islands

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 641,900

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Honiara

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

Following elections in November 2014, Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare named nearly 40 political appointees to his new government in January 2015, up from 14 in the previous administration. Opposition critics said the appointments would impose a heavy burden—roughly \$12 million annually—on taxpayers amid a struggling economy. Subsequent decisions by the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission to grant tax-free salaries and other improved benefits to lawmakers further fueled public frustration with the government.

By October, Sogavare was struggling to stay in power as a number of ministers and lawmakers withdrew from his coalition. Police went on high alert to prevent any political unrest, but a no-confidence motion against the government was withdrawn at the end of the month after Sogavare secured the support of several independent members of Parliament.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 25 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

Members of the 50-seat, unicameral National Parliament are elected for four-year terms. A parliamentary majority elects the prime minister. The National Parliament also selects a governor general for a five-year term. He represents the British monarch as head of state and appoints the cabinet on the advice of the prime minister. In May 2014, Sir Frank Kabui won a second term as governor general.

The parliamentary elections in 2014 were considered a significant improvement over previous years' balloting, with largely peaceful and orderly conduct at the polling stations,

though allegations of vote buying persisted. Independent candidates dominated the voting, taking a record 32 seats. The Democratic Alliance Party won 7, followed by the United Democratic Party with 5, the People's Alliance Party with 3, and three smaller parties with 1 each. Parliament elected Sogavare, who had served as prime minister on two previous occasions, to lead the new government.

A new voter roll prepared with biometric technology had a positive impact on the 2014 elections. Nearly 90 percent of registered voters participated, up from 52 percent in the 2010 elections, and the results were accepted by candidates and voters. Flawed voter rolls, bribery allegations, fraudulent ballots, ballot box theft, voter intimidation, and violence had marred previous polls.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

There are several political parties, but alliances are driven more by personal ties and clan identities than formal policy platforms or ideology. Frequent changing of party affiliations has a destabilizing effect on government. In May 2014, Parliament approved a revised Political Parties Integrity Act with the aim of encouraging a stronger party system through more formalized registration mechanisms, though proposals that would have restricted party switching were dropped. The courts rejected complaints from the opposition that some elements of the new law were unconstitutional. The defections from Sogavare's coalition in late 2015 indicated that the law had not achieved its goals, spurring calls for further reform.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

Corruption and abuse of office are serious problems, and many public officials have faced charges over the years. In January 2015, the chief justice openly urged the new government to fight corruption and stop the appointment of "cronies" to key positions. An auditor general's report released that month found that at least \$8.6 million in government funds from fiscal years 2012 and 2013 were unaccounted for. In March and April, the Leadership Code Commission, which investigates allegations of misconduct by lawmakers, charged a former finance minister and a former mining minister with official misconduct involving conflicts of interest.

The new government said it would form a new policy-monitoring unit to improve government performance, but anticorruption groups noted that the unit would be staffed by expensive political appointees. Critics have also pointed to a lack of oversight regarding implementation of the Constituency Development Funds Act of 2013, which permits lawmakers to spend special funds at their discretion to improve conditions in their districts.

Public pressure in 2013 forced the government to withdraw a bill that would have given former prime ministers and their surviving spouses monthly pensions, free housing, free health care, a service staff, and other benefits. However, in April 2015 the Parliamentary Entitlements Commission granted lifetime pension payments to all lawmakers and higher rates to those who would have already received them, as well as tax-free status on lawmakers' salaries and terminal grants when they leave office. The new benefits drew strong public criticism given the size of the national debt, high unemployment, and other spending needs.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 43 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

Freedoms of expression and of the press are generally respected, but politicians and elites sometimes use legal and extralegal means to intimidate journalists. There are several print newspapers. The government operates a national radio station, and subnational and

private radio stations are also available. Subscription television services offer some local content, but the country has been unable to sustain a local free-to-air television station; plans for the national radio broadcaster to create a television service were under discussion in 2015. Internet penetration has grown, reaching about 10 percent in 2015, but access is limited by high costs and lack of infrastructure, particularly in rural areas.

Freedom of religion is generally respected, as is academic freedom. There are few significant constraints on open and free private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, and the government generally recognizes this right in practice. Organizers of demonstrations must obtain permits, which are typically granted. Civil society groups operate without interference.

Workers are free to organize, and strikes are permitted with certain restrictions. Laws against antiunion discrimination by employers are reportedly ineffective. The country's main labor union, the Solomon Islands National Union of Workers, was disbanded by court order in late 2013 after lengthy litigation over an illegal strike by plantation workers. However, labor activists registered a new entity, the Workers Union of Solomon Islands, in 2014.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16

Lack of resources limits provision of legal counsel and hinders conduct of timely trials. The same problem plagues the Ombudsman's Office in its investigation of official abuse and corruption.

The police force has historically lacked training, suffered from factional and ethnic rivalries, and drawn accusations of brutality. The police were disarmed in 2003 because of involvement in criminal activity as well as violence between the two dominant ethnic groups in 1998–2003. The military component of the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI), which was organized to restore peace, withdrew from the country in 2013. A police mission from Australia, New Zealand, and other Pacific Island countries will remain through 2017 to train and support the local police in an advisory role. Government payments to former militants, ostensibly as part of a rehabilitation program, remained a matter of public controversy at the end of 2015.

In addition to lingering tensions among local ethnic groups, a growing Chinese presence in the country's economy has led to public resentment in recent years.

Same-sex sexual activity can be punished with up to 14 years in prison. While cases are reportedly rare, the government has resisted international pressure to decriminalize such activity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16

There are few significant impediments to freedom of movement, and property rights are generally respected.

Discrimination limits economic and political opportunities for women. Many lawmakers have voiced support for increasing women's participation in the National Parliament, including through reserved seats for women; just one woman won a seat in the 2014 elections. Rape and other forms of violence against women and girls are serious problems. A women's shelter reported in November 2015 that it was overwhelmed by demand for its services. In 2014, legislators passed the Family Protection Act, which criminalized various forms of domestic abuse and provided victim-protection mechanisms, but it had yet to be promulgated at the end of 2015.

Local and foreign women and children are vulnerable to sex trafficking and domestic servitude, including through forced marriages or “adoptions” to pay off debts. Migrant workers sometimes face forced labor in the mining, logging, and fishing industries. The country is not a party to the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

Somalia

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 10,806,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Capital: Mogadishu

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Somaliland, which is examined in a separate report.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Somalia was plagued by much of the same political and security pitfalls that have characterized the country for the last quarter century. The government continued its halting progress toward transition in 2016, when the current administration’s mandate expires. Critical transition-related legislation was largely ignored as lawmakers wrestled over an impeachment motion against the president. In July, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud announced that national elections planned for 2016 would not be contested under a one-person, one-vote system. Despite broad skepticism, the administration and its international partners had previously remained publicly committed to holding national elections in 2016, as well as a constitutional referendum in 2015. In December, the government and its international partners held a National Consultative Forum to discuss transition options for 2016.

The Shabaab, an extremist group that once controlled most of southern Somalia, remained an active presence in the country despite significant gains made by the combined efforts of the Somali army and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). In March, Shabaab fighters took siege of the Makka al-Mukarama Hotel in Mogadishu for more than 12 hours, killing at least 21 people. In September, the Shabaab targeted an AMISOM base 55 miles southwest of Mogadishu, killing dozens. The group also attacked another Mogadishu hotel, the Sahafi Hotel, in November, killing at least six people. In December, the Shabaab executed five men accused of assisting U.S. intelligence.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 0 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

Following the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, the Somali state had largely ceased to exist and had no governing authority. In September 2012, Somalia established a

new government and drafted a provisional constitution in an attempt to usher in the country's first permanent government in more than 20 years. The constitution established a 275-member House of the People (HOP), with members to be directly elected to four-year terms. Because direct elections could not be held in 2012, Somali traditional elders appointed provisional members to the HOP. The provisional legislature then elected Mohamud to a four-year term. An Upper House of Parliament, which would have 54 members, has yet to be formed. The final communique of the December 2015 National Consultative Forum committed to forming the Upper House during the 2016 transition. The provisional constitution outlines the expectation that women be included in all branches of government and includes a nondiscrimination clause that specifically mentions women.

After dismissing two prime ministers in as many years, Mohamud appointed Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, then Somali ambassador to the United States, to the role in December 2014. Sharmarke previously served as prime minister during the Transitional Federal Government.

Mandates for the current administration and for parliament end in August 2016. The central government acknowledged in July that the security situation will make it impossible to organize a one-person, one-vote election. An alternative transition mechanism has yet to be determined.

In August, 115 lawmakers leveled a motion of no-confidence against Mohamud, citing incompetence and calling for his impeachment. Speaker of Parliament Mohamed Sheikh Osman Jawari dropped the motion in September on the grounds that the dispute with the president could instead be resolved through negotiations.

The 2012 provisional constitution calls for the establishment of a series of federal member states on the subnational level. Though progress was made toward establishing these states throughout the country, the administration struggled to maintain good relations with newly formed administrations in Puntland, Jubbaland, South West State, and Central Regions State. Relations between Puntland and the government in Mogadishu wavered as the regional administration threatened to cut ties with the central government over border disputes in the newly created Central Regions State. In July, Prime Minister Sharmarke traveled to Puntland for negotiations with the administration. Following a week of meetings, the two governments signed a cooperation agreement, committing to the provisional constitution and support for federalism and national unity. Also participating in the negotiations were representatives from Jubbaland, which was also at odds with the central government.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

No effective or legally recognized political parties currently exist. The current political process is largely driven by clans: traditional kinship networks that are the pillars of Somali social and political organization. The four largest clans—Darod, Dir, Hawiye, and Digil-Mirifle—exercise outsized influence.

The provisional constitution calls for the creation of legislation governing the administration of elections and creation of political parties. A special parliamentary sub-committee has drafted legislation to create regulations for a political party system, but the draft has been awaiting approval for several months. Among the considerations that faced the sub-committee was whether political parties can be formed on the basis of clan identity.

Representation in nearly all government bodies, parliament included, is determined by the so-called 4.5 formula, a quota system under which the four majority clans each receive 61 delegates while the remaining minority clans receive 31 delegates combined. Critics of the formula point out that it codifies the dominant role of majority clans in the political

system. The process by which clan leaders doled out parliamentary seats in 2012 was opaque and reportedly rife with bribery and nepotism. Under the agreement signed at the National Consultative Forum, Somali leaders vowed to develop a mixed electoral process, where some regions allow clan leaders to select government representatives, while others are selected by district representatives.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

Although the new parliament was highly regarded when it took power in 2012, lack of member commitment and political infighting have stifled its effectiveness. The parliament has largely been a platform for squabbling between rival political and clan factions.

Corruption is rampant in Somalia. Although Somali auditor general Nur Jumale Farah said in March that his office would present parliament with a report detailing financial irregularities within government ministries, he never did so. The UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, in a September 2015 report to the Security Council, alleged that the “impunity enjoyed by those who have engaged in misappropriation of public finances perpetuates a culture of corruption in Somali politics.” It also alleged that at least six officials from the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources accepted bribes from British firm Soma Oil & Gas Holdings Limited, which was seeking to explore hydrocarbon reserves off the coast of Somalia. The payments—totaling nearly half a million dollars—were made for a purported capacity-building program, though there was no evidence that such a program existed. Soma Oil has rejected the claims. The Somali government and British fraud office have both said they will open investigations into the matter. Somalia was tied for last out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Somali citizens have little power to exert influence over the system, either as individuals or through civil society. Citizens rarely have relationships with or access to their local members of parliament. There are few accountability mechanisms for government officials; to the extent that these mechanisms exist, they largely come from the international community.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 2 / 40

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 1 / 16

Radio is the primary news medium in Somalia. Internet and mobile telephone services are widely available in large cities, but poverty and illiteracy limit access. While the provisional constitution calls for freedom of speech and the press, the government has taken a heavy-handed approach toward the media.

In October, National Intelligence and Security Agency forces raided the offices of Universal TV, suspended the station, and arrested the outlet’s regional director and producer. The incident occurred after the station aired a debate during which members of parliament discussed security matters; the intelligence agency accused the outlet of inciting violence. The journalists—Abdullahi Hersi and Awil Dahir Salad—were released six days after their arrest. In April, security forces had raided the Shabelle Media Network and arrested 20 journalists after the outlet aired footage of a Shabaab representative taking responsibility for the siege of a university in northeastern Kenya where nearly 150 students were killed. The network had been closed between August 2014 and March 2015 after another government raid on its offices for allegedly inciting violence.

In 2014, the Somali cabinet passed a controversial draft of a media law that permits censorship by the Ministry of Information, requires broadcasters to seek permission to air

foreign media, prohibits the dissemination of material “harming the country, the people or the religion,” and levies hefty fines for breaching an undefined code of ethics. Domestic and international rights organizations characterized the legislation as overly restrictive. The National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) successfully lobbied parliamentarians to reform the draft. In December, parliament approved the revised legislation.

Somalia remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. At least three journalists were killed in 2015 in connection with their work. In one high-profile killing in April, Daud Ali Omar, a producer for Radio Baidoa, and his wife, Hawo Abdi Aden, were murdered in their home by unidentified gunmen. Omar worked for a progovernment radio station. Local journalists suspect that he was killed by gunmen affiliated with the Shabaab.

Nearly all Somalis are Sunni Muslims, but there is a very small Christian community. Somalia’s provisional constitution recognizes Islam as the official religion and forbids the promotion of any other faith, but also includes clauses promoting religious freedom and forbidding discrimination on the basis of religion. However, the constitution also requires that any candidate for the presidency be a Muslim. The Shabaab often takes a heavy-handed approach toward religious practice in areas it controls. Anyone accused of apostasy risks execution. Between March and May, suspected Shabaab militants killed three moderate clerics in the southern city of Baidoa. The Shabaab imposes crude versions of Sharia (Islamic) law in areas under its control, banning music, films, and certain clothing.

Limited funding and infrastructure, lack of qualified instructors, and unregulated private education all pose challenges to the country’s educational system.

Free expression of political views and private discussion of politics is curtailed by the prevailing sense of insecurity and political instability in the country, especially in areas controlled by the Shabaab.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Freedom of assembly has not been respected amid ongoing instability and violence in Somalia. Many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and UN agencies operate out of Kenya and have limited activities in the country. In April, four international aid workers were killed by a roadside bomb in Garowe, Puntland, and four others were abducted in Gedo region in southern Somalia.

Labor unions are beginning to expand their operations. In 2014, the government ratified the International Labour Organization’s conventions on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining, and the Worst Forms of Child Labor. However, few improvements have been seen regarding working conditions or workers’ rights. The Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU) hosted an International Labor Day celebration in May during which 200 union leaders and supporters discussed the need to mobilize around ongoing abuses.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

A weak judicial system functions at the national level. The provisional constitution outlines a judicial framework that includes the creation of a Constitutional Court, Federal Government courts, and Federal Member State courts, but these institutions have yet to be established. An independent expert commissioned by the UN Human Rights Council found that the judicial system was ineffective, thus denying Somalis the right to justice and equal protection under the law. The harshest codes are enforced in areas under Shabaab control, where people convicted of theft or other minor crimes are flogged or have their limbs amputated, often in public.

In March, President Mohamud dissolved the constitutionally mandated Judicial Service Commission, claiming that the appointment of the body did not fit constitutional requirements. Critics claim the move was made so the president could appoint his allies. In May, the cabinet approved a newly appointed slate of commissioners.

The Somali government had faced allegations of utilizing the military's court system to administer judgments against civilians. In October 2015, the European Union said most of the 29 executions it documented in Somalia for the current year had been ordered by military courts.

The absence of functional democratic institutions over a period of many years has given way to a lawless environment. Residents must also contend with abuses committed by warlords, clan leaders, and the Shabaab in the absence of government control in several areas of the country. Despite losses since the 2012 transition, the Shabaab continues to control large swaths of the south-central region. In September, the group took over two towns in southwest Somalia.

Most Somalis share the same ethnicity, but clan divisions have long fueled violence. The larger, more powerful clans continue to dominate political and economic life.

Same-sex sexual activity is illegal and punishable by up to three years in prison. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals are subject to broad social stigma and hostility.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 1 / 16

Although all Somalis have constitutionally protected freedom of movement, the Shabaab, warlords, armed militias, and others often inhibit this freedom. The autonomy and individual rights of Somali citizens are severely restricted by the insecurity in the country, both in government and Shabaab-controlled areas.

The provisional constitution protects the right to own and use property. While the economy is a relatively bright spot in Somalia, it is largely informal and severely restricted by the conflict. Despite the challenges, Somalia exported five million livestock in 2014, for its highest annual total in more than two decades. In 2015, parliament approved legislation seeking to address the country's high rates of youth unemployment by discouraging companies from hiring foreign workers.

Women in Somalia face considerable discrimination. Of the 275 seats in Somalia's parliament, women hold 38, or 14 percent. The final communique for the National Consultative Forum committed to a "fixed number of seats reserved for women in both houses (of parliament)." Although outlawed under the new constitution, nearly all Somali girls undergo some form of female genital mutilation. Sexual violence is rampant, perpetrators enjoy impunity, and rape victims are often stigmatized. A 2014 Human Rights Watch report documented rape, abuse, and sexual exploitation of local women and girls by AMISOM troops. Although the African Union promised to investigate the report's findings, no soldiers had been prosecuted as of the end of 2015.

More than 40 percent of Somali residents rely on remittances, which total an estimated \$1.6 billion annually. In February, the U.S. bank Merchants, which manages 80 percent of remittance transfers out of the United States to Somalia, closed the accounts of remittance organizations over fears of some funds being diverted to the Shabaab or other illicit actors.

In January, Somalia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite this, an estimated 40 percent of children aged 5 to 14 are employed in the economy, half of them while also attending school. The Shabaab and clan militias have reportedly recruited child soldiers as young as eight years old. In 2016, Somalia was categorized as a special

case in the U.S. State Department's *Trafficking in Persons Report* for the 14th straight year, given the various groups in control of different areas of the country, with the report noting the difficulty it had in gathering accurate information about trafficking in Somalia. It did point out that a lack of understanding by Somali officials of the difference between trafficking and smuggling was a common problem across the many groups with authority in the country.

South Africa

Political Rights Rating: 2

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 55,041,000

Capital: Tshwane/Pretoria

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

South Africa experienced a year of significant popular unrest and discontent with the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in 2015. Several service-delivery protests turned violent, and the largest student demonstrations since the end of apartheid swept the country. A wave of xenophobic violence reached an apex in April and reappeared sporadically later in the year, and authorities initiated a campaign against illegal activities that drew criticism for disproportionately affecting immigrants.

Antagonism between opposition parties and the ANC intensified during the year, with opposition members being removed from Parliament on several occasions—most dramatically during President Jacob Zuma's annual address to the legislature. Opposition parties and independent media continued to claim that alleged corruption by Zuma and other senior ANC figures—including accusations that the president personally benefited from state-funded renovations to his private home—has not been properly investigated.

The government disregarded an order by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the arrest of Omar al-Bashir, the president of Sudan, leading to heated exchanges between the judiciary and executive branches.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 33 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Elections for the 400-seat National Assembly, the lower house of the bicameral Parliament, are determined by party-list proportional representation. The 90 members of the upper chamber, the National Council of Provinces, are selected by provincial legislatures. The National Assembly elects the president to serve concurrently with its five-year term, and can vote to replace him or her at any time. Presidents can serve a maximum of two terms.

National elections in 2014 were declared free and fair by domestic and international observers. The ANC won, though with a smaller majority than in previous elections—a

trend that has persisted for three consecutive elections. The ANC took 62.2 percent of the national vote, 249 of 400 seats in the National Assembly, and clear majorities in eight of nine provinces. The Democratic Alliance (DA) remained the largest opposition party, winning 89 seats with 22.2 percent of the vote, up from 16.7 percent in the previous election, and maintained control over the Western Cape. The newly formed leftist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) won 25 seats, the Inkhatha Freedom Party (IFP) took 10 seats, and nine smaller parties shared the remainder. The National Assembly elected Zuma for a second term as president.

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) is largely considered independent. However, the IEC's integrity has recently come under greater scrutiny. In September 2014, IEC chairperson Pansy Tlakula resigned from her position, following a June 2014 ruling by the Electoral Court that found her guilty of misconduct for her involvement in an unlawful lease agreement. In October 2015, after the position had stood vacant for more than a year, President Zuma appointed Vuma Mashinini as IEC chairperson ahead of local elections in 2016. Members of opposition parties raised concerns about the new chairperson's ties to the president—Mashinini had formerly served as Zuma's special projects adviser.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

The ANC, which is part of a tripartite governing alliance with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), has won every election since 1994. Nevertheless, opposition parties are able to compete in elections, and there are frequent upsets; in 2015, the ANC lost to various opposition parties in several by-elections. The DA is the leading opposition party, followed by the EFF and the IFP.

Factionalism within the ANC and within COSATU, as well as tensions between the alliance partners, has risen in recent years. The ANC has been criticized by several former leaders, such as former South African president and senior ANC member Kgalema Motlanthe, who in 2014 accused the ANC of disrespecting the country's constitution and stated that internal democracy within the party is severely impaired. In response, Zuma made public threats against ANC critics.

Since the last national elections, parliamentary sessions have taken on a more adversarial tone. In February 2015, the annual State of the Nation address descended into chaos after EFF members disrupted Zuma's speech. Following scuffles in which tables were overturned and the jaw of one female parliamentarian was fractured, EFF members were asked to vacate Parliament. Citing security reasons, the government temporarily jammed phone signals in the parliamentary chamber, which prevented journalists, security personnel, and legislators from using their mobile phones during the disturbances. Critics have questioned the legality of this and other aspects of the security response.

In the run-up to local elections scheduled for 2016, there have been a few isolated instances of political violence. In August 2015, the EFF reported that the ANC-affiliated South African Student Congress attacked one of its public meetings. In October, the DA claimed that it had come under attack while preparing for the launch of a mayoral campaign in Pretoria. Both the EFF and DA alleged that police failed to adequately respond to requests for help.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Corruption hampers the functioning of government. Despite comprehensive anticorruption laws and several agencies tasked with combating corruption, enforcement remains inadequate. Public servants regularly fail to declare their business interests as required by law,

and the ANC has been criticized for charging business leaders fees for access to top government officials. The tender process for public contracts is often politically driven and opaque. In September 2015, the Japanese firm Hitachi agreed to pay a settlement of \$19 million to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in a case involving accusations that the company sold a 25 percent stake in a South African subsidiary to Chancellor House, an in-house investment firm for the ANC, in exchange for government contracts. Hitachi was under investigation by the World Bank at year's end. Also in September, crowds numbering in the thousands and with support from civil society, unions, religious groups, and the political opposition gathered in Cape Town, Pretoria, and Durban to protest corruption. South Africa was ranked 61 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

President Zuma continued to face scrutiny in 2015 for alleged corruption relating to improvements to his home in Nkandla, KwaZulu-Natal. A 2014 report compiled by Public Protector Thuli Madonsela, who oversees investigations of government misconduct, found that Zuma derived undue personal benefit from the 246 million rand (\$23 million) renovations, which were ostensibly initiated for security reasons. She recommended that Zuma repay a portion of the funds. In May 2015, Police Minister Nathi Nhleko released a separate report concluding that Zuma should not be required to repay any of the costs. In August, over opposition from other parties, the ANC majority in the National Assembly endorsed the findings of the second report.

In December, Zuma unexpectedly fired Finance Minister Nhlanhla Nene and replaced him with a low-profile legislator. The ouster caused a national uproar, and the South African rand plummeted to a record low against the U.S. dollar. Under immense pressure to address the fallout, Zuma replaced the new appointee with Pravin Gordhan, who held the position from 2009 to 2014.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 46 / 60 (–2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Freedoms of expression and the press are protected in the constitution and generally respected in practice. South Africa features a vibrant and often adversarial media landscape, including independent civic groups that help counter government efforts to encroach on freedom of expression. Nonetheless, concerns about press freedom have grown in recent years amid increasing government pressure on both state-run and independent outlets.

A number of recent incidents have compromised the credibility of the state-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The June 2015 appointment of Mbulaheni Obert as the new SABC board chairperson raised concerns about the broadcaster's independence, with critics questioning Obert's close ties to Minister of Communications Faith Muthambi and to the controversial chief operating officer of SABC, Hlaudi Motsoeneng. Motsoeneng's own position has been contested by accusations of abuse of power and allegations that he misrepresented his qualifications to gain the position. He remained in office at year's end after an SABC disciplinary hearing cleared him of all charges.

Private newspapers and magazines are often critical of powerful figures and institutions and remain a crucial check on the government. In October, Zuma backed a controversial proposal for the creation of a media appeals tribunal to regulate journalistic work; he made assurances that such a body would not violate the constitution. Internet access is legally unrestricted and growing rapidly, though many South Africans cannot afford connectivity.

Zuma has not yet signed into law a revised version of the controversial Protection of State Information Bill, which would allow state agencies to restrict the publication of a wide range

of information through a “national interest” classification. In October, Zuma announced that the bill remained under consideration, and that a forthcoming revised version would be within constitutional bounds. The government has increasingly made use of the apartheid-era National Key Points Act to restrict access to and reporting on locations deemed to be important to national security, including the Nkandla residence. In January, the police minister complied with a court order to release a list of 204 sites protected under the law.

Freedom of religion and academic freedom are constitutionally guaranteed and actively protected by the government. South Africans may freely engage in private discussions of a political nature without fear of harassment.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedoms of association and peaceful assembly. Freedom of assembly is generally respected, and South Africa has a vibrant protest culture; demonstrators must notify police ahead of time but are rarely prohibited from gathering. According to the police minister, authorities were present at 14,740 protests in the 2014–15 fiscal year, of which 2,289 turned violent. In recent years, police have forcefully dispersed a growing number of protests over the delivery of public services after participants became violent. On several occasions in 2015, protesters set fire to school libraries, government buildings, and vehicles. Police have faced accusations of provoking some of the violence.

In October, student protests erupted through the country over plans to increase university tuition fees. While the gatherings were mostly peaceful, police clashed with participants in Cape Town, where students stormed Parliament grounds, and near government buildings in Pretoria, where a police vehicle was torched. After a week of unrest, the government conceded to demands not to increase fees, but the protests continued for several weeks over other issues. In November, police arrested 163 students and staff from the University of Johannesburg during a protest; they were held overnight before being released.

South Africa hosts a vibrant civil society. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can register and operate freely, and lawmakers regularly accept input from NGOs on pending legislation. Recently, however, some civil society organizations have complained of harassment and increased surveillance.

South African workers are generally free to form, join, and participate in independent trade unions, and the country’s labor laws offer unionized workers a litany of protections; contract workers and those in the informal sector enjoy fewer safeguards. Strike activity is very common, and unionized workers often secure above-inflation wage increases. COSATU dominates the labor landscape but faces growing challenges from factionalism as well as independent unions. Growing union rivalries, especially in mining, have led to a rise in the use of violent tactics to win and retain members and to attack opponents; violent and illegal strikes have also increased in recent years.

The Farlam Commission, a government-sponsored inquiry into the 2012 police killing of 34 striking mineworkers at Marikana, released its long-awaited report in June 2015. The commission placed the bulk of responsibility for the incident on the police, the mining company, and a miners’ union, while largely exonerating senior government officials. The families of the dead miners and their legal representatives criticized the report for being politicized. In October, National Police Commissioner Riah Phiyega was suspended, pending a separate investigation into her actions regarding to the massacre.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16 (–1)

The constitution guarantees judicial independence, and courts operate with substantial autonomy. The Judicial Services Commission appoints Constitutional Court judges based on both merit and efforts to racially diversify the judiciary.

In 2015, a number of judgments held the executive branch to account in such a manner as to suggest that the judiciary commands significant independence. However, in June, the government disregarded a High Court order barring Sudanese president Bashir from leaving South Africa, issued to give the judiciary time to evaluate a request by a regional NGO that South Africa comply with an ICC order for Bashir's arrest. As a party to the Rome Statute of the ICC, South Africa is required to execute the arrest warrant. After the incident, the government threatened to withdraw from the ICC.

Prosecutorial independence has been undermined in recent years. The National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) has experienced a string of politically motivated appointments and ousters, and the office appeared to be embroiled in infighting between Zuma allies and critics. In May, Zuma abruptly canceled an inquiry into whether NPA director Mxolisi Nxasana, who had leveled charges against alleged Zuma allies in the NPA, was fit to hold office. Shortly thereafter, Nxasana resigned and received a large payout from the government. Zuma appointed Shaun Abrahams to the position in June. The following month, Abrahams abruptly dropped fraud and perjury charges that the NPA had filed against the deputy director of public prosecutions.

Shortages of judicial staff and financial resources undermine defendants' procedural rights, including the rights to a timely trial and state-funded legal counsel. According to a Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS) report, there were 43,298 pretrial detainees in the 2014–15 fiscal year, representing 27 percent of the total prison population. Pretrial detainees wait an average of three months before trial, and some are held beyond the legal maximum of two years.

Customary law plays a significant role in areas that under apartheid had been designated as land reserves for the country's black population. Traditional councils in these areas have authority over some aspects of local administration and can enforce customary law as long as it does not contravene the constitution. While this policy reduces the burden on state courts, customary law is replete with discriminatory provisions affecting women and certain minorities.

Despite constitutional prohibitions, there are many reports of police torture and excessive force during arrest, interrogation, and detention. In August 2015, a court convicted eight police officers murder for killing a Mozambican taxi driver in 2013 by dragging him behind a police vehicle; they were sentenced in November to 15 years in prison. Also in November, several police officers were arrested after the emergence of surveillance footage that showed them killing a suspected robber by shooting him in the head as he lay on the ground. According to the JICS report, there were 3,152 inmate complaints of assault by prison officials from April 2014 to March 2015. In October, a parliamentary committee adopted several recommendations aimed at demilitarizing the police.

South Africa has one of the highest rates of violent crime in the world. After an earlier decline, murder, attempted murder, and armed robbery increased for the third consecutive fiscal year in 2014–15. Vigilantism remains a problem.

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on a range of categories, including race, sexual orientation, and culture. State bodies such as the South African Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Public Protector are empowered to investigate and prosecute discrimination cases. Affirmative-action legislation has benefited previously disadvantaged racial groups in public and private employment as well as in education. Racial imbalances in the workforce persist, however, and a majority of the country's business assets are owned by white individuals. The indigenous, nomadic Khoikhoi and Khomani San peoples suffer from social and legal discrimination.

Xenophobic violence against immigrants from other African countries has broken out sporadically in recent years. In a wave of attacks that spread from Durban to Johannesburg

in April, foreign-owned shops were torched, thousands of people were displaced, and at least seven people were killed. Further xenophobic violence was reported in October and November, including some deadly attacks. In response to the violence, the government initiated a police operation aimed at ridding the country of “illegal weapons, drug dens and prostitution rings.” The operation has been criticized by human rights groups for targeting foreign nationals, and for violating people’s civil liberties, including through searches conducted without warrants and deportations without due process.

South Africa has one of the world’s most liberal legal environments for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is prohibited in the constitution, same-sex couples have the same adoption rights as heterosexual married couples, and same-sex marriage is legal. However, there are frequent reports of physical attacks against LGBT people, including instances of so-called corrective rape, in which lesbians are raped by men who claim that the action can change the victim’s sexual orientation.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16 (– 1)

While there are no official restrictions on housing, employment, or freedom of movement for most South Africans, travel and some other personal freedoms are inhibited by the country’s high crime rate. For many foreigners, the threat of xenophobic violence impedes freedom of movement as well. The legacy of apartheid continues to segregate the population and restrict nonwhite opportunity for employment and education.

The state generally protects citizens from arbitrary deprivation of property. However, the vast majority of farmland remains in the hands of white South Africans, who make up 9 percent of the population. Illegal squatting on white-owned farms is common, as are attacks on white farm owners. In February 2015, Zuma proposed a new land reform plan that would prohibit foreigners from becoming landowners in South Africa and restrict the size of farms that locals could own. The plan had not been implemented at year’s end.

The constitution guarantees equal rights for women, which are actively promoted by the Commission on Gender Equality. Nevertheless, women suffer de facto discrimination with regard to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and property rights, particularly in rural areas. Sexual harassment is common, and reports of forced marriages persist. Women are also subject to wage discrimination in the workplace and are not well represented in top management positions. Women are better represented in government, holding 42 percent of the seats in the National Assembly. Two of the nine provinces are led by female premiers. Despite a robust legal framework criminalizing domestic violence and domestic rape, both are grave problems. Only a small percentage of rapes are reported.

South Africans, predominantly from rural regions, as well as foreign migrants are vulnerable to sex trafficking and forced labor. Organized criminal syndicates are responsible for the bulk of trafficking, and brothels have been known to operate with the tacit support of government officials.

South Korea

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 50,714,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Capital: Seoul

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

The April 2015 suicide of businessman Sung Wan-jong, who left a note implicating senior government officials in corruption, shook the administration of President Park Geun-hye and prompted the resignation of Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo. Other allegations of corruption in recent years had prompted the passage in March of an anticorruption law that made it easier to convict government officials accused of bribery, but the law was criticized for also including journalists and educators. Despite the Sung scandal, Park's Saenuri Party was able to gain seats in by-elections for the National Assembly in late April.

In June, the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea opened an office in Seoul to support ongoing efforts to gather information about violations occurring in the North. Reunions of family members separated by the Korean War took place in October at the Diamond Mountain resort in North Korea. The event was the 19th round of such reunions since inter-Korean summit talks in 2000.

In December, President Park reached an agreement with Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe to resolve a long-running dispute over the exploitation of Korean women and girls as sex slaves for the Japanese military during World War II. Under the agreement, the Japanese government would provide financial compensation to the surviving Korean "comfort women," and Abe issued an apology for their treatment. Advocates for the comfort women criticized the deal, citing a lack of consultation with the victims and Japan's failure to accept formal legal responsibility.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 34 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

The 1988 constitution vests executive power in a directly elected president, who is limited to a single five-year term. In the 2012 presidential election, Park of the Saenuri Party defeated Democratic United Party (DUP) candidate Moon Jae-in, 52 percent to 48 percent, to become the first female president of the Republic of Korea.

The unicameral National Assembly is composed of 300 members serving four-year terms. As of the most recent national elections in 2012, 246 of the 300 lawmakers were elected in single-member districts and 54 were chosen through proportional representation. The Saenuri Party won three of four seats contested in April 2015 by-elections, bringing its total number of seats to 160. The main opposition party, the New Politics Alliance for Democracy (NPAD), held 130 seats.

By-elections for various local offices held in October 2015 were also seen as a victory for the Saenuri Party, which won 15 of 24 races. The NPAD won only two, and independent

candidates won seven, prompting calls for the resignation of NPAD chairman Moon Jae-in. Voter turnout for the elections was about 20 percent, the lowest since 2000.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

Political pluralism is robust, with multiple parties competing for power and succeeding one another in government. Currently, the two dominant parties are the ruling conservative Saenuri Party and the liberal NPAD, though party structures and coalitions are relatively fluid.

In December 2014, the Constitutional Court called for the immediate dissolution of the United Progressive Party (UPP) on the grounds that it violated the National Security Law and the constitution by conducting pro-North Korean activities; as a result, the party's five elected National Assembly members were removed from office. The decision marked the first time the court had ordered the breakup of a political party since its founding in 1988, and only the second time such an action had been taken in South Korea's history. The ruling was heavily criticized by both domestic and international organizations. The NPAD issued a statement arguing that the UPP's fate should have been decided through elections rather than a court ruling. In January 2015, the Supreme Court upheld the nine-year prison sentence of former UPP leader Lee Seok-ki, who had been convicted in early 2014 of conducting pro-North activities. The court also backed a previous ruling that stripped Lee of his voting rights and eligibility to hold political office for seven years after his release.

The National Intelligence Service (NIS) has been implicated in a series of scandals in recent years, including allegations that it interfered in political affairs. Former NIS chief Won Sei-hoon was sentenced to three years in prison in February 2015, when the Seoul High Court revised and strengthened a 2014 verdict involving an illegal online campaign by NIS officials to influence the 2012 election in Park's favor. In July 2015, the Supreme Court ordered a new trial after ruling that evidence used against Won was inadmissible.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Elected officials generally determine and implement state policy without undue interference from unelected entities and interests. However, despite government anticorruption efforts, bribery, influence peddling, and extortion persist in politics, business, and everyday life. South Korea was ranked 37 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The National Assembly passed a new anticorruption law in March, despite disagreement over its constitutionality. The law establishes strict punishments for those convicted of accepting bribes, and eliminates the need to prove a direct link between a gift and a favor in order to secure a conviction. The law targets government officials, but it is also applicable to journalists and educators, which prompted calls for revisions and a challenge before the Constitutional Court. If upheld, the law would take effect in late 2016.

In April 2015, Sung Wan-jong, a prominent businessman and former National Assembly member with the Saenuri Party, committed suicide, leaving behind a list of eight high-ranking politicians whom he had allegedly bribed. The list included former presidential chiefs of staff and Prime Minister Lee, who had been appointed in February. Lee denied the claims but resigned later in April. In July, prosecutors indicted Lee and former South Gyeongsang governor Hong Joon-pyo for allegedly accepting illegal campaign funding; the prosecutors reported finding insufficient evidence to charge the other figures identified by Sung. Lee and Hong were facing trial at year's end.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 49 / 60 (– 1)**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief:** 12 / 16 (– 1)

The news media are generally free and competitive. Newspapers are privately owned and report aggressively on government policies and allegations of official and corporate wrongdoing. Some forms of official censorship are legal, however. Under the National Security Law, enacted in 1948 to prevent espionage and other threats from North Korea, listening to North Korean radio is illegal, as is posting pro-North messages online; authorities have deleted tens of thousands of web posts deemed to be pro-North, drawing accusations that the law's broadly written provisions are being used to circumscribe political expression. Journalists at major news outlets have at times faced political interference from managers or the government. The inclusion of journalists in the 2015 anticorruption law raised concerns that it could be misused to punish critical reporting and encourage self-censorship.

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and it is respected in practice.

Academic freedom is mostly unrestricted, though the National Security Law limits statements supporting the North Korean regime or communism. In addition, the new anti-corruption law subjects public and private school teachers and administrators to the same oversight as public officials, potentially allowing increased government influence or intimidation. Two other developments in 2015 stoked concerns about bias in education. In May, Human Rights Watch called on the Ministry of Education to revise new sex-education guidelines launched earlier in the year that deliberately excluded any mention of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people, apparently under pressure from conservative religious groups. In October, President Park announced that beginning in 2017, middle and high schools would be required to use history textbooks produced by an official institute, rather than choosing from a variety of options. The announcement drew protests from opponents who saw it as an attempt to whitewash the authoritarian rule of Park's father, Park Chung-hee, who held the presidency from 1962 to 1979.

Private discussion is typically free and open, and the government generally respects citizens' right to privacy. A wiretap law sets the conditions under which the government may monitor telephone calls, mail, and e-mail. In July 2015, leaked communications between the Italian company Hacking Team and the NIS showed that the NIS had purchased software called Remote Control System (RCS), which allows remote surveillance of computers and mobile phones. That month, an unnamed NIS employee committed suicide and left a note admitting that he had deleted files that he felt could have caused public misunderstandings about the agency's surveillance. The employee maintained that the RCS software was not used for surveillance of ordinary citizens, but rather for counterterrorism and covert operations involving North Korea. Opposition leaders called for a full investigation into the usage of RCS.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The government generally respects freedoms of assembly and association, which are protected under the constitution. However, several legal provisions conflict with these principles, creating tension between the police and protesters over the application of the law. For instance, the Law on Assembly and Demonstration prohibits activities that might cause social unrest. Police must be notified of all demonstrations. Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have alleged that police who mistreat demonstrators have not been penalized equally with protesters under this law.

In May 2015, conservative Christian groups tried to prevent an annual LGBT parade in Seoul by flooding police offices with competing applications for use of space. Police initially banned the parade, citing potential traffic congestion, but a court overturned the ban in June. The event proceeded as scheduled with police protection, despite the presence of counterprotesters.

In November, a massive antigovernment demonstration was held in Seoul over the textbook controversy and other grievances. Some protesters used slingshots and other such weapons against the police, who responded with water cannons containing liquid tear gas and blue paint to help identify demonstrators for later arrest. More than 500 people were injured in the clashes, and dozens were arrested. While the rally organizers were criticized for allowing violence to take place, police also faced criticism for illegally barricading the streets with vehicles and allegedly using excessive force. Another antigovernment rally in December proceeded without incident.

Human rights groups, social welfare organizations, and other NGOs are active and generally operate freely. The country's independent labor unions advocate workers' interests, organizing high-profile strikes and demonstrations that sometimes lead to arrests. However, labor unions in general have diminished in strength and popularity, especially as the employment of temporary workers increases.

F. Rule of Law: 13 / 16

South Korea's judiciary is generally considered to be independent. Judges render verdicts in all cases. While there is no trial by jury, an advisory jury system has been in place since 2008, and judges largely respect juries' decisions. Reports of beatings or intimidation by guards in South Korea's prisons are infrequent.

Cases of bullying and violence in the military have been on the rise. In February 2015, a South Korean soldier was sentenced to death for killing five fellow soldiers in a 2014 shooting spree, though the country has not carried out an execution since 1997. At his military trial, the soldier claimed that his rampage had been incited by bullying. In May, another soldier opened fire during a training session, killing two fellow reservists and injuring two others before killing himself.

The country's few ethnic minorities face legal and societal discrimination. Residents who are not ethnic Koreans face extreme difficulties obtaining citizenship, which is based on parentage rather than place of birth. Lack of citizenship bars them from the civil service and limits job opportunities at some major corporations. As of March 2015, there were over 1.8 million foreign-born people residing in Korea, including students, white-collar workers, migrant laborers, undocumented workers, and women married to Korean men. The number of multicultural families has more than doubled in the past eight years, reaching over 820,000 in 2015.

There were roughly 29,000 North Korean defectors in South Korea at the end of 2015. Defectors are eligible for South Korean citizenship, but they can face months of detention and interrogations upon arrival, and some have reported abuse in custody and societal discrimination.

Same-sex sexual relations are legal, and the law bars discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, transgender people are not specifically protected, and societal discrimination against LGBT people persists. In April 2015, the Ministry of Justice rejected an attempt by the Beyond the Rainbow Foundation to become the country's first registered LGBT advocacy group on the grounds that it promoted human rights only for a "social minority." The group's previous attempts to register with municipal and human rights authorities in Seoul had also been rejected.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Travel both within South Korea and abroad is unrestricted, though travel to North Korea requires government approval. South Korea fully recognizes property rights and has a well-developed body of laws governing the establishment of commercial enterprises.

South Korean women have legal equality, and a 2005 Supreme Court ruling granted married women equal rights with respect to inheritance. Women face social and employment discrimination in practice, and continue to be underrepresented in government. According to the 2015 World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index, Korea ranks 115 out of 145 countries in terms of gender parity.

In February 2015, the Constitutional Court overturned a law that made adultery a crime. Same-sex marriage is not legal; in July, a male couple filed a lawsuit seeking recognition of their marriage, marking the first case of its kind. A ruling was pending at year's end.

Foreign migrant workers are vulnerable to debt bondage and forced labor, including forced prostitution. Korean women and foreign women recruited by international marriage brokers can also become sex-trafficking victims. Although the government actively prosecutes human trafficking cases, those convicted often receive light punishments. In September 2015, about 1,000 people held a rally in Seoul to call for the decriminalization of prostitution—a punishable offense since 2004. Illegal sex workers are vulnerable to abuse, trafficking, and withholding of wages.

South Sudan

Political Rights Rating: 7**Population:** 12,152,000**Civil Liberties Rating:** 6**Capital:** Juba**Freedom Rating:** 6.5**Freedom Status:** Not Free**Electoral Democracy:** No**Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)**

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	—	—	—	—	—	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

After seven broken cease-fires, the main protagonists of South Sudan's civil war signed a deal in August 2015 to end the fighting. Riek Machar, the former vice president whose dismissal by President Salva Kiir in 2013 presaged the fighting, was the first to sign the agreement. Kiir added his name to the deal after stalling for a week, but made it clear he was acting under pressure from the international community. The agreement essentially returned South Sudan to the status quo ante, with Machar taking up the position of first vice president under Kiir in a transitional government of national unity, to expire in 30 months.

There were reported violations of the cease-fire by each side in the latter part of 2015. In November, the United Nations said the two factions were actively amassing weapons and ammunition in preparation for a resumption of hostilities. Despite these reports, the UN Security Council decided against imposing an arms embargo.

In October, the full horrors of the conflict became clearer when the African Union (AU) made public the findings of its long-delayed investigation into human rights abuses in the

early months of the war. The report said both sides committed grave offenses such as rape, murder, torture, dismemberment, forced cannibalism, and looting, largely targeting civilians. The commission submitted a confidential list of alleged perpetrators to the AU's Peace and Security Council and called for the creation of a special court to try them. It also recommended the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

South Sudan's conflict has contributed to one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world. According to a UN report from October, around 2.2 million people have been displaced and more than 4.6 million people were severely food insecure, partly as a result of the fighting. As of August, almost 200,000 people were taking shelter at bases of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) throughout the country.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 2 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

Kiir was elected president of the semiautonomous region of Southern Sudan in 2010, and became president of South Sudan when it achieved independence in 2011. A revised version of Southern Sudan's 2005 interim constitution, adopted at independence, gives sweeping powers to the executive, which dominates all other institutions of the state. The president cannot be impeached and has the authority to fire state governors and dissolve the parliament and state assemblies. Kiir was quick to use these wide powers, notably dismissing his entire cabinet and the vice president, Machar, in 2013. He also fired two state governors and missed constitutional deadlines to elect permanent replacements.

A permanent constitution was due to be passed by 2015, but work was hampered by administrative delays, budget shortfalls, and the civil war. The National Constitutional Review Commission has yet to produce a draft. Some opposition politicians boycotted the constitutional consultation process, claiming it was insufficiently inclusive and was dominated by members of the ruling Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

South Sudan's bicameral National Legislature was reconfigured after independence. The SPLM exercises almost total control of the lower house, the National Legislative Assembly (NLA), holding 90 percent of the 332 seats. In addition to members of the old, preindependence Southern legislature—who were elected in 2010—the chamber includes 96 former members of Sudan's National Assembly and 66 additional members appointed by the president. The upper chamber, the Council of States, includes 20 former members of Sudan's Council of States, plus 30 members appointed by Kiir. In principle, significant powers are devolved to the 10 state assemblies, but there have long been complaints that power is too centralized. In October, Kiir announced that South Sudan's 10 states would be replaced by 28 new states with boundaries that largely reflected ethnic divisions. The plan raised some concerns that federal level political tensions would merely be transferred to a lower level of government.

Preparations for the country's first national elections, originally scheduled for 2015, were derailed by the outbreak of the civil war. Under a new timetable established by the August 2015 peace deal, elections will be held at least 60 days before the 30-month mandate of the national unity government expires.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16 (+ 1)

Although the peace agreement reached in August set a timetable for elections, in practice opposition parties have no chance of winning real political power. Five opposition parties are represented in the NLA, but they lack both the resources to operate effectively

and the experience to formulate policy and set party platforms. The SPLM is intolerant of opposition. The derailment of electoral preparations by the civil war removed what little opportunity there might have been for the opposition to gain power.

The SPLM is also deeply intolerant of internal dissent. The civil war was preceded by Kiir's decision to marginalize a significant portion of South Sudan's political leadership, his refusal to convene a meeting of the SPLM's executive body to discuss complaints about his governing style, and his failure to promote internal party democracy. Kiir has been accused of allowing his decisions to be led by a group of close advisers, described by his opponents as "regional and ethnic lobbies and close business associates." Accusations persist that members of the country's largest ethnic group, the Dinka, dominate the SPLM's leadership and the security services to the detriment of others.

South Sudan's military, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), exercises an overbearing influence over political affairs and public life.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Endemic corruption has shattered public confidence in the state. South Sudan is ranked 163 of the 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Government appointments are typically handed to SPLM loyalists or potential rivals with little regard for merit, and corrupt officials take advantage of inadequate budget monitoring to divert public funds. The vast majority of the state's revenues remain in the capital, Juba, where they are shared among a tiny elite. Ghost workers are used to artificially inflate the public payroll, allowing corrupt officials to steal the surplus.

Opaque management of South Sudan's oil wealth, which accounts for the largest share of government revenue, allows some SPLM officials to line their own pockets without consequences.

The civil conflict has engendered a war economy where well-connected military elites have flourished while formal economic activity has ground to a halt. Military spending takes up at least 40 percent of the budget. In addition, the president's office operates its own, entirely opaque, security budget.

Institutions set up to promote accountability are weak and underfunded. According to the Enough Project, in the first quarter of 2015 the Anti-Corruption Commission and the National Audit Chamber received only 64 and 17 percent of their budgets, respectively.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: 3 / 0 (-1)

In both government-controlled areas and parts of the country occupied by Machar loyalists, combatants have engaged in targeted killings against opponents based on their ethnicity in order to pursue vendettas and seek political gain. Civilians have been murdered, raped, tortured, and had their homes and livestock destroyed because of their ethnicity. While some of these atrocities were the result of poorly disciplined fighters acting on their own initiative, others appear to have been officially planned and coordinated.

The AU report on South Sudan relayed estimates from exiles and the opposition that mass killings of up to 20,000 members of the Nuer ethnic group took place in the opening days of the civil war, in December 2013. It said the killings were carried out by members of the state security forces and the Presidential Guard. The AU commission found that systematic gross violations of human rights were committed by both sides and that in some cases, these crimes were planned and coordinated. Neither side has made any attempt to hold its forces accountable for the widespread abuses that mostly targeted civilians.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 12 / 60 (–1)**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief:** 4 / 16

The operating environment for journalists has deteriorated since independence. Conditions became even more difficult with the outbreak of the civil war, which prompted a government crackdown on reporters, including some foreign correspondents, who tried to interview rebel leaders or provide balanced coverage of the conflict. As a result, many reporters exercise self-censorship, while others have left the country altogether. The government's attitude toward the media was summed up by Kiir in August, when he said that "freedom of the press does not mean you work against the country."

Events in 2015 underlined the risks faced by the media. In the worst incident, five reporters were killed in January when their convoy was attacked in Western Bahr el Ghazal state. Two other journalists were shot dead in separate attacks in May and August. These incidents made South Sudan the deadliest African country in which to practice journalism in 2015, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). No suspects have been arrested in connection with any of the attacks, nor has there been any progress in the investigation into the 2012 murder of online journalist Diing Chan Awuol.

Members of the National Security Service (NSS) have ordered the closure of newspapers with coverage they disliked in recent years. In February 2015, the independent *Nation Mirror* was shut down for printing antigovernment articles. In August, two newspapers and a radio station were shuttered indefinitely.

Although parliament has passed bills to govern public broadcasting in South Sudan, to set up a media oversight authority, and to guarantee the public right of access to information, none of the bills have been implemented.

The interim constitution guarantees religious freedom, but places of worship became targets for attack by both sides in the conflict after the civil war broke out. During the fighting in Malakal, Bor, and Bentiu, thousands of people taking refuge in churches and mosques were attacked because of their ethnicity.

There are no government restrictions on academic freedom, but basic access to education is limited outside state capitals. The education system has been seriously disrupted by the civil war. Some 70 percent of schools were closed in the three most conflict-affected states—Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile—and some schools were commandeered for military use.

Public discussion of political issues is muted for fear of harassment by authorities. The government uses the NSS to track and intimidate perceived critics and is believed to use telephone surveillance to monitor opponents.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are enshrined in the interim charter but have been seriously eroded in practice. Protests do occur but have faced excessive governmental force. South Sudan is highly dependent on assistance from foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), yet the government has taken an increasingly confrontational approach toward them. In May, South Sudan's parliament passed a law that included a provision to limit the number of foreign workers organizations could hire. Kiir refused to sign the bill and sent it back to parliament for further consideration; it had not been enacted by year's end.

South Sudan is a dangerous place for humanitarian workers, who have been targeted by combatants on numerous occasions. At least 29 aid workers were killed during the civil war through August 2015, according to the United Nations. Four World Food Programme staff

who had gone missing in 2014 were declared presumed dead in August 2015. Armed groups have singled out UNMISS personnel and civilians in their care for attack. Both sides in the civil war have interfered with the delivery of humanitarian supplies, especially to areas near South Sudan's second largest city, Malakal.

Domestic civil society organizations, including unions, remain nascent. A Workers' Trade Union Federation, formed in 2010, has 65,000 members. Legislation to codify labor rights has stalled in the NLA.

F. Rule of Law: 1 / 16

The rhetorical commitment to an independent judiciary in South Sudan's interim constitution is "unmatched by practice," according to the October AU report. Judges are few in number, the mechanism for appointments is unclear, and the court system is under huge strain. According to the U.S. State Department, pretrial detainees were estimated to account for between one-third and two-thirds of the prison population. Inefficiencies in the justice system have led to indefinite detention.

The president was accused of using the outbreak of fighting in December 2013 as a pretext to detain prominent political rivals. Eleven current and former senior SPLM officials were arrested on suspicion of involvement in an attempted coup. All members of the group were released in 2014 following pressure from the international community and were reinstated to the SPLM in June 2015.

There is a culture of impunity within the security forces, with serious abuses carried out against civilians, reportedly with the full knowledge or on the orders of senior commanders. The NSS, which reports directly to the president, has been responsible for arbitrary arrests and abuses. Under the National Security Service Law, which came into force in early 2015, the NSS has almost unlimited powers to detain and interrogate suspects.

Members of the SPLA, the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS), and the NSS have played a central role in the violence that has engulfed South Sudan since 2013. UNMISS, the AU, and human rights organizations have accused members of the security services of involvement in extrajudicial killings, attacks on civilians, enforced disappearances, destruction of property, and sexual violence. Internal investigations into their conduct were announced in recent years, but there have been no public reports on their progress.

While there have been modest improvements to the penal system, prison facilities are poor, with unsanitary conditions and insufficient food for inmates. Children and the mentally ill are routinely detained with the general prison population.

Civilians, including children, the elderly, and the infirm, have been terrorized by both sides in the civil war. The AU report outlined multiple cases of murder, rape, mutilation, and even forced cannibalism committed by armed combatants against civilians, and said war crimes had taken place in the cities of Juba, Bor, Malakal, and Bentiu. Control of Malakal changed hands a dozen times during the fighting, leaving it virtually destroyed. Residents, including women and children, were targeted for attack by combatants from both sides, even as they took refuge in churches and hospitals.

Since the war for independence from Sudan ended in 2005, more than two million refugees and internally displaced people have moved back to the South. The government encouraged their return but has largely failed to provide them with even the most basic assistance.

Same-sex sexual conduct is not explicitly illegal in South Sudan, but "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" is punishable by up to 10 years in prison. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals face widespread discrimination and stigma.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16 (- 1)

South Sudan’s interim constitution enshrines the rights of free movement and residence, as well as the right to an education. In reality, poverty, poor to nonexistent service delivery, and conflict have restricted the ability of most citizens to exercise these rights.

Land use and ownership are frequent causes of conflict in South Sudan, and returning refugees have exacerbated the problem. Unclear or nonexistent laws have been exploited by SPLM officials and overseas investors to uproot people from their land. Foreign workers in South Sudan have complained of harassment and discrimination. Both sides in the civil war have reportedly looted foreign-owned businesses.

The interim constitution guarantees the rights of women to equal pay and property ownership. Women hold a quarter of the posts in the NLA, fulfilling a constitutional gender quota. Nonetheless, women are routinely exposed to discriminatory practices and domestic abuse. The prevalence of child marriage contributes to low levels of educational attainment among girls. Official figures suggest that almost half of girls aged 15 to 19 are married. Systematic and widespread sexual and gender based violence against women was committed with impunity by both sides during the civil war.

Sex and labor trafficking is widespread, with rural woman and girls, the internally displaced, or migrants from neighboring countries being the most vulnerable to exploitation. The use of child soldiers is widespread, with both the SPLA and other armed groups forcibly recruiting children as combatants.

Spain

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 1
Freedom Rating: 1.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 46,400,000
Capital: Madrid

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

The success of two new parties in the 2015 general elections, held in December, upset the two-party system traditionally dominated by the conservative Popular Party (PP) and the center-left Spanish Socialist Worker’s Party (PSOE). The year ended without a clear candidate for prime minister, and difficult coalition talks were expected in 2016. Both the PP and PSOE had also lost ground in regional and municipal elections held in May. Meanwhile, tensions with Catalonia continued, as secessionist candidates won its regional elections, held in September.

A restrictive new public safety act that entered into force in July contained a measure envisioning fines of as much as 600,000 (\$680,000) for participating in unauthorized protests outside key government buildings or certain types of infrastructure, and of up to 30,000 (\$34,000) for spreading images deemed to endanger the safety of law enforcement

officers. It also allows authorities to summarily return migrants, including potential asylum-seekers, who illegally cross from Morocco into the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, in North Africa.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 39 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The lower house of Spain's bicameral parliament, the Congress of Deputies, is composed of 350 members elected in multimember constituencies for each of Spain's provinces, with the exception of the North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, each of which is assigned one single-member constituency. The Senate has 266 members, 208 of whom are elected directly, and 58 of whom are chosen by regional legislatures. Spain's elections are generally considered free and fair. Members of both the Senate and Congress serve four-year terms. The royal family plays a largely ceremonial role.

Following legislative elections, the monarch selects a candidate for prime minister, generally the leader of the majority party or coalition. The parliament then votes on the selected candidate. With powerful regional parliaments, Spain is one of the most decentralized countries in Europe.

The success of two new parties in the December 2015 general elections resulted in the introduction of coalition politics to Spain, which for decades had been dominated by just two parties: the PP and the PSOE. While the ruling PP finished first with 29 percent of the vote, it failed to win enough support to govern alone. The PSOE won 22 percent of the vote, down from the 29 percent it won in 2011 polls. The new parties—the left-wing, anti-austerity Podemos (We Can), and the center-right Ciudadanos (Citizens)—won 21 and 14 percent of the vote, respectively. A handful of smaller parties also won parliamentary representation. At the year's end, there was no clear candidate for prime minister. In January 2016, King Felipe VI will begin talks with party leaders to form a new government.

The fragmentation of Spanish politics was presaged in May 2015, when both the PP and PSOE lost significant ground to smaller parties in regional parliamentary elections held in 13 of Spain's 17 regions, and in municipal elections held countrywide, frequently failing to achieve governing majorities in contested legislative bodies. Notably, left-wing parties formed alliances to take control of the city governments of Madrid and Barcelona. In Madrid, Manuela Carmena of the left-wing Ahora Madrid (Madrid Now) coalition took the mayorship after the coalition allied with the PSOE to push the PP from power. In Barcelona, Ada Colau, head of the leftist coalition Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona in Common), took the office.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Citizens have the right to organize political parties. While the PP and the PSOE dominated what had traditionally been a two-party system, recent corruption scandals and persistent economic woes have weakened their grip on power, permitting the rise of Podemos and Ciudadanos.

The Catalan separatist movement is an ongoing source of tension in Spain. While Catalonia is already autonomous—a distinction that facilitates a certain degree of self-governance—the wealthy region held a symbolic independence referendum in 2014, even after Spain's Constitutional Court suspended the legal basis for it. In October 2015, Catalan president Artur Mas appeared before the High Court of Catalonia to face allegations of civil disobedience for defying the Constitutional Court's order. In November, the Catalan parliament passed a resolution setting out a path for Catalan independence, but it was struck

down in December by Spain's Constitutional Court. Meanwhile, Catalonia's regional parliamentary elections were held in September. The separatist party Junts Pel Si (Together for Yes) won the majority of seats, but fell short of an absolute majority. At the year's end, political parties were still in coalition talks, with the selection of a regional president pending.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12

According to a 2013 survey from Transparency International, 83 percent of respondents felt that political parties in Spain were corrupt or extremely corrupt; campaign financing is a particular point of contention. Though more than three-quarters of party expenses are funded by the state, a 2007 law confirmed the right of political parties to use commercial bank loans for funding. In 2012, Spain strengthened rules on political financing by restricting access to loans, increasing transparency, and establishing an audit framework. In March 2015, Spain's parliament approved a set of anticorruption measures that among other provisions prohibited banks from forgiving debt owed by political parties.

High-profile corruption investigations continued to plague the royal family in 2015. Princess Cristina, the elder sister of Spain's current king, faces tax fraud charges in connection with a case against her husband, Iñaki Urdangarin, who stands accused of embezzling several million euros in public funds in his role as chairman of a nonprofit sports foundation. The trial is set to open in January 2016.

Upon taking the throne in 2014, King Felipe began establishing rules to reform the monarchy. Among them are increased transparency of royal funds—including external audits that will be made public; a prohibition on members of the royal family working outside the palace; and greater controls on gifts to the royal family. Under the new rules, Felipe's sisters, Elena and Cristina, were to retain their titles but will no longer be considered part of the royal family, as they work in the private sector. In June 2015, King Felipe stripped Princess Cristina of the title of Duchess of Palma de Mallorca after it emerged that she would stand trial for tax fraud.

Although the courts have a solid record of investigating and prosecuting corruption cases, the high workload means that the court system is often overburdened, and cases proceed slowly. Spain is ranked 36 of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 56 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Spain has a free and active press, with more than 100 newspapers covering a wide range of perspectives and actively investigating high-level corruption. Despite this dynamic environment, excessive political intervention into the creation and staffing of television and radio stations has posed a threat to freedom of expression, especially at the regional and local levels. The Spanish press has also suffered from ownership consolidation. Most broadcast media, as well as newspapers and magazines, are now controlled by a limited number of media groups.

In July 2015, a new public safety law, nicknamed the "gag law" by its critics, came into force. The law established fines of up to 30,000 (\$34,000) for spreading images that would endanger the safety of law enforcement officers, and up to 600 (\$680) for insulting a police officer. Burning the national flag can also prompt fines under the act's provisions. Holocaust denial with the intention of promoting or justifying genocide is prohibited.

The majority of Spaniards have access to the internet and there is no outright internet censorship. However, in 2014 Spain passed a copyright law that requires aggregators that post links and excerpts of news articles to pay a fee to the national newspaper publishers' association, or risk potential fines of up to 600,000 (\$800,000). The law can be applied to third-party sites providing hosting or payment services to an infringing site. In response, Google removed Spanish publishers from Google News and shut the site down in Spain.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution and other laws. As the nation's dominant religion, Roman Catholicism enjoys privileges not afforded to others, such as financing through the tax system. The role of Catholicism in politics is strong, with the PP in particular promoting conservative values. Jews, Muslims, Protestants, Mormons, Buddhists, and adherents to the Orthodox Church all have *notorio arraigo* or "deeply-rooted" status with the state, allowing them to worship privately and publicly. However, only Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and Protestants hold special agreements with the government that allow them certain privileges, including tax-related benefits and permission to station chaplains in hospitals and other institutions.

While the government does not restrict academic freedoms, budget cuts to education funding have disproportionately affected lower-income students and weakened the education system. Private discussion is open and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly, a right that the government has long respected. However, the public safety act that took effect in July 2015 introduced a fine of as much as 600,000 (\$680,000) for participating in unauthorized protests outside key government buildings or certain kinds of infrastructure. Large demonstrations against the bill have taken place across the country. At the year's end, no one had yet been prosecuted under its provisions. Sizeable anti-austerity protests and strikes have also become common in Spain.

Domestic and international nongovernmental organizations operate without government restrictions. With the exception of members of the military, workers are free to strike, organize, and join unions of their choice.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary. Politicians elect members of some important judicial institutions, such as the Constitutional Court and the Office of the General Public Prosecutor. By removing the power of judges to nominate members of the General Council of the Judiciary and reducing the number of permanent positions on that body, experts believe that a 2013 reform weakened judicial independence. Court proceedings are bound by the rule of law. Prisons and detention centers are overcrowded, and police mistreatment is a concern.

Spain is a major pathway for undocumented immigrants, many of whom congregate at the Moroccan border in an attempt to reach Ceuta and Melilla. Spanish authorities are known to employ harsh tactics to restrict the movement of illegal immigrants. The public safety act allows police in Ceuta and Melilla to summarily expel migrants and asylum-seekers attempting to jump security barricades to reach Spanish territory, with no human rights safeguards.

Civil society organizations such as Human Rights Watch have raised concerns about the punitive approach that the new public safety act takes towards marginalized groups such as sex workers and the homeless. Racial profiling during police checks is also a persistent

problem. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals can face societal discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Citizens may travel freely throughout the country and choose their residence, employment, and institution of higher education. Private business activity is largely unrestricted, although a lack of access to credit has created obstacles, especially for small and medium-sized firms.

Legal protections are in place to safeguard women from rape, domestic abuse, and sexual harassment in the workplace. In September 2015, PP deputies in the Senate pushed through legislation requiring women between the ages of 16 and 18 to obtain parental consent when seeking abortions. Violence against women remains a serious issue in Spain, as does human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. In 2014, the Spanish government increased funding for trafficking victims. Same-sex marriage is legal in Spain, and same-sex couples may adopt children.

↑ Sri Lanka

Political Rights Rating: 4↑

Civil Liberties Rating: 4↑

Freedom Rating: 4.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 20,900,000

Capital: Colombo

Ratings Change, Trend Arrow: Sri Lanka’s political rights and civil liberties ratings each improved from 5 to 4, and it received an upward trend arrow, due to generally free and fair elections for president in January 2015 and parliament in August, and improved conditions for freedom of expression, religious freedom, civil society, and judicial independence under the new administration.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,5,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Following a series of high-level defections from President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s ruling United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA), the government suffered a defeat to a newly unified opposition alliance in presidential elections held early in January 2015. Maithripala Sirisena of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), who won the election and was sworn in as president that month, ushered in a broad reversal of the country’s authoritarian drift under Rajapaksa. Sirisena’s 2015 reforms included the curtailing of executive power, the reestablishment of independent commissions, and the introduction of freedom of information legislation.

Though Rajapaksa was able to win a seat in parliamentary elections held in August, the opposition United National Party (UNP) captured the most seats and formed a government with the backing of smaller parties on a platform of undertaking a wide range of electoral and governance-related reforms. Ranil Wickremasinghe, long-time leader of the UNP, again

became prime minister, and a new cabinet was drawn from a range of coalition partners, including the SLFP, one of the parties that comprised the UPFA. The pace of reforms promised by Sirisena, although initially slow due to divisions within the ruling coalition, improved in late spring, and accelerated even further after the parliamentary elections.

The new government also signaled a willingness to investigate the issue of alleged war crimes committed in 2009 during the final phase of the military's campaign against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) rebel group. In September 2015, the foreign minister promised at a UN Human Rights Council hearing to set up a truth, justice, and reconciliation commission to investigate atrocities. The pledge was made at the same session at which the council released a damning report containing details of abuses committed by both sides.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 23 / 40 (+7)

A. Electoral Process: 8 / 12 (+2)

The 1978 constitution vested strong executive powers in the president, but the approval in April 2015 of the 19th Amendment curtailed those powers somewhat by reintroducing term limits—limiting the president to two five-year terms—and requiring the president to consult the prime minister on ministerial appointments. The prime minister heads the leading party in Parliament, but has limited authority. The 225-member unicameral Parliament is elected for six-year terms through a mixed proportional representation system.

In the January 2015 presidential election, Rajapaksa suffered a surprise defeat, with his opponent, Sirisena, winning 51 percent of the vote; turnout was a record 82 percent. In the August 2015 parliamentary elections, the UNP, the largest party in the United National Front for Good Governance coalition, to a modest victory; it won 106 seats, a 46-seat increase from the 2010 polls. The UPFA took 95 seats, a decline of 49, while the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the largest party representing the ethnic minority, won 16 seats, an increase of 2. In August, the UNP and the SLFP agreed to form a coalition government.

In the run-up to the presidential election, groups such as the Center for Monitoring Election Violence accused the government of acts of violence and of inappropriate use of state resources—particularly transportation, infrastructure, police services, and the media. While dozens of violent incidents were reported prior to the parliamentary elections, including several murders, the polling itself was relatively fair.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16 (+3)

A range of political parties, some of which explicitly represent the interests of ethnic and religious minority groups, are able to operate freely and contest elections. In addition to the UNP and UPFA, the main parties include the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP); the TNA and several smaller Tamil parties; the Buddhist nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU); and the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress, the country's largest Muslim party.

The longtime ruling-coalition practice of coopting opposition members of parliament and abusing state resources during election periods was challenged in late 2014, when a number of parties and prominent politicians defected from the UPFA ahead of the 2015 presidential election. In late 2014, disparate opposition groups—including the UNP, JVP, JHU, and the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress—formed an alliance and selected a “common opposition candidate.” Sirisena, a cabinet minister and former member of Rajapaksa's party. The JHU and the Muslim Congress had previously been members of Rajapaksa's ruling alliance.

Despite harassment of opposition politicians in the lead-up to the January 2015 election, the opposition candidate managed to triumph. Harassment of the opposition declined markedly for the August parliamentary polls. In the north and east, members of various Tamil political parties, who have faced frequent threats in the past, also faced less intimidation in 2015. In addition, Tamil civilians faced fewer hindrances in voting during both polls, in contrast to the 2010 elections. In what was described as an amicable gesture to the Tamil community by Sirisena, in early 2015 the newly elected president appointed a civilian governor in Northern Province, where Tamils comprise a majority; the new governor replaced a retired army commander.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12 (+2)

Government accountability and inclusivity improved in 2015 under Sirisena, as the Rajapaksa family's power over various ministries waned and Parliament resumed a greater role in setting policy. The passage of the 19th Amendment in April and the appointment of independent commissions in the fall, including the National Human Rights Commission, represented important steps toward improving accountability mechanisms and reversing Rajapaksa's consolidation of executive power. However, some critics alleged that the amendment process was opaque and that its restrictions on executive power did not go far enough.

Corruption remains a concern, though steps were taken in 2015 to strengthen enforcement of existing safeguards and uphold the current legal and administrative framework. The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption was given additional powers of investigation and prosecution under the 19th Amendment; a new commissioner was appointed in October 2015, and a number of cases were initiated by year's end, although the commission's speed in dealing with a backlog of cases remained hampered by a lack of staff. Nevertheless, the commission opened investigations into a number of high-ranking politicians and officials from the previous government, including members of the Rajapaksa family. The cabinet approved a Right to Information bill in December 2015, but it had not been adopted by Parliament at the year's end. Sri Lanka was ranked 83 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: - 1 / 0

Following the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 2009, the traditionally Tamil areas of the north and east have seen a heightened military presence. The Rajapaksa government encouraged settlement by ethnic Sinhalese civilians by providing land certificates, housing, and other infrastructure with the aim of diluting Tamil dominance in these areas. While such policies have ended under the new government, and some land has been released, displacement of Tamil civilians remains a concern, and a significant amount of land—44,000 acres—is still under military control.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 32 / 60 (+7)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16 (+3)

Freedom of expression is guaranteed in the constitution, and respect for this right dramatically improved in 2015 under the new administration. A number of laws and regulations that can restrict this right—including the Official Secrets Act, antiterrorism regulations, and laws on defamation and contempt of court—were used less frequently to punish critical journalists. The level of verbal and physical attacks on journalists also dramatically lessened

during the year, although isolated incidents were reported by local monitoring groups. However, Tamil-language outlets such as the *Uthayan* newspaper faced greater constraints; in April, a freelancer for the daily was arrested for writing a story critical of local police. Investigations into past attacks on journalists and media outlets, such as the high-profile murder of Lasantha Wickrematunga in 2009, were initiated in early 2015. In August, four Sri Lankan army officers were arrested and accused of involvement in the January 2010 disappearance of Prageeth Eknaligoda, a political cartoonist and columnist. In addition, a number of exiled journalists were able to return to the country. The blocking of online media, particularly Tamil-language news sites and other independent outlets, such as the investigative news website *Colombo Telegraph*, lessened in 2015.

The constitution gives special status to Buddhism, and religious minorities face discrimination and occasional violence. Tensions between the Buddhist majority and the Christian and Muslim minorities—particularly evangelical Christian groups, which are accused of forced conversions—sporadically flare into attacks by Buddhist extremists. However, harassment and attacks instigated by the militant Bodu Bala Sena (BBS, or Buddhist Power Force) eased in 2015. In recent years, the minority Ahmadiyya Muslim sect has faced increased threats and attacks from Sunni Muslims, who accuse Ahmadis of apostasy.

Academic freedom is generally respected, but there are occasional reports of politicization in universities and a lack of tolerance for dissenting views by both professors and students, particularly for academics who study Tamil issues, according to the Federation of University Teachers' Associations. Harassment of student leaders and activists continues to be a concern. In October 2015, several peaceful student protests were violently dispersed by police.

Although the Rajapaksa government had stepped up levels of online surveillance, and some additional monitoring of the Tamil minority continued, the climate of fear eased under the new administration, including in the north and east. As a result, individuals were more willing to express dissent on politics and other sensitive matters. Levels of internet censorship were also reduced, allowing greater access to viewpoints and more open private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12 (+2)

Although demonstrations occur regularly, authorities sometimes restrict freedom of assembly. Police occasionally use excessive force to disperse protesters. The army has imposed some restrictions on assembly in the north and east, particularly for planned memorial events concerning the end of the war.

Conditions for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) improved dramatically under the new government in 2015, with a lessening of official harassment and interference. Human rights and peace-seeking groups were able to operate much more freely, as state-sponsored surveillance, smear campaigns, death threats, disruption of activities, and criminal investigations into their funding and activities mostly ended and such groups were regularly consulted on policy formulation and able to speak freely at international fora. In recent years, some NGOs have faced difficulty operating in the northern and eastern areas of the country, although the United Nations and humanitarian organizations are generally given adequate access to former conflict zones.

Most of Sri Lanka's trade unions are independent and legally allowed to engage in collective bargaining, but this right is poorly respected. Except for civil servants, most workers can hold strikes, though the 1989 Essential Services Act allows the president to declare any strike illegal. While more than 70 percent of the mainly Tamil workers on tea

plantations are unionized, employers routinely violate their rights. Harassment of labor activists and official intolerance of union activities, particularly in export processing zones, are regularly reported.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16 (+2)

Although the judiciary had become less independent and more politicized under Rajapaksa, the appointment of a new, Tamil chief justice in January 2015 was a positive step taken by the new administration, as was the re-formation of an independent commission to oversee judicial appointments. Corruption remains common in the lower courts, but the levels of threats and political interference that occurred under Rajapaksa abated under the new government.

Police and security forces occasionally engage in abusive practices, including arbitrary arrest, extrajudicial execution, forced disappearance, custodial rape, torture, and prolonged detention without trial, all of which disproportionately affect Tamils, as described in an October 2015 Human Rights Watch report. The London-based NGO Freedom from Torture noted several dozen cases during 2015 in which Tamils were tortured by security forces on suspicion of involvement with the LTTE.

Under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), suspects can be detained for up to 18 months without trial; this, along with 2006 antiterrorism regulations, has been used to detain perceived enemies of the government. The new government promised to undertake a review of those detained under PTA regulations, as well as to consider repealing the law, but several hundred people remain in detention without charge, according to human rights watchdogs, with several dozen more detained under the PTA in 2015. The National Human Rights Commission—which is rebuilding capacity after being weakened by Rajapaksa—is empowered to investigate abuses but is characterized by insufficient authority and resources.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center estimated that around 73,700 internally displaced persons remained in Sri Lanka as of July 2015. The status of hundreds of Tamils who disappeared during the war's closing offensives remains unclear. A November 2015 visit by the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearance urged the government to hasten its review of more than 23,000 unsolved disappearances.

Tamils report systematic discrimination in areas including government employment, university education, and access to justice. The status of Sinhala as the official language puts Tamils and other non-Sinhala speakers at a disadvantage. Ethnic tensions occasionally lead to violence.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face societal discrimination, occasional instances of violence, and some official harassment, though government officials have stated that LGBT people are constitutionally protected from discrimination. Sex “against the order of nature” is a criminal offense, but cases are rarely prosecuted.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

Freedom of movement is restricted by security checkpoints, particularly in the north. Government appropriation of land in the north and east as part of economic development projects or “high security zones” following the end of the civil war had prevented local people from returning to their property. The Sirisena administration, however, has released some military-held land for resettlement by displaced civilians. There have been few official attempts to help Muslims forcibly ejected from the north by the LTTE in the early 1990s to return to their homes.

Access to education is affected by corruption from the primary through the tertiary levels, and observers have noted education as one of the most corrupt sectors in Sri Lanka.

However, with a revitalized anticorruption commission, investigations into cases of bribery for admission into schools made greater headway in 2015.

Women are underrepresented in politics and the civil service. Female employees in the private sector face sexual harassment as well as discrimination in salary and promotion opportunities. Rape of women and children and domestic violence remain serious problems, with hundreds of complaints reported annually; existing laws are weakly enforced. The presence of the army in the north and east has increased the risk of harassment and sexual abuse for female civilians in those areas. Although women have equal rights under civil and criminal law, matters related to the family—including marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance—are adjudicated under the customary law of each ethnic or religious group, and the application of these laws sometimes results in discrimination against women.

Although the government has increased penalties for employing minors, thousands of children continue to work as household servants, and many face abuse. Throughout the country, the military's role and expanded size under former president Rajapaksa and its presence in a variety of economic sectors—including tourism and infrastructure projects—remain causes for concern.

Sudan

Political Rights Rating : 7

Civil Liberties Rating : 7

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 40,833,900

Capital: Khartoum

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

In national elections held in April 2015, President Omar al-Bashir and the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) retained their hold on the executive and legislature. Al-Bashir faced few credible opponents, and opposition parties accused the NCP of sabotaging the electoral process. Opposition leaders had called for the elections to be postponed, arguing that a credible vote would be impossible without improvements to the country's National Dialogue, an easing of political repression, and meaningful action toward ending Sudan's multiple armed conflicts. Their requests were largely ignored, and a mass boycott and public apathy toward the electoral process fueled low turnout in April. The National Dialogue, a series of consultations on political and constitutional reform, resumed in October; most opposition figures as well as the European Union, United Nations, and other international bodies refrained from participation.

Violence in Darfur continued. The prosecutor's office of the International Criminal Court (ICC) tracked more than 500 crimes reportedly carried out by government-backed forces, resulting in 1,200 deaths, between December 2014 and June 2015; these included aerial bombardment, ground attacks, indiscriminate killing of civilians, rape, and forced displacement. Armed conflict also continued in the states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile,

where the African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies documented more than 250 attacks on civilians between January and September 2015.

In June, President al-Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes stemming from his role in the Darfur conflict, traveled to South Africa for an African Union (AU) conference. The ICC criticized the South African government for allowing him to enter and leave the country without executing the arrest warrant against him.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 2 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

Sudan is governed according to its 2005 interim constitution. Efforts to redraft the document have been under way since the independence of South Sudan in 2011, but no meaningful progress has been made. Civil society has been largely excluded from the process. Constitutional amendments passed in January 2015 gave the president the power to directly appoint state governors and strengthened the already powerful National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS).

Members of the lower house of the bicameral legislature, the 426-seat National Assembly, are elected using a mixed majoritarian and party-list system. State legislatures choose the members of the upper house, the 56-seat Council of States. All lawmakers serve five-year terms. Under the interim constitution, the president may serve a maximum of two five-year terms. Al-Bashir has held executive power since 1989, but has claimed that the limits of the 2005 constitution—under which an election was first held in 2010—do not apply retroactively.

National elections were held in April 2015. All the main opposition parties boycotted the polls, allowing al-Bashir to win another term in office with 94 percent of the vote. The NCP won 323 of 426 seats in the National Assembly, with many of the remaining seats captured by government loyalists. Although the elections were extended by one day in order to boost participation, voter turnout stood at 46 percent, as reported by the National Election Commission. Critics of the government insisted the low turnout was a result of lack of choice; an NCP spokesman, however, stated that the turnout was the result of outdated voter rolls.

The government and security forces subjected opposition figures to harassment and arrest in the lead-up to the elections, but the voting period itself was largely peaceful. The AU sent a small observation mission to Sudan against the wishes of its own pre-election assessment team. In its final report, AU observers reported that the result reflected the will of the voters but noted that a failure to respect basic freedoms and human rights had weakened the process. The United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway—which did not send monitors—issued a joint statement expressing regret over Sudan’s “failure to create a free, fair, and conducive elections environment.”

The National Election Commission is not independent; its chairman is an NCP official. In June 2014, the National Assembly passed amendments to Sudan’s 2008 electoral legislation, largely without consultation with the main opposition leaders. Among other modifications, the amendments increased the statutory seats in the National Assembly—which had decreased after the independence of South Sudan—to 426.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 3 / 16

The NCP dominates the political system in Sudan and uses intimidation, arbitrary arrest, and onerous regulations, often using the state security apparatus, to prevent other parties from operating freely. Some of the June 2014 amendments appeared to be designed

to enhance the electoral prospects of small parties, notably by increasing the number of seats determined by proportional representation from 40 to 50 percent and eliminating the 4 percent threshold for representation. Nevertheless, the political arena remains heavily favorable to the NCP. Political parties have experienced problems registering with the authorities. The Sudanese Political Parties Affairs Council denied the Sudanese Republican Party (SCP) recognition in 2014 because it refused to endorse a system of Sharia (Islamic law).

Opposition leaders and activists are routinely arrested and held without charge, often for extended periods. In 2014, the head of the National Umma Party, his deputy, and the head of the Sudanese Congress Party were all detained in separate cases and held for several weeks before being released without charge. In the lead-up to the April 2015 elections, opposition figures faced harassment, arrest, and detention. NISS agents detained members of the SCP and perceived supporters of the armed opposition Sudan Revolutionary Front. On several occasions, authorities denied opposition parties permits for rallies and forums, including at parties' own headquarters.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Power and resources are concentrated in and around Khartoum, while outlying states are neglected and impoverished. Members of the NCP, particularly those from favored ethnic groups, tightly control the national economy and use the wealth they have amassed in banking and business to buy political support.

Sudan is considered one of the world's most corrupt countries, and ranked 165 of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. High-ranking members of the party retain prominent commercial interests that heavily benefit from government contracts. In 2015, legislators discussed a draft bill for the creation of a national anticorruption commission; the bill had not been adopted at year's end.

A high proportion of the national budget is spent on unspecified national security priorities. In January, legislators passed a freedom of information law; however, enforcement and awareness of the law remained unclear at year's end.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: -4 / 0

The government stands accused of attempting to change the ethnic distribution of Sudan through its ongoing response to an insurgency led by marginalized Muslim but non-Arab ethnic groups in Darfur. In 2004, government-supported Arab militias known as *janjaweed* began torching villages, massacring inhabitants, and raping women and girls. The military also bombed settlements from the air. As of the end of 2014, the United Nations estimated that more than 2.5 million people had been displaced by the violence. In 2009, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for al-Bashir on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur; a charge of genocide was added in 2010. Accusations of ethnically targeted violence have also been leveled against the government for its handling of the wars in South Kordofan and Blue Nile, which began in 2011, in which Sudan's military has launched aerial bombardments and engaged in indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas thought to be strongholds of support for the militant group Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 6 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 2 / 16

The 2005 interim constitution recognizes freedom of the press, but media face significant obstacles in practice. The 2009 Press and Publication Act allows a government-appointed press council to prevent publication or broadcast of material it deems unsuitable,

temporarily shut down newspapers, and impose heavy fines for violations of media regulations. Approximately one-quarter of the population has access to mobile broadband services. The authorities have been accused of restricting internet access in order to stifle protests.

NISS officers routinely raid printing facilities to confiscate editions of newspapers considered to be in violation of the Press and Publication Act. By waiting until editions are printed, they impose crippling financial losses on media houses. On a single day in February 2015, state authorities confiscated the print runs of 14 newspapers without explanation. Media workers whose reports meet with official disapproval or who cover sensitive topics risk arrest and detention. In the run-up to the April elections, the NISS summoned newspaper editors to warn them to avoid election coverage, particularly opposition calls for a boycott. In December, police arrested the editors of the newspapers *Al-Saiha* and *Al-Tayar* and charged them with a range of offenses—including undermining the constitution, which carries the death penalty. The papers had published articles considered to be critical of the government.

Religious freedom, though guaranteed by the interim constitution, is not upheld in practice. Approximately 97 percent of Sudan's population is Muslim, nearly all of them Sunni. The authorities have shown increased intolerance of Christians since 2013; they have destroyed or shuttered several churches, refused permits for new churches, closed church-affiliated nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), ordered expatriate Christian workers out of the country, and detained a number of evangelical Christians. Security forces detained Peter Yen Reith, a Christian pastor from South Sudan, in January 2015 and charged him with offenses including spying, which carries the death penalty; Reith had traveled to Khartoum in search of his colleague Yat Michael, who was detained the previous month and faced similar charges. The pastors, who had reportedly been targeted because their church had refused to give up land to the authorities, were held in detention until August. That month, a Khartoum court acquitted them of the most serious charges but convicted Michael on the charge of disturbing the peace and Reith on the charge of participation in a criminal group. The law prohibits apostasy, blasphemy, and conversion to any religion apart from Islam. The 2015 report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended that the U.S. State Department renew its designation of Sudan as a country of particular concern.

Respect for academic freedom is limited. The government administers public universities, monitors appointments, and sets the curriculum. Authorities do not directly control private universities, but self-censorship among instructors is common. The authorities have adopted an increasingly confrontational approach toward universities, which have emerged as a center of opposition to the government.

The NISS intimidates individuals who engage in private discussion of issues of a political nature, and reportedly monitors private communications without adequate oversight or authorization.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are provided for by the interim constitution and by law. These freedoms were violently curtailed in September 2013, when security forces used live ammunition against mostly peaceful protests in Khartoum, Wad Madani, and other towns. The African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, which monitors human rights in Sudan, has verified that 185 participants, including at least 15 children, were killed by gunfire during the demonstrations. On the eve of the one-year anniversary of the protests,

the authorities preemptively rounded up nearly 60 activists in order to prevent further disturbances. Public assembly was also curtailed around the April 2015 elections, with security forces particularly cracking down on signs of dissent in Darfur. In April, police fired tear gas at protesters at Al-Fashir University in Darfur who were calling for a boycott of the vote. At least 29 students were arrested, 17 of whom were charged with offenses that carry the death penalty. The same month, police and soldiers fired live rounds during a protest at a camp for internally displaced people in central Darfur.

The operating environment for NGOs is challenging. All NGOs must register with the governmental Humanitarian Assistance Commission (HAC). The HAC regularly places restrictions or bans on the operations of NGOs and the movements of their workers, particularly in Darfur, Southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile. In January, the authorities ordered the closure of a cultural center in Omdurman and the Sudanese Writer's Union without explanation. In March, NISS officers raided a training session of the Khartoum-based NGO TRACKS, and later arrested a participant, charging him with crimes against the state.

Trade union rights are minimal, and there are no independent unions. The Sudan Workers' Trade Unions Federation has been coopted by the government, which also must approve all strikes.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The judiciary is not independent. Lower courts provide some due process safeguards, but the higher courts are subject to political control. Special security and military courts do not apply accepted legal standards. Sudanese criminal law is based on Sharia and allows punishments such as flogging and cross-amputation (removal of the right hand and left foot). In 2013, Sudan's deputy chief justice confirmed that 16 cases of amputation had been carried out since 2001. In May 2015, a court in Darfur ordered the amputation of the right hands of three men who were convicted of theft. The accused were not provided legal representation.

Security forces have detained hundreds of opposition supporters since 2011, when street protests against the government and the economic situation in Sudan began. Following the September 2013 protests, at least 800 people were detained, including some who were arrested as they sought medical treatment. The government has not held security forces accountable for their handling of these events.

The 2010 National Security Act gives the NISS sweeping authority to seize property, conduct surveillance, search premises, and detain suspects for up to four and a half months without judicial review. The police and security forces routinely exceed these broad powers, carrying out arbitrary arrests and holding people at secret locations without access to lawyers or family members. Human rights groups accuse the NISS of systematically detaining and torturing government opponents, including Darfuri activists and journalists. Three leading activists who were arrested in 2014 after signing a document calling for peace and political transition were released without charge in April 2015. In August, 17 political activists, mainly from the SCP, were detained and interrogated before being released without charge; several reported being beaten in custody.

The government has met attempted rebellions in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile with indiscriminate violence, including the bombing of civilians, targeted killings, forced displacement of communities, the burning of villages, and the use of rape as a weapon of war. The executors of these activities are regular forces, supplemented by paramilitary groups under the loose authority of the NISS. One counterinsurgency group, the Rapid Support Forces, has reportedly murdered civilians, committed mass rapes, poisoned wells,

and looted livestock during campaigns in Darfur and South Kordofan since its establishment in 2013.

Beyond the capital, Sudan's many distinct ethnic, regional, and religious groups face political, social, and economic marginalization. Same-sex sexual acts are illegal, though this prohibition does not appear to be strongly enforced. Official and societal discrimination against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals are widespread. Sudan passed legislation in 2014 to strengthen the rights of asylum seekers, but there are strong concerns about enforcement. In 2014, more than 70 asylum seekers were forcibly repatriated to Eritrea, where they were likely to face persecution.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 1 / 16

The government restricts freedom of movement in conflict-affected areas, particularly in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, where a state of emergency is in place.

Under a political agreement reached by Sudan and South Sudan in 2012, southerners living in Sudan were guaranteed rights of residency and movement as well as the rights to engage in economic activity and acquire property. The agreement, which has yet to be fully implemented, does not address the question of citizenship, putting some people at risk of being reclassified as "foreigners" even if they have lived in Sudan their entire lives.

Female politicians and activists play a role in public life in Sudan, and women are guaranteed 30 percent of seats in the National Assembly. In daily life, however, women face extensive discrimination. Islamic law denies women equitable rights in marriage, inheritance, and divorce. Traditional and religious law restricts the property rights of women. A widow can only inherit an eighth of her husband's estate, with the rest being divided among her children. Women convicted of adultery can face the death penalty. Police use criminal code provisions outlawing "indecent and immoral acts" to prohibit women from wearing clothing of which they disapprove.

Sudan strengthened its laws on gender-based violence in February 2015, establishing the offense of sexual harassment and amending the definition of rape to bring it closer to international standards. However, women at high risk for sexual violence, particularly from security forces, who use rape as a weapon of war. In one of the worst recent examples, more than 200 women and girls were raped, some of them repeatedly, when soldiers entered the Darfur town of Tabit in October 2014. The authorities have blocked efforts by the United Nations to investigate the crime. Female genital mutilation continues to be widely practiced.

While state officials have been accused of involvement in cases of human trafficking, either through bribes or active engagement, the government has increasingly played a proactive role in addressing the problem, and passed an antitrafficking law in 2014. The Sudanese military and Darfur rebel groups continue to use child soldiers.

Suriname

Political Rights Rating: 2

Population: 576,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3↓

Capital: Paramaribo

Freedom Rating: 2.5

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ratings Change: Suriname's civil liberties rating declined from 2 to 3 due to the judiciary's lack of financial independence from the executive and the ruling party's deliberate failure to proceed with the long-delayed formation of a Constitutional Court.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,3,F

INTRODUCTION

The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), led by President Desi Bouterse, won a simple majority in May 2015 parliamentary elections. The new National Assembly then reelected Bouterse in July.

As a consequence of the election result, Bouterse was less likely to face criminal charges for his actions as leader of the country's military regime in the 1980s. A law that had granted him amnesty in 2012 was supposed to be reviewed by a Constitutional Court, but the NDP-controlled legislature has declined to establish the court. Although a November 2015 ruling by another court instructed prosecutors to proceed with Bouterse's trial, it remained unclear at year's end whether they would do so.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 34 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The 1987 constitution provides for a unicameral, 51-seat National Assembly. Representatives are elected for five-year terms via proportional representation. The president is elected by a two-thirds majority of the assembly, also for five-year terms. If no such majority can be reached, a United People's Assembly—consisting of lawmakers from the national, regional, and local levels—convenes to choose the president by a simple majority. The electoral laws meet international standards of fairness.

Suriname held legislative elections in May 2015. The NDP became the first single party in the country's history to win a simple majority, taking 26 of the 51 seats. An opposition coalition, Victory 7, won 18 seats. The A-Combination coalition claimed 5 seats, while the Party for Democracy and Development through Unity (DOE) and the Progressive Workers' and Farmers' Union (PALU) won 1 seat each. In July, the National Assembly reelected President Bouterse, who was unopposed. International election observers considered the voting to be transparent, free, and fair.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 14 / 16 (+ 1)

Suriname's many political parties operate freely. They often reflect the country's ethnic cleavages. Most parties form coalitions to contest elections; while Bouterse's NDP ran alone in 2015, it had formed an electoral bloc for the previous elections in 2010. The

opposition coalition Victory 7, which placed second in 2015, campaigned on promises to fight corruption, strengthen democracy, and repeal the 2012 law that granted Bouterse and 24 other defendants amnesty for their role in extrajudicial killings in 1982.

Despite Bouterse's military background, the civilian authorities maintain control over the military. Citizens did not face intimidation in casting their votes during 2015.

Ethnic minorities have political opportunities and are protected against exclusion, though the representation of some groups remains low, and the political system has failed to address the interests of indigenous and Maroon communities regarding issues such as land rights.

C. Functioning of Government: 8 / 12

Freely elected officials determine the country's laws and government policies, but the government does not effectively enforce anticorruption laws. Widespread official corruption has been linked to trafficking of drugs and other contraband. President Bouterse and lawmaker Ronnie Brunswijk of the A-Combination bloc both face 1999 convictions in absentia for drug trafficking in the Netherlands. In March 2015, Bouterse's son, Dino Bouterse, was sentenced to more than 16 years in prison in the United States after pleading guilty in 2014 to drug trafficking and other charges; in a sting by U.S. authorities, he had agreed to various transactions with agents posing as members of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

A September 2014 report on Suriname's implementation of the Inter-American Convention against Corruption noted a lack of transparency and accountability in the High Court of Justice, the Public Prosecutions Department, the Ministry of Justice and Police, and the Central Government Auditing Bureau. Government officials are not legally required to disclose information on their finances. Suriname does not have laws to facilitate access to information, which is limited in practice.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 43 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression and freedom of the press. The media sector is fairly diverse, and internet access is not restricted, though some journalists and outlets reportedly engage in self-censorship in response to government pressure. Defamation and libel remain criminal offenses. Contempt toward or hatred of the government is punishable with up to seven years in prison. Insulting the head of state is an offense punishable with five years in prison and the loss of some civil rights, including the right to vote.

Article 18 of the constitution protects freedom of religion. The constitution also bans discrimination on the grounds of religious origin. The authorities typically respect these guarantees and do not infringe on academic freedom. Private discussion is also generally open and free.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

The constitution protects the right to freedom of peaceful association and assembly, as well as the right to demonstrate. The government respects these rights in practice. While workers are free to join independent trade unions, civil servants lack the legal right to strike. Collective bargaining is a legal and common practice. Trade unions are actively involved in politics.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16 (– 1)

The country's legal system is based on the Dutch civil system. Defendants' right to a fair and public trial, with the presumption of innocence, is generally enforced. Constitutional guarantees notwithstanding, judicial independence is a matter of considerable concern.

President Bouterse, who led the country's military regime from 1980 to 1987, was involved in the abduction and extrajudicial killing of 15 political opponents in 1982. Although he has accepted "political responsibility" for the murders, he has not faced legal consequences for his actions. The parliament pardoned Bouterse and 24 fellow suspects in an amnesty law in 2012. The law's constitutionality was challenged, but it could not be reviewed until the establishment of a Constitutional Court, as called for in the constitution. The legislature has yet to establish such a court, effectively blocking a trial. In November 2015, Suriname's top appellate court, the Court of Justice, instructed the attorney general to proceed with the case against Bouterse and the other defendants, but it remained unclear at year's end whether he would comply. The attorney general is appointed by the president, and the prosecution and court system remains dependent on the Ministry of Justice and Police for funding.

While prison conditions are generally adequate, temporary detention facilities suffer from hygienic deficiencies and overcrowding. In March 2015, the National Assembly abolished the death penalty, which had not been carried out since 1927. However, the new legislation also increased the maximum prison sentence from 20 to 50 years and tightened parole provisions for serious crimes.

Suriname remains an important transit site for the trafficking of drugs. Violent crimes such as burglary and armed robbery are increasingly common, and police resources are insufficient to address the problem. There are many cases of police abuse. In one prominent incident in 2015, police reportedly assaulted Guyana's ambassador to Suriname.

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on race or ethnicity. Nevertheless, the Maroons, descendants of slaves who make up roughly 21 percent of the population, face inequality in areas such as education and employment. Indigenous groups do not enjoy any group rights or special protections. Under Article 41 of the constitution, all natural resources are national property, meaning minority groups can be dispossessed of their lands. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights has found this situation to be in violation of international law, and a draft law that would acknowledge the collective ownership rights of indigenous communities has yet to be adopted.

Same-sex sexual relations are legal, though the age of consent differs from that for heterosexual couples. The penal code changes adopted in March 2015 added protections against discrimination and hate speech for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people. However, in practice members of the LGBT community continued to face societal discrimination, harassment and abuse by police, and open hostility from some politicians and public figures.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

The government generally upholds constitutional freedoms of internal movement and residence, though the lack of protections for indigenous and Maroon lands leave those communities vulnerable to displacement by unregulated logging and mining operations. Property rights and private business activity are impeded in part by corruption, which is evident in land policy, government contracts, and the issuing of licenses.

The constitution bars gender discrimination, but many women face de facto inequality on issues related to marriage, inheritance, and property due to discriminatory local customs.

Legal protections notwithstanding, women also experience disadvantages in access to employment and education, and domestic violence remains a serious problem. Women hold about a quarter of the seats in the National Assembly.

Women and migrant workers are especially at risk of human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and forced labor in various industries, including illegal mining operations. Corruption among officials has facilitated the criminal activities of traffickers.

Swaziland

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 1,286,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Mbabane (administrative), Lobamba (legislative, royal)

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

Swaziland continues to face widespread condemnation for restrictions on freedom of speech, media, trade unions, and political parties. At the start of 2015, the U.S. government stripped the country of its eligibility for trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) over its poor record on workers' rights; European countries have threatened similar action. However, some progress was registered in 2015, as a ban on the Trade Union Congress of Swaziland (TUCOSWA) was lifted in May, and leaders of the outlawed People's United Democratic Movement (PUDEMO) were released on bail in July, though they remain subject to restrictions while awaiting trial on sedition charges.

In June, the Supreme Court ordered the release of a human rights lawyer and a journalist who had been jailed the previous year in connection with articles criticizing the judiciary. The public prosecutor's office later stated that the two should not have been convicted.

According to the Joint UN Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Swaziland has one of the world's highest rates of HIV infection, with 29 percent of Swazi residents between the ages of 15 and 49 living with the disease.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 1 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

King Mswati III of Swaziland is the last absolute monarch in Africa. Although the 2005 constitution removed the king's ability to rule by decree, the members of the bicameral parliament, all of whom serve five-year terms, cannot initiate legislation. Of the House of Assembly's 65 members, 55 are elected by popular vote within the *tinkhundla* system, which allows local chiefs to vet candidates; the king appoints the other 10 members. The king also appoints the prime minister from among the members of the House of Assembly, as well as 20 members of the 30-seat Senate, with the remainder selected by the House of Assembly. Traditional chiefs govern designated localities and typically report directly to the king.

Although the 2013 parliamentary elections were peaceful and saw significant turnover among members (at least 46 of the 55 elected members were new), international observers judged the polls to be neither free nor fair.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16

According to the constitution, election to public office is based on individual merit rather than political parties. This, in effect, makes political parties illegal. However, political associations have organized, the two largest being PUDEMO and the Ngwane National Liberatory Congress (NNLC). Both PUDEMO and the NNLC boycotted the 2013 elections. In 2014, PUDEMO president Mario Masuku and Maxwell Dlamini, the head of the association's youth wing, were arrested for calling for the king's overthrow. They were released on bail in July 2015, but are subject to restrictions, including a prohibition on addressing public gatherings.

In September 2015, former Malawian president Bakili Muluzi brokered a meeting between the king and representatives from Swaziland's civil society, which were collectively known as the G15. By December 2015, the meeting had yet to take place.

The king's absolute power in Swaziland is doled out through traditional chiefs, who are in charge of the daily governance of their chiefdoms. While the positions are typically passed down from generation to generation within certain families, the constitution stipulates that the king can make appointments of his choice to the roles at any point.

Although the constitution allotted five of the House of Assembly's seats for representatives of "marginalized groups not already adequately represented in the House," there are practically no members of minority groups in the government, as most officials had some connection to the royal family.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

Elected members of parliament have no oversight or influence over setting government policy, making laws, or adjusting spending levels.

Corruption is a major problem. Areas most affected include public contracting, government appointments, and school admissions. While the country does have an Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), all of its staff are appointed by the king. In 2015, the body's deputy head took the commission to court for unpaid wages; soon thereafter, she was suspended from her position and arrested on charges of corruption and obstruction.

There is no oversight of the king's budget, and audits are presented only to the king and a Royal Board of Trustees chaired by the minister of finance. Though some 63 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, the king continues to demand an enormous salary from state coffers.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 17 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 7 / 16 (+ 1)

Constitutional rights to free expression are severely restricted in practice and can be suspended by the king. Publishing criticism of the ruling family and any member of his government is banned, and both state-owned and independent newspapers have faced consequences for disseminating such material. In 2014, human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko and Bheki Makhubu, editor of the *Nation* magazine, were charged with contempt of court and sentenced to two years in prison after they published articles criticizing the judiciary. After 18 months behind bars, the Supreme Court in June 2015 overturned their convictions; the public prosecutor's office later stated that they should not have been convicted. Separately,

civil society groups alleged that authorities took efforts to limit media coverage of an August 2015 accident, in which a number of young women on their way to the traditional Reed Dance event were killed in a vehicular collision. Police said 13 women were killed, but one civil society group said that the death toll may have been as high as 65.

About a quarter of the population has access to the internet; the government reportedly monitors online communications. Approximately 86 percent of the country has access to mobile technology, and many young people use social media to access more diverse views than what is generally found in Swaziland's traditional media outlets.

Freedom of religion is not explicitly protected under the constitution but is mostly respected in practice, although security forces have been accused of intimidating church leaders deemed sympathetic to prodemocracy movements.

Academic freedom is limited by prohibitions against criticizing the monarchy.

Private discussion is not free. Those who criticize the king risk losing benefits they might have acquired through traditional patronage systems. Undercover police officers are typically present at union, civil society, and arts events.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 2 / 12

The government restricts freedoms of assembly and association through the sweeping powers granted under the 2008 Suppression of Terrorism Act, which allows it to declare any organization a terrorist group. Police harassment and surveillance of civil society organizations continues, with numerous reports of illegal searches, arrests, and violent interrogations.

Swaziland has active labor unions, some of which have called for democratic reforms. Workers in most areas of the economy, with the exception of essential services such as police and health care, can join unions; however, government pressure and crackdowns on strikes have limited union operations. The Public Order Act continues to serve as a means of regulating and barring protest and industrial action; demonstrators routinely face violence and arrests by police. In an attempt to qualify for AGOA, Swaziland passed amendments to the Industrial Relations Act to permit registration of trade unions in late 2014. However, security personnel forcefully broke up a February 2015 meeting of TUCOSWA when discussions turned to democratic reforms. In March, security forces blocked TUCOSWA from electing members to its national executive committee. While TUCOSWA was finally able to register with the Swaziland Ministry of Labor and Social Security in May, police intimidation of its members has continued.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16 (-1)

The dual judicial system includes courts based on Roman-Dutch law and traditional courts using customary law. Although the judiciary is independent in most civil cases, the king holds ultimate judicial power and is immune from prosecution. Despite such immunity, King Mswati is currently being personally sued for \$1.5 million in a foreign court in connection with the financial collapse of a company running Swaziland's Ngwenya iron ore mine. According to the suit, the king allegedly took that amount from the company in order to buy artwork for his personal collection, and then later refused to repay the money.

The Law Society of Swaziland has accused the king of appointing judges in contravention of the constitution. In 2015, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) called for an overhaul of the Swazi legal system, saying the king exercised an inappropriate amount of influence over judicial appointment processes, thus undermining judicial independence.

Arbitrary arrests, although banned by the constitution, do take place, particularly ahead of planned public protests. Forced searches of homes and offices, as well as torture in

interrogations, continue. Prisons are overcrowded, and inmates are subject to rape, beatings, and torture.

People with albinism are discriminated against and are susceptible to violent attacks. Discrimination against members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community is widespread, and many LGBT people hide their sexual orientation.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

Swazi residents are largely free to move throughout and exit the country. However, Swazi citizens from minority ethnic groups often face delays in obtaining passports and other citizenship documents, with political activists subject to additional barriers in procuring passports. Recent years have seen numerous residents forcibly evicted from their homes, often to make way for development projects.

The constitution grants women equal rights and legal status as adults, but these rights remain restricted in practice. Widows in particular face regular violations of their rights to property ownership, and face restrictions on their ability to appear in public while in mourning. In many cases, a widow is placed into a marriage with another male from the family of her deceased husband. While both the legal code and customary law provide some protection against gender-based violence, it is common and often tolerated with impunity. Human rights advocates have criticized the traditional Reed Dance for propagating forced marriages. In 2015 only four women served in the House of Assembly, down from nine in 2008.

According to the U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, orphaned girls in Swaziland are particularly susceptible to sex trafficking or being forced into domestic labor, while young boys can be forced into agricultural labor and market vending. The report also noted some government progress in addressing human trafficking, with authorities having recently launched several investigations into suspected trafficking operations.

Sweden

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 9,804,792

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Stockholm

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

More than 160,000 people—the vast majority fleeing violence in Syria and Iraq—applied for asylum in Sweden in 2015, placing severe pressure on the country's ability to process applications and accommodate new arrivals. Meanwhile, the 2014 agreement between the social-democratic government and center-right opposition on budget proposals,

designed to curb the controversial right-wing Sweden Democrats party, was broken in October, expanding the Sweden Democrats' capacity to influence the response to the refugee crisis and other national policies.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Sweden's unicameral parliament, the Riksdag, is comprised of 349 members who are elected every four years by proportional representation. A party must receive at least 4 percent of the vote nationwide or 12 percent in an electoral district to win representation. The prime minister is appointed by the speaker of the Riksdag and confirmed by the body as a whole. King Carl XVI Gustaf, crowned in 1973, is the ceremonial head of state.

In the 2014 parliamentary elections, the Social Democratic Party (SAP) won 113 seats, and SAP leader Stefan Löfven became prime minister in a minority government with the Green Party, which won 25 seats. The Moderates took 84 seats, the Center Party secured 22 seats, the Liberal People's Party won 19 seats, and the Christian Democrats gained 16 seats, all suffering losses compared with the results of the 2010 elections. The Left Party won 21 seats, a slight increase from 2010. The Sweden Democrats made the most significant gains, increasing their representation from 20 seats to 49 seats and becoming the third biggest party in the Riksdag. To avert snap elections amid disagreements about the proposed national budget, in late 2014 the SAP-led government reached a historic budget deal with the opposition parties of the center-right Alliance—the Moderates, the Center Party, the Liberals, and the Christian Democrats. The so-called December Agreement committed the Alliance to vote for all government budget proposals until 2022. However, the agreement collapsed in October 2015 when the Christian Democrats decided to leave it, leading the rest of the Alliance parties to also nullify the deal.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

For the majority of the last century, the SAP ruled with the support of the Left Party and, in later decades, with the support of the Greens. Eight political parties gained representation in the Riksdag in 2014, with the SAP, the Moderates, and the Sweden Democrats holding the most seats. The Sweden Democrats, who first gained political footing in the 2006 parliamentary elections, maintain a far-right platform with a strong stance against immigration. Although the 2014 December Agreement diminished the party's ability to participate in the political process, its popularity has continued to rise, and is particularly strong in the country's southern constituencies. A December 2015 poll conducted by the government statistical agency showed support at nearly 20 percent, up from 14.5 percent in May.

The country's principal religious, ethnic, and immigrant groups are represented in the parliament. Since 1993, the indigenous Sami community has elected its own legislature, which has significant powers over community education and culture and serves as an advisory body to the government.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Corruption rates are low in Sweden, which was ranked 3 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. The country has one of the most robust freedom of information statutes in the world, and state authorities respect the right of both citizens and noncitizens to access public information. However, Sweden has faced criticism for insufficient enforcement of foreign bribery laws.

In 2015, the telecommunication giant TeliaSonera, in which the Swedish state has a 37 percent stake, remained embroiled in a corruption scandal related to its dealings in Uzbekistan. TeliaSonera faces allegations that it paid heavy bribes to a company with ties to Uzbekistan's ruling family in order to secure business there. Swedish and U.S. prosecutors continued to investigate the claims in 2015.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 60 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16 (+ 1)

Sweden's media are independent. Most newspapers and periodicals are privately owned, and the government subsidizes daily newspapers regardless of their political affiliation. Public broadcasters air weekly radio and television programs in several immigrant languages. The ethnic minority press is entitled to the same subsidies as the Swedish-language press.

Freedom of speech is guaranteed by law, and the government does not restrict access to the internet. Hate-speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt based on race, color, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, or sexual orientation. In June 2015, local media reported that Sweden's attorney general had launched an investigation into the editor of Nordfront, a website owned and run by the Swedish arm of the Nordic Resistance Movement, a neo-Nazi organization with a reputation for violence. The editor, Martin Saxlind, faced allegations of incitement to racial hatred in connection to an article published on the website praising Adolf Hitler. The attorney general formally charged Saxlind in September, but the status of the case remained unclear at year's end. Also in September, Saxlind was sentenced to six months in prison in a separate case for rioting against antiracism demonstrators in 2013; he planned to appeal the verdict, claiming that he was at the demonstration as a journalist and did not engage in violence.

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and respected by the government. Although the population is 66 percent Lutheran, all churches, as well as synagogues and mosques, receive some state financial support. A number of mosques were vandalized in 2015, and anti-Semitic crimes also continued. State authorities make great efforts to document religion-based hate crimes, investigate and prosecute cases, and provide adequate resources for victims. The police force includes a permanent unit trained to handle hate crimes.

Academic freedom is ensured for all, and private discussion is open and vibrant. The 2008 Signals Intelligence Act regulates the monitoring of cross-border communications, overseen exclusively by the National Defense Radio Establishment, and the Electronic Communication Act regulates domestic surveillance by security forces. There were no reports in 2015 of authorities engaging in unlawful surveillance of private communications.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are respected in law and practice. There is heavy police presence at demonstrations organized by far-right groups as well as at counterdemonstrations, some of which have become violent in the past. In September and October 2015, Swedish and Finnish activists organized a number of public gatherings near the twin border cities of Haparanda (on the Swedish side) and Tornio (on the Finnish side), where many asylum seekers entered Finland during the year. Most demonstrators, gathered primarily in Tornio, were rallying against the border crossing, while others were gathered in support of the refugees. The events concluded peacefully.

The rights to strike and organize in labor unions are guaranteed. Trade union federations, which represent approximately 80 percent of the workforce, are strong and well organized.

F. Rule of Law: 16 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and the rule of law prevails in civil and criminal matters. Conditions in prisons and temporary detention facilities are adequate. Swedish courts have jurisdiction to try suspects for genocide committed abroad.

In 2011, Sweden sought the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange so that he could be questioned regarding four allegations—one of rape, one of unlawful coercion, and two of sexual molestation—stemming from two incidents in Stockholm in 2010. Sweden’s chief prosecutor, Marianne Ny, faced criticism in June 2015 for requesting but promptly cancelling an interview with Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he has lived since 2012 in order to avoid extradition. Assange cannot be charged before he is interrogated, according to Swedish law. The statutes of limitation on the three lesser allegations of sexual misconduct expired in August, but prosecutors have the authority to investigate the more serious charge of rape until 2020. Ecuador and Sweden began bilateral talks in August to resolve the situation and reached an agreement in December to allow Swedish police to question Assange in the embassy; an interrogation was expected to take place in 2016.

Approximately 50,000 Roma reside in Sweden, and the government in 2015 continued implementation of a national integration plan for Roma, set to conclude in 2032. The Swedish state is highly active in ensuring equal protection and rights for all members of the population. An equality ombudsman oversees efforts to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation.

An unprecedented influx of asylum seekers in 2015, mostly from the Middle East, led to political tension as well as a strain on government resources; the country’s Migration Agency struggled to process applications for asylum in a timely manner, and a housing shortage led to inadequate living conditions for some arrivals. The Swedish government maintained an open-door policy for the majority of the year while participating in European Union (EU) discussions about quotas for the intake and resettlement of refugees. In 2015, the country received more asylum seekers per capita than any other EU member, and its approval rate of over 70 percent for asylum applications was among the highest in the bloc. In November, however, the government introduced tighter border controls and entry requirements in order to stem the flow of migration.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 16 / 16

Freedom of movement is legally guaranteed and respected in practice. The government also respects the rights of individuals to own property and establish a private business. A 2011 Supreme Court ruling granted Sami reindeer herders common-law rights to disputed lands.

Sweden is a global leader in gender equality. Approximately half of Riksdag members and the same proportion of government ministers are women. More than 70 percent of women work outside the home, earning the equivalent of 94 percent of men’s wages, when differences in age, sector, and experience are taken into account.

Same-sex couples are legally allowed to marry and adopt; lesbian couples have the same rights to artificial insemination and in-vitro fertilization as heterosexual couples. The Lutheran Church allows same-sex marriage ceremonies.

Sweden is a destination and transit point for women and children trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but the Swedish government is proactive in combating the problem. The 2004 Aliens Act helped to provide more assistance to trafficking victims, and a special ambassador aids in combating human trafficking.

Switzerland

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 8,292,851

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Bern

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Swiss voters elected a new parliament, choosing deputies for the National Council and the Council of States. The right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) made the most significant gains, largely at the expense of centrist and left-wing parties. The election campaign as well as general national dialogue were dominated by discussions of the refugee crisis that gripped Europe during the year. The wearing of veils in public spaces was also a focus of discussion, and local governments in multiple cantons confronted the question of banning veils that cover the head or face. In December, the Federal Constitutional Court ruled the banning of the hijab (headscarf) to be unconstitutional.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 39 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The constitution provides for a Federal Assembly with two directly elected chambers: the 46-member Council of States (in which each canton has two members and each half-canton has one) and the 200-member National Council. All lawmakers serve four-year terms. The Federal Council (cabinet) is a seven-person executive council, with each member elected by the Federal Assembly. The presidency is largely ceremonial and rotates annually among the Federal Council's members.

Federal elections were held in 2015. Voting for the National Assembly took place in October, while the two rounds of voting for the Council of States took place in October and November. In the National Council, the right-wing SVP made strong gains and won 65 seats, up from the 54 it previously held. The Social Democratic Party (SP) won 43 seats, the FDP—a group formed through the merger of the Free Democratic Party and the Liberal Party—took 33 seats, the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) captured 27 seats, and the Green Party won 7 seats. Six smaller parties also gained representation. In the Council of States, the FDP and the CVP won 13 seats each, the SP took 12, and three other parties split the remainder.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Political parties are free to form and operate, and a wide range of parties are active at the federal and regional levels. The political system is extremely stable, but remains open to new groups. By common agreement, the Federal Council is comprised of two members each from the SVP, the SP, and the FDP, and one member from the CVP.

Restrictive citizenship laws and procedures tend to exclude many immigrants as well as their children from political participation.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Swiss governance is characterized by decentralization. The 26 cantons have significant control over economic and social policy, with the federal government's powers largely limited to foreign affairs and some economic matters. Referendums, which are used extensively, are mandatory for any amendments to the federal constitution, the joining of international organizations, or major changes to federal laws.

The government is free from pervasive corruption. Switzerland was ranked 7 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. In 2013, Switzerland signed an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) convention against tax evasion, in which states pledge to share information for tax enforcement. As the world's largest offshore financial center, however, Switzerland has been criticized for failing to comply with recommended international norms on preventing tax evasion, money laundering, and the financing of terrorism. In a June 2015 report, the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) criticized Switzerland for failure to combat lack of transparency in party financing.

Some improvements were made during the year. In September, legislators adopted amendments to the penal code that toughened penalties for bribery involving private-sector entities. Also in September, federal police and prosecutors launched an anonymous hotline for members of the public to use for reporting corruption and related malfeasance.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 57 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the constitution. Switzerland has a free media environment, although the state-owned Swiss Broadcasting Corporation dominates the broadcast market. Consolidation of newspaper ownership in large media conglomerates has forced the closure of some small and local newspapers. The law penalizes public incitement to racial hatred or discrimination as well as denial of crimes against humanity. The government does not restrict access to the internet.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution, and most cantons support one or more churches. The country is roughly split between Roman Catholics and Protestants, although some 400,000 Muslims form the largest non-Christian minority, at about 5 percent of the population. In a 2009 referendum, voters approved a ban on the future construction of minarets on mosques.

Discussions about banning veils in public continued in 2015. In the absence of federal consensus, local government have been able to make varying decision on the matter in recent years. In 2013, voters in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino supported banning face-covering veils in public spaces through a referendum. In March 2015, the Council of States issued a decision that the prohibition did not violate federal laws, and in November, the legislature of Ticino approved the ban, prescribing fines of up to 10,000 Swiss francs (\$10,000). In a case brought by a student in St. Gallen whose school barred her from

wearing a hijab (headscarf), the Federal Supreme Court ruled in December that prohibiting headscarves is unconstitutional. In August, while the case was ongoing, some SVP lawmakers called for the deportation of the student's family, claiming that they were a threat to "social peace." Following the incident, the Federal Commission against Racism denounced discriminatory and offensive language by politicians, urging them to set an example for responsible public debate. In September, several SVP representatives announced plans to progress an initiative for a federal ban on face-covering veils.

Most public schools provide religious education, depending on the predominant creed in the canton. Religion classes are mandatory in some schools, although waivers are regularly granted upon request. The government respects academic freedom, and private discussion remains open and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are protected by the constitution. The right to collective bargaining is respected, and approximately 16 percent of the workforce is unionized.

In 2014, local authorities in Fribourg banned the Islamic Central Council of Switzerland (IZRS) from holding its annual meeting, citing security risks related to the potential for rioting and concerns regarding Muslim radicalism; the Fribourg cantonal court upheld the ban. In October 2015, the Federal Supreme Court overturned the lower court decision, ruling that Fribourg authorities had restricted the group's right to assemble using inappropriate legal grounds and insufficient evidence.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and the rule of law prevails in civil and criminal matters. Most judicial decisions are made at the cantonal level. The federal Supreme Court is empowered to review cantonal court decisions when they pertain to federal law. Some incidents of police discrimination and excessive use of force have been documented. Conditions in prisons and detention centers generally meet international standards, and the Swiss government permits visits by independent observers.

In 2014, the Federal Council announced a ban on membership in the Islamic State (IS) militant group, and barred activities including propaganda, fundraising, and recruitment for IS. Violators of the ban can face up to three years in prison. Swiss citizens who travel abroad to fight with the group may be subject to prosecution upon return. These provisions were applied for the first time in April 2015 when a Swiss citizen was stopped from boarding a plane from Zurich to Istanbul due to suspicions that he intended to fight with IS.

Immigration and asylum policies have been at the forefront of national dialogue in recent years. In a June 2013 referendum, about 80 percent of voters approved a proposal to tighten asylum laws, and in a February 2014 referendum, just over 50 percent of voters supported a proposal to further increase restrictions on immigration. The February vote obliged the government to act within three years to impose new quotas on foreign workers and renegotiate labor market agreements with the European Union (EU). It also required employers to give preference to Swiss citizens in hiring, and restricted immigrants' rights to welfare benefits.

Switzerland received approximately 38,000 first-time asylum applications in 2015, an increase of more than 70 percent from the previous year. In September, legislators approved amendments to asylum laws aimed at expediting the application process; among other things, the amendments shortened the processing time from 700 to 140 days, and mandated

that applicants have access to free legal counsel. SVP legislators denounced the amendments, and by year’s end, the party had gathered enough signatures to call for a referendum against the measures.

The rights of cultural, religious, and linguistic minorities are legally protected, but minority groups—especially those of African and Central European descent, as well as Roma—face increasing societal discrimination. There are some right-wing extremist groups whose platforms include hostility toward minorities and immigrants, and some incidents of hate speech and aggression were reported in 2015.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Freedom of movement is respected, and there are no undue limitations on the ability to choose one’s place of residence, employment, or education. The rights to hold property and to open a business remain unrestricted.

Women were only granted universal suffrage at the federal level in 1971, and the half-canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden denied women the right to vote until 1990. In the 2015 elections, 64 women were elected to the National Council. The constitution guarantees men and women equal pay for equal work, but pay differentials remain. Switzerland was ranked 8 out of 145 countries surveyed in the World Economic Forum’s 2015 Gender Gap Index, which analyzes equality in the division of resources and opportunities between men and women.

In a 2005 referendum, voters approved same-sex civil unions. Recognized since 2007, these unions grant many of the legal benefits of marriage, with the exception of full adoption rights.

According to the U.S. State Department’s 2016 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, Switzerland is primarily a destination for victims of human trafficking; the government complies with international standards for combating trafficking, and devotes adequate resources to protecting victims.

Syria

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 17,065,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Capital: Damascus

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

The civil war that started in the wake of a peaceful 2011 uprising continued unabated in 2015. By December it had displaced some 6.6 million people within Syria and created roughly 4.3 million Syrian refugees; most of those who remained in the country were in need of humanitarian assistance. The United Nations stopped providing casualty figures in

January 2014, but the independent Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported a total of 330,000 dead as of August 2015.

The Syrian regime survived despite losing significant territory to three distinct and mutually hostile groups: the self-declared Islamic State (IS), Kurdish militias, and a loose coalition of rebel factions ranging from relatively moderate forces to radical Islamist organizations such as Jabhat al-Nusra, an affiliate of Al-Qaeda. President Bashar al-Assad appeared to enjoy active or passive support among constituencies including religious minorities—Alawites, Christians, and Druze—given the threat of Sunni Muslim extremism. Russia, Iran, the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah, and Shiite militias from Iraq continued to provide the regime with critical military, material, and political support. Russia stepped up its involvement in September 2015, moving troops and equipment into the country and beginning a campaign of air strikes from Syrian bases. While Russia largely targeted rebel-held areas, a U.S.-led international coalition continued its own air strikes against IS.

Human rights violations by the regime persisted as it besieged major opposition-held population centers in what amounted to a “surrender or starve” strategy, causing malnutrition and civilian deaths. The government maintained its obstruction of international efforts to aid affected populations, in violation of UN Security Council resolutions, and reports of torture and other mistreatment of detainees continued to emerge. Human Rights Watch as well as Syrian medical and civil defense personnel accused regime forces of using chlorine bombs during 2015, despite the previous year’s completion of an international program designed to eliminate Syria’s stockpile of chemical weapons.

Insurgent groups also committed serious human rights violations, though the United Nations reported that these were dwarfed by the regime’s abuses. Rebel atrocities included detention, torture, and execution of perceived dissidents and rivals, and sectarian killings of civilians. The worst violators were jihadist militant groups, particularly IS, which suffered some territorial losses to Kurdish and Arab militias but was able to capture new territory and population centers during 2015. Most notably, IS captured the city of Palmyra from government forces in May. Among a variety of other human rights abuses, evidence emerged during the year that IS had used chemical weapons, most likely a mustard agent, against its opponents.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: – 3 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

Bashar al-Assad assumed power after the death of his father, longtime president Hafez al-Assad, in 2000. Constitutional revisions adopted in 2012 provided for future presidential elections, replacing a presidential referendum system in which the sole candidate was nominated by the ruling Baath Party. However, among other restrictions, candidates needed support from at least 35 lawmakers to qualify.

Assad was reelected for a third term in June 2014 with what the government claimed was 88.7 percent of the vote amid 73.4 percent turnout. The voting was conducted only in government-controlled areas and in a climate of severe repression. Observers were invited from friendly authoritarian countries including North Korea, while major democratic states denounced the voting as illegitimate.

Members of the 250-seat, unicameral People’s Council serve four-year terms but hold little independent legislative power. Almost all power rests in the executive branch. The last legislative elections were held in May 2012 amid open warfare and an opposition boycott. The Baath Party and allied factions took 168 seats, progovernment independents secured 77, and a nominal opposition group won 5.

Opposition-held Syria—as distinguished from IS territory and the Kurdish region—continued to lack an effective or unified governing structure in 2015. The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, or Etilaf, was formed in 2012 to act as the international representative body of the revolution. Comprising delegates from opposition groups in exile, it has been recognized as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people by the Arab League, the United States, and many European countries. Etilaf has undergone several changes of leadership through internal elections; in January 2015, delegates meeting in Istanbul chose Khaled Khoja to serve a six-month term as president; he was subsequently reelected in August. These elections are competitive to an extent, but heavily influenced by the coalition’s foreign backers. Moreover, Etilaf’s links to local leaders and fighters inside Syria remain tenuous, casting serious doubt on the degree to which it is genuinely representative of civilians or fighters in the country.

Provisional local councils in certain rebel-held areas have organized rudimentary elections, and some appear to have been fairly contested and even impartially monitored. Separately, Syria’s Kurdish north, known locally as Rojava, declared autonomy from Damascus in January 2014 and adopted a provisional constitution. Its decentralized political and administrative structure prioritizes decision making at the neighborhood and municipal levels, where representatives are directly elected by residents. Elections at these levels took place throughout 2015. However, in Rojava and elsewhere, experiments in civilian self-government remain vulnerable to derailment by hostile militant groups, bombardment and siege by progovernment forces, and chronic resource shortages. IS does not allow elections of any kind in areas under its control.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

Formally, the state forbids parties based on religious, tribal, or regional affiliation. Until a 2011 decree allowed the formation of new parties, the only legal factions were the Baath Party and its several small coalition partners. Independent candidates are heavily vetted and closely allied with the regime. The 2012 constitutional reforms relaxed rules regarding the participation of non-Baathist parties, but the government maintains a powerful intelligence and security apparatus to monitor and punish opposition political activity in practice.

Within the domestic progovernment camp, politics and decision making are completely dominated by Assad, his extended family, and a close circle of business and security allies. The president’s relatives control key elements of the security forces. Although the government is often described as an Alawite regime and a protector of religious minorities, it is not an authentic vehicle for these groups’ political interests. Political access is a function not primarily of sect, but of proximity and loyalty to Assad and his associates. The political elite is not exclusively Alawite and indeed includes members of the majority Sunni sect, which also makes up most of the rebel movement; meanwhile, Alawites, Christians, and Druze outside Assad’s inner circle are just as politically disenfranchised as the broader Sunni population. Foreign actors including Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia also exert heavy influence over the regime due to their critical contribution to the war effort.

Political activity in rebel-held areas is more vigorous than in regime areas, but it is still seriously constrained, and in some places nonexistent. Civilians’ political aspirations are often subordinated to whatever armed group controls a given area. Opposition territory is divided among a multitude of armed factions, including moderate, Islamist, and radical jihadist units, with varying implications for local political life. Local councils are often sponsored or appointed by prominent families and armed groups, and overwhelmed by addressing humanitarian needs and delivering basic services.

In the Kurdish region, the decentralized governance structure allows for the participation of most citizens in political life, including ethnic and religious minorities. However,

the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the most powerful Syrian Kurdish group, dominates political life in practice and controls most of the Kurdish area's armed forces. It has been accused of arbitrarily detaining perceived opponents.

No political activity is permitted in IS-controlled territory. Those who oppose IS rule must either refrain from expressing their views openly or flee to other areas, as dissent is severely punished.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

Government institutions lacked public accountability and were plagued by corruption even before the armed conflict. Those who question state policies or use of public funds face harassment, imprisonment, or death. Members of the ruling family and their inner circle are said to own or control much of the Syrian economy. The civil war has created new opportunities for corruption within the government and its relations with the private sector. The regime has regularly distributed patronage in the form of public resources, and implemented policies to benefit favored industries and companies, to shore up its base of support. Government contracts and trade deals have also been awarded to allies like Iran as compensation for political and military aid. Even basic state services are extended or withheld based on a community's demonstrated political loyalty to the Assad regime, providing additional leverage for bribe-seeking officials. Syria was ranked 154 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

The government's lack of public accountability has been exacerbated during the civil war by the rise of militias that are nominally loyal to the regime but increasingly autonomous and free to exploit the population in regime-held areas. They have reportedly engaged in abuses including looting, extortion, and the erection of arbitrary checkpoints.

Corruption is also widespread in rebel-held areas. Some rebel commanders, including from brigades nominally aligned with democratic powers and their allies, have been accused of looting, extortion, and theft. In addition, local administrators and activists complain that little of the international aid reportedly given to opposition representatives abroad seems to reach them, raising suspicions of graft.

Islamist factions appear somewhat more disciplined and eager to enforce their decrees, though militant groups such as IS are not accountable to the public. IS runs an extensive extortion network and smuggling operations that extend into Iraq and Turkey.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: - 3 / 0

The armed conflict has grown increasingly sectarian, with Sunni civilians bearing the brunt of government and progovernment militia attacks, some Islamist factions persecuting minorities and others they deem insufficiently pious, and civilians of all confessions seeking safety among their respective groups. The result is significant, ongoing change in the country's demographics. In 2015, belligerents negotiated large-scale sectarian population transfers in an apparent attempt to secure their hold on strategic territory, though full implementation of the agreements remained stalled at year's end. Separately, Amnesty International accused Kurdish militias of destroying some Arab and Turkmen settlements and forcibly removing their inhabitants for suspected sympathies with IS or other armed factions.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 2 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 2 / 16

The constitution nominally guarantees freedom of speech and the press, but this is not implemented in practice. Freedom of expression is heavily restricted in government-held

areas, and journalists or ordinary citizens who disseminate critical views are subject to the regime's coercive measures, including censorship, detention, torture, and death. Most domestic news outlets are controlled by the regime, which substantially hinders access to information. All media are required to obtain permission to operate from the Interior Ministry. The state controls major newspapers, while private media in government areas are generally owned by figures closely associated with the regime. The state has stopped trying to block Facebook but instead uses it for surveillance, monitoring the pages of opponents and dissidents. Meanwhile, the progovernment Syrian Electronic Army has mounted a series of cyberattacks on opposition supporters, activists, and news outlets, including major foreign media.

Media freedom varies in other parts of Syria, but local outlets are generally under heavy pressure to support the dominant militant faction in their area. Journalists in every region suffer from a lack of physical security. At least 14 journalists were killed in Syria in 2015. IS executed a Japanese journalist in January, and in December suspected IS militants murdered editor Ahmed Mohamed al-Moussa of Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently, a citizen journalist group that operates clandestinely in IS-held territory. Others were killed while reporting on front lines, by terrorist bombings, or by regime air strikes. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, as of July some 25 journalists remained missing. Many others have been kidnapped or imprisoned but eventually released.

While the constitution mandates that the president be a Muslim, there is no state religion, and the regime has generally allowed freedom of worship as long as religious activities do not spill over into the political sphere. The government tightly monitors mosques and controls the appointment of Muslim religious leaders. In opposition-held areas, freedom of worship also generally prevails, except in territory controlled by the more extreme Islamist groups. IS has destroyed numerous religious and cultural sites and artifacts in its region, and implemented harsh restrictions on any religious activity that does not conform to its version of Sunni Islam. Christians living in IS-held areas are reportedly forced to pay special taxes and remove all outward symbols of their faith from their homes and persons. The war has increased sectarian hostility and polarization in both government and rebel-held areas. The regime has carried out massacres of Sunni civilians, while non-Sunni civilians have been killed by Sunni jihadists.

Academic freedom is heavily restricted. University professors in government-held areas have been dismissed or imprisoned for expressing dissent, and some have been killed in response to their outspoken support for regime opponents. Education in general has been greatly disrupted by the civil war, with school facilities regularly attacked or commandeered by combatants on all sides. IS has reconstituted an educational system of sorts in some of its territory, though it is based on religious and political indoctrination. Schooling in regime areas continues to emphasize political indoctrination as well. The PYD began to introduce Kurdish-language education in 2015, with critics alleging that the curriculum advanced the party's political agenda.

Private discussion is subject to heavy surveillance and punishment in areas controlled by the government, IS, and the more extreme insurgent groups, but the environment is somewhat more open than before the uprising in some rebel-held districts. The PYD allegedly suppresses freedom of speech in its areas.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Freedom of assembly is severely restricted across Syria. Opposition protests in government-held areas are usually met with gunfire, mass arrests, and torture of those

detained. The regime generally denies registration to nongovernmental organizations with reformist or human rights missions, and regularly conducts raids and searches to detain civic and political activists. IS, the PYD, and some rebel factions have also used force to suppress civilian demonstrations.

A variety of new grassroots civil society networks have emerged in many parts of Syria since the 2011 uprising, monitoring human rights abuses by all sides in the conflict and attempting to provide humanitarian and other services in areas with no state presence. However, such activists face violence, intimidation, and detention by armed groups, and must operate secretly in some cases.

Professional syndicates in state-held areas are controlled by the Baath Party, and all labor unions must belong to the General Federation of Trade Unions, a nominally independent grouping that the government uses to control union activity. The economic and political pressures of the war have made functioning labor relations virtually impossible across the country.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The constitution forbids government interference in the civil judiciary, but all judges and prosecutors must belong to the Baath Party and are in practice beholden to the political leadership. Military officers can try civilians in both conventional military courts and field courts. While civilians may appeal military court decisions with the military chamber of the Court of Cassation, military judges are neither independent nor impartial, as they are subordinate to the military command.

Government forces have been responsible for the arrest and torture of tens of thousands of people since the uprising began in 2011. An archive of some 55,000 images that came to light in 2014—compiled by a military police photographer who defected from the regime—documented the torture, starvation, and death of prisoners on a massive scale. In 2015, a Human Rights Watch analysis of the photos concluded that they showed at least 6,786 different detainees who had died in government custody and showed signs of torture and other mistreatment. According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, more than 117,000 people were arrested and detained between 2011 and late 2015.

IS and some other Islamist militant groups have set up crude religious courts in their areas, imposing harsh punishments for perceived offenses by civilians. IS routinely carries out public executions, and insurgent factions including Jabhat al-Nusra have also been accused of summary killings of civilians and torture of detainees. More generally, the breakdown of state authority and the proliferation of both loyalist and rebel militias has led to warlordism, crime, and arbitrary exercise of authority by all sides in the conflict.

The Kurdish minority has historically faced official discrimination and severe restrictions on work, travel, property ownership, and cultural and linguistic expression, though their situation improved significantly after 2011 due to receding government authority. Syrian law also discriminates against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people; according to the 1949 penal code, “unnatural sexual intercourse” is punishable with up to three years in prison. Separately, there were multiple reports in 2015 of IS executing men for their perceived sexual orientation.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 0 / 16

The proliferation of checkpoints manned by various armed groups, heavy combat, and general insecurity have severely restricted the free movement of people and vital supplies since 2011. The regime has systematically blockaded regions controlled by rebels, and rebel

and IS forces have done the same to regime-held territories. As of late 2015, more than 400,000 Syrians were living under siege conditions, unable to leave their place of residence.

Rampant corruption predated the Syrian uprising, affecting the daily lives of Syrians. Citizens are frequently required to bribe officials to complete bureaucratic procedures, and business investors and owners must often pay bribes to operate. Since the war broke out, Syrians who fear persecution have been wary of approaching official institutions to request critical documentation, and must resort to the black market. Rebel groups, IS, and Kurdish forces also extort businesses and confiscate private property to varying degrees.

Women are underrepresented in Syrian politics and government, and face serious legal discrimination. They hold just 12 percent of the seats in the legislature, though some have been appointed to senior positions, including one of the two vice presidential posts. Husbands may prevent their wives from leaving the country with their children, and women cannot pass citizenship on to their children. Male perpetrators of killings classified as “honor crimes” can receive reduced sentences under the penal code. Personal status law for Muslims is governed by Sharia (Islamic law) and is discriminatory in marriage, divorce, and inheritance matters. Church law governs personal status issues for Christians, in some cases barring divorce.

In addition to increased sexual violence associated with the armed conflict, domestic abuse is endemic. Rates of early marriage are reportedly high, with displaced and refugee families in particular marrying off young daughters as a perceived safeguard against rape, a means of covering up such crimes, or a response to economic pressure. Forced prostitution and human trafficking are also serious problems among these populations.

Conditions for women are uneven in areas outside government control, ranging from extreme discrimination, sexual slavery, and onerous codes of dress and behavior in IS territory, to formal equality under the PYD in Kurdish areas. All government positions in Rojava are reportedly shared between a man and a woman, and women are well represented in political life and military service.

Forced labor is widespread in Syria, as virtually every armed group engages in forced conscription and the use of child soldiers.

Taiwan

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 2
Freedom Rating: 1.5
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 23,468,000
Capital: Taipei

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,1,F	2,1,F	2,1,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F

INTRODUCTION

President Ma Ying-jeou and the ruling nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) party continued to pursue closer ties with China in 2015. However, a controversial 2013 trade agreement

that would open up their respective service sectors remained stalled in the legislature at year's end. When the Ma administration sought to expedite passage of the accord in 2014, student-led protests that became known as the Sunflower Movement successfully blocked the effort. Beijing considers Taiwan a Chinese province, and while Taiwan has stopped short of declaring formal independence, many residents remain wary of growing Chinese influence.

Broader dissatisfaction with KMT policies, including accusations that it had failed to address widening income inequality and sluggish economic growth, contributed to the party's defeat in November 2014 municipal elections and threatened its chances in general elections scheduled for January 2016. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) remained the main opposition force, and several new parties were formed during 2015, including the New Power Party, headed by leaders of the Sunflower Movement.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The president, who is directly elected for up to two four-year terms, appoints the premier with the consent of the national legislature (Legislative Yuan), which consists of 113 members serving four-year terms. The Executive Yuan, or cabinet, is made up of ministers appointed by the president on the recommendation of the premier. The three other branches of government are the judiciary (Judicial Yuan), a watchdog body (Control Yuan), and a branch responsible for civil-service examinations (Examination Yuan). Direct elections for both the president, held since 1996, and for the legislature, held since 1991, have been considered generally free.

President Ma won a second term in the 2012 general elections, and the KMT retained its majority in the legislature, taking 64 seats. The DPP, historically a pro-independence party, kept its status as the main opposition faction with 40 seats. The remainder went to smaller parties and an independent candidate.

Elections in Taiwan are administered by the Central Election Commission. To maintain its impartiality, the law mandates that no political party may hold more than one-third of the seats on the commission. Since 2007, instances of vote buying and other electoral irregularities have gradually waned thanks to tighter enforcement of anticorruption laws.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Taiwan's multiparty system features vigorous competition between the two major parties, the KMT and the DPP. Opposition parties are able to function without interference. The KMT, which for decades governed Taiwan as an authoritarian, one-party state until democratic reforms took hold in the 1980s and 90s, retains a considerable financial advantage over its rivals as part of this legacy, and in recent years it has benefited from the fact that the business sector generally favors the Ma administration's China-friendly policy. Nevertheless, there have been two rotations of power between the KMT and DPP since 2000, and the DPP and independents made major gains in the 2014 local elections. The latter part of 2015 was dominated by campaigning for the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in January 2016, in which a number of smaller parties, including the newly formed New Power Party, were expected to compete.

Taiwan's constitution grants all citizens the right to vote, including members of 16 indigenous tribes, who make up roughly 2 percent of the population. Six seats in the Legislative Yuan are reserved for aboriginal candidates elected by aboriginal voters.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Though consideration of China necessarily plays a significant role in Taiwanese politics, elected officials in Taiwan are free to set and implement policy without undue influence from foreign or other unelected actors.

Corruption is significantly less pervasive than in the past, but it remains a problem in Taiwan. Politics and big business are closely intertwined, leading to malfeasance in government procurement. The former deputy mayor of New Taipei City, Hsu Chih-chien, was charged with bribery along with two of his family members in November 2015. Hsu allegedly took NT\$7.58 million (US\$230,000) in bribes from two construction companies in exchange for expediting the approval process for the companies' projects.

Former president Chen Shui-bian of the DPP, who was serving a 20-year prison sentence for corruption, was granted medical parole in January. The decision came after the authorities were accused of failing to provide him with adequate care behind bars. The parole was repeatedly reviewed and extended through the end of 2015.

Taiwan was ranked 30 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. The Taiwanese government has taken significant steps toward improving transparency, including through the launch of a database for public documents in 2013. Civil society groups are able to comment on and influence pending legislation and regulatory decisions. However, analysts have identified shortcomings in Taiwan's 2005 freedom of information law, including inadequate enforcement mechanisms.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 52 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

Taiwan's media reflect a diversity of views and report aggressively on government policies and corruption allegations, though many outlets display strong party affiliation in their coverage. Beijing has exerted growing influence on Taiwanese media. A number of media owners have significant business interests in China or rely on advertising by Chinese companies, leaving them vulnerable to pressure and prone to self-censorship on topics considered sensitive by the Chinese government. In recent years, Taiwanese regulators have resisted proposed mergers that would place important media outlets in the hands of businessmen with significant ties to China. The government does not restrict internet access.

In July 2015, during a protest over proposed changes to the high school curriculum, police arrested three journalists who followed students breaking into the Ministry of Education. The reporters were later released without charge.

Taiwanese of all faiths can worship freely. Religious organizations that choose to register with the government receive tax-exempt status. Educators in Taiwan can generally write and lecture without interference. Private discussion is open and free, and there were no reports of the government illegally monitoring online communication.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12 (+ 1)

Taiwan's Assembly and Parade Act, passed in 1988, enables authorities to prosecute protesters who fail to obtain a permit or follow orders to disperse, but freedom of assembly is largely respected in practice. Since 2014, there has been a spike in youth-led demonstrations. Although the police were accused of using excessive force while expelling student protesters from the Executive Yuan in 2014, their handling of students' brief occupation of the Ministry of Education building in July 2015 was more restrained. The latter protesters,

mainly high school students, argued that proposed new curriculum guidelines were China-centric and had been drafted through an insufficiently transparent process. The police arrested 33 people, though only five eventually faced charges.

Meanwhile, cases stemming from the 2014 protests made their way through the courts. Authorities announced charges against 119 people in February 2015, citing alleged offenses including instigating others to commit a crime, trespassing, illegal entry into a building, obstructing an officer from discharge of duties, and violating the Assembly and Parade Act. In August, a court sentenced student leader Chen Wei-ting to 20 days in prison, but the penalty was commuted to a fine of NT\$20,000 (US\$620).

All civic organizations must register with the government, though registration is freely granted. Nongovernmental organizations typically operate without harassment.

Trade unions are independent, and most workers enjoy freedom of association, though the government strictly regulates the right to strike. Among other barriers, teachers, workers in the defense industry, and government employees are prohibited from striking.

F. Rule of Law: 14 / 16

Taiwan's judiciary is independent, and trials are generally fair. Police largely respect the ban on arbitrary detention, and attorneys are allowed to monitor interrogations to prevent torture. Family members of inmates facing the death penalty are typically not informed about scheduled dates of executions. Despite criticism from human rights organizations opposed to the death penalty, Taiwan executed six inmates in June 2015.

The constitution provides for the equality of all citizens, though the island's indigenous people continue to face social and economic discrimination. Disputes over their lands have continued amid long-stalled efforts to pass legislation on indigenous autonomy. In April 2015, the government released a draft law that would establish 16 autonomous governments for indigenous groups, overseen by an Executive Yuan agency, with authority over natural resources, cultural heritage, and local industries. Critics said the measure granted insufficient self-rule and was formulated without input from indigenous communities. It had not passed by year's end.

Taiwanese law prohibits discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation, and violence against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people is adequately addressed by police.

Taiwanese law does not allow for asylum or refugee status, and a 2010 bill that would address the problem was still under legislative review at the end of 2015.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Taiwan's residents enjoy freedom of movement, and restrictions on travel between Taiwan and China have been gradually eased in recent years. A program launched in 2011 allows Chinese tourists to travel to Taiwan without supervision. In September 2015, Taiwanese authorities raised the cap on the number of Chinese tourists who could travel to Taiwan through the program from 4,000 to 5,000 per day.

Urban renewal projects and conversions of agricultural land for industrial or residential use have been criticized for unfairly displacing residents. In 2013, the Constitutional Court found parts of the Urban Renewal Act to be unconstitutional; the act requires agreement from just 10 percent of residents for a renewal project to be approved by the local government. However, revisions to the law remained stalled in the Legislative Yuan at the end of 2015.

The constitution guarantees women equal rights, though Taiwanese women continue to face discrimination in employment and compensation. After the 2012 elections, women held one-third of the seats in the legislature.

Same-sex marriage is not permitted. A bill that would amend the civil code to legalize such unions was introduced in 2013, but it failed to make progress during 2015. In June, amid pressure for reform triggered by the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to legalize same-sex marriage, a spokesperson for Taiwan’s Justice Ministry said that the practice would remain illegal “for now.”

According to official statistics, there were approximately 588,000 foreign workers in Taiwan in 2015, many of whom are household workers. Household workers are not covered under basic labor laws, including statutes governing minimum wage, limits on work hours, and overtime pay, rendering them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. They are often subject to sexual harassment. Exploitation of foreign workers is also common in the fishing industry. Even though the industry is regulated under the Fair Labor Standards Act, the rules are not strictly enforced.

Taiwan is a destination country for human trafficking victims, particularly migrant workers from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Sex trafficking remains a problem, with women originating in China or Southeast Asia often among the victims.

↓ Tajikistan

Political Rights Ratings: 7↓

Population: 8,452,153

Civil Liberties Ratings: 6

Capital: Dushanbe

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ratings Change, Trend Arrow: Tajikistan received a downward trend arrow, and its political rights rating declined from 6 to 7, due to the government’s mounting persecution of the opposition before and after the 2015 parliamentary elections, including the arrest of opposition leaders and a ban on the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), which violated the guarantees of political pluralism established in the peace agreement that ended the country’s civil war in 1997.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

Tajikistani authorities continued to arbitrarily limit free speech, access to information, and the right to civic organization in 2015. The government led a legal and media campaign against the country’s largest opposition group, the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), ahead of and following parliamentary elections in March, in which the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) retained its majority. In September, after a series of decisions revoking the legal status of the IRPT and limiting its activities, the Supreme Court declared

the party a terrorist organization, criminalizing membership in or public expression of support for the group. Authorities shuttered IRPT offices and arrested scores of members following the decision.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 2 / 40 (–5)

A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12 (–1)

Tajikistan’s 1994 constitution provides for a strong, directly elected president who enjoys broad authority to appoint and dismiss officials. In the 63-seat Assembly of Representatives (lower chamber), members are elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms. In the 33-seat National Assembly (upper chamber), 25 members are chosen by local assemblies, and 8 are appointed by the president, all for five-year terms.

The incumbent administration uses its nearly absolute control over media coverage, an extremely high threshold for number of signatures required to run for office, and the exclusion of Tajikistani migrant workers—who, by various estimates, comprise 20 to 45 percent of the electorate—from the nomination process for the presidency and parliament to cement its dominance over the electoral process. In 1992, Emomali Rahmon, a member of the Communist Party during Tajikistan’s last years as part the Soviet Union, was installed as president in the midst of a civil war that lasted from 1992 to 1997. Rahmon was elected to the office in 1994 and has been in power since. The most recent presidential election took place in 2013, and Rahmon was reelected to a fourth term with 83.6 percent of the vote; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) observers noted that the election “lacked a real choice” and failed to meet international standards.

The PDP has consistently dominated legislative elections. Ahead of parliamentary elections in March 2015, the government directed an extensive anti-opposition campaign through state media, and the persecution of many candidates, particularly those of the IRPT, led to the disenfranchisement of the country’s most significant opposition forces. The PDP won 51 of 63 lower house seats, and a group of small, mostly progovernment parties took the remainder; the IRPT failed to secure any seats for the first time since 1999. According to OSCE monitors, the elections were marred by serious violations and failed to meet democratic standards.

The country’s electoral laws and framework do not adequately guarantee the free and fair conduct of elections, and amendments made in 2014 were largely cosmetic. Electoral commissions are subject to influence from the government, which has the power to nominate members, and laws are often enforced in inconsistent and nontransparent ways.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16 (–3)

A 1999 constitutional referendum permitted the formation of religion-based political parties and paved the way for the legal operation of the Islamist opposition, including the IRPT. Opposition parties were promised 30 percent of senior government posts as part of the peace accords that ended the civil war in 1997, but this quota has never been met. The government has consistently marginalized the opposition, which became virtually alienated from the political process after the 2015 elections.

Scores of IRPT members and their relatives were beaten, harassed, and imprisoned throughout 2015, with some reportedly tortured in custody. Ahead of the March elections, the government used state-controlled media and state-funded religious clerics to malign opposition figures, especially those of the IRPT. Officials and security forces continued to escalate pressure on the IRPT after the elections, raiding meetings and offices and harassing members. In June, party leader Muhiddin Kabiri announced that he would attempt to lead

the party from exile due to fear of persecution. In August, the Justice Ministry revoked the party's legal registration on the basis of a technicality about minimum membership requirements, ordering the group to cease all activities. The campaign reached an apex in September, when the authorities accused the IRPT of involvement in an uprising led by Deputy Minister of Defense Abduhalim Nazarzoda in which more than 20 fighters and security officers, including Nazarzoda, were killed. Although the accusations were denied by IRPT leaders and lacked evidence, security forces began arresting dozens of the group's members on antiterrorism grounds. Later in September, the Supreme Court declared the IRPT a terrorist organization, criminalizing membership in or expression of support for the group. Arrests of members escalated after the decision, which radically altered the postwar political landscape and left thousands of citizens vulnerable to prosecution for previous membership in or support of what had been the country's second largest political party.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12 (–1)

Following the March 2015 elections, the ruling party cemented a virtually unopposed position in determining and implementing policy. Officials from the president's native Kulob district are dominant in government. At least two of Rahmon's children hold senior government posts, and various family members reportedly maintain extensive business interests in the country, including the largest bank, the railroad, and the national television channel, among many others. Patronage networks and regional affiliations are central to political life, and corruption is pervasive. Major irregularities at the National Bank of Tajikistan and the country's largest industrial company, TALCO Aluminum, have been documented and linked together. Tajikistan was ranked 136 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Public officials are not required to disclose financial information, and government decision-making and budgetary processes lack transparency.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 14 / 60 (–1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16 (–1)

Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and the press, independent journalists face harassment and intimidation. Tajikistan decriminalized libel in 2012, but the civil charge is often used to cripple newspapers that criticize the government. The government controls most printing presses, newsprint supplies, and broadcasting facilities. Most television stations are state-owned or only nominally independent. The government blocks some critical websites and news portals and uses mass blackouts on websites, social media platforms, email services, and even mobile messaging programs to prevent protests or criticism. In 2014, in response to attempts by Russia-based Tajik opposition groups to mobilize protests in Dushanbe, the authorities blocked hundreds of websites and communications platforms throughout the country, reportedly imposing a full blackout on internet services in some areas. The September 2015 Supreme Court ruling on the IRPT also shuttered the party's weekly newspaper and its website, two of the most popular opposition outlets in the country.

The government imposes a number of restrictions on religious freedom. Religious activities are restricted to state-approved houses of prayer. Authorities limit the number of mosques that can function in towns and have undertaken a campaign in recent years to shutter those that lack proper registration. In 2015, Tajikistan continued to prosecute individuals for alleged membership in extremist religious organizations. Christian groups have also reported arbitrary restrictions on their activities, and Jehovah's Witnesses—who have

been banned since 2007—are subject to harassment and arrest. In June 2015, the state-controlled Islamic University announced the suspension of its Islamic religious school, which since 2013 had been the only such institution to operate with a license. The closure of IRPT offices, which had served as important civic and religious community centers and provided both religious and secular education services, further closed the space for religious freedom.

Wearing the hijab (headscarf) in schools and universities is not permitted. A 2011 law banned minors from attending regular religious services in mosques and prohibited private religious education, limiting even private discussion of religious topics in the home; many religious leaders criticized the law or quietly refused to obey it. The government exercises significant influence over the administration of education institutions, and security forces are known to engage in extensive surveillance of private communications, often without authorization.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

The government limits freedoms of assembly and association. Local government approval is required to hold demonstrations, and officials reportedly refuse to grant permission in many cases and often interfere with the ability of journalists to report on public gatherings.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must register with the Ministry of Justice and are vulnerable to closure for minor technicalities. In August 2015, Rahmon signed amendments to the Law on Public Associations that compel NGOs to disclose funding from foreign sources to the Ministry of Justice. The legislation requires that foreign funds be logged in a state registry before organizations can access them, and gives the government oversight of operations supported by the funds.

Citizens have the legal right to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively, but unions are largely subservient to the authorities.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16

The judiciary lacks independence. Many judges are poorly trained and inexperienced, and bribery is reportedly widespread. Court proceedings rarely follow the rule of law, and nearly all defendants are found guilty. Police frequently make arbitrary arrests and beat detainees to extract confessions. Overcrowding and disease contribute to often life-threatening conditions in prisons. In 2015, several lawyers defending arrested IRPT members were themselves arrested, mostly on unrelated spurious charges. In November, the parliament passed controversial amendments introducing a new certification process for the practice of law. The legislation requires all current lawyers as well as those entering the profession to undergo the process and to renew certification every five years, and expands the grounds on which licenses may be denied, barring those who have faced legal charges in the past from practicing law.

Discrimination against ethnic minorities is not a significant problem in Tajikistan. Same-sex sexual conduct is legal, but discrimination, harassment, and violence against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people are common, and there is no legislation against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT people frequently face abuse by security forces.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

Tajikistani citizens can travel freely but must register their permanent residence with local authorities. The authorities require foreign nationals to obtain permission in order to

access the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region, which has in recent years been the site of violent clashes between local forces and the national government. In May 2015, the government announced that it was suspending the issuance of travel permits to the region, which borders Afghanistan, due to escalating security concerns. The right to choose institutions of higher education is formally protected but has been plagued by widespread corruption, and students interested in studying Islamic theology are forbidden from attending schools outside the country without special permission from the state.

The scarcity of economic opportunity has forced many to seek work abroad. Tajikistan ranks near the bottom in global surveys of economic freedom, reflecting a dysfunctional economic environment that impacts everything from peasant farms to large enterprises. By law, all land belongs to the state, which allocates use rights primarily for agricultural purposes in a process plagued by corruption and inefficiency. The government streamlined processes for starting a new business, paying taxes, and obtaining credit in 2014.

Sexual harassment, discrimination, and violence against women, including spousal abuse, are common, but cases are underreported and seldom adequately investigated. Reports indicate that women sometimes face societal pressure to wear headscarves, though official policy discourages the practice. Women are underrepresented at all levels of government.

Despite some government efforts to address human trafficking, Tajikistan remains a source and transit country for persons trafficked for prostitution. Child labor, particularly on cotton farms, also remains a serious problem.

Tanzania

Political Rights: 3

Civil Liberties: 4↓

Freedom Rating 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ratings Change: Tanzania's civil liberties rating declined from 3 to 4 due to the passage of the Statistics Act and the Cybercrimes Act, which imposed restrictions on freedom of expression and had a chilling effect on the media, academia, and civil society.

Population: 52,291,000

Capital: Dar-es-Salaam

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

In October, Tanzania held its most competitive elections since its transition to multi-party rule in the early 1990s. John Magufuli, the candidate of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party, won the presidential election with 58 percent of the vote. The runner-up, Chama Cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA) candidate Edward Lowassa—a former prime minister who had been considered a front-runner for the CCM nomination and who had defected to the opposition after losing the ruling party's primary nomination—claimed electoral malfeasance and rejected the results. International observers generally

assessed the conduct of the elections on Tanzania's mainland positively. Magufuli was inaugurated in November, succeeding President Jakaya Kikwete of the CCM; Magufuli's running mate, Samia Suluhu Hassan, became the country's first-ever female vice president. Meanwhile, the CCM lost some seats in the parliamentary polls, as opposition parties, many of which had coordinated parliamentary and presidential candidates through a unified coalition, gained their largest representation in parliament yet. Later in November, parliament approved Majaliwa Kassim Majaliwa, a former junior minister and relative unknown, as the country's new prime minister.

However, simultaneous elections on the semi-autonomous archipelago of Zanzibar sparked controversy. Polls conducted ahead of the vote had predicted a contentious election for Zanzibar's president and a potential victory for Maalim Seif Sharif Hamad of the opposition Civic United Front (CUF). The elections were praised for their smooth conduct in their immediate aftermath. However, prior to the announcement of official results, Zanzibar Electoral Commission (ZEC) Chair Jecha Salim Jecha declared the elections for Zanzibar's president and legislature "null and void," saying the process "was not fair and had breaches of the law." In a joint statement, election missions from the Commonwealth, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union, and the European Union (EU) expressed "great concern" at the ZEC's move and noted that they had assessed the voting as "conducted in a generally peaceful and organized manner, according to the procedures outlined in the laws of the United Republic of Tanzania and the laws of Zanzibar." Hamad refused to accept the annulment, and the CCM and CUF remained in ongoing negotiations at the year's end.

In the run-up to the elections, the Tanzanian government enacted the Statistics Act and the Cybercrimes Act, two laws that had the potential to significantly limit freedom of expression, civil society activities, and access to information.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 27 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 8 / 12 (– 1)

The president of Tanzania is elected by direct popular vote for up to two five-year terms. Legislative authority lies with a unicameral, 357-seat National Assembly (the Bunge) whose members serve five-year terms. Of these members, 239 are directly elected in single-member constituencies, 102 seats are reserved for women elected by political parties, 10 are presidential appointees, 5 are members of the Zanzibar legislature, and 1 is held by the attorney general. Zanzibar elects its own president and 81-seat House of Representatives, whose members serve five-year terms and are seated through a mix of direct elections and appointments. Zanzibar maintains largely independent jurisdiction over its internal affairs.

The 2015 national elections saw a voter turnout of 65 percent, compared with 43 percent in 2010. In the presidential race, Magufuli won with 58 percent of the vote, and Lowassa took 40 percent. In the National Assembly, the CCM won 152 seats, down from 186 in the previous parliament. Opposition parties, many of which had coordinated candidates through a unified coalition, gained their largest representation in parliament yet. CHADEMA won 34 seats, CUF took 32 seats, and the Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT) and the National Convention for Construction and Reform (NCCR)–Mageuzi each won one legislative seat.

Despite some irregularities, the 2015 national elections were generally deemed credible by domestic and international observers. An observer mission from the EU described "highly competitive, generally well organized elections, but with insufficient efforts at transparency from the election administrations." However, there were some areas that

observers documented with concern; the EU mission noted that the CCM had drawn on state resources, such as public stadiums, to support its campaign.

However, the unilateral annulment of Zanzibar's presidential election, while accepting the results of the Zanzibari vote for the mainland presidential election, undermined the fairness of the electoral framework, which is facilitated by the National Election Commission (NEC) and the ZEC, both of which are appointed by the Tanzanian president and whose independence has been questioned. In addition, the executive maintains the ability to appoint regional and district commissioners, who are influential during elections.

The current constitution was passed in 1977, when the country was under single-party rule. In March 2014, the presidentially appointed Constitutional Review Commission submitted its second draft of a new constitution to the Constituent Assembly (CA), a body of 640 Tanzanian and Zanzibari legislators and presidential appointees, for approval. The draft proposed a three-tiered federal state, fewer cabinet members, independent candidature, limits on executive appointment, and an explicit bill of rights. In April 2014, Tanzania's three primary opposition parties quit the CA, saying their input was not being considered. Nevertheless, the CA passed a controversial draft later in 2014. Opposition parties led by CHADEMA sought a judicial block to the new constitution, suggesting it was passed without a quorum, and initiated a nationwide campaign to garner public support for their position. Though the government was scheduled to conduct a nationwide referendum on the proposed constitution in April 2015, the NEC that month announced an indefinite delay of the poll, citing an inability to register citizens using a new biometric system in time for the vote.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 12 / 16

Tanzanians have the right to organize into political parties, and there is growing support for opposition parties. The constitution permits political parties to form "shadow governments" while in opposition. Four opposition parties—the CUF, CHADEMA, NCCR-Mageuzi, and the National League for Democracy (NLD)—decided to support a single presidential candidate and to field parliamentary candidates cooperatively in the 2015 elections. This coalition, known as the Coalition for a People's Constitution, Ukawa, posed the most significant threat to CCM's rule in the country's history.

Although political diversity has grown in recent years, minority parties report regular harassment and intimidation by the ruling party and various state institutions, including the police. People's choices are influenced by threats from military forces and the use of material incentives by the ruling party.

Cultural, ethnic, religious, and other minority groups have full political rights, but parties formed on explicitly religious, ethnic, or religious bases are prohibited.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12

Magufuli was known as an antigraft figure and campaigned accordingly, promising to establish an anticorruption court. Almost immediately after his inauguration, he undertook reforms aimed at cutting spending and enhancing service provision. In November 2015, he barred government officials from taking foreign trips without special authorization from his office. Magufuli also shrank the cabinet to 19 ministers, down from 30, and canceled a ministerial retreat to cut costs. The savings, he announced, would be put toward social service spending.

Despite the presence of the Prevention and Combating Corruption Bureau (PCCB), corruption is pervasive in all aspects of political and commercial life in Tanzania. The PCCB has been accused of focusing on low-level corruption and doing little to address graft

committed by senior government officials. In December, Magufuli removed the director general of the PCCB, Edward Hoseah, for negligence. The president also suspended four senior PCCB officials for taking unauthorized trips abroad following the ban on government travel. Tanzania was ranked 117 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In 2014, twelve international donors withheld close to \$500 million in budgetary support for the government following a corruption scandal in which senior government and business officials were accused of funneling more than \$180 million in payments for nonexistent energy contracts to private offshore bank accounts. In March 2015, the donors agreed to release \$44 million of the frozen funds "in recognition of actions taken" in response to the scandal. The government has complained that it has had to suspend some development projects due to lack of donor funds.

In September, the United States warned the Tanzanian government that it must demonstrate a greater commitment to fighting corruption if it wants to retain its scheduled \$473 million in development assistance in 2016. The warning came after the Tanzanian government faced new allegations of public wrongdoing in 2015. In February, the government suspended the head of the Tanzania Ports Authority after concerns about alleged procurement infractions. In July, two former government ministers were sentenced to jail for three years after being found guilty of abuse of office in connection with a gold-auditing contract, accounting for a loss of some \$5.2 million in government funds.

The government remains sporadically responsive to citizen input between elections, and citizens generally have access to public information, though observers have expressed concern that the Statistics Act and Cybercrimes Act will inhibit access to public information. The parliament of Tanzania inconsistently publishes legislation, committee reports, budgets, and other documents.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 33 / 40 (–2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16 (–1)

Although the constitution provides for freedom of speech, it does not specifically guarantee freedom of the press. Independent media on mainland Tanzania came under increasing pressure in the run-up to the 2015 elections. Current laws give authorities broad discretion to restrict media on the basis of national security or public interest, and difficult registration processes hinder print and electronic media. In January, the government banned the circulation in Tanzania of the regional weekly the *East African*, citing registration issues. The ban remained in place at year's end. In the spring, Kikwete signed the Statistics Act, passed by parliament in March, and the Cybercrimes Act, passed in April. The Statistics Act severely restricts citizen access to information by requiring data released publicly to be first approved by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Those publishing information not approved could face a minimum sentence of a year in jail or a fine of over \$2,000. Following public outcry, the NBS released a statement clarifying that the act governs only official government statistics, but went on to say that, while the law does not prohibit a person or agency "from producing and publishing their own statistics . . . if such agencies want to produce official statistics intended to be used by the government for planning and policy making, they have to adhere to set standards and principles of official statistics."

The Cybercrimes Act gives the government significant leeway to arrest anyone perceived of publishing information deemed false, deceptive, misleading, or inaccurate and to levy heavy penalties against individuals involved in a host of criminalized cyberactivities. Following the October elections, Tanzanian police raided an office being used by the Tanzania Civil Society Consortium on Election Observation (Tacceo) and, under the auspices of

the Cybercrimes Act, seized 28 computers and 26 mobile phones, claiming that the group was attempting to compile and publish election results. Thirty-six data clerks were arrested and taken in for questioning before being released on bail.

Two other controversial bills—the Media Services Bill, and the Access to Information Bill—were withdrawn from consideration in June after being criticized as overly restrictive. The Media Services bill would create a media services council to oversee a mandatory licensure process for journalists and media houses. The Access to Information Act provides a series of vague exemptions under which the government would withhold information from the public. It also allows fees to be demanded for the provision of information. The Minister of State for the President’s Office said greater input from media stakeholders would be invited before the Access to Information Bill would be reintroduced.

Press freedom in Zanzibar is more constrained than on the mainland. The Zanzibari government owns the only daily newspaper, and private media other than radio are nearly nonexistent. Internet access, while limited to urban areas, is growing, but authorities monitor websites that are critical of the government.

Freedom of religion is generally respected. Relations between the various faiths are largely peaceful, though there have been periodic instances of violence. In March 2015, President Kikwete warned of increasingly tense relations between Tanzania’s Christian and Muslim communities and asked religious leaders to refrain from involvement in political matters. Kikwete attributed some recent tensions to Christian opposition to the government’s decision to allow Tanzanian courts to recognize Islamic court rulings in family law cases.

Historically, there have been few government restrictions on academic freedom. However, researchers and academics are likely to be disproportionately affected by the Statistics Act. People actively engage in private discussions, but the CCM uses a system of party-affiliated cells in urban and rural areas for public monitoring. Each cell is reportedly responsible for 10 households.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12 (– 1)

The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, but the government can limit this right since all assemblies require police approval and critical political demonstrations are at times actively discouraged. In March 2015, police banned a protest they had initially approved that would have criticized the government for failing to protect albino Tanzanians from violence. Police cited the possibility of violence in banning the demonstration.

There is generally freedom for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and more than 4,000 are registered. While current laws give the government the right to deregister NGOs, there has been little interference in NGO activity. Many NGOs, such as Research and Education for Democracy in Tanzania and the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC), publish reports that are critical of the government. However, the Statistics Act and the Cybercrimes Act were expected to interfere with the work of NGOs, predictions that appeared to be borne out by the police raid of Taceo, which occurred in LHRC offices.

Trade unions are ostensibly independent of the government and are coordinated by the Trade Union Congress of Tanzania and the Zanzibar Trade Union Congress. The Tanzania Federation of Cooperatives represents most of Tanzania’s agricultural sector. Essential public service workers are barred from striking, and other workers are restricted by complex notification and mediation requirements. Strikes are infrequent on both the mainland and Zanzibar, but in January, Tanzania-Zambia Railway Authority (TAZARA) workers went on a three-day strike to protest five months of unpaid salaries, amounting to some \$1.4 million.

Following similar strikes last year, TAZARA fired more than 1,000 employees for “unlawful” strike actions, even while admitting it owed employees back pay.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16

Tanzania’s judiciary suffers from underfunding and corruption. Judges are political appointees, and the judiciary does not have an independent budget, making it vulnerable to political pressure and influencing what cases the judiciary considers.

Rule of law does not always prevail in civil and criminal matters. Despite recent improvements, policies and rules regarding arrest and pretrial detention are often ignored. Prisoners suffer from harsh conditions, including overcrowding and poor medical care. Security forces reportedly abuse, threaten, and mistreat civilians routinely and with limited accountability. Vigilante justice and mob violence are common, and security forces are often unable or unwilling to enforce the rule of law.

Tanzania’s albino population faced increasing violence in 2015. In March, attackers chopped off the hand of a six-year-old boy in western Tanzania, the third such incident in 2015. Albino body parts are believed to bring good luck, leading to the trafficking, death, and dismemberment of many albinos. In March, Tanzanian police arrested more than 200 so-called witch doctors for violence against albinos.

Consensual same-sex sexual relations are illegal and punishable by lengthy prison terms, and members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community face discrimination and police abuse. Most hide their sexual orientation.

More than 250,000 refugees from conflicts in neighboring countries reside in Tanzania. More than 80,000 Burundian refugees flooded into the country in 2015 following an outbreak of civil unrest after the Burundian president’s decision to stand for a third term. Human rights advocates have criticized the 2002 Prevention of Terrorism Act for giving police and immigration officials sweeping powers to arrest suspected illegal immigrants.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

Citizens generally enjoy basic freedoms, including in travel, residence, employment, and education. However, the prevalence of petty corruption can inhibit these freedoms.

Tanzanians have the right to establish private businesses but are often required to pay bribes to set up and operate them. The state remains the owner of all land and leases to individuals and private entities. Land-rights disputes over government leases of customary Maasai grazing lands to hunting and tourism corporations have garnered international attention. In February 2015, indigenous rights activists criticized the government for the forcible eviction of Maasai villages related to the establishment of a hunting park by a United Arab Emirates–based company. In October, a Tanzanian court ruled that a U.S. safari company’s acquisition of some 10,000 acres of land was legal, turning down a Maasai group’s claim to the land.

Women’s rights are constitutionally guaranteed but not uniformly protected. Rape, female genital mutilation, and domestic violence are reportedly common but rarely prosecuted. Although the minimum female age for marriage is 15, a 2014 Human Rights Watch report cited the occurrence of marriages to girls as young as seven. Eight cabinet posts are held by women.

Equality of economic opportunity is limited, and there is continued economic exploitation. Poverty, especially in rural areas, affects approximately 33 percent of the population.

Thailand

Political Rights Rating: 6

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 65,121,250

Capital: Bangkok

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	7,4,NF	6,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

The National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), the military junta that seized power in a 2014 coup, continued to suppress political dissent in 2015. Civil society activists were closely monitored, and individuals who expressed anticoup sentiments were frequently summoned for questioning and intimidation sessions known as “attitude adjustments.” Nevertheless, some signs of resistance surfaced during the year, including a series of student protests opposing the coup. The government responded with threats, arrests, and charges of sedition.

The NCPO lifted martial law in April, but invoked an article of the interim constitution to issue orders that granted its leader unchecked powers beyond judicial oversight, and expanded the authority of military officers in the area of law enforcement. The orders also preserved most of the restrictions on expression and assembly that had been in effect under martial law.

Meanwhile, the NCPO’s road map for a return to civilian rule was adjusted in 2015, pushing general elections further into the future. A controversial draft constitution that had drawn criticism from across the political spectrum was ultimately rejected in September 2015 by the National Reform Council (NRC), an advisory body appointed by the NCPO. The move triggered a new round of drafting. At year’s end, general elections were not expected until 2017; the delays have prompted concerns that the NCPO intends to hold on to power indefinitely.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 7 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 1 / 12

Under the 2007 constitution that was drafted after the 2006 military coup, Thailand was governed through a bicameral parliamentary system. In late 2013, amid mass antigovernment protests, elections were called in an attempt to end a persistent deadlock between Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra’s Pheu Thai Party (PTP) and the opposition Democrat Party (DP) and People’s Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC). Elections were held in early 2014, but protests disrupted the voting process in some constituencies, eventually prompting the Constitutional Court to call new national elections. Before the polls could take place, the Constitutional Court found Yingluck and nine cabinet members guilty of abuse of power for 2011 personnel changes that granted the post of national police chief to a relative of Yingluck’s; she subsequently complied with the court’s order to step down as caretaker prime minister. A military coup in May 2014 forestalled further electoral plans.

General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the army chief at the time of the coup, became both head of the NCPO and prime minister. An interim constitution promulgated by the NCPO in July 2014 created a 220-seat National Legislative Assembly (NLA)—which formally installed the prime minister and cabinet—and the 250-member NRC. The NRC was designed to provide the leadership with recommendations for reform of all aspects of governance and the political process. Both the NRC and the NLA comprised members appointed by the NCPO, and were dominated by current and former military officers and individuals who had opposed the Yingluck government. However, the NRC was dissolved following its rejection of the draft constitution in September 2015. A National Reform Steering Assembly (NRSA) was then convened to replace it. The new body consisted of 200 members appointed by the head of NCPO, and included academics, representatives of political parties, former members of the NRC, and a significant number of military and police members.

The effort to draft a new permanent constitution formed a major component of the military's road map back to electoral democracy. The NCPO, the NLA, and the cabinet had selected a Constitutional Drafting Committee in November 2014, and the panel released its draft in March 2015. It prompted widespread criticism from Thailand's various political factions for weakening political parties and elected officials while strengthening unelected institutions. One controversial section envisioned a crisis committee composed of military and police commanders with the authority to assume executive and legislative powers in an emergency, though the criteria for declaring an emergency were vaguely defined. The draft charter also increased the percentage of Senate seats that would be appointed; introduced the proportional allocation of seats in the lower house, a move expected to encourage the proliferation of small parties and unstable coalition governments; and contained a mechanism that could allow the appointment of a prime minister who was not a member of parliament.

The NRC's rejection of the draft constitution in September effectively extended military rule. In October, the military government appointed a new 21-member committee tasked with producing a draft constitution within six months, with the NCPO leadership expressing a preference that the new charter be based on the rejected one. The NCPO's new timeline envisioned an eventual referendum on the charter, the drafting of organic laws, and preparations for general elections, which officials indicated would be held no earlier than 2017.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 3 / 16 (– 1)

Since Thaksin Shinawatra, Yingluck's brother, and his Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party came to power in 2001, there have been two main political factions in Thailand's system: the DP, which is today associated with traditional elites, and the TRT and its successors (the People's Power Party and the PTP). The latter have won every election since 2001. While the actions of the NCPO have favored the interests of the DP's core supporters, leaders of both the DP and the PTP have been kept on the sidelines of the political process since the 2014 coup.

Following the coup, political parties continued to be regulated under a 2007 law. However, the NCPO enacted measures banning the formation of new political parties and prohibiting existing parties from meeting or conducting political activities, including any party-wide deliberations on the constitutional drafting process. State funding for political parties was also suspended.

In 2014 and 2015, the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) recommended the retroactive impeachment of 38 former senators and 248 members of the dissolved lower

house in connection with a 2013 attempt by Yingluck's PTP to amend the constitution to make the Senate a fully elected body. However, in August 2015 the NLA decided not to take action against the former lawmakers, who would have been banned from politics for five years if impeached.

A dramatic expansion of the military government's powers in 2015 further undermined citizens' ability to participate in the political process. In April, the NCPO lifted martial law, but invoked Article 44 of the interim constitution to issue new orders that preserved most of the restrictions on expression and assembly in place under martial law, and went further in granting the head of the NCPO absolute power beyond legislative or judicial oversight.

Members of Thailand's ethnic and religious minority groups are poorly represented in national politics.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

The NLA, which serves in place of an elected parliament, passed a number of laws in 2015 that were criticized for infringing on citizens' rights and for being approved without consideration of comments from the public.

Corruption is widespread at all levels of Thai society. Several government officials have been investigated for involvement in corruption, and the NACC receives a high number of complaints each year. In January 2015, the NLA, acting on a recommendation the NACC issued the previous year, voted to retroactively impeach former prime minister Yingluck in connection with a rice-subsidy scheme that reportedly incurred a \$16 billion loss for the state; she was banned from politics for five years as a result. The same day, the attorney general announced criminal charges against Yingluck, also in connection with the rice-subsidy program. If convicted, she faced a prison sentence of up to 10 years and a lifetime ban from politics. The case was ongoing at the year's end.

During 2015, the NCPO faced allegations in the media and from some opposition figures of financial irregularities in an army-supervised project to develop Rajabhakti Park, a new historical park in the resort town of Hua Hin that commemorates Thailand's kings. The army launched an internal investigation into the graft allegations. Following an opaque process, the head of the army announced in November that key figures had been cleared of wrongdoing. In response to a public outcry, the Defense Ministry soon announced its own investigation of the project. In late December, the ministry said that it had uncovered "irregularities" but lacked the authority to investigate further, and that it had passed its findings along to the prime minister.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 25 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 6 / 16

The government and military control licensing and transmission of Thailand's main television stations and all radio frequencies. Most print publications are privately owned. Since taking power in 2014, the NCPO has systematically used censorship, intimidation, and legal action to suppress freedom of speech. Journalists and media outlets risk penalties for violating an NCPO ban on material that "maliciously" criticizes the government or is deemed divisive. Many media workers have been summoned for sessions known as "attitude adjustments," during which military officials interrogate them or issue warnings about their work; the sessions can last for days. Outlets also face suspension and revocation of their operating licenses.

The authorities commonly conduct internet surveillance of citizens and media outlets and block sites that are critical of the government or deemed insulting to the monarchy. The

government pursued various options to strengthen its control of internet activity in 2015. These included proposing cybersecurity legislation that would enable broader surveillance, as well as planning for a single gateway system to monitor or filter online traffic. The cybersecurity bill was pending at year's end; in October, following a public outcry, authorities said they would not pursue plans to establish a single internet gateway.

Defamation is a criminal offense, and charges are often used by politicians and companies to silence opponents, critics, and activists. The 2007 Computer Crimes Act assigns significant prison terms for the publication of false information deemed to endanger the public or national security, and allows the government to review the data of individual web users for the preceding 90 days; it has also been invoked against whistle-blowers and government critics. In December 2015, a mining company filed criminal defamation charges against a 15-year-old student over remarks in an interview with the Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS) in which she alleged that the firm's activities were contaminating the water supply in her village. The company also sued Thai PBS, seeking 50 million baht (\$1.4 million) in damages and a five-year suspension of its broadcasting license. A British human rights activist at year's end faced charges of defamation and of violating the Computer Crimes Act in connection with 2013 allegations that a Thai fruit wholesale company had committed labor rights violations. Separately, in September 2015, a court in Phuket acquitted two journalists from the news website *Phuketwan* of defaming the Thai navy and violating the Computer Crimes Act; the charges were related to a 2013 report implicating the navy in trafficking of ethnic Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. The Computer Crimes Act was invoked on a number of occasions in 2015 against people who criticized the NCPO on Facebook, or who posted images or video footage showing confrontations between citizens and military personnel.

The number of *lèse-majesté* cases has sharply increased under the NCPO. Cases have been used to target activists, scholars, students, journalists, and politicians. In August 2015, military courts imposed record-setting prison sentences of 30 and 28 years, respectively, on two people convicted of insulting the monarchy in Facebook posts. A Thai freedom of expression organization, Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw), observed that sentences in *lèse-majesté* cases handed down by military courts since the coup tended to be more severe than sentences issued by civilian courts. Furthermore, in April 2015, an appeals court overturned a previous *lèse-majesté* acquittal, while in September another appeals court increased the sentence for a defendant convicted of *lèse-majesté* and violating the Computer Crimes Act in 2014, who had initially been granted a suspended sentence. Cases initiated late in the year had the potential to broaden the interpretation of *lèse-majesté*. In December 2015, a man was charged for posting a satirical comment on Facebook about the king's dog; he faced up to 37 years in prison. Also in December, a man was arrested after "liking" and sharing a picture on Facebook that was deemed insulting to the king. He faced a prison term of up to 32 years.

While the 2007 constitution explicitly prohibited discrimination based on religious belief, the current interim constitution only states in general terms that rights and freedoms will be protected in line with "existing international obligations." While there is no official state religion, speech considered insulting to Buddhism is prohibited by law. A long-running civil conflict in the south, which pits ethnic Malay Muslims against ethnic Thai Buddhists, continues to undermine citizens' ability to practice their religions. Nevertheless, religious freedom in the majority of the country is generally respected, religious organizations operate freely, and there is no systemic or institutional discrimination based on religion.

Academic freedom is constrained under the NCPO. University discussions and seminars on topics regarded as politically sensitive are subject to monitoring or outright cancellation by government authorities, who also require organizers to request permission to hold such events. Academics are subjected to oppressive tactics including summonses for questioning, home visits by security officials, and surveillance of their activities. The junta has also pressured universities to discourage anticoup activism by students, and has pushed schools and universities to adjust their curriculums to include more patriotic themes.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

Prohibitions on political gatherings of five or more people continued to be enforced in 2015, and those who engaged in symbolic actions and protests against military rule faced a spectrum of consequences, including being warned, fined, arrested, or charged with violating NCPO orders. In May, on the first anniversary of the coup, students in Bangkok and outside of the capital who engaged in anticoup demonstrations were detained for violating the ban on assembly. In June, a group of young activists calling themselves the New Democracy Movement organized a series of civil disobedience actions that resulted in the arrest of 14 of the group's members. They were released after 12 days, but at year's end they faced charges of sedition, which carries a punishment of up to seven years in prison, and will face trial in a military court. Another civil society leader was charged with sedition for supporting the students; the status of the case against him was unclear at the end of 2015.

A public assembly law that was approved in May and took effect in August requires protest organizers to notify the police 24 hours in advance of the event, and sets limits on where demonstrations can take place. For instance, gatherings must be organized a certain distance away from royal palaces and government buildings, and may not impede public services. Activists argued that the law was designed to prevent demonstrations by entangling organizers in court battles over the events' legality.

Thailand has a vibrant civil society, but groups focused on defending human rights or freedom of expression face restrictions. The NCPO often insists that such activities break laws concerning political gatherings, or create "public disturbances." In June 2015, authorities canceled a panel discussion organized by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, at which participants were to discuss human rights in Thailand since the coup. Even activities that are less overtly anticoup in nature do not escape government scrutiny. In 2015, security officials were sent to monitor seminars on LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) rights, environmental issues, and the draft cybersecurity law. Authorities sometimes cautioned organizers against opposing NCPO policies ahead of such events.

Thai trade unions are independent and have the right to collectively bargain. However, civil servants and Thailand's numerous temporary workers do not have the right to form unions, and less than 2 percent of the total workforce is unionized. Antiunion discrimination in the private sector is common, and legal protections for union members are weak and poorly enforced.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

Although the interim constitution grants independence to the judiciary, the military courts' jurisdiction over certain types of civilian cases, including those related to lèse-majesté and national security offenses, effectively compromises judicial independence. Military court cases initiated during the martial-law period feature no right to appeal, but convictions in cases tried after the revocation of martial law in April 2015 can be appealed.

NCPO orders issued that month under Article 44 of the interim constitution allow the detention of individuals without charge for up to seven days, as under martial law. The orders also expanded the authority of military officers in the area of law enforcement, permitting them to arrest, detain, and investigate crimes related to the monarchy and national security.

To quell anticoup sentiment, hundreds of politicians, activists, academics, and journalists were summoned and detained by the NCPO during the first year of military rule; people who refused summons were subject to criminal punishment. While 2015 did not feature a wave of mass summons at the same scale, the practice of ordering people to report to the NCPO continued. Notably, two politicians from the PTP and a well-known journalist were each temporarily detained in September after being summoned for “attitude adjustments.” Separately that month, the NCPO established a temporary detention facility for civilians inside an army base. Two people being held following their arrest for *lèse-majesté* offenses died in custody there under unclear circumstances in late 2015, prompting a statement of concern from the UN Human Rights Office.

A combination of martial law and emergency rule has been in effect for over a decade in the four southernmost provinces, where Malay Muslims form a majority and a separatist insurgency has been ongoing—with varying intensity and multiple rebel groups—since the 1940s. Civilians are regularly targeted in shootings, bombings, and arson attacks, and insurgents have often focused on schools and teachers as symbols of the Thai state. Counter-insurgency operations have involved the indiscriminate detention of thousands of suspected militants and sympathizers, and there are long-standing and credible reports of torture and other human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, by both government forces and insurgents. The police and military often operate with impunity; successful criminal prosecutions of security personnel are extremely rare. Peace negotiations between the government and the dominant southern militant group, the National Revolutionary Front (BRN), were suspended in 2013. However, by the close of 2015, the NCPO had engaged in several rounds of informal talks with the Mara Patani Consultative Council, a coalition of six armed groups.

Other regions of the country have generally been free from terrorism or insurgencies. However, in August 2015, an explosion in central Bangkok killed 20 people and injured more than 100, marking the deadliest peacetime bombing in Thai history. Police arrested one suspect in September. Authorities faced criticism for issuing unclear or contradictory statements about the investigation.

In Thailand’s north, so-called hill tribes are not fully integrated into society. Many lack formal citizenship, which renders them ineligible to vote, own land, attend state schools, or receive protection under labor laws. A 2008 amendment to the Nationality Act was supposed to facilitate citizenship registration, but in practice, a lack of documentation made this difficult.

Thailand is known for its tolerance of the LGBT community, though societal acceptance is higher for tourists and expatriates than for nationals, and unequal treatment and stigmatization remain challenges. The new Gender Equality Act, which took effect in September 2015, represents the first antidiscrimination mechanism in the country to outline protections in a way that includes LGBT people. However, equality advocates have expressed concern about overly broad exceptions in the act. Same-sex couples do not have the same rights as opposite-sex couples, but a civil partnership bill is under consideration by the NLA.

Thailand has not ratified the UN conventions on refugees. In July 2015, the government faced international condemnation after it forcibly repatriated approximately 100 members

of the Uighur ethnic group to China, where they were at risk of persecution and punishment by the Chinese government. The country drew similar criticism in November, when it repatriated two Chinese dissidents who had been registered as refugees by the UN refugee agency.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16

Except in areas affected by civil conflict, citizens have freedom of travel and choice of residence. Citizens also have freedom of employment and higher education. The rights to property and to establish businesses are protected by law, though in practice business activity is affected by some bureaucratic delays, and at times by the influence of security forces and organized crime in certain areas.

While women have the same legal rights as men, they remain subject to economic discrimination in practice, and are vulnerable to domestic abuse, rape, and sex trafficking. Sex tourism has been a key part of the economy in some urban and resort areas. Spousal rape is a criminal offense.

Exploitation and trafficking of migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos are serious and ongoing problems, as are child and sweatshop labor. Porous borders and government indifference, if not outright collusion, have helped to fuel migrant smuggling networks operating in Thailand. Renewed attention to these challenges was sparked by the discovery in May 2015 of mass graves along the Malaysian border containing what were believed to be the remains of dozens of ethnic Rohingya people from Myanmar and Bangladesh. The graves were found at trafficking camps where smugglers held migrants captive for ransom. Military and government officials were among those implicated in the subsequent investigations and charges related to these incidents. Authorities have suggested that the August 2015 bombing attack in Bangkok was perpetrated by members of a human trafficking organization who were angry about authorities' increased attention to their operations.

Timor-Leste

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 1,245,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Dili

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

**Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)**

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

In February 2015, the ruling National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) formed a new unity government with the Revolutionary Front for an Independent Timor-Leste (Fretilin), previously in opposition. Independence leader Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão resigned as prime minister and was succeeded by Rui Maria de Araújo, a former health minister from Fretilin. Araújo represents a younger generation whose legitimacy stems in

part from technical and professional skills rather than solely from participation in the independence struggle. The decision to bring Fretilin into the governing coalition was also an effort to restore a consensus-driven approach to government and prevent a recurrence of the instability that affected the country in 2006. Gusmão retained a seat in the cabinet as minister for planning and strategic investment.

Internal security continued to improve in 2015. In August, Paulino Gama, popularly known as Mauk Moruk, was shot and killed during a joint police-military operation targeting his Maubere Revolutionary Council (KRM), which had allegedly carried out attacks on police earlier in the year. KRM and another outlawed group, the Committee for the Popular Defense of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (CPD-RDTL), do not represent a significant threat to physical security, but they had challenged Gusmão's legitimacy as well as that of the constitution. Mauk Moruk had been apprehended in March 2014 after both organizations were declared illegal by Parliament, but he was released on bail in December of that year.

Economic growth continued to be the government's primary concern in 2015. Timor-Leste remains one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia. It depends on large draw-downs from its Petroleum Fund to finance infrastructure development projects and programs that ensure peace and stability, including payments to veterans of the independence struggle and army deserters who catalyzed the 2006 crisis. The withdrawals have exceeded sustainable levels for several years, and the fund could be depleted by 2025, according to some projections.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 29 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

The directly elected president is a largely symbolic figure, with formal powers limited to the right to veto legislation and make certain appointments. The president and members of the 65-seat, unicameral Parliament serve five-year terms, with the president eligible for a maximum of two terms. The leader of the majority party or coalition in Parliament becomes prime minister.

Presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 2012, and observers deemed the voting largely free and fair. José Maria Vasconcelos, popularly known as Taur Matan Ruak, won the presidential election as an independent in a runoff against former parliamentary speaker Francisco Guterres of Fretilin. Due to the 3 percent vote threshold required to enter Parliament, only 4 out of 21 competing parties garnered seats. CNRT led with 30 seats and formed a coalition with the Democratic Party, which won 8 seats, and the new National Reconstruction Front of Timor-Leste—Change (Frenti-Mudança), which had broken from Fretilin in 2011 and took 2 seats in the elections. Gusmão secured a second term as prime minister. Fretilin won 25 seats and remained in opposition until the February 2015 coalition deal, in which Gusmão stepped down and was replaced by Araújo of Fretilin.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 12 / 16

Fretilin led Timor-Leste's first elected government from 2001 to 2007 with little opposition, after which CNRT was formed and led all successive governments, with Fretilin in opposition. Although the new coalition agreement brokered in 2015 was meant in part to make way for a new generation of leadership, independence heroes and their rivalries dating back to the anti-Indonesian resistance movement continue to dominate national politics, and have at times caused governmental paralysis or even violence, as in the 2006 crisis. The 2015 agreement left no formal opposition force in Parliament.

Cultural, ethnic, and religious minorities have full political rights and electoral opportunities. Amendments to the election laws made in 2011 require one-third of candidates on party lists for parliamentary elections to be female.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

Although Fretilin focused attention on specific cases of government corruption and financial mismanagement during its time in opposition, Parliament in general has shown little initiative in government oversight functions or the development of draft legislation. Draft bills introduced by the government are rarely debated. Some civil society organizations have played an oversight role by challenging the government on issues such as the budget, use of the Petroleum Fund, and the independence of the judicial sector. In December 2015, the president vetoed a proposed budget for 2016 that had been approved by Parliament, citing unsustainable spending and drawdowns from the Petroleum Fund.

Voter frustration with corruption and nepotism has plagued both Fretilin- and CNRT-led governments, and the new coalition cabinet in 2015 replaced several ministers who had been connected to past or current corruption cases. In 2014, Finance Minister Emilia Pires, a close associate of Gusmão, was indicted over a contract for hospital beds that was awarded to a firm owned by her husband. She was not included in the new cabinet, and her trial was incomplete at year's end.

According to the constitution, the immunity of members of the government is automatically lifted if they are charged with a crime carrying more than two years in prison. In practice, however, the courts ask Parliament to lift immunity before proceeding with a case, and Gusmão sent a letter in late 2014 asking Parliament not to remove the immunity of government officials in the interests of government continuity and functioning. The letter was widely believed to have been written in support of Pires and the speaker of Parliament, Vicente Guterres, who was under suspicion in a separate procurement case.

An anticorruption commission created in 2009 has a broad mandate but lacks the authority to prosecute suspects. Timor-Leste was ranked 123 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 36 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16

Media freedom is protected in the constitution. In practice, however, the free flow of information remains hampered, primarily by poor infrastructure and scarce resources. Domestic media outlets are vulnerable to political pressure due to their reliance on government financial support in a media market with small audiences and limited nongovernmental sources of paid advertising. Radio is the medium with the greatest reach; printing costs and illiteracy rates generally prevent the expansion of print media. The country has several daily newspapers and tabloids, some of which are loosely aligned with political parties. Estimates on internet penetration have varied in recent years, but according to the latest data from the International Telecommunication Union, the rate reached 13 percent in 2015.

Journalists are often treated with suspicion, particularly by government officials, and in many cases practice self-censorship. Authorities regularly deny access to government information. The 2009 penal code decriminalized defamation but retained provisions against false accusation, and defamation remains part of the civil code. There are sporadic reports of violence against journalists, including four assaults by police officers in March and April 2015.

A 2014 media law created a government-sponsored Press Council with the power to revoke journalists' credentials under a new licensing system. The law also stipulated that foreign owners may hold no more than a 30 percent stake in Timorese media outlets.

Freedom of religion is protected in the constitution, and Timor-Leste is a secular state, though approximately 97 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Protestant groups have reported some cases of discrimination and harassment. While religious education is included in the school curriculum, parents may remove their children from the classes. Academic freedom is generally respected, and there are few constraints on open and free private discussion.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. A 2004 law regulates political gatherings and prohibits demonstrations aimed at "questioning constitutional order" or disparaging the reputations of the head of state and other government officials. The law requires that demonstrations and public protests be authorized in advance and restricts how close these activities can be to government buildings and critical infrastructure. However, these restrictions have almost never been enforced in recent years.

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can generally operate without interference, although the state has more actively monitored and regulated their work since independence. Few NGOs operate outside of the capital.

Workers, other than police and military personnel, are permitted to form and join labor unions, bargain collectively, and strike; in practice, however, labor organizations are slow to form. Unionization rates are also low due to high levels of unemployment and informal economic activity. A 2011 law requires written notification five days in advance of a strike.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

Timor-Leste suffers from weak rule of law and a prevailing culture of impunity, which were exacerbated by shake-ups in the composition of the judiciary in 2014. Late in the year, the government, with support from Parliament, terminated the contracts and revoked the visas of foreigners working in judicial, prosecutorial, and anticorruption institutions. Due to limited capacity within the country, the judicial system has depended since independence on contracted foreign judges and lawyers. The 2014 terminations did not follow legal protocol, according to which only the Superior Council of Magistrates may remove judicial officers. As a result of the move, legal proceedings in some courts were delayed or forced to restart with new personnel in 2015.

The terminations were initially seen as political meddling aimed at disrupting corruption cases against government allies, though such cases were not abandoned. Analysts also pointed to perceived court bias against the government and instances of incompetence in the judiciary that damaged its legitimacy. In a bid to address the system's problems comprehensively, Parliament called for a thorough audit as part of its 2014 action. In December 2015, a new Legislative Reform and Justice Sector Commission was sworn in.

The expulsion of the foreign judicial officers, all Portuguese speakers, highlighted the language challenge facing the legal system in Timor-Leste. The use of Portuguese for court administration poses an obstacle due to the limited number of Portuguese speakers and the difficulty of translating legal terms into local languages. A shortage of Portuguese interpreters often forces the adjournment of trials.

The introduction of mobile courts in 2008—in part to reduce case backlogs—has helped bring formal justice to remote areas, but their expedited procedures have reduced

fair trial standards. Across the justice sector, due process rights are often restricted or denied, owing largely to a dearth of resources and personnel. Alternative methods of dispute resolution and customary law are widely used, though they lack enforcement mechanisms and have other significant shortcomings, including unequal treatment of women.

Internal security continued to improve in 2015. After KRM allegedly launched attacks on police in January and March, the police and military carried out security operations that led to the killing of the group's leader, Mauk Moruk, in August. During the operations, however, government forces subjected civilians to arbitrary arrest and physical abuse, according to Amnesty International. Police officers and soldiers are regularly accused of excessive force and abuse of power, though the courts have had some success in prosecuting them.

While hate crimes based on sexual orientation are considered an aggravating circumstance in the penal code, other protections against discrimination for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people are lacking. Issues like sexual orientation and gender identity reportedly receive little public attention, but a small number of LGBT advocacy organizations have been active in recent years.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

Citizens generally enjoy freedom of unrestricted travel, though travel by land to the enclave of Oecusse is hampered by visa requirements and Indonesian and Timorese checkpoints. Individuals also enjoy free choice of residence and employment, but unemployment rates are high, and most of the population still relies on subsistence farming.

The status and reintegration of the thousands of Timorese refugees living in the Indonesian portion of the island—having fled a 1999 Indonesian crackdown in Timor-Leste following that year's referendum on independence—remained unresolved in 2015. The Timorese government has long encouraged the return of the refugees, but concerns over access to property and other rights, as well as the status of former militia members, continue to hinder their return.

While Timorese have the right to establish businesses, property rights are complicated by past conflicts, changes in sovereignty, and the unclear status of communal or customary land rights. A new draft land law designed to establish formal tenure and help resolve disputes was amended and presented to Parliament in 2013; it was still pending at the end of 2015.

Equal rights for women are constitutionally guaranteed, but discrimination and gender inequality persist in practice and in customary law. Women hold 25 of the 65 seats in Parliament, and eight positions in the new cabinet, including the powerful position of finance minister. Despite a 2010 law against domestic violence, gender-based and domestic violence remain widespread. A 2015 survey by the Asia Foundation found that 59 percent of women who had been in a relationship had experienced sexual or physical partner violence, and of these, a majority experienced severe violence. Civil society groups have criticized the courts' use of prison sentences for only the most severe and injurious domestic violence cases. Many victims are reluctant to seek justice.

Timorese women and girls from rural areas are vulnerable to human trafficking for sexual exploitation and domestic servitude, and children are sometimes placed in bonded labor. The government makes some effort to prosecute offenders. A draft antitrafficking bill meant to improve protection and prevention measures was submitted to Parliament in 2015 but had yet to pass at year's end.

Togo

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 7,231,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Lomé

Freedom Rating: 4.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

In presidential elections held in April 2015, incumbent president Faure Gnassingbé successfully consolidated his hold on power, winning 59 percent of the vote and a third term in office. The election proceedings were largely considered free and fair by independent domestic and international observers, though turnout was lower than in previous elections. Opposition candidates critiqued the electronic voter roll system, and the main opposition candidate, Jean-Pierre Fabre, and his followers protested the results. Gnassingbé's support from the military, disproportionate electoral districts, his unwillingness to step down after repeated opposition attempts to pass term limits, and disunity among the opposition all make it improbable that political power will change hands in any meaningful way in the near future.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 18 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12 (+1)

The president is elected to a five-year term and appoints the prime minister. Despite numerous failed attempts at constitutional reform in 2014, Togo is one of only two countries in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) without presidential term limits. In April 2015, Gnassingbé won reelection with 59 percent of the vote, a slightly smaller percentage than he received in the 2010 polls. At 61 percent, voter turnout was lower than at any time since Gnassingbé was first elected.

The election was considered largely free and fair by the African Union observer mission. However, opposition critique of the new electronic vote tabulation system and delays in appointing the electoral commission's vice president—a post that by law must be held by a member of the opposition—until the eve of the vote itself reinforced a lack of public faith in the electoral process. The vote was postponed by 10 days to accommodate voter list revisions called for by ECOWAS. While all presidential candidates were given equal airtime on public media during the election period, Fabre was reportedly prohibited from broadcasting a message viewed as critical of the government.

The 91 members of the unicameral National Assembly are elected to five-year terms. Legislative elections were held in 2013 after much delay. International observers considered them to be credible and transparent, though the opposition disputed the results. Gnassingbé's Union for the Republic (UNIR) won 62 seats and 23 of the country's 28 electoral zones, including some opposition strongholds. This result was bolstered by district gerrymandering that heavily favors UNIR. The opposition Save Togo Collective (CST) won 19

seats, the Rainbow Coalition won 6 seats, the Union of Forces for Change (UFC) won 3, and an independent candidate won one seat.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 7 / 16 (– 1)

Although opposition parties are free to operate, the structure of the electoral system, including districting and the single round of elections, have helped Gnassingbé and his party remain in power. Internal divisions, as well as district allocations dramatically favoring UNIR, are sources of weakness for the opposition. The results of the 2015 poll added another five years to the Gnassingbé family's 48-year hold on power.

The government is dominated by Gnassingbé's Kabyé ethnic group, who also make up the vast majority of the security services. The Éwé, Togo's largest ethnic group, are persistently excluded from positions of influence; they are prominent within the opposition.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12

The National Assembly was freely elected in 2013 and has influence over policy, but local political figures are appointed by the president. Perhaps as a result, a 2014 Afrobarometer survey indicated that the vast majority of Togolese citizens have little to no interaction with their political representatives, and instead tend to reach out to religious figures and traditional leaders.

Corruption remains a serious problem. Reforms under President Gnassingbé empowered the National Assembly to appoint the members of the Anticorruption Commission (CAC), but the body has been slow to make progress and appears to be aligned with the president and UNIR. In July 2015, the National Assembly passed a law to create a new body under the auspices of the CAC that will be largely preventive rather than punitive. Four out of the seven members are appointed by the president, raising concerns about its independence.

Also in July, a group of 40 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) created a civil society anticorruption network, intended to serve as an independent body to support the capacity of existing anticorruption actors, expand judicial reform, and inform the public about the negative consequences of corruption. Togo is ranked 107 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Reports outlining government expenditures are published multiple times a year, though according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), limited information and inadequate cross-checking between departments have hampered the consistency of budget disclosures.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 30 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

Freedom of the press is guaranteed by law but often disregarded in practice. The availability of diverse and critical voices in the media has increased in recent years. While no incidents of harassment of journalists took place during the election and no defamation cases were reported in 2015, impunity for crimes against journalists and frequent defamation suits in the past have encouraged self-censorship. The National Assembly passed a new Penal Code in 2015 that criminalizes the publication of false information with a punishment of between six months and two years in prison and a hefty fine. Journalist associations and media outlets in Togo have spoken out against the new law, while the government defends it as a necessary step to fight cybercrime and terrorism.

The High Authority of Broadcasting and Communications (HAAC) is widely believed to be a close ally of the Gnassingbé administration. The HAAC can impose severe

penalties—including the suspension of publications or broadcasts and the confiscation of press cards—if journalists are found to have made “serious errors” or are “endangering national security.” The HAAC mandated a media blackout for one day before the election, and journalists were prohibited from reporting the results of the exit polls on election day.

Access to the internet is generally unrestricted. Although penetration is low, Togolese activity online is increasing, and internet access is now free at public universities. In 2015, the Togolese Media Observatory, an independent journalists’ association, issued a report harshly criticizing the quality of reporting in online content.

Religious freedom is constitutionally protected and generally respected. Islam and Christianity are recognized as official religions; other religious groups must register as associations.

University figures are able to engage in political discussions, such as the constitutional reform debate. However, government security forces are believed to maintain a presence on university campuses and have cracked down on student protests in past years. In 2014, nine students were expelled in connection with their participation in demonstrations the previous year.

Citizens are increasingly able to speak openly in private discussion, though political discussion is prohibited on religious radio and television stations.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12 (+ 1)

Freedom of assembly is sometimes restricted, particularly in election years. A 2011 law requires that demonstrations receive prior authorization and only be held during certain times of the day. Opposition groups frequently held demonstrations in 2015, primarily protesting the lack of presidential term limits before the vote and disputing the election results afterward. Unlike in the past, the police refrained from violence in 2015 against opposition protests. However, police did open fire on a March student protest.

Following the government’s attempts to revitalize an inhabited nature reserve in the north of the country, protests by local residents in November turned violent and a local police officer was killed. In response, the government suspended its plans to relocate the population.

Freedom of association is largely respected, and human rights organizations generally operate without government interference. Togo’s constitution guarantees the right to form and join labor unions, though workers’ rights in the lucrative export processing zone are regularly violated. The country’s main labor union, Synergy of Togolese Workers, voluntarily suspended all demonstrations leading up to the 2015 presidential election. Following an explosion at a cement factory in June in which as many as 10 workers died, cement workers went on strike to protest the terrible working conditions, leading to the suspension of operations at three major factories near Lomé.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

The judicial system lacks resources and is heavily influenced by the presidency. The Constitutional Court in particular is believed to be partial to UNIR; Fabre chose not to appeal the election results with the court for this reason. During the year, the government announced plans to improve the judiciary; these included providing greater access to the courts and modernizing judicial facilities. The High Court of Magistrates also cracked down on judicial corruption by suspending and firing two judges for “unethical behavior.”

Lengthy pretrial detention is a serious problem, particularly for Gnassingbé’s political opponents. In 2013, more than 40 members of the opposition were arrested in connection

with major market fires; seven remain in pretrial detention. In addition, at least one former minister accused of fraud has been in jail since 2012 without a trial. Prisons suffer from overcrowding and inadequate food and medical care. The government periodically releases prisoners to address overcrowding, but the process by which individuals are chosen for release is not sufficiently transparent. In 2015, the Ministry of Justice approved the creation of a new body composed of 20 NGOs that seeks to improve prison conditions through intervening in detention management.

Many of these gradual moves on the part of the government directed at the judiciary and prisons are in response to recommendations from the 2012 Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission, which investigated political violence and human rights violations that occurred in Togo between 1958 and 2005. Despite these apparent efforts, impunity persists for many Gnassingbé supporters, perpetuating a climate of fear for those critical of the government.

The north and south of the country have historically been divided along political and ethnic lines. Discrimination among the country's 40 ethnic groups occurs but was not widely reported in 2015. Same-sex sexual activity continues to be punishable by fines and up to three years in prison under the penal code passed in 2015.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

Travel within Togo can involve arbitrary traffic stops as a means for police to coerce drivers into paying bribes. Some 60 percent of the population is employed in agriculture. The country is increasingly seen as a Western-friendly investment environment and has moved to privatize a number of industries. As a result, Togo's score has recently improved in the *Index of Economic Freedom*. In 2015, the government implemented reforms to reduce the time and financial means necessary to start a business.

A 2013 amendment to the Electoral Code requires that women have equal representation on party lists. The Law on Political Party and Electoral Campaign Funding, passed after the 2013 legislative elections, requires that a portion of a party's public financing be determined in proportion to the number of women from that party elected in the most recent national and local elections. Of the 91 seats in the National Assembly, 17 were held by women in 2015. According to the 2014 Afrobarometer survey, the vast majority of Togolese support having more women in leadership roles. A 2014 provision to the Family Code assigned women equal status in the household as well improved inheritance rights. Even so, women's opportunities for education and employment are limited. Spousal abuse is widespread, though the new penal code provides for 5 to 10 years in prison for rape and no longer excludes spousal rape.

The government has been making increasing efforts to reduce trafficking, which is most common in (though not limited to) the sex industry and for forced labor inside Togo.

Tonga

Political Rights Rating: 2
Civil Liberties Rating: 2
Freedom Rating: 2.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 103,300
Capital: Nuku'alofa

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	5,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 31 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 44 / 60

A new government headed by longtime democracy activist 'Akilisi Pohiva of the Democratic Party of the Friendly Islands took office in January 2015 following general elections in November 2014.

However, the prime minister soon became entangled in a series of controversies. The first involved Pohiva's appointment of his son as his personal assistant. Pohiva claimed that only his son could help him with his health needs and that he was paying him out of his own salary. By September, lawmakers were questioning the use of public funds to pay for the son's travel expenses. Pohiva was also criticized for serving as foreign minister as well as education minister. In October, opponents asked the king to remove him and his deputy from the education portfolio, alleging nepotism, corruption, and bullying of staff. At year's end, Pohiva still held both cabinet posts.

The year's most prominent dispute involved ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In March, the parliament declared its readiness to ratify the treaty, and Pohiva was a supporter. However, some lawmakers and religious groups raised concerns that ratification would force Tonga to change laws governing the male-only succession to the throne and to legalize same-sex marriage and abortion, though nongovernmental organizations supporting the treaty insisted that this was not the case. After a number of protests and petitions, Pohiva said in September that the government was backing away from its bid to ratify CEDAW. Instead, he proposed passing legislation that would allow a referendum on the issue. No date had been set by year's end.

Citing concerns about online pornography and other internet content that could be harmful to children or the community, the parliament unanimously passed legislation in October to create a new regulatory body with powers to take down or block offending material. The regulator would also assume some media oversight functions currently performed by the Ministry of Communications. It remained unclear how the new laws and agency would affect access to information and freedom of expression in practice.

In November, 'Etuata Lavulavu, the minister of infrastructure and tourism, was ordered to work without pay for five months after an audit found evidence of abuse of office, though he avoided impeachment. As of December he faced trial on separate charges that he had bribed voters and engaged in illegal campaign spending to secure his seat in the 2014 elections.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Tonga, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Trinidad and Tobago

Political Rights Ratings: 2
Civil Liberties Rating: 2
Freedom Rating: 2.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy :Yes

Population: 1,351,000
Capital: Port-of-Spain

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

General elections held in September 2015 led to the defeat of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar’s People’s Partnership (PP) coalition government by the People’s National Movement (PNM), led by Keith Rowley. In the lead-up to the vote, several incidents shook the political landscape. In May, a parliamentary majority suspended Rowley from the legislature due to his role in the so-called “emailgate” scandal, in which alleged government emails shared by Rowley connected several officials to abuse of office and other crimes. Also in May, police arrested Jack Warner, Independent Liberal Party leader and former vice president of FIFA, the global soccer governing body. The arrest followed a request by U.S. authorities, who filed charges against Warner and several others for fraud and related malfeasance in FIFA operations. Separately, several cabinet ministers and other high-ranking officials faced administrative penalties during the year—including dismissal from the PP government—for suspected malfeasance.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 33 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

The president is elected to a five-year term by a majority of the combined houses of Parliament, though executive authority rests with the prime minister. Parliament consists of the 41-member House of Representatives and the 31-member Senate; members of both houses are elected to five-year terms. The president appoints 16 senators on the advice of the prime minister, 6 on the advice of the opposition, and 9 at his or her own discretion.

Anthony Carmona has held the presidential seat since 2013. The most recent general elections were held in September 2015 and led to a change of government. The PNM, which had been in opposition since 2010, won 23 seats, while the ruling PP took 18. PNM leader Rowley took office as prime minister.

The Elections and Boundaries Commission, which oversees the conduct of elections, extended voting by one hour due to heavy rain on the island of Trinidad. Persad-Bissessar’s United National Congress (UNC), the majority PP member, challenged the decision in court, arguing that the extension was unconstitutional. Trinidad and Tobago’s appeal court

voted in favor of the UNC in November, allowing the party to officially contest results in six constituencies. Subsequent proceedings were ongoing at year's end.

A controversial 2014 constitutional reform bill stalled in 2015, and neither government expressed intentions to pursue it further. Among other things, the bill sought to limit the time a prime minister could stay in office, to allow for the recall of members of the House of Representatives, and to require that electoral candidates win a majority—rather than a plurality—of votes in single-member districts to gain seats.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 13 / 16

A wide range of political parties operate in Trinidad and Tobago. After the country gained independence in 1962, the PNM dominated the political landscape for several decades. However, increasingly diverse political groupings have been able to compete for power in recent years, and the political arena is now largely divided between the PNM and the PP, which consists of the UNC, the Congress of the People, the Tobago Organization of the People, and the National Joint Action Committee.

Political parties are technically multiethnic, though the PNM is favored by Afro-Trinidadians, while the UNC is affiliated with Indo-Trinidadians; the PP coalition overall represents multiethnic interests.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Corruption remains a pervasive problem in Trinidad and Tobago, which was ranked 72 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. A number of legislators and other high-ranking officials were either forced to resign, suspended from their duties, or dismissed in 2015 for suspected abuse of office and other misdeeds. In February, Persad-Bissessar requested the resignation of Anand Ramlogan and Gary Griffith from the posts of attorney general and minister of national security, respectively; the two faced accusations of tampering with witnesses in a defamation lawsuit filed against Rowley. Separately, in May, the U.S. Department of Justice filed charges against Warner for racketeering, fraud, money laundering, and bribery in connection to his role as FIFA vice president. Trinidadian police arrested Warner, and U.S. officials sought his extradition to face charges. He launched a challenge against the extradition request, and the case was ongoing at year's end.

Trinidad's Integrity Commission, established in 2000, has the power to investigate public officials' financial and ethical performance. In May 2015, the body concluded its inquiry into "emailgate," a scandal that emerged in 2013 when Rowley shared emails seemingly implicating Persad-Bissessar, Ramlogan, and other senior figures in serious crimes, including conspiracy to harm a journalist, illegal surveillance, and obstruction of justice. The accused officials as well as several independent entities contested the authenticity of the emails, and the Integrity Commission concluded that there was insufficient evidence of any serious wrongdoing. The commission's conclusions were not without controversy; the deputy chairman of the body resigned due to disagreement with the termination of the investigation.

Drug-related corruption extends to the business community, and a significant amount of money is believed to be laundered through front companies. The 2000 Proceeds of Crime Act imposes severe penalties for money laundering and requires that major financial transactions be strictly monitored. Legislators approved a new law in January 2015 that will create a special office to oversee and regulate matters related to public procurement.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 48 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

Freedom of speech is constitutionally guaranteed. Press outlets are privately owned and vigorously pluralistic. There are three daily newspapers and several weeklies, as well as private and public broadcast media outlets. Internet access is unrestricted. Media advocates have expressed concerns that the Defamation and Libel Act of 2013 has the potential to limit press freedom. In June 2015, the Media Association of Trinidad and Tobago voiced alarm at threats and harassment against journalists, asking law enforcement agencies to step up protection efforts.

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and the government honors this provision in practice. Academic freedom is generally observed, and private conversations are not surveilled or sanctioned by the state.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are respected. Civil society is relatively robust, with a range of interest groups engaged in the political process. Labor unions are well-organized and politically active, though union membership has declined in recent years. Strikes are legal and occur frequently.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16

The judicial branch is independent, though subject to some political pressure and corruption. Rising crime rates have produced a severe backlog in the court system. Corruption in the police force, often drug-related, is endemic, and misconduct by officers sometimes leads to the dismissal of criminal cases. Most abuses by the authorities go unpunished. Trinidad and Tobago has a mandatory death sentence for murder on the books, but no one has been executed since 1999. The death penalty was a major topic of debate in 2015, with Attorney General Faris Al-Rawi—who replaced Ramlogan—voicing support for reviving its application. Most prisons are severely overcrowded.

The government has struggled in recent years to address violent crime. Many Trinidadians of East Indian descent, who are disproportionately targeted for abduction, blame the increase in violence and kidnapping on government and police corruption.

Racial disparities persist, with Indo-Trinidadians comprising a disproportionate percentage of the country's upper class. Same-sex sexual relations are illegal, though the law is not generally enforced. Human rights groups have criticized the government's unwillingness to address discrimination and violence against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people in Trinidad and Tobago.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

There are no undue restrictions on freedom of movement and the right to choose one's residence. Citizens are free to seek admission to local educational institutions and engage in commercial activity, though corruption in the business sector impedes equality of opportunity.

Domestic violence as well as violence based on gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation remain significant concerns. A draft policy on gender and development was introduced for legislative discussion in 2009 and submitted to the cabinet in 2012, but has since stalled. In the September 2015 vote, 13 women won seats in the House of Representatives, one of whom became speaker; nine women also gained ministerial positions in the 24-member cabinet.

The U.S. State Department's 2016 *Trafficking in Persons* report placed Trinidad and Tobago on its Tier 2 Watch List, but noted that the government elected in September 2015 boosted antitrafficking efforts, including by increasing funding, trainings for police, and educational campaigns.

Tunisia

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 11,026,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Tunis

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,3,PF	1,3,F	1,3,F

INTRODUCTION

Following a year in which the country adopted a historic and progressive constitution and successfully held free and fair elections at the parliamentary and presidential levels, Tunisia experienced a number of challenges in 2015 that threatened to undermine its democratic progress. Three high-profile terrorist attacks in Tunis and Sousse killed dozens of people, leading to the imposition of states of emergency for much of 2015 that included curfews and prohibition on public demonstrations. The attacks also spurred passage of a new antiterrorism law that was criticized by rights advocates for granting broad new powers to the security services.

After winning a significant victory in last year's elections, there were concerns that Nidaa Tounes, the country's main secularist party, would attempt to govern without input from Ennahda, the moderate Islamist party that led the previous government. However, in February parliament approved a coalition government that included Ennahda in some minor capacities. A significant bloc within Nidaa Tounes protested the inclusion of Ennahda in government, touching off a crisis that threatened the former's survival.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Tunisia's 2014 constitution established a unicameral legislative body, the Assembly of the Representatives of the People (ARP), and a semipresidential system in which the majority party in parliament selects a head of government, while a popularly elected president serves as head of state and exercises restricted powers. The ARP consists of 217 representatives serving five-year terms, with members elected on party lists in 33 multimember constituencies.

Parliamentary elections were held in October 2014 with a high turnout of 67 percent of registered voters. Nidaa Tounes won a plurality of the vote and 86 seats. Ennahda placed second with 69 seats, 20 fewer than in 2011. Three other parties won enough seats to play significant roles in government formation: the populist-centrist Free Patriotic Union won 16

seats, the leftist Popular Front won 15, and the center-right Afek Tounes won 8. Eleven other parties won between one and four seats each, and two seats went to independents.

Presidential elections were held the following month, with about 64 percent of registered voters casting a ballot in the first round. Beji Caid Essebsi of Nidaa Tounes won 40 percent of the vote, followed by Mohamed Moncef Marzouki of Congress for the Republic at 33 percent. Some 20 additional candidates ran; Ennahda did not put forward a candidate. Because no candidate won a majority, a runoff was held in December, in which Essebsi won with 55 percent of the vote against 44 percent for Marzouki. Despite some complaints regarding campaign finance violations and allegations of vote buying, no evidence surfaced to indicate systematic violations or a significant impact on electoral results. International and local observers concluded that the 2014 elections were free and fair.

Following the elections, Nidaa Tounes initially attempted to form a coalition government excluding Ennahda and relying on smaller secularist parties to secure a parliamentary majority. However, following pushback from the ARP, Nidaa Tounes reached an agreement with Ennahda to form a coalition government, which was approved by parliament in February 2015. The decision by the party's leadership to include Ennahda in the coalition sparked a crisis within Nidaa Tounes, which had already been suffering from factional divisions and internal governance problems. In November, 32 Nidaa Tounes ARP members announced their resignation from the party as a result of these issues, though they were persuaded to tentatively suspend that decision days later. In December, another 22 Nidaa Tounes representatives announced their intention to resign from the party.

The Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), a neutral nine-member commission, supervises the electoral process. Tunisia's new electoral law, adopted in 2014 in advance of election season, garnered praise from observers as a credible framework for reflecting the will of the voters. However, the law's gender parity provisions—in which males and females alternate within each list, rather than requiring males and females to alternate at the head of lists across regions—attracted criticism.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

In the 2014 elections, 70 parties participated. The two dominant parties are Nidaa Tounes, a secular coalition of leftists, trade unionists, businesspeople, and members of the former government of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (who was ousted after a popular revolution in 2011), and Ennahda, a moderate Islamist party. Nidaa Tounes experienced a series of crises in 2015 that threatened its survival as a cohesive entity. The party's leftist wing has long been subordinated to more powerful business and elite political interests and is underrepresented at the executive level in the current government. Throughout 2015, a power struggle played out between the leftist faction led by Mohsen Marzouk, elected secretary-general of the party in May, and *ancien régime* elements led by Hafedh Essebsi, son of President Caid Essebsi. Delays in holding the party's congress to elect a new leadership led to street clashes between the competing groups in November and Marzouk's resignation from his post in December, casting doubt on the party's ability to continue to function in its current form.

The Tunisian military, historically marginalized by the political leadership, remained politically neutral in 2015. However, its budget has significantly expanded in the past several years and it has established its own intelligence and security services. While generally viewed as positive developments correcting longstanding internal dysfunction, these changes have led some experts to caution against an unwarranted increase in the military's powers and its potential politicization.

The government and both domestic and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have worked to increase the political participation of marginalized groups, including disabled Tunisians, and ensure their inclusion in elections. Low youth voter turnout continued to concern nearly all observers in 2014, although tens of thousands of young people made up the majority of election monitors, polling station workers, campaign staff, and election volunteers.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12 (+ 1)

In January 2014, Ennahda, then the largest party in the now-defunct interim legislature and leader of a coalition government, handed over power to a caretaker government in advance of elections. Although the move was a positive step in quelling a bitter political dispute with the opposition, it did install an unelected technocratic administration for most of the year. In December 2014, the newly elected ARP was formally seated, and Caid Essebsi was sworn in as the country's president later that month. With the ARP's approval of a cabinet in February 2015, the transition to a fully democratic administration at the both the legislative and executive levels was completed.

The removal of Ben Ali and his close relatives and associates, who had used their positions to create private monopolies in several sectors, represented an important step in combating corruption and eliminating conflicts of interest. A provisional anticorruption authority is to be replaced by a Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Commission, established by the 2014 constitution. However, few prosecutions have occurred to date, with the exception of in absentia trials for members of the Ben Ali and Trabelsi clans—the two former ruling families.

Moreover, petty corruption continues to plague the country, with tax evasion, falsification of documents, and bribery rampant in the civil service. Tunisia was ranked 76 out of 168 countries and territories assessed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

In July 2015, the cabinet approved a so-called reconciliation law that would suspend all legal proceedings and investigations into public corruption committed under the Ben Ali regime and ease the process for obtaining amnesty for such crimes. The law had not yet been passed by year's end.

Since the revolution, Tunisia has improved its record on government transparency. A 2011 decree requires internal documents of public institutions to be made available to the public. The 2014 constitution enshrined the right of access to information, along with an independent commission to monitor compliance. However, a draft law that would help bring Tunisia up to international standards and improve implementation was unexpectedly withdrawn from consideration in July 2015.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 42 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 13 / 16

Freedom of expression improved dramatically following the revolution, and the 2014 constitution guarantees freedoms of opinion, thought, expression, information, and publication, subject to some restrictions. However, the media continued to face obstacles in 2015, including prosecutions under Ben Ali-era criminal laws. Blogger Yassine Ayari was sentenced by a military court to a year in prison in January for violating the military code by "defaming the army" on Facebook; Ayari was released from prison in April. Also in March, three journalists were arrested for allegedly defaming the president and other offenses. They were sentenced to six-month suspended prison sentences before being released.

The High Independent Authority of Audiovisual Communication (HAICA) continued to be the subject of debate due to concerns about its politicization and its aggressive policy of fining television and radio stations, especially during the elections. In November, the prime minister dismissed the head of the national public broadcaster and installed an interim chief without consulting HAICA. The body brought a legal challenge against the government's actions in December, but no resolution was achieved by year's end.

The 2014 constitution introduced freedom of religion to an extent largely unprecedented in the Arab world. It guarantees freedom of belief and of conscience for all religions, as well as for the nonreligious, and bans campaigns against apostasy and incitement to hatred and violence on religious grounds. While the constitution identifies Islam as the state religion and requires the president to be a Muslim, no constitutional provision identifies Sharia (Islamic law) as a source of legislation.

Despite these provisions, the state retains significant influence over the internal affairs of religious institutions, particularly mosques. A Ben Ali-era law authorizing the government to appoint local imams and banning any unauthorized activity at mosques remains in place. Following the revolution, a monitoring commission within the religious affairs ministry undertook a campaign to root out allegedly extremist imams from mosques across the country and replace them with state appointees. In 2015, the minister of religious affairs gave the police primary responsibility for the surveillance of mosques. Following the mass shooting in Sousse in June, the state shut down 80 mosques accused of promoting extremist positions.

Article 33 of the 2014 constitution explicitly protects academic freedom, and it continues to improve in practice.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12 (– 1)

The 2014 constitution guarantees the rights to assembly and peaceful demonstration. Public demonstrations on political, social, and economic issues regularly take place. However, when police responded to a protest against economic conditions in February, they shot and killed a demonstrator. Rights groups have criticized a counterterrorism law adopted in July for its vague language, creating concern that the law could be used to stifle demonstrations and curtail protest activity. In September, the government began enforcing a ban on all public demonstrations under the state of emergency imposed in response to the shooting in Sousse. On at least three occasions that month, police used excessive force to disperse protests against the proposed reconciliation law.

The constitution guarantees the freedom to establish political parties, unions, and associations. Tens of thousands of new civil society organizations began operating after the revolution, and NGO conferences were held throughout the country during 2015. Antiterrorism and security justifications are sometimes used to circumvent legal procedures for closing civil society organizations.

The constitution guarantees the right to form labor unions and to strike. The Tunisian economy has been rocked by continuous strikes across all sectors since the revolution demanding labor reform, better wages, and improved workplace conditions. Although strikes are almost never suppressed by force, in May 2015 the cabinet announced a decision to not pay public sector employees on days they participated in a strike. However, agreement was reached between labor unions and the government to raise public sector salaries for at least the next three years.

F. Rule of Law: 9 / 16

The constitution guarantees a robust and independent judiciary. However, little reform has taken place since the revolution, numerous Ben Ali-era judges remain on the bench,

and successive administrations have regularly attempted to manipulate the judiciary. In May 2015, the ARP passed a law establishing a Supreme Judicial Council (CSM), which will monitor the judicial system. Critics noted a variety of serious deficiencies in the law, including outsize executive influence on the CSM's composition and functions. The Constitutional Council, Tunisia's interim constitutional review body, ruled in June that the new law was unconstitutional on numerous grounds related to its manner of passage and content; no law to replace it was passed by year's end.

In June 2014, Tunisia established a Truth and Dignity Commission (TDC) to examine political, economic, and social crimes committed since 1956. By May 2015, the commission had received nearly 12,000 complaints of rights violations under Ben Ali. However, observers have noted that the selection process for the body's 15 commissioners lacked transparency and engagement with civil society, its organizational structure is suboptimal, and it is plagued by slow decision-making processes. Moreover, specialized courts to adjudicate cases of violations are still nonoperational.

Security issues, particularly threats from radical Salafi Muslim groups, are a major concern for the government. In March, two gunmen attacked the Bardo Museum in Tunis, killing 20 and wounding dozens more. Another mass shooting at a popular tourist resort in Sousse killed 38 people in June. The Islamic State claimed responsibility for both attacks, but the government asserted that local Islamist groups based in Tunisia were behind them. In November, a bomb exploded in Tunis near a bus carrying members of the elite presidential guard, killing 12 people. President Essebsi declared a state of emergency in early July that lapsed in October but was reinstated in late November and was then extended through the end of the year. Continuous terrorist threats also led to near-unanimous passage of a sweeping new antiterrorism bill, signed into law by Essebsi in August. The bill gives police expanded surveillance and detention powers, allows terror suspects to be tried in closed-door hearings, and permits witnesses in such trials to remain anonymous.

The constitution refers to state protections for persons with special needs, prohibiting all forms of discrimination and providing aid to integrate them into society. It also calls for the state to create a culture of diversity. However, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people continue to face discrimination in law and society. In September, a man was sentenced to one year in prison for allegedly engaging in same-sex sexual acts, and six other men were sentenced to three years in prison in December. An appeals court reduced the September sentence to two months in December, and the defendant was released with time served.

Tunisia has no asylum law, leaving the United Nations as the sole entity processing asylum claims. Migrants are often housed in informal detention centers, where they suffer from substandard living conditions. Delays in the issuance of residency permits make it impossible for many to work legally, forcing them to take odd jobs with no labor protections. A draft asylum law that would normalize the status of migrants and increase their rights and protections was circulating in parliament in late 2015.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 11 / 16

Freedom of movement has improved substantially since 2011. The 2014 constitution guarantees freedom of movement within the country, as well as freedom to leave. Unlike in some other Arab countries, women do not require the permission of a male relative to travel. The southern border was closed several times in 2015 in response to the various terrorist attacks, and Tunis was placed under curfew following the November bus bombing.

The protection of property rights continued to be an area of concern, closely linked to high levels of corruption as well as a large backlog of property cases. The 2014 constitution

introduced new protections for property, including intellectual property, but their implementation has yet to be seen.

Tunisia has long been praised for relatively progressive social policies, especially in the areas of family law and women’s rights. The 2014 constitution guarantees equality before the law for men and women, and the 1956 personal status code giving women equality with men has remained in force. The code grants women equal rights in divorce, and children born to Tunisian mothers and foreign fathers are automatically granted citizenship. Medical abortion is legal. Currently, 68 women serve in the parliament. Areas of ongoing concern for women’s rights include social discrimination and unequal inheritance laws, as well as domestic abuse.

Tunisian women and children are subject to sex trafficking and forced domestic work in both Tunisia and internationally.

↓ Turkey

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 78,215,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Ankara

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Trend Arrow: Turkey received a downward trend arrow due to renewed violence between the government and Kurdish militants, terrorist attacks by the Islamic State group, and intense harassment of opposition members and media outlets by the government and its supporters ahead of November parliamentary elections.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Turkey held two parliamentary elections in 2015 amid an exceptionally polarized and volatile political environment. Prior to the first vote in June, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan campaigned for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), hoping that it could gain 60 percent of parliamentary seats, which would allow it to call a referendum on constitutional changes to create a stronger presidency. In a surprise result, the AKP failed to secure even a simple parliamentary majority, while the Kurdish-oriented Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) cleared the 10 percent electoral threshold for representation in the legislature. Four parties entered the parliament, but negotiations to form a coalition government failed, and new elections were called for November. In this round, the AKP won 49 percent of the vote, an eight-point improvement on the June result, and 317 seats, enough for a majority but short of the 60 percent goal. Nonetheless, Erdoğan indicated that he would seek the support required to press ahead with the adoption of a presidential system.

The political and security situation surrounding the November elections was deeply affected by violence that rocked Turkey throughout the second half of 2015. In July, a bombing at a gathering of Kurdish student activists in Suruç, a town on the Syrian border, killed 33 people. The Syrian-based Islamic State (IS) militant group was blamed for the attack, but many Kurds accused the government of complicity or failure to address the

threat from IS. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militant group then killed two Turkish police officers in retaliation, setting off broader fighting that ended a two-year cease-fire between the PKK and the government. By year's end, hundreds of soldiers and police, PKK fighters, and civilians had been killed. Armed gangs of Kurdish youth took over parts of some towns in the Kurdish-populated southeast, and government forces moved in to restore control. In addition, in September and October there were some 200 attacks by civilian mobs against offices of the HDP, which the AKP and nationalist parties accused of being a political wing of the PKK. Over 40 HDP mayors were arrested or removed from office. Also in October, a bombing in Ankara that was attributed to IS killed 102 people at another largely Kurdish demonstration.

A continued crackdown on the media added to the pressure on the electoral environment. Throughout the year, dozens of journalists were arrested and prosecuted for insulting the president and other government officials or for allegedly supporting terrorist organizations. Numerous websites were also blocked. A week before the November elections, the government seized the assets of a major conglomerate, including two daily newspapers, *Millet* and *Bugün*, and two television channels that had been critical of the ruling party.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 24 / 40 (-2)

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12 (-1)

Under the current constitution, the prime minister is the head of government and holds most executive authority, while the president is the head of state and has powers including a legislative veto and authority to appoint judges and prosecutors. In August 2014, Turkey held direct presidential elections for the first time; presidents were previously elected by the parliament. Erdoğan prevailed with 51.8 percent of the vote, winning a once-renewable five-year term. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu assumed Erdoğan's posts of prime minister and head of the AKP. Some domestic and international observers, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), pointed to irregularities in the campaign, including media bias and self-censorship, misuse of state resources to support Erdoğan's election bid, lack of transparency in campaign finances, and voter fraud.

The unicameral parliament, the 550-seat Grand National Assembly, is elected for a four-year term. In the June 2015 elections, the AKP won the most votes (41 percent) but secured only 258 seats, short of a majority. Three opposition parties also won seats: the secularist Republican People's Party (CHP, 132 seats), the Nationalist Action Party (MHP, 80 seats), and the predominantly Kurdish HDP (80 seats). All three ruled out a coalition with the AKP, and deep divisions between the MHP and HDP prevented the opposition from forming a coalition on its own. Consequently, Erdoğan exercised the option to call new elections. In the November vote, the AKP won 49 percent of the ballots and 317 seats, giving it a clear parliamentary majority. CHP won 134 seats with 25 percent of the vote, whereas the HDP and MHP lost votes and parliamentary mandates, winning only 59 and 40 seats, respectively. Davutoğlu remained prime minister.

There were some irregularities with respect to the electoral process. Erdoğan campaigned for the AKP in the June elections, which domestic and international observers said violated the president's nonpartisan status under both precedent and law. Opponents of the government alleged media bias and censorship, noting that the state-owned TRT television station provided extensive coverage of the AKP's campaign while giving far less time to opposition parties and also rejecting some of their advertisements. Finally, the HDP suffered from terrorist attacks, arrests, and mob violence. The OSCE, while acknowledging that Turkish voters had a choice among parties and that the vote count was transparent, concluded that the media restrictions and violence severely hindered the campaign.

Judges on the Supreme Board of Elections oversee voting procedures, with the participation of nonvoting representatives of the four largest political parties, but critics have suggested that the board is subject to influence from the government. Its decisions cannot be appealed.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 9 / 16 (– 1)

Turkey has a competitive multiparty system. In June 2015, the three opposition parties won a majority of parliamentary seats, though they were unable to form a coalition due to ideological differences.

The rise of new parties is inhibited by the 10 percent vote threshold for parliamentary representation, and parties can be disbanded for endorsing policies that are not in agreement with constitutional parameters. This rule has been applied in the past to Islamist and Kurdish-oriented parties. There have been no such bans since 2009, and Kurdish-oriented parties, most recently the HDP, have competed in various elections. However, some members of pro-Kurdish parties have been arrested for alleged links to the PKK, and the HDP was subjected to violence and intimidation during 2015, including bombings attributed to IS and hundreds of attacks on HDP offices surrounding the elections. After the cease-fire between the government and the PKK collapsed in July, officials accused the HDP of being a proxy for the PKK. Erdoğan called for any HDP lawmakers with PKK ties to be prosecuted, but he stopped short of urging the closure of the party itself. Critics alleged that the AKP government was using its battle with the PKK to weaken its political opponents and reverse its June defeat. Between the June and November elections, roughly 500 HDP members and officials, including over 20 elected mayors, were taken into custody on terrorism charges.

The military has historically been a dominant force in politics. Under the AKP, however, various reforms, and especially a series of deeply flawed, politically motivated prosecutions, have increased civilian control over the military. Hundreds of military officers were convicted in 2012 and 2013 for alleged involvement in coup plots. Over 200 were acquitted in March 2015 after a retrial in which the court ruled that some evidence against them had been falsified.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

Corruption remains a major problem. In 2015, Turkey was still dealing with the effects of a 2013–14 scandal in which leaked audiotapes pointed to possible corruption among senior politicians, including Erdoğan and his family. The government largely denied the charges and blamed the affair on a “parallel state” of rogue officials linked to the exiled Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen. Investigations to substantiate the corruption allegations have been extremely limited. In January 2015, the parliament voted against opening a trial for four former ministers. Meanwhile, throughout 2015, the government continued its campaign to ferret out elements of the “parallel state,” investigating individuals and businesses accused of affiliation with Gülen, who has been branded a terrorist by the state.

In November 2015, Transparency International issued a report that was critical of Turkey, citing its failure to strengthen safeguards against money laundering, bribery, and collusion in the allocation of government contracts.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 29 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 8 / 16

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed, and some media outlets are critical of the government. However, in recent years dozens of intellectuals and journalists have

been jailed, particularly on terrorism charges. Government harassment of journalists is also common, leading to self-censorship and dismissals.

During 2015, scores of journalists, as well as some high school students and a former Miss Turkey, were charged with insulting President Erdoğan and other officials; some received prison sentences. In September, the offices of the liberal newspaper *Hürriyet*—owned by the Doğan Group, which had been involved in earlier disputes with the government—were twice attacked by AKP supporters after Erdoğan lashed out against its news coverage. Three foreign journalists who were covering the conflict with the PKK were deported that month.

In October, *Bugün* and *Millet*, two newspapers owned by the Koza-İpek group, were placed under government trusteeship pending an investigation into the company's purported ties to Gülen. Koza-İpek's television stations, KanalTürk and Bugün TV, were also shut down. Seventy-one journalists from these outlets were fired, and they resumed operation under new management, producing coverage that was more supportive of the government. Separately, some television distributors moved to drop the signals of stations that were critical of the government. Following the Ankara bombing that month, the authorities attempted to restrict coverage of the incident.

Immediately after the November elections, police raided the offices of an opposition-aligned magazine and jailed two of its journalists for allegedly plotting to overthrow the government. Among other arrests and charges that month, 18 journalists, including the editor of *Cumhuriyet*, were put on trial for allegedly disseminating terrorist propaganda by publishing a photo related to the abduction and murder of an Istanbul prosecutor by a leftist terrorist group in March. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that a total of 14 journalists were behind bars in Turkey as of December.

Threats to internet freedom remain a concern. In the past, the government has blocked access to services such as Twitter and YouTube after they published materials alleging government corruption. Twitter reported that in the first six months of 2015, Turkey continued to account for more than half of all content-removal requests worldwide. It was second only to India for content restrictions on Facebook during the same period. In March 2015, the parliament passed new laws that expanded the state's power to temporarily block content and conduct surveillance without a court order. Hundreds of websites and social-media accounts were blocked over the course of the year. In April, for instance, 166 websites were blocked for publishing images of the abducted Istanbul prosecutor. Roughly 100,000 websites were blocked as of the end of the year, according to Engelli Web, though this included sites banned in previous years or for apolitical reasons like copyright infringement.

The constitution protects freedom of religion, and religious expression has become more prominent in the public sphere under the AKP. Critics charge that the AKP has a religious agenda favoring Sunni Muslims, evidenced by the expansion of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and the alleged use of this institution for political patronage and to deliver government-friendly sermons in mosques. The Alevi minority, a non-Sunni Muslim group, has historically faced violence and discrimination. The AKP's promises of an "Alevi opening" to address these problems have led to disappointment among Alevis, though the new government formed after the November 2015 elections pledged to renew the effort, including by authorizing the state to cover the costs of Alevi houses of worship and religious leaders, as it does with Sunni institutions. In August, the Supreme Court of Appeals had confirmed a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that the state must pay such expenses for Alevis. In December, the government announced plans to grant full legal status to Alevi houses of worship. Three non-Muslim religious groups—Jews, Orthodox

Christians, and Armenian Christians—are officially recognized. However, disputes over property and prohibitions on training of clergy remain concerns for these communities.

Academic freedom is limited by self-censorship and legal or political pressure regarding sensitive topics, including contemporary political developments. The government has asserted more authority over individual academics and both public and private universities through the state's Higher Education Board, which in October 2015 introduced a draft regulation that would make it easier to close private universities for becoming "the focal point of acts against the country's indivisible integrity." Also in October, a professor at Ankara University was indicted for "spreading terrorist propaganda" by posing a question on an exam that asked students to analyze the writings of the PKK's leader.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12 (+ 1)

Freedoms of association and assembly are protected in the constitution, and Turkey has an active civil society. Protests and public gatherings on a range of issues were held without incident during 2015, though others were broken up by security forces, particularly in the southeast, and terrorist bombings added a new risk to public assemblies. In April 2015, Erdoğan signed legislation that increased criminal penalties for various actions during protests and empowered police to fire on demonstrators who use incendiaries. Police continued to suppress May Day demonstrations in 2015, as well as attempts to mark the anniversary of the 2013 Gezi Park protests. Unlike in previous years, Istanbul's annual LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) pride parade was dispersed by police in June. Meanwhile, prosecutions linked to the original Gezi protests continued to produce verdicts during 2015; in October and November, some 270 demonstrators were sentenced to as much as 14 months in jail for a variety of offenses.

Turkey has many politically active nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). However, authorities have monitored and harassed some NGOs in recent years—most notably those affiliated with Gülen's Hizmet movement.

There are four national trade union confederations. Trade unions have been active in organizing antigovernment protests. However, union activity, including the right to strike, remains limited by law and in practice, and union-busting activities by employers are common. Because of various threshold requirements, only half of union members in Turkey enjoy collective-bargaining rights, and fewer than 10 percent of workers are unionized. In January, 15,000 workers in the United Metal Workers Union declared a strike, but the government banned it on national security grounds. From May to July, metalworkers at several automobile factories engaged in wildcat strikes and work stoppages to press for higher wages.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16 (- 1)

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but the government has been able influence judges in the past through appointments, promotions, and financing. In the wake of corruption allegations against the government, thousands of police officers, judges, and prosecutors were reassigned during 2014, and the government passed laws to gain more control over the courts as well as the Higher Council of Judges and Prosecutors, the body responsible for judicial appointments. Antiterrorism laws are widely employed to investigate and prosecute critics of the government. The package of security legislation passed in March 2015 included expanded police powers to carry out surveillance, searches, and detentions without court orders. Impunity for past human rights abuses by the security forces remains a serious problem.

In recent years, the government enacted a number of reforms to enhance the rights of ethnic Kurds, and a cease-fire with the PKK had been in effect since March 2013. However, renewed violence broke out in July 2015, leading to episodes of intense urban fighting in the southeast. PKK attacks on security forces in September prompted reprisals against the HDP and Kurdish-owned businesses. By year's end, hundreds of militants, police, soldiers, and civilians had been killed. The government also detained thousands of Kurds for alleged links to the PKK. In November, Tahir Elçi, a prominent human rights lawyer who had been detained in October after saying that the PKK is not a terrorist organization, was killed by an unknown assailant while speaking to the media. The HDP called his death an assassination, and others raised similar suspicions, sparking protests in several Turkish cities.

In addition to violence linked to the PKK, Turkey suffered from terrorist attacks by Islamist militants and a radical leftist group in 2015. After the October bombing in Ankara that was attributed to IS, authorities detained over 300 suspected IS militants, and two policemen were killed during a related raid in Diyarbakır. Separately, attacks by the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front included the abduction and murder of an Istanbul prosecutor in March and a nonfatal shooting at the city's U.S. consulate in August.

Turkey is providing temporary protection to over 2 million refugees, most of them from Syria. While refugees have access to education and health care, they are not allowed to work, and caring for the refugees has strained government resources. Over the course of 2015, the authorities increased restrictions on the internal movement of refugees as well as controls at the country's borders.

Same-sex sexual activity is not explicitly prohibited, but LGBT people are subject to widespread discrimination, police harassment, and occasional violence. There is no legislation to protect people from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 9 / 16

Freedom of travel and choice of residence and employment are largely respected, though movement in parts of the southeast was seriously hampered in late 2015 by curfews, checkpoints, and fighting between security forces and PKK militants.

Property rights are generally upheld. However, since the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and subsequent allegations of official corruption, businesses and foundations perceived to be opponents of the government have come under pressure, including through intrusive tax and regulatory inspections and denial of government contracts. In January 2015, a lengthy investigation into a refinery owned by the conglomerate Koç Holding resulted in a \$69 million tax fine, which some saw as politically motivated. In May, Bank Asya, an Islamic lender linked to Gülen's movement, was formally transferred to the state-run Savings Deposit Insurance Fund. In September, business and university officials in Kayseri, including the chief executive of Boydak Holding, were detained by police in an anti-Gülen investigation. In October, the government seized 23 companies of the Koza-İpek conglomerate, again for alleged links to the Gülen movement.

The constitution grants women full equality before the law, but only about 29 percent of working-age women participate in the labor force. Women's rights issues, including the problem of violence against women, have gained more visibility in Turkey, inspiring multiple demonstrations during 2015; all political parties included these concerns in their electoral platforms. The government has declared combating domestic violence a priority, but critics argue that it has not done enough, focusing more on family integrity than women's rights. Many question the government's commitment to women's rights given the often sexist rhetoric of leading officials and demeaning verbal attacks by the government and pro-AKP media against female politicians from opposition parties.

Migrants to Turkey have been subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor. Refugees from Syria and other conflict areas are especially vulnerable to exploitation, and the authorities' efforts to combat trafficking largely fail to match the seriousness of the problem.

Turkmenistan

Political Rights Rating: 7

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 5,373,000

Capital: Ashgabat

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov's government reinforced its repressive controls on politics and society in 2015. During the year, legislators discussed constitutional changes that would allow the president to serve for an unlimited number of terms. State authorities continued to limit the availability of independent information, harass and imprison critics, and pressure ethnic and religious minorities. International criticism and pressure have not led to genuine respect for fundamental freedoms by the government. When confronted with accusations of human rights violations at the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting hosted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in September, the delegation from Turkmenistan denied the claims, calling them "subjective, provocative attacks and biased comments."

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 0 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

Turkmenistan is not an electoral democracy. Since its independence in 1991, none of the country's elections have been free or fair. President Berdymukhammedov has maintained all the means and patterns of repression established by his predecessor, Saparmurat Niyazov, whose authoritarian rule lasted from 1985 to 2006. Berdymukhammedov was formally elected to his first five-year presidential term in 2007. In the last presidential election, held in 2012, he was reelected to a second five-year term with 97 percent of the vote and 96 percent turnout, according to the country's election commission. While Berdymukhammedov had promised that the polls would include opposition candidates and adhere to international norms, all seven of his challengers were minor figures associated with the ruling Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT).

Under the 2008 constitution, the Mejlis became the sole legislative body, and its number of seats expanded from 50 to 125, with members elected to five-year terms from individual districts. The charter gave citizens the right to form political parties, and a new law outlining the requirements for party formation was approved by the Mejlis in 2012. In the most recent parliamentary elections, held in 2013, the DPT took 47 seats, followed by the Federation of

Trade Unions with 33, the Women’s Union with 16, the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs with 14, and a youth organization and other “citizen groups” with 8 and 7, respectively. The Mejlis remains tightly under executive control despite the appearance of pluralism.

The election commission has no meaningful independence from the executive branch. In May 2015, the parliamentary speaker announced that the constitutional commission was considering proposals that would allow Berdymukhammedov to serve as president indefinitely.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16 (– 1)

The party system in Turkmenistan is dominated by the ruling DPT and controlled by the executive branch. Cosmetic legislative changes in recent years, ostensibly aimed at increasing pluralism, have only served to establish progovernment political parties. Formerly the Soviet-era Communist Party of Turkmenistan, the DPT was the only party permitted to operate legally and field candidates for elections until 2013. The 2012 law on political parties specified the legal basis for any citizen to form an independent party, but barred parties formed on professional, regional, or religious lines, among other restrictions. Berdymukhammedov subsequently announced plans to form two new groups—the Agrarian Party and the Party of Entrepreneurs and Industrialists—even though the 2012 law forbade profession-based parties and barred government officials from creating parties. Both groups were openly organized by sitting members of the DPT, but only the latter registered in time to participate in the 2013 parliamentary elections. Aside from the DPT and the Party of Entrepreneurs and Industrialists, the entities that won seats were unions and civic groups affiliated with the state. The Agrarian Party was formally registered in 2014 and, like the Party of Entrepreneurs and Industrialists, is loyal to the government.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

Corruption in Turkmenistan, which was ranked 154 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index, is widespread. Many public officials are widely understood to have bribed their way into their positions. The government’s lack of transparency affects nearly all spheres of the economy and public services. After holding a steady exchange rate to the dollar in 2014, the government allowed the manat to fall more than 19 percent on January 1, 2015, but offered no information on the devaluation to the public, leading rumors to circulate and cause considerable panic. In late January, after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) criticized the government’s lack of communication and transparency, Berdymukhammedov made a televised address, explaining that declining global gas and oil prices had caused the devaluation.

Decisions to award large-scale contracts to foreign companies are ultimately made by the president without any effective legal control or oversight, with bribes playing a key part in the process. Allocation of state profits from hydrocarbon exports remains opaque. Legislation passed in 2014 required government agencies to establish websites with basic information about their operations and to answer public inquiries submitted online, but compliance remained unclear in 2015.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 4 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 1 / 16 (– 1)

Although the 2013 media law banned press monopolies and censorship, freedom of the press is severely constrained by the government, which controls nearly all broadcast and

print media. In April 2015, the government announced its decision to eliminate the use of private satellite dishes—a move seemingly intended to limit access to Radio Azatlyk, the Turkmen service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). Although internet penetration is low, Turkmenistan’s main internet service provider is run by the government and restricts access, including by blocking undesirable websites and monitoring user activity. The government mandated obligatory internet access for educational, scholarly, and cultural institutions in 2014. While the OSCE praised the legislation, it also warned that certain provisions—for example, limits on vaguely defined propaganda and the liability of users for the truthfulness of their postings—can be used to maintain and expand restrictions on online content.

The few independent reporters that still operate in Turkmenistan risk detention by the authorities; rights groups suspect that imprisoned journalists are subject to torture. Osmankuly Hallyev was forced to resign from Radio Azatlyk in June 2015 after police threatened to jail him if he did not end his affiliation with the outlet. Hallyev’s family members have faced job dismissals and harassment by police due to his journalistic work, and his son—a photojournalist and RFE/RL correspondent—fled the country in 2014 to avoid further persecution. Photojournalist Saparmamed Nepeskuliyev, who reported for RFE/RL and the opposition-minded *Alternative Turkmenistan News* on social issues, health care, and corruption, was arrested in July for allegedly possessing an illegal medication, and was being held incommunicado at year’s end. According to some reports, Nepeskuliyev was sentenced in August to three years in prison on the falsified charge, but details about his status and location remained unconfirmed.

Legal restrictions and harassment by the government have virtually extinguished the ability of individuals to freely practice religion. Changes to the administrative code in 2013 introduced fines for the dissemination of religious literature, among other measures. Religious groups are required to register with state authorities, and practicing an unregistered religion is illegal, with violators subject to fines. Many minority religious groups have been refused registration, and members of some groups face persecution. Jehovah’s Witnesses, who are conscientious objectors to compulsory military service, continued to report arbitrary detention, harassment, and abuse by state authorities in 2015. According to the independent religious freedom watchdog Forum 18, four Jehovah’s Witnesses were arrested on spurious hooliganism charges in February; three of them reported being beaten by police. Also in February, a Protestant religious leader was fined after police raided a private gathering he attended. The officers discovered a copy of the New Testament and accused the man of disseminating the text illegally. Forum 18 reported that at least one attendee was subsequently forced to write a statement abandoning his faith.

The government places significant restrictions on academic freedom. In August, President Berdymukhammedov announced plans to require foreign academics to attain government approval of any scholarly work about Turkmenistan before publication, ostensibly to prevent the proliferation of “personal views” into interpretations of Turkmenistan and its people.

The openness of private discussion is highly restricted due to intrusive supervision by state security services, including physical surveillance, monitoring of telephone and electronic communications, and use of informers.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

The constitution guarantees freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, but in practice, these rights are severely restricted. Sporadic protests, usually focused on social issues,

have taken place in recent years. The Law on Assemblies, the first of its kind, was signed by the president in March and entered into force in July, explicitly defining the right of individuals and groups to hold peaceful gatherings with prior authorization. However, due to concurrent restrictions and the forbidding political environment, the law is unlikely to lead to the free exercise of this right. The Law on Public Associations, in force since 2014, contains slight improvements for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), among them the ability of foreign individuals and entities to found and join organizations. However, the freedom of association remains restricted in practice. Onerous registration requirements and the state's unfettered ability to monitor NGOs inhibit the capacity of civil society, which is limited to the work of a few dedicated activists.

The government-controlled Association of Trade Unions of Turkmenistan is the only central trade union permitted. Workers are barred by law from bargaining collectively or staging strikes.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The judicial system is subservient to the president, who appoints and removes judges without legislative review. The authorities frequently deny rights of due process, including public trials and access to defense attorneys. Prison conditions are unsanitary and overcrowded, and the state maintains a system of labor camps. According to international watchdogs, security forces use various forms of torture and violence—including rape, asphyxiation, starvation, and forcible administration of drugs—against suspects and inmates.

The government has released a number of political prisoners since Niyazov's death in 2006, but many others remain behind bars. Many long-term political prisoners have been subject to enforced disappearance, and nothing is known about the condition of jailed former foreign ministers Boris Shikmuradov and Batyr Berdyev, along with some 28 others. Amnesty International has received reports that harassment, arbitrary imprisonment, and torture of political opponents is widespread. A September 2014 report by the Prove They Are Alive! campaign extensively documented the torture practices employed by prison workers in Ovadan Depe, where most political prisoners are reportedly held.

Employment and educational opportunities for ethnic minorities are limited by the government's promotion of Turkmen national identity. The country's small Persian, Afghan, and Balochi minorities are denied education in their native language. Their cultural centers have been shut down, and officials from the National Security Ministry regularly interrogate community elders. The law does not protect LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people from discrimination, and traditional social taboos make even discussion of LGBT issues difficult. Sexual activity between men is illegal and punishable by up to two years in prison and a possible additional term of up to five years in a labor camp.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 3 / 16

Freedom of movement is restricted, with a reported blacklist preventing some individuals from leaving the country. Geldy Kyarizov, a prominent breeder of Akhal-Teke horses who is out of favor with the government, and two family members were denied exit from the country in August 2015 while attempting to travel to Moscow. After international pressure from human rights organizations, Kyarizov and his family were allowed to leave Turkmenistan in September. Because the decision followed the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, critics argued that it was an isolated gesture, rather than a move to ease travel policies. A few activists who hold dual citizenship and continue to reside in

Turkmenistan are able to travel abroad using their Russian passports. The government enforces compulsory military service for male citizens from the age of 18, going so far as to rush final school examinations, issue diplomas early, and confiscate passports in order to facilitate conscription.

A Soviet-style command economy and widespread corruption diminish the equality of opportunity. In September, the Council of Elders, a rubber-stamp advisory body, proposed cutting important welfare benefits across the country, including free electricity, gas, and water. Council deputies described the proposal as an overdue turn to free market forces, rather than as a measure provoked by the country's current economic difficulties. The constitution establishes the right to property ownership, but the deeply flawed judiciary provides little protection to businesses and individuals. Arbitrary evictions and confiscation of property are common. In October, Amnesty International reported that forced evictions and demolitions in and around Ashgabat, conducted as part of a campaign to beautify the city ahead of the 2017 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, had affected approximately 50,000 people.

Traditional social and religious norms, inadequate education, and poor economic conditions limit professional opportunities for women, and domestic violence is common.

Turkmenistan is a source for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking, and there are no adequate mechanisms for the prevention or investigation of trafficking. The government requires many civil servants and private individuals to participate in the annual cotton harvest.

Tuvalu

Political Rights Rating: 1
Civil Liberties Rating: 1
Freedom Rating: 1.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 11,800
Capital: Funafuti

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 57 / 60

Enele Sopoaga, the prime minister since 2013, secured a new term after March 2015 parliamentary elections, holding together his alliance of independent lawmakers. There are no political parties in Tuvalu, though no law bars their formation. Incumbents won 12 of Parliament's 15 seats.

The elections had been postponed by more than a week due to damage from a cyclone. This and other severe weather events underscored the country's vulnerability to the effects of climate change. In August, the government said it was considering the idea of buying land in Australia or New Zealand to support the population in the face of rising sea levels.

A UN committee reviewing discrimination against women in Tuvalu reported in March that the country had adopted new legislation against domestic violence in 2014 and abolished some discriminatory practices in recent years. However, it found that inequality in law and society still limited women's human rights. The constitution offers no protection against gender-based discrimination, and customary norms curtail women's role in society. Women cannot inherit the traditional title of *matai*, or chief, from their fathers, and few women hold prominent roles in business or government. Victims of domestic violence often refrain from reporting abuse. In December, the government said it was training counselors, religious leaders, and a specialized police unit to help address the problem.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Tuvalu, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Uganda

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 40,141,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Kampala

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	6,4,PF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

Restrictions on and abuses against the opposition and civil society intensified in 2015 as police and the government enforced the 2013 Public Order Management Act (POMA). In November, Parliament unanimously passed the Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO) Bill, which vastly increases the government's power over NGOs and could be used to ban targeted groups. It was awaiting the president's signature at year's end. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) groups and individuals continued to suffer harassment and intimidation during the year, despite the government's decision not to reintroduce the Anti-Homosexuality Act (AHA), which was struck down by the Constitutional Court on a technicality in 2014.

As general elections set for February 2016 drew nearer, police harassment of opposition candidates and their supporters increased. Electoral law changes introduced in 2015 appeared to disadvantage the opposition. Eight candidates were cleared by the Electoral Commission (EC) to seek the presidency, including incumbent Yoweri Museveni of the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM), longtime opposition leader Kizza Besigye with the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), and former prime minister Amama Mbabazi as the nominee of the newly formed Go Forward movement.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 11 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

Uganda's single-chamber Parliament and the president are elected for five-year terms. As of 2015 there were 375 elected members of Parliament (MPs), including 238 elected in

single-member constituencies, 112 elected to reserved seats for women, and 25 chosen to represent special interest groups (the military, youth, people with disabilities, and trade unions). Additional, ex-officio seats are held by cabinet ministers, who are appointed by the president and do not have voting rights. In 2005, constitutional amendments lifted a ban on political parties but also removed presidential term limits.

Museveni, the president since 1986, last won reelection in 2011 with 68 percent of the vote. Besigye placed second with 26 percent. In concurrent parliamentary elections, the NRM secured 263 of 375 elected seats, followed by the FDC with 34. Smaller parties and independents took the remainder. According to international observers, the elections were undermined by flawed administration, extensive state-media bias, and government spending on behalf of the ruling party.

The president appoints the members of the EC, and a parliamentary committee dominated by the ruling party approves the chairperson, compromising the commission's independence. In 2009, Museveni renewed the panel and its chairman for a second seven-year term.

After inviting recommendations for constitutional changes and receiving dozens of electoral reform proposals from a group representing all registered parties in Parliament, the NRM-dominated legislature in August 2015 passed a Constitutional Amendment Bill that changed the name of the Electoral Commission to the Independent Electoral Commission but otherwise ignored the cross-party recommendations.

Two additional bills concerning the upcoming 2016 elections—the Presidential Elections (Amendment) Bill and the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill—were signed into law in October. They increased the nomination fees required from presidential and parliamentary candidates, removed a previous requirement that presidential candidates campaign in each of the country's districts, and shortened by one hour the length of time polls stay open on election day. In August, Parliament approved the creation of 43 new counties, which double as single-member districts, meaning there would be 281 such constituencies for the 2016 parliamentary elections. In September, the Constitutional Court ruled unconstitutional the framework for elections to the parliamentary seats reserved for special interest groups, except those for people with disabilities. It remained unclear at year's end whether the framework would be amended to address the court's concerns in time for the elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 5 / 16

The ability of the opposition to compete with the NRM is hindered by harassment of opposition leaders, restrictive party registration requirements and voter and candidate eligibility rules, the use of government resources to support NRM candidates, a lack of access to state-media coverage, and paramilitary groups that intimidate voters and government opponents. Opposition groups have also suffered from infighting and funding shortages. In June 2015, opposition parties and civil society groups announced the formation of The Democratic Alliance, a new political coalition that planned to field a joint presidential candidate. However, the coalition failed to settle on a standard bearer, as neither Besigye nor Mbabazi agreed to stand down.

The POMA has been used to obstruct opposition candidates from holding rallies and meetings with supporters. After Mbabazi announced his presidential bid in June, his supporters were arrested in several locations around the country and charged with unlawful assembly and campaigning before the official start of the election season. According to an October 2015 Human Rights Watch report, police in September illegally used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse two rallies for Mbabazi in eastern Uganda. Besigye and his supporters also faced harassment. Besigye was arrested multiple times in 2015, with officials

claiming that it was illegal for him to hold rallies before his candidacy had been proved by the EC. In a video released in October, police officers could be seen pulling the clothes off of a leading FDC official, Zaina Fatuma, as they arrested her. Police argued that Fatuma had deliberately undressed herself as a protest. Activists speculated that the incident was meant to deter political participation by women.

Throughout 2015, Museveni's supporters worked to consolidate support for the president and sideline dissidents within the NRM, especially in response to the candidacy of Mbabazi, a former secretary general of the party. According to a November report on the NRM presidential primary by the Citizens Election Observation Network–Uganda (CEON-U), the poll featured instances of violence, intimidation, vote buying, and denial of voter access to polling stations.

The military, which is closely aligned with Museveni and currently holds 10 seats in Parliament, exerts a powerful role behind the scenes to support him as well as its own extensive commercial interests. At the end of 2015, it remained to be seen how that influence would be affected by the Constitutional Court ruling concerning interest-group seats in the legislature.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

Power is concentrated in the hands of the NRM leadership, the security forces, and especially the president, who retains office through deeply flawed elections. Ordinary MPs and civic groups have little practical ability to affect legislation or government policies.

Despite high-profile scandals and investigations, increased media attention, and laws and institutions designed to combat corruption, top government officials are rarely punished for such offenses. Electoral corruption is a particular concern ahead of the 2016 balloting, with vote buying the most visible problem.

The 2012 Petroleum Law gives the energy minister wide-ranging powers over the oil sector; the opposition and international monitoring groups criticized the law for lack of parliamentary or independent oversight of the minister's decisions. In July 2015, the government released a list of 19 companies interested in bidding on oil-drilling contracts. The transparency of the bidding process was hailed as a positive development, though international organizations expressed ongoing concern about corruption in the oil industry as well as human rights and environmental protection in the areas being opened for drilling. Uganda was ranked 139 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 25 / 40

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

Constitutional protections for freedoms of expression and of the press are often undermined by provisions in the penal code, including laws on criminal libel and treason, as well as by extralegal government actions.

Uganda has a vibrant media sector, with nearly 200 private radio stations and dozens of television stations and print outlets. Independent journalists and media outlets are often critical of the government, but in recent years they have faced escalating government restrictions and intimidation, leading many to self-censor. Journalists often face harassment or physical attacks by police or ordinary citizens while covering the news. In the lead-up to the 2016 elections, journalists reported self-censorship on political issues as well as instances of bribes being offered in exchange for positive coverage of the government. In December,

Museveni denounced the *Daily Monitor* newspaper and the broadcaster NTV, saying they sided with the political opposition.

There were no reported restrictions on internet access in 2015, and online media generally operate in a freer environment than the traditional press. However, the government has reportedly sought to increase surveillance of internet and mobile-phone communications in the context of antiterrorism campaigns under the 2002 Antiterrorism Act and the 2010 Regulation of Interception of Communications Act. An October 2015 report released by Privacy International describes a secret program begun by the government in 2011 to use an invasive form of spyware to remotely monitor the computers and communication devices of opposition members, journalists, and activists. The report states that the program sought information that could be used to blackmail its targets. The government denied the existence of such a program.

The 2014 Anti-Pornography Act (APA) defines pornography in broad terms and gives a Pornography Control Committee wide-ranging powers to determine what amounts to pornographic material in any medium, including online. Potential penalties for violations include fines and up to 10 years in prison.

There is no state religion, and freedom of worship is constitutionally protected and generally respected in practice. However, the government has restricted religious leaders from engaging in political debates and religious groups whose members allegedly pose security risks. An October 2015 Center for Strategic and International Studies report found that Museveni uses a combination of patronage and threats to limit the public role of religious institutions. Academic freedom has been undermined by alleged surveillance of university lectures by security officials, and by the need for professors to obtain permission to hold public meetings at universities.

In addition to the threat of state surveillance, free and open private discussion is limited by a climate of intimidation pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, LGBT individuals and others face the fear of being “outed” by tabloid newspapers that publicly identify real or perceived gay men and lesbians, along with personal details and photos.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

Freedom of assembly is restricted by law and in practice. Among other repressive provisions, the POMA requires groups to register with the local police in writing three days before any gathering, public or private, to discuss political issues. The police have broad authority to deny approval for such meetings if they are not deemed to be in the “public interest,” and to use force to disperse assemblies judged unlawful. Besigye and other opposition leaders have been arrested numerous times in recent years for organizing marches and protests.

Freedom of association is guaranteed in the constitution but often restricted. Civil society in Uganda remains vibrant, and several NGOs address politically sensitive issues. However, their existence and activities are vulnerable to legal restrictions and the manipulation of burdensome registration requirements. The NGO law passed in November 2015 was criticized by local civil society organizations and international rights groups for the broad powers it grants the government—including the authority to shutter organizations and jail their members for vaguely worded offenses. The measure was awaiting the president’s assent at year’s end.

Workers’ rights to organize, bargain collectively, and strike are recognized by law, except for workers providing essential government services. However, legal protections

often go unenforced. Many private firms refuse to recognize unions, and strikers are sometimes arrested. In the September 2015 Constitutional Court ruling that struck down the parliamentary election framework for interest-group seats, the court found that elections to the seats reserved for labor representatives unconstitutionally excluded nonunionized workers.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

Executive and military influence undermines judicial independence, and a December 2014 report by Al-Jazeera uncovered corruption at all levels of the judiciary. In March 2015, Museveni appointed Bart Magunda Katureebe to be chief justice of the Supreme Court, filling a vacancy created by a 2013–14 dispute over the president’s attempt to reappoint Benjamin Odoki, who was past the age of mandatory retirement.

Prolonged pretrial detention, inadequate resources, and poor judicial administration impede access to justice. The prison system is operating at more than twice its intended capacity, with pretrial detainees constituting more than half of the prison population. Rape, vigilante justice, and torture and abuse of suspects and detainees by security forces are persistent problems.

Since a series of terrorist bombings struck Kampala in 2010, security forces have illegally detained and abused terrorism suspects. Security was ramped up periodically in response to alleged terrorist threats during 2015. In March, gunmen assassinated a prosecutor in the trial of 13 suspected members of the Shabaab, the Somali Islamist militant group, who were accused of involvement in the 2010 bombings. In June, Parliament passed the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Bill, which grants police discretion in freezing the assets and seizing the property of terrorism suspects. The opposition criticized the bill’s definition of terrorism, which they said was vague and open to abuse.

In 2014, as part of a community policing initiative, the Uganda Police Force officially launched a “crime preventers” program with the aim of training more than a million young people across Uganda. The government claims that participants are permitted to support any political party and that their role is to help fight crime. However, critics, including opposition politicians and civil society groups, have accused crime preventers of physical abuse, extortion, and partisan intimidation, saying the program was effectively establishing extralegal, NRM-affiliated militias across the country ahead of the 2016 elections.

Northern Uganda continues to struggle to recover economically from 20 years of attacks by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebel group, with residents accusing the central government of neglect and corruption related to donor funds earmarked for the region. The LRA has not staged attacks in Uganda itself since 2005, but the government plays a leading role in an African Union mission to eliminate the group from neighboring countries.

LGBT people in Uganda face overt hostility from the government and much of society. According to a September 2015 report by the Human Rights Campaign, violence against LGBT individuals spiked while the AHA was in place and declined after it was struck down in 2014. However, other forms of discrimination persisted, including shunning by family members and eviction by landlords. Although the AHA, which criminalized “promoting” or “aiding and abetting” homosexual acts, is no longer in force, same-sex sexual activity is still subject to penalties of up to life in prison under existing law.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 7 / 16

Freedom of movement in Uganda is largely unrestricted. However, the government has occasionally enforced travel restrictions for security purposes, particularly in the north.

Bribery is common in many facets of life, such as interacting with traffic police, gaining admittance to some institutions of higher education, and obtaining government jobs. Licenses are required to start a business, obtain construction permits, and register property, and the multistage processes involve numerous opportunities for officials to seek bribes. Customary tenure is widespread in the north, and land disputes are common, particularly when private development projects are at stake.

Although the constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and acknowledges the equal rights of women, gender discrimination remains pronounced, particularly in rural areas. Women won nearly 35 percent of the seats in the 2011 parliamentary elections, and one-third of local council seats are reserved for women. The law gives women the right to inherit land, but discriminatory customs often trump legal provisions in practice. Rape and domestic violence are widespread and underreported, and offenders are rarely prosecuted. Cultural practices such as female genital mutilation persist, despite the 2010 Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act.

While early versions of the APA contained a provision that appeared to ban short skirts and other clothing deemed sexually explicit, the final bill did not contain this clause. Nevertheless, according to an October 2014 report by Amnesty International, a number of women wearing such clothing were attacked and stripped by mobs due to public misconceptions about the law.

Sexual abuse of minors is a significant problem. Ritual sacrifice of abducted children has reportedly increased in recent years, with wealthier individuals paying for the killings to seek good fortune. Uganda continues to be a source and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and prostitution.

Ukraine

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 42,828,300

Civil Liberties Rating: 3

Capital: Kyiv

Freedom Rating: 3.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Crimea, which is examined in a separate report.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,2,F	3,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	4,3,PF	3,3,PF	3,3,PF

INTRODUCTION

Conditions in Ukraine stabilized somewhat in 2015 compared with the previous year, which included the Euromaidan protests, the downfall of President Viktor Yanukovich, Russia's occupation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbas, and presidential and parliamentary elections. With Crimea still held by Russia and continued fighting between government forces and Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, President Petro Poroshenko's top priority was restoring the country's territorial integrity and peace within its borders.

The leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany agreed in February to the so-called Minsk II accord, which called for a cease-fire, withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front, release of hostages and detainees, changes in the Ukrainian constitution to give more autonomy to the regions, legislation on special status for parts of the Donbas regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, withdrawal of foreign forces from Ukraine, and restored Ukrainian government control over the eastern border by the end of 2015. Low-intensity combat, albeit with numerous fatalities, continued along the line of contact until early October, when Russia turned its attention to a military intervention in Syria.

By the end of 2015, at least 9,000 people had been killed and more than 20,000 injured in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The fighting also displaced more than two million people, and the government has struggled to meet the humanitarian needs of those displaced within Ukraine. The 3.5 million people who live in the occupied Donbas territories are effectively dependent on Russia; those still receiving Ukrainian pensions in 2015 had to travel to government-held areas to collect them. The occupied area, which once comprised 15 percent of Ukraine's economy, had lost more than 60 percent of its former economic activity by year's end, and various pro-Russian militias and organized crime groups had seized or looted key economic assets. The media in the area remained under the tight control of the de facto authorities.

The debate over constitutional amendments allowing decentralization shaped Ukrainian politics for much of 2015. Although supporters of decentralization hoped to shift power and financing to local governments so as to bring state services and authority closer to the people, the issue was entangled with Moscow's demand that the Ukrainian government grant significant autonomy to the separatist territories—the self-styled Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR). This connection made it difficult to proceed with decentralization reforms without running afoul of Ukrainians who opposed concessions to Russia, in addition to regional authorities who resisted losing power and resources to subregional entities.

In March, in keeping with the Minsk II accord, the parliament adopted legislation giving special status to the separatist-held areas, to take effect after Russian troops are withdrawn and elections are held under Ukrainian law. When legislators granted initial approval in August to constitutional amendments on decentralization, including a provision allowing the special-status law, a Ukrainian nationalist from the Svoboda party threw a hand grenade that killed three members of the National Guard of Ukraine outside the parliament building. The controversial vote undermined the governing coalition, with the Radical Party withdrawing to join the opposition. A second and final vote on the amendments, scheduled for December and requiring a two-thirds majority, did not take place by year's end.

Beyond the Donbas issue, critics of the decentralization amendments objected to a provision that gave the president and his appointed regional prefects the ability to overrule and even disband local councils. The president currently appoints regional governors, but they cannot disband councils. The process of amalgamating Ukraine's 11,000 villages and other primary-level municipalities (*hromady*) into about 1,500 larger, more manageable units proceeded slowly under separate legislation, and only 159 were ready to participate in the October 2015 local elections. Under pressure from the Kremlin, the DNR and LNR postponed their own local elections until March 2016. They had threatened to hold the votes in the fall without Ukrainian government oversight, in violation of the Minsk II accord.

Meanwhile, Ukraine continued to pursue greater integration with Europe. A free-trade agreement with the European Union (EU) was set to take effect at the beginning of 2016, and much of Ukraine's previous trade with Russia has been cut off by tit-for-tat sanctions

between the two countries. However, obstacles to further integration include stalled anticorruption reforms and the activities of armed militia groups.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 25 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12

The president is elected to a maximum of two five-year terms. After Yanukovich fled the country in February 2014, a snap presidential election was held that May. Poroshenko won 54.7 percent of the overall vote and majorities in regions across the country. The process was largely considered free and fair by international observers, although voting could not take place in Crimea and some districts in the east.

Yanukovich in 2010 had overseen the restoration of the 1996 constitution, which featured a dominant presidency, but a 386–0 vote by the parliament in February 2014 reversed that move, reviving the 2004 charter. The latter, the product of a compromise during the Orange Revolution, had shifted power to the prime minister and cabinet and made them responsible to the parliament, though the president retained control over the foreign and defense ministers and the head of the security service. This division of power had led to infighting between the president and prime minister between 2004 and 2010, and similar rifts began to emerge in 2015.

Citizens elect delegates to the Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council), the 450-seat unicameral parliament, for five-year terms, according to a system in which half of the members are chosen by closed-list proportional representation and half in single-member districts. The early parliamentary elections held in October 2014 produced a legislature with a reformist majority. Petro Poroshenko's Bloc won 133 seats, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk's People's Front took 81, Self-Reliance 33, the Opposition Bloc 29, the Radical Party 22, and Fatherland 19. Several smaller parties and 96 independents divided the remainder. While the elections were generally deemed free and fair, voting was again impossible in Crimea and separatist-held parts of Donetsk and Luhansk, where many citizens would likely have voted against the winning reformist parties. As a result of the occupation, the elections filled only 423 of the parliament's 450 seats.

Parliamentary by-elections in Chernihiv in July 2015 were marred by flagrant vote buying as Poroshenko vied for control against the powerful businessman—or “oligarch”—Ihor Kolomoysky. Poroshenko's candidate prevailed.

In October 2015, Ukraine held elections for more than 10,000 mayors and 155,970 local, district, and regional council members, with 132 political parties participating. Turnout was 46.6 percent. Petro Poroshenko's Bloc and its allies won more than 16,500 seats, while former prime minister Yuliya Tymoshenko's Fatherland party placed second with over 8,000 seats. The Opposition Bloc, a successor to Yanukovich's Party of Regions, did well in some of the eastern and southern regions, taking over 4,000 seats. Oligarchs like Kolomoysky funded many of the parties, benefiting from a lack of effective campaign-finance laws and poor implementation of those that existed. A number of parties sought to attract votes with gifts of food and money. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe described the influence of business groups as a primary concern, among other problems, though it generally found the elections to be competitive and well organized. The electoral laws did not allow for internally displaced persons to vote outside their home municipalities.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 10 / 16

Since the fall of Yanukovich, Ukraine's political party system has experienced extreme volatility. With court approval in December 2015, the Justice Ministry banned the Communist Party; it had been accused of supporting the pro-Russian separatists, and refused to

comply with May legislation prohibiting Soviet or Nazi symbols. Other older parties have all but disappeared, while a variety of new groups have formed and won important offices. Such instability can be attributed in part to the fact that the country's parties are typically little more than vehicles for their leaders and financial backers, and they generally lack coherent ideologies or policy platforms. In 2015, the president, the prime minister, a former prime minister, the Kyiv mayor, the Lviv mayor, and numerous other leaders all had their own parties. The most dramatic collapse during the year was that of Yatsenyuk's People's Front, which won 22 percent in the 2014 parliamentary elections but polled only around 2 percent ahead of the 2015 local elections; it decided to compete in a bloc with Poroshenko's and Kyiv mayor Vitaliy Klychko's parties to avoid a humiliating defeat on its own.

In late October, the authorities detained Hennadiy Korban—the head of an opposition party, Ukrainian Association of Patriots (UKROP), that was established in June and affiliated with Kolomoysky—on suspicion of kidnapping, embezzlement, and ties to organized crime. Observers raised concerns that the action was politically motivated. The government said the arrest was part of its effort to combat corruption and “restore order” in the country.

In an attempt to improve transparency in the political process, the president in October signed a law providing for the public financing of parties that secure at least 2 percent of the national vote and requiring parties to disclose the sources of their funding. Implementation is scheduled to begin in July 2016.

Russia maintained a powerful influence over the course of Ukrainian political life through its occupation of Crimea, involvement in the fighting in the east, imposition of economic sanctions on the rest of the country, and manipulation of the price Ukraine pays for natural gas.

Ethnic minorities are able to participate freely in political affairs in Ukraine. However, their voting and representation has been hindered by factors including the conflict in the Donbas, illiteracy and lack of identity documents for many Roma, and rules against running as an independent for many local, district, and regional offices.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

Aside from the conflict in the east, the main obstacle to effective governance in Ukraine is corruption, and the vast majority of citizens were deeply disappointed with the government's slow progress in combating it during 2015.

In April, the government sharply reduced energy subsidies, aiming to remove distortions in the market that had drained state coffers and fostered corruption. Among other measures during the year, new traffic police forces were introduced in Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, and other cities—a popular change that in many places reportedly ended the scourge of street-level officers seeking bribes, though the new officers represented only a small fraction of the country's overall police force.

Much remains to be done. No major figures have been arrested, and the government has recovered almost none of the billions of dollars in assets that were allegedly looted under previous administrations. Critics—including former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, who was appointed governor of Odesa in May—claim that there is a “shadow government” that allows powerful insiders to take advantage of the system for personal gain. Oligarchs continue to exert considerable influence over Ukrainian life through their control of some 70 percent of the economy, much of the media, and the financing of political parties. In March 2015, after attempting to assert control over the country's main oil company, Kolomoysky was dismissed from the governorship of Dnipropetrovsk by Poroshenko. However, the tycoon continued to influence politics through his support for election financing, his personal television network, armed battalions that are nominally loyal to the state,

and other means. Political parties use their positions in the parliament to control lucrative state companies.

Another key problem is pervasive corruption among Ukraine's prosecutors and judges. Poroshenko resisted numerous calls to replace Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin during 2015, and reformers such as Deputy Prosecutor General David Sakvarelidze complained that many prosecutors block efforts to fight corruption. Although the parliament adopted a lustration law in 2014, it has not been used against prosecutors and judges.

A package of anticorruption legislation adopted in 2014 is being implemented slowly. The reforms set up a National Anticorruption Bureau (NABU) to investigate corrupt officials, called for a National Agency for Corruption Prevention (NACP), and sought to establish a separate anticorruption section within the prosecutor general's office. Artem Sytnyk was appointed to lead the NABU in April 2015, and Shokin appointed Nazar Kholodnytsky as the new anticorruption prosecutor in November, though it remained to be seen how effective either official would be, particularly without reforms in the prosecutor's office and judiciary. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) focused on combating corruption complained in June that they were not properly included in the process of choosing the new leaders of the NACP as required by law. In December, Poroshenko signed a law creating an additional agency to deal with the assets of corrupt officials, potentially exacerbating the problem of overlapping authorities in the fight against graft.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 36 / 60 (–1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and expression, and libel is not a criminal offense. The media landscape features considerable pluralism and open criticism of the government. However, business magnates with varying political interests own and influence many outlets. Poroshenko owns the television network Fifth Channel and has rebuffed press freedom groups' calls to sell it. Among other key media owners are Kolomoysky (1 + 1), Dmytro Firtash (Inter), Rinat Akhmetov (Ukraine), Viktor Pinchuk (Novy Kanal, STB, ICTV), and Andriy Podshchypkov, whose cable and satellite broadcaster 112 Ukraine is often critical of Poroshenko. In August 2014, the Interior Ministry banned the broadcast of over a dozen Russian channels, arguing that the country's information space had to be protected from Russia's "propaganda of war and violence." Under a law signed in April 2015, which amended 2014 legislation on the same topic, Ukraine's national and regional state-owned broadcasters were transferred to a new public-service broadcasting corporation, with a supervisory council on which civil society representatives would hold a majority.

Several incidents during the year presented threats to media freedom, particularly in the context of tensions with Russia. News photographer Serhiy Nikolayev was killed while covering fighting in the east in February, and Oles Buzyna, a journalist with strong pro-Russian views, was murdered in Kyiv in April. A broadly worded law adopted in May criminalized praise for and banned symbols of the Soviet and Nazi regimes. In September, Poroshenko banned more than 38 international journalists and bloggers from Ukraine, citing security reasons. Also that month, 1 + 1 suspended a talk show shortly before it was to air an appearance by a political opponent of Poroshenko.

The constitution and a 1991 law define religious rights in Ukraine, and these are generally respected. However, the conflict has increased friction between rival branches of the Orthodox Church, and smaller religious groups continue to report some discrimination. In the DNR and LNR, separatist forces have reportedly persecuted Protestant and other non-Russian Orthodox denominations, forcing them to flee or operate underground churches.

A June 2014 law dramatically reduced the government's control over education and allowed universities much greater freedom in designing their own programs. Universities also gained an expanded ability to manage their own finances, and faculty members were permitted to devote more of their time to research activities.

Ukrainians generally enjoy open and free private discussion, although the polarizing effects of the conflict have weighed on political expression, and intimidation prevails in the separatist-held areas.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12

The constitution guarantees the right to peaceful assembly but requires organizers to give the authorities advance notice of any demonstrations. While officials generally create an open environment for public gatherings in practice, Ukraine lacks a law governing the conduct of demonstrations and specifically providing for freedom of assembly. Moreover, threats and violence by nonstate actors sometimes prevent certain groups from holding events, particularly those advocating equal rights for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people.

Civil society has flourished since 2014, as civic groups with a variety of social, political, cultural, and economic agendas have emerged or become reinvigorated. Trade unions function in the country, but strikes and worker protests are infrequent. Factory owners are still able to pressure their workers to vote according to the owners' preferences.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

Ukraine has long suffered from politicized courts, and judges were subject to intense political pressure under Yanukovich. An April 2014 judicial reform law sought to weaken the top-down power of court chairmen, who assign cases to specific judges and often make decisions about judges' salaries and other work conditions. The chairmen, in turn, reputedly take orders from powerful politicians. While the new law removed all chairmen from office and allowed judges to elect new ones, the former incumbents often managed to return to their jobs, reportedly using bribery and other illicit methods. In many cases, no one dared to run against the former chairmen, apparently fearing the repercussions of a failed attempt to unseat them. Separately, many of the prosecutors appointed under Yanukovich remain in office. Despite these reforms, Poroshenko has been unwilling to give up his control of the judicial branch. The senior prosecutors and law enforcement officials he has appointed are frequent targets of criticism for failing to arrest high-level suspects on corruption charges.

Due to the ongoing fighting in eastern Ukraine, substantial parts of the population face extensive violence—including inaccurate shelling by both sides. In 2014, given the collapse of the military following more the 20 years of neglect, Ukraine had to rely on independent volunteer groups to defend the country. These groups are now formally subordinate to Ukrainian state institutions, though their loyalty remains in doubt, as some are still funded by oligarchs or other outside forces. Certain groups have also been accused of criminal activity. In July 2015, members of the Right Sector militia involved in smuggling on Ukraine's western border engaged in a shootout with local police in Mukacheve, leaving at least three people dead. The incident was seen as a direct challenge to the Kyiv government, which quickly replaced the regional leadership.

Although the national government has generally protected the legal rights of minority groups, the Romany population continues to suffer from discrimination. The LGBT community also faces bias and hostility in Ukraine. Right-wing groups attacked an LGBT equality march in Kyiv in June despite police protection, causing a number of injuries, and an

Odesa court banned an LGBT event in August due to the threat of violence. In a small victory, under pressure from the EU, the parliament amended the labor code in November to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 10 / 16 (– 1)

The ongoing conflict with Russian-backed separatists in the east has displaced many residents from their homes and hampered freedom of movement within the country. The separatist-controlled territories are largely lawless, with armed groups controlling public buildings and looting local businesses for supplies. Numerous reports indicate that separatist commanders force local residents to perform menial tasks.

In the rest of Ukraine, small and medium-sized businesses continue to suffer at the hands of corrupt bureaucrats, tax collectors, and corporate raiders.

Gender discrimination is prohibited under the constitution, but government officials demonstrate little interest in or understanding of the problem. Human rights groups have reported that employers openly discriminate on the basis of gender, physical appearance, and age. Women currently make up about 12 percent of the parliament. A new local elections law, adopted in July 2015, includes a 30 percent quota for women on the party lists, but there are no sanctions for parties that do not comply. The new law on party financing provides financial incentives for parties to achieve gender equality.

The trafficking of women domestically and abroad for the purpose of prostitution remains a major problem. The displaced population is especially vulnerable to exploitation for sex trafficking and forced labor. Separatist forces have reportedly recruited children as soldiers and informants.

United Arab Emirates

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 9,577,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Abu Dhabi

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6NF

INTRODUCTION

The government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) continued to suppress dissent in 2015, restricting the use of social media and utilizing an expansive antiterrorism law that criminalizes criticism of the regime. Amid security concerns exacerbated by the ongoing conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, the UAE also retained a role in helping challenge the regional spread of Islamist militancy, providing support for the Egyptian government and participating in a Saudi Arabia–led coalition against antigovernment forces in Yemen.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 7 / 40 (– 1)**A. Electoral Process:** 1 / 12

All decisions about political leadership rest with the dynastic rulers of the seven emirates, who form the Federal Supreme Council, the highest executive and legislative body in the country. These leaders select a president and vice president, and the president appoints a prime minister and cabinet. The emirate of Abu Dhabi, the major oil producer in the UAE, has controlled the federation's presidency since its inception in 1971.

In 2006, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum succeeded his late brother as ruler of the emirate of Dubai and prime minister of the UAE. The 40-seat Federal National Council (FNC) serves as an advisory body, reviewing proposed laws and questioning federal government ministers. Half of its members are elected by an electoral college chosen by the seven rulers, while the government directly appoints the other 20 for two-year terms. The first elections to the FNC took place in 2006 with a 6,689-member electoral college. In the 2011 elections, only about 36,000 voters participated despite the expansion of the electoral college to more than 129,000 members. The third elections to the FNC took place in October 2015, and while the size of the new electoral college stood at more than 224,000 members—some thirty-four times higher than in 2006—voter turnout remained low, at 35 percent. Overseas voting was permitted for the first time.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16

Political parties are banned in the UAE. The allocation of positions in the government is determined largely by tribal loyalties and economic power. Since 2011, the UAE has aggressively cracked down on suspected members of the Association for Reform and Guidance, or Al-Islah—a group formed in 1974 to peacefully advocate for democratic reform—accusing them of being foreign agents of the Muslim Brotherhood intent on overthrowing the government. The government officially declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization in 2014. Dozens of activists, civil society leaders, academics, and students remained behind bars in 2015, facing or having been indicted on the charge of attempting to overthrow the government. Those defendants who were convicted in the so-called UAE 94 mass trial in 2013 remained in prison in 2015. In December, one of the defendants who had been convicted in absentia was forcibly returned from Indonesia to the UAE. Separately, six Libyan nationals who had been detained for alleged links to the Muslim Brotherhood in 2014 remained in prison without charge or access to legal counsel; others who had been temporarily detained with them have made allegations of torture in custody.

Citizens are believed to constitute less than 15 percent of the population. Noncitizens—including many expatriate minority groups—have limited opportunities for participation and representation in politics.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

The UAE is considered one of the least corrupt countries in the Middle East, and the government has taken steps in recent years to increase efficiency and streamline bureaucracy. Officials declared 2015 the “Year of Innovation,” an initiative that included calls for reforming public services in addition to advancing the country's commercial interests. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, who holds the posts of vice president and prime minister of the UAE in addition to ruling Dubai, launched a 2 billion dirham (\$550 million) innovation fund in November to support new programs in both the public and private sectors; the fund will be managed by the Ministry of Finance. These and other initiatives are part of the

government's broader "UAE Vision 2021" plan, aimed at improving key governmental, social, economic, and technological areas. The UAE was ranked 23 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Transparency in government is generally low, and despite legal provisions, accessing public information remains difficult. Public officials are not required to disclose information about their income or assets.

Discretionary Political Rights Question A: 2 / 4 (– 1)

Citizens have some limited opportunities to express their interests through traditional consultative sessions, including during an open *majlis*, or council. The participation of women in consultative processes is limited, and the severe difficulty of acquiring citizenship leaves the noncitizen majority without meaningful prospects for political participation.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 13 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16

Although the UAE's constitution provides for some freedom of expression, the government restricts this right in practice. The 1980 Publications and Publishing Law, considered one of the most restrictive press laws in the Arab world, regulates all aspects of the media. It prohibits criticism of the government, its allies, and religion and also bans pornography. Journalists commonly practice self-censorship, and outlets frequently publish government statements without criticism or comment. Media operate with relatively more freedom in the free media zones of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Ras al-Khaimah—areas in which foreign outlets produce material for foreign audiences—but the zones remain subject to UAE media laws and have additional regulatory codes and authorities. Critics have voiced concerns that the broad language of a 2014 counterterrorism law can be used to restrict the exercise of free expression, among other things. The legislation provides the death penalty for offences including "undermining national security" and possession of material that opposes or denigrates Islam. A new law against hate speech and discrimination, containing broad definitions and criminalizing a wide range of free speech activities, was enacted in July 2015.

Online news portals, blogs, and social media platforms are an increasingly common source of news and information. A 2012 cyber law allows for the imprisonment of anyone who publishes online content that insults the state, organizes antigovernment protests, or is deemed a threat to national security. Offenders can also be fined up to \$272,000. Among several cases during the year, in August 2015, human rights activist and academic Nasser bin Ghaith was arrested days after using social media to criticize the Egyptian security forces' treatment of protesters in 2013; the grounds for his arrest were unclear and his whereabouts remained unknown at year's end. Bin Ghaith had previously been arrested in 2011 as part of the so-called UAE 5, a group of activists who were indicted in 2011 for "publicly insulting" high-ranking officials but subsequently pardoned.

The constitution provides for freedom of religion. Islam is the official religion, and the majority of citizens are Sunni Muslims. The minority Shiite Muslim sect and non-Muslims are free to worship without interference. The government controls content in nearly all Sunni mosques.

The Ministry of Education censors textbooks and curriculums in both public and private schools. Several Western universities have opened satellite campuses in the UAE, although faculties are cautious to not criticize the government out of fear of losing funding. In March 2015, a professor from New York University (NYU) was barred from boarding a flight from New York to Abu Dhabi at the request of UAE officials, who cited unspecified security

concerns. The academic was an outspoken critic of the country's treatment of migrant workers, and had planned to travel to Abu Dhabi—where NYU maintains a campus—for research into the topic.

Social media platforms have become a popular means of communication but are heavily monitored by the government. The openness of private discussion is limited by sensitivities surrounding a range of topics, including government policy and officials, the ruling family, and Islam.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 2 / 12

The government places restrictions on freedoms of assembly and association. Public meetings require government permits. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) must register with the Ministry of Social Affairs and can receive subsidies from the government, though they are subject to many burdensome restrictions. In May 2015, airport officials in Dubai denied entry to a representative of Amnesty International who had been invited to speak about the rights of migrant workers at a conference.

Workers—most of whom are foreign—do not have the right to organize, bargain collectively, or strike. Expatriate workers can be banned from working in the UAE if they try to leave their employer before at least two years of service. Workers occasionally protest against unpaid wages and poor working and living conditions, but such demonstrations are frequently dispersed.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16

The judiciary is not independent, with court rulings subject to review by the political leadership. The legal system is divided into Sharia (Islamic law) courts, which address family and criminal matters, and secular courts, which cover civil law. Sharia courts sometimes impose flogging sentences for drug use, prostitution, and adultery.

While the federal Interior Ministry oversees police forces, each emirate's force enjoys considerable autonomy. Arbitrary arrests and detention have been reported, particularly of foreign residents. Detainees are often denied adequate access to legal counsel during interrogations, and lengthy detention without charge is not uncommon. Authorities have been criticized by international human rights organizations for failure to investigate allegations of torture and mistreatment in custody. Prisons in the larger emirates are overcrowded. The 2014 antiterrorism law allows the cabinet to determine whether groups are terrorist organizations and introduces fines of up to \$27 million, imprisonment of up to life, and death sentences for terrorist offences. The law is broad and ambiguous, defining a terrorist offence as any action or inaction carried out for a "terrorist result," which includes "opposing the country, or influencing the public authorities of the country or another country or international organization while discharging its duties, or receiving a privilege from the country or another country or an international organization."

Discrimination against noncitizens and foreign workers, who comprise more than 80 percent of the UAE's population, is common. While the Interior Ministry has established methods for stateless persons, known as *bidoon*, to apply for citizenship, the government uses unclear criteria in approving or rejecting such requests. Same-sex relations are illegal, and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people are subject to widespread social stigma and discrimination.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

Emiratis face no apparent restrictions on freedom of movement within the UAE or on their type or place of employment, although under UAE's *kafala* system, a migrant worker's

legal status is tied to an employer’s sponsorship. Foreign workers are often exploited and subjected to harsh working conditions, physical abuse, and withholding of passports with little to no access to legal recourse. A series of ministerial decrees issued in September 2015 aim to improve conditions for migrant workers. Among other things, the decrees give workers more flexibility to terminate employment under certain conditions, including through indemnification or in the case of extended nonpayment of wages, and aim to combat abusive practices like contract substitution, in which a worker is recruited with one contract abroad but forced to sign a less favorable agreement upon arrival in the UAE.

The UAE has made reforms in recent years to ease procedures for establishing and operating businesses. However, the government exercises considerable influence over the economy and is involved in many of the country’s major economic and commercial initiatives.

The constitution does not address gender equality. Muslim women are forbidden to marry non-Muslims and receive smaller inheritances than men. No laws protect against marital rape, and men are permitted to physically discipline their wives. Women are politically underrepresented, though they have in recent years received appointments to various levels of government, including the cabinet. Although only one woman was elected to the FNC in 2015, she was appointed to the role of speaker and president, marking the first time that the position has been held by a woman. The government appointed an additional eight women to the FNC.

Despite a 2006 antitrafficking law and the opening of new shelters for female victims, the government has failed to adequately address human trafficking. Migrants in particular are at high risk of being trafficked for the purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation.

United Kingdom

Political Rights: 1

Civil Liberties: 1

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 65,092,000

Capital: London

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

Prime Minister David Cameron’s Conservative Party won general elections held in May 2015, enabling it to govern without its former coalition partner, the Liberal Democrats. Euroskeptic groups, including some within the ruling party, continued to criticize Britain’s membership in the European Union (EU), and Cameron pledged to hold a referendum by the end of 2017 on whether the country should leave the bloc.

Mass surveillance by the security services, including Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), remained a concern in 2015. In July, a government-commissioned report on the issue called for greater judicial oversight and consideration for privacy rights.

Also that month, the High Court found a mass surveillance measure passed in 2014, the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act (DRIPA), to be unlawful.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Each of the members of the House of Commons, the dominant, lower chamber of the bicameral Parliament, is elected in a single-member district. Executive power rests with the prime minister and cabinet, who must have the support of the Commons. The House of Lords, Parliament's upper chamber, can delay legislation initiated in the Commons. The Commons must reconsider any measure defeated by the Lords, but it can ultimately overrule the upper chamber. The Lords' approximately 800 members consist mostly of "life peers" nominated by successive governments. There are also 89 hereditary peers (nobles) and 26 bishops and archbishops of the Church of England. The monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, plays a largely ceremonial role as head of state. Elections in Britain are consistently free and fair.

The Conservative Party, which had been ruling in coalition with a smaller party, the Liberal Democrats, won an unexpected victory in the May 2015 general elections, taking 36.9 percent of the popular vote and increasing its share of Commons seats by 24 for a total of 330, an outright majority. The second-ranked Labour Party took 30.4 percent of the vote and 232 seats, a loss of 26. The Scottish National Party (SNP) won 4.7 percent of the vote and 56 seats, an increase of 50. The Liberal Democrats won 7.9 percent of the vote and lost 49 seats, leaving them with just 8. The Euroskeptic, populist United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), campaigning on an anti-immigration platform, secured only one seat, despite having won the country's 2014 European Parliament elections and taken two Commons seats in 2014 by-elections. Turnout for the 2015 voting was 66.1 percent. Local elections in England took place on the same day, with the Conservatives winning control of 163 of 279 councils; Labour placed second with control of 74 councils.

Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) consolidated their control over the Northern Ireland Assembly in its most recent elections in 2011. The SNP, which rules in Scotland, made major gains in the Scottish Parliament elections that year, and Labour led the Welsh Assembly voting. The next legislative elections for Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales were scheduled for May 2016. The success of the SNP in the 2015 general elections fueled speculation that the party may push for another referendum on Scottish independence, particularly if Britain voted to leave the EU in the referendum promised by Cameron.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

The Conservative Party and Labour Party have dominated British politics for decades, though several other parties regularly win seats in Parliament. After its loss in the May 2015 elections, Labour replaced its leader, Ed Miliband, with Jeremy Corbyn. The SNP, led by Nicola Sturgeon, supplanted the Liberal Democrats as the third-largest party. Smaller parties, such as UKIP and the Greens, fare better in races for the European Parliament, which feature proportional-representation voting.

Under Britain's system of "devolution," Parliament has granted certain powers to sub-national legislatures, augmenting the political representation of regional populations as well as parties like the SNP. In Wales, Plaid Cymru champions Welsh nationalism. A 2011 referendum increased the Welsh Assembly's autonomy, giving it authority to make laws in 20 subject areas without consulting Parliament.

In Northern Ireland, the main Catholic and republican parties are Sinn Féin and the Social Democratic and Labour Party, while the leading Protestant and unionist parties are the Ulster Unionist Party and the DUP. The armed struggle between unionists and Irish nationalists over governance in Northern Ireland largely ended with a 1998 peace agreement, which established the Northern Ireland Assembly. The August 2015 shooting death of a former operative of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA)—an outlawed Irish nationalist militant group that had formally disarmed—led to a political crisis amid speculation that the group was still active. The DUP temporarily blocked the functioning of the power-sharing executive it leads with Sinn Féin, but the party’s ministers resumed their duties in October.

A bill introduced in May 2015 proposed greater power and autonomy for the Scottish Parliament, in keeping with a pledge by the main British parties ahead of the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence, which was narrowly defeated. The legislation passed the Commons and was awaiting review by the Lords at year’s end.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Britain’s freely elected officials make and implement national policy, and corruption is not pervasive, though high-profile scandals have damaged political reputations under both Labour and Conservative governments. The Bribery Act, which is considered one of the most sweeping pieces of antibribery legislation in the world, came into force in 2011. In July 2015, a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly accused First Minister Peter Robinson of accepting millions of dollars in kickbacks to sell assets managed by the Republic of Ireland’s National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) to the U.S. investment firm Cerberus. An investigation of the sale was ongoing at year’s end.

Parties in the United Kingdom are financed through membership fees, donations, and state funding (if they are in opposition), and there have been scandals over donations to political parties. Prime Minister Cameron has pledged to enact new rules requiring greater transparency for lobbying in Britain, though a new lobbying register established in March 2015 was criticized for its narrow scope and lack of enforcement mechanisms.

A 2013 World Bank study concluded that Britain’s freedom of information laws are “reasonably successful.” Civil liberties groups and the press have criticized government-proposed reforms to limit freedom of information requests.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 55 / 60 (–2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 13 / 16 (–2)

Press freedom is legally protected, and the media are lively and competitive. Daily newspapers span the political spectrum, though economic pressures and rising internet use have driven some smaller papers out of business. On rare occasions, the courts have imposed so-called superinjunctions that forbid the media from reporting on certain information or even the existence of the injunction itself.

The state-owned British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is editorially independent and competitive with its counterparts in the commercial market. A series of scandals have plagued the broadcaster in recent years, including the convictions of several current and former employees for sexual and verbal abuse in 2013, and a controversy involving senior managers who were given inordinately high severance payouts and executive pay.

In the wake of a 2011 scandal in which reporters at the *News of the World* were accused of hacking the voicemails of hundreds of public figures and crime victims, a 2013 royal charter created a special panel that would certify an independent regulatory body for the

press. However, most of the newspaper industry opted to create a self-regulatory body, the Independent Press Standards Organization (IPSO), that would not seek recognition under the charter. The chairman of the House of Lords Communications Committee criticized the situation in 2015, saying IPSO had not demonstrated independence from the industry. A possible second regulator, Impress, was reportedly planning to apply for recognition under the royal charter.

The 2013 Defamation Act overhauled the country's plaintiff-friendly libel laws, introducing a "public interest" defense, setting more stringent requirements for claimants, and making it more difficult for foreigners to file complaints in cases with little connection to Britain. Nevertheless, the number of libel cases has increased, in particular those involving online statements.

The government does not restrict internet access. New online criminal offenses were introduced in April 2015 under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act, including the dissemination of images of a naked person without the subject's consent, also known as "revenge porn."

Although the Church of England and the Church of Scotland have official status, freedom of religion is protected in law and practice. A 2006 law bans incitement to religious hatred, with a maximum penalty of seven years in prison. Nevertheless, minority groups, particularly Muslims, report discrimination, harassment, and occasional assaults. The Muslim community has come under threat and occasional violence from far-right groups like the English Defence League. The Metropolitan Police recorded a 70 percent increase in Islamophobic hate crimes in London in the 12 months preceding July 2015. In the weeks following November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, the Metropolitan Police reported that Islamophobic hate crimes in London tripled.

Academic freedom is generally respected. However, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act of 2015, adopted in February, requires schools and universities to prevent students from being drawn into terrorism and to vet the remarks of visiting speakers as part of that effort. The new legal obligation raised concerns that open debate and academic inquiry could be stifled, adding to a reported trend in which many universities have sought to suppress racist and other potentially offensive speech on campus.

The effects of mass surveillance on free and open private discussion are also a growing concern. In July 2015, a government-commissioned report on surveillance by British security agencies held that although the power to collect bulk communications data on British citizens may be justified, privacy concerns must be considered early in the collection process. It also stated that judges, rather than ministers, should authorize warrants for the collection of data related to criminal matters, and that there should be judicial review of warrants related to national security that are authorized by ministers.

Separately in July, the High Court ruled that DRIPA, the 2014 law governing intelligence agencies' authority to monitor communications data, was unlawful because it allowed the agencies to conduct surveillance without judicial oversight. The court also found that the law was too vague about which kinds of allegations justified surveillance, and gave the government until March 2016 to adopt new legislation that would address these problems.

In November 2015, Home Secretary Theresa May released a new draft Investigatory Powers Bill that would require communications companies to store metadata on customers' activity for 12 months and allow this information to be accessed by police and other security services without a warrant. Among other provisions, however, the bill called for judicial commissioners to review ministerial authorization of warrants for the actual interception of communications, including their content.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are respected, though police have been criticized for certain crowd-control tactics in recent years. A number of demonstrations and assemblies were organized during 2015, including rallies across the country in June to protest government austerity measures.

Civic and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate freely. Groups identified as terrorist organizations can be banned, and there are concerns that the legal definition is broad enough that it could be interpreted to encompass legitimate associations and activism. Surveillance of NGOs has also drawn criticism. In July 2015, the Investigatory Powers Tribunal disclosed that Amnesty International was among the groups whose data GCHQ had accessed and illegally retained. In September, Human Rights Watch filed a complaint with the tribunal alleging that its communications had also been the target of such surveillance, which entailed cooperation with the U.S. National Security Agency.

A lobbying law adopted in 2014 was heavily criticized for limiting the amount of money organizations can spend during election years; opponents assert that the law's ambiguous language could lead to self-censorship and hinder the work of smaller groups.

Workers have the right to organize trade unions, which have traditionally played a central role in the Labour Party in particular. The rights to bargain collectively and strike are also respected.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

A new Supreme Court began functioning in 2009, transferring final judicial authority from the House of Lords. In April 2015, the Criminal Justice and Courts Act, a sweeping legal reform law, came into effect. Among other things, it increased maximum prison sentences for terrorists and pedophiles, made certain kinds of extreme pornography illegal, and introduced measures to reduce recidivism.

The police maintain high professional standards, and prisons generally adhere to international guidelines. Inmates are banned from voting. Although the European Court of Human Rights has ruled on several occasions that this is a violation of prisoners' rights, an EU court ruled in October 2015 that voting bans can be legal for prisoners convicted of serious crimes. The decision could lead prisoners convicted of lesser crimes to challenge the voting ban.

Britain's strict antiterrorism laws allow authorities to control the movement of terrorism suspects when the evidence against them is insufficient for prosecution or deportation. The 2015 Counter-Terrorism and Security Act has been criticized for giving excessive powers to police, including the authority to seize travel documents of individuals attempting to leave the country if they are suspected of planning to engage in terrorist-related activities abroad, and to forcibly relocate terrorism suspects within the country, up to 200 miles away from their homes.

Immigrants and their descendants receive equal treatment under the law, but generally face living standards below the national average. There have also been reports of unwarranted suspicion and rising anti-immigrant sentiment amid recent terrorist attacks and plots.

A new immigration bill proposed in 2015 would require landlords to check the immigration status of their tenants, oblige banks to perform background checks before opening an account, and make it a criminal offense for migrants to obtain jobs without appropriate paperwork. It would also allow police to seize vehicles belonging to illegal migrants and allow authorities to electronically track those released on bail while awaiting deportation.

At year's end the bill had passed the Commons and was under review by the Lords. Plans by Cameron to curb social benefits for EU migrants, which would require the amendment of EU rules on freedom of movement within the bloc, met with resistance from other EU leaders during 2015.

In June 2015, the High Court found that the government's fast-track procedure for asylum seekers—under which failed applicants were detained while their appeals were processed in an expedited manner—unlawfully prioritized speed over fairness. The Court of Appeal confirmed the ruling in July.

The authorities actively enforce a 2010 law barring discrimination on the basis of factors including sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Citizens generally enjoy freedom of travel and choice of residence, employment, and institution of higher education. Economic activity is not excessively influenced by the government.

While women receive equal treatment under the law, they remain underrepresented in top positions in politics and business. The number of women in the House of Commons rose to 191, or 29 percent, as a result of the 2015 elections, from about 23 percent before the elections. Gender discrimination persists in the workplace in practice. Abortion is legal in Great Britain, though heavily restricted in Northern Ireland, where it is allowed only to protect the life or the long-term health of the mother.

Same-sex marriage became legal in July 2013. Religious organizations are permitted to refuse to conduct same-sex marriages.

The Modern Slavery Act, which increases punishments for human traffickers and offers greater protections for victims, became law in March 2015. Children and migrant workers are among those most vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking.

↓ United States of America

Political Rights Rating: 1

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Trend Arrow: The United States received a downward trend arrow because of the cumulative impact of flaws in the electoral system, a disturbing increase in the role of private money in election campaigns and the legislative process, legislative gridlock, the failure of the Obama administration to fulfill promises of enhanced government openness, and fresh evidence of racial discrimination and other dysfunctions in the criminal justice system.

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Puerto Rico, which is examined in a separate report.

Population: 321,234,000

Capital: Washington, D.C.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

As the 2016 election campaign got under way, relations between the Democratic Party administration of President Barack Obama and Congress—controlled by the Republican Party—remained tense throughout 2015. The two sides managed to enact a crucial spending bill in December, but only after John Boehner stepped down as speaker of the House of Representatives in October, under pressure from hard-line conservatives in the Republican rank and file. Facing continued legislative gridlock on many issues, Obama attempted to push through parts of his agenda by issuing executive orders and other such measures. While this led to some policy actions, especially on environmental regulation, his efforts to remove the threat of deportation from as many as 5 million undocumented immigrants, a substantial portion of the estimated 11 million thought to be in the United States illegally, were stymied when federal courts blocked the plan's implementation.

Immigration was also a major subject of debate among the 2016 presidential candidates. Some Republican contenders called for mass deportations of undocumented immigrants and the construction of a wall along the border with Mexico. Most of the Republicans also called for a halt in the admission of refugees from the war in Syria, ostensibly to prevent infiltration by terrorists, and one contender, wealthy real-estate developer Donald Trump, proposed a complete ban on entry to the United States for all Muslims. The campaign in general featured a surge in popularity for strident, antiestablishment candidates like Trump on the right and Senator Bernard Sanders of Vermont on the left.

Mass shootings continued to claim lives across the country, renewing a perennial discussion of proposed restrictions on gun ownership. While the targets of the separate attacks included a college campus and a women's health clinic and featured a variety of motives, the year's deadliest assault was carried out in San Bernardino, California, by a husband and wife who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) militant group. Obama took modest executive actions to tighten enforcement of existing laws and urged further changes through the legislative process. However, the gun lobby, led by the National Rifle Association, and the Republican Party remained strongly opposed to any new gun-control proposals.

A controversy over relations between black citizens and the police grew in intensity in 2015. There were demonstrations in Baltimore, Chicago, Minneapolis, Cleveland, and other cities after high-profile incidents in which black people, often unarmed, were shot or fatally injured in confrontations with the police. While seeking justice in individual cases, protesters also demanded major changes in police use-of-force practices and asked the federal Justice Department to investigate local law enforcement policies.

In a major advance toward equal rights for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people, the Supreme Court ruled in June that the federal constitution guaranteed a right to same-sex marriage, effectively legalizing such marriages nationwide.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 36 / 40 (– 1)**A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12**

The United States is a presidential republic, with the president serving as both head of state and head of government. Cabinet secretaries and other key officials are nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate, the upper house of the bicameral Congress. Presidential elections are decided by an Electoral College, making it possible for a candidate to win the presidency while losing the national popular vote. Electoral College votes are apportioned to each state based on the size of its congressional representation. In most cases, all of the electors in a particular state cast their ballots for the candidate who won

the statewide popular vote, regardless of the margin. Two states, Maine and Nebraska, have chosen to divide their electoral votes between the candidates based on their popular-vote performance in each congressional district. The president may serve up to two four-year terms. In the 2012 election, President Obama, the incumbent, won the Electoral College tally by 332 to 206 and the popular vote by 51 to 47 percent, defeating his Republican Party challenger, Mitt Romney.

The Senate consists of 100 members—two from each of the 50 states—serving six-year terms, with one-third coming up for election every two years. The lower chamber, the House of Representatives, consists of 435 members serving two-year terms. All national legislators are elected directly by voters in the districts or states that they represent. In the 2014 congressional elections, Republicans won control of the Senate with 54 seats. Democrats control 44 seats, and there are two independent senators who generally vote with the Democrats. In the House, Republicans added to their majority, taking 247 seats, versus 188 for the Democrats. Republicans also control the majority of state governorships and legislatures.

In some states, citizens have a wide-ranging ability to influence legislation through referendums. Such direct-democracy mechanisms, often initiated by signature campaigns, have been hailed by some as a reflection of the openness of the U.S. system. However, they have also been criticized on the grounds that they can lead to incoherent governance, undermine representative democracy, and weaken the party system. Referendums in various states in recent years have resulted in the legalization of same-sex marriage, elimination of affirmative-action programs for minority groups, legalization of recreational use of marijuana, and increases in the state minimum wage.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16 (– 1)

The intensely competitive U.S. political environment is dominated by two major parties, the right-leaning Republicans and the left-leaning Democrats. The country’s “first past the post” or majoritarian electoral system discourages the emergence of additional parties, as do a number of specific legal and other hurdles. However, on occasion, independent or third-party candidates have significantly influenced politics at the presidential and state levels, and a number of newer parties, such as the Green Party or groups aligned with organized labor, have modestly affected politics in certain municipalities in recent years.

Election campaigns in the United States are long and expensive. The two main parties and the constituency and interest groups that support them have used an array of methods to circumvent legal restrictions on campaign spending, and the Supreme Court on several occasions has struck down such restrictions, finding that they violated free-speech rights. The cost of the 2012 presidential race alone reached at least \$5.8 billion, and spending on television and radio advertising for the 2016 race in 2015 was more than triple that spent in 2011, suggesting even greater spending in the coming year. Such ballooning expenditures have drawn criticism in part because they lead elected officials to devote more time to fundraising and less to official duties, and because large donations increase the risk or appearance of corruption. Among other such reports during the year, the *New York Times* found that just 158 families accounted for the majority of campaign donations in the first half of 2015, reinforcing the perception that the wealthy and other privileged groups wield undue influence in the political system.

While the majoritarian system has discouraged the establishment of parties based on race, ethnicity, or religion, religious groups and racial or ethnic minorities have been able to gain a political voice through participation in the two main parties. A number of laws

have been enacted to ensure the political rights of minorities. However, relatively new laws in a number of states require voters to present driver's licenses, birth certificates, or other forms of identification before casting ballots. Sponsors of such legislation claim that the intent is to combat voter fraud. Critics contend that such fraud is at most a minor problem and accuse Republicans of adopting the laws to suppress participation by demographic groups that tend to support Democrats, particularly low-income black voters. While the courts have struck down some voter identification laws, others have been upheld, and the issue was set to be contested further as the 2016 elections approached.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Federal policymaking and government have been hampered in recent years by partisan gridlock in Congress, and between Congress and the executive branch. Impasses over taxation, federal debt, and spending bills have repeatedly threatened to halt government operations or trigger a default on public debt. While the all-encompassing "omnibus" spending bill passed in December 2015 is set to fund the government until October 2016, Congress again failed to use "regular order"—the traditional procedure for appropriations legislation whereby each of 12 bills funding different portions of the government are debated and passed individually in each chamber before being reconciled in conference committees. Regular order, which has not been followed in full in at least a decade, is widely seen as more transparent than recent practices.

American society has a tradition of intolerance toward government corruption, and the media are aggressive in reporting on such malfeasance. Cases of corruption at the federal level have been relatively rare or small in scale in recent years. The most serious abuses have instead been uncovered among state and local officials. In 2015, the Democratic leader of the New York State Assembly and the Republican leader of the State Senate resigned their leadership posts to face corruption charges, and both were eventually convicted.

The United States has a history of open and transparent government. It was the first country to adopt a freedom of information law. A substantial number of auditing and investigative agencies function independently of political influence. Such bodies are often spurred to action by the investigative work of journalists. Federal agencies regularly place information relevant to their mandates on websites to broaden public access.

In 2009, Obama ordered that millions of government documents from the Cold War era be declassified, and instructed federal agencies to adopt a cooperative attitude toward public information requests. However, the administration has since encountered criticism for engendering an atmosphere of secrecy. Prosecutors have exerted efforts to compel journalists to reveal the sources of leaked national security information, and the administration has been accused of implementing an aggressive policy to discourage government officials from having contact with the media. Journalists and scholars have also charged that the administration has failed to live up to the president's promise of a responsive policy toward freedom of information requests. A 2015 report by the Justice Department found that the backlog of information requests had grown to nearly 160,000 in the 2014 fiscal year, from 77,000 in 2009, as an increase in requests coincided with a decline in dedicated staffing. Also in 2014, agencies cited exemptions to withhold information related to nearly 220,000 requests.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 54 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

The United States has a free, diverse, and constitutionally protected press. While newspapers have been in economic decline for a number of years, the media environment retains

a high degree of pluralism. Internet access is widespread and unrestricted, and news websites now constitute a major source of political news, along with cable television networks and talk-radio programs. News coverage has also grown more polarized, with particular outlets and their star commentators providing a consistently right-or left-leaning perspective.

The Justice Department has been criticized for its efforts in recent years to compel journalists, via the courts, to reveal their sources of classified information. However, both the president and the attorney general pledged in 2014 that journalists would not be jailed for refusing to identify sources.

The United States has a long tradition of religious freedom. The constitution protects the free exercise of religion while barring any official endorsement of a religious faith, and there are no direct government subsidies to houses of worship. The debate over the role of religion in public life is ongoing, however, and religious groups often mobilize to influence political discussions on the diverse issues in which they take an interest. The Supreme Court regularly adjudicates difficult cases involving the relationship between church and state.

The academic sphere features a substantial level of intellectual freedom. Nevertheless, universities have faced problems related to their establishment of overseas branches in such repressive settings as China, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates. Critics have accused universities of avoiding discussion of sensitive issues at these foreign campuses and agreeing to restrain student political activism. U.S. universities have also been criticized for giving in to pressure from student activist groups that object to speakers who have been invited to campus events. Speakers have regularly been disinvited or decided to withdraw from appearances after protests were launched. University students have also mounted protests over what they perceive as an environment of racism on campus. In 2015, both the chancellor and the president of the University of Missouri resigned in the wake of such protest actions. Another controversy involves academic involvement with Israel. Several scholarly associations have voted to condemn Israeli policies and endorse the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign.

Americans generally enjoy open and free private discussion, including on the internet. However, civil libertarians, many lawmakers, and other observers have pointed to the real and potential effects of National Security Agency (NSA) data collection and other forms of government monitoring on the rights of U.S. citizens. In June 2015, Congress passed the USA Freedom Act, which banned the bulk collection of citizens' telephone and internet records, a step urged by civil libertarians. Meanwhile, policymakers and experts continued to debate possible restrictions on encrypted communications, which ensure privacy but prevent even legally authorized monitoring by law enforcement agencies.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12

In general, officials respect the right to public assembly. Demonstrations against government policies are frequently held in Washington, New York, and other major cities. In response to acts of violence committed in the course of some past demonstrations, local authorities often place restrictions on the location or duration of large protests directed at meetings of international institutions, political party conventions, or targets in the financial sector. During 2015, demonstrations over alleged police misconduct were held in a number of cities. While most were peaceful, protests in Baltimore over the death of a black man during transportation in a police van were punctuated by an outbreak of violence and arson in late April.

The United States gives wide freedom to trade associations, nongovernmental organizations, minority rights advocates, and issue-oriented pressure groups to organize and pursue their civic or policy agendas.

Federal law guarantees trade unions the right to organize and engage in collective bargaining. The right to strike is also guaranteed. Over the years, however, the strength of organized labor has declined, and less than 7 percent of the private-sector workforce is currently represented by unions. While public-sector unions have higher rates of membership, with over 35 percent in 2015, they have come under pressure from officials concerned about the cost of compensation and pensions to states and municipalities. The overall unionization rate in the United States is approximately 11 percent. The country's labor code and decisions by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) during Republican presidencies have been regarded as impediments to organizing efforts, although the board has been sympathetic to unionization during the Obama presidency. Union organizing is also hampered by strong resistance from private employers. In 2015, Wisconsin became the 25th state to adopt "right to work" legislation, which weakens unions by allowing workers who benefit from union bargaining efforts to opt out of paying union dues or fees. A case challenging such fees among public-sector workers in California was before the Supreme Court at year's end. Organized labor's political clout at the national level has diminished along with its membership, but unions continue to provide significant support to Democratic candidates during election campaigns.

F. Rule of Law: 13 / 16 (– 1)

Judicial independence is respected. Although the courts have occasionally been accused of intervening in areas that are best left to the political branches, most observers regard the judiciary as one of the country's strongest democratic institutions. In recent years, much attention has been paid to the ideological composition of the Supreme Court, which has issued a number of major decisions by a one-vote margin and is currently seen as having a conservative majority. Concern has also been raised about a trend toward the politicization of judicial elections in some states.

While the United States has a strong rule-of-law tradition, the criminal justice system's treatment of minority groups has long been a problem. Black and Latino inmates account for a disproportionately large percentage of the prison population. Civil liberties organizations and other groups have also advanced a broader critique of the justice system, arguing that there are too many Americans in prison, that prison sentences are often excessive, that too many prisoners are relegated to solitary confinement or other maximum-security arrangements, and that too many people are incarcerated for minor drug offenses. A broad left-right political coalition calling for reform on the last issue has emerged despite increased partisan rancor on other matters. Although the U.S. incarceration rate has declined somewhat in recent years, it remains easily one of the highest in the world. Additional calls for prison reform have focused on the incidence of violence and rape behind bars.

Many critics of the incarceration problem point to abuses and deficiencies at other stages of the legal process. Media reports and analyses in 2014 and 2015 drew new attention to the extensive use of plea bargaining in criminal cases, with prosecutors employing the threat of harsh sentences to avoid trial and effectively reducing the role of the judiciary; the practice of municipalities imposing fines for minor offenses as a means of raising budget revenues, which can lead to jail terms for those who fail to pay; deficiencies in the parole system; and long-standing funding shortages for public defenders, who represent low-income criminal defendants.

The increased focus on the criminal justice system has coincided with a series of widely publicized incidents over the past two years in which police actions led to the deaths of black civilians. A number of the confrontations were captured on video, and the recordings

appeared to show unjustified use of force by the officers in question. In response, the Justice Department has launched investigations into both specific incidents and broader police practices in several municipalities. As officers have often avoided indictments in such cases, critics called for sweeping changes to the grand jury system and the appointment of special prosecutors for cases involving police shootings. Some jurisdictions have enacted policies requiring police to wear body cameras and record interactions with civilians. While bipartisan efforts to reform aspects of the criminal justice system are gaining momentum in Congress, responsibility for the overwhelming majority of law enforcement issues rests with state and local governments.

Use of the death penalty has declined significantly in recent years. There were 28 executions, in six states, in 2015—the lowest number in more than two decades. The death penalty has been formally abolished by 19 states; in another 15 states where it remains on the books, executions have not been carried out for the past five years or more. The most recent federal execution was in 2003. Of particular importance in this trend has been the exoneration of some death-row inmates based on new DNA testing, as well as legal challenges to the constitutionality of the prevailing methods of lethal injection. Lethal injection has also come under pressure due to pharmaceutical companies' refusal to supply the designated drugs for the purpose of executions, forcing states to search for new suppliers or adopt new drug combinations, which in turn draw fresh legal challenges.

The Supreme Court has effectively ruled out the death penalty for crimes other than murder and in cases where the perpetrator is a juvenile or mentally disabled, among other restrictions. In 2012, the court further decided that juvenile offenders could not be subjected to mandatory sentences of life imprisonment without the possibility of parole.

The Obama administration made slow progress in 2015 in its effort to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, which has been used to hold terrorism suspects captured abroad in the early 2000s, in many cases without formal charge or trial. While Obama has repeatedly stated his determination to close the detention center, Congress has expressly forbidden the transfer of detainees to American prisons. A number of detainees determined to be low-level threats were transferred to cooperating countries, but at year's end, 107 men remained confined at Guantanamo.

The United States is one of the world's most racially and ethnically diverse societies. In recent years, residents and citizens of Latin American ancestry have replaced black Americans as the largest minority group, and the majority held by the non-Latino white population has declined. An array of policies and programs are designed to protect the rights of minorities, including laws to prevent workplace discrimination. However, the black population and some other groups continue to lag in overall economic standing, educational attainment, and other social indicators. The Supreme Court has authorized the use of race or ethnicity as a factor in university admissions under certain narrow conditions to improve access for minorities, but several states have banned it outright through referendums. A new challenge to the practice was pending at the court at the end of 2015.

Federal antidiscrimination legislation does not include LGBT people as a protected class, though many states have enacted such protections. The government bans discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in federal employment and among federal contractors.

The United States has generally maintained liberal immigration policies in recent decades. Most observers believe that the country has struck a balance that both encourages assimilation and permits new immigrants to maintain their religious and cultural customs. Many Americans remain troubled by the large number of immigrants in the country illegally, however, and the government has responded by strengthening border security and

stepping up deportation efforts, especially for undocumented immigrants found guilty of criminal offenses.

Although the Obama administration and most Democrats support proposals that would offer many current undocumented immigrants a path to resident status and eventual citizenship, such reforms have been opposed by most Republican elected officials. The administration has focused its enforcement policies on criminals and other high-priority categories of migrants while explicitly sparing groups like those who entered the country illegally as children.

During 2015, a controversy arose over the administration's September announcement that it intended to allow 10,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict to resettle in the United States over the next year. Only about 2,000 Syrians had been admitted since the war began in 2011, and other countries, including Canada, were taking in many more. Thirty-one U.S. governors said they would oppose the refugees' settlement in their states, citing the possibility of terrorist infiltration. However, the governors apparently had no legal authority to block the plan, and Syrian refugees began arriving in larger numbers by year's end. The United States was set to take in 85,000 refugees from all countries in the 2016 fiscal year, up from 70,000 in previous years.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Citizens of the United States enjoy freedom of movement and a high level of personal autonomy. The right to own property is protected by law and is jealously guarded as part of the American way of life. Business entrepreneurship is encouraged as a matter of government policy.

Women have made important strides toward equality over the past several decades. They now constitute almost half of the American workforce and are well represented in professions like law, medicine, and journalism. In December 2015, the Defense Department announced that all combat roles in the military were open to women. Although women with recent university degrees have effectively attained parity with men, the average compensation for female workers is roughly 80 percent of that for male workers. Many female-headed families continue to live in conditions of chronic poverty. In the past five years, there has been a renewed effort in some states to restrict a woman's access to abortion. A number of new state laws are being tailored to push the boundaries of prior court decisions, and some have survived initial judicial scrutiny, adding to state-by-state variation in access.

In its June 2015 ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Supreme Court found that all states must allow same-sex marriage. The practice had already become legal in most states through court decisions, legislative action, or referendums, but the new ruling invalidated laws in a minority of states that still barred same-sex couples from marrying.

The "American dream"—the notion of a fair society in which hard work will bring economic and social advancement, regardless of the circumstances of one's birth—is a core part of the country's identity, and voters tend to favor government policies that enhance equality of opportunity. Recently, however, studies have shown a widening inequality in wealth and a narrowing of access to upward mobility. A principal driver of inequality is the widening gap between Americans with university degrees and those with a high school degree or less. A number of states and municipalities have enacted substantial hikes in the minimum wage, and the unemployment rate continued to decline in 2015. However, wages overall have remained stagnant for many years, and the number of well-compensated jobs for the less-educated have fallen steeply. A consequence of this trend is working-class resentment of immigrants, who are seen as competitors for blue-collar jobs. At the same

time, Democratic Party leaders have generally failed to win passage of measures that require wealthier citizens to pay more in taxes. Among the world's prosperous, stable democracies, the United States is unique in having a large underclass of poor people who have at best a marginal role in economic life.

Uruguay

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 3,562,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1

Capital: Montevideo

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Electoral Status: Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

In March 2015, the leftist Broad Front (Frente Amplio) coalition—which won a majority in general elections in 2014—entered a new term in office. Tabaré Vázquez, who ran as the Frente Amplio presidential candidate, returned to the office for a second nonconsecutive term. Uruguay is one of the most stable and peaceful countries in the region, and during the year, authorities made attempts to address some persisting human rights concerns, particularly human trafficking and conditions in detention facilities.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The 1967 constitution established a bicameral General Assembly consisting of the 99-member Chamber of Representatives and the 30-member Senate, with all members directly elected for five-year terms. The president is directly elected for a single five-year term.

The most recent general elections were held in October 2014. The Frente Amplio retained a majority in the parliament, winning 50 seats in the Chamber of Representatives and 15 seats in the Senate. The National Party placed second with 32 and 10 seats in the respective houses, followed by Colorado with 13 and 4 seats; Popular Assembly and the Independent Party took the remaining seats. The Tabaré Vázquez–Raúl Sendic ticket of the Frente Amplio captured the presidency after a run-off in November. Vázquez, who served as the country's first leftist president from 2005 to 2010, returned to the presidential seat in March 2015 with Sendic as his vice president; the constitution bans consecutive presidential terms.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Uruguay's multiparty system is open and competitive. The major political parties are the Colorado Party, the National Party (also known as Blanco), the Independent Party, and the Frente Amplio coalition, the latter of which is currently in power. Frente Amplio

includes the Popular Participation Movement, the New Space Party, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the Uruguayan Assembly, among other factions.

The small Afro-Uruguayan minority, comprising approximately 8 percent of the population, is severely underrepresented in government. Representation of women in national, regional, and local government is also low, although a gender quota system was implemented in the most recent elections to increase the participation of women as candidates.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

The level of corruption in Uruguay is relatively low compared to regional standards, and government institutions have established a fairly strong record of accountability to the electorate. Uruguay was ranked 21 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Enforcement of the country's Transparency Law, which prohibits a range of offenses related to abuse of office, is relatively strong at the national level. Some challenges in establishing transparent practices—including limited online resources available to the public—remain at the regional level. The law provides for access to public information, and authorities generally comply with requests.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 58 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Constitutional guarantees regarding free expression are respected, and violations of press freedom are rare. The press is privately owned; the broadcast sector includes both commercial and public outlets. There are numerous daily and weekly newspapers, some of which are connected to political parties. A 2009 law eliminated criminal penalties for the defamation of public officials. The government does not place restrictions on internet usage or monitor private online communications without proper legal permission.

Freedom of religion is legally protected and broadly respected. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of anti-Semitic attacks in 2015.

The government does not restrict academic freedom. Private discussion is open and vibrant.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are protected by law, and the government generally respects these rights in practice. A wide array of community organizations are active in civic life. In September, police clashed with student demonstrators who were advocating for increased public spending on education.

Workers are free to exercise the right to join unions, bargain collectively, and hold strikes. Unions are well organized and politically powerful. In August, there was a significant dispute between members of teachers' unions, who went on strike to demand higher wages and a larger education budget, and the president, who issued a decree that teachers constituted an "essential service" and could not continue the strike. Vázquez shortly revoked the decree, but the unions suspended the strike after 15 days without reaching an agreement with the government.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The judiciary is mostly independent, but the court system remains severely backlogged. More than 60 percent of the prison population consists of people awaiting trials. Overcrowded detention facilities, poor sanitary conditions, and violence among inmates remain

serious problems. The prison system held approximately 109 percent of its intended capacity as of October 2015, a decrease from 120 percent in 2014. Medical care for prisoners is substandard, and many rely on visitors for food. The recidivism rate is approximately 60 percent. In 2015, the United Nations helped the government launch a program for improving the treatment of juvenile offenders, whose detentions are administered by the System of Penal Responsibility for Adolescents (SIRPA).

Efforts to seek justice for human rights violations committed under the military regime that ended in 1985 have been inconsistent. Although 2011 legislation enabled trials regardless of a prior amnesty law by removing a statute of limitations, the Supreme Court declared in 2013 that the 2011 law was unconstitutional; the decision prompted concerns about impunity. In February 2015, Vazquez announced that he intended to create a truth commission to shed light on the crimes of the dictatorship, and issued a presidential decree on the establishment of this body in May.

Uruguay has historically been one of the most peaceful countries in the region. The homicide rate was only 8 per 100,000 people in 2015, but nevertheless marked an exception—the total of 274 homicides reported as of December made 2015 the deadliest year recorded. Officials have attributed the steady rise in crime over the past few years to warring drug gangs, as Uruguay has become an increasingly important transit point for the narcotics trade. Police are pushing for more expansive laws to battle increasing violent crimes. Currently, officers are only allowed to shoot if they have already been subject to gunfire, and can only shoot suspects who are facing them.

Uruguay continued to receive international scrutiny for agreeing to resettle six detainees released from the notorious U.S. military prison in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The six men, who arrived in Uruguay in December 2014 as refugees, expressed concerns in 2015 about meagre job opportunities and living standards. In April, four of the former detainees staged a protest outside the U.S. embassy in Montevideo to demand that the U.S. government take responsibility for their care.

The Afro-Uruguayan minority continues to face economic and social inequalities. A 2013 affirmative action law includes incentives to increase graduation rates and an 8 percent quota in government employment, but implementation has been slow.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

Freedom of movement is protected, and individuals are generally free to choose their residence, employment, and institution of higher education without interference.

There is a high level of social inclusion in the country, though some problems remain. Women enjoy equal rights under the law but face discriminatory traditional attitudes and practices, including a persisting wage gap. Women hold 16 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Representatives and 29 percent in the Senate. Women comprise approximately 25 percent of the armed forces—much higher than the regional average for Latin American countries, which stands at 4 percent. Violence against women remains a serious concern, with the government reporting that 7 out of 10 women in Uruguay suffer some kind of violence.

The parliament approved same-sex civil unions in 2007, legalized abortion for any reason during the first trimester in 2012, and voted overwhelmingly to legalize same-sex marriage in 2013.

In 2012, Uruguay became the first country in the world to ratify the Domestic Workers Convention, which outlines domestic workers' core labor rights. According to the U.S. State Department's 2016 *Trafficking in Persons* report, the government of Uruguay does not meet

the minimum international standards for combatting human trafficking, but continues to make improvements. The report criticized trafficking legislation for defining the offense only in a transnational sense, and noted that there are few resources available to victims.

Uzbekistan

Political Rights Rating: 7

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Population: 31,291,000

Capital: Tashkent

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Ratings	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

In March 2015, President Islam Karimov was reelected to a fourth term with a reported 90 percent of the vote despite a constitutional limit of two consecutive terms. The government continued to suppress all political opposition during the year. The few remaining civic activists and critical journalists in the country faced physical violence, prosecution, hefty fines, involuntary hospitalization, and arbitrary detention. In an exceptional case in February, authorities released popular journalist and religious figure Hayrullo Hamidov, who served five years of a six-year sentence on religious extremism charges.

Gulnara Karimova, the president's elder daughter, remained under house arrest in 2015 amid persisting allegations of corruption and links to organized crime. Several high-ranking officials who played a role in the case against Karimova and her associates were dismissed, signaling what many analysts believe are ongoing shifts in internal competition for power and resources.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 0 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

After Uzbekistan gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Karimov, the incumbent Communist Party leader, was elected president. He has been reelected three times since then despite a clear constitutional limit of two consecutive terms. In the most recent presidential election, held in March 2015, Karimov won a fourth term with 90 percent of the vote amid a 91 percent turnout, according to official state data. Monitors from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) raised serious doubts about the independence of the electoral commission and noted a lack of competition and alternatives. The other presidential candidates praised Karimov in their campaigns, and were not perceived as true challengers.

Uzbekistan has a bicameral legislature. The lower house is composed of 150 seats, with 135 members directly elected in single-member constituencies and 15 representing the Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan, which holds separate indirect elections. The 100-member upper house, or Senate, has 84 members elected by regional councils and 16 appointed by the president. All members of the parliament serve five-year terms.

Parliamentary elections held in December 2014 offered voters no meaningful choice, as all participating parties supported the government; observers from the OSCE reported that the elections “lacked genuine competition and debate.” Karimov’s Movement of Entrepreneurs and Businesspeople–Liberal Democratic Party (UzLiDeP) won the most votes and took 52 seats, while three loyalist parties split the remainder. Local human rights activists alleged serious disparities between reported turnout, which the government claimed was more than 88 percent, and the number of actual votes cast.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

Only four political parties are currently registered—UzLiDeP, the People’s Democratic Party (PDPU), the Adolat (Justice) Social Democratic Party, and the Milliy Tiklanish (National Revival) Democratic Party. All are progovernment, and no genuine opposition parties operate legally. The four parties indulge in mild criticism of one another and occasionally of government ministers below the president. Unregistered opposition groups function primarily in exile, and domestic supporters or family members of exiled opposition figures are frequently persecuted. In March 2015, UzLiDeP and Milliy Tiklanish announced that they had formed a parliamentary alliance, christening themselves the “Bloc of Democratic Forces.” Shortly thereafter, the PDPU and Adolat announced that they had also formed an alliance, ostensibly in opposition. At year’s end, there were no indications that these actions had led to any change in party politics or parliamentary decision making, which remained firmly in line with executive policy.

No registered party represents the specific interests of minority ethnic or religious groups.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

The legislature serves as a rubber stamp for the executive branch. Police, security services, and judges interpret the laws as they choose or according to political dictates, leaving little recourse to appeal.

Corruption is pervasive. Uzbekistan was ranked 153 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International’s 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Graft and bribery among low- and mid-level officials are common and at times even transparent. Social-media platforms have given space to new public discourse on corruption, allowing citizens to self-document bribery and other malfeasance. Citizens have made efforts to gather and publicize evidence of abuse of office in some sectors, but such attempts have not been successful in compelling the government to change Uzbekistan’s entrenched culture of corruption.

In January 2015, authorities unrolled a new wave of fraud and embezzlement charges against businesses associated with Karimova, leading to the prosecution of dozens of lower-level employees. In March, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) published a report suggesting that between 2002 and 2011 alone, Karimova received payments and shares from international telecommunications companies totaling \$1 billion. The report detailed a series of extortive maneuvers and schemes that Karimova used to control the access of foreign firms to licenses, contracts, and other aspects of Uzbekistan’s telecommunications market. Although the allegations and charges against Karimova and her associates were ostensibly about governmental corruption, many analysts have suggested that the case points to an internal power struggle. Beginning in April, prominent officials who had played a role in investigating, charging, and confiscating assets from Karimova faced dismissal, arrest, and prosecution. Among them were Rashid Qodirov,

Uzbekistan's longtime prosecutor general, and members of the influential Sharifhojaev family, including the first deputy head of the National Security Services.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 3 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 0 / 16 (– 1)

Despite constitutional guarantees, freedoms of speech and the press are severely restricted. The state controls major media outlets and related facilities, and state-run television has aired “documentaries” that smear perceived opponents of the government. Although official censorship was abolished in 2002, it has continued through semiofficial mechanisms that strongly encourage self-censorship. Foreign reporters are generally excluded from the country. Even recording artists must obtain special licenses from a government authority to perform in public; licenses can be revoked if performance content is deemed to be “meaningless” or insufficiently patriotic and edifying.

The government has shuttered several independent outlets in recent years, leaving few reliable sources available domestically. In May 2015, a Tashkent court ordered the closure of the *Noviy Vek* newspaper after the state Agency for Press and Information filed a complaint over the paper's publication of “inappropriate” jokes. The outlet, which upon registration in 1992 became Uzbekistan's first privately owned newspaper since independence, covered domestic society and politics.

The government systematically blocks websites that contain content critical of the regime. Mainstream news, information, and social-media websites based outside the country are sometimes blocked as well. Authorities maintain and frequently update a list of banned proxy sites that would allow users to access blocked content anonymously. In February, under the auspices of morality and family values, legislators passed measures requiring that internet cafes close by 9 p.m. and prohibiting minors from using them during school hours.

The government permits the existence of approved Muslim, Jewish, and Christian denominations but treats unregistered religious activity as a criminal offense. The state exercises strict control over Islamic worship, including the content of sermons. Suspected members of banned Muslim organizations and their relatives have faced arrest, interrogation, and torture. Arrested believers are frequently accused of founding previously unknown religious organizations, a charge that carries high penalties. In most cases, little evidence of the existence of such organizations is presented at the closed trials.

The government continued prosecuting religion-based offenses in 2015, and introduced some new restrictions as well. Authorities made regular use of a 2014 decree banning any literature or media intended to “change” or “distort” a person's beliefs, determining the definition of these terms on a case-by-case basis. The decree has led to an increase in the seizure of religious literature by customs officials, including electronic media found in searches of personal electronic devices such as mobile phones and laptops. During the year, Christian and Muslim groups reported torture and threats of rape following raids of churches and private homes in which religious literature was seized. In February, authorities deported two Russian nationals who were convicted of smuggling religious material. The men, who were transporting fruit from Georgia into Uzbekistan, were arrested at a border crossing in the Karakalpakstan autonomous region in November 2014 for possessing two Islamic books and recordings of sermons on their mobile phones.

The government severely restricts travel to pilgrimage sites abroad, and requires citizens to undergo a lengthy application process to receive permission to exit the country for religious reasons. Applicants frequently complain about excessively long waiting lists for making the hajj to Saudi Arabia. In 2015, officials announced that they would permit

approximately 5,200 individuals to exit Uzbekistan for the hajj—less than 20 percent of the quota allocated to Uzbekistan by Saudi Arabia. Separately, in September, the Education Ministry banned anyone under the age of 18 from attending any prayer services in mosques, introducing a fine of \$750 for parents who allow their children to attend. The legal basis for the ban as well as its consequences remained unclear at year's end.

The government reportedly limits academic freedom. Bribes are commonly required to gain entrance to exclusive universities and to obtain good grades. The freedom of private discussion is limited by *mahalla* committees, traditional neighborhood organizations that the government has transformed into an official system for public surveillance and control.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Despite constitutional provisions for freedom of assembly, authorities severely restrict this right in practice, breaking up virtually all unsanctioned gatherings and detaining participants.

Freedom of association is tightly constrained, and unregistered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) face extreme difficulties and harassment. After a major episode of unrest in the city of Andijon in 2005, the government shut down virtually all foreign-funded organizations in Uzbekistan. In 2015, the country's few remaining human rights activists continued to face harassment, prosecution, travel restrictions, and violence, particularly when attempting to document conditions for workers during the annual cotton harvest. In May, police detained Elena Urlaeva, head of the Human Rights Alliance (HRA), while she was interviewing workers who were part of the harvest in a town near Tashkent. Police sedated Urlaeva and subjected her to invasive searches and other medical procedures. In September, Urlaeva and Malohat Eshonqulova, head of the Birdamlik (Solidarity) movement, were arrested and subjected to body cavity searches by a medic in the presence of male police officers, who denied their requests for privacy. Also in September, police detained and reportedly beat HRA activist Dmitriy Tikhonov after he photographed teachers and students being transported to cotton fields. In October, officials summoned him to hear charges; upon returning to his residence, Tikhonov found his home office—where he kept records of his investigations into alleged abuse by local authorities—burned to the ground. Tikhonov reported other possessions to be missing—notably, a hard drive and a legal manual he had created to educate the public about labor laws.

The Council of the Federation of Trade Unions is dependent on the state, and no genuinely independent union structures exist. Organized strikes are extremely rare.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The judiciary is subservient to the president, who appoints all judges and can remove them at any time. The Lawyers' Chamber, a regulatory body with compulsory membership, serves as a vehicle for state control over the legal profession. Law enforcement authorities routinely justify the arrest of suspected Islamic extremists or political opponents by planting contraband, filing dubious charges of financial wrongdoing, or inventing witness testimony.

Prisons suffer from severe overcrowding and shortages of food and medicine. As with detained suspects, prison inmates—particularly those sentenced for their religious beliefs—are often subjected to abuse or torture. In September 2014, Human Rights Watch released a report detailing 34 cases of long-term political imprisonment in Uzbekistan. The individuals listed in the report remained behind bars in 2015 with the exception of Hamidov, who was released in February in a landmark decision by the government. Shortly after his release, he began working with one of the country's most influential pop-culture outlets to

produce material criticizing the Islamic State (IS) militant group. This development signaled growing worries among officials about the group’s reach in Uzbekistan, as the government has not been known to allow anyone imprisoned for religious extremism to access audiences through mass media.

Although racial and ethnic discrimination are prohibited by law, the belief that senior positions in government and business are reserved for ethnic Uzbeks is widespread. Moreover, the government appears to be systematically closing schools for the Tajik-speaking minority.

Sex between men is illegal and punishable with up to three years in prison. The law does not protect LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people from discrimination, and traditional social taboos make discussing LGBT issues difficult.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 3 / 16

Permission is required to move to a new city, and bribes are commonly paid to obtain the necessary documents. Restrictions on foreign travel include the use of exit visas, which are often issued selectively. Despite such controls, millions of Uzbeks seek employment abroad, particularly in Russia and Kazakhstan; activists who attempt to help them form unions or organize for better labor conditions are routinely harassed and prosecuted.

Women’s educational and professional prospects are limited by cultural and religious norms and ongoing economic difficulties. Victims of domestic violence are discouraged from pressing charges against perpetrators, who rarely face prosecution. The trafficking of women abroad for prostitution remains a serious problem.

Widespread corruption and the government’s tight control over the economy limit equality of opportunity, and economic exploitation remains a serious problem. A 2009 law imposed tougher penalties for child labor, and in 2012, Uzbekistan’s prime minister pledged to end the practice completely. Reports continue to indicate that forced child labor is significantly less pervasive than in the past. However, international monitors noted that forced adult labor increased in 2015 to meet government quotas during the annual harvest campaign, which began in September. Self-reporting on social-media platforms sharply continued to increase public awareness of people injured or killed during the harvest campaign due to unsafe labor conditions. Some adults reported receiving threats and harassment if they refused to participate in the harvest.

Vanuatu

Political Rights Ratings: 2
Civil Liberties Ratings: 2
Freedom Rating: 2.0
Freedom Status: Free
Electoral Democracy: Yes

Population: 277,500
Capital: Port Vila

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 31 / 40 (– 1)

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 47 / 60

Like many Pacific island states, Vanuatu is threatened by rising sea levels and other effects of climate change. A powerful cyclone struck the region in March 2015, killing at least two dozen people, displacing many more, and destroying nearly all crops across the country. To raise funds for the recovery, the government expanded its programs granting Vanuatu passports in exchange for investments in the country. The schemes have largely targeted Chinese nationals seeking tax benefits or easy access to European countries.

In June, Prime Minister Joe Natuman, in office since May 2014, was ousted in a no-confidence vote after three government lawmakers shifted support to the opposition. Former prime minister Sato Kilman was chosen to replace him, marking the ninth change of government in seven years. Political uncertainty deepened in October, when 15 government lawmakers were convicted of bribery charges, leaving Kilman vulnerable to another no-confidence motion. Speaker Marcellino Pipite, one of those convicted, pardoned himself and 13 of the others while serving as acting head of state during an overseas trip by President Baldwin Lonsdale; the remaining member had pleaded guilty and was not pardoned. Lonsdale revoked the pardons after returning, and the convicted lawmakers received prison sentences of three to four years.

Important legislative business ground to a halt as Kilman, left with a weak minority government, pushed for early elections, while the opposition sought a government of national unity. The president ultimately called elections for late January 2016.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Vanuatu, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Venezuela

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 30,620,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Capital: Caracas

Freedom Rating: 5.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

An opposition coalition, the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), won a dramatic victory in parliamentary elections on December 6, overcoming the ruling party's intimidation and continued manipulation of the electoral environment. With a turnout of over 74 percent, voters gave the opposition a tenuous supermajority in the National Assembly. The electoral authorities generally presented the results in a timely manner, and both sides of

the political divide accepted the overall outcome, though court challenges against the victories of some opposition candidates were pending at year's end. The new lawmakers were set to take office in January 2016.

The December elections took place in a context of deep economic crisis. Shortages of basic goods, massive devaluation of the Venezuelan currency, and unchecked inflation were widely considered to be the main causes for social protests that took place throughout the year.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 15 / 30 (+2)

A. Electoral Process: 5 / 12

The president serves six-year terms, and since 2009 neither the president nor other elected officials have been subject to term limits. The most recent presidential election was held in April 2013, after longtime incumbent Hugo Chávez died of cancer. Nicolás Maduro, Chávez's vice president and handpicked successor, narrowly defeated opposition leader Henrique Capriles, 50.6 percent to 49.1 percent. Turnout was nearly 80 percent. Maduro was officially declared the winner by the Chavista-dominated National Electoral Commission (CNE). The opposition accused the government of multiple violations, including election-day abuses and the rampant misuse of state resources during the campaign, and for the first time since 2005 it refused to accept the outcome's legitimacy without a more complete audit. Protests in the election's immediate aftermath left nine people dead and hundreds injured. A limited audit conducted by the CNE revealed few discrepancies, while the Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ) rejected the opposition petitions in August 2013, thereby concluding the electoral process.

The unicameral, 167-seat National Assembly is popularly elected for five-year terms, using a mix of majoritarian and proportional-representation voting. Three seats are reserved for indigenous representatives. In early June 2015, after a very long wait, the CNE announced that parliamentary elections would be held in December. As with past elections, the campaign environment was clearly tilted in favor of the ruling Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). The judiciary was used to disqualify prominent opposition candidates, the PSUV freely abused public resources to boost voter support, the opposition had inadequate access to the state-dominated media, and observers from the Organization of American States were barred from monitoring the vote. The campaign was also marred by intimidation and some violence. In late November, opposition party official Luis Manuel Díaz was shot and killed at a campaign rally. Meanwhile, public employees reported intimidation and monitoring by superiors with the aim of ensuring that they voted for the government, followed by threats and firings after the results were announced.

Despite these obstacles, MUD representatives were able to supervise the voting process and access the results in a timely manner. The coalition won 109 seats, and MUD-aligned candidates won the three indigenous seats, leaving the PSUV with just 55. Under a 2009 electoral reform, the system gives a notable seat advantage to the party with the most votes, allowing the MUD to achieve its strong victory with only about 56 percent of the national vote; the PSUV received some 41 percent of the vote. Court challenges against opposition victories in some districts were pending at year's end, threatening the two-thirds majority in the assembly that would allow the MUD to make unilateral changes to legislation and executive appointments.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 8 / 16 (+2)

The MUD's 2015 campaign activities and eventual victory in the legislative elections demonstrated that it could still function effectively, giving voters a meaningful opportunity

to change the country's political landscape. However, the opposition remained vulnerable to government pressure throughout the year.

Opposition leadership in some states and localities has been blunted in recent years by laws allowing the national government to cut budgets and strip important functions from subnational administrations. Several opposition leaders, including Mayor Daniel Ceballos of San Cristóbal, were jailed in 2014 for allegedly inciting or failing to halt violent demonstrations in their jurisdictions. Ceballos was transferred to house arrest in August 2015.

The most prominent criminal case against an opposition figure in 2015 was that of Leopoldo López, who had been held in a military prison since February 2014 for supposedly instigating violence during that year's protests. In September 2015 he was sentenced to 13 years and nine months in prison following a closed-door trial in which the judge blocked most of the evidence and witnesses proposed by the defense. Among other cases, Caracas mayor Antonio Ledezma was detained in February 2015 and remained under house arrest at year's end for allegedly plotting a coup against the government. Maria Corina Machado, who was expelled from the National Assembly in 2014 and charged that December with involvement in an alleged plot to assassinate Maduro, remained free in 2015 but was banned from running in the parliamentary elections. More than 70 people whom the opposition considered political prisoners remained in detention at year's end.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

The government's economic policies—particularly its currency and price controls—have greatly increased opportunities for corruption, black-market activity, and collusion between public officials and organized crime networks. Gasoline smuggling alone costs the government several billion dollars per year.

A series of U.S. criminal investigations in 2015 implicated high-ranking Venezuelan officials in bribery, money laundering, and drug trafficking. Those under suspicion included managers at the national oil company, a former intelligence chief, the commander of the national guard, the head of the National Assembly, and two nephews of Maduro's wife.

There is little transparency regarding government spending, and outlays reportedly rose sharply in the run-up to the 2015 elections. The government secured billions of dollars in new loans from China during the year, and overall expenditures vastly exceeded the amount originally budgeted for 2015, though the increase was driven in part by rampant inflation. Meanwhile, the government failed to publish vital economic data, including monthly inflation statistics, for most of the year.

Venezuela was ranked 158 out of 168 countries in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 20 / 60 (–2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 8 / 16

The Chávez and Maduro governments, claiming that the private media were controlled by the right, have sought to build a state communications infrastructure with the aim of confronting the opposition and propagating their own political and ideological program. This state media apparatus includes not only the television station VTV, which has modernized and expanded its signal to cover the entire national territory, but also Vive TV, Ávila TV, and Telesur, as well as a large number of state-owned newspapers.

Laws such as the 2004 Law on Social Responsibility of Radio and Television give the government the authority to control media content, and because the judiciary and regulatory agencies lack political independence, the legal framework is effectively used to control or

punish any media owner or journalist whom the leadership perceives as an adversary. Critical media also face harassment in the form of tax penalties, equipment confiscation, and withdrawal of government advertising. A series of private news outlets have changed ownership under financial pressure in recent years, and their coverage subsequently grew more favorable to the authorities.

In September 2015, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) ordered Venezuela to reinstate the broadcast license of the critical private outlet Radio Caracas Television (RCTV), which the government had terminated in 2007. The court found that the decision was made for illegitimate political reasons and violated the right to freedom of expression. However, the Venezuelan TSJ quickly rejected the IACHR ruling as “unenforceable.”

Journalists and other media workers continued to encounter intimidation and physical attacks during 2015. The Institute for Press and Society, a local media watchdog, recorded 380 press freedom violations, including a number of assaults and threats by state officials. In recent years, dozens of prominent opposition activists and journalists have found that their social-media accounts had been hacked and used to disseminate threats and denunciations aimed at the opposition.

Constitutional guarantees of religious freedom are generally respected, though tensions between the government and the Roman Catholic Church remain high. Government relations with the small Jewish community have also been strained at times.

Academic freedom came under mounting pressure during Chávez’s tenure, and a school curriculum developed by his government emphasizes socialist concepts. A 2008 Organic Education Law included ambiguities that could lead to restrictions on private education and increased control by the government and communal councils. In universities, elections for student associations and administration positions have become more politicized, and rival groups of students have clashed over both academic and political matters. In 2015, budget cuts and the exodus of hundreds of faculty members to other countries further undermined universities’ autonomy.

In recent years the government has repeatedly aired illegally intercepted conversations of opposition members, and ordinary Venezuelans have become more reticent about calling attention to their political views in situations in which they might be overheard.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Although freedom of peaceful assembly is guaranteed in the constitution, the right to protest has become a sensitive topic in recent years, and rights groups have criticized legal amendments that make it easier to charge protesters with serious crimes. Widespread anti-government protests during 2014 featured violence on the part of both police and demonstrators. More than 40 people were reportedly killed, and at least 3,100 were arrested. Political protests were less frequent in 2015, due in part to the previous year’s crackdown and the new opposition focus on preparing for the December elections. However, labor protests reportedly increased.

The government has sought to undermine the legitimacy of human rights and other civil society groups by questioning their international ties. The 2010 Law on Political Sovereignty and National Self-Determination threatens sanctions against any “political organization” that receives foreign funding or hosts foreign visitors who criticize the government. Dozens of civil society activists have been physically attacked in recent years, and other forms of harassment are common, including bureaucratic hurdles to registration. In March 2015, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights expressed alarm over government intimidation directed against activists and others who appear before regional human rights bodies.

Workers are legally entitled to form unions, bargain collectively, and strike, with some restrictions on public-sector workers' ability to strike. Control of unions has shifted from traditional opposition-allied labor leaders to new workers' organizations that are often aligned with the government. The competition has contributed to a substantial increase in labor violence as well as confusion and delays during industrywide collective bargaining.

F. Rule of Law: 1 / 16 (-2)

Politicization of the judicial branch increased dramatically under Chávez, and high courts generally do not rule against the government. Conviction rates remain low, the public defender system is underfunded, and most judges and prosecutors lack tenure, undermining their autonomy.

The National Assembly has the authority to remove and appoint judges to the TSJ, which controls the rest of the judiciary and is viewed as friendly to the government. In October 2015, a group of TSJ judges requested early retirement, allowing the outgoing legislature to appoint 13 new judges to serve 12-year terms on the 32-member tribunal in December. The move was seen as an attempt to ensure PSUV control over the judiciary despite the opposition's election victory.

The detentions and trials of opposition leaders have also demonstrated political control over the judiciary. In October, a few weeks after the sentencing of Leopoldo López, prosecutor Franklin Nieves fled the country and said he had been pressured by the executive branch to defend what he called false evidence that was used to secure a conviction in the case. In December, the outgoing National Assembly appointed the trial judge in the López case, Virginia Susana Barreiros Rodríguez, as the country's chief ombudsperson.

The police and military have been prone to corruption, widespread arbitrary detention and torture of suspects, and extrajudicial killings, with few convictions. Military officials, many of them in active service, occupy many top positions in government ministries and state-level administrations, and the armed forces perform routine government duties, blurring the lines between civilian and military functions. Foreign governments assert that the military has adopted a permissive attitude toward drug trafficking. Prison conditions in Venezuela remain among the worst in the Americas. The Venezuelan Prison Observatory reported 109 deaths within prison walls in the first six months of 2015, continuing a decrease in fatalities from an annual high of 591 in 2012.

Violent crime remains a serious problem and a major source of popular discontent. According to the nongovernmental Venezuelan Violence Observatory, the murder rate in 2015 was estimated at 90 per 100,000 residents, up from 82 per 100,000 in 2014. Globally, only El Salvador had a similarly high rate. More than 100 police officers were killed during the first nine months of the year in Caracas alone.

The formal and constitutional rights of indigenous people, who make up about 2 percent of the population, improved under Chávez, though such rights are seldom enforced by local authorities. Indigenous communities trying to defend their land rights are subject to abuses, particularly along the Colombian border. Afro-Venezuelans also remain marginalized and underrepresented among the country's political and economic elite, despite some state efforts to ameliorate conditions.

Although discrimination based on sexual orientation is barred, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) Venezuelans face widespread de facto discrimination and are occasionally subjected to violence. In the December 2015 elections, transgender lawyer and political activist Tamara Adrián won a seat in the National Assembly, though she was forced to register under the name she received at birth. Separately, Rosmit Mantilla, a gay activist,

was one of three candidates to win assembly seats while behind bars, having been arrested in 2014 after joining that year’s protests.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

The country’s currency controls and other economic policies, combined with a decline in the number of flights to and from Venezuela, have made it extremely difficult for Venezuelans to travel abroad. In April 2015, the government announced a reduction in the amount of foreign currency to be made available for the purpose of travel.

In another restriction on freedom of movement, Maduro ordered parts of the border with Colombia closed in August, ostensibly to stop smuggling activities that he blamed for food shortages in Venezuela. A state of emergency was imposed in the affected areas, allowing searches without a warrant, while security forces seized property and quickly deported more than 1,500 Colombian nationals. Many thousands of others reportedly fled their homes to avoid deportation, and some reported physical abuse by the authorities.

Property rights have also been affected by years of price controls, nationalizations, overregulation, and corruption. While the pace of expropriation has declined in recent years—due in part to the state’s dominant position in many strategic industries—the government has continued to threaten to nationalize businesses deemed to lack commitment to revolutionary goals. Accusations of mismanagement, underinvestment, graft, and politicized hiring practices within state-owned enterprises are common.

Women are guaranteed progressive rights in the 1999 constitution, and a 2007 law was designed to combat violence against women. However, domestic violence and rape remain common and are rarely punished in practice. Women are poorly represented in government, with just 14 percent of the seats in the new National Assembly, but they hold a number of important offices in the executive branch.

Trafficking of women remains inadequately addressed by the authorities. Venezuelan women and children are subjected to sex trafficking both within Venezuela and within neighboring countries. Migrants to Venezuela are also subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking.

Vietnam

Political Rights Ratings: 7

Population: 91,714,000

Civil Liberties Ratings: 5

Capital: Hanoi

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	7,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

Several high-profile bloggers and activists were arrested or assaulted in 2015, and state control of the media, restrictions on religious freedom, and crackdowns on political dissidents continued.

Vietnam's relations with neighboring China have been strained over disputed territory in the South China Sea, and groups of anti-China protesters gathered in Ho Chi Minh City and other cities on a number of occasions, at times prompting police violence and detentions. However, the government tolerated some demonstrations during the year, including environmental protests in Hanoi.

In July, the head of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) made a landmark trip to the United States and met with President Barack Obama in a sign of increasingly close U.S.-Vietnam relations. Shortly before the trip, Hanoi released a prominent political activist from prison.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 3 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

The CPV is the only state-recognized political party, and its Politburo and Central Committee are effectively the country's top decision-making bodies. The unicameral National Assembly, whose 500 members are elected to five-year terms, generally follows CPV dictates. The president is elected by the National Assembly for a five-year term, and is responsible for appointing the prime minister, who is confirmed by the legislature.

In tightly controlled 2011 elections for the National Assembly, the CPV took 454 seats, officially vetted nonparty members secured 42 seats, and self-nominated candidates won the remaining 4. In July 2011, the legislature elected Truong Tấn Sang as president and approved Nguyễn Tấn Dũng, prime minister since 2006, for a second term. Nguyễn Phú Trọng had been chosen as CPV general secretary at a party congress in January 2011.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16

The CPV enjoys a monopoly on political power, and no other parties are allowed to operate legally. The Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), responsible for vetting all candidates for the National Assembly, is ostensibly an alliance of organizations representing the people, but in practice it acts as an arm of the CPV. Splits between factions within the party exist and have become more noticeable than in the past, but public discussion of internal dissent is actively suppressed.

Leaders and members of illegal opposition parties are subject to arrest and imprisonment. Lê Thanh Tùng, a member of the banned reformist political coalition Bloc 8406, was granted amnesty in June 2015, shortly before the CPV general secretary's U.S. visit. However, he had been due to complete his four-year prison sentence for "propaganda against the state" about six months later, and other political dissidents were arrested during the year.

Although ethnic minorities are represented within the CPV, they are almost never allowed to rise to senior leadership positions. A law that took effect in June 2015 requires 18 percent of the final candidates for National Assembly elections to be ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities held about 16 percent of seats in the incumbent National Assembly and occupied one position in the 28-member cabinet.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

The CPV leadership determines and implements government policy, but it is not freely elected or accountable to the public, and it operates with considerable opacity. Membership in the CPV is widely viewed as a means of enhancing one's personal wealth and connections, and corruption and nepotism are ongoing problems within the party.

CPV and government leaders have acknowledged growing public discontent with corruption, and the authorities periodically prosecute high-profile officials and businessmen for malfeasance. In July 2015, for example, Nguyễn Xuân Sơn was removed as chairman of the state-owned oil firm PetroVietnam and arrested for alleged fraud at his previous post as chief executive of a bank that had since failed. However, observers argue that enforcement is selective and often linked to political rivalries, and those who attempt to independently expose corruption continue to face censorship and arrest.

Reducing corruption and improving transparency at underperforming state-owned enterprises has been an economic priority for the government in recent years. The CPV announced plans in 2013 and 2014 to shed light on the finances of state enterprises, clean up their debts, and make them more efficient. In 2015, the government proceeded with an effort to offer shares in hundreds of state-owned enterprises to private investors.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 17 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16

The state controls all print and broadcast media, and authorities actively silence critical journalists and bloggers through arrest, prosecution, and other means of harassment. A 1999 law requires journalists to pay damages to groups or individuals found to have been harmed by press articles, even if the reports are accurate. A 2006 decree prescribes fines for any publication that denies revolutionary achievements, spreads “harmful” information, or exhibits “reactionary ideology.” Decree 72, issued in 2013, gave the state sweeping new powers to restrict speech on blogs and social media.

While some jailed journalists and bloggers completed their sentences or otherwise won release during 2015, new arrests, criminal charges, and physical assaults continued to be reported. Among several other cases during the year, plainclothes police attacked activist blogger Trịnh Anh Tuấn with bricks in April, and the government in May charged Kim Quốc Hoa, editor of the newspaper *Người Cao Tuôi*, with disseminating false information and revealing confidential security-related information after the paper published several articles on official corruption.

Foreign media representatives must notify authorities if they travel outside Hanoi, and the government has at times refused visas for foreign journalists who report on sensitive topics. Satellite television is officially restricted to senior officials, international hotels, and foreign businesses, though many private homes and businesses have satellite dishes.

A 2003 law bans the receipt and distribution of antigovernment e-mail. Websites considered reactionary are blocked, and owners of domestic websites must submit plans for their content for official approval. Internet cafés are required to register the personal information of users and record the sites they visit. Internet service providers face fines and closure for violating censorship rules.

Despite government restrictions on internet activity, many Vietnamese use the web and social media to participate in political debate, often employing technical circumvention methods to avoid censorship and maintain anonymity. The authorities have deployed pro-government social-media users to manipulate public opinion online.

Religious freedoms remain restricted. All religious groups and most individual clergy members are required to join a party-controlled supervisory body and obtain permission for most activities. Those who fail to register their activity with the state are often arrested and harassed, and several religious freedom advocates remained behind bars in 2015. The Roman Catholic Church selects its own bishops and priests, but they must be approved by the government. Although the CPV has sought to improve its relations with foreign religious leaders in recent years, Vietnamese Christians continue to be persecuted, particularly

outside of major cities; in 2014 and 2015 the government increased its repression of ethnic minority Christians in the Central Highlands, according to a Human Rights Watch report released in June. A bill under discussion in the National Assembly during 2015 included onerous registration requirements and would give the government extensive control over religious groups' internal affairs.

Academic freedom is limited. University professors must refrain from criticizing government policies and adhere to party views when teaching or writing on political topics. Although citizens enjoy more freedom in private discussions than in the past, authorities continue to punish those who openly criticize the state.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12

Freedoms of association and assembly are tightly restricted. Organizations must apply for official permission to assemble. In March 2015, the government tolerated environmental protests in Hanoi. Demonstrators took to the streets and Facebook to oppose a government plan to cut down thousands of trees in the capital. Later that month, the city government jettisoned the plan. In a climate of increasing tensions with Beijing over disputed territory in the South China Sea, the authorities also sometimes tolerate anti-China protests. However, security forces beat and detained demonstrators who gathered in Ho Chi Minh City in November to protest a visit by Chinese president Xi Jinping.

Private organizations outside the umbrella of the VFF are discouraged. A small, active community of independent nongovernmental groups promote environmental conservation, land rights, women's development, and public health, but they face government restrictions and complex registration requirements. Land rights activists in particular are frequently arrested. In May 2015, the government permitted a U.S. delegation to meet with representatives of Vietnamese civil society organizations during a U.S.-Vietnam human rights dialogue in Hanoi, though police detained several would-be participants and prevented them from attending.

The Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL) is Vietnam's only legal labor federation and is controlled by the CPV. All trade unions are required to join the VGCL. However, in recent years the government has permitted hundreds of independent "labor associations" without formal union status to represent workers at individual firms and in some service industries. Farmer and worker protests against local government abuses, such as land confiscations and harsh working conditions, have also become more common. The central leadership often responds by pressuring local governments and businesses to comply with tax laws, environmental regulations, and wage agreements. More than 250 illegal strikes took place during 2015, according to official figures. In March, thousands of workers at factories that make footwear for prominent international brands went on strike to protest a revision of the national social insurance law. The strike ended when the government agreed to reconsider the change.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

Vietnam's judiciary is subordinate to the CPV, which controls the courts at all levels. Defendants have a constitutional right to counsel, but lawyers are scarce, and many are reluctant to take on human rights and other sensitive cases for fear of state harassment and retribution, including arrest. Defense lawyers do not have the right to call witnesses and often report insufficient time to meet with their clients. In national security cases, police can detain suspects for up to 20 months without access to counsel. The police are known to abuse suspects and prisoners, and prison conditions are poor.

New police regulations that took effect in August 2014 codified rules for police investigations and prohibited police coercion during interrogations. Some human rights groups praised the measure as a step forward, but critics raised concerns about enforcement and argued that the reforms failed to protect due process rights. At least 14 people were killed in police custody during 2015, according to the U.S. State Department. In March, members of the National Assembly expressed skepticism over a Ministry of Public Security report claiming that a majority of 226 people said to have died in police custody between October 2011 and September 2014 had committed suicide or succumbed to illnesses.

Ethnic minorities, who often adhere to minority religions, face discrimination in mainstream society, and some local officials restrict their access to schooling and jobs. Minorities generally have little input on development projects that affect their livelihoods and communities. Human rights organizations criticized the government in 2015 for deploying security forces to suppress unapproved religious activity and political dissent among ethnic minority communities in the highlands.

The law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and societal discrimination remains a problem. However, there is no ban on same-sex sexual activity, and the government has been relatively open to calls for equal rights for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people in recent years. In August 2015, the fourth annual LGBT pride parade took place in Hanoi, and related events were held in other cities.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

Although freedom of movement is protected by law, authorities have restricted the movement of political dissidents and ethnic minorities. Human rights organizations have accused Vietnam of pressuring Cambodia's government to return ethnic minority refugees who fled persecution in the highlands.

Land rights have become one of the most contentious issues in the country. All land is owned by the state, which grants land-use rights and leases to farmers, developers, and others. Among other high-profile incidents during 2015, a group of farmers who had traveled to meet a land rights activist being released from jail in north-central Vietnam were reportedly attacked by plainclothes police on their way home in June. In July, a woman was seriously injured by a bulldozer while protesting the confiscation of farmland to build an industrial park. In September, a woman arrested after protesting the seizure of her family farm received an 18-month prison sentence for disturbing public order.

Women generally have equal access to education, and men and women receive similar treatment in the legal system. Women secured 122 seats in the National Assembly in the 2011 elections. Although economic opportunities have grown for women, they continue to face discrimination in wages and promotion. Domestic violence against women reportedly remains common, and the law calls for the state to initiate criminal as opposed to civil procedures only when the victim is seriously injured.

In January 2015, Vietnam repealed a legal ban on same-sex marriages, but the government still does not officially recognize such unions. A revised civil code passed in November recognized transgender people's right to legally change their gender identity, but only after undergoing sex reassignment surgery.

Enforcement of labor laws covering child labor, workplace safety, and other issues remains poor. Vietnam is a source country for human trafficking. Vietnamese women seeking work abroad are subject to sex trafficking in countries including China, Cambodia, and Laos, and internationally brokered marriages sometimes lead to domestic servitude and

forced prostitution. Male migrant workers are also vulnerable to forced labor abroad in a variety of industries.

↓ Yemen

Political Rights Rating: 7↓

Population: 26,737,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Capital: Sanaa

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ratings Change, Trend Arrow: Yemen's political rights rating declined from 6 to 7, and it received a downward trend arrow, due to the collapse of the political system and the effects of an escalating civil war and related Saudi-led military intervention on the civilian population.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

Yemen collapsed into civil and regional war in 2015. Tensions between Houthi forces, which had occupied Sanaa in late 2014, and President Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi's government continued into the early part of the year, when efforts to negotiate an end to the political stalemate between competing forces broke down. In January, Houthi leaders rejected a new constitution that would have led to the creation of a federated Yemen and decentralized power. Soon thereafter, Hadi resigned as president and fled the country, eventually settling in Saudi Arabia. Violence between the Houthis and supporters of the fallen president escalated in the spring as Houthi forces began marching south from Sanaa toward Aden, establishing control over large parts of the country. Houthi forces enjoyed the backing of ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was ousted from power in 2012 but has remained politically influential.

In March, concerned about the possibility of total Houthi control in Yemen, Saudi Arabia led a small coalition of Arab states in a war against the Houthis that continued through the end of the year. The campaign, in combination with a Saudi naval blockade preventing food, medicine, and other humanitarian aid from entering the country, resulted in thousands of deaths and widespread destruction. Hadi returned to Aden from his self-imposed exile on several occasions in September and November to supervise the campaign to retake control of Yemen, but by year's end neither the warring parties nor international brokers appeared positioned to decisively end the conflict.

Against this backdrop, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) carried out regular bombings during the year. In addition, supporters of the Islamic State (IS) militant group began attacks in Yemen for the first time, killing hundreds in coordinated bombings. The United States continued to carry out regular drone strikes against al-Qaeda in Yemen.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 4 / 40 (–5)**A. Electoral Process:** 2 / 12 (–1)

Under the existing constitution, the president is elected for seven-year terms and appoints the 111 members of the largely advisory upper house of parliament, the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council). The 301 members of the lower house, the House of Representatives, are elected to serve six-year terms. Provincial councils and governors are also elected.

Parliamentary elections have been repeatedly postponed. The original six-year mandate of the current parliament expired in 2009, and elections were put off again in 2011 amid a popular uprising against longtime president Ali Abdullah Saleh. In November of that year, under sustained pressure from the United States, the United Nations, and the Gulf Cooperation Council, Saleh signed a Saudi-brokered agreement that transferred his powers to then Vice President Hadi in exchange for immunity from prosecution for his role in the violent crackdown on antigovernment protests that year. In February 2012, Yemeni voters confirmed Hadi, who ran unopposed, as interim president with a two-year term. In January 2014, the multiparty National Dialogue Conference (NDC), a months-long initiative in which more than 500 delegates aimed to reach agreement on Yemen's political future, concluded with a plan to transform the country into a federated state of six regions, which would be ratified in a new constitution. Hadi's term was extended at that time until the reforms proposed by the NDC could be finalized in a new constitution.

However, the constitutional drafting process and elections schedule were thrown into disarray by a rebellion of the Houthis, a Shiite Muslim population in the country's northwest. Houthi forces took over large swaths of the country, eventually occupying Sanaa in September 2014. A new cabinet was announced in November of that year as part of the UN-brokered deal with the Houthis. In January 2015, Houthi leaders extracted concessions from the Hadi government that would have created a power-sharing arrangement in exchange for their withdrawal from the capital. However, the Houthis subsequently refused to evacuate Sanaa and turn over control of key government installations. In response, President Hadi and his cabinet resigned their positions, resulting in a total collapse of the government and the intensification of Houthi efforts to establish control over the rest of the country.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 1 / 16 (–3)

Although the political system was long dominated by Saleh and his party, the General People's Congress (GPC), Yemen's relatively well-developed and experienced opposition parties had historically been able to wring some concessions from the government. The 2012 ouster of Saleh was accomplished through a sustained campaign of protests motivated primarily by frustration with imbalances of power and high levels of corruption, but also by lack of access to decision-making and political participation by regular citizens.

However, the Houthis now dominate the political system. They are vigorously challenged by opposing domestic and international forces, including Saudi Arabia, where the Hadi government fled in exile. Following the support of the opposition Islah political party for the Saudi-led airstrikes, Houthi forces systematically persecuted their associates, forcibly disappearing more than 100 members in April and shuttering a number of affiliated organizations throughout the year.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12 (–1)

After coming to power in 2011, Hadi and the central government had struggled to consolidate authority. Aside from competition between warring factions, the network of

corruption and patronage established under Saleh remained entrenched in public institutions, creating additional obstacles to political compromise. Efforts by the NDC to create a viable reformed political system seemed to crystallize in late 2014 with the writing of a constitution. But in January 2015, Houthi leaders rejected the new constitution and the proposed concept of a federal system. Following the collapse of the Hadi government later that month, Houthi forces announced in February their formal takeover of the government, dissolving parliament and assuming control of the executive branch.

Despite efforts by the government to fight endemic corruption, Yemen lacks most legal safeguards to combat it. Yemen was ranked 154 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. The Houthi advance, rejection of the constitution, and the resignation of the president and prime minister have effectively ended government accountability.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 13 / 60 (– 3)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16 (– 1)

Legislation such as the Press and Publications Law restrict reporting. The government controls most terrestrial television and radio, though there are several privately owned radio stations. Access to the internet is not widespread, and authorities have blocked websites they deem offensive.

Though the state's ability to enforce its oppressive legal regime is diminished by the war, spaces and opportunities for free expression have been as well. In 2015, attacks on journalists and the media increased dramatically, with abuses committed by both Houthi and pro-Hadi forces. Since gaining control of Sanaa, the Houthis have systematically persecuted journalists and attempted to manipulate media coverage of their activities. By March 2015, nearly 70 press freedom violations by Houthi forces had already been reported, including threats, kidnappings, and confiscations of equipment. At the start of April, the international coalition forces backing Hadi announced that all Houthi-affiliated media were military targets. That month, a coalition airstrike hit the offices of the television station Yemen Today, killing a journalist and three other people. Two additional journalists were killed by an airstrike in May after being kidnapped by Houthi rebels. Houthi abductions of journalists are common; Reporters without Borders reported that 11 were being held at the end of August.

Islam is the official religion, and the constitution declares Sharia (Islamic law) to be the source of all legislation. Yemen has few non-Muslim religious minorities, and their rights are generally respected in practice, though conversion from Islam and proselytizing to Muslims is prohibited. The outbreak of war has inflamed sectarian tensions between the Shiite Houthis and Sunni militant groups. In March 2015, more than 130 people were killed by suicide bombers at two Shiite mosques in Sanaa. Further blasts hit three Shiite mosques in June.

Strong politicization of campus life, including tensions between supporters of the GPC and the Islah party, infringes on academic freedom at universities. The war in 2015 led to damage to school facilities across the country, periodic suspensions of classes and other activities at schools and universities, and deaths of children who were inside schools that were bombed.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Yemenis have historically enjoyed some freedom of assembly, with periodic restrictions and sometimes deadly interventions by the government. There were frequent demonstrations against both Houthi expansion and Saudi military aggression in 2015. In January and

February, Houthi forces violently broke up pro-Hadi protests in Sanaa, making several arrests and firing live rounds. At least six people were killed by Houthi forces in the city of Torba in March while protesting the group's presence there.

Freedom of association has historically been constitutionally guaranteed. Several thousand nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) work in the country, though their ability to operate is restricted in practice. In April 2015, Houthi forces shut down four NGOs associated with political groups opposed to their rule, and detained a number of their employees and associates. The law acknowledges the right of workers to form and join trade unions, but in practice these organizations have little freedom to operate. Virtually all unions belong to a single labor federation, and the government is empowered to veto collective bargaining agreements.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

The judiciary is nominally independent, but it is susceptible to interference from the executive branch and political factions. Authorities have a poor record of enforcing judicial rulings, particularly those issued against prominent tribal or political leaders. Lacking an effective court system, citizens often resort to tribal forms of justice and customary law, practices that have increased as the influence of the state has continued to deteriorate. Arbitrary detention is common, stemming in part from inadequate training for law enforcement officers and a lack of political will among senior government officials to eliminate the problem. Security forces affiliated with the Political Security Office (PSO) and the Interior Ministry torture and abuse detainees, and PSO prisons are not closely monitored. The war has periodically halted the operations of some municipal and judicial offices, although the Ministry of Justice continued to operate under Houthi influence.

The outbreak of war has resulted in widespread violence across the country, the destruction of critical infrastructure, and thousands of deaths and injuries. Saudi airstrikes have not always distinguished between military and civilian targets. Several hospitals and clinics operated by Doctors without Borders were bombed throughout the year in what observers believed to be deliberate attacks. The United Nations estimated that nearly 3,000 people were killed and more than 5,000 wounded in the fighting by the end of 2015.

In addition, forces loyal to AQAP used the opportunity created by fighting between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia to carry out attacks during the year. The United States continued an aggressive bombing and drone campaign against Al-Qaeda forces in the country. ISIS loyalists also claimed to have carried out attacks in Yemen for the first time in 2015.

Yemen is relatively ethnically homogeneous. However, the Akhdam, a small minority group, live in poverty and face social discrimination. Thousands of refugees fleeing war and poverty in the Horn of Africa are smuggled annually into Yemen, where they faced increased violence in 2015.

Same-sex sexual activity is illegal, with possible penalties including lashes, imprisonment, and death. Due to the severe threats they face, few LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) Yemenis reveal their sexual identity in public. The war has disrupted relatively robust informal networks of LGBT people that had existed in many of Yemen's major cities. The resurgence of the religiously conservative Houthi movement has reportedly increased anti-LGBT sentiment.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 3 / 16 (–2)

Freedom of movement, property rights, and business activity are impaired by the security situation and corruption. In November 2015, Houthi officials prevented Shafiq al-Wahsh, a leading Yemeni women's rights advocate, from traveling to Egypt and Jordan

to participate in peace talks, though they did allow 16 other delegates to attend. Internal displacement increased rapidly over the course of the year, with more than 2.5 million internally displaced persons by year's end. Saudi Arabia imposed a naval blockade on the country for most of the year, leading to shortages of food, medicine, fuel, and other essential imports, and resulting in dire humanitarian conditions.

Women continue to face discrimination in many aspects of life. A woman must obtain permission from her husband or father to receive a passport and travel abroad, cannot confer citizenship on a foreign-born spouse, and can transfer Yemeni citizenship to her children only in special circumstances. Women are vastly underrepresented in public office; there was just one woman in the lower house of parliament before it was dissolved. School enrollment and educational attainment rates for girls fall far behind those for boys. In December 2015, terrorists shut down several faculties at the University of Aden in order to enforce gender segregation in classrooms. Yemen's penal code allows lenient sentences for those convicted of "honor crimes"—assaults or killings of women by family members for alleged immoral behavior. Although the law prohibits female genital mutilation, it is still prevalent.

The war increased the risk of human trafficking in Yemen, and the government was no longer able to pursue antitrafficking efforts it had previously begun.

Zambia

Political Rights Rating: 3

Population: 15,474,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Capital: Lusaka

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: Yes

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,3,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF	3,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

In January, Zambian voters elected Edgar Lungu, the Patriotic Front (PF) secretary general and the defense and justice minister, as the country's sixth president, following the late 2014 death of President Michael Sata, also of the PF. Lungu narrowly defeated Hakainde Hichilema of the United Party for National Development (UPND), 48.8 percent to 47.2 percent, in a vote that left the nation divided along regional lines and, to a lesser degree, along tribal lines. During Lungu's first year in office, the PF continued many of Sata's restrictive laws and policies, including using the colonial-era Public Order Act to interfere with the activities of the opposition. Political violence, primarily between supporters of the PF and UPND, erupted sporadically during the year. Meanwhile, Lungu found himself confronted with dissent among a faction of PF members who had been aligned with Sata. Lungu's government also grappled with the effects of a sharp economic contraction caused in part by plummeting copper prices.

Zambians have been working on drafting a new constitution since the early 2000s, and under Sata, civil society and church groups were involved in a drawn-out constitution-making process. However, in late 2015, parliament instead approved a package of amendments to the existing 1991 charter. Following several months of public comment, the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Bill was introduced to parliament in December, and

pushed through days later by a coalition of lawmakers from the PF and the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD). Among other provisions, it requires presidential candidates to select a running mate who would take over the presidency in the event of the head of state's death—an event that triggered early elections in Zambia on two occasions in recent years. It also requires that the winner of a presidential election gain more than 50 percent of the vote. Constitutional experts and civil society organizations criticized the parliamentary debate of the bill as rushed, and argued that the government watered down some protections written into a draft constitution released in 2014, a document that many Zambians had expected to vote on in a national referendum. Lungu was expected to sign the legislation in early 2016. A national referendum on a bill of rights, which was not included in the amendment bill, is planned for August 2016, alongside general elections.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 26 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 8 / 12

The president and the unicameral National Assembly are elected to serve concurrent five-year terms. The National Assembly includes 150 elected members and 8 members appointed by the president. After his victory in the January 2015 presidential by-election, Lungu appointed PF chairwoman Inonge Wina as vice president, making her the first woman to hold the position in Zambia. The election was generally seen as free and credible by observers. However, voter turnout fell to historically low levels, reaching just 32 percent.

The PF won a plurality in 2011 parliamentary elections, and in 2015 continued to extend its majority in parliament through multiple by-elections. By-elections, triggered in part by a PF strategy of enticing opposition legislators to switch parties with offers of government posts (a party switch automatically leads to a by-election), have altered the balance of power in the National Assembly in favor of the PF since the 2011 general elections. In 2015, the PF held 87 seats, up from 61 in 2011; the MMD had 36 seats, down from 55 following the 2011 polls; and the UPND held 31 seats, from 29 previously. Although some by-elections have been characterized by violence between party cadres and the misuse of the media by the PF, observers have generally deemed voting credible.

In October 2015, reports emerged that electoral authorities in PF strongholds were permitting voters to register more than once. The Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) pledged to investigate instances of electoral malpractice, and warned the voting public against registering multiple times. Additionally, in September Hichilema alleged that some people had been unable to register to vote because poor management by the PF had resulted in delays in the issuance of national identity cards, which are required in order to register.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 11 / 16 (–1)

The major political parties are the PF, the MMD, and the UPND. Since its 2011 election loss, the MMD—which had governed Zambia for the previous 20 years—has been weakened considerably by infighting and PF efforts to coopt its members. The MMD's loss of seats in recent by-elections means that no party currently meets the 53-seat threshold to be recognized as the official opposition in parliament.

The two main opposition parties, as well as smaller parties, have also been weakened in recent years by harassment and intimidation from the PF, including use of the police and the Public Order Act to prevent them from holding both indoor and outdoor meetings and rallies. Such incidents were frequent in 2015. In one high-profile event in June, police broke up an indoor meeting at which UPND parliament member Stephen Katuka was addressing

constituents; officials claimed that he had failed to secure police permission for the gathering. In October, Forum for Democracy and Development (FDD) leader Edith Nawakwi was detained by police in Kitwe after she held an indoor meeting with party members. She was questioned for several hours and later released with a warning; Nawakwi said officers had suggested that the meeting caused a breach of the peace. In December, police inspector general Kakoma Kanganja defended as legal the actions of police in Lundazi, who had thrown a tear gas canister into a meeting hall to break up a party meeting of the MMD attended by its president, Nevers Mumba. Kanganja claimed that the MMD did not have a police permit to hold the meeting.

The constitution prohibits the formation of political parties aimed exclusively at representing the interests of a particular ethnic group. However, a number of political parties are affiliated with tribal groups, and the government in practice does not limit the political rights of people belonging to ethnic minorities.

C. Functioning of Government: 7 / 12 (+ 1)

The state of Sata's health had been the subject of speculation since 2012, raising questions among some observers about who was actually running the country. Following Sata's death in 2014, Lungu's January 2015 election marked the restoration of an environment in which Zambia's head of state was clearly in charge of the government.

Corruption is widespread. The PF has taken some steps to fight graft; in 2012, the National Assembly reinserted the key "abuse of office" clause of the Anti-Corruption Act, which had been removed by the MMD-dominated legislature in 2010. The clause allows for the prosecution of public officials for violations such as abuse of authority or misuse of public funds. However, many prosecutions and court decisions in Zambia are thought to reflect political motivations.

In March 2013, the National Assembly voted to lift former president Rupiah Banda's immunity from prosecution. Among other charges, Banda, of the MMD, was accused of abuse of power in connection with a \$2.5 million oil deal with a Nigerian company from which he allegedly benefited during his 2008–11 presidency. In June 2015, Banda was acquitted, with a Lusaka court saying there was insufficient evidence to convict him.

Access to information legislation was drafted in 2002, but neither the previous MMD administrations nor the PF government have taken action to approve it. In April, Lungu gave some indication that he was preparing to approve the legislation. However, in May, following a press article alleging that the government had contracted a foreign loan without declaring it, Lungu announced that he was "thinking twice" about enacting the access bill.

Nevertheless, 2015 saw some improvements in government openness and transparency. Throughout the year, ministers often issued unprompted statements in parliament, while in November Lungu held his first—albeit his only—press conference, the PF's first in four years.

Zambia was ranked 76 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 34 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 11 / 16

Freedoms of expression and of the press are constitutionally guaranteed, but the government frequently restricted these rights in practice in 2015. Although the PF has pledged to free the public media—consisting of the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation

(ZNBC) and the widely circulated *Zambia Daily Mail* and *Times of Zambia*—from government control, these outlets have generally continued to report along progovernment lines. Many journalists reportedly practice self-censorship. The ZNBC dominates the broadcast media, though several private stations have the capacity to reach large portions of the population. Roughly 17 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2014, according to the International Telecommunication Union.

Journalists at public, community, and privately owned outlets faced stepped-up harassment and attacks by government officials and PF supporters throughout 2015, especially in retaliation for hosting opposition figures or criticizing ruling party officials on the air. In July, armed PF supporters in Kitwe entered the offices of Radio Icengelo and disrupted its operations just before the UPND's Hichilema was scheduled to speak on one of its programs. In August, Central Province Minister Davies Chisopa of the PF ordered the dissolution of UN-supported Mkushi Radio's board over its alleged bias toward the UPND. The same month, ZNBC radio producer Martin Maseka, who also leads Zambia's broadcasters' union, was suspended from his job at the station for publicly criticizing Information Minister Chishimba Kambwili's threat to fire ZNBC staff who had been protesting questionable management practices at the broadcaster. In October, Kambwili threatened to revoke the broadcasting license of Lusaka's Radio Phoenix, saying it disseminated antigovernment propaganda. Also that month, Christine Ngwisha was dismissed from Radio Phoenix, days after interviewing Kambwili on one of the station's live programs; Kambwili had complained that the absence of callers-in during the interview indicated that the station supported the UPND.

In December, PF supporters in Chipata disrupted a live broadcast on Breeze FM featuring opposition Rainbow Party president and former PF secretary general Wynter Kabimba, assaulting a security guard and inflicting property damage. Following the incident, the station cancelled all its political news programming for fear of becoming a target of violence. A week later, *Post* newspaper journalist Peter Sukwa and Feel Free Radio journalist Kelvin Phiri were attacked by PF supporters while investigating allegations that non-Zambians were being registered as voters in Vubwi, on the border with Malawi. One of the journalists reported that an attacker had urinated into his mouth, and had poured fuel on him and threatened to set him alight. A deputy home affairs minister, Colonel Panji Kaunda of the PF, condemned the attack and called on police to make arrests.

Government officials frequently bring lawsuits in response to critical or unfavorable reporting. In May, *Post* newspaper owner Fred M'membe was arrested along with one of the newspaper's reporters for publishing a letter from the Anti-Corruption Commission indicating that a presidential aide was being investigated. They were charged with publishing classified information, and the case against them remained open at the year's end. Although artistic expression is generally free, in June artist Fumba Chama (also known as Pilato) was arrested and charged with conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace in connection with his satirical song about Lungu. His case was discontinued in July.

Constitutionally protected religious freedom is respected in practice. The government does not restrict academic freedom. Private discussion is generally free in Zambia. However, in 2015, two journalists sued a local mobile phone service provider, alleging that between 2013 and 2014 it had placed wiretaps on their phones and rerouted their text messages to undisclosed recipients. Both journalists had previously faced obscenity or sedition charges, reputedly filed in connection with their alleged involvement with the *Zambian Watchdog*, an independent news outlet that has been periodically blocked in Zambia.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 7 / 12

Freedom of assembly is guaranteed under the constitution but is not consistently respected by the government. Under the Public Order Act, police must receive a week's notice before all demonstrations. While the law does not require people to obtain a permit for a demonstration, the police in 2015 continued to break up rallies and indoor meetings led by opposition political parties and activists, claiming that organizers lacked such permits. The police can choose where and when rallies are held, as well as who can address them.

Freedom of association is guaranteed by law but is not always respected in practice. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are required to register and reregister every five years under the 2009 NGO Act, which was signed into law by Banda but not implemented. In 2013 the PF attempted to implement the law, initially requiring every group to register or face a ban. While many NGOs complied with the registration requirement, others resisted it as a violation of the right to free association, and mounted a legal challenge. In 2014, the government and some NGOs agreed to resolve the dispute out of court, leading to a suspension of the forced registration provision and negotiations on a self-regulatory framework. No amendments had been made to the law by the end of 2015.

The law provides for the right to join unions, strike, and bargain collectively. Historically, Zambia's trade unions were among Africa's strongest, but the leading bodies, including the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), have faced marginalization under PF rule. In May 2015, Lungu agreed to lift a salary freeze affecting public-sector workers, which was issued in 2013 and had prompted outrage from the ZCTU. In October, following negotiations with the government, public-sector workers received salary increases ranging from 9 to 29 percent.

F. Rule of Law: 8 / 16

While judicial independence is guaranteed by law, the government often does not respect it in practice. Zambia's courts lack qualified personnel and resources, and significant trial delays are common. Pretrial detainees are sometimes held for years under harsh conditions, and many of the accused lack access to legal aid, owing to limited resources. In rural areas, customary courts of variable quality and consistency—whose decisions often conflict with the constitution and national law—decide many civil matters.

On a positive note, Lungu in March 2015 dissolved a tribunal established by Sata in 2013 that had probed alleged misconduct by judges, including several who had ruled against Sata's allies in a high-profile case involving Zambia's national airline; the tribunal appeared to violate constitutional provisions for judicial independence. Several judges who were suspended as a result of the tribunal's operations saw those suspensions lifted following Lungu's order. In October, a court ordered the government to pay the legal costs of one of the judges who had been investigated.

Separately, Lungu in February appointed Irene Mambilima as Zambia's chief justice, and her candidacy was unanimously ratified by the National Assembly shortly afterward. She replaced Lombe Chibesakunda, Sata's ally and cousin, who was widely considered to be biased in favor of the PF. Chibesakunda's appointment had never been ratified because she was past the constitutionally mandated retirement age of 65.

Allegations of police corruption and brutality are widespread, and security forces have generally operated with impunity. There are reports of forced labor, abuse of inmates by authorities, and deplorable health conditions in the country's prisons.

Some leaders in Western Province, a traditionally poor and marginalized region, have repeatedly demanded to secede from Zambia. Successive national administrations have had a contentious relationship with the Lozi, the province's largest ethnic group. In 2012, a small group of separatists in the region declared independence after Sata reneged on a campaign promise to honor the 1964 Barotseland Agreement, which promised the area limited local self-governance and provided for future discussions of greater autonomy or independence. (Presidents since independence have not honored the agreement.) Several people accused of leading the separatist movement are currently on trial for treason.

Consensual sexual activity between members of the same sex is illegal under a law criminalizing "acts against the order of nature," an offense punishable by prison sentences of between 15 years and life. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people have faced increased public harassment and legal prosecution under the measure in recent years. In October 2015, Hatch Brill, a transgender woman, was convicted under the law in the western town of Mongu, after a man reported her to police following a sexual encounter. Her accuser was not charged.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

The government generally respects the constitutionally protected rights of free internal movement and foreign travel. However, movement is often hindered by petty corruption, such as police demands for bribes at roadblocks, for which perpetrators are rarely prosecuted.

Most agricultural land, on which the majority of citizens conduct subsistence farming, is administered according to customary law; while technically such land is communally held, certain individuals and families exercise very strong use rights, and traditional chiefs have substantial power over land allocations. However, the president retains ultimate authority over all land in the country and can intercede to block or compel its sale or transfer. Executive branch powers have been used to buttress a land privatization scheme since the mid-1990s that has undermined traditional land rights and resulted in the accumulation of large estates by commercial agriculture and mining concerns. Zambia ranks low on indexes of economic freedom; processes for starting and operating businesses can be opaque and time-consuming.

Societal discrimination, low literacy levels, and violence remain serious obstacles to women's rights. In the 2011 polls, women won just 17 of the 150 elected seats in the National Assembly. At the end of 2015, women occupied 22 of 150 elected seats, or 14 percent. Women are denied full economic participation, and rural, poor women often require male consent to obtain credit. Discrimination against women is especially prevalent in customary courts, where they are considered subordinate with respect to property, inheritance, and marriage. Rape, while illegal and punishable by up to life in prison with hard labor, is widespread, and the law is not adequately enforced. Spousal rape is not considered a crime. Domestic abuse is common, and traditional norms inhibit many women from reporting assaults. Zambia's child marriage rate is among the highest in the world; 42 percent of women between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before they turned 18. Child rape is not traditionally punished under customary law. In December 2015, Lungu named Clifford Dimba, who in 2014 was convicted of raping a 14-year-old girl, the country's ambassador against gender violence, after pardoning him.

There is significant labor exploitation in some sectors of the economy. In particular, labor abuses in Chinese-operated copper mines, including unsafe working conditions and resistance to unionization, have been reported.

The use of child labor in dangerous industries, including mining, is a problem in Zambia. According to the U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons* report, the most prevalent forms of exploitation in Zambia were internal trafficking of women and children for domestic servitude and forced labor in agriculture, mining, textile work, construction, and small businesses. The report notes that the government does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but is making efforts to do so.

Zimbabwe

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 17,354,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5↑

Capital: Harare

Freedom Rating: 5.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Status Change, Ratings Change: Zimbabwe's civil liberties rating improved from 6 to 5, and its status improved from Not Free to Partly Free, due to some gains in citizens' civil liberties in 2015. While the country continued to struggle with the internal factionalization of both its ruling and major opposition parties, the judiciary showed increasing independence by deciding against powerful political interests, including ruling party elites.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	5,6,NF	5,6,NF	5,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe in 2015 continued to suffer from factionalization of the two major parties and a deepening economic malaise. Over the course of more than 20 by-elections, held mostly as a result of lawmakers being expelled from both major parties, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) greatly increased its share of seats in the National Assembly during the year. The main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change–Tsvangirai (MDC-T), boycotted these elections, leaving ZANU-PF to run against several small opposition parties and its own former members. Even with the lack of competition, some of the contests were characterized by voter-roll discrepancies, large numbers of assisted voters, and episodes of violence.

Former ruling party elites and those involved in the political struggle to succeed long-time president Robert Mugabe reported receiving threats or being subjected to surveillance by the Central Intelligence Office (CIO) during 2015.

Despite these signs of political turmoil, there were some marginal improvements in civil liberties. The courts ruled against the ruling party in several prominent cases, suggesting greater judicial independence than in the past. Political pressure on teachers and restrictions on the operations of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which in previous years included legal and extrajudicial harassment, also appeared to ebb in 2015.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 12 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

Zimbabwe has a bicameral legislature. In the lower chamber, the 270-seat National Assembly, 210 members are elected through a first-past-the-post system with one member

per constituency, and 60 female members are elected by proportional representation. The 80-seat Senate includes 6 members from each of Zimbabwe's 10 provinces who are elected through proportional representation, and 20 appointed members, including 18 traditional leaders and 2 members representing people with disabilities. Members in both houses serve five-year terms.

The 2013 constitution limited the president to two five-year terms, removed the presidential power to veto legislation and dismiss Parliament, and devolved some powers to the provinces. The term-limit restriction was not retroactive, however, meaning Mugabe, who has been the country's leader since independence in 1980, could serve two more terms. The constitution also empowered the president's political party, not Parliament, to select a presidential successor in the case of a death in office—a critical provision given that Mugabe turned 91 in 2015. The 2013 constitutional referendum was deemed credible by a range of observers, though the vote was preceded by a crackdown on prodemocracy civil society groups.

Although far less violent than the 2008 elections, the 2013 presidential and legislative elections were marred by serious irregularities. Mugabe won the presidency with 61 percent of the vote; his opponent, MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai, took 34 percent. ZANU-PF also captured 197 seats in the National Assembly, compared with 70 for the MDC-T. According to the Zimbabwe Electoral Coalition (ZEC), more than 300,000 voters were rejected at the polls over registration issues, and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) claimed that up to one million voters were omitted from the rolls or turned away at the polling centers. The ZEC also reported that 200,000 "assisted" votes were cast, leading to accusations that ZANU-PF supporters were casting votes for people not genuinely in need of assistance. Selective distribution of benefits to ruling party supporters and use of government institutions to campaign were also rampant.

The 2012 Electoral Amendment Act reconstituted the ZEC with new commissioners nominated by all political parties, but the ZEC president and much of the staff remained partisan and susceptible to political influence. Another Electoral Amendment Act passed in 2014 expanded the powers of observers and election agents and reduced ambiguities in the process for handling ballots. The amendments also reinstated postal voting, which was historically used to ensure that the armed forces collectively voted in favor of ZANU-PF. Legal loopholes that permit the printing of extra ballots, unfair media coverage, and interference of police officers in voter choice remain unrevised. In 2015, the MDC-T asked the Constitutional Court to rule on the question of holding elections before the electoral law has been brought fully into compliance with the new constitution, but the case was withdrawn at the end of September on a technicality. In December, the MDC-T, People First, and several other opposition parties signed a joint call for further electoral reforms.

The 2015 parliamentary by-elections featured a number of shortcomings. There were reports of violence, particularly in the Hurungwe West constituency, where Temba Mliswa, who had been expelled by ZANU-PF, ran to reclaim his seat as an independent. Candidates in several constituencies said they were threatened by ZANU-PF supporters, who also allegedly visited voters to record their registration numbers and threaten repercussions if they failed to vote. Reports that traditional leaders were both threatened and provided with assistants to campaign and monitor voting behavior, combined with allegations that CIO agents were deployed to by-election constituencies, suggest that such illegal campaigns were overseen by central authorities. Election monitors and non-ZANU-PF candidates also widely reported the use of fraud, including manipulation of the voter roll and fabrication of votes.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 6 / 16

ZANU-PF has dominated politics since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, though infighting over who will succeed Mugabe has led to the formation of splinter groups. Joice Mujuru, who was replaced as vice president in December 2014 and expelled from ZANU-PF, emerged as the leader of a breakaway faction, People First, during 2015. The main opposition party, the MDC, has also split into multiple factions—first over whether to contest the 2005 Senate elections, and then after its defeat in the 2013 elections—but the MDC-T remains the largest opposition grouping.

The ruling party uses state institutions as well as violence and intimidation to punish opposition politicians, their supporters, and critical political activists. Itai Dzamara, a journalist and activist who had called for Mugabe to resign, was abducted in March 2015, allegedly by government agents. The authorities denied any knowledge of his whereabouts, and he remained missing at year's end. In September, seven MDC-T lawmakers reportedly received death threats via mobile-phone text messages that appeared to warn them against disrupting Mugabe's annual speech to Parliament. Also that month, ZANU-PF politicians received threatening text messages that were thought to have come from factional rivals.

Youth brigades affiliated with ZANU-PF factions led by First Lady Grace Mugabe and Saviour Kasukuwere, on the one hand, and Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa, on the other, engaged in brawls around the capital during the year. CIO agents were said to be watching the movements of current and former ZANU-PF elites on behalf of Mnangagwa, a former CIO chief and presidential aspirant. The CIO also continued to threaten opposition leaders.

Zimbabwe's ethnic Shona majority dominates both major political parties, and some members of the Ndebele minority have complained of political marginalization. An MDC splinter party headed by Welshman Ncube, an Ndebele, has been accused of tribalism by its rivals. The small white minority has faced years of hostile speeches and policies from ZANU-PF.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

The civilian leadership has only partial electoral legitimacy, and the commanders of the highly partisan military, police, and intelligence agencies continue to play a central role in government decision making. The CIO remains closely tied to the presidency and free from any substantial regulation by the legislature or civilian bureaucracy.

Government effectiveness has been undermined by the use of appointments for political patronage. The president regularly reshuffles the cabinet, increasing the number of ministers in 2015 to more than 72, each of whom receives large salaries and allowances, vehicles, housing, and special staff. Other state and party officials were dismissed during the year as part of an effort to purge allies of former vice president Mujuru.

Corruption has become endemic since 2000, including at the highest levels of government. The collapse in public-service delivery and the politicization of food and agricultural aid have made the problem ubiquitous at the local level as well.

The Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission, which was enshrined in the 2013 constitution, has little independent investigative or enforcement capacity. Zimbabwe was ranked 150 out of 168 countries and territories assessed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. According to another Transparency International report released in 2015, some 77 percent of Zimbabweans thought that the country had grown more corrupt over the past two years.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 20 / 60 (+4)**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief:** 8 / 16 (+2)

Freedom of the press is restricted. Although the constitution protects freedoms of the media and expression, the country's repressive legal framework—including the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Official Secrets Act, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (CLCRA)—has yet to be reformed. These laws restrict who may work as a journalist by requiring journalists to register with the state. They also severely limit what journalists may publish and mandate harsh penalties, including long prison sentences, for violations.

Constitutional Court rulings in 2013 and 2014 found that key CLCRA provisions—on criminal defamation, undermining the authority of the president, and publishing falsehoods detrimental to the state—were harmful and unconstitutional under the old constitution. At the end of 2015, a case brought by the Media Institute of Southern Africa arguing that the CLCRA's media restrictions are unconstitutional under the new constitution was pending before the Constitutional Court. Journalists and others who criticize the government continue to be jailed and charged with violating provisions of the CLCRA.

Criticizing the government in some cases is also punished extrajudicially, particularly when it involves Mugabe. Journalists are subject to beatings or arrests while reporting on demonstrations. In August 2015, police temporarily detained three journalists covering a union-led protest over job cuts and warned them that they could share the fate of Itai Dzamarara, the journalist and activist who was abducted in March.

The state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) continues to dominate broadcast media. The government also controls the two main daily newspapers, though there are a number of independent print outlets. Satellite television services based abroad are available, but access is still prohibitively expensive for many Zimbabweans. Commercial radio licenses issued to date have generally gone to companies that are either state controlled or owned or operated by individuals with close links to the ruling party. While the law allows for the licensing of community radio stations, the government has not offered such licenses since 2001, nor has it taken steps to license private television broadcasters.

Internet access and usage have expanded rapidly in recent years despite frequent power outages, and access is rarely blocked or filtered, allowing online news sources to gain popularity. However, as with traditional media, those who disseminate critical content online face criminal sanctions and the threat of violence.

Freedom of religion is generally respected in Zimbabwe, though the ruling party favors certain religious leaders, which at times has led to confrontations with other groups. No major incidents of this kind were reported in 2015.

Political pressure on teachers and academics has eased in recent years, though the state still responds with force to student protests. Prominent academics rank among the government's most vociferous critics, and some are allowed to operate with little interference. Mugabe serves as the chancellor of all eight state-run universities, and the Ministry of Higher Education supervises education policy at universities. Nevertheless, there is respect for academic freedom in many government institutions.

Zimbabweans enjoy some freedom and openness in private discussion, but official monitoring of public gatherings, prosecution of offenses like insulting the president, and the threat of political violence serve as deterrents to unfettered speech.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12 (+1)

Freedom of assembly is limited, though protests do occur. POSA requires police permission for public meetings and demonstrations, allows police to impose arbitrary curfews,

and forbids criticism of the president. In 2015, a number of assemblies by perceived government opponents were blocked or violently dispersed through the deployment of police and soldiers. Those affected included women's rights activists, street vendors protesting tighter state regulation, and MDC-T supporters.

NGOs are active and generally professional. They remain subject to legal restrictions under POSA, the CLCRA, and the Private Voluntary Organisations Act, despite the rights laid out in the constitution. Historically, these laws have often been implemented in a partisan manner; NGOs, human rights lawyers, and civil society workers also face extralegal harassment and arbitrary arrest by security services. However, with the prominent exception of Dzamara's abduction and the short-term arrest of activists who protested on his behalf, few episodes of legal or police harassment aimed at NGOs were reported in 2015. Some groups that are critical of the government said they were allowed to operate more or less freely in urban areas, so long as they did not organize public demonstrations.

The Labor Act allows the government to veto collective-bargaining agreements that it deems harmful to the economy. Strikes are allowed except in "essential" industries. Because the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) has led resistance to Mugabe's rule, it has become a particular target for repression. It has also seen its membership decline due to closure of companies and liberalization of collective bargaining. In 2015, the ZCTU began staging protests over proposed wage freezes and a widespread loss of jobs linked to the weakening economy and relatively strong currency. Many of these protests were either banned by the police or led to police violence.

An amendment to the labor law intended to make it harder for firms to dismiss workers was hastily passed in August 2015 following the loss of an estimated 25,000 jobs in July. The rash of dismissals was precipitated by a Supreme Court ruling that firms were not required to provide redundancy payouts or give more than three months' notice to fired workers. The new law requires firms to pay a minimum of one month's pay for every two years worked, and was backdated to mid-July.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16 (+ 1)

The executive branch has exerted considerable pressure on the courts or sought to circumvent their authority over the years, but a series of rulings in 2015 demonstrated an increased degree of judicial independence, building on a trend from 2014. For example, in May, the Constitutional Court barred police from arresting women on unsubstantiated charges of soliciting for prostitution, an apparently common abuse. In June, the High Court barred the government from evicting legal street vendors and held that eviction of illegal vendors needed to comply with due process and could not involve the military. In October, the High Court ordered Local Government Minister Saviour Kasukuwere to reinstate the mayor of Gweru and 11 city councilors, finding that the clause of the Urban Council Law under which he had suspended them was unconstitutional. Also that month, the Labour Court ruled in favor of a civil servant who was unfairly dismissed on the grounds of his presumed sexual orientation.

The government has so far failed to fully implement new and update standing legislation as mandated by the 2013 constitution. At the end of 2015, the General Laws Amendment Bill was scheduled for a vote in Parliament in early 2016. However, this bill would bring only 126 statutes out of more than 400 into alignment with the constitution. Meanwhile, the judiciary has been left to struggle with interpreting contradictions between the new constitution and existing law.

The constitution gives arrested suspects the right to contact relatives, advisers, and visitors; to be informed of their rights; and to be released after 48 hours unless a court

orders them to remain detained. However, these rights are often violated in practice. Security forces abuse citizens, frequently ignoring basic rights regarding detention, searches, and seizures. In September 2015, the Constitutional Court struck down a section of the Criminal Procedures and Evidence Act that allowed prosecutors to override court decisions granting bail to detainees for seven days by stating an intent to appeal. This provision had been routinely used to block bail for political detainees.

Lengthy pretrial detention remains a problem, and despite some improvements in recent years, prison conditions are harsh and sometimes life-threatening. By official estimates, 17 percent of detainees have not yet been convicted, and the prison population is 12 percent larger than the intended capacity. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, and food shortages have contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and other illnesses among inmates.

Discrimination on the basis of a broad range of characteristics is prohibited under the 2013 constitution. However, notwithstanding the 2015 Labour Court ruling, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity is not expressly prohibited. Sex between men is a criminal offense and can be punished with a fine and up to one year in prison. Mugabe has been vocal in his opposition to same-sex sexual relations, and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) groups have been subject to regular harassment by security forces.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

High passport fees inhibit legal travel abroad. At the same time, badly underfunded immigration and border authorities lack the capacity to effectively enforce travel restrictions. Politicized enforcement is also less of a problem than in the past, when the government would seize passports of domestic opponents and expel or deny entry to foreign critics.

Property rights are not respected. In January 2015, police officers demolished the homes of at least 200 families living in an area where Grace Mugabe reportedly planned to create a wildlife sanctuary, although the courts have shown independence in multiple rulings against the interests of the first lady in this venture. The authorities also continued to demolish, without court orders, homes around Harare that were deemed to have been built illegally, affecting thousands of residents.

In rural areas, the nationalization of land has left both commercial farmers and smallholders with limited security of tenure. Farmers without title to their land have little collateral to use for bank loans. Seizures of land owned by the country's few remaining white commercial farmers, as well as some ZANU-PF elites involved in factional struggles, continued in 2015.

The 2007 Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act stipulates that 51 percent of shares in all large companies operating in Zimbabwe must be owned by black Zimbabweans. Since the 2013 elections, ZANU-PF has courted international investors and indicated that it will apply the indigenization laws selectively. In 2015, the government continued to grant exemptions to private investors and allow noncompliant companies to operate.

Women enjoy extensive legal protections, and women serve as ministers in the national and local governments. However, societal discrimination and domestic violence persist, and sexual abuse is widespread. Female members of the opposition have faced particular brutality at the hands of security forces. The prevalence of customary laws in rural areas undermines women's civil rights and access to education. According to a UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) survey published in 2015, approximately one-third of women aged 20 to 49 were

married before they turned 18, and 5 percent of those aged 15 to 49 were married before age 15.

Zimbabwean women and girls are subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor, particularly in border areas, and both adults and children from rural districts are trafficked into domestic servitude in cities or forced agricultural labor. Officials do not actively combat trafficking, and some are complicit in such activities.

Abkhazia

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 242,800

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Freedom Rating: 4.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

During a tumultuous year, parties opposed to Abkhaz president Raul Khajimba coalesced in a new Bloc of Opposition Forces of Abkhazia. Its leading member party, Amsakhara, demanded Khajimba's resignation at a party congress in October 2015, saying he had failed to fulfill campaign promises.

In June, Russia delayed financial aid to Abkhazia, saying the funds were contingent on the ratification of a controversial section of a 2014 treaty that would establish a coordination center between Moscow and Abkhazia's interior ministries. The provision was heavily criticized domestically, with opponents claiming that its terms served to expand Russian influence in Abkhazia.

In 2015, officials began a process of issuing new Abkhaz passports, requiring residents to exchange existing documents for new ones. During this process, the passports of around 22,000 ethnic Georgians in the Gali region are expected to be invalidated.

At the end of 2015, only Russia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and the Pacific Island state of Nauru recognized Abkhazia's independence from Georgia.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 19 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12

Abkhazia's 1999 constitution established a presidential system, in which the president and vice president are elected for five-year terms. The parliament, or People's Assembly, consists of 35 members elected for five-year terms from single-seat constituencies. Under the constitution, only ethnic Abkhaz can be elected to the presidency. None of Abkhazia's elections have been recognized internationally.

The 2012 parliamentary elections marked a significant shift toward independents, who captured 28 of the 35 seats, compared with 4 for opposition parties and only 3 for the ruling United Abkhazia party. Six of the nine incumbents seeking reelection were defeated, including the outgoing parliamentary speaker. Amid a low 44 percent turnout, only 13 candidates won majorities in the first round, requiring runoff votes for the remaining 22 seats.

A snap presidential election was held in 2014, following the resignation of President Aleksandr Ankvab amid widespread public protests. The protests followed his refusal to meet the demands of the newly formed Coordinating Council—an amalgam of opposition parties and movements—that included the dismissal of Ankvab's cabinet and the redistribution of power from the office of the president to that of the prime minister.

Four candidates competed for the presidency. Khajimba, who had run in three previous presidential elections, won with 51 percent of the vote, followed by the former leader of the State Security Service, Aslan Bzhanias, with 36 percent. Former defense minister Mirab Kishmaria captured approximately 6 percent, and former interior minister Leonid Dzapshba won over 3 percent of the vote.

More than 20,000 Gali Georgians were disenfranchised before the election, when Abkhaz authorities removed their names from voter lists; the decision was partly driven by claims that the Gali Georgians' Abkhaz passports were illegal. The political status of this group had been a point of serious contention between Ankvab and the opposition, who claimed that ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia posed a security threat. Gali Georgians had been allowed to vote in previous elections.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 8 / 16

Political opposition groups in Abkhazia are active. In 2014, growing opposition cooperation culminated in the protest actions of the Coordinating Council, which drew together a broad range of opposition parties representing different political beliefs. The wave of protests organized by the group that year led to Ankvab's resignation and the subsequent presidential election.

A political standoff between Khajimba and opposition members emerged in early 2015, only months after his inauguration, leading to a significant reorganization of Abkhazia's political landscape. In January, the opposition party Amtsakhara, which had supported Ankvab, released a sharply worded statement criticizing Khajimba's record on implementing preelection promises. Then, in May, Amtsakhara adopted a resolution criticizing Khajimba on a number of counts, including economic and budgetary mismanagement, corruption, and ceding too much control to Moscow—mirroring the criticisms leveled against Ankvab by the Coordinating Council in 2014—and demanding the replacement of Khajimba's government with an opposition-led coalition government. In June, ostensibly in response to the opposition's demands, the Abkhaz parliament passed over 40 draft laws, which included provisions on reforming election laws as well as the judiciary, media, and banking system.

By mid-July, Amtsakhara had joined three other political groups to form the Bloc of Opposition Forces of Abkhazia. During a party meeting in October 2015, about 3,000 Amtsakhara members issued a vote of no confidence in Khajimba, and called on him to resign. In response, Khajimba pledged to remain in office until his term's end in 2019. He additionally established a consultative council open to all parties, but Amtsakhara and the other groups comprising the Bloc of Opposition Forces of Abkhazia refused to participate.

In 2015, Abkhazia began a process of issuing new Abkhaz passports, requiring residents to exchange existing documents for new ones. During this process, the passports of around 22,000 ethnic Georgians in the Gali region are expected to be declared invalid. According to a new provision, Gali Georgians holding dual citizenship with Georgia are only eligible to receive residence permits, effectively stripping them of Abkhaz citizenship. Under an Abkhaz law on foreign citizenship adopted in December 2015, individuals holding residence permits may not vote or own property.

C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12 (+ 1)

The ability of elected authorities to set and implement policies is limited by the influence of Moscow, which funds a significant portion of the state budget, has paid for construction and refurbishments of military and other infrastructure in Abkhazia, and in 2015 had several thousand troops permanently stationed in the territory. However, there has been

significant pushback against a 2014 Russian-Abkhaz treaty, provisions of which critics say threaten Abkhaz autonomy.

The treaty, signed in 2014 and ratified by Moscow in January 2015, stipulates the creation of a joint Russian-Abkhaz military force, increased Russian funding to regional military efforts, and the doubling of Russian subsidies to Abkhazia; its terms also state that Russia will respond to an attack on Abkhazia as an attack on itself. The 2014 treaty negotiations were met with contentious public debate in Abkhazia, and although several unpopular provisions were removed from the final draft, its signing was nevertheless condemned by members of the Abkhaz military and government, in addition to the Abkhaz opposition and civil society. Critics argued that the terms infringe on Abkhaz autonomy, a complaint Amsakhara cited as a precipator of its October 2015 call for Khajimba's resignation.

In June 2015, Russian officials announced that it would make the payment of pledged financial aid contingent on the ratification of a controversial section of the treaty that would establish a coordination center between Moscow and Abkhazia's interior ministries. The ultimatum was widely condemned in Abkhazia, and prompted concerns that Russian authorities ultimately sought to annex the region. Abkhaz lawmakers had not ratified the section of the treaty at the year's end, and Moscow had not released funds it attached to the ratification.

Corruption is believed to be extensive, and government officials are not required to provide declarations of income.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 23 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 8 / 16

Local broadcast media are largely controlled by the government, which operates the Abkhaz State Television and Radio Company (AGTRK). Abkhaz journalists and opposition have criticized Khajimba since 2014 for failing to reform AGTRK; critics argue among other things that it fails to air material that could be perceived as unflattering to the government. In 2015, about 1,200 people signed a petition calling for the resignation of AGTRK head Emma Khojava, which Khajimba rejected.

Major Russian television stations broadcast into Abkhazia. The print media are considered more influential, consisting of several weekly newspapers. The government publication *Respublika Abkhazii* competes with two main independent papers, *Chegemskaya Pravda* and *Novaya Gazeta*. The internet and social media platforms have become increasingly popular in recent years. Some legal restrictions apply to both traditional and online media, including criminal libel statutes.

Religious freedom in Abkhazia is affected by the political situation. In 2011, the Abkhaz Orthodox Church split into two factions; while both officially support autocephaly, or independence, for the Abkhaz church, the newer faction accused the established leadership of acquiescing to de facto control by the Russian Orthodox Church. Outside Abkhazia, the territory is still formally considered to be in the Georgian Orthodox Church's jurisdiction. Abkhazia's Muslims are allowed to practice freely, but some Muslim leaders have been attacked in the past. Jehovah's Witnesses were banned by a 1995 decree.

Armenian-language schools generally operate without interference, but Gali's schools are officially allowed to offer instruction only in Russian. Ethnic Georgian residents without Abkhaz passports are restricted from attending Sukhumi State University.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

Opposition and civil society groups mount regular protests. Although most nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) rely on funding from outside Abkhazia, the NGO sector exerts significant influence on government policies.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 16

The criminal justice system suffers from chronic problems, including limited defendant access to qualified legal counsel, violations of due process, and lengthy pretrial detentions. Local NGOs have petitioned for significant judicial reform. Prison facilities are reportedly insufficient.

In January 2015, five people, including a Russian border guard, were killed during a police response to the alleged kidnapping of a Gali resident.

Galien ethnic Georgian residents continue to suffer from widespread poverty and undefined legal status. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people do not enjoy comprehensive legal protections.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Travel and choice of residence are limited by the ongoing separatist dispute. Travel permits remain expensive and burdensome to obtain, and travel has become more difficult since Russian border guards closed the administrative line between Abkhazia and Georgia and took control of the sole official crossing point in 2012. About 90 percent of Abkhazia’s residents hold Russian passports, as Abkhaz travel documents are not internationally recognized.

Equality of opportunity and normal business activities are limited by corruption, criminal organizations, and economic reliance on Russia, which accounts for nearly all foreign investment. Foreigners are barred from buying Abkhaz property, and some ethnic Russians have reported that their homes have been confiscated.

A strong NGO sector has contributed to women’s involvement in business and civil society. However, Abkhaz women complain of being underrepresented in government positions. NGOs have expressed concern about human trafficking in Abkhazia.

Crimea

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 2,300,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rating	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

Russian forces continued to occupy the Crimean Peninsula in 2015, following an invasion of the Ukrainian territory in 2014 that led to its incorporation into the Russian Federation through an internationally criticized referendum. The United States, the European Union, and several allied countries renewed sanctions on key Russian and Crimean individuals and companies in 2015, and the international community widely maintained the view that the annexation constituted a violation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity. The occupation

government continued to limit the full range of political and civil rights for Crimea's residents, according to an assessment published by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in July. Since the Russian occupation, tens of thousands of people have left Crimea, with estimates ranging from 40,000 to 60,000. The results of a poll by the German firm GfK, published in February, showed that 82 percent of Crimean respondents supported the annexation, although strong pressures and restrictions on freedom of expression affect the reliability of such polls.

The occupation government showed signs of dysfunction and discord in 2015. Considerable delays marred the distribution of passports and the registration of businesses, and corruption remained a major problem. Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) launched corruption investigations into several prominent Crimean officials, and the region's local leadership claimed that the probes were motivated by Moscow's commercial and political interests. The Russian Ministry for Crimean Affairs, established in 2014 to facilitate the territory's integration, was abolished in July 2015, and its responsibilities were transferred to the Ministry of Economic Development.

The occupation authorities continued to harass members of Crimea's ethnic Tatar minority, who have faced political persecution and discrimination since the invasion. Tatar media outlets have been shuttered, and several private businesses owned by Crimean Tatars have been arbitrarily closed by officials or torched by unidentified assailants.

The international community has little access to Crimea, as the authorities have denied or limited travel for representatives of the OSCE, the United Nations, and the Council of Europe. Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko has vowed to return the peninsula to Ukrainian control, although he has not presented a clear plan to achieve this.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: – 1 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

Under the administrative system established by Russia, the Crimean Peninsula is divided into the Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol, a port of roughly 380,000 residents that had also been governed separately under Ukrainian control. Sevastopol's political institutions largely mirror those of Crimea proper in their structure and observance of democratic norms.

The head of the Republic of Crimea is elected by its legislature, the State Council of Crimea, for up to two consecutive five-year terms. Lawmakers choose the leader based on a list of nominees prepared by the Russian president. In October 2014, they unanimously elected Sergey Aksyonov as the head of the republic, and he simultaneously served as prime minister. Aksyonov had been the acting leader of Crimea since February 2014, when a group of armed men forced legislators to elect him prime minister at gunpoint. He had reputedly been involved in organized crime during the 1990s.

The State Council consists of 75 members elected for a term of five years. Two-thirds of the members are elected by party list and one-third in single-member districts. Legislative elections under the Russian-organized constitution took place in September 2014, on the same day as Russia's regional elections. All of the parties allowed to participate supported the annexation, pro-Ukraine parties were excluded, and the ethnic Tatar minority boycotted the voting. The ruling party in Russia, United Russia, took 70 seats, while the ultranationalist LDPR (formerly known as the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia) secured the remaining 5 seats. No other parties crossed the 5 percent vote threshold to enter the legislature. The elections received little international recognition.

Residents of Crimea were not permitted to take part in Ukrainian presidential and parliamentary elections held in May and October 2014, or the Ukrainian local elections in October 2015.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

The occupation authorities use intimidation and harassment to eliminate any public opposition to Russia's annexation of Crimea and to the current government. The FSB, the local police, and "self-defense" units made up of pro-Russian residents enforce this political order. Ukrainian political parties are not able to operate, and the Crimean Tatars—the only group that has continued to openly oppose the Russian occupation—have faced considerable political persecution. The headquarters of the Mejlis, the official but nongovernmental representative body of the Crimean Tatar people, was seized and closed by the authorities in 2014. The incumbent chairman of the body, Refat Chubarov, and Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev have been banned from the territory since 2014. Ahtem Ciygoz, a deputy chairman of the Mejlis, was arrested in January 2015 on suspicion of "organizing mass disorder" in relation to clashes that occurred between pro-Russian and Crimean Tatar demonstrators in Simferopol in 2014. Several other Tatar leaders were arrested on the same grounds in 2015.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

All major policy decisions are made in Moscow and executed by Russian president Vladimir Putin's representatives in Crimea or the local authorities, who are beholden to Moscow. Given the territory's relative poverty under Ukrainian rule and the collapse of its key tourism and agricultural sectors following the occupation, it now relies heavily on Russian subsidies. International sanctions, dependence on mainland Ukraine for water and electricity supplies, and the lack of a land connection to Russia all put the region under severe logistical stress. In November 2015, unidentified individuals cut lines for the supply of electricity from Ukraine to Crimea, causing extensive power outages. A combination of Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian activists initially blocked repair attempts.

Bureaucratic infighting, corruption scandals, and tensions between federal and local authorities interfered with governance in 2015, particularly as various Russian companies sought access to Crimea's assets. The FSB and Russia's Investigative Committee arrested several local authorities during the year in an ostensible campaign against corruption. The head of the local branch of Russia's Federal Tax Service, Nikolay Kochanov, was arrested in June for bribery. During a visit to the region in August, Putin noted that more than 60 officials had recently been dismissed for corruption. Aksyonov and other local leaders disputed the investigations, claiming that the FSB was using allegations of corruption to discredit Crimean authorities.

D. Discretionary Political Rights Question B: - 1 / 0

Russian and local pro-Russian officials' policies and actions in Crimea have led to an influx of 30,000 to 35,000 Russian troops and additional civilian personnel, an outflow of many ethnic Ukrainians, and the persecution of ethnic Tatars. The Russian occupation also represents a major setback to Tatars' long-term campaign to reestablish property and other rights that were lost in a Soviet-era mass deportation of the group.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 10 / 60 (- 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 3 / 16

Free speech is severely limited in Crimea. In addition to other restrictive Russian laws, an amendment to the Russian criminal code that took effect in 2014 banned public calls for action aimed at violating Russia's territorial integrity, meaning statements against the annexation, including in the media, can be punished with up to five years in prison.

The Russian telecommunications agency Roskomnadzor required all media outlets to seek registration under Russian regulations by April 2015. Before the annexation, there were approximately 3,000 outlets in Crimea. After the April deadline, Roskomnadzor reported that 232 outlets were registered and authorized to operate. The occupation authorities have essentially cut the territory off from access to Ukrainian television, with armed men seizing the transmission centers in 2014 and imposing Russian broadcasts. Independent and pro-Ukraine media no longer function in Crimea.

Media owned by the Crimean Tatars have come under particular scrutiny. Security forces raided the offices of the Tatar broadcaster ATR in January 2015, confiscating equipment, questioning staff, and temporarily shutting off transmissions. In March, Aksyonov proclaimed that outlets like ATR could not be allowed to operate “during wartime,” and ATR ended its broadcasts on March 31 after failing to obtain a license from Roskomnadzor. With assistance from the Ukrainian government and the Tatar community, the station moved its operations to Kyiv and resumed broadcasting in June.

Russia has also replaced Crimean internet service providers with Russian equivalents. The state-controlled Rostelecom began providing service to the peninsula in July 2014. Crimea’s internet service providers must operate under Russia’s draconian media laws, and independent websites have come under increasing pressure. In October 2015, three online outlets providing independent reporting on Crimea—the news portals Sobytiya Kryma (Events of Crimea) and Black Sea News and the website of the Center for Journalistic Investigations—received notice from Roskomnadzor that they were blocked in Crimea and Russia. The agency accused the outlets of publishing information that called for “mass disturbances, extremist activities, and participation in mass demonstrations.” After his report on human rights abuses in Crimea was published in March, Andriy Klymenko, cofounder of Black Sea News, was charged in absentia with “challenging the legitimacy of the annexation and threatening Russian sovereignty.”

The occupation authorities have forced religious organizations to reregister. At the time of annexation, there were approximately 1,400 registered religious groups in Crimea and 674 additional communities operating without registration. As of August 2015, there were only 53 locally registered religious organizations, in addition to a few groups registered through an alternative procedure in Moscow.

Schools must use the Russian state curriculum. By the beginning of the academic year in September 2015, instruction in the Ukrainian language had been almost completely eliminated. In December, a Ukrainian-language theater school for children closed amid pressure and harassment from local officials. Since the annexation, the authorities have also drastically reduced the availability of education in the Tatar language.

The FSB reportedly encourages residents to inform on individuals who express opposition to the annexation, and a climate of fear and intimidation seriously inhibits private discussion of political matters.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are restricted. The de facto authorities, including the FSB, repress all independent political and civic organizations. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are subject to harsh Russian laws that enable state interference and obstruct foreign funding.

Trade union rights are formally protected under Russian law, but limited in practice. As in both Ukraine and Russia, employers are often able to engage in antiunion discrimination and violate collective-bargaining rights. Pro-Russian authorities have threatened to nationalize property owned by labor unions in Crimea.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

Under Moscow's rule, Crimea is subject to the Russian judicial system, which lacks independence and is effectively dominated by the executive branch. Russian laws bar dual citizenship for public officials, and Crimean judges were required to receive Russian citizenship in order to return to their positions after the annexation. In 2015, approximately 500 judges were serving in Crimea. In July, the Russian Constitutional Court ruled that Russia could refuse to comply with European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decisions to avoid violating the federal constitution, and in December, Putin signed legislation allowing the Constitutional Court to review rulings issued by international bodies. Irregular, paramilitary "self-defense" groups operate in Crimea with impunity, and a permanent auxiliary police force was created out of such units in 2014.

In August 2015, a Russian military court sentenced Ukrainian film director Oleh Sentsov, who actively opposed Russia's annexation of Crimea, to 20 years in prison on terrorism charges. A codefendant, activist Oleksandr Kolchenko, was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Sentsov claimed that he was abused while in custody, and many international leaders and human rights organizations decried the trial as politically motivated, designating Sentsov and Kolchenko as political prisoners. Several other individuals are behind bars in Russia and Crimea on similar charges, and a number of cases were ongoing at year's end.

After the annexation, Crimea became subject to Russia's 2013 law banning dissemination of information that promotes "nontraditional sexual relationships," which tightly restricts the activities of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people and organizations.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16 (– 1)

The occupation authorities have sought to compel Crimea residents to accept Russian citizenship and surrender their Ukrainian passports. Those who fail to do so face the threat of dismissal from employment, loss of property rights, inability to travel to mainland Ukraine and elsewhere, and eventual deportation as foreigners.

Property rights are poorly protected, and the Russian invasion has resulted in a redistribution of assets in favor of Russian and pro-Russian entities. The occupation authorities have seized Ukrainian state property, and a law passed by the Crimean legislature in 2014 allows the government to condemn and purchase "strategic" assets. Several companies owned by Ukrainian individuals—including Krymenergo, Crimea's main electricity supplier, and Ukrtelecom, the region's largest landline telephone operator—were expropriated in January and February 2015. In February, Aksyonov announced that the nationalization process would conclude on March 1.

Same-sex marriage is not legal under Russian law. Government officials demonstrate little interest in or understanding of gender-equality issues. Domestic violence against women remains a serious problem in Crimea, and Russian laws do not offer strong protections. Discrimination on the basis of gender, physical appearance, and age are not uncommon. Women hold 14 of the 75 seats in the State Council of Crimea.

As in both Ukraine and Russia, migrant workers, women, and children are vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of forced labor or sexual exploitation.

Gaza Strip

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 1,869,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Israel or the West Bank, which are examined in separate reports. Prior to its 2011 edition, *Freedom in the World* featured one report for Israeli-occupied portions of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and another for Palestinian-administered portions.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	—	—	—	—	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, residents of the Gaza Strip were still struggling to recover from a 50-day conflict in July and August 2014 between Israeli forces and Hamas militants, dubbed Operation Protective Edge by the Israeli military. More than 2,100 Palestinians were killed, including an estimated 1,500 civilians. Sixty-six Israeli soldiers were also killed, as were seven civilians in Israel. Promises of aid failed to materialize in the form of quick reconstruction, and the economy remained on the verge of collapse.

In addition to the devastating effects of the war, Gaza residents continued to face serious restrictions on press freedom and other civil liberties throughout 2015, and there was no movement toward long-overdue elections during the year.

Negotiations aimed at repairing the rift between Hamas in Gaza and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank yielded an agreement on a new unity government in 2014, but it had yet to take effective control in Gaza or merge the two bureaucracies at the end of 2015.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 3 / 40 (–2)

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12 (–2)

Residents of Gaza were never granted citizenship by either Egypt or Israel, and are mostly citizens of the PA. The Hamas-controlled government in the territory has claimed to be the legitimate leadership of the PA. However, the authority—a quasi-sovereign entity created by the 1993 Oslo Accords—is effectively fractured, and Hamas officials implement PA law selectively.

The PA president is elected to four-year terms, and international observers judged the 2005 presidential election to be generally free and fair. However, PA president Mahmoud Abbas lost control over Gaza after the 2007 Fatah-Hamas schism, and Prime Minister Ismail Haniya of Hamas continued to lead the government in Gaza despite being formally dismissed by Abbas. Other Hamas ministers remained in their posts in Gaza after almost all Fatah-affiliated leaders were expelled or fled to the West Bank. When Abbas's elected term expired in 2009, Hamas argued that the PA Basic Law empowered the head of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)—Aziz Dweik of Hamas—to serve as acting president.

The unicameral, 132-seat PLC serves four-year terms. Voting in Gaza during the 2006 PLC elections was deemed largely fair by international observers. Hamas won 74 seats,

while Fatah took 45. The subsequent Hamas-Fatah rift, combined with Israel's detention of many (especially Hamas-affiliated) lawmakers, has prevented the PLC from meeting since 2007, and its term expired in 2010. No elections have been held since 2006; Gaza did not participate in 2012 local elections in the West Bank.

After lengthy negotiations, Hamas and Fatah agreed in April 2014 to form a national unity government that would organize presidential and parliamentary elections, and a new cabinet was announced in early June of that year. Following the summer 2014 conflict with Israel, another agreement in September laid out the terms by which the unity PA government—headed by Abbas and his prime minister, Rami Hamdallah—would merge the administrations and take control of Gaza and its border crossings. However, the plan had yet to be implemented at the end of 2015. Abbas made unilateral changes to the cabinet in July and December, which Hamas rejected, dealing another setback to the reconciliation effort. Hamas was still in de facto control of the Gaza Strip at the end of 2015, and there were no indications that elections would be held in the near future.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16

Since the 2007 schism, Gaza has effectively functioned as a one-party state, with Fatah largely suppressed and smaller factions tolerated to varying degrees. There is little to no public display of opposition party activities, and negligible party organizing. In January 2013, Hamas authorities allowed a mass rally by Fatah supporters in Gaza for the first time in several years. However, despite the unity government deal concluded in 2014, relations between the two factions and their supporters remained hostile in 2015.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

The expiration of the presidential and parliamentary terms in 2009 and 2010 has left Gaza's authorities with no electoral mandate, and the continued failure to set new election dates in 2015 further undermined their legitimacy. The ability of local officials to make and implement policy is limited by Israeli and Egyptian border controls, Israeli military actions, and the fact that the Palestinian territories remain politically divided.

Humanitarian organizations and donor countries allege that Hamas exerts almost total control over the distribution of funds and goods in Gaza, and allocates resources according to political criteria with little or no transparency, creating ample opportunity for corruption. The 2014 unity agreement raised hopes that donor funds would flow through an internationally recognized PA structure, but the pact had yet to be implemented at the end of 2015.

Partly as a result of the continued disunity, tens of thousands of public workers in Gaza remained without regular pay during the year, threatening basic government functions. Hamas has suffered in recent years from a decline in funding from foreign patrons as well as a crackdown on economically important smuggling routes from Egypt, while the Ramallah-based PA has been reluctant to recognize and pay civil servants hired by the Hamas government since 2007.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 9 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 4 / 16 (– 1)

The media are not free in Gaza. In 2008, Hamas replaced the PA Ministry of Information with a government Media Office and banned all journalists not accredited by it; authorities also closed down all media outlets not affiliated with Hamas. Some of those restrictions have since been eased. In 2014, Hamas lifted a ban on the distribution of three West Bank newspapers—*Al-Ayyam*, *Al-Quds*, and *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*—that are generally associated

with Fatah; it has also allowed the transmission of PA-controlled Palestine TV. Blogging and other online media activity have reportedly increased in recent years.

However, journalists, bloggers, and social-media users faced a rise in harassment and arrests by Hamas authorities in 2015. The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) reported 76 Palestinian violations of media freedom in Gaza, up from 24 in 2014, though that year had also featured a number of journalist deaths associated with Israel's Operation Protective Edge. According to the same report, Israeli authorities were responsible for 407 violations in both the West Bank and Gaza. The 2015 violations largely consisted of arrests, interrogations, physical assaults, and denial of coverage. One journalist, Kamal Mohamad Ali Abu Nahel of Palestine TV, died under suspicious circumstances.

Freedom of religion is restricted in Gaza. The PA Basic Law declares Islam to be the official religion of Palestine and states that "respect and sanctity of all other heavenly religions (Judaism and Christianity) shall be maintained." Hamas authorities have enforced traditional Sunni Islamic practices and conservative dress, and have attempted to exert political control over mosques.

Hamas has taken over the education system, aside from schools run by the United Nations. A teachers' strike in 2009 led to the replacement of many strikers with new, Hamas-allied teachers. Thousands of teachers are subject to irregular pay as part of the broader financial problems affecting civil servants. Hamas security officials have reportedly confiscated "immoral" books from (mostly university) bookstores in recent years. In 2013, Hamas segregated schools by gender for pupils above age nine. Israeli and Egyptian restrictions on trade and travel have limited access to educational materials, and university students have difficulty leaving the territory to study abroad. Gazans are now mostly absent from West Bank universities. Nearly 300 schools were damaged or destroyed during the 2014 conflict, and not all had been reconstructed by the beginning of the school year in August 2015.

Intimidation by Hamas militants and other armed groups has some effect on open and free private discussion in Gaza, and the authorities reportedly monitor social media for critical content.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Since 2008, Hamas has significantly restricted freedoms of assembly and association, with security forces violently dispersing unapproved public gatherings of Fatah and other groups. Israeli forces repeatedly fired on demonstrations near the border fence in 2015.

There is a broad range of Palestinian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civic groups, and Hamas operates a large social-services network. However, Hamas has restricted the activities of aid organizations that do not submit to its regulations, and many civic associations have been shut down for political reasons since the 2007 PA split. Aid and reconstruction efforts after the 2014 conflict, led by UN agencies, have been held up in part by disagreements over international and PA access to the territory and control over border crossings.

Independent labor unions in Gaza continue to function, and PA workers have staged strikes against Hamas-led management. However, the Fatah-aligned Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, the largest union body in the territories, has seen its operations greatly curtailed. Unresolved PA-Hamas staffing redundancies and compensation problems linked to the unity government plan led to further strikes and protests by civil servants during 2015.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

Laws governing Palestinians in the Gaza Strip derive from Ottoman, British Mandate, Jordanian, Egyptian, PA, and Sharia (Islamic law), as well as Israeli military orders. The judicial system is not independent, and Palestinian judges lack proper training and experience. Hamas security forces and militants continued to carry out arbitrary arrests and detentions during 2015, and torture of detainees and criminal suspects was reported. The Palestinian human rights ombudsman agency, the Independent Commission for Human Rights, receives complaints from Gaza residents but has limited access to Hamas detention centers and Gaza's central prison. Hamas authorities continued to issue death sentences in 2015, though unlike in previous years, there were no reported executions.

As of December 2015 there were 342 Palestinians from Gaza being held in Israeli prisons. Israeli troops killed a total of 23 Gaza residents in 2015, in many cases shooting protesters or stone throwers who approached the border fence, according to the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem. Some deaths also resulted from Israeli air strikes and exchanges of fire with Gaza-based militants, who launched rockets into Israel sporadically during the year.

Vulnerable groups including LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people reportedly face societal discrimination and official harassment in Gaza. Laws dating to the British Mandate authorize up to 10 years in prison for sexual acts between men.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 2 / 16

Freedom of movement in Gaza is severely restricted, and conditions worsened in 2014 as civilians were displaced within the territory by fighting between Israel and Hamas. Roughly 20,000 homes were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable, and nearly 500,000 people were displaced. Only a fraction of the damaged or destroyed homes had been reconstructed by the end of 2015. Unexploded ordnance also presented a lingering obstacle to internal movement.

Both Israel and Egypt exercised tight control over border areas, and Hamas imposed its own restrictions, for example by requiring exit permits for outgoing travelers. The Rafah border crossing with Egypt was opened only sporadically during 2015, contributing to a sharp drop in the number of Gazans entering and exiting the strip compared to the previous year. A limited number of people were allowed to cross into Israel for humanitarian or business reasons. As many as 50,000 Gaza residents lack identity documents that are recognized by Israel, severely curbing their ability to travel.

Under Hamas, personal status law is derived almost entirely from Sharia, which puts women at a stark disadvantage in matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and domestic abuse. Rape and domestic violence remain underreported and frequently go unpunished, as authorities are allegedly reluctant to pursue such cases. An increase in the number of so-called honor killings has been reported in recent years. The Hamas authorities have enforced restrictions on women's attire and behavior that is deemed immoral.

The blockade of Gaza's land borders and coastline has greatly reduced economic opportunity in the territory. A dense network of tunnels beneath Gaza's border with Egypt has facilitated much economic activity and is also used to transport weapons. However, the tunnels are sometimes bombed by Israel, and since the 2013 coup in Egypt, authorities there have made an aggressive effort to shut them down. In 2015 Egypt began flooding the tunnels with seawater, which also threatened drinking water and farmland.

Israel's security-related restrictions on the entry of construction materials through Gaza border crossings have hampered the economy and rebuilding after the 2014 conflict. Israeli

forces also prevented farming near the border fence and barred Gazan fishermen’s access to coastal waters beyond six miles from shore during 2015. Hamas has imposed price controls and other rules that may further dampen economic activity. The unemployment rate was among the highest in the world in 2015, reaching well over 40 percent before slipping to 38 percent in the fourth quarter. Youth unemployment remained above 60 percent.

Hong Kong

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 7,286,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 2

Freedom Rating: 3.5

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,2,PF	5,2,PF	5,2,PF	5,2,PF	5,2,PF	5,2,PF	5,2,PF	5,2,PF	5,2,PF	5,2,PF

INTRODUCTION

A political standoff over the degree of autonomy and democratic rule in Hong Kong remained unresolved in 2015. In a decision the previous year, the Standing Committee of China’s National People’s Congress (NPC) had authorized the self-governing territory to hold a direct popular vote for its chief executive for the first time in 2017, but an effectively pro-Beijing committee would control nominations for the contest. The proposal was met with strong civil society opposition in Hong Kong, leading to large student-led protests that continued for more than two months. Opponents were motivated in part by a growing sense that Hong Kong was losing its unique political and cultural character in the face of rising interference and migration from the mainland.

The Hong Kong government nevertheless presented an electoral reform bill in June 2015 that closely tracked Beijing’s directives, and the measure was rejected by the territory’s Legislative Council (Legco), leaving the existing system of indirect elections in place. Meanwhile, the authorities continued to deal with the aftermath of the 2014 protests. A number of student leaders were charged with offenses that carry a five-year prison sentence.

Increasing pressure on freedom of expression added to concerns about Hong Kong’s civil liberties, which remain far more expansive than on the mainland. In an unprecedented move in October, the University of Hong Kong’s governing council blocked the appointment of a prodemocracy academic as pro-vice-chancellor. Also that month and in December, five Hong Kong residents associated with a local book publisher went missing and were believed to be in the custody of mainland authorities at year’s end. The publisher had been known for producing books that were critical of Chinese leaders.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 16 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

Hong Kong’s 1997 Basic Law calls for the election of a chief executive and the unicameral Legco. Under electoral reforms adopted in 2010, the chief executive, who serves a five-year term, is chosen by a 1,200-member election committee. Some 200,000 “functional

constituency” voters—representatives of various elite business and social sectors, many with close ties to Beijing—elect 900 of the committee’s members, and the remaining 300 consist of Legco members, Hong Kong delegates to China’s NPC, religious representatives, and members of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), an advisory body to the NPC. Candidates for chief executive must be nominated by at least 150 members of the election committee.

Also under the 2010 reforms, which took effect in 2012, the number of seats in the Legco increased from 60 to 70. While 30 members are still elected by the functional constituency voters, 35—up from 30—are chosen through direct elections in five geographical constituencies. Hong Kong’s 18 district councils nominate candidates for the remaining 5 Legco seats from among themselves, and the nominees then face a full popular vote. All 70 members serve four-year terms.

In March 2012, the election committee chose Leung Chun-ying, a member of the CPPCC, as the new chief executive. He won 689 of the 1,050 valid votes cast following an unusually competitive race against two other candidates—Henry Tang, a high-ranking Hong Kong civil servant who took 285 votes, and Democratic Party leader Albert Ho, who secured 76. Officials from China’s Liaison Office reportedly lobbied members of the election committee to vote for Leung and pressured media outlets to remove critical coverage of him ahead of the balloting. Leung took office in July 2012.

During the Legco elections in September 2012, pro-Beijing parties won 43 seats, though only 17 of those were directly elected. Prodemocracy parties took 27 seats, which would enable them to block any proposed constitutional changes; amendments to the Basic Law require a two-thirds majority.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 7 / 16

Over a dozen parties in Hong Kong’s multiparty system are currently represented in the Legco. The main parties in the prodemocracy camp are the Civic Party, the Democratic Party, and the Labor Party. The largest pro-Beijing party is the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is not formally registered in Hong Kong but exercises considerable influence, both through its interactions with local government officials and through indirect economic and other pressure.

Hong Kong residents’ political choices are limited by the semidemocratic electoral system, which ensures the dominance of pro-Beijing interests. While the Basic Law states that universal suffrage is the “ultimate aim,” only incremental changes have been permitted to date.

Under the NPC Standing Committee’s 2014 decision on electoral reforms for 2017, the chief executive could be elected in a popular vote, with the two or three candidates selected by a nominating committee whose membership would mirror that of the current election committee. Moreover, whereas candidates currently need only 150 votes on the election committee to be nominated for a place in the body’s final vote, at least half the members of the new nominating committee would have to approve candidates for the popular vote.

The prodemocracy Legco members vowed to block any reform bill that did not include some form of public nomination. Despite that pledge and the massive protests—known as the Umbrella Movement—that followed the NPC’s ruling, in April 2015 the Hong Kong government introduced legislation that matched Beijing’s guidelines. As expected, the Legco rejected it in June, failing to muster the necessary two-thirds majority for passage. Because most progovernment lawmakers left the chamber in an attempt to prevent a quorum and delay the voting, the final count was 28 against and only 8 in favor.

While there are no legal restrictions on ethnic minorities participating in politics or running for office, the Legco had no ethnic minority members as of 2015. The Basic Law requires most top elected and appointed officials to be permanent Hong Kong residents with no right of abode in a foreign country, though up to 20 percent of Legco members can be permanent residents who are non-Chinese or have right of abode in a foreign country.

C. Functioning of Government: 6 / 12

Directly elected officials have little ability to set and implement government policies under the territory's political system, and mainland authorities are highly influential. The Basic Law restricts the Legco's lawmaking powers, prohibiting legislators from introducing bills that would affect Hong Kong's public spending, governmental operations, or political structure.

Hong Kong is generally regarded as having low rates of corruption. It was ranked 18 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. However, business interests are closely intertwined with the government.

In October 2015, former chief executive Donald Tsang was charged with misconduct. He had stepped down at the end of his term in 2012, and the Independent Commission Against Corruption had been investigating allegations that he accepted gifts from tycoons while in office. The charges were related to Tsang's failure to disclose that he leased a luxurious flat in Shenzhen from a Chinese businessman with substantial interests in Hong Kong. Tsang was the highest-ranking Hong Kong official ever to be arrested. His deputy, Rafael Hui, was sentenced in December 2014 to seven and a half years in prison for his role in a massive bribery scheme. Billionaire property developer Thomas Kwok was sentenced to five years in prison in the same case. Appeals were pending at the end of 2015.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 47 / 60 (-2)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16 (-1)

The Basic Law upholds freedoms of speech, press, and publication. Residents have access to dozens of daily newspapers, international radio broadcasts, and satellite television. Foreign media operate without interference. Mainland China's internet censorship regime does not apply in Hong Kong, and residents enjoy unrestricted access to a wide range of news sites. However, in recent years the Hong Kong and Chinese governments, as well as businesses that have close ties with Beijing, have increased political and economic pressure on media independence, and physical attacks against journalists are a growing problem.

In December 2015, mainland e-commerce giant Alibaba acquired the *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong's leading English-language newspaper. Although the paper had faced accusations of self-censorship and pro-Beijing bias under its previous owner, its purchase by a company with strong ties to the Chinese central government stoked fears of a further reduction in its editorial independence.

The media company Next Media and its founder, Jimmy Lai, have been subject to intimidation for their support of Hong Kong's prodemocracy movement. In January, Next Media's headquarters and Lai's home were targeted in firebomb attacks, and a large quantity of the company's *Apple Daily* newspapers were stolen from a vendor.

In August, two men were sentenced to 19 years in prison for attacking and nearly killing former *Ming Pao* newspaper editor Kevin Lau in early 2014, but they refused to disclose who had ordered the attack. Lau had been known for overseeing investigations into local officials and politically connected mainlanders.

The authorities arrested at least nine people for their online activities between June 2014 and June 2015, according to a report produced by the Journalism and Media Studies Centre at the University of Hong Kong. Most were accused of inciting violence or illegal protest actions on social media.

In the year's most dramatic media freedom development, five Hong Kong residents associated with a Hong Kong publishing house and bookstore went missing between October and December and were believed to be in the custody of mainland authorities at year's end. The publisher had released a number of books that were critical of the Chinese leadership. One of the men disappeared while in Thailand, three were last seen in mainland China, and the fifth was thought to have been abducted in Hong Kong, raising fears that Chinese authorities no longer respected the territory's legal autonomy. Moreover, two of the men held citizenship in European countries.

Religious freedom is generally respected in Hong Kong. Adherents of the Falun Gong spiritual movement, which is persecuted in mainland China, are free to practice in public. However, in recent years they have frequently been confronted and harassed by members of the Hong Kong Youth Care Association (HKYCA), which has ties to the CCP.

University professors can generally write and lecture freely, and political debate on campuses is lively. However, a series of incidents in 2015 stoked concerns that Beijing is putting greater pressure on Hong Kong's academic sphere. In April, City University of Hong Kong abruptly closed its creative writing program, whose students had published a number of works that were supportive of the Umbrella Movement in 2014. In an unprecedented move in September, the governing council of the University of Hong Kong rejected a nominee for the post of pro-vice-chancellor, Johannes Chan, who had been unanimously approved by the search committee. The majority of the council members are neither students nor university employees; six are appointed directly by the Hong Kong chief executive. Chan's supporters said that he had been rejected because his background as a human rights lawyer and prodemocracy scholar made him unacceptable to Beijing. In December, Chief Executive Leung appointed a pro-Beijing scholar and close ally, Arthur Li, as chairman of the university's governing council.

Private discussion is open and free in Hong Kong, though mainland security agencies are suspected of monitoring the communications of prodemocracy activists.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12

The Basic Law guarantees freedoms of assembly and association. The Public Order Ordinance requires organizers to give police seven days' notice before protests and to obtain official assent, which is rarely denied.

The 2014 Umbrella Movement protests against Beijing's electoral reform plan drew more than 100,000 people at their peak, and featured long-term encampments that paralyzed key commercial and government districts. Police made only sporadic and partial attempts to break up the camps during most of the protest period. Nevertheless, their increased use of baton charges, pepper spray, and arrests to clear the last groups of protesters late in the year was seen as part of a recent trend of eroding respect for freedom of assembly. The encampments also faced assaults by counterdemonstrators, many of whom were later found to have links with criminal gangs. Such developments have helped to fuel radicalization among some in the prodemocracy and localist movements.

Most of the hundreds of people arrested during the Umbrella Movement were quickly released, and only about 160 had been charged by September 2015, with alleged offenses including unlawful assembly and assaulting police. Several civilians and police officers

have also been charged for assaulting protesters. In August, authorities announced charges against student leaders Joshua Wong, Nathan Law, and Alex Chow for unlawful assembly and other offenses. Their trials were pending at year's end.

Separately in 2015, annual mass demonstrations on June 4 and July 1, marking the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown and the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China, drew tens of thousands of people and proceeded without incident.

Hong Kong hosts a vibrant and largely unfettered nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector. Trade unions are independent, but collective-bargaining rights are not recognized, protections against antiunion discrimination are weak, and there are few regulations on working hours.

F. Rule of Law: 14 / 16 (– 1)

The judiciary is independent, and the trial process is generally fair. The NPC reserves the right to make final interpretations of the Basic Law, effectively limiting the power of Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal. A white paper issued by the Chinese government in June 2014 declared that for Hong Kong officials, including judges, "loving the country is the basic political requirement," which many jurists saw as a demand for loyalty to Beijing and a threat to the territory's rule of law and judicial impartiality.

Police are forbidden by law to employ torture and other forms of abuse. They generally respect this ban in practice, and complaints of abuse are investigated. Arbitrary arrest and detention are illegal; detained suspects must be charged within 48 hours or released. Prison conditions largely meet international standards.

Citizens are generally treated equally under the law, though South Asian minorities face language barriers and de facto discrimination in education and employment. Antidiscrimination laws do not specifically protect LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people.

There were an estimated 11,500 refugees in Hong Kong as of 2015, most of whom came from South or Southeast Asia. While the government does not accept them for settlement, it does offer protection from refoulement, and those deemed eligible can be referred to UN officials for third-country resettlement. However, under a unified screening system launched in 2014, fewer than 20 of about 5,400 people screened have had their claims substantiated, raising serious doubts about the fairness of the process. While awaiting adjudication of their cases, asylum seekers are not permitted to work and receive only small food and housing allowances, forcing many to live in precarious and impoverished conditions.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 13 / 16

Hong Kong residents generally enjoy freedom of movement, though authorities periodically deny entry to visiting political activists and Falun Gong practitioners, raising suspicions of a Beijing-imposed blacklist. While property rights are largely respected, collusion among powerful businessmen with political connections is perceived as an impediment to fair economic competition. A 2012 Competition Ordinance took full effect in December 2015, empowering a commission to enforce compliance.

After many mainland women came to Hong Kong to give birth in order to access the welfare system or skirt China's controls on family size, the territory in 2013 barred those without Hong Kong spouses from delivering in its hospitals, with violations punishable by fines or jail time. Pregnant mainlanders can also be denied entry if they lack an appointment at a Hong Kong hospital or proof of another purpose for their visit.

Women in Hong Kong are protected by law from discrimination and abuse, and they are entitled to equal access to schooling and to property in divorce settlements. However,

they continue to face de facto inequality in employment opportunities, salary, inheritance, and welfare. Only 11 of the 70 Legco members are women, and there are no women on the Court of Final Appeal.

Despite government efforts, Hong Kong remains a destination and transit point for human trafficking linked to sexual exploitation and forced labor. Hong Kong’s roughly 330,000 foreign household workers, primarily from Indonesia and the Philippines, are vulnerable to abuse. Since foreign workers face deportation if dismissed, many are reluctant to bring complaints against employers. In addition, household workers are exempt from the territory’s hourly minimum-wage law; the government instead sets minimum monthly wages and food allowances that are far below the hourly rate. Foreign household workers are often required by their recruitment agencies to pay exorbitant fees.

Indian Kashmir

Political Rights Rating: 4

Population: 12,541,300

Civil Liberties Rating: 4

Freedom Rating: 4.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,5,PF	5,4,PF	5,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,5,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	4,4,PF

INTRODUCTION

Negotiations between India and Pakistan over the divided region of Kashmir were called off in August 2015 following news of an official meeting between Pakistani envoys and Kashmiri separatist leaders. No plans to resume talks were set. The year’s stalemate came after a negative turn in India-Pakistan relations that included Pakistani shelling across the Line of Control (LoC) in the fall of 2014. Tensions on the de facto border continued in 2015, though cease-fire violations dropped off in late October after another spate of shelling. Heightened security measures reportedly reduced the infiltration of fighters from the Pakistani side, leading to fresh concerns about militant recruitment from within the Indian-controlled Kashmir Valley.

Elections for the state assembly of Jammu and Kashmir in November and December 2014 gave no single party a majority. The People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) consequently formed a coalition government, and the PDP’s Mufti Mohammad Sayeed was sworn in as chief minister in March 2015.

Violence surrounding a September court order to enforce a long-dormant ban on the slaughter of cows and sale of beef included the mob killing of a Muslim truck driver in October. The court order was set aside by a full panel of the state’s High Court later that month, after India’s Supreme Court asked it to resolve conflicting rulings by the state’s courts. Opposition politicians proposed amendments to the penal code that would decriminalize beef in the state, but the leadership adjourned the legislative session before taking them up.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 22 / 40**A. Electoral Process: 9 / 12**

India has never held a referendum allowing Kashmiri self-determination as called for in a 1948 UN resolution. However, Jammu and Kashmir enjoys substantial autonomy under Article 370 of India's constitution. All laws passed by the Indian parliament, except those related to defense, foreign affairs, and financial matters, require the assent of the Kashmiri legislature to come into force in the state. Like other Indian states, it has an elected bicameral legislature and a chief minister entrusted with executive power. An appointed governor serves as symbolic head of state. Members of the 87-seat lower house, or Legislative Assembly, are directly elected for six-year terms; the governor can nominate two additional members to ensure representation for women. The 36-seat upper house, the Legislative Council, has 28 members elected indirectly by the assembly and various local councils, and 8 members nominated by the governor.

Elections for national parliamentary seats and the state assembly in 2014 were broadly free and fair, with reduced levels of voter intimidation, harassment, and violence compared with past elections. However, in the April national elections, turnout was less than 40 percent in all districts in the Kashmir Valley due in part to threats of poll violence; 4,306 of 4,773 polling stations throughout the state were declared sensitive prior to the elections, meaning they received tighter security measures. The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), the incumbent party at the state level, lost its three seats in the state's six-member delegation to India's lower house. The Hindu nationalist BJP won three after winning none in 2009, and the PDP also won three. The first stage of voting on April 24 was marked by large youth protests and a partial boycott. At least 600 people, mainly youths, were preventively detained prior to the second stage of voting on April 30.

The state assembly elections were held in November and December. Unusually high turnout was attributed in part to anti-BJP mobilization after the party took power at the national level in April. No party won an absolute majority. The most successful parties were the PDP and BJP, with 28 and 25 seats, respectively. The Election Commission and security forces were praised for their handling of the process. The PDP formed a coalition government with the BJP that took office in March 2015.

Panchayat (local council) elections were held across Jammu and Kashmir in 2011 for the first time since 2001, and were described as the first truly open local elections since 1978. Although separatist groups urged citizens to boycott the polls, turnout was reported at about 80 percent. More than 700 panchayat leaders resigned in 2012, facing death threats after several were assassinated. Municipal elections originally slated for 2011 have been repeatedly delayed. The next round of panchayat elections was expected to take place in 2016.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 9 / 16

The state is governed under a multiparty system, but normal party politics and electoral activities are often disrupted by militant violence, intimidation, and separatist boycotts. For more than a decade, state-level power has rotated between the two largest Kashmiri parties, the PDP and the JKNC. The ruling coalition formed by the PDP and BJP in early 2015 marked the first time that the Hindu nationalist BJP entered government in this Muslim-majority state. Observers questioned the BJP's ability to build trust with Kashmiri Muslims. The potential for confrontation was underscored during the beef ban controversy in the fall, in which the BJP speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Kavinder Gupta, adjourned the body without taking up proposed bills that would decriminalize the slaughter of cows and sale of beef.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12

Corruption in Jammu and Kashmir remains widespread and among the worst in India, though the government has taken some steps to combat it. The 2011 Jammu and Kashmir State Vigilance Commission Act established an anticorruption commission with the power to investigate alleged offenses under the state's 2006 Prevention of Corruption Act. Its first commissioners were appointed in 2013, and it has processed more than a thousand complaints, in some cases filing bribery charges against public officials.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 29 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

The 1971 Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act gives district magistrates the authority to censor publications in certain circumstances but is rarely invoked. Conditions have improved since protest-related violence in 2010 led some newspapers to suspend circulation and related curfews inhibited journalists. Foreign journalists are generally able to travel freely, meet with separatist leaders, and file reports on a range of issues, including government abuses.

Print media thrive in Jammu and Kashmir, and online media have proliferated, providing new platforms for public discussion. There are more than 1,000 registered publications in the state. However, threats of government reprisal, including the detention of journalists under the Public Safety Act and the withdrawal of official advertising from publications, continue to intimidate the media. Journalists also face threats from militant groups, and authorities sometimes impose internet blackouts in an attempt to prevent unrest. During the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha in September 2015, when communal tensions were high following the court order to enforce a ban on the sale of beef, the government suspended internet service for 80 hours.

Freedom of worship is generally respected by the authorities. However, communal violence between Muslims and Hindus periodically flares up, and many have been injured and killed as a result. After the October 2015 mob killing of a Muslim truck driver, apparently due to a rumor that he was transporting beef, a number of protests ensued, and some demonstrators clashed with police. In addition, a Muslim state legislator was assaulted by BJP colleagues and later by Hindu activists after he served beef at a private party to protest the ban.

Academic freedom is circumscribed. Authorities monitor the research produced at Kashmiri universities, and a combination of official and self-censorship discourages students and professors from pursuing sensitive topics of inquiry. Private discussion is somewhat more free, though fear of reprisal by government or militant forces can serve as a deterrent to uninhibited speech.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 6 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are often restricted. Although local and national civil rights groups are permitted to operate, they are sometimes harassed by security forces. The separatist All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) is allowed to function, but its leaders are frequently subjected to short-term preventive detention, and its requests for permits for public gatherings are often denied. Separatist leaders are frequently arrested prior to planned demonstrations. After separatist groups called for protests against the September beef-ban order, a number of leading figures were placed under house arrest. Nevertheless, businesses and other services were temporarily shut down in much of the Kashmir Valley as part of the protests, and young demonstrators clashed with police in some locations.

Although workers have the right to form unions and engage in collective bargaining under Indian law, protection of labor union rights in Kashmir is generally poor.

F. Rule of Law: 6 / 16

Courts are politicized and act as an extension of Indian executive and military authority. The courts in Jammu and Kashmir, already facing large backlogs of cases, are further hampered by intermittent lawyers' strikes. The government and security forces frequently disregard court orders, leading to low levels of public trust in the judiciary.

Broadly written legislation such as the unpopular Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and the Disturbed Areas Act allow security forces to search homes and arrest suspects without a warrant, shoot suspects on sight, and destroy buildings believed to house militants or arms. Under the AFSPA, prosecutions of security personnel cannot proceed without the approval of the central government, which is rarely granted. The state's Public Security Act allows detention without charge or trial for up to two years, though 2012 amendments barred the detention of minors under the law. Indian security personnel based in the state have continued to carry out arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, forced disappearances, and custodial killings of suspected militants and their alleged civilian sympathizers. Newly elected chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed said in March 2015 that the AFSPA would eventually be revoked in Jammu and Kashmir, but the BJP-PDP government did not pursue the matter during the year.

Militant groups based in Pakistan have killed pro-India politicians, public employees, suspected informers, members of rival factions, soldiers, and civilians. The militants also engage in kidnapping, extortion, and other forms of intimidation in Jammu and Kashmir. However, overall violence in the state has declined significantly in the past decade. A total of 147 civilians, security personnel, and militants were killed in militant-related violence in 2015, down from 193 deaths in 2014 and more than 1,000 in 2006.

A pattern of violence targeting Pandits, or Kashmiri Hindus, has forced several hundred thousand Hindus to flee their homes in the region over the years. Many continue to reside in refugee camps near Jammu. Other religious and ethnic minorities, such as Sikhs and Gurjars, have been targeted in the past, but such reports have dissipated in recent years. Local Sikh organizations expressed solidarity with the aspirations of the state's Muslim majority in the 2014 state assembly elections.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 8 / 16

Freedom of movement is curtailed by both state and federal authorities. The Indian government restricts the travel of foreigners and other Indian citizens to sensitive areas within Jammu and Kashmir, and internal movement is disrupted by roadblocks, checkpoints, and periodic protest-related shutdowns or curfews. Kashmiri residents face delays of up to two years to obtain and renew passports due to heightened levels of scrutiny. Property rights are undermined by displacement and military activity related to the conflict, and the regulatory environment constrains the establishment and operation of new businesses.

Women face some societal discrimination as well as domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Female civilians continue to be subjected to harassment, intimidation, and violent attacks, including rape and murder, at the hands of both the security forces and militant groups. In 2014, a telephone service was established in the state to provide support free of charge to women who have been victims of harassment or abuse. Women are underrepresented in government, though the chief minister's daughter, Mehbooba Mufti Sayeed, is president of the PDP and a member of the Indian parliament.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Political Rights Rating: 5

Population: 146,600

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Freedom Rating: 5.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF	5,5,PF

INTRODUCTION

In May 2015, Nagorno-Karabakh held parliamentary elections, with observers noting significant improvements in comparison with the 2010 polls—in particular, fairer conduct and the participation of a broader array of parties. Unlike in 2010, two opposition groups, Movement 88 and National Revival, gained seats in the legislature.

Cross-border clashes between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan continued during the year, with a higher number of violent incidents than in past years. Reports that both sides used mortars and other heavy weaponry drew international condemnation and concern about the state of the 1994 cease-fire agreement. Negotiation efforts, led by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, continued during the year; the body is co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 15 / 40 (+3)

A. Electoral Process: 6 / 12 (+2)

Nagorno-Karabakh has enjoyed de facto independence from Azerbaijan since 1994 and retains close political, economic, and military ties with Armenia. None of Karabakh’s elections have been considered valid by the international community, which does not recognize the territory’s independence.

The president is directly elected for up to two five-year terms and appoints the prime minister. Of the unicameral National Assembly’s 33 members, 11 are elected through single-mandate constituencies and 22 by party list.

President Bako Sahakyan, the incumbent since 2007, was reelected in 2012 with 66.7 percent of the vote. His main opponent, former deputy defense minister Vitaly Balasanyan, received 32.5 percent. The two main candidates had nearly identical foreign-policy goals—primarily, achieving international recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh’s independence—though Balasanyan also focused on social justice and accused the government of tolerating corruption and fiscal mismanagement. Balasanyan claimed that administrative resources were misused to aid Sahakyan during the campaign.

The most recent parliamentary elections were held in May 2015. Seven parties participated in the vote, and five passed the threshold to gain seats. Prime Minister Arayik Harutyunyan’s Free Motherland (Azat Hayrenik) party maintained its dominant position in the legislature, winning 15 seats. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF)–Dashnaktsutyun and the Democratic Party of Artsakh (AZhK), part of Free Motherland’s ruling coalition, gained seven and six seats, respectively. Two opposition parties gained representation—Movement 88 gained three seats, while National Revival captured one. An independent candidate won the remaining seat.

International observers reported that the elections were a notable improvement over the 2010 vote, which was marred by the absence of opposition candidates and the use of state resources to support progovernment candidates. The vote was conducted in a timely and peaceful manner, and political parties only reported minor intimidation during the campaign process.

Amendments passed in 2014 led to some improvements to the electoral code. The number of parliamentary seats under the proportional system increased, and the electoral threshold decreased to 5 percent for political parties and 7 percent for electoral coalitions. The changes also required a minimum 22 percent female representation on party lists, although implementation remained unclear. The amendments were considered a positive step in providing a legal framework for broader political participation.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 6 / 16 (+ 1)

The three main political parties are Free Motherland and its allies, AZhK and ARF–Dashnaksutyun. Given the territory’s uncertain status, dissent and opposition have generally been regarded as signs of disloyalty and a security risk. As a consequence, opposition groups have often become inactive or been absorbed into the government; no true opposition candidates participated in the 2010 legislative elections. The May 2015 elections, however, featured genuine opposition participation, with two parties—Movement 88 and National Revival—gaining a total of four seats in the new legislature.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

The ability of Karabakh officials to set and implement government policies is limited in practice by security threats along the cease-fire line, warnings from Baku, and the dominant role played by the Armenian government and other regional actors. Spikes in the level of cross-border violence in 2015, in addition to escalated verbal hostility from Baku, strained the functioning of domestic governance. Though cease-fire violations have become increasingly common in recent years, the scale of violence in 2015 was among the highest recorded since 1994, when the cease-fire agreement was signed.

Nagorno-Karabakh continues to suffer from significant corruption, particularly in the construction industry; officials practice favoritism in filling civil service positions.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 18 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 6 / 16

The territory officially remains under martial law, which imposes restrictions on civil liberties, including on media freedom. However, the authorities maintain that martial law provisions have not been enforced since 1995, a year after the cease-fire agreement with Azerbaijan was signed.

The government controls many of Nagorno-Karabakh’s media outlets, and the public television and radio stations have no local competition. Most journalists practice self-censorship, particularly on subjects related to the peace process. The internet penetration rate is low but expanding, and social media platforms are increasingly used by the public and by government officials for the dissemination and discussion of news.

The Voice of Talyshistan, a radio station launched in 2013 by the Yerevan State University and an Armenian nongovernmental organization (NGO), continued to broadcast in 2015. The station provides programming in Talysh, an Iranian language, from Nagorno-Karabakh into southeastern Azerbaijan, home to the country’s minority Talysh population.

Some Azerbaijani officials have called the station a “provocation” meant to promote anti-Azerbaijani sentiments.

Most residents of Karabakh belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, and the religious freedom of other groups is limited. A 2009 law banned religious activity by unregistered groups and proselytism by minority faiths, and made it more difficult for minority groups to register. Although at least three minority groups subsequently gained legal status, officials reportedly denied registration to a Protestant group and the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 3 / 12

Freedom of assembly is formally restricted under martial law provisions. Freedom of association is also limited, but trade unions are allowed to organize. The few NGOs that are active in the territory suffer from poor funding and competition from government-organized groups.

In 2014, more than 150 Karabakh residents held a demonstration outside of President Sahakyan’s residence during a visit by James Warlick, the U.S. co-chair of the Minsk Group. The demonstrators voiced opposition to Warlick’s recent proposal on a conflict settlement for Karabakh that, among other things, suggested returning some disputed territory to Azerbaijan. Also in 2014, residents of Stepanakert organized protests against a planned increase in public transportation fares, submitting a formal appeal to the mayor. Both local authorities and Prime Minister Harutyunyan held meetings with the protesters, and although the fare increase was not reversed, the Karabakh government announced plans to subsidize transportation costs for students and low-income residents.

In January 2015, Karabakh police assaulted several dozen members of an Armenian opposition group who were trying to cross into the territory. The group, the Founding Parliament, had reportedly planned a rally in Karabakh in order to publicize its antigovernment efforts in Armenia. Karabakh officials justified the incident by alleging that the group members had provoked the police, and claiming that the planned rally would have disturbed public order.

F. Rule of Law: 4 / 12

The judiciary is not independent in practice, and the courts are influenced by the executive branch as well as by powerful political, economic, and criminal groups.

A 2011 amnesty law released or commuted the sentences of up to 20 percent of the prison population. The law applied to inmates who had fought in the war with Azerbaijan or had family killed in the conflict. The amnesty also stipulated the closure of at least 60 percent of pending criminal cases and the release of suspects from pretrial detention.

The security of the population is affected by regular incidents of violence along the cease-fire line. Hundreds or thousands of cease-fire violations are reported each month, and soldiers as well as civilians on both sides are killed or injured each year. While conflicting reports of casualties given by Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Karabakh authorities remain difficult to reconcile, independent reports in 2015 widely indicated that the year was one of the deadliest on record since the 1994 cease-fire agreement, with the scale of cross-border violence between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan reaching new heights. The Minsk Group confirmed that both sides used mortars and other heavy weapons around civilian areas for the first time since the end of the war. In December, Azerbaijani forces used tanks to shell across the border.

In December, the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan held a summit in Switzerland to discuss the conflict. Although they reaffirmed their commitment to the Minsk Group

structure and to negotiations, no significant progress was made, and international observers remained concerned about the continuation or intensification of cross-border violence.

The Azerbaijani government has repeatedly threatened to consider a military solution to the conflict, and Baku's rapid military buildup, buoyed by oil revenue, has contributed to escalating tensions in recent years. Reports that Russia, a Minsk Group co-chair, continues to sell arms to Armenia and Azerbaijan have also led to unease. Moscow also provides military support to Armenia, where it maintains a base. In July, Russian officials extended a \$200 loan to Armenia for the modernization of its military.

In March 2015, a Karabakh appeals court upheld the 2014 convictions of two Azerbaijani citizens reportedly involved in the murder of a Karabakh civilian youth, with charges including illegal border crossing, kidnapping, and weapons possession. One of the defendants had received a life sentence, while the other had been sentenced to 22 years in prison. Azerbaijani authorities denounced the trial, requesting that the men be released. Karabakh declined to treat the men as prisoners of war on the grounds that their actions had targeted a civilian.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

The freedom of movement within Nagorno-Karabakh and travel around the territory are hindered by the larger geopolitical situation, the instability of the cease-fire, and the presence of land mines, which cause deaths and injuries each year. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, at least 50,000 antipersonnel mines were laid during the war. In many cases, records of minefield locations were lost or never created. In 2015, efforts to clear mines continued, led largely by the HALO Trust, an international NGO.

Many Azeris who fled the territory during the separatist conflict continue to live in poor conditions in Azerbaijan, despite Baku's increased efforts to provide new housing in recent years. In June 2015, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled in favor of Karabakh residents displaced as a result of the conflict. Ruling in two separate cases, the ECHR found that Armenia and Azerbaijan must create mechanisms for compensating displaced citizens and restoring their property rights, setting a precedent that could affect hundreds of similar cases.

Since 2012, more than 100 ethnic Armenians from Syria have settled in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Karabakh government has provided incentives—including housing and aid—for them to stay in the territory.

A small group of powerful elites control major industries and economic activity, limiting opportunities for most residents. However, the government has instituted a number of economic rehabilitation projects in recent years.

Men and women have equal legal status, though women are underrepresented in the public and private sectors and remain subject to discrimination. The 2014 electoral code amendments included a gender quota for party lists, but only five women captured seats in the 2015 parliamentary elections. Women are not subject to military conscription. The government administers material incentives to encourage couples to have children, with the goal of repopulating the territory. Couples receive several hundred dollars when they marry and additional funds the birth of each child.

Northern Cyprus

Political Rights: 2

Population: 314,000

Civil Liberties: 2

Freedom Rating: 2.0

Freedom Status: Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F	2,2,F

INTRODUCTION

In April 2015, Mustafa Akıncı was elected president of the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), defeating incumbent Derviş Eroğlu with over 60 percent of the vote. Akıncı campaigned as the peace candidate, pledging to make progress in reunification talks with the Republic of Cyprus—the internationally recognized government that controls the southern, Greek-speaking portion of the island. UN-brokered negotiations had stalled in 2014, and Akıncı’s surprise victory was taken as a sign that TRNC voters desired both reconciliation with the Greek Cypriots and an end to their own isolation. The TRNC is recognized only by Turkey, and Turkish influence is a source of unease for many in Northern Cyprus.

In May, Akıncı met with Nicos Anastasiades, his Greek Cypriot counterpart, who had openly welcomed Akıncı’s election. The two leaders pledged to meet regularly, and they agreed that reunification should occur through the creation of a two-state federation. They endorsed a five-step plan toward that goal, including the establishment of connections between the two power grids and the opening of more crossing points along the UN buffer zone that divides the island. Also in May, the TRNC unilaterally removed a visa requirement for visitors from the Republic of Cyprus, and by September the two sides were working on establishing a new property court. Talks continued through the end of the year, with both sides expressing hope that a reunification deal could be put to a referendum as early as 2016. However, difficult issues, including power sharing, territorial adjustments, and the fate of Turkish settlers and troops in the TRNC, must be resolved.

Akıncı’s election separately sparked a domestic political shake-up. The failure of Sibel Siber, the candidate of the governing Republican Turkish Party (CTP), to advance to the presidential runoff prompted the CTP to elect new leaders at a party congress in June, which in turn led Ömer Kalyoncu of the CTP to replace outgoing party leader Özkan Yorgancıoğlu as prime minister. Former president Mehmet Ali Talat became the CTP’s new leader.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 32 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 11 / 12

The president, who serves as head of state and represents the TRNC internationally, is popularly elected to five-year terms. In April 2015, seven candidates vied for the presidency. None won a majority, necessitating a runoff between the top two candidates. Akıncı, backed by the social democratic Communal Democracy Party (TDP), won just over 60 percent of the runoff vote, defeating incumbent president Eroğlu, who was supported by the National Unity Party (UBP) and had led the first-round voting with 28 percent.

For elections to the 50-seat Assembly of the Republic, the TRNC employs a proportional representation system with a 5 percent vote threshold for parties to win representation. The center-left CTP, which had been the main opposition party, led the 2013 elections with 21 seats. The nationalist-oriented UBP placed second with 14, followed by the center-right Democratic Party (DP) with 12 and the TDP with 3. The CTP formed a coalition government with the DP. After the CTP leadership changes in June 2015, however, the UBP replaced the DP as the junior coalition partner.

The Supreme Election Committee is an independent body, and elections in the TRNC are generally considered free and fair. However, in 2014 some accused it of not ensuring the neutrality of the assembly speaker's office in a constitutional referendum held that year.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 12 / 16

Turkish Cypriots are free to organize political parties, and elections are competitive. Opposition parties and candidates have prevailed in recent elections, leading to rotations of power. A law passed in October 2015 limits the powers of lawmakers who leave their party and stipulates that parties receiving at least 3 percent of the vote may obtain state funding, among other provisions.

There is a widespread perception that Turkey wields most political power in Northern Cyprus. The TRNC relies heavily on Turkey for security and economic support, and Turkey has applied pressure on TRNC governments to adhere to economic protocols and austerity measures. Transitional Article 10 of the constitution grants the Turkish military control over the TRNC's security and police forces. Efforts to change this provision as part of the 2014 constitutional reform package failed to win parliamentary support. Upon his election as president in 2015, Akıncı declared that there should be a more equal and fraternal relationship between Turkey and the TRNC, instead of one dominated by Turkey. This prompted a harsh reaction from Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who suggested that Akıncı was ungrateful for Turkish support.

Minority rights remain a concern. A few hundred Greek Cypriots and Maronites live in the TRNC, mostly in small enclaves. They are legally citizens of the Republic of Cyprus and thus are not eligible to vote in TRNC elections. Proposals to include expanded minority rights in the 2014 constitutional reform package were rejected, though Akıncı has spoken positively of improving minority rights.

C. Functioning of Government: 9 / 12

Many observers suggest that the autonomy and effectiveness of elected TRNC officials is hampered by interference from Turkey. Corruption and a lack of transparency in governance are also concerns. The 2013 assembly elections were called early after several representatives decried corruption in the UBP, the ruling party at the time. The new law on political parties adopted in October 2015 strengthened court oversight of party finances.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 47 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 14 / 16

Freedom of the press is guaranteed by law, and a number of media outlets are openly critical of the government. However, some observers suggest that press freedom has been compromised as the Turkish government pressures editors and journalists in the TRNC to tone down stories that are critical of Ankara. In August 2015, the Turkish armed forces in Northern Cyprus accused the TRNC newspaper *Afrika* of insulting the military; the paper's

chief editor and a writer were summoned for questioning by prosecutors and later released. The government does not restrict internet access.

The TRNC is a secular state and legally guarantees freedom of worship. There are some disputes over the condition of Christian churches and access to religious sites, although joint Cypriot bodies work together on cultural heritage projects that include restoration of churches and mosques.

Academic freedom and freedom of open private discussion are respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 9 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are generally upheld. Nongovernmental organizations typically operate without restrictions, and many have been active in reunification efforts by working with Greek Cypriot partners. Workers may form independent unions, bargain collectively, and strike, though employers are reportedly able to block unionization in the private sector amid weak labor regulations. In March 2015, public-sector unions struck to protest the adoption of austerity measures that cut salaries, and some demonstrators scuffled with police.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and trials generally meet international standards of fairness. TRNC police, under the control of the Turkish military, sometimes fail to respect due process rights, and there have been allegations of abuse of detainees. Lawyers' associations and journalists have actively worked to remedy irregularities in the justice system, but proposed constitutional reforms to provide greater oversight failed to pass in the 2014 referendum.

The tiny Greek and Maronite minorities live in a collection of enclaves where their social and economic prospects are limited. Some have reported difficulties at border checkpoints, as well as alleged surveillance by TRNC authorities. The small Kurdish minority reportedly faces economic discrimination and alleged police monitoring, according to the U.S. State Department.

The settlement of Turkish nationals in Northern Cyprus since the 1970s is a source of contention. Official figures suggest that more than one-third of TRNC residents were born in Turkey, and that when tallied with their children, settlers account for nearly half of the total population. The Republic of Cyprus government has accused Turkey of deliberately encouraging population transfer over the years to increase its control over the TRNC and undermine the reunification process. In July 2014, a Cypriot group filed a complaint at the International Criminal Court (ICC) demanding an investigation into Turkey's settlement policy as a potential war crime.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people reportedly face social stigmatization and typically keep their sexual orientation or gender identity private. However, same-sex sexual activity was decriminalized in 2014.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16

Movement within the TRNC territory is relatively free. The only direct flights from the TRNC are to Turkey. Most governments do not recognize TRNC travel documents, so many Turkish Cypriots have obtained Republic of Cyprus passports, for which they are eligible. In May 2015, TRNC visa requirements were lifted for visitors from the Republic of Cyprus, making it easier for ethnic Greeks and Maronites to visit relatives and ancestral villages.

There is a right to private property. The TRNC formed the Immovable Property Commission in 2006 to resolve claims by Greek Cypriots who owned property in the north

before the island's 1974 division. In 2010, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) recognized the commission as an "accessible and effective" mechanism. As of late 2015, the commission had settled more than 700 claims out of over 6,200 applications and awarded hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation. However, Turkey ceased its funding for the commission in 2014, and since then its work has been seriously hampered.

Women's legal rights are equal to those of men, but they face various forms of discrimination in practice. They are also underrepresented in politics. In May 2015, Akıncı and Anastasiades announced the creation of a joint gender equality commission. The October law on political parties included a provision requiring 30 percent of a party's candidates for the legislature to be women.

Although prostitution is illegal, forced prostitution in nightclubs is a pervasive problem. According to the U.S. State Department, the TRNC lacks an adequate antitrafficking law, and some authorities are reportedly complicit in trafficking.

Pakistani Kashmir

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 5,662,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	013	2014	2015
	7,5,NF	7,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

Tensions along the Line of Control (LoC) remained high during 2015, with repeated exchanges of artillery fire between Indian and Pakistani forces causing casualties and disrupting civilian life in the border areas.

As political parties in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) prepared for legislative elections scheduled for 2016, the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML–N), the ruling party in Pakistan, won assembly elections held in Gilgit–Baltistan (GB) in June and nominated a new chief minister for that region. Also during the year, the prospect of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—a massive transport and energy infrastructure project—passing through GB provoked a new round of debate on the area's ambiguous constitutional status.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 9 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 4 / 12

Pakistan seized control of both AJK and GB following the partition of British India in 1947. Pakistan never formally incorporated either territory, leaving them neither sovereign nor provinces of Pakistan. Instead the relationship has been determined by various provisional arrangements pending a final settlement of the dispute with India. Article 1 of the constitution of Pakistan, which defines the territories of the country, obliquely refers to these areas as "such States and territories as are or may be included in Pakistan, whether by accession or otherwise."

AJK operates under an interim constitution enacted in 1974. A president, elected by the Legislative Assembly, serves as head of state, while the elected prime minister is the chief executive. An AJK Council is based in Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, consisting of both Kashmiri and Pakistani officials and chaired by the Pakistani prime minister. The council holds a number of key executive, legislative, and judicial powers, such as control over the appointment of superior judges and the chief election commissioner. The constitution can theoretically be amended by a majority of the total membership of the Legislative Assembly and the Council in a joint sitting. In June 2015, a committee of the Legislative Assembly published recommendations for a reform of the interim constitution that would transfer most of the AJK Council's powers to the elected AJK government in Muzaffarabad. The proposal remained under discussion at year's end.

Of the AJK Legislative Assembly's 49 seats, 41 are filled through direct elections: 29 with constituencies based in the territory and 12 representing Kashmiri "refugees" throughout Pakistan. Another eight are reserved seats: five for women and one each for representatives of overseas Kashmiris, technocrats, and religious leaders. The system disproportionately favors nonresident refugees over AJK residents. The nonresident elections are more vulnerable to manipulation by federal Pakistani authorities, and the party in office at the federal level tends to win these seats. Electoral politics in AJK track those in Pakistan, but with a lag stemming from their different election calendars. Thus the Azad Kashmir Peoples' Party (AKPP) continued to run the AJK government in 2015 after its federal affiliate, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), lost out to the PML-N at the federal level in 2013.

In the 2011 legislative elections, the AKPP won 20 of the 41 seats, followed by the PML-N with nine seats and the Muslim Conference (MC) party with five. AKPP leader Chaudhry Abdul Majid became prime minister, and Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan was installed as president. The elections were marred by allegations of rigging and vote buying, as well as some violence and harassment, with at least three election-related killings reported.

The next elections were scheduled for 2016. In December, the AJK government accused the AJK Council of attempting to influence the outcome by distributing federal development funds to legislators on a partisan basis. Meanwhile, the AJK government resisted the AJK Council's pressure to appoint the latter's choice for chief election commissioner, leading to a legal dispute that was unresolved at year's end.

GB is governed under the 2009 Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order (GBESGO), which can only be amended by the Pakistani government. The political structure includes a 33-member GB Legislative Assembly (GBLA) based in Gilgit and a 15-member Gilgit-Baltistan Council (GBC), headed by the Pakistani prime minister and vice-chaired by a federally appointed governor, which meets in Islamabad. The GBC consists of six members of the GBLA and nine Pakistani Parliament members appointed by the governor. The GBLA in turn is composed of 24 directly elected members, six seats reserved for women, and three seats reserved for technocrats; the reserved seats are filled through a vote by the elected members. The GBLA has the authority to choose the chief minister and introduce legislation on 61 subjects. Ultimate authority rests with the governor, who is the signing authority for legislation passed by the assembly. The governor has significant power over judicial appointments, and his decisions cannot be overruled by the GBLA. The federally dominated GBC retains control over strategically important subjects and key fiscal matters. A majority of high-level positions in the local administration are reserved under the GBESGO for Pakistani bureaucrats.

In February 2015, the PML-N government in Islamabad appointed its federal minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan, Chaudhry Muhammad Barjis Tahir, as governor of GB. The appointment generated some controversy because of the new governor's lack of ties to the area and claims that it was a partisan appointment. In June, elections were held for the GBLA, with security provided by the Pakistan army. In keeping with the well-established pattern of victory by the party in power in Islamabad, the PML-N took 15 of the 24 directly elected seats. No other party won more than two seats, including the previously governing PPP. One notable race pitted a jailed left-wing activist, Baba Jan Hunzai, against the PML-N's Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan, scion of the ruling family of the former princely state of Hunza. Baba Jan ultimately placed second behind Mir Ghazanfar.

In the wake of the elections, Hafiz Hafeezur Rehman of the PML-N became chief minister. In November, the federal government installed Mir Ghazanfar as governor, replacing the unpopular Barjis Tahir, who remained a federal minister.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 4 / 16

The interim constitution of AJK bans political parties that do not endorse the territory's eventual accession to Pakistan, and government employees must declare loyalty to the cause of accession. Similar rules prevail in GB, meaning nationalist leaders and parties are denied access to the political process and public employment. Activists accused of opposition to Pakistani rule have been subject to surveillance, harassment, and sometimes imprisonment. Among other cases during 2015, a group of 19 people were charged with sedition in February for their remarks at a conference on GB's status, and eight nationalist political activists were charged in June for protesting against the GBLA elections.

Historically, it has been the norm for the party in office at the federal level to form the local governments in AJK and GB. When a change occurred at the federal level, a transition would be effected in the local assemblies through cross voting and party switching. This has been a source of considerable political corruption. In 2013, after a PML-N government replaced the PPP in Pakistan, the new ruling party at the federal level stopped the local units from undertaking a full-fledged political coup. However, the PML-N government's decision to replace the GB governor in early 2015 was criticized as a bid to ensure the party's victory in the GBLA elections, and federal authorities were similarly accused of preparing to rig the 2016 AJK Legislative Assembly elections in favor of the PML-N.

C. Functioning of Government: 3 / 12

The two territories lack representation in the Pakistan Parliament and in constitutional bodies established for consultation and coordination between the federal government and the provinces, severely limiting transparency and accountability. In effect, the Pakistan prime minister, the minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan, and through them the federal civil service exercise full control over the operation of government in both territories. Federal intelligence agencies are also deployed in the territories and wield considerable power over local elected representatives and officials.

The territories lack any meaningful fiscal autonomy, as federally sanctioned taxes are imposed on both, and they receive a share of the resulting funds from the federal government in the form of grants. The territories' local representatives are excluded from the Pakistani bodies that negotiate interprovincial resource allocation, the National Finance Commission and the Council of Common Interest.

In August 2015, the newly elected GBLA passed a resolution demanding the status of a constitutional province. The federal government subsequently established a reform

committee, headed by a senior adviser to the prime minister, to consider upgrading the constitutional status of GB. The development was triggered in part by the launch of the CPEC mega-project; Beijing reportedly raised legal concerns about investing in projects that would run through disputed territory. No decision on the matter was made by year's end.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 2 / 0

The Sunni Muslim share of the population in GB has increased significantly in the decades since a pre-1947 rule was abolished to allow immigration from different parts of Pakistan. State agencies are suspected of deliberately engineering a demographic change in the sparsely populated Shiite-majority region. Under the 2009 GBESGO, settlers were given formal citizenship rights in GB. The pre-1947 restrictions on acquiring citizenship are still in place in AJK.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 19 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 6 / 16

AJK and GB are subject to laws that curb freedom of expression, particularly related to the political status of the regions. Media houses need permission from the AJK Council and the federal Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan to operate. In October 2015, three cable television channels in Muzaffarabad were closed down for allegedly operating without a license; AJK authorities described the move as part of its implementation of Pakistan's National Action Plan against terrorism. A court challenge against the closures was pending at year's end.

Though a wide range of media are present and active, censorship of political content, both direct and indirect, is common. Self-censorship is also prevalent as a means of avoiding state harassment. A number of local dailies have faced bans. In GB there have been reports of journalists being fired if they refuse to toe the government line. The government is known to withdraw advertisements, which are a source of revenue for media houses, from outlets seen as too critical. AJK and GB have access to the internet, with the same restrictions as in Pakistan. Usage is more common in urban areas.

Pakistan is an Islamic republic and has numerous restrictions on religious freedoms, including blasphemy laws, that are also enforced in AJK and GB. Sectarian tensions are sharper in GB, a Shiite-majority region.

Educational opportunities in the territories are limited. Academics are not free from political indoctrination. Any expression of views contradicting the official line on the regions' status can invite censure and even legal action. Student union activity has long been under state surveillance for signs of nationalist political views. Local languages and scripts are not taught in government schools.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 4 / 12

There are restrictions on freedom of assembly and association. The AJK interim constitution bans activities that are prejudicial to AJK's accession to Pakistan. Nationalist groups are subject to persecution. Nevertheless, demonstrations and protests remain common, especially in AJK. The harsh curbs on assembly are limited mostly to issues that concern the regions' status vis-à-vis Pakistan.

Humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are subject to strict registration requirements and thus operate at the pleasure of the authorities. However, NGOs working

on political or human rights issues face more intrusive government scrutiny and, in some cases, harassment.

AJK is subject to labor laws similar to those in Pakistan, though with fewer protections for workers. Unions and professional organizations are frequently barred. Labor laws and activities are at a very nascent stage of development in GB.

F. Rule of Law: 3 / 16 (-1)

AJK has a multitiered, dual judicial system with a Supreme Court, a High Court, and district courts. Islamic judges handle criminal cases involving Sharia (Islamic law), while regular judges deal with other criminal and civil cases. The president of AJK, in consultation with the AJK Council, appoints the chief justice of the Supreme Court. Other judges of the superior courts are appointed by the AJK president on the advice of the council, after consultation with the chief justice. Under the constitution, the president is bound by the advice of the prime minister, making judicial appointments easily susceptible to manipulation by the executive in AJK and by federal institutions through the AJK Council. This has led to a politicized judiciary. Charges of nepotism, favoritism, and corruption are common, as are delays in judicial proceedings, due in part to unfilled vacancies in the courts.

GB has a Supreme Appellate Court and a GB Chief Court. The chief judge and other judges of the Supreme Appellate Court are appointed on a contractual basis by the prime minister of Pakistan in his capacity as chairman of the GBC, on the recommendation of the governor. Though the 2009 GBESGO is silent about the role of the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan, all appointments to the top judiciary have been routed through the ministry in practice. The process of appointments is consequently lengthy and gives disproportionate influence to the federal government. There have been instances in which the ministry has not honored the recommendations of the local government in a timely manner, leading to delays and dysfunction in the courts. Some areas in GB have parallel or informal judicial systems, including some operated by religious authorities.

The federal government, army, and intelligence agencies have a considerable presence in AJK and GB, and surveillance of political activities is the norm. Arbitrary arrests, torture, and deaths in custody at the hands of security forces have been reported, especially targeting independence supporters and other activists. In GB, a small and nonviolent free-Balawaristan movement, which sought independence for GB and neighboring areas under Chinese control, has been crushed ruthlessly.

Extremist groups devoted largely to attacks on Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir operate from AJK and GB and have links with similar factions based in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Internecine tension between pro-Pakistan and nationalist Kashmiri militant groups is common.

In the wake of a major terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar in December 2014, Pakistani authorities increased pressure on Afghan refugees to return to their country. In April 2015, police in AJK announced that they would expel some 11,000 Afghan refugees from the territory. They invoked Pakistan's National Action Plan against terrorism, but failed to specify a link between the affected refugees and terrorist activity. Refugees, many of whom had lived in AJK for decades, subsequently complained of harassment, forced evictions, and arbitrary closure of businesses.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

The citizens of AJK and GB have Pakistani national identity cards and passports. They are internationally recognized as Pakistani nationals. However, there are reports of passports being denied or not renewed for citizens suspected of questioning Pakistani control

over the region. Pakistan has been reluctant to offer citizenship to migrants displaced from Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. Many of these refugees have been subjected to abuse and arbitrary arrest for demanding their rights.

The pre-1947 state subject law, which is still in effect in AJK and bars outsiders from seeking permanent residency, allows only legal residents to own property. Procedures for establishing private enterprises are onerous.

Instances of violence against women and so-called honor killings are rarer in AJK than in GB, which features greater cultural diversity and a wide range of local practices with respect to women’s rights. Honor killings have been reported in GB’s Sunni-majority Diامر district, and women in Diامر’s Tangir Valley apparently did not participate in the 2015 elections. Although the law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, treatment is unequal in practice. Women are legally permitted to marry without the consent of their family, but they frequently face societal censure if they do so. Many women are victims of forced marriages. Inheritance laws are skewed heavily against women, who in most cases receive far less than their rightful share. While school enrollment is lower for girls than for boys in GB, the gap has narrowed in recent years.

Laws against sex trafficking are not actively enforced in AJK or GB, though some cases of labor trafficking have been prosecuted.

AJK and GB are economically dependent on federal assistance. The Pakistani government exercises full control over decisions on how the natural resources of the region are used. GB is rich in minerals, and AJK has abundant water. Four large hydropower projects that supply electricity to the rest of Pakistan have been undertaken in AJK. Nevertheless, the region faces persistent electricity cuts.

Puerto Rico

Political Rights Rating: 1

Population: 3,500,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 1↑

Freedom Rating: 1.0

Freedom Status: Free

Ratings change: Puerto Rico’s civil liberties rating improved from 2 to 1 due to a pattern in which demonstrations and protests have been held without government interference in recent years.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,1,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,2,F	1,1,F

INTRODUCTION

In June 2015, Puerto Rican governor Alejandro García Padilla announced that Puerto Rico’s debt was not payable, and in August the commonwealth missed a debt payment for the first time in history, worth \$58 million. Since taking office in 2012 the García Padilla government has implemented massive austerity measures, and submitted a budget in May calling for further spending cuts—a move that prompted street protests. Both the U.S. Congress and the administration of President Barack Obama have proposed legislative changes to allow for Puerto Rico’s debt restructuring.

Unemployment on the island was more than double than in the mainland United States in mid-2015, and overall socioeconomic conditions on the island remain dire. Economic problems have led to increased migration to the mainland United States.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 37 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

As a U.S. commonwealth, Puerto Rico exercises approximately the same control over its internal affairs as do the 50 states. The commonwealth constitution, modeled after that of the United States, provides for a governor elected for four-year terms and a bicameral legislature. The 27-member Senate and the 51-member House of Representatives are also elected for four-year terms. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens guaranteed all civil liberties granted in the United States, though they cannot vote in U.S. presidential elections. Puerto Ricans can participate in the primary and caucus process, however. A single delegate represents Puerto Rico in the U.S. Congress and is allowed to vote on floor amendments to legislation, but not on the final passage of bills. Pedro Pierluisi of the opposition New Progressive Party (PNP) was reelected to this post in 2012 by a narrow margin. In the 2012 gubernatorial election, García Padilla, then a senator with the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) received 48 percent of the vote, narrowly defeating incumbent governor Luis Fortuño of the PNP, who captured 47 percent. Four other candidates received less than 3 percent each. In legislative elections held the same day, the PPD won 18 Senate seats to the PNP's 8; the Puerto Rican Independence Party won 1 seat. Three smaller parties won no seats. In the Puerto Rico House of Representatives, the PPD won 28 seats and the PNP won the remaining 23.

A two-part, nonbinding referendum on Puerto Rico's territorial status was held the same day as the 2012 elections. The first question, asking whether voters wanted Puerto Rico to maintain its current territorial status, was supported by only 46 percent of the voters. A second question asked voters to choose whether they preferred statehood, independence, or a sovereign free associated state; the statehood option was selected by 61 percent of voters. However, with more than 470,000 voters choosing not to answer the question, in effect only 45 percent supported statehood. Governor García Padilla subsequently made it clear that he did not support statehood.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Power has alternated between the pro-commonwealth PPD and the pro-statehood PNP for several decades. Unlike U.S. state legislatures, Puerto Rico elects a number of at-large proportional seats in addition to those won in the first-past-the-post electoral districts. In addition, extra seats are granted to opposition parties if required to limit a party's legislative control in either house to two thirds.

Puerto Ricans have consistently been nearly equally divided between support for commonwealth status and full U.S. statehood, while the option of independence enjoys little popular support.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

Corruption is common in Puerto Rico. A number of leading political figures have been indicted in recent years on various corruption charges. In 2014, a Superior Court judge was charged with accepting bribes from a defendant in a criminal case. In January 2015, the judge was convicted and subsequently sentenced to ten years' imprisonment.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60 (+ 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Puerto Rico's tradition of varied and vigorous news media has been challenged by a decline in newspapers stemming from the ongoing economic crisis, among other factors. While internet access in Puerto Rico is slower and more expensive than in mainland United States, access is not restricted.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed in this largely Roman Catholic territory. A substantial number of Evangelical churches have been established in recent years. Academic freedom and open and free discussion are generally respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 11 / 12 (+ 1)

Freedom of assembly is protected by law, and Puerto Ricans frequently protest local or federal government policies. The police approach to demonstrations has improved since the violent response to 2011 student protests. Numerous demonstrations took place throughout 2015 in protest of austerity measures put in place in response to the debt crisis. In November, thousands took to the streets in San Juan to protest unequal federal funding for health-care on the island, compared to the mainland. Civil society is robust, with numerous nongovernmental organizations representing special interests. The government respects the rights of trade unions, which are generally free to organize and strike.

F. Rule of Law: 12 / 16

The legal system is based on U.S. law, and the island's Supreme Court heads an independent judiciary, which is generally free of political interference. Access to justice is difficult for those who lack resources to pay legal fees. All federal court proceedings are conducted in English, sometimes making access to justice difficult for the large percentage of Puerto Rican residents who do not speak English as their primary language.

Crime remains a serious problem. The center of the narcotics trade has shifted from San Juan to smaller communities, leaving housing projects in some towns under virtual siege by drug cartels. Authorities have increased actions targeting narcotics trafficking. In fiscal year 2015, more than 22,000 kilograms (48,500 pounds) of cocaine were seized by security forces—a significant increase compared to the 11,000 kilograms (24,250 pounds) seized during the previous fiscal year. In June 2015, federal indictments were handed down for 105 members of a San Juan drug syndicate. Experts have voiced concerns that the increase in antinarcotics activity may be an indication of traffickers increasingly bypassing surrounding islands to move drugs through Puerto Rico, as more lenient customs requirements make it easier to transport packages from Puerto Rico to the mainland United States.

Following criticism from the U.S. Justice Department and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) for patterns of police violence and suppression of freedoms of speech and assembly, Puerto Rico in 2013 formally agreed to a police reform plan to be overseen by Justice Department authorities; the plan included more police training and increased federal oversight. A number of investigations into police corruption and abuse have been opened since then. In one high-profile case, 10 members of the antidrug unit of the San Juan police force, including a lieutenant and a sergeant, were arrested in a 2015 corruption sting; they were accused of accepting bribes and stealing drugs and cash during both legal and illegal raids. However, budget issues have also frustrated police reform efforts.

In 2013, the U.S. Justice Department announced a lawsuit against the Puerto Rico Police for sustained racial and sexual discrimination against a female officer. In August 2015, the Justice Department accepted a consent agreement with the police department

resolving the case, which provided compensation to the officer and required the department to revise its antidiscrimination policies.

Hate crimes against LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people—including violent attacks and cases of murder—remain a problem. In July, a federal court ruled Puerto Rico’s ban on same-sex marriage unconstitutional, less than two weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to extend marriage rights to same-sex couples nationwide.

Dominicans that have migrated to the island make up a distinct minority that faces racism and xenophobia. Despite large, vibrant communities, Dominicans in Puerto Rico lack strong representative organizations to advocate for their civil rights. Due to stereotyping and racial profiling, authorities often arrest black Puerto Ricans without identification, assuming they are undocumented Dominican migrants.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 14 / 16

Puerto Ricans enjoy freedom of travel and choice of residence. As Lawful Permanent Residents of the United States, Puerto Ricans can travel freely within United States territory without restriction. There are no limitations on rights to enter institutions of higher education or choose one’s place of employment. Despite the prominence of organized crime, the rights to own property or operate a private business are generally not inhibited.

Although women enjoy equal rights under the law, a 2011 U.S. Justice Department report cited evidence that police officers failed to investigate incidents of sexual assault and domestic violence, including spousal abuse by fellow officers. The trafficking of men, women, and children for forced labor or sex work takes place in Puerto Rico, though authorities have successfully prosecuted some trafficking cases in recent years.

Somaliland

Political Rights Rating: 5↓

Population: 3,500,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Freedom Rating: 5.0

Freedom Status: Partly Free

Ratings Change: Somaliland’s political rights rating declined from 4 to 5 due to the upper house’s unilateral decision to postpone presidential and parliamentary elections by 22 months. While some delay was generally expected and agreed upon by the opposition and the government due to the government’s stalled election preparations, the upper house pushed the voting back further based on questionable “security” grounds, among other reasons.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	4,4,PF	4,4,PF	5,4,PF	5,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	4,5,PF	5,5,P

INTRODUCTION

In May 2015, Somaliland’s upper legislative chamber, the Guurti, announced that presidential and parliamentary elections would be postponed until 2017 and extended the current government’s term by two years. President Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud Silanyo’s approval of this move was later upheld through a court decision, officially delaying

elections—which were scheduled for June 2015—until March 2017. The delay contradicted the wishes of opposition parties and Somaliland’s international donors, both of which had previously agreed on a 12-month election postponement to allow more time for voter registration. Opposition parties had expressed concern that the government was delaying election preparation, especially voter registration, in order to extend Silanyo’s term.

Meanwhile, the government continued to suppress criticism in advance of the elections. While journalist arrests and harassment dropped, a climate of fear continues to characterize the media environment.

Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991 following the outbreak of civil war. The regional administration lacks international recognition as an independent state. Talks between Somaliland and Somalia continued in early 2015, but stalled in March due to disagreements about the composition of the Somali negotiating team.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 15 / 40 (–6)

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12 (–3)

According to Somaliland’s constitution, the president is directly elected for a maximum of two five-year terms and appoints the cabinet. The presidential election of 2010, originally scheduled for 2008, resulted in a smooth transfer of power from the United People’s Democratic Party (UDUB) to Kulmiye, the main opposition party. Silanyo, the leader of Kulmiye, captured almost 50 percent of the vote, comfortably ahead of incumbent Dahir Riyale Kahin’s 33 percent. International monitors identified some irregularities, but declared the vote free and fair. In May 2014, Silanyo announced his intention to run for a second term in the elections scheduled for 2015.

Members of the 82-seat lower legislative chamber, the House of Representatives, are directly elected for five-year terms, while members of the 82-seat upper chamber, or Guurti, are clan elders indirectly elected for six-year terms. The last parliamentary elections were held in 2005 and have been delayed since 2010. Again in 2015, terms for both houses and the president were extended until April 2017. Also in 2015, the Guurti clashed with the National Electoral Commission (NEC)—which had recommended a poll delay to June 2016 based on technical challenges—when the upper chamber announced the election postponement until March 2017. Opposition parties and international observers have vocally opposed further delay, and suggest that the government is using election postponements for political purposes.

In 2012, Somaliland held municipal elections, the first such elections in a decade. Though the elections were deemed free and fair by a coalition of local observers, large protests followed. Following the elections, Silanyo called for a new voter roll to be created, but as of the end of 2015, there were still major delays in initiating voter registration.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 9 / 16 (–1)

Although parties defined by region or clan are technically prohibited, party and clan affiliations often coincide. A constitutional restriction allows for a maximum of three officially recognized political parties. The Registration and Approval Committee (RAC) reviewed 18 parties and associations to determine which could participate in the 2012 local elections. From the seven parties that competed, the three parties that received the most votes were officially declared eligible for elections for the coming decade: Wadani, the UCID, and Kulmiye. Due to the 2015 election delays, the opposition has little chance to compete in elections or win political power in the near future.

C. Functioning of Government: 4 / 12 (–2)

Although the civilian government and legislature determine state policies, their legitimacy has been critically undermined by the Guurti's undue influence in delaying elections. Electoral mandates for the House of Representatives and the presidency have technically expired.

Corruption in Somaliland was a serious problem under the government of former president Kahin, but there have been signs of improvement under Silanyo. A bill to strengthen the five-member Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Commission was passed by the legislature in 2012. In February 2014, the commission released a three-year anti-graft strategy. However, concerns in 2015 about Silanyo's opaque handling of the Berbera Oil Terminal's management led to skepticism about his intentions to tackle corruption.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 25 / 60**D. Freedom of Expression and Belief:** 7 / 16

While freedoms of expression and the press are guaranteed by the constitution, these rights are limited in practice. The Silanyo administration has adopted a harsh approach to perceived critics in recent years, suspending several media outlets and levying heavy penalties on opposition journalists. Many journalists in Somaliland lack formal training and opportunities for professional development.

According to the Somaliland-based Human Rights Centre (HRC), the government detained 19 journalists in 2015, some on multiple occasions. In April 2015, authorities detained Kalsan TV journalist Ahmed Saed Mohamed after he published a controversial story about Berbera's Port Authority. He was released without charge after five days. In September, two journalists were arrested for their reporting on the same subject. In November, the HRC reported the arrest of two *Hubsad* journalists who were accused of running an unregistered newspaper. While the journalists have since been released, they still face criminal charges.

Somaliland's laws allow for the establishment of private radio stations, but the government makes licenses difficult to obtain. A press protection law, passed in 2004, has yet to be implemented due to the government's claims that it needs additional amendments. The government employs intimidation tactics, including sending the police or the paramilitary Rapid Reaction Unit to raid journalists' homes or offices, to limit unfriendly reporting.

In September 2015, four musicians—part of the Horn Stars band—were arrested after returning from a performance in Mogadishu, Somalia's capital. Reports suggest the group waved a Somali flag at the concert to “oppose” Somaliland's independence.

Islam is the state religion, and nearly all Somaliland residents are Sunni Muslims. While the constitution allows for the freedom of belief, it prohibits conversion from Islam and proselytizing by members of other faiths. It also requires that candidates for the presidency, vice presidency, and House of Representatives be Muslim. Academic freedom is less restricted than in neighboring Somalia. The territory has at least 10 universities and colleges of higher learning, though they are not adequately funded or staffed.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are constitutionally guaranteed. However, the government has been known to repress demonstrations in the past. After the announcement of election delays in May 2015, for example, widespread protests broke out in Hargeisa, Berbera, and Burco. The government reportedly withheld permission for the Wadani party to demonstrate, and both Wadani and the Justice and Welfare Party reported that authorities

raided their offices soon after demonstrations began. Some 30 people were detained by the police, but later released, and government troops reportedly blocked media access to the protests.

Local and international nongovernmental organizations operate without serious interference. The constitution does not explicitly protect the right to strike, though it does permit collective bargaining. The right to belong to a union is generally respected.

F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16

The judiciary is underfunded and lacks independence, and the Supreme Court is largely ineffective, though the May 2015 appointment of a new chief justice, Adan H. Ali Ahmed, was welcomed by civil society. Somaliland has approximately 100 judges, most of whom lack formal legal training; judges are usually selected on the basis of clan or political affiliation, and are subject to interference from the government.

Somaliland's constitution allows for three legal systems based on Sharia (Islamic law), civil law, and customary law. Upon taking office, Silanyo pledged to strengthen the independence of the judiciary and release all prisoners who had not been charged with a crime, apart from those accused of terrorism or theft. In 2014, multiple members of the judiciary reported that they frequently face pressure from cabinet officials to make particular rulings or to release suspects.

Somaliland's police and security forces are sometimes accused of using excessive force. According to the HRC's 2015 annual report, many of Somaliland's police stations, which are intended to hold individuals for up to 48 hours, are used for long-term detention. These facilities have become overcrowded, and detainees are often held without food or other basic necessities.

In August 2015, police fired live ammunition into a crowd that had gathered to watch a land dispute between a Hargeisa family and the police. A young boy was killed, two men and a teenager were injured by gunshot, and one man was wounded after a police beating. In the same month, a police officer fired into a cell containing approximately eight inmates in a Hargeisa prison. Ahmed Dayib Abdi was killed in the incident; reports suggest he was initially detained for participating in a protest against excessive police force. The other inmates who had been detained with Ahmed were released without charge following his death. The officer who fired the shot that killed Ahmed was arrested, according to the HRC, though there has not been a thorough investigation of the incident.

In August 2015, Hargeisa's regional court dropped the criminal case against HRC founder Guleid Ahmed Jama, whose arrest was allegedly linked to the organization's 2014 report.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 6 / 16

Societal fault lines are largely clan-based. Larger, wealthier clans have more political clout than the less prominent groups, and clan elders often intervene to settle conflicts. Business opportunities are limited, and unemployment is high.

While society in Somaliland is patriarchal, women have made modest advances in public life. Quotas for political representation of women have been frequently discussed but never adopted. In 2010, Kulmiye expressed support for a 25 percent quota across all political institutions. In September 2015, parliament began reviewing a 10 percent quota contained within an elections law. There are no female judges, four women in high-level government positions, and one female legislator in the House of Representatives.

Violence against women, including rape, remains a major problem, though the establishment of the international donor-sponsored Baahi-Koob Sexual Assault Referral Centre

in Hargeisa led to 399 reported rape cases, 191 related prosecutions, and 47 convictions in 2014 alone. The practice of female genital mutilation is widespread.

The Somaliland government has made attempts to combat human trafficking in recent years. The 2014 U.S. State Department *Trafficking in Persons Report* estimated that 50 Somaliland residents are smuggled out of the territory every month; 2015 saw an increase in the number of minors and unemployed university graduates being trafficked. The government has a specialized department within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to investigate suspected trafficking.

South Ossetia

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 52,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Freedom Rating: 6.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	—	—	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

South Ossetia's foreign relations were a prominent topic of public discussion during the year, and fomented discord in the territory's legislature between proponents and critics of closer ties with Russia. In March, South Ossetia's de facto president, Leonid Tibilov, signed a sweeping bilateral treaty on the territory's alliance and integration with the Russian Federation. The agreement aims to synchronize South Ossetia's security and border mechanisms with those of Russia, among other goals. The international community, particularly Georgia, condemned the agreement, arguing that its terms give Moscow excessive control over the territory.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 2 / 40 (+ 1)

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

Under the South Ossetian constitution, the president and the 34-seat parliament are elected for five-year terms. Elections held by the separatist government are not monitored by independent observers or recognized by the international community. Most ethnic Georgian residents have either declined or been unable to participate in elections since separatist forces first seized land in the early 1990s and expanded their control in a 2008 war.

The most recent presidential election was held in 2012, after the Supreme Court invalidated a 2011 vote based on questionable claims of electoral violations. In the second round of the 2011 election, polls had shown Alla Dzhioyeva, a former education minister who opposed Russian annexation of South Ossetia, to be the winner. A new election was called amid protests by Dzhioyeva's supporters, with Dzhioyeva herself barred from running. Four new candidates, all favorable to Russia, competed in 2012. Tibilov, who had led South

Ossetia's Committee for State Security in the 1990s, received 42 percent of the vote, followed by human rights ombudsman David Sanakoyev with 25 percent. Tibilov won the runoff with 54 percent.

Parliamentary elections held in 2014 were a substantial improvement from previous ones. Unlike in the 2009 vote, in which only three parties were able to participate, candidates from nine parties succeeded in registering in 2014. The opposition United Ossetia, led by former presidential contender Anatoliy Bibilov, won 20 seats, followed by the Unity of the People party with six seats. The People's Party and Nykhas each captured four seats.

Tibilov, an independent, did not openly support any party. Officials did not arbitrarily bar parties from participating, and of the several individuals who had been denied registration because of alleged failure to meet the five-year residency requirement, the majority were able to register after appealing to the Supreme Court.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 2 / 16

In line with his campaign pledge of national unity, Tibilov included members of the opposition in his government. Sanakoyev took the post of foreign minister, Dzhiyeva became deputy prime minister, and Bibilov kept his position of emergency situations minister. Although not all appointees have retained their posts, Tibilov's presidency has signaled some political liberalization. A number of new political parties have been able to register in recent years. These include Bibilov's United Ossetia, which won the most seats in the 2014 elections; New Ossetia, headed by Sanakoyev; and Dzhiyeva's Freedom Square. In contrast, in the lead-up to the 2011 presidential vote, leading opposition figures were prevented from registering, and some opposition candidates were beaten or jailed.

Geopolitical considerations are a major force behind officials' political choices and heavily affect party politics. Tibilov has significantly increased ties with Russia, and officials endorsed by Moscow have gained or maintained key government positions in recent years, many appointed directly by Russia or from Russia's North Ossetia–Alania republic. The year 2015 featured growing antagonism between United Ossetia and the minority parties in the legislature over South Ossetia's relations with Russia and Georgia. In March, 19 United Ossetia legislators passed a vote of no confidence in Sanakoyev, reportedly in reaction to the foreign minister leaking an early draft of the integration treaty with Russia. The foreign minister, who released the draft in January, strongly opposed the treaty's broad provisions for Russian control over South Ossetian security and defense. United Ossetia deputies—strongly favoring closer ties with Moscow—viewed Sanakoyev as an hindrance on negotiations, and Bibilov publicly denounced him for the leak days before the March vote. Tibilov refused to dismiss Sanakoyev, leading legislators to schedule a second vote for April. Although the motion failed amid a boycott by the three minority parties, Tibilov reserved his position and terminated Sanakoyev's appointment shortly thereafter, moving him to the post of state adviser; the maneuver was reportedly intended to prevent further parliamentary conflict.

In 2013, Russian president Vladimir Putin appointed Vladislav Surkov, the reputed architect of Russia's nominally pluralistic but tightly managed party system, as his presidential aide responsible for social and economic issues in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

The ability of elected officials to determine and implement policy is heavily influenced by the Russian government. Both Tibilov and opposition figures have spoken repeatedly of

formally uniting the territory with Russia's North Ossetia or joining the Russian Federation directly.

South Ossetian officials reached an agreement on border regulation with Moscow in February 2015. The following March, Tibilov and Putin signed a sweeping treaty on alliance and integration. The bilateral agreement, which is binding for 25 years with the possibility of 10-year extensions, closely integrates South Ossetia's defense, security, and customs mechanisms—among other things—with those of Russia, and charges Moscow with protection of the territory's borders. The treaty received wide condemnation from the international community for giving broad control of the territory to the Russian state. In October, Tibilov announced plans to hold a referendum on the question of South Ossetia's incorporation into the Russian Federation. Officials had not set a date or announced further details at year's end.

The March treaty was the latest in a number of agreements expanding Russia's influence over South Ossetia. A 2013 agreement on interparliamentary cooperation aimed to harmonize Ossetian laws with Russian legislation; a memorandum of cooperation on anti-terrorism was signed in 2013 to enhance security and border protection; and a 2011 agreement gave Russia the freedom to build and operate military bases in the territory for 49 years. Roughly 4,000 Russian troops remain stationed in South Ossetia.

Russian aid comprises almost the entirety of South Ossetia's budget, and financial processes and decisions are largely nontransparent. Having pledged to root out his predecessor's allegedly rampant corruption and increase stability, Tibilov initiated an investigation in 2012 into suspected embezzlement involving former president Eduard Kokoity and the disbursement of Russian funds earmarked for postwar reconstruction; a number of allegedly corrupt officials were replaced in the process.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: - 2 / 0 (+ 1)

During the 2008 war, Ossetian forces seized or razed property in previously Georgian-controlled villages, and large numbers of ethnic Georgians fled the fighting. Authorities in South Ossetia have since barred ethnic Georgians from returning to the territory unless they renounce their Georgian citizenship and accept Russian passports. Of approximately 20,000 ethnic Georgians displaced from their homes in South Ossetia, most have not been able to return. However, conditions for local residents have largely stabilized since the war, particularly due to the absence of open conflict across the administrative line separating the territory from Georgia.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 9 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression: 4 / 16

Local media are almost entirely controlled by the authorities. Self-censorship is pervasive, although according to local journalists, outlets have been able to operate under gradually more open conditions since the war. South Ossetia's state broadcasters are subject to frequent blackouts and technical interruptions, and an increasing number of residents rely on online outlets for news and other information. Foreign media, including broadcasts from Russia and Georgia, remain accessible.

Freedom of religion has sometimes been adversely affected by the political and military situation. While the majority of the population is Orthodox Christian, there is a sizeable Muslim community, many members of which migrated from the North Caucasus. The planned construction of a Russian Orthodox house of worship in Tskhinvali has encountered opposition from local residents. While some merely disagree with the design and placement

of the church, other critics have called the plan an intrusion, noting that the Georgian Orthodox Church retains official jurisdiction over the South Ossetian Orthodox Church.

The government exerts influence over the education system. Many South Ossetians receive higher education in Russia. Private discussion is constrained by the sensitivity of some topics, particularly the territory's foreign relations and geopolitical standing.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 1 / 12

While antigovernment protests were extremely rare before the 2008 war, opposition groups mounted demonstrations following the flawed 2009 elections, and Tskhinvali residents protested repeatedly over the slow postwar reconstruction process and related government corruption. In the run-up to the 2014 parliamentary elections, groups were generally able to assemble to support different candidates and platforms without significant intimidation or harassment.

Though some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in the territory, most are subject to government influence and receive funding from Russia. Activists operate under the close scrutiny of the authorities and have been subject to intimidation in the past. In July 2015, security forces in South Ossetia interrogated Larisa Sotieva, a senior advisor for the United Kingdom-based peacebuilding NGO International Alert, and accused her of committing espionage and teaching local residents how to engineer "color revolutions." After the interrogation, officials banned Sotieva from implementing any International Alert projects in the territory. In October, the leaders of two prominent local NGOs—the Association for Social, Economic, and Cultural Development of South Ossetia and the Women's Association for Democracy and Human Rights—announced that they were preparing to dissolve their organizations due to increasing scrutiny and pressure by officials.

Amendments made to NGO legislation in 2014 increased the oversight capacity of local authorities over NGO activity and subjected organizations with foreign funding to broader and more frequent reporting requirements. The legislation is similar to Russia's infamous "foreign agents" law of 2012.

F. Rule of Law: 1 / 16

South Ossetia's judiciary is not independent. The justice system has been manipulated to punish perceived opponents of the separatist leadership, while government allies reportedly continue to violate the law with relative impunity. Russian prosecutors have attempted to curb malfeasance by local officials, but the Russian court system itself remains deeply flawed.

Physical abuse and poor conditions are reportedly common in South Ossetian prisons and detention centers. Arbitrary arrests of ethnic Georgians have been reported. In April 2015, on Tibilov's initiative, legislators passed an amnesty act that pardoned or reduced the sentences of 20 convicts.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 3 / 16

Freedom of movement in and out of the territory is restricted. Russian authorities have prevented ethnic Ossetians from entering Georgia, but travel to Russia—primarily through the strategic Roki Tunnel, the only land route linking the country to South Ossetia—remains largely unimpeded. Russian troops have been known to detain Georgian nationals near the administrative border for illegal crossing, but usually release detainees with a fine. In July 2015, Georgian officials accused Moscow of violating international law after Russian servicemen moved South Ossetia's administrative border as far as one kilometer further into Georgian territory.

The territory’s political and military situation has negatively affected protections for property rights, particularly for local residents close to the administrative border. The extension of the border in July affected private property, with some landowners reporting loss of access to farmland. The territory’s high unemployment rate, lacking industry, and poor administrative coordination have all contributed to difficulties in advancing economic reform.

Tibet

Population: 3,000,000 [Note: This figure from China’s 2010 census covers only the Tibet Autonomous Region. Areas of eastern Tibet that were incorporated into neighboring Chinese provinces are also assessed in the report below.]

Political Rights Rating: 7

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,N

INTRODUCTION

No official dialogue between Beijing and the Tibetan government in exile took place in 2015; such talks were last held in 2010. In April the Chinese government released a white paper on the region, and in August the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held its Sixth Forum on Tibet, led by party head and Chinese president Xi Jinping. Reports on both signaled the Chinese government’s intent to maintain a hard-line position on the issue of Tibetan autonomy while intensifying indoctrination campaigns within the region.

Over the course of the year, at least seven Tibetans set themselves on fire to protest CCP rule. The authorities responded with arrests of family members, “patriotic education” campaigns, travel restrictions, and intrusive controls on monasteries. The security clamp-down that has been in place since a 2008 popular uprising increasingly extended to Tibetan areas outside the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).

The Chinese authorities have had difficulty quelling popular reverence for the Dalai Lama. In June, despite an official ban and threats of arrest by the Chinese government, many Tibetans celebrated the religious figure’s 80th birthday in public and private.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: – 2 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

The Chinese government rules Tibet through administration of the TAR and 12 Tibetan autonomous prefectures or counties in the nearby provinces of Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, and Yunnan. Under the Chinese constitution, autonomous areas have the right to formulate their own regulations and implement national legislation in accordance with local conditions. In practice, however, decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of senior, ethnic (Han) Chinese CCP officials. In 2011, Chen Quanguo replaced Zhang Qingli as

TAR party secretary. The few ethnic Tibetans who occupy senior positions serve mostly as figureheads and echo official doctrine. Losang Gyaltzen, an ethnic Tibetan, has served as chairman of the TAR government since 2013.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

All political activity outside the CCP is illegal and harshly punished, as is any evidence of loyalty to or communication with the Tibetan government in exile in Dharamsala, India. The exile government includes an elected parliament serving five-year terms, a Supreme Justice Commission that adjudicates civil disputes, and a directly elected prime minister, also serving five-year terms. The unelected Dalai Lama, who traditionally served as head of state, renounced his political role in 2011. Lobsang Sangay was elected prime minister in the same year, replacing a two-term incumbent and becoming the exile government's top political official. In 2014, the Dalai Lama announced that he may not reincarnate, which would make him the last to hold the religious title.

Political opportunities for ethnic Tibetans within Tibet remain limited by the effective dominance of ethnic Chinese officials at all levels of the CCP. The ethnic Tibetan population's concerns about and objections to party policies are actively suppressed.

C. Functioning of Government: 1 / 12

Corruption is believed to be extensive in Tibet, as in the rest of China. Little information is available on the scale of the problem, but there were reports in 2015 of moves to curb corruption among the region's officials as part of Chinese president Xi Jinping's nationwide anticorruption campaign. In January, state media reported that 15 CCP officials in Tibet had been found guilty of "serious discipline violations" in 2014, employing a euphemism commonly used for corruption but also applied to political infractions. Official reports on the investigations revealed a focus on suspected religious sympathies and support for Tibetan independence among officials, leaving it unclear whether the 15 individuals were punished for abuse of office or for their religious or political views. In June, state media reported that antigraft authorities were investigating Le Dake, deputy chief of the Tibet People's Congress and former head of state security in the region, for vague "violations of discipline and law." Also in June, the media reported a bribery and embezzlement case against Huang Xiangtian, former CCP chief of Lhasa's economic development zone.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: - 3 / 0

The Chinese government's economic development programs in Tibet have strongly encouraged ethnic Chinese migration to the region, disproportionately benefited ethnic Chinese residents, and exacerbated the marginalization of ethnic Tibetans, who have also been displaced by mass resettlement campaigns. In late 2014 and early 2015, officials announced new railway and urbanization projects that risk further diluting the Tibetan population in the region; one such plan aims to increase the "permanent urban population" of Tibet by approximately 30 percent by 2020, with many new settlers likely to be ethnic Chinese.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 3 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 0 / 16

Chinese authorities tightly restrict all media in Tibet. In 2015, officials continued to suppress information about self-immolations and related security crackdowns. According to overseas advocacy and rights groups, scores of Tibetan writers, intellectuals, and musicians have been arrested since 2008 as part of an effort to curb dissent and control Tibetan cultural expression, with some sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

Internet blackouts are periodically imposed at protest sites and in 2015 included a months-long shutdown in Ngaba (Aba) County, Sichuan Province, where monks had led individual protests in September. International broadcasts are jammed and communications devices periodically confiscated. The online restrictions and monitoring in place across China are enforced even more stringently in the TAR. In August, authorities reportedly shut down the website Choemei, one of the longest-running Tibetan-language platforms for news, cultural writings, and literature.

Internet and mobile-telephone users have been arrested for accessing or transmitting banned information, particularly during politically sensitive periods. In June 2015, reports emerged that Tsering Dondrub, a young Tibetan, was detained by police in Qinghai Province for using WeChat, a popular mobile messaging platform, to share images of the Tibetan flag and the Dalai Lama in advance of the leader's 80th birthday; no further details on his status were available at year's end.

Access to the TAR is highly restricted and regulated for foreign journalists, who are also consistently prevented from entering Tibetan areas of Sichuan and other provinces, though no permission is technically required to travel there. Residents who assist foreign journalists are reportedly harassed. In a rare case, in September 2015, Chinese authorities took a small group of foreign journalists on a closely supervised visit to the TAR; the tour was arranged to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the founding of the TAR.

The authorities regularly suppress religious activities, particularly those seen as forms of dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence. Several monks, including a 15-year-old, were arrested in 2015 for publicly protesting CCP rule. Possession of Dalai Lama-related materials can lead to official harassment, arrest, and punishment, including restrictions on commercial activity and loss of welfare benefits in some places; many Tibetans nevertheless secretly possess such items.

Religious Affairs Bureaus (RABs) control who can study in monasteries and nunneries. Officials enforce a minimum age requirement of 18 for those who wish to become monks or nuns, although some institutions continue to accept younger children without registration. Monks and nuns are required to sign a declaration rejecting Tibetan independence, expressing loyalty to the government, and denouncing the Dalai Lama. Since 2012, the CCP has set up committees of government officials within monasteries to manage their daily operations and enforce party indoctrination campaigns. Police posts are increasingly common even in smaller monasteries.

Intrusive government interference in both large religious celebrations and small, personal rituals is extensive. In June 2015, authorities issued a ban on public gatherings and canceled several planned events in advance of the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday on July 6. Officials in Qinghai Province's Malho (Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture circulated a document in early 2015 outlining various activities that were construed as support for Tibetan independence, calling for harsh punitive measures; the list included ordinary activities like reciting prayers and burning incense. In December, Chinese officials announced plans to compile an online database of "living Buddhas" in an attempt to root out an allegedly growing number of fraudulent ones.

Ideological education campaigns reach most monasteries and nunneries in the region. Such campaigns typically force participants to recognize the CCP claim that China "liberated" Tibet and to denounce the Dalai Lama. Some monks and nuns have reportedly left their institutions to avoid the sessions. The effort has also been extended to the lay population in recent years, with students, civil servants, and farmers required to participate in discussions, singing sessions, and propaganda film screenings. In April 2015, Chen Quanguo announced a new round of "patriotic education" tests at monasteries and nunneries in the TAR.

University professors cannot lecture on certain topics, and many must attend political indoctrination sessions. The government restricts course materials to prevent the circulation of unofficial versions of Tibetan history, and has reduced the use of Tibetan as the language of instruction in schools in recent years.

Freedom of private discussion is severely limited by factors including the authorities' monitoring of electronic communications, the heavy security presence, and regular ideological campaigns in Tibetan areas.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

The Chinese authorities severely restrict freedoms of assembly and association. Independent trade unions and human rights groups are illegal, and even nonviolent protests are often harshly punished. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including those focused only on apolitical issues like development and public health, operate under highly restrictive agreements. Nevertheless, Tibetans continue to seek avenues for expressing dissatisfaction with government policies. In 2015, Tibetans held periodic demonstrations or vigils to protest CCP rule. Authorities often responded with arrests or violent crackdowns. In July, security forces in Sichuan Province's Kardze (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture reportedly opened fire to disperse a group of approximately 1,000 people gathered to mourn the death in custody of religious leader Tenzin Delek Rinpoche; no injuries were reported. Individuals are periodically detained for engaging in solitary protests to air demands such as freedom in Tibet or the return of the Dalai Lama.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The CCP controls the judicial system in Tibet, and courts consequently lack independence. Critics of Chinese rule continue to face arrests and disappearances. Torture is reportedly widespread. According to a partial database compiled by the U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China, there were 646 Tibetan political prisoners behind bars as of September 1, 2015—including 51 individuals detained in 2015. Defendants lack access to meaningful legal representation. Trials are closed if state security is invoked, and sometimes even when no political crime is listed. Chinese lawyers who offer to defend Tibetan suspects have been harassed or disbarred. Security forces routinely engage in arbitrary detention, and detainees' families are often left uninformed as to their whereabouts or well-being. Amnesty International reported two deaths of Tibetan prisoners of conscience in custody in 2015, including that of Tenzin Delek, who died in July while serving a life sentence on charges of "terrorism and separatism," which he had repudiated. Chinese authorities cremated his body without his family's permission, and suppressed public efforts to mourn the religious leader and protest his mistreatment.

The use of self-immolation to protest Chinese rule declined further in 2015, following harsh punishments inflicted by the Chinese authorities. Authorities responded to immolations with information blackouts, a heightened security presence, and increased surveillance. Guidelines unveiled in 2012 state that engaging in self-immolations and organizing, assisting, or gathering crowds related to such acts should be considered criminal offenses, including intentional homicide in some cases. Officials have offered cash rewards of hundreds of thousands of yuan for information on planned self-immolations. Since 2013, the government has also employed collective-punishment tactics in various counties in Sichuan and Qinghai Provinces to deter self-immolations and other protests against Chinese rule, imposing financial penalties on families, canceling public benefits for the households of self-immolators or other activists, and ending state-funded projects in their villages.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people suffer from discrimination. No LGBT-focused groups operate in the TAR, and discussion of LGBT issues remains taboo.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 3 / 16

Heightened restrictions on freedom of movement—including the use of troop deployments, roadblocks, and passport restrictions—continued in 2015, particularly in areas where self-immolations took place. Increased security efforts and the cooperation of the Nepalese government have made it difficult for Tibetans to cross the border into Nepal. Approximately 100 Tibetans were reported to have crossed successfully in 2014, continuing a trend of declines from more than 2,000 in 2007. Obtaining a passport is extremely difficult for Tibetans. In July 2015, a Human Rights Watch report detailed the various additional requirements, excessive delays, and arbitrary denials in the issuance of passports for Tibetans and some other minorities, finding that a slower and more restrictive system is in place in minority-dominated areas than elsewhere in China. Authorities continue to restrict access to the TAR for human rights researchers as well as some tourists. They are often denied entry surrounding politically sensitive dates, such as the annual anniversary of the 2008 protests. During other periods, tourists are required to travel in groups and obtain official permission to visit the TAR, and even then, last-minute travel bans are periodically imposed.

Tibetans receive preferential treatment in university admission examinations, but this is often not enough to secure entrance. The dominant role of the Chinese language in education and employment limits opportunities for many Tibetans. Private employers favor ethnic Chinese for many jobs, and Tibetans reportedly find it more difficult to obtain permits and loans to open businesses.

Since 2003, the authorities have intensified efforts to resettle rural Tibetans—forcibly or with incentives—into permanent-housing areas with little economic infrastructure. According to Human Rights Watch, more than two million TAR residents have been resettled since 2006, and plans to continue the program persisted in 2015. Many have reportedly tried to return to their previous lands, risking conflict with officials.

China’s restrictive family-planning policies are more leniently enforced for Tibetans and other ethnic minorities. Officials limit urban Tibetans to two children and encourage rural Tibetans to stop at three. As a result, the TAR is one of the few areas of China without a skewed sex ratio. Women are well represented in many public-sector jobs and CCP posts within the TAR, though most high-level officials are men. However, advocates noted in 2015 that women suffer specific religious and political persecution related to Chinese suppression of Tibetan identity. Tibetan women continue to be targets of human trafficking, with many taken to China for domestic service or forced marriages.

Transnistria

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 500,686

Civil Liberties Rating: 6

Freedom Rating: 6.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	6,6,NF

INTRODUCTION

Legislative elections were held in the breakaway region of Transnistria in November 2015. The struggling economy and public mistrust of the government were determining factors in a landslide victory by opposition party *Obnovleniye* (Renewal). Transnistria's economy worsened significantly during the year, due in part to the recession in Russia and less Russian financial support, though Transnistria blames its financial problems on an alleged blockade imposed by Moldova. Economic decline left the government unable to fully pay salaries and pensions.

Relations between Moldova and Transnistria worsened in 2015. Tensions had already increased after Moldova pursued closer ties with the European Union (EU) following Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine. Political turmoil and a financial scandal in Moldova also contributed to the suspension of international talks involving the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Transnistria; the United States and the EU serve as observers in negotiations.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 10 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 3 / 12

While Transnistria maintains its own legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, no country recognizes its independence. Both the president and the 43-seat, unicameral Supreme Council are elected to five-year terms. Constitutional amendments approved in 2011 created a relatively weak post of prime minister and set a two-term limit on the presidency. In 2014, the Supreme Council voted to hold the next local and legislative elections simultaneously in November 2015, instead of in March and December, respectively. The move was reportedly designed to conserve resources, though some critics ascribed political or corrupt financial motives to the change.

Presidential elections in 2011 featured increased competition and a broader choice for voters compared with previous polls. Yevgeny Shevchuk, a former parliament speaker running as an independent, led the first round with 39 percent, followed by Anatoly Kaminsky, who had Russia's endorsement. Shevchuk won the runoff against Kaminsky, securing 74 percent of the vote. Kaminsky resigned as parliament speaker and head of *Obnovleniye* in 2012.

Obnovleniye won a landslide victory in November 2015 legislative elections, securing 31 seats. Poor economic conditions and dissatisfaction with Shevchuk's government contributed to the upset. Vadim Krasnoselsky, former security chief of Sheriff Enterprises, a business conglomerate that dominates the Transnistrian economy, was elected parliament speaker, and Pavel Prokudin was appointed prime minister.

A small group of Shevchuk's allies and supporters demonstrated against the results of the elections, claiming vote manipulation.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 5 / 16

Shevchuk, who had fallen out with President Igor Smirnov in 2009 and resigned from *Obnovleniye* leadership in 2010, formed the *Vozrozhdeniye* (Revival) movement to back his 2011 presidential bid. *Obnovleniye*, the majority party in the legislature, is associated with Transnistria's monopolistic business conglomerate, Sheriff Enterprises, and maintains a close relationship with the ruling party in Russia. Despite internal political rivalry and infighting, Transnistria's entire political establishment, including nominal opposition parties and civil society organizations, supports the separatist system and Russia's role as patron.

Moscow's political influence in Transnistria is undergirded by the presence of 1,500 Russian troops, who are stationed to guard a Soviet-era ammunition depot and uphold a 1992 cease-fire between Transnistria and Moldova. The Moldovan government periodically calls for Russia to withdraw its forces.

While Transnistria has three official languages—Russian, Ukrainian, and Moldovan—Russian is the de facto language used by the government. Authorities do not allow voting in Moldovan elections to take place in Transnistrian-controlled territory, but residents with Russian citizenship had access to two dozen polling stations during Russia's tightly controlled 2012 presidential election.

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

Corruption and organized crime are serious problems. The authorities are entrenched in the territory's economic activities, which rely heavily on smuggling schemes. Since 2005, the EU has assisted Ukraine and Moldova in maintaining customs controls and seizing smuggled goods along their internationally recognized shared border.

Russia has a major stake in the Transnistrian economy and backs Transnistria through loans, direct subsidies, and natural gas supplies. The Transnistrian government routinely faces enormous budget deficits, and it holds a debt of about \$4 billion for gas imports from state-owned Russian energy giant Gazprom. Individuals associated with the former Smirnov administration have been accused of embezzling Russian aid and Transnistrian public assets.

Sheriff Enterprises backed *Obnovleniye* in the 2015 elections. In the months before, Shevchuk had initiated a campaign against oligarchs linked to Sheriff, urged the adoption of antitrust and tax legislation directed at reducing revenue from the business holding, and investigated Sheriff and an associated company for smuggling large amounts of foreign currency.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 14 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 5 / 16

The media environment is restrictive. Nearly all media are state owned or controlled and refrain from criticizing the authorities. The few independent print outlets have small circulation. Critical reporting draws harassment by the government, which also uses bureaucratic obstruction and the withholding of information to inhibit independent media. Sheriff Enterprises dominates the private broadcasting, cable television, and internet service markets.

Shevchuk issued a decree in 2014 that required government agencies, private organizations, and citizens to report instances of "extremist" material online. Journalist Sergey Ilchenko was detained from March to July 2015 on charges of sedition and extremism. After his initial arrest, the Transnistrian Committee for State Security (KGB) released a warning to internet users to keep Transnistrian "statehood" in mind when posting. In August, a Moldovan journalist was accused of extremism and temporarily detained. During the 2015 legislative election campaign, Shevchuk ordered the prosecutor general to enhance control over media to avoid "extremism" and ensure impartiality of information. Moldovan press cannot enter Transnistria without accreditation, and authorities sometimes deny entrance to or temporarily detain Moldovan journalists. Moldovan channels are blocked in Transnistria.

Religious freedom is limited. Orthodox Christianity is the dominant faith, and authorities have denied registration to several smaller religious groups. Unregistered groups face harassment by police and Orthodox opponents.

The eight schools that provide instruction in Romanian using the Latin alphabet, which is associated with support for reintegration with Moldova, face harassment by authorities and are forced to use substandard facilities. In February 2015, Transnistrian police temporarily detained the director of one of the schools.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 2 / 12

Authorities severely restrict freedom of assembly and rarely issue required permits for public protests. demonstrations The Central Electoral Commission opened an administrative case against the protesters for violating a law prohibiting protests within 100 feet of official buildings.

Freedom of association is similarly circumscribed. All nongovernmental activities must be coordinated with local authorities, and noncompliant groups face harassment, including surveillance and visits from security officials. Civil society organizations face increasing problems to work in Transnistria and international organizations need the approval of the authorities for their projects, visits and meetings with civil society and media.

The region's trade unions are holdovers from the Soviet era, and the United Council of Labor Collectives works closely with the government.

F. Rule of Law: 2 / 16

The judiciary is subservient to the executive and generally implements the will of the authorities. Defendants do not receive fair trials, and the legal framework falls short of international standards. Politically motivated arrests and detentions are common. Several Moldovans are held illegally in Transnistrian prisons.

Human rights groups have received credible accounts of torture in custody, and prison conditions are harsh and unsanitary. A 2013 UN report found protracted pretrial detention, lengthy sentences for minor crimes, and an "alarming" health situation in prisons, including cases of drug-resistant tuberculosis. There is no separate juvenile justice system, and addicts face forced medical treatment. Suspicious deaths of military conscripts occur periodically amid reports of routine mistreatment. No improvements have been made since the publication of the UN report.

Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, authorities discriminate against the Romanian-speaking minority. Ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians together account for some 60 percent of the population. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people have also reported discrimination, and same-sex sexual activity is illegal.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Travelers are frequently detained and questioned by Transnistrian authorities, who in some cases seize or demand money and goods. The majority of residents hold Russian, Ukrainian, or other passports besides Moldovan, though many are believed to have multiple citizenship. Between April 2014 and April 2015, about 75,000 Moldovan passport holders in Transnistria obtained biometric passports to benefit from Moldova's new visa-free EU travel privileges.

Transnistria and Russia complained in May 2015 of increased border restrictions by Ukrainian and Moldovan authorities, claiming that an economic blockade was being imposed. Transnistrian-Russian trade declined by 50 percent in 2015. Moldova imposed a ban on cars with Transnistrian license plates crossing into Ukraine starting in August; the ban was temporarily lifted in October. In June 2015, Russia issued certificates to a list of companies allowing them to circumvent a Russian embargo on Moldovan products; all but two are located in Transnistria or Gagauzia, a pro-Russia region of Moldova.

The 2013 UN report found that many residents have lost their rights to housing and land following flawed privatizations of factories and collective farms. Others living along the cease-fire line between Moldova and Transnistria are hampered by jurisdictional disputes involving their farmland.

Women are typically underrepresented in positions of authority, making up less than 10 percent of the legislature, though Shevchuk’s government includes several women in high-ranking positions. Domestic violence is a widespread problem, affecting an estimated 36 percent of women, and many domestic violence incidents are not reported to police. Transnistria is a significant source for trafficking in women for the purpose of prostitution and forced labor. Moldovan authorities offer resources to Transnistrian trafficking victims.

West Bank

Political Rights Rating: 6

Population: 2,785,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 5

Freedom Rating: 5.5

Freedom Status: Not Free

Note: The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Israel or the Gaza Strip, which are examined in separate reports. Prior to its 2011 edition, *Freedom in the World* featured one report for Israeli-occupied portions of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and another for Palestinian-administered portions.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	—	—	—	—	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank continued to operate without an electoral mandate or a functioning legislature. Negotiations aimed at repairing its rift with the Hamas regime in Gaza, which dated to 2007, led to an agreement in 2014. However, the terms by which the unified PA government would take control in Gaza had yet to be implemented at the end of 2015.

Meanwhile, Israeli-Palestinian peace talks remained frozen after they broke off in 2014, fueling frustration across the territories and setting the stage for an outbreak of violence in the last third of 2015.

The unrest was triggered in part by rumors that Israel planned to change the rules governing prayer at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif complex, which the Israeli authorities strongly denied. Palestinians perpetrated dozens of stabbings and other attacks against Israeli civilians and security personnel, while Israeli police and soldiers cracked down severely on all forms of protest, drawing accusations of excessive force. Militant Israeli settlers contributed to the violence with attacks on Palestinian civilians.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 6 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 2 / 12

Most Palestinian residents of the West Bank are citizens of the PA, a quasi-sovereign entity created by the 1993 Oslo Accords. Jewish settlers in the West Bank are Israeli citizens.

The PA president is elected to four-year terms. The prime minister is nominated by the president and requires the support of the unicameral, 132-seat Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), which also serves four-year terms. Voting in the West Bank during the 2005 presidential and 2006 PLC elections was deemed largely free and fair by international observers. Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas won the presidency with 62 percent of the vote, but Hamas led the PLC balloting with 74 seats, leaving Fatah with 45. The two factions formed a unity government headed by Prime Minister Ismail Haniya of Hamas.

After the 2007 schism left Hamas in control of the Gaza Strip, Abbas appointed a new cabinet in the West Bank—with Salam Fayyad as prime minister—that lacked the PLC's approval. In 2008, PA security forces arrested hundreds of Hamas members and supporters. The rift, combined with Israel's detention of many Palestinian lawmakers, prevented the PLC from functioning, and its term expired in 2010.

The Fatah-led Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) indefinitely extended Abbas's presidential term after his electoral mandate expired in 2009. Abbas issued a law permitting the Fatah-affiliated minister of local government to dissolve municipal councils, leading to the replacement of nearly all Hamas-affiliated municipal officials in the West Bank with Fatah loyalists. Elections were held for more than 90 municipalities in 2012 amid some accusations of unfairness, with Hamas and Islamic Jihad boycotting. Only half of eligible Palestinians registered to participate, and only 54 percent of those registered actually voted. Fatah won 40 percent of the seats at stake; others were taken by independents, including many former Fatah members.

In 2013, Abbas appointed Rami Hamdallah to replace Fayyad as prime minister. Hamdallah retained his post in the unity cabinet with Hamas that was announced in 2014, but efforts to put the agreement into practice made little progress in 2015. In August, Abbas and some of his allies resigned from the PLO's Executive Committee in an attempt to trigger new internal elections through a meeting of the organization's rarely convened, 800-member Palestinian National Council. Some observers alleged that Abbas's move was designed to purge his critics from the Executive Committee. A vote scheduled for September 2015 was indefinitely postponed amid internal opposition to the maneuver.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 5 / 16

The PA and Israeli forces in the West Bank have largely suppressed Hamas since 2007. PA security forces alone detained roughly 150 Hamas members in March and July 2015, although the PA denied that the arrests were political in nature and said they were related to security. A number of smaller Palestinian parties continue to operate, including through membership in the PLO. Despite the unity government deal concluded in 2014, relations between Fatah and Hamas and their respective supporters remain poor.

After Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, which has not been recognized internationally, Arab residents were issued Israeli identity cards and given the option of obtaining Israeli citizenship, though most have rejected this option. Non-Israeli citizens can vote in municipal and PA elections, but are subject to restrictions imposed by the Israeli municipality. In the 2006 PLC elections, Israel barred Hamas from campaigning in the city. Israeli authorities can strip noncitizens of their Jerusalem residency if they fail to meet various conditions demonstrating that the city remains their "center of life."

C. Functioning of Government: 2 / 12

The 2007 schism left the West Bank PA with a cabinet that lacked the support of the legislature, and the expiration of the presidential and parliamentary terms in 2009 and 2010

further undermined the government's legitimacy. The PA's ability to implement policy decisions is limited in practice by direct Israeli control over much of the West Bank.

Abbas has overseen some improvements on corruption, and Fayyad was credited with significantly reducing corruption at the higher levels of the PA. Nevertheless, a local non-governmental organization (NGO), the Coalition for Accountability and Integrity (AMAN), continued to detail endemic corruption in its reports during 2015, noting a decline in transparency in the PA's budget.

The PA put forward an anticorruption strategy for 2015–18, promising to strengthen legislation and improve the effectiveness of the relevant agencies, but critics argued that such measures would not be sufficient as long as the political and structural roots of the problem remained unaddressed.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 3 / 0

Construction of Jewish settlements and related land seizures in the West Bank continued in 2015. Meanwhile, according to partial data from the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, Israeli authorities demolished at least 118 Palestinian housing units in the West Bank (not including East Jerusalem) during the year due to lack of building permits or as a form of punishment, leaving over 400 people homeless. In East Jerusalem, the number of housing units demolished was at least 28, and at least 29 people were left homeless.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 24 / 60 (– 1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 9 / 16

The media are not free in the West Bank. Under a 1995 PA press law, journalists may be fined and jailed, and newspapers closed, for publishing “secret information” on PA security forces or news that might harm national unity or incite violence. Media outlets are routinely pressured to provide favorable coverage of the PA and Fatah. Journalists who criticize the PA or Fatah face arbitrary arrests, threats, and physical abuse. Reporters are also subject to administrative detention by Israeli forces. Since 2007, both the PA and Israeli forces have regularly suppressed Hamas-affiliated media outlets in the West Bank.

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) reported 116 press freedom violations—including physical assaults—by Palestinian forces in the West Bank in 2015, a 29 percent increase from the previous year. According to the same report, Israeli authorities were responsible for 407 violations in both the West Bank and Gaza. Journalists were repeatedly obstructed, attacked, and injured by security forces while attempting to cover protests in the West Bank.

The PA Basic Law declares Islam to be the official religion of Palestine and states that “respect and sanctity of all other heavenly religions (Judaism and Christianity) shall be maintained.” Blasphemy against Islam is a criminal offense. Synagogues are occasionally attacked by Palestinian militants. Some Palestinian Christians have experienced intimidation and harassment by radical Islamist groups and PA officials.

Israel generally recognizes freedom of religion in the West Bank. However, attacks on religious sites by radical Jewish settlers, including vandalism of churches and mosques, have increased in recent years. Citing security concerns, Israel occasionally imposes age restrictions on Muslim men seeking to pray at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif compound in Jerusalem. Authorities barred men under age 50 for a period in late 2015 amid clashes over increased visits to the site by Jews. However, individuals are generally able to access religious sites.

The PA has authority over Palestinian education. Israeli military closures, curfews, and the security barrier separating most of the West Bank from Israel restrict access to academic institutions, particularly those located between Israel and the barrier. Schools have sometimes been damaged during military actions, and student travel between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has been limited.

Israeli academic institutions in the West Bank increasingly face international and domestic boycotts. Primary and secondary education in West Bank settlements is administered by Israel, though religious schools have significant discretion over curriculums. According to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, East Jerusalem's schools are badly underfunded compared with schools in West Jerusalem.

Private discussion is relatively open and free, though both Israeli and PA security forces are known to monitor online activity and arrest individuals for alleged incitement or criticism of the Palestinian authorities.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 5 / 12 (– 1)

The PA requires permits for demonstrations, and those held to protest against PA policies are generally dispersed. Israel's Military Order 101 requires a permit for all "political" demonstrations of more than 10 people; demonstrations are routinely broken up with force, occasionally resulting in fatalities. Such clashes increased in 2015, as Israeli forces sought to restrict and disperse frequent and sometimes violent demonstrations, declaring some protest areas to be closed military zones.

A broad range of Palestinian nongovernmental organizations operate freely in the West Bank. Since 2007, however, many Hamas-affiliated groups have been shut down for political reasons. Activists and others who criticize the PA leadership can face harassment and abuse by security services.

Workers may establish unions without government authorization, but labor protections in general are poorly enforced. Palestinian workers seeking to strike must submit to arbitration by the PA Labor Ministry, and various other rules make it difficult to mount a legal strike. Palestinian workers in Jerusalem are subject to Israeli labor law.

F. Rule of Law: 5 / 16

The PA judicial system is partly independent. West Bank laws derive from Ottoman, British Mandate, Jordanian, Israeli, and PA legislation, as well as Israeli military orders. The High Judicial Council oversees most legal proceedings. Israel's Supreme Court hears petitions from non-Israeli residents of the West Bank regarding home demolitions, land confiscations, road closures, and military tactics. Decisions in favor of Palestinian petitioners, while rare, have increased in recent years. Most applications regarding the security barrier have been rejected, but the Israeli Supreme Court has repeatedly ordered changes to its route after hearing petitions.

The PA also has a military court system that lacks almost all due process, including the right to appeal sentences, and can impose the death penalty. No executions have been carried out since 2005, however. The PA military courts handle cases on a range of security offenses, on collaborating with Israel, and on drug trafficking. Human rights groups regularly document allegations of arbitrary detention and torture, and PA security officers are rarely punished for such abuses. The Independent Commission for Human Rights, the Palestinian human rights ombudsman, received dozens of torture complaints from the West Bank in 2015.

Palestinians accused of security offenses by Israel are tried in Israeli military courts, which grant some due process protections but limit rights to counsel, bail, and appeal.

According to B'Tselem, at the end of 2015 there were 5,723 Palestinian security detainees and prisoners from the West Bank held in Israeli prisons.

Most convictions in Israeli military courts are based on confessions, sometimes obtained through coercion. Israel's Supreme Court banned torture in a 1999 ruling, but physical coercion is considered permissible when the prisoner is believed to have vital information about impending attacks. Human rights groups criticize Israeli interrogation methods, which allegedly include some forms of physical abuse, isolation, sleep deprivation, psychological pressure, and threats of violence against detainees and their relatives.

According to Defense for Children International (DCI) Palestine, 422 Palestinian children (aged 12–17) from the occupied territories were being held in Israeli military detention as of December 2015 (up from 152 a year earlier), including 116 aged 12 to 15 (up from 10 a year earlier). Most Palestinian child detainees are serving sentences of less than a year for throwing stones or other projectiles at Israeli forces in the West Bank, handed down by a special court for minors; acquittals on such charges are very rare. DCI Palestine reports that most of these children are taken from their homes in the middle of the night, interrogated without a parent or lawyer, and subjected to threats as well as physical and verbal abuse. East Jerusalem Palestinian minors are tried in Israeli civilian juvenile courts.

The number of Palestinians in Israeli custody increased considerably in the fall of 2015, amid the broader escalation in violent demonstrations, related clashes with Israeli forces, and a series of Palestinian stabbing, vehicular, and shooting attacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians. According to B'Tselem, Israeli security forces killed a total of 117 Palestinians in the West Bank in 2015, compared with 46 in 2014 and 27 in 2013. Another nine were killed by Israeli civilians. Palestinian attackers killed 16 Israeli civilians and three Israeli security personnel. Human rights groups accused Israeli soldiers of using deadly force against some Palestinian attackers when they did not pose a lethal threat.

Militant Jewish settlers escalated attacks on Palestinian individuals and property in 2015 as part of their “price tag” campaign, launched as a response to Israeli policies aimed at limiting settlement. Most perpetrators of such activity enjoy impunity. A 2015 report by the Israeli human rights watchdog Yesh Din revealed that of 260 cases of vandalism to Palestinian-owned fruit trees investigated by Israeli police from 2005 to August 2015, only six led to indictments, and none led to convictions. The report found that Israeli police had an 85 percent failure rate overall in investigating what it called ideologically motivated crimes by Israeli civilians against Palestinians, and only 75 indictments have been served over the past decade. Among the year's most high-profile acts of violence was a July arson attack in which suspected Jewish extremists firebombed a Palestinian home in the village of Duma, killing three people, including an 18-month-old child. By year's end Israeli authorities had arrested a number of suspects in that case and in some related attacks on Palestinians or their property.

Israeli soldiers accused of harassing or assaulting Palestinian civilians are subject to Israeli military law, though convictions, which are rare, typically result in light sentences. A December 2015 report by Yesh Din showed that of 229 investigations of suspected crimes by Israeli soldiers against Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in 2014, only eight resulted in indictments, mostly for minor offenses.

Although LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people in the West Bank do not face prosecution for same-sex activity, they are reportedly subject to harassment and abuse by PA authorities and members of society.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 5 / 16

Checkpoints and roadblocks continue to hamper freedom of movement, stunt trade, and restrict Palestinian access to jobs, hospitals, and schools. The United Nations reported at

the end of 2015 that 91 new obstacles had been deployed by Israeli security forces since October, adding to 452 already in place. Most were unmanned obstructions designed to divert Palestinian traffic to routes controlled by staffed checkpoints.

Israel's West Bank security barrier, which the International Court of Justice declared illegal in 2004, has meant that 150 Palestinian communities on the eastern side need special permits to access their land in the "seam zone" between the barrier and the pre-1967 border, or Green Line. Some 11,000 Palestinians currently live in this zone.

Palestinian women are underrepresented in most professions and encounter discrimination in employment, though they have full access to universities. Palestinian laws and societal norms, derived in part from Sharia (Islamic law), disadvantage women in marriage, divorce, and inheritance. For Christians, personal status issues are governed by ecclesiastical courts. Rape and domestic abuse remain underreported and frequently go unpunished, as authorities are allegedly reluctant to pursue such cases. An increase in the number of so-called honor killings has been reported in recent years.

The PA has no law focused on combating trafficking in persons. Some Palestinians—both children and adults—reportedly work in exploitative conditions in Israeli settlements, where the PA has no jurisdiction. Israeli labor laws are rarely applied to protect such workers.

Western Sahara

Political Rights Rating: 7

Population: 604,000

Civil Liberties Rating: 7

Capital: Laâyoune

Freedom Rating: 7.0

Freedom Status: Not Free

Electoral Democracy: No

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline For Year Under Review (Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review Rating	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

INTRODUCTION

The year 2015 saw a continued stalemate between Morocco and the pro-independence Polisario Front—a nationalist liberation movement comprised of members of the Sahrawi ethnic group. The Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), the UN mission established in 1991 to implement a national referendum on independence for the territory, has never been able to fulfill its mandate. Long-standing support for Morocco from France and the United States continues to give Rabat the upper hand in the territory dispute.

The United Nations renewed MINURSO's mandate for another year in April 2015, but Sahrawis continue to doubt its effectiveness and lament its lack of a human rights monitoring mechanism. The UN envoy to Western Sahara, Christopher Ross, attempted to restart negotiations toward a political settlement in October 2015, but Polisario Front representatives indicated that they would continue to engage with the United Nations and Rabat only

in a limited capacity. In November 2015, the Moroccan government reiterated its longstanding position that it will not accept full independence for Western Sahara under any circumstances.

In March 2015, Moroccan officials permitted the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Human Rights Abuses Committed by the Moroccan State to legally register its status as a nongovernmental organization (NGO). However, Moroccan authorities still interfered with its activities following registration.

POLITICAL RIGHTS: – 3 / 40 (– 1)

A. Electoral Process: 0 / 12

A promised referendum on independence for Western Sahara has yet to be held, despite a cease-fire between Morocco and the Polisario Front brokered by the United Nations more than two decades ago. The United Nations considers Western Sahara to be a “Non-Self-Governing Territory.” Morocco controls two-thirds of the territory of Western Sahara, including the entire Atlantic seaboard. The region under its influence, which Morocco considers to be its Southern Provinces, is home to the majority of the territory’s population. In the territory that Morocco does not fully control—principally the eastern portion and refugee camps in Algeria—the Polisario is ostensibly the governing power. The Polisario’s General Popular Congress is responsible for administration of the refugee camps.

Morocco works to retain the territory as a vital component of the kingdom. In November 2015, the Moroccan government reiterated its longstanding position that it will not accept full independence for Western Sahara under any circumstances, proposing only limited local autonomy. There are no free elections within Western Sahara. Morocco holds authority over municipal elections and excludes candidates who support independence. Some members of the Moroccan Parliament represent districts in Western Sahara.

The Polisario Front operates a General Popular Congress made up of delegates from refugee camps in Polisario-controlled areas of Western Sahara and Algeria. In December 2015, Mohammed Abdelaziz, a founding member of the front and its secretary-general since 1976, was reelected to another term by congressional delegates. The Polisario Front is based in Tindouf, Algeria.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 0 / 16

Morocco continues to repress Sahrawi activism to liberate the disputed Western Sahara territory. The Polisario Front is fragmented between hard-line elements demanding full independence and more moderate factions willing to compromise with Morocco.

C. Functioning of Government: 0 / 12

Corruption among both Moroccan authorities and the Polisario is rampant and goes uninvestigated.

Discretionary Political Rights Question B: – 3 / 0 (– 1)

Morocco has tried to bolster its claim to Western Sahara over the years by working to alter its demographics. Moroccan authorities offer financial incentives for Moroccans to move to Western Sahara and for Sahrawis to move to Morocco. By some counts, Moroccans now significantly outnumber Sahrawis in Western Sahara. Alterations to the physical landscape, including a sand berm running the length of the territory, serve as additional means of population control, preventing ethnic Sahrawis from accessing Moroccan-controlled areas.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 7 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 3 / 16

Freedom of expression within Moroccan-controlled areas of Western Sahara is strictly curtailed. Moroccan authorities regularly detain or expel local and foreign reporters who seek to cover sensitive issues. Moroccan law bars the media and individuals from challenging Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, leading to self-censorship. Access to the internet and independent satellite broadcasts are largely unavailable in the territory due to economic constraints.

Some locally based pro-Sahrawi media outlets do operate, such as the all-volunteer Equipe Media group, though they face regular harassment by Moroccan authorities. In January 2015, Moroccan police surrounded a house where a group of journalists had gathered to film a project discussing Sahrawi resistance; two were assaulted when they left the residence, while the rest spent hours inside until the police departed. In March, the president of Equipe Media and one of its journalists were assaulted, harassed, and interrogated about the nature of their work by security officials at the Laâyoune airport before being allowed to depart for a conference in Spain.

Freedom of expression within Polisario-controlled areas is also constrained, and there have been reports of restrictions by Polisario (and Algerian) authorities in refugee camps in Tindouf.

Nearly all Sahrawis are Sunni Muslims, as are Moroccans, and Moroccan authorities generally do not interfere with their freedom of worship.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 0 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are severely restricted. Although demonstrations and protests are common, they are often violently dispersed. In March 2015, Moroccan police attacked women who had gathered to demonstrate against the abuse of women by occupation forces, injuring more than a dozen.

In addition to Sahrawi activists, many of their foreign sympathizers present in Western Sahara are also targeted by the authorities. In February 2015, four activists from the Canary Islands were expelled from the territory after they tried to hold training sessions with local activists. In March, two Norwegian activists were also expelled for allegedly working with local pro-independence groups.

In March 2015, Moroccan officials announced that for the first time, two Sahrawi non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would be allowed to register, ending a longstanding prohibition against such groups. The most prominent, the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Human Rights Abuses Committed by the Moroccan State, was reportedly legally registered by August. However, authorities continued to curtail its operations, generally prohibiting any of its public activities.

Sahrawis are technically subject to Moroccan labor laws in Moroccan-controlled areas, and unions are present but not frequently active. In May 2015, local bus drivers went on strike to protest unfair treatment by the authorities and the proliferation of unlicensed taxis, many of which are allegedly controlled by elements within the security services as side businesses.

F. Rule of Law: 0 / 16

The government of Morocco asserts judicial and penal administration within Western Sahara. Security forces in the territory have a history of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrest and detention, disappearances, and custodial torture. In one case that

attracted international attention, 21-year-old Mohamed Lamine Haidala, an ethnic Sahrawi, was beaten and stabbed by five men in January 2015; his family claimed the assailants were Moroccan settlers. Haidala was repeatedly summoned to the police station for interrogations over much of the following week, interrupting necessary medical care. He died of his injuries in early February. Months later, authorities had yet to undertake an independent investigation into his death.

Moroccan law, administered in Moroccan-controlled parts of Western Sahara, prohibits same-sex sexual acts.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 4 / 16

Morocco and the Polisario Front both restrict free movement in Western Sahara. In the 1980s, Morocco constructed a 1,700-mile wall, or berm, to divide the northwest Moroccan-controlled region of Western Sahara from the southeast pro-independence Polisario Front-controlled Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The wall is surrounded on both sides by land mines, and constitutes what may be the longest continuous land mine field in the world. In May 2015, three people were severely injured and one died when after their vehicle struck a mine.

Western Sahara possesses extensive natural resources, including phosphate, iron ore deposits, hydrocarbon reserves, and fisheries. The Moroccan government and foreign companies routinely exploit these resources while the local population remains largely impoverished. In recent years, oil companies have made efforts to secure rights to oil exploration and drilling, with no discernible benefit for the Western Sahara population. In December 2015, the European Court of Justice struck down a free trade agreement between the European Union (EU) and Morocco for improperly permitting European access to Western Sahara's resources. The EU has vowed to appeal. The SADR government routinely signs contracts with firms for the exploration of oil and gas, but these contracts cannot be formally implemented given the territory's status. No credible free market exists.

The National Union of Sahrawi Women was created in 1974 and is especially present in the refugee camps in Tindouf. It also has representation and influence in Morocco-controlled territory, though its scope is difficult to gauge. According to journalistic accounts, women in Sahrawi society enjoy relatively strong civil liberties, and they are prominent in activist circles and in the pro-independence movement. Some observers attribute this to the liberal interpretation of Islam in Sahrawi society, as well as the nomadic roots of the culture. Others ascribe it to the ordeal of living in refugee camps or under occupation. Both Moroccan authorities and Sahrawi NGOs have made efforts to fight child labor in Western Sahara. However U.S. Labor Department has criticized Moroccan authorities for failing to publish more specific information about such efforts.

Survey Methodology

INTRODUCTION

Freedom in the World is an annual global report on political rights and civil liberties, composed of numerical ratings and descriptive texts for each country and a select group of related and disputed territories. The 2016 edition covers developments in 195 countries and 15 territories from January 1, 2015, through December 31, 2015.

The report's methodology is derived in large measure from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. *Freedom in the World* is based on the premise that these standards apply to all countries and territories, irrespective of geographical location, ethnic or religious composition, or level of economic development. *Freedom in the World* operates from the assumption that freedom for all peoples is best achieved in liberal democratic societies.

Freedom in the World assesses the real-world rights and freedoms enjoyed by individuals, rather than governments or government performance per se. Political rights and civil liberties can be affected by both state and nonstate actors, including insurgents and other armed groups.

Freedom House does not equate legal guarantees of rights with the on-the-ground fulfillment of those rights. While both laws and actual practices are factored into the ratings decisions, greater emphasis is placed on implementation.

Countries and territories with small populations are not penalized for lacking pluralism in the political system or civil society if these limitations are determined to be a function of size and not overt restrictions by the government or other powerful actors.

Territories are selected for inclusion in *Freedom in the World* based on their political significance and size. Freedom House divides territories into two categories: related territories and disputed territories. Related territories are in some relation of dependency to a sovereign state, and the relationship is not currently in serious legal or political dispute. Disputed territories are areas within internationally recognized sovereign states whose status is in serious political or violent dispute, and whose conditions differ substantially from those of the relevant sovereign states. They are often outside of central government control and characterized by intense, longtime, and widespread insurgency or independence movements that enjoy popular support. Freedom House typically takes no position on territorial or separatist disputes as such, focusing instead on the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area.

HISTORY OF FREEDOM IN THE WORLD

Freedom House's first year-end reviews of freedom began in the 1950s as the *Balance Sheet of Freedom*. This modest report provided assessments of political trends and their implications for individual freedom. In 1972, Freedom House launched a new, more comprehensive annual study called *The Comparative Study of Freedom*. Raymond Gastil, a Harvard-trained specialist in regional studies from the University of Washington in Seattle, developed the methodology, which assigned political rights and civil liberties ratings to 151 countries and 45 territories and categorized them as Free, Partly Free, or Not Free. The findings appeared each year in Freedom House's *Freedom at Issue* bimonthly journal (later

titled *Freedom Review*). *Freedom in the World* first appeared in book form in 1978 and included short narratives for each country and territory rated in the study, as well as a series of essays by leading scholars on related issues. *Freedom in the World* continued to be produced by Gastil until 1989, when a larger team of in-house analysts was established. In the mid-1990s, the expansion of the country and territory narratives demanded the hiring of outside analysts—a group of regional experts from the academic, media, and human rights communities—and the project has continued to grow in size and scope in the years since.

The methodology is reviewed periodically, and a number of modest changes have been made over the years to adapt to evolving ideas about political rights and civil liberties. However, the time-series data are not revised retroactively, and any changes to the methodology are introduced incrementally in order to ensure the comparability of the ratings from year to year.

RESEARCH AND RATINGS REVIEW PROCESS

Freedom in the World is produced each year by a team of in-house and external analysts and expert advisers from the academic, think tank, and human rights communities. The 2016 edition involved more than 80 analysts and nearly 30 advisers. The analysts, who prepare the draft reports and scores, use a broad range of sources, including news articles, academic analyses, reports from nongovernmental organizations, and individual professional contacts. The analysts score countries based on the conditions and events within their borders during the coverage period. The analysts' proposed scores are discussed and defended at annual review meetings, organized by region and attended by Freedom House staff and a panel of the expert advisers. The final scores represent the consensus of the analysts, advisers, and staff, and are intended to be comparable from year to year and across countries and regions. The advisers also provide a detailed review of and commentary on a number of key country and territory reports. Although an element of subjectivity is unavoidable in such an enterprise, the ratings process emphasizes methodological consistency, intellectual rigor, and balanced and unbiased judgments.

RATINGS PROCESS

Freedom in the World uses a three-tiered rating system, consisting of **scores**, **ratings**, and **status**. The complete list of the questions used in the scoring process, and the tables for converting scores to ratings and ratings to status, appear at the end of this essay.

Scores – A country or territory is awarded 0 to 4 points for each of 10 political rights indicators and 15 civil liberties indicators, which take the form of questions; a score of 0 represents the smallest degree of freedom and 4 the greatest degree of freedom. The political rights questions are grouped into three subcategories: Electoral Process (3 questions), Political Pluralism and Participation (4), and Functioning of Government (3). The civil liberties questions are grouped into four subcategories: Freedom of Expression and Belief (4 questions), Associational and Organizational Rights (3), Rule of Law (4), and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights (4). The political rights section also contains two additional discretionary questions. For additional discretionary question A, a score of 1 to 4 may be added, as applicable, while for discretionary question B, a score of 1 to 4 may be subtracted, as applicable (the worse the situation, the more points may be subtracted). The highest score that can be awarded to the political rights checklist is 40 (or a total score of 4 for each of the 10 questions). The highest score that can be awarded to the civil liberties checklist is 60 (or a total score of 4 for each of the 15 questions). The scores from the previous edition are

used as a benchmark for the current year under review. A score is typically changed only if there has been a real-world development during the year that warrants a decline or improvement (e.g., a crackdown on the media, the country's first free and fair elections), though gradual changes in conditions, in the absence of a signal event, are occasionally registered in the scores.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties Ratings – A country or territory is assigned two ratings (7 to 1)—one for political rights and one for civil liberties—based on its total scores for the political rights and civil liberties questions. Each rating of 1 through 7, with 1 representing the greatest degree of freedom and 7 the smallest degree of freedom, corresponds to a specific range of total scores (see tables 1 and 2).

Free, Partly Free, Not Free Status – The average of a country's or territory's political rights and civil liberties ratings is called the Freedom Rating, and it is this figure that determines the status of Free (1.0 to 2.5), Partly Free (3.0 to 5.0), or Not Free (5.5 to 7.0) (see table 3).

Trend Arrows – A country or territory may be assigned an upward or downward trend arrow to highlight developments of major significance or concern. These developments may include a positive or negative shift over multiple years, an especially notable change in a single year, or an important event in a country that is particularly influential in its region or the world. A trend arrow must be linked to a specific change or changes in score, and cannot be assigned if the country had no net change in score. Unlike in previous years, countries whose scores triggered a change in ratings or status could also be assigned a trend arrow in *Freedom in the World 2016*. Most score changes do not warrant trend arrows. Decisions on whether a country or territory should receive a trend arrow are made by Freedom House staff, after consultation with the analyst and expert advisers.

Electoral Democracy – *Freedom in the World* assigns the designation “electoral democracy” to countries that have met certain minimum standards for political rights; territories are not included in the list of electoral democracies. According to the methodology, an electoral democracy designation requires a score of 7 or better in the Electoral Process subcategory and an overall political rights score of 20 or better. Freedom House's term “electoral democracy” differs from “liberal democracy” in that the latter also implies the presence of a substantial array of civil liberties. In *Freedom in the World*, all Free countries can be considered both electoral and liberal democracies, while some Partly Free countries qualify as electoral, but not liberal, democracies.

RATINGS AND STATUS CHARACTERISTICS

Political Rights

1 – Countries and territories with a rating of 1 enjoy a wide range of political rights, including free and fair elections. Candidates who are elected actually rule, political parties are competitive, the opposition plays an important role and enjoys real power, and the interests of minority groups are well represented in politics and government.

2 – Countries and territories with a rating of 2 have slightly weaker political rights than those with a rating of 1 because of such factors as political corruption, limits on the functioning of political parties and opposition groups, and foreign or military influence on politics.

3, 4, 5 – Countries and territories with a rating of 3, 4, or 5 either moderately protect almost all political rights or strongly protect some political rights while neglecting others. The same factors that undermine freedom in countries with a rating of 2 may also weaken political rights in those with a rating of 3, 4, or 5, but to a greater extent at each successive rating.

6 – Countries and territories with a rating of 6 have very restricted political rights. They are ruled by one-party or military dictatorships, religious hierarchies, or autocrats. They may allow a few political rights, such as some representation or autonomy for minority groups, and a few are traditional monarchies that tolerate political discussion and accept public petitions.

7 – Countries and territories with a rating of 7 have few or no political rights because of severe government oppression, sometimes in combination with civil war. They may also lack an authoritative and functioning central government and suffer from extreme violence or rule by regional warlords.

Civil Liberties

1 – Countries and territories with a rating of 1 enjoy a wide range of civil liberties, including freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. They have an established and generally fair legal system that ensures the rule of law (including an independent judiciary), allow free economic activity, and tend to strive for equality of opportunity for everyone, including women and minority groups.

2 – Countries and territories with a rating of 2 have slightly weaker civil liberties than those with a rating of 1 because of such factors as limits on media independence, restrictions on trade union activities, and discrimination against minority groups and women.

3, 4, 5 – Countries and territories with a rating of 3, 4, or 5 either moderately protect almost all civil liberties or strongly protect some civil liberties while neglecting others. The same factors that undermine freedom in countries with a rating of 2 may also weaken civil liberties in those with a rating of 3, 4, or 5, but to a greater extent at each successive rating.

6 – Countries and territories with a rating of 6 have very restricted civil liberties. They strongly limit the rights of expression and association and frequently hold political prisoners. They may allow a few civil liberties, such as some religious and social freedoms, some highly restricted private business activity, and some open and free private discussion.

7 – Countries and territories with a rating of 7 have few or no civil liberties. They allow virtually no freedom of expression or association, do not protect the rights of detainees and prisoners, and often control or dominate most economic activity.

The gap between a country's or territory's political rights and civil liberties ratings is rarely more than two points. Politically oppressive states typically do not allow a well-developed civil society, for example, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to maintain political freedoms in the absence of civil liberties like press freedom and the rule of law.

Because the designations of Free, Partly Free, and Not Free each cover a broad third of the available scores, countries or territories within any one category, especially those at either end of the range, can have quite different human rights situations. For example, those

at the lowest end of the Free category (2 in political rights and 3 in civil liberties, or 3 in political rights and 2 in civil liberties) differ from those at the upper end of the Free group (1 for both political rights and civil liberties). Also, a designation of Free does not mean that a country or territory enjoys perfect freedom or lacks serious problems, only that it enjoys comparatively more freedom than those rated Partly Free or Not Free (and some others rated Free).

FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2016

Checklist Questions

The bulleted subquestions are intended to provide guidance to the analysts regarding what issues are meant to be considered in scoring each checklist question. The analysts do not need to consider every subquestion during the scoring process, as the relevance of each varies from one place to another.

POLITICAL RIGHTS (0–40 POINTS)

A. ELECTORAL PROCESS (0–12 points)

1. Is the head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

- Did established and reputable national and/or international election monitoring organizations judge the most recent elections for head of government to be free and fair? (*Note:* Heads of government chosen through various electoral frameworks, including direct elections for president, indirect elections for prime minister by parliament, and the electoral college system for electing presidents, are covered under this and the following sub-questions. In cases of indirect elections for the head of government, the elections for the legislature that chose the head of government, as well as the selection process of the head of government himself, should be taken into consideration.)
- Have there been undue, politically motivated delays in holding the most recent election for head of government?
- Is the registration of voters and candidates conducted in an accurate, timely, transparent, and nondiscriminatory manner?
- Can candidates make speeches, hold public meetings, and enjoy media access throughout the campaign free of intimidation?
- Does voting take place by secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedure?
- Are voters able to vote for the candidate or party of their choice without undue pressure or intimidation?
- Is the vote count transparent, and is it reported honestly with the official results made public? Can election monitors from independent groups and representing parties/candidates watch the counting of votes to ensure their honesty?
- Is each person’s vote given equivalent weight to those of other voters in order to ensure equal representation?
- Has a democratically elected head of government who was chosen in the most recent election subsequently been overthrown in a violent coup? (*Note:* Although a peaceful, “velvet coup” may ultimately lead to a positive outcome—particularly if it replaces a head of government who was not freely and fairly elected—the new leader has not been freely and fairly elected and cannot be treated as such.)
- In cases where elections for regional, provincial, or state governors and/or other subnational officials differ significantly in conduct from national elections, does

the conduct of the subnational elections reflect an opening toward improved political rights in the country, or, alternatively, a worsening of political rights?

2. Are the national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

- Did established and reputable domestic and/or international election monitoring organizations judge the most recent national legislative elections to be free and fair?
- Have there been undue, politically motivated delays in holding the most recent national legislative election?
- Is the registration of voters and candidates conducted in an accurate, timely, transparent, and nondiscriminatory manner?
- Can candidates make speeches, hold public meetings, and enjoy media access throughout the campaign free of intimidation?
- Does voting take place by secret ballot or by equivalent free voting procedure?
- Are voters able to vote for the candidate or party of their choice without undue pressure or intimidation?
- Is the vote count transparent, and is it reported honestly with the official results made public? Can election monitors from independent groups and representing parties/candidates watch the counting of votes to ensure their honesty?
- Is each person's vote given equivalent weight to those of other voters in order to ensure equal representation?
- Have the representatives of a democratically elected national legislature who were chosen in the most recent election subsequently been overthrown in a violent coup? (*Note:* Although a peaceful, "velvet coup" may ultimately lead to a positive outcome—particularly if it replaces a national legislature whose representatives were not freely and fairly elected—members of the new legislature have not been freely and fairly elected and cannot be treated as such.)
- In cases where elections for subnational councils/parliaments differ significantly in conduct from national elections, does the conduct of the subnational elections reflect an opening toward improved political rights in the country, or, alternatively, a worsening of political rights?

3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair?

- Is there a clear, detailed, and fair legislative framework for conducting elections? (*Note:* Changes to electoral laws should not be made immediately preceding an election if the ability of voters, candidates, or parties to fulfill their roles in the election is infringed.)
- Are election commissions or other election authorities independent and free from government or other pressure and interference?
- Is the composition of election commissions fair and balanced?
- Do election commissions or other election authorities conduct their work in an effective and competent manner?
- Do adult citizens enjoy universal and equal suffrage? (*Note:* Suffrage can be suspended or withdrawn for reasons of legal incapacity, such as mental incapacity or conviction of a serious criminal offense.)
- Is the drawing of election districts conducted in a fair and nonpartisan manner, as opposed to gerrymandering for personal or partisan advantage?
- Has the selection of a system for choosing legislative representatives (such as proportional versus majoritarian) been manipulated to advance certain political interests or to influence the electoral results?

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION (0–16 points)

1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

- Do political parties encounter undue legal or practical obstacles in their efforts to be formed and to operate, including onerous registration requirements, excessively large membership requirements, etc.?
- Do parties face discriminatory or onerous restrictions in holding meetings, rallies, or other peaceful activities?
- Are party members or leaders intimidated, harassed, arrested, imprisoned, or subjected to violent attacks as a result of their peaceful political activities?

2. Is there a significant opposition vote and a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

- Are various legal/administrative restrictions selectively applied to opposition parties to prevent them from increasing their support base or successfully competing in elections?
- Are there legitimate opposition forces in positions of authority, such as in the national legislature or in subnational governments?
- Are opposition party members or leaders intimidated, harassed, arrested, imprisoned, or subjected to violent attacks as a result of their peaceful political activities?

3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?

- Do such groups offer bribes to voters and/or political figures in order to influence their political choices?
- Do such groups intimidate, harass, or attack voters and/or political figures in order to influence their political choices?
- Does the military control or enjoy a preponderant influence over government policy and activities, including in countries that nominally are under civilian control?
- Do foreign governments control or enjoy a preponderant influence over government policy and activities by means including the presence of foreign military troops, the use of significant economic threats or sanctions, etc.?

4. Do cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

- Do political parties of various ideological persuasions address issues of specific concern to minority groups?
- Does the government inhibit the participation of minority groups in national or subnational political life through laws and/or practical obstacles?
- Are political parties based on ethnicity, culture, or religion that espouse peaceful, democratic values legally permitted and de facto allowed to operate?

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT (0–12 points)

1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

- Are the candidates who were elected freely and fairly duly installed in office?
- Do other appointed or non–freely elected state actors interfere with or prevent freely elected representatives from adopting and implementing legislation and making meaningful policy decisions?

- Do nonstate actors, including criminal gangs, the military, and foreign governments, interfere with or prevent elected representatives from adopting and implementing legislation and making meaningful policy decisions?
- 2. Is the government free from pervasive corruption?**
- Has the government implemented effective anticorruption laws or programs to prevent, detect, and punish corruption among public officials, including conflict of interest?
 - Is the government free from excessive bureaucratic regulations, registration requirements, or other controls that increase opportunities for corruption?
 - Are there independent and effective auditing and investigative bodies that function without impediment or political pressure or influence?
 - Are allegations of corruption by government officials thoroughly investigated and prosecuted without prejudice, particularly against political opponents?
 - Are allegations of corruption given wide and extensive airing in the media?
 - Do whistleblowers, anticorruption activists, investigators, and journalists enjoy legal protections that make them feel secure about reporting cases of bribery and corruption?
 - What was the latest Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index score for this country?
- 4. Is the government accountable to the electorate between elections, and does it operate with openness and transparency?**
- Are civil society groups, interest groups, journalists, and other citizens able to comment on and influence pending policies or legislation?
 - Do citizens have the legal right and practical ability to obtain information about government operations and the means to petition government agencies for it?
 - Is the budget-making process subject to meaningful legislative review and public scrutiny?
 - Does the government publish detailed accounting expenditures in a timely fashion?
 - Does the state ensure transparency and effective competition in the awarding of government contracts?
 - Are the asset declarations of government officials open to public and media scrutiny and verification?

ADDITIONAL DISCRETIONARY POLITICAL RIGHTS QUESTIONS

- A. For traditional monarchies that have no parties or electoral process, does the system provide for genuine, meaningful consultation with the people, encourage public discussion of policy choices, and allow the right to petition the ruler? (0–4 points)**
- Is there a non-elected legislature that advises the monarch on policy issues?
 - Are there formal mechanisms for individuals or civic groups to speak with or petition the monarch?
 - Does the monarch take petitions from the public under serious consideration?
- B. Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group? (–4 to 0 points)**
-

- Is the government providing economic or other incentives to certain people in order to change the ethnic composition of a region or regions?
- Is the government forcibly moving people in or out of certain areas in order to change the ethnic composition of those regions?
- Is the government arresting, imprisoning, or killing members of certain ethnic groups in order change the ethnic composition of a region or regions?

CIVIL LIBERTIES (0–60 points)

D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF (0–16 points)

1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression? (Note: In cases where the media are state controlled but offer pluralistic points of view, the survey gives the system credit.)

- Are print, broadcast, and/or internet-based media directly or indirectly censored?
- Is self-censorship among journalists common, especially when reporting on politically sensitive issues, including corruption or the activities of senior officials?
- Are libel, blasphemy, or security laws used to punish journalists who scrutinize government officials and policies or other powerful entities through either onerous fines or imprisonment?
- Is it a crime to insult the honor and dignity of the president and/or other government officials? How broad is the range of such prohibitions, and how vigorously are they enforced?
- If media outlets are dependent on the government for their financial survival, does the government withhold funding in order to propagandize, primarily provide official points of view, and/or limit access by opposition parties and civic critics? Do powerful private actors engage in similar practices?
- Does the government attempt to influence media content and access through means including politically motivated awarding of broadcast frequencies and newspaper registrations, unfair control and influence over printing facilities and distribution networks, selective distribution of advertising, onerous registration requirements, prohibitive tariffs, and bribery?
- Are journalists threatened, arrested, imprisoned, beaten, or killed by government or nongovernmental actors for their legitimate journalistic activities, and if such cases occur, are they investigated and prosecuted fairly and expeditiously?
- Are works of literature, art, music, or other forms of cultural expression censored or banned for political purposes?

2. Are religious institutions and communities free to practice their faith and express themselves in public and private?

- Are registration requirements employed to impede the free functioning of religious institutions?
- Are members of religious groups, including minority faiths and movements, harassed, fined, arrested, or beaten by the authorities for engaging in their religious practices?
- Are religious practice and expression impeded by violence or harassment from nonstate actors?
- Does the government appoint or otherwise influence the appointment of religious leaders?

- Does the government control the production and distribution of religious books and other materials and the content of sermons?
- Is the construction of religious buildings banned or restricted?
- Does the government place undue restrictions on religious education? Does the government require religious education?
- Are individuals free to eschew religious beliefs and practices in general?

3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free of extensive political indoctrination?

- Are teachers and professors free to pursue academic activities of a political and quasi-political nature without fear of physical violence or intimidation by state or nonstate actors?
- Does the government pressure, strongly influence, or control the content of school curriculums for political purposes?
- Are student associations that address issues of a political nature allowed to function freely?
- Does the government, including through school administration or other officials, pressure students and/or teachers to support certain political figures or agendas, including pressuring them to attend political rallies or vote for certain candidates? Conversely, does the government, including through school administration or other officials, discourage or forbid students and/or teachers from supporting certain candidates and parties?

4. Is there open and free private discussion?

- Are people able to engage in private discussions, particularly of a political nature (in places including restaurants, public transportation, and their homes) without fear of harassment or detention by the authorities or powerful nonstate actors?
- Do users of personal online communications—including private e-mail, text messages, or personal blogs/social-media platform with a limited following—face legal penalties, harassment, or violence from the government or powerful nonstate actors in retaliation for critical remarks?
- Does the government employ people or groups to engage in public surveillance and to report alleged antigovernment conversations to the authorities?

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS (0–12 points)

1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion?

- Are peaceful protests, particularly those of a political nature, banned or severely restricted?
- Are the legal requirements to obtain permission to hold peaceful demonstrations particularly cumbersome and time consuming?
- Are participants of peaceful demonstrations intimidated, arrested, or assaulted?
- Are peaceful protestors detained by police in order to prevent them from engaging in such actions?

2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations? (Note: This includes civic organizations, interest groups, foundations, etc., with an emphasis on those engaged in human rights– and governance-related work.)

- Are registration and other legal requirements for nongovernmental organizations particularly onerous and intended to prevent them from functioning freely?
- Are laws related to the financing of nongovernmental organizations unduly complicated and cumbersome?
- Are donors and funders of nongovernmental organizations free of government pressure?

- Are members of nongovernmental organizations intimidated, arrested, imprisoned, or assaulted because of their work?
- 3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?**
- Are trade unions allowed to be established and to operate free from government interference?
 - Are workers pressured by the government or employers to join or not to join certain trade unions, and do they face harassment, violence, or dismissal from their jobs if they do?
 - Are workers permitted to engage in strikes, and do members of unions face reprisals for engaging in peaceful strikes? (*Note:* This question may not apply to workers in essential government services or public safety jobs.)
 - Are unions able to bargain collectively with employers and able to negotiate collective bargaining agreements that are honored in practice?
 - For states with very small populations or primarily agriculturally-based economies that do not necessarily support the formation of trade unions, does the government allow for the establishment of peasant organizations or their equivalents? Is there legislation expressly forbidding the formation of trade unions?
 - Are professional organizations, including business associations, allowed to operate freely and without government interference?

F. RULE OF LAW (0–16 points)

- 1. Is there an independent judiciary?**
- Is the judiciary subject to interference from the executive branch of government or from other political, economic, or religious influences?
 - Are judges appointed and dismissed in a fair and unbiased manner?
 - Do judges rule fairly and impartially, or do they commonly render verdicts that favor the government or particular interests, whether in return for bribes or other reasons?
 - Do executive, legislative, and other governmental authorities comply with judicial decisions, and are these decisions effectively enforced?
 - Do powerful private concerns comply with judicial decisions, and are decisions that run counter to the interests of powerful actors effectively enforced?
- 2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Are police under direct civilian control?**
- Are defendants' rights, including the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, protected?
 - Are detainees provided access to independent, competent legal counsel?
 - Are defendants given a fair, public, and timely hearing by a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal?
 - Are prosecutors independent of political control and influence?
 - Are prosecutors independent of powerful private interests, whether legal or illegal?
 - Is there effective and democratic civilian state control of law enforcement officials through the judicial, legislative, and executive branches?
 - Are law enforcement officials free from the influence of nonstate actors, including organized crime, powerful commercial interests, or other groups?
- 3. Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies?**

- Do law enforcement officials make arbitrary arrests and detentions without warrants or fabricate or plant evidence on suspects?
- Do law enforcement officials beat detainees during arrest and interrogation or use excessive force or torture to extract confessions?
- Are conditions in pretrial facilities and prisons humane and respectful of the human dignity of inmates?
- Do citizens have the means of effective petition and redress when their rights are violated by state authorities?
- Is violent crime either against specific groups or within the general population widespread?
- Is the population subjected to physical harm, forced removal, or other acts of violence or terror due to civil conflict or war?

5. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

- Are members of various distinct groups—including ethnic and religious minorities, LGBT and intersex people, and the disabled—able to exercise effectively their human rights with full equality before the law?
- Is violence against such groups widespread, and if so, are perpetrators brought to justice?
- Do members of such groups face legal and/or de facto discrimination in areas including employment, education, and housing because of their identification with a particular group?
- Do women enjoy full equality in law and in practice as compared to men?
- Do noncitizens—including migrant workers and noncitizen immigrants—enjoy basic internationally recognized human rights, including the right not to be subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment, the right to due process of law, and the rights of freedom of association, expression, and religion?
- Do the country’s laws provide for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and other regional treaties regarding refugees? Has the government established a system for providing protection to refugees, including against *refoulement* (the return of persons to a country where there is reason to believe they fear persecution)?

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS (0–16 points)

1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of travel or choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher education?

- Are there restrictions on foreign travel, including the use of an exit visa system, which may be issued selectively?
- Is permission required from the authorities or nonstate actors to move within the country?
- Do state or nonstate actors determine or otherwise influence a person’s type and place of employment?
- Are bribes or other inducements needed to obtain the necessary documents to travel, change one’s place of residence or employment, enter institutions of higher education, or advance in school?

2. Do individuals have the right to own property and establish private businesses? Is private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, political parties/organizations, or organized crime?

- Are people legally allowed to purchase and sell land and other property, and can they do so in practice without undue interference from the government or nonstate actors?
 - Does the government provide adequate and timely compensation to people whose property is expropriated under eminent domain laws?
 - Are people legally allowed to establish and operate private businesses with a reasonable minimum of registration, licensing, and other requirements?
 - Are bribes or other inducements needed to obtain the necessary legal documents to operate private businesses?
 - Do private/nonstate actors, including criminal groups, seriously impede private business activities through such measures as extortion?
- 3. Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family?**
- Is violence against women—including domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and rape—widespread, and are perpetrators brought to justice?
 - Is the trafficking of women and/or children abroad for prostitution widespread, and is the government taking adequate efforts to address the problem?
 - Do women face de jure and de facto discrimination in economic and social matters, including property and inheritance rights, divorce proceedings, and child custody matters?
 - Does the government directly or indirectly control choice of marriage partners and other personal relationships through means such as requiring large payments to marry certain individuals (e.g., foreign citizens), not enforcing laws against child marriage or dowry payments, restricting same-sex relationships, or criminalizing extramarital sex?
 - Does the government determine the number of children that a couple may have?
 - Does the government engage in state-sponsored religious/cultural/ethnic indoctrination and related restrictions on personal freedoms?
 - Do private institutions, including religious groups, unduly infringe on the rights of individuals, including choice of marriage partner, dress, gender expression, etc.?
- 5. Is there equality of opportunity and the absence of economic exploitation?**
- Does the government exert tight control over the economy, including through state ownership and the setting of prices and production quotas?
 - Do the economic benefits from large state industries, including the energy sector, benefit the general population or only a privileged few?
 - Do private interests exert undue influence on the economy through monopolistic practices, cartels, or illegal blacklists, boycotts, or discrimination?
 - Is entrance to institutions of higher education or the ability to obtain employment limited by widespread nepotism and the payment of bribes?
 - Are certain groups, including ethnic or religious minorities, less able to enjoy certain economic benefits than others? For example, are certain groups restricted from holding particular jobs, whether in the public or the private sector, because of de jure or de facto discrimination?
 - Do state or private employers exploit their workers through activities including unfairly withholding wages and permitting or forcing employees to work under unacceptably dangerous conditions, as well as through adult slave labor and child labor?

KEY TO SCORES, PR AND CL RATINGS, STATUS			
Table 1		Table 2	
Political Rights (PR)		Civil Liberties (CL)	
Total Scores	PR Rating	Total Scores	CL Rating
36–40	1	53–60	1
30–35	2	44–52	2
24–29	3	35–43	3
18–23	4	26–34	4
12–17	5	17–25	5
6–11	6	8–16	6
0–5*	7	0–7	7

Table 3	
Combined Average of the PR and CL Ratings (Freedom Rating)	Freedom Status
1.0 to 2.5	Free
3.0 to 5.0	Partly Free
5.5 to 7.0	Not Free

* It is possible for a country's or territory's total political rights score to be less than zero (between –1 and –4) if it receives mostly or all zeros for each of the 10 political rights questions *and* it receives a sufficiently negative score for political rights discretionary question B. In such a case, it would still receive a final political rights rating of 7.

Tables and Ratings

Independent Countries

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Afghanistan	Not Free	6	6	
Albania*	Partly Free	3	3	
Algeria	Not Free	6	5	
Andorra*	Free	1	1	
Angola	Not Free	6	6 ▼	↓
Antigua and Barbuda*	Free	2	2	
Argentina*	Free	2	2	
Armenia	Partly Free	5	4	
Australia*	Free	1	1	
Austria*	Free	1	1	
Azerbaijan	Not Free	7 ▼	6	↓
Bahamas*	Free	1	1	
Bahrain	Not Free	7	6	
Bangladesh*	Partly Free	4	4	
Barbados*	Free	1	1	
Belarus	Not Free	7	6	
Belgium*	Free	1	1	
Belize*	Free	1	2	
Benin*	Free	2	2	
Bhutan*	Partly Free	3	4	
Bolivia*	Partly Free	3	3	
Bosnia and Herzegovina*	Partly Free	4	3	
Botswana*	Free	3	2	
Brazil*	Free	2	2	
Brunei	Not Free	6	5	
Bulgaria*	Free	2	2	
Burkina Faso	Partly Free	4 ▲	3	
Burundi	Not Free	7 ▼	6 ▼	
Cambodia	Not Free	6	5	
Cameroon	Not Free	6	6	

Independent Countries

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Afghanistan	Not Free	6	6	
Albania*	Partly Free	3	3	
Algeria	Not Free	6	5	
Andorra*	Free	1	1	
Angola	Not Free	6	6 ▼	↓
Antigua and Barbuda*	Free	2	2	
Argentina*	Free	2	2	
Armenia	Partly Free	5	4	
Australia*	Free	1	1	
Austria*	Free	1	1	
Azerbaijan	Not Free	7 ▼	6	↓
Bahamas*	Free	1	1	
Bahrain	Not Free	7	6	
Bangladesh*	Partly Free	4	4	
Barbados*	Free	1	1	
Belarus	Not Free	7	6	
Belgium*	Free	1	1	
Belize*	Free	1	2	
Benin*	Free	2	2	
Bhutan*	Partly Free	3	4	
Bolivia*	Partly Free	3	3	
Bosnia and Herzegovina*	Partly Free	4	3	
Botswana*	Free	3	2	
Brazil*	Free	2	2	
Brunei	Not Free	6	5	
Bulgaria*	Free	2	2	
Burkina Faso	Partly Free	4 ▲	3	
Burundi	Not Free	7 ▼	6 ▼	
Cambodia	Not Free	6	5	
Cameroon	Not Free	6	6	

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Canada*	Free	1	1	
Cape Verde*	Free	1	1	
Central African Republic	Not Free	7	7	
Chad	Not Free	7	6	
Chile*	Free	1	1	
China	Not Free	7	6	
Colombia*	Partly Free	3	4	
Comoros*	Partly Free	3	4	
Congo (Brazzaville)	Not Free	6	5	
Congo (Kinshasa)	Not Free	6	6	
Costa Rica*	Free	1	1	
Côte d'Ivoire	Partly Free	4 ▲	4	
Croatia*	Free	1	2	
Cuba	Not Free	7	6	
Cyprus*	Free	1	1	
Czech Republic*	Free	1	1	
Denmark*	Free	1	1	
Djibouti	Not Free	6	5	
Dominica*	Free	1	1	
Dominican Republic*	Partly Free ▼	3 ▼	3	
East Timor*	Partly Free	3	3	
Ecuador*	Partly Free	3	3	
Egypt	Not Free	6	5	
El Salvador*	Free	2	3	↓
Equatorial Guinea	Not Free	7	7	
Eritrea	Not Free	7	7	
Estonia*	Free	1	1	
Ethiopia	Not Free	7 ▼	6	
Fiji*	Partly Free	3	3 ▲	
Finland*	Free	1	1	
France*	Free	1	1	
Gabon	Not Free	6	5	
The Gambia	Not Free	7 ▼	6	
Georgia*	Partly Free	3	3	
Germany*	Free	1	1	
Ghana*	Free	1	2	
Greece*	Free	2	2	

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Grenada*	Free	1	2	
Guatemala*	Partly Free	4 ▲	4	
Guinea	Partly Free	5	5	
Guinea-Bissau	Partly Free ▲	5	5	
Guyana*	Free	2	3	
Haiti	Partly Free	5	5	
Honduras*	Partly Free	4	4	↓
Hungary*	Free	2	2	↓
Iceland*	Free	1	1	
India*	Free	2	3	
Indonesia*	Partly Free	2	4	
Iran	Not Free	6	6	
Iraq	Not Free	5 ▲	6	
Ireland*	Free	1	1	
Israel*	Free	1	2	
Italy*	Free	1	1	
Jamaica*	Free	2	3	
Japan*	Free	1	1	
Jordan	Not Free	6	5	
Kazakhstan	Not Free	6	5	
Kenya*	Partly Free	4	4	
Kiribati*	Free	1	1	
Kosovo*	Partly Free	3 ▲	4	
Kuwait	Partly Free	5	5	
Kyrgyzstan	Partly Free	5	5	
Laos	Not Free	7	6	
Latvia*	Free	2	2	
Lebanon	Partly Free	5	4	
Lesotho*	Partly Free ▼	3 ▼	3	
Liberia*	Partly Free	3	4	
Libya	Not Free	6	6	
Liechtenstein*	Free	1	1	
Lithuania*	Free	1	1	
Luxembourg*	Free	1	1	
Macedonia	Partly Free	4	3	↓
Madagascar*	Partly Free	3 ▲	4	
Malawi*	Partly Free	3	3 ▲	

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Malaysia	Partly Free	4	4	
Maldives*	Partly Free	4	5 ▼	↓
Mali	Partly Free	5	4	
Malta*	Free	1	1	
Marshall Islands*	Free	1	1	
Mauritania	Not Free	6	5	
Mauritius*	Free	1	2	
Mexico*	Partly Free	3	3	
Micronesia*	Free	1	1	
Moldova*	Partly Free	3	3	↓
Monaco*	Free	2	1	
Mongolia*	Free	1	2	
Montenegro*	Partly Free ▼	3	3 ▼	↓
Morocco	Partly Free	5	4	↓
Mozambique	Partly Free	4	4 ▼	
Myanmar	Not Free	6	5 ▲	↑
Namibia*	Free	2	2	
Nauru*	Free	2 ▼	2	
Nepal*	Partly Free	4	4	
Netherlands*	Free	1	1	
New Zealand*	Free	1	1	
Nicaragua	Partly Free	4	3	
Niger*	Partly Free	3	4	
Nigeria*	Partly Free	4	5	↑
North Korea	Not Free	7	7	
Norway*	Free	1	1	
Oman	Not Free	6	5	
Pakistan*	Partly Free	4	5	
Palau*	Free	1	1	
Panama*	Free	2	2	
Papua New Guinea*	Partly Free	4	3	
Paraguay*	Partly Free	3	3	
Peru*	Free	2	3	
Philippines*	Partly Free	3	3	
Poland*	Free	1	1	
Portugal*	Free	1	1	
Qatar	Not Free	6	5	

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Romania*	Free	2	2	
Russia	Not Free	6	6	
Rwanda	Not Free	6	6	↓
Saint Kitts and Nevis*	Free	2 ▼	1	
Saint Lucia*	Free	1	1	
Saint Vincent and Grenadines*	Free	1	1	
Samoa*	Free	2	2	
San Marino*	Free	1	1	
São Tomé and Príncipe*	Free	2	2	
Saudi Arabia	Not Free	7	7	
Senegal*	Free	2	2	
Serbia*	Free	2	2	
Seychelles*	Partly Free	3	3	
Sierra Leone*	Partly Free	3	3	
Singapore	Partly Free	4	4	
Slovakia*	Free	1	1	
Slovenia*	Free	1	1	
Solomon Islands*	Partly Free	3	3	
Somalia	Not Free	7	7	
South Africa*	Free	2	2	
South Korea*	Free	2	2	
South Sudan	Not Free	7	6	
Spain*	Free	1	1	
Sri Lanka*	Partly Free	4 ▲	4 ▲	↑
Sudan	Not Free	7	7	
Suriname*	Free	2	3 ▼	
Swaziland	Not Free	7	5	
Sweden*	Free	1	1	
Switzerland*	Free	1	1	
Syria	Not Free	7	7	
Taiwan*	Free	1	2	
Tajikistan	Not Free	7 ▼	6	↓
Tanzania*	Partly Free	3	4 ▼	
Thailand	Not Free	6	5	
Togo	Partly Free	4	4	
Tonga*	Free	2	2	

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Trinidad and Tobago*	Free	2	2	
Tunisia*	Free	1	3	
Turkey*	Partly Free	3	4	↓
Turkmenistan	Not Free	7	7	
Tuvalu*	Free	1	1	
Uganda	Not Free	6	5	
Ukraine*	Partly Free	3	3	
United Arab Emirates	Not Free	6	6	
United Kingdom*	Free	1	1	
United States*	Free	1	1	↓
Uruguay*	Free	1	1	
Uzbekistan	Not Free	7	7	
Vanuatu*	Free	2	2	
Venezuela	Partly Free	5	5	
Vietnam	Not Free	7	5	
Yemen	Not Free	7 ▼	6	↓
Zambia*	Partly Free	3	4	
Zimbabwe	Partly Free ▲	5	5 ▲	

PR and CL stand for political rights and civil liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating.

▲ ▼ up or down indicates an improvement or decline in ratings or status since the last survey.

↑ ↓ up or down indicates a positive or negative trend.

* indicates a country's status as an electoral democracy.

NOTE: The ratings reflect global events from January 1, 2015, through December 31, 2015.

Related Territories

Territory	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Hong Kong	Partly Free	5	2	↓
Puerto Rico	Free	1	1 ▲	

Disputed Territories

Territory	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Abkhazia	Partly Free	4	5	
Crimea	Not Free	7	6	
Gaza Strip	Not Free	7	6	
Indian Kashmir	Partly Free	4	4	
Nagorno-Karabakh	Partly Free	5	5	
Northern Cyprus	Free	2	2	
Pakistani Kashmir	Not Free	6	5	
Somaliland	Partly Free	5 ▼	5	
South Ossetia	Not Free	7	6	
Tibet	Not Free	7	7	
Transnistria	Not Free	6	6	
West Bank	Not Free	6	5	
Western Sahara	Not Free	7	7	

PR and CL stand for political rights and civil liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating.

▲ ▼ up or down indicates an improvement or decline in ratings or status since the last survey.

↑ ↓ up or down indicates a positive or negative trend.

NOTE: The ratings reflect global events from January 1, 2015, through December 31, 2015.

Combined Average Ratings—Independent Countries

FREE	Mauritius	Philippines	Cambodia
1.0	Monaco	Seychelles	Congo (Brazzaville)
Andorra	Mongolia	Sierra Leone	Djibouti
Australia	Saint Kitts and Nevis	Solomon Islands	Egypt
Austria	Taiwan	Ukraine	Gabon
Bahamas			Iraq
Barbados	2.0	3.5	Kazakhstan
Belgium	Antigua and Barbuda	Bhutan	Mauritania
Canada	Argentina	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Myanmar
Cape Verde	Benin	Burkina Faso	Oman
Chile	Brazil	Colombia	Qatar
Costa Rica	Bulgaria	Comoros	Thailand
Cyprus	Greece	Kosovo	Uganda
Czech Republic	Hungary	Liberia	
Denmark	Latvia	Macedonia	6.0
Dominica	Namibia	Madagascar	Afghanistan
Estonia	Nauru	Nicaragua	Angola
Finland	Panama	Niger	Cameroon
France	Romania	Papua New Guinea	Congo (Kinshasa)
Germany	Samoa	Tanzania	Iran
Iceland	Sao Tome and Principe	Turkey	Libya
Ireland	Senegal	Zambia	Russia
Italy	Serbia		Rwanda
Japan	South Africa	4.0	Swaziland
Kiribati	South Korea	Bangladesh	United Arab Emirates
Liechtenstein	Tonga	Côte d'Ivoire	Vietnam
Lithuania	Trinidad and Tobago	Guatemala	
Luxembourg	Tunisia	Honduras	6.5
Malta	Vanuatu	Kenya	Azerbaijan
Marshall Islands		Malaysia	Bahrain
Micronesia	2.5	Mozambique	Belarus
Netherlands	Botswana	Singapore	Burundi
New Zealand	El Salvador	Sri Lanka	Chad
Norway	Guyana	Togo	China
Palau	India		Cuba
Poland	Jamaica	4.5	Ethiopia
Portugal	Peru	Armenia	The Gambia
Saint Lucia	Suriname	Lebanon	Laos
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines		Maldives	South Sudan
San Marino	PARTLY FREE	Mali	Tajikistan
Slovakia	3.0	Morocco	Yemen
Slovenia	Albania	Nigeria	
Spain	Bolivia	Pakistan	7.0
Sweden	Dominican Republic		Central African Republic
Switzerland	East Timor	5.0	Equatorial Guinea
Tuvalu	Ecuador	Guinea	Eritrea
United Kingdom	Fiji	Guinea-Bissau	North Korea
United States	Georgia	Haiti	Saudi Arabia
Uruguay	Indonesia	Kuwait	Somalia
	Lesotho	Kyrgyzstan	Sudan
1.5	Malawi	Venezuela	Syria
Belize	Mexico	Zimbabwe	Turkmenistan
Croatia	Moldova		Uzbekistan
Ghana	Montenegro	NOT FREE	
Grenada	Nepal	5.5	
Israel	Paraguay	Algeria	
		Brunei	

Combined Average Ratings—Related Territories

FREE 1.0 Puerto Rico	PARTLY FREE 3.5 Hong Kong
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Combined Average Ratings—Disputed Territories

FREE 2.0 Northern Cyprus
PARTLY FREE 4.0 Indian Kashmir
4.5 Abkhazia
5.0 Nagorno-Karabakh Somaliland
NOT FREE 5.5 Pakistani Kashmir West Bank
6.0 Transnistria
6.5 Crimea Gaza Strip South Ossetia
7.0 Tibet Western Sahara

Electoral Democracies (125)

Albania	India
Andorra	Indonesia
Antigua and Barbuda	Ireland
Argentina	Israel
Australia	Italy
Austria	Jamaica
Bahamas	Japan
Bangladesh	Kenya
Barbados	Kiribati
Belgium	Kosovo
Belize	Latvia
Benin	Lesotho
Bhutan	Liberia
Bolivia	Liechtenstein
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Lithuania
Botswana	Luxembourg
Brazil	Madagascar
Bulgaria	Malawi
Canada	Malta
Cape Verde	Marshall Islands
Chile	Mauritius
Colombia	Mexico
Comoros	Micronesia
Costa Rica	Moldova
Côte d'Ivoire	Monaco
Croatia	Mongolia
Cyprus	Montenegro
Czech Republic	Namibia
Denmark	Nauru
Dominica	Nepal
Dominican Republic	Netherlands
East Timor	New Zealand
Ecuador	Niger
El Salvador	Nigeria
Estonia	Norway
Fiji	Pakistan
Finland	Palau
France	Panama
Georgia	Papua New Guinea
Germany	Paraguay
Ghana	Peru
Greece	Philippines
Grenada	Poland
Guatemala	Portugal
Guyana	Romania
Hungary	St. Kitts and Nevis
Iceland	St. Lucia

St. Vincent and the Grenadines	Sweden
Samoa	Switzerland
San Marino	Taiwan
Sao Tome and Principe	Tanzania
Senegal	Tonga
Serbia	Trinidad and Tobago
Seychelles	Tunisia
Sierra Leone	Turkey
Slovakia	Tuvalu
Slovenia	Ukraine
Solomon Islands	United Kingdom
South Africa	United States
South Korea	Uruguay
Spain	Vanuatu
Sri Lanka	Zambia
Suriname	

Contributors

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