



Freedom in the World 2017 - Romania

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Freedom Status: Free

Aggregate Score: 84 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 2.0 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Political Rights: 2 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Civil Liberties: 2 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

Quick Facts

Population: 19,800,000

Capital: Bucharest

GDP/capita: \$8,973

Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

OVERVIEW

Romania's multiparty system has ensured regular rotations of power, and executive authority is often divided between a president and prime minister from different parties. Civil liberties are generally respected, though ongoing concerns include police brutality, discrimination against Roma and other vulnerable groups, and corruption and political influence in the judiciary. Key media outlets are controlled by businessmen with political interests. While political corruption remains an entrenched problem, prosecutors have made major progress in holding senior politicians accountable in recent years, raising tensions between investigators and elected officials.

Key Developments in 2016:

- The caretaker government installed in late 2015 took a number of steps to strengthen transparency and access to information during the year.
- In March, the government enacted new regulations on prison and detention conditions that were expected to improve food and medical care, counseling, and communication with law enforcement authorities and families, and would allow electronic monitoring of convicts outside prisons.
- Parliamentary elections were held in December, and a new government headed by the Social Democratic Party (PSD) was set to take office in early 2017.

Executive Summary:

Parliamentary elections were held in December 2016 under a new electoral law adopted the previous year. It lowered the number of members needed to create a new political party from 25,000 to 3, leading to the registration of many new parties. The law also allowed mail-in voting for citizens living abroad, though participation was limited; fewer than 9,000 people registered to vote by mail, and some 4,000 ballots were cast by mail. New technological measures were introduced to help prevent fraud, including video cameras to record the ballot count.

The size of each chamber of Parliament was reduced in keeping with the electoral law, and all members were elected under a party-list proportional representation system. The PSD won a plurality, taking 154 of 329 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 67 of 136 seats in the Senate. The National Liberal Party (PNL) placed second with 69 and 30. The Save Romania Union (USR) – a new, broad-based centrist party formed after the June local elections – came in third, taking 30 lower house seats and 13 in the Senate. The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) captured 21 and 9, the Alliance of Democrats and Liberals (ALDE) took 20 and 9, and the Popular Movement Party (PMP), led by former president Traian Băsescu, received 18 and 8. The remaining 17 members of the Chamber of Deputies represented ethnic minorities. A new cabinet led by the PSD's Sorin Grindeanu in coalition with the ALDE, a PNL splinter party, was expected to be confirmed in early January 2017.

Despite the acknowledged improvements, the elections revealed some gaps in the new electoral code, such as flawed procedures for vetting candidate eligibility, registering as an observer, and conducting ballot recounts. Analysts also noted a scarcity of regulations on party financing.

For the year before the elections, Romania was governed by a technocratic caretaker cabinet, with Dacian Cioloș as prime minister. It sought to work with Parliament, but continued the practice of using emergency ordinances to pass legislation. The government also implemented a variety of administrative reforms aimed at improving transparency and access to information; for example, the new Ministry for Public Consultation and Civic Dialogue – created at the end of 2015 – launched an online platform offering fiscal and budgetary information on thousands of public institutions and approved the creation of a registry for lobbyists.

The work of the National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) continued to meet with resistance from much of the political class and their media allies, and related disputes were adjudicated by the Constitutional Court. In February, the court barred the DNA from using intelligence agency wiretaps, meaning prosecutors would have to build their own surveillance capacity. In June, the court ruled against decriminalizing abuse of power, but limited its application to actual breaches of the law rather than cases in which officials inflicted harm by doing their jobs improperly. In October, the court blocked a bill passed by Parliament in June that would have exempted many lawmakers from conflict-of-interest charges related to the hiring of relatives.

The DNA's head, Laura *Codruța Kövesi*, was also the target of illegal surveillance and harassment during the year. A former Romanian intelligence officer was detained for such abuses in September, and members of a private Israeli intelligence firm admitted their involvement in October. Separately, *Kövesi* was cleared of academic plagiarism accusations in December, and her accuser, a businessman and former lawmaker facing corruption charges, fled the country.

Meanwhile, the DNA continued to pursue numerous cases against current and former high-ranking officials, and the caretaker government forced some of its own ministers to step down in response to scandals or poor performance.

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Romania, see [Freedom in the World 2016](#).

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