



Freedom in the World 2017 - Croatia

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Freedom Status: Free

Aggregate Score: 87 (0 = Least Free, 100 = Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 1.5 (1 = Most Free, 7 = Least Free)

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

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

Quick Facts

Population: 4,200,000

Capital: Zagreb

GDP/capita: \$11,536

Press Freedom Status: Partly Free

OVERVIEW

Croatia is a parliamentary republic that regularly holds free elections. Civil and political rights are generally respected, though there are serious problems with corruption in the public sector. Minority rights have improved over the last two decades, though the Roma minority faces discrimination, and tensions between the members of the ethnic Croat majority and ethnic Serb minority persist.

Key Developments in 2016:

- Snap parliamentary elections held in September saw low turnout.
- Corruption and bribery cases against prominent figures proceeded during the year, but key verdicts have yet to be handed down.
- The interior minister threatened to remove "false Serb" residents of Vukovar from population lists, amid tensions related to the ethnic Serb minority's use of the Cyrillic alphabet. The remarks drew criticism from officials in both Croatia and Serbia.

Executive Summary:

Snap parliamentary elections in September 2016 – which were held after the previous prime minister lost a confidence vote, and were the second legislative polls in less than a year – were

marked by low turnout, with just over 52 percent of eligible voters casting ballots, compared to 61 percent in the last elections. The conservative Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) won the most seats. Andrej Plenković became the new prime minister after the party formed a coalition with the reformist Most party, whose popularity in recent years is seen as reflecting growing dissatisfaction with the mainstream HDZ and center-left Social Democratic Party (SDP).

Corruption and bribery proceedings against former president Ivo Sanader continued in 2016. Corruption proceedings also continued against Zagreb mayor Milan Bandić, while new proceedings were opened against čuro Gavrilović, the owner of one of Croatia's largest companies, on allegations of abuse of office and war profiteering during the early 1990s. Such proceedings have been slow, due in part to multiple levels of appeals processes.

Relations between members of Croatia's ethnic Croat majority and ethnic Serb minority are sometimes fraught due to the sensitive legacy of the 1991-95 war in Croatia. In August 2016, amid increasing tensions over the use of the Cyrillic alphabet by ethnic Serbs in Vukovar, Interior Minister Vlaho Orepić announced that following a survey of Vukovar residents' ethnicities, "false Serbs" would be deleted from population lists. Under Croatian law, minority populations have the right to signage in their own language in towns and cities where they comprise at least 30 percent of the population, and thus the removal of Serbs from population lists could permit the removal of Cyrillic signage from the city. Other Croatian officials condemned the comments, as did figures in Serbia.

Croatia experienced an unprecedented wave of migration in 2015, with hundreds of thousands of people – primarily asylum seekers – arriving in the country, mostly with the intent of continuing on to other European Union (EU) countries. It is expected that thousands of those asylum seekers subsequently denied asylum in other countries will be returned to Croatia – which under treaty obligations is responsible for their registration, but lacks housing and other infrastructure to support them.

Explanatory Note:

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

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