

Switzerland

FREE

96
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	39 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	57 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS**96 /100 Free**

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. See the methodology.



Overview

Switzerland's political system is characterized by decentralization and direct democracy, and broad coalition governments are common. Political rights and civil liberties are generally respected, though laws and policies adopted in recent years have reflected a growing wariness of immigration and minority groups, which face societal and systemic discrimination.

Key Developments in 2022

- The year was marked by concerns about rising inflation (which reached an annual average rate of 2.8 percent for the year), rising living costs, the energy crisis resulting from the Russian military's war of aggression against Ukraine, and Switzerland's support for Ukraine, which sparked renewed debates about Switzerland's tradition of neutrality.
- In August, the Federal Council passed new legislation that requires Swiss political parties to disclose the sources of their party and campaign financing, starting with the elections in 2023.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

4/4

Executive power is exercised by the seven-member Federal Council, with each member elected by the bicameral Federal Assembly to four-year terms. The Federal Council represents a consensus-based coalition among most large parties in the Federal Assembly. The presidency is largely ceremonial and rotates annually among the Federal Council's members. Ignazio Cassis of the Free Democratic Party of Switzerland (FDP) assumed the post in January 2022, succeeding Guy Parmelin of the Swiss People's Party (SVP).

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?

4/4

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, whose seats are apportioned among the cantons based on population. All lawmakers serve four-year terms. Switzerland's electoral process is vibrant and pluralistic, garnering high levels of confidence from the public.

The October 2019 elections resulted in a minor shake-up in Swiss politics. In the National Council, the right-wing SVP remained the largest party but lost ground, taking 54 seats, down from 65 in the last parliament. The Social Democratic Party (SP) won 39 seats (losing 4), the FDP took 28 seats (losing 4), and the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) took 25 seats (losing 2). The biggest winners of the election were the Green Party (GPS), which won 28 seats (gaining 17), and the Green Liberal Party (GLP), which won 16 seats (gaining 9). No other party won more than 10 seats.

In the Council of States, the CVP won 13 seats, the FDP secured 12, the SP took 9, the SVP took 6, and the GPS won 5. The GPS made gains, while the SP sustained losses.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?

4/4

Swiss elections are free and fair, and the Election Commission, which administers them, is considered impartial.

Swiss voters took part in three referendums in 2022, voting on 11 policy issues in total. Among them, in May, voters approved increased spending on Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency). Human rights organizations and members of the SP and the Greens had jointly put the proposed funding increase on the referendum agenda in hopes that Swiss voters would reject it out of concerns about the agency's human rights record.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

4/4

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, while stable, remains open to new groups. In January 2021, the CVP and the Conservative Democratic Party, which held three lower-house seats, merged to form the Center Party.

Transparency International and other organizations have long criticized Swiss party financing and lobbying regulations for being opaque. In August 2022, the Federal Council passed legislation that requires parties in Switzerland to disclose party financing sources and campaign donations starting with the 2023 elections.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

4/4

While most parties govern together by common agreement in the country's consociational political system, they compete vigorously in elections and can gain or lose influence depending on their performance at the polls. Contentious policy issues are often decided in referendums.

The seven-seat Federal Council currently comprises two members each from the FDP, the SP, and the SVP, along with one Center Party member. After the 2019 elections, the GPS, which now holds more seats than the CVP and as many as the FDP, petitioned the parliament to change the Federal Council's composition to accommodate their electoral success. The GPS lost a parliamentary vote over the issue but will likely renew their bid should they repeat their strong performance in

the next election. A GPS seat was effectively denied based on an interpretation of the “magic formula,” whereby Federal Council seats are distributed according to the approximate strength of the four largest parties in the parliament.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?	4/4
--	------------

People’s political choices are generally free from domination by democratically unaccountable entities.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?	3/4
--	------------

Restrictive citizenship laws and procedures tend to exclude immigrants from political participation. Noncitizens represent 26 percent of the Swiss population yet cannot vote in federal elections. As a consequence of the Swiss *jus sanguinis*, this includes around 350,000 people born in Switzerland.

The 2019 elections saw a record number of women elected to the National Council. Women currently represent 41.7 percent of the body but made up 50.3 percent of the Swiss population as of 2022. Switzerland was one of the last countries in the world to introduce women’s suffrage, doing so at the federal level only in 1971. At the cantonal level, women in the canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden were denied the right to vote until 1990.

People with disabilities and living under full guardianship have the automatic right to vote on local and cantonal matters in Geneva and can request the right to vote in Ticino and Vaud. However, Switzerland does not fully comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which it ratified in 2014. In 2022, some canton-level initiatives developed with the aim of combatting this disability-based discrimination; however, no electoral reforms had been passed by year’s end.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

4/4

Switzerland's freely elected officials determine and implement national and local policy through a decentralized governance system. 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. Extensively used referendums are mandatory for any federal constitutional amendments, the joining of international organizations, and major changes to federal laws.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?

4/4

Safeguards against corruption are generally effective. Pierre Maudet, a former Geneva cantonal government head who had accepted benefits from Abu Dhabi's crown prince in 2015, was convicted of receiving an undue financial advantage and received a suspended sentence in 2021. He ran again in cantonal elections in March 2021, but lost.

A law to improve whistleblower protection was rejected in 2019 and again in 2020 by the National Council. The failed reform effort came in response to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) criticizing Switzerland for failing to fully implement its Anti-Bribery Convention recommendations.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?

4/4

The government is generally transparent in its operations. In recent years, an increasing number of cantonal governments have passed transparency laws making government data more accessible.

In June 2021, the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) reported that Swiss authorities did not fully adopt its previous recommendations regarding legislators' financial declarations and liabilities. In response, the Federal Council in August 2022 passed new legislation that requires Swiss political parties to disclose the sources of their party and campaign financing, starting with the elections in 2023.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	4/4
---------------------------------------	-----

Press freedom is generally respected. Switzerland has an open media environment, though the state-owned, editorially independent Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG/SSR) dominates the market. Consolidation of newspaper ownership in the hands of large conglomerates has forced the closure of some smaller newspapers in recent years.

In 2020, the telecommunications committee of the Council of States voted to support a revision to Article 93 of the constitution that would impose regulations that already existed for radio and television outlets onto other, new forms of media. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) criticized the proposal, warning it would impact the freedom of those outlets.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?

3/4

Freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed and the penal code prohibits discrimination against any religion. However, Muslims face legal and practical discrimination. The construction of new minarets and mosques is prohibited as the result of a 2009 referendum. In 2018, St. Gallen became the second canton to pass a ban on burqas, after Ticino in 2016. In 2020, the National Council rejected a proposal to ban burqas. In March 2021, however, Swiss voters narrowly approved a proposal to restrict their public use nationwide.

Antisemitic incidents and hate crimes have increased. A report on antisemitism released by the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG) in February 2022 recorded 806 hate postings on social media platforms in 2021, an increase of two-thirds compared to the previous year; the report also documented threats against Jews and attacks on synagogues.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?

4/4

Academic freedom is largely respected.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

4/4

Individuals are generally able to express their personal views on political issues without fear of retribution.

The Federal Intelligence Service (FIS) was granted wider surveillance powers in 2017, allowing it to monitor internet usage, bug private property, and tap phone lines of suspected terrorists. A 2018 law required mobile and internet service providers to retain user data, including information on which websites users visited, for six months.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	4/4
-------------------------------	-----

Freedom of assembly is constitutionally guaranteed. The government lifted many pandemic-related restrictions in February 2022, and all remaining restrictions in April. The state of emergency (“special situation”), which allowed the Federal Council to quickly respond to rising infections, expired in March 2022.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?	4/4
---	-----

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) generally operate without undue restrictions, though some groups face surveillance. In 2021, it came to light that the FIS had been monitoring Solidarity Without Borders, which advocates for the interests of migrants and asylum seekers, along with other NGOs. In June 2022, it emerged that the FIS had also been monitoring leading Green politicians, the NGO Public Eye, and other groups. The revelations were particularly explosive because they came as the Federal Council was proposing to expand the purview of the intelligence service.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?	4/4
--	-----

Workers are generally free to form trade unions and other professional organizations. The right to engage in collective bargaining and strikes is respected. However, Switzerland ranks among those countries with relatively weak job

protection for unionized employees, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). The Swiss Trade Union Federation reports regular breaches of labor law including unlawful dismissal for union activity.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	4/4
------------------------------------	-----

While the judiciary is largely independent in practice, judges are selected based on a system of proportional party, linguistic, and regional representation in the Federal Assembly. Two Federal Supreme Court members were selected under this system in June 2021. Green and SP judges are underrepresented within the court.

Campaigners advocating for judges to be selected by lottery collected the needed signatures for their proposal in 2019. The Federal Council rejected the proposal in 2020, and Swiss voters rejected it in November 2021.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	4/4
---	-----

Authorities generally observe legal safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention. The constitution's due process clause guarantees fair trial proceedings. In 2020, however, members of parliament approved legislation allowing police to preventively detain and surveil individuals suspected of terrorist activities. Swiss voters approved the legislation in June 2021. Amnesty International heavily criticized the law, warning it could be employed against children as young as 12 years old and is vague in its definition of terrorism.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?	4/4
--	-----

Switzerland is free from war and other major threats to physical security, though violent incidents do occur. Occasional instances of excessive force by police have been documented. Conditions in prisons and detention centers generally meet international standards, and the Swiss government permits visits by independent observers.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

3/4

Although the law prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or religion, anti-immigrant attitudes have grown in recent years. A 2016 immigration law included measures meant to curb mass migration from the EU and required employers to give preference to Swiss citizens in hiring practices. In 2020, voters rejected an SVP proposal to end the free movement agreement with the EU.

The rights of cultural, religious, and linguistic minorities are legally protected, but minority groups—especially Roma, Sinti, and non-White people—face societal discrimination.

Women generally enjoy equal rights but face pay and workplace discrimination. According to government figures released in November 2022, the gender pay gap in 2020 was 18.4 percent, roughly 5 percent wider than the EU average.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

4/4

Freedom of movement is respected, and there are no undue limitations on the ability to change one's place of residence, employment, or education. Movement

within Switzerland and internationally was limited by COVID-19 measures in 2020 and 2021, but such restrictions were lifted later in 2021.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

4/4

The rights to own property and operate private businesses remain unrestricted. However, rising COVID-19 infections in early 2022 again forced some businesses to reduce their activity or even close temporarily.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

4/4

Personal social freedoms are protected for most people. In a 2005 referendum, voters approved same-sex civil unions. Recognized since 2007, these unions granted many of the legal benefits of marriage. Limited adoption rights for same-sex civil partners were granted in 2018. Members of parliament voted to approve same-sex marriage and allow transgender and intersex people to update identity documents more easily in 2020. Voters also supported same-sex marriage and adoption rights in a September 2021 referendum. The right to easily update identity documents, meanwhile, was included in the civil code and took effect in January 2022.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

3/4

The Swiss government does not fully comply with international antitrafficking standards, according to the US State Department's 2022 *Trafficking in Persons Report*. Swiss authorities made some efforts to support international trafficking investigations during the department's reporting period, but sentencing of

convicted traffickers was considered “lenient.” In April 2021, Switzerland signed on to an ILO framework to combat forced labor, modern slavery, human trafficking, and child labor.

Labor regulations are generally enforced, but migrant workers are more vulnerable to exploitation. No nationwide minimum wage exists and voters rejected an initiative to introduce one in 2014. The cantons of Geneva, Jura, Neuchâtel, Ticino, and the half-canton of Basel-Stadt do maintain minimum wages.



On Switzerland

See all data, scores & information on this country or territory.

See More [➤](#)

Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

96/100 Free

Other Years

2024

**Be the first to know
what's happening.**

Join the Freedom House weekly
newsletter

Subscribe

ADDRESS

1850 M St. NW Floor 11
Washington, DC 20036

GENERAL INQUIRIES

info@freedomhouse.org

PRESS & MEDIA

(202) 296-5101

press@freedomhouse.org

@2024 FreedomHouse