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Freedom House

Freedom in the World 2022 - Transnistria

Not Free

18

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 6 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 12 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

20 / 100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

* Indicates a territory as opposed to an independent country.

Note

Freedom in the World reports assess the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area, regardless of whether they are affected by the state, nonstate actors, or foreign powers. Disputed territories are sometimes assessed separately if they meet certain criteria, including boundaries that are sufficiently stable to allow year-on-year comparisons. For more information, see the report methodology and FAQ.

Overview

Transnistria is a breakaway region of Moldova. The territory has operated with de facto independence since a brief military conflict in 1992, though it is internationally recognized as a part of Moldova. Its government and economy are heavily dependent on subsidies from Russia, which maintains a military presence and peacekeeping mission in the territory. Political competition is restricted, and the ruling political group is aligned with powerful local business interests. Impartiality and pluralism of opinion in the media is very limited, and authorities closely control civil society activity.

Key Developments in 2021

- In December, incumbent president Vadim Krasnoselsky won reelection in a contest marred by a lack of competition and low turnout. Krasnoselsky's only competitor was a local clerk, while notable opposition figures were not allowed to register.
- In November, Communist Party leader Oleg Horzhan, who was arrested in 2018 and is serving a four-and-one-half-year prison sentence, began a hunger strike along with Serghei Mirovici, a pensioner who was imprisoned for “extremism” and “insulting the president” via social media in 2019.
- In August, the territory's Supreme Court conditionally released opposition activist Gennady Chorba, who had been detained for allegedly organizing a protest in 2020 and later faced extremism charges.

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 **0** / elections? **4**

The president is elected for up to two consecutive five-year terms. Incumbent Vadim Krasnoselsky, who was backed by the Renewal (Obnovleniye) Party, was reelected with 79 percent of the vote in the December 2021 presidential election. Krasnoselsky's only competitor was a local clerk, Sergey Pinzar, who won 11.8 percent. Another 8.8 percent of ballots were ruled invalid. Turnout stood at 35.2 percent, a record low for a presidential contest.

The elections were considered especially uncompetitive. Notable opposition figures Anatoly Dirun and Nikolai Malyshev were not allowed to register as candidates by the Central Election Commission due to alleged irregularities in the signatures collected for their nominations. Another candidate, Sergei Dechev, withdrew his candidacy without explanation. An electoral-code amendment instituted in June removed the “against all” option from the presidential ballot.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because key political figures were barred from participating in the presidential election, which failed to offer voters a genuine democratic choice.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 0 / 4

Elections for the Supreme Council were last held in November 2020. A total of 51 candidates applied to run for seats, and only 45 were registered, with 4 denied registration and 2 withdrawing their applications. In 23 of the 33 electoral districts, candidates ran unopposed; by comparison, only two candidates had run unopposed in each of the previous two legislative elections. Voter turnout was just 28 percent of the eligible electorate. Renewal won 29 seats, and the remainder went to candidates who had links to Sheriff Enterprises, the powerful business conglomerate that dominates the Transnistrian economy and backs the party.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant 1 / election management bodies? 4

The Central Election Commission has long been criticized by various political figures for lack of impartiality and independence. In June 2021, the Renewal-dominated Supreme Council amended the electoral code to remove the “against all” option from ballots for the December presidential poll. Dirun and Malyshev, who were prevented from contesting the election, alleged that their disqualifications were politically motivated.

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 1 / competing parties or groupings? 4

Transnistria’s entire political establishment, including opposition parties, supports the separatist agenda and Russia’s role as the territory’s foreign patron. Figures who oppose the local elite, who are anchored around Sheriff Enterprises, have been consistently intimidated and silenced in recent years.

The opposition Communist Party faces political repression. In 2018, party leader Oleg Horzhan was arrested, stripped of his parliamentary immunity, and jailed for organizing illegal demonstrations, criticizing officials, and interfering with law enforcement agents. He received a four-and-a-half-year prison sentence. In February 2021, security officers searched the home of acting Communist Party chairwoman Nadezhda Bondarenko for a manuscript authored by Horzhan. In November, Horzhan began a hunger strike while in prison.

In August 2021, the territory’s Supreme Court conditionally released opposition activist Gennady Chorba, who had been detained for allegedly organizing a protest in 2020 and later faced extremism charges.

In December 2021, the authorities reportedly searched the home of aspiring presidential candidate Anatoly Dirun, seizing a computer and other items. Dirun was reportedly facing a forgery charge.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through 1 / elections? 4

The Renewal Party has long controlled the legislature, and the 2016 victory of Vadim Krasnoselsky cemented its control over the executive branch. The territory’s persecuted opposition parties did not play a significant role in the 2020 legislative elections, which left the Supreme Council with no genuine opposition. Opposition candidates were prevented from contesting the December 2021 presidential election, which Krasnoselsky won by a wide margin amid low turnout.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people’s political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political 1 / sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 4

The ruling Renewal Party and the political establishment more broadly are dominated by Sheriff Enterprises. In addition, the political influence of the Russian government is undergirded by the presence of Russian troops, who are ostensibly stationed in Transnistria to guard a Soviet-era ammunition depot and, as peacekeepers, to uphold a 1992 cease-fire between Transnistrian and Moldovan forces. Moscow has also financially supported the territory’s pension system and provided subsidized energy.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other 1 / relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 4

Both men and women have the legal right to vote, participate in campaigns, and run for office. However, the system in practice allows little opportunity for independent political activity by any segment of the population, and few women are included in the political leadership; only two women hold seats in the Supreme Council.

While Transnistria has three official languages—Russian, Ukrainian, and Moldovan—Russian dominates in governmental affairs and public communications. Authorities do not allow voting in Moldovan elections to take place in Transnistrian-controlled territory, though residents who sought to vote in Moldova's July 2021 elections were observed traveling into Moldova proper to participate. Residents with Russian citizenship were able to participate in the September State Duma elections through polling stations deployed in Transnistria.

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? 0 / 4

Transnistria's flawed elections undercut the democratic legitimacy of both executive leaders and legislative representatives. The 2020 legislative and 2021 presidential elections were both marred by low rates of participation and a lack of competition. Sheriff Enterprises exerts a strong influence on elected officials' policy decisions, which are also closely monitored by Moscow.

Score Change: The score declined from 1 to 0 because the head of government and legislative representatives were not freely elected.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 0 / 4

Transnistrian politics have long been built on personal business interests, nepotism, and favoritism. There are few visible safeguards against official corruption.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 1 / 4

Although officials publish some government information on websites and are occasionally interviewed by media outlets about their policies, the public is generally excluded from decision-making processes, and governmental openness and transparency are limited in practice.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 0 / 4

Authorities closely monitor and control the public media, and Sheriff Enterprises dominates private broadcasting, leading to widespread self-censorship. The territory's few independent print outlets have limited circulation. Critical reporting can result in reprisals including criminal charges. The government also uses bureaucratic obstruction and withholding of information to inhibit independent journalism.

Legislation adopted in 2016 gave authorities even greater control over state media outlets, including the power to appoint editorial staff, and enabled officials to limit media access to their activities and bar the use of recording devices.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 2 / 4

Most of the population is Orthodox Christian, and authorities have denied registration to several smaller religious groups, which at times face harassment by police and Orthodox opponents. The law imposes restrictions and penalties related to unauthorized distribution of religious literature, preaching in public spaces, and organized religious activities in residential buildings. Foreign religious groups are not permitted to register, and foreign individuals may not found or join registered groups.

Jehovah's Witnesses have been unable to obtain registration in Transnistria. Members of the Muslim community report a reluctance to openly practice their faith due to past intimidation by authorities, and they have struggled to advance plans to establish a mosque in Tiraspol.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 1 / 4

Academics and students may take part in international forums, but potential reprisals by Transnistrian authorities are a deterrent to participation in programs sponsored by Moldova. Academic analysis of topics such as the 1992 conflict, the role of the Russian Federation and peacekeeping forces, and Transnistrian statehood are subject to censorship.

The few Latin-script schools in Transnistria that are overseen by the Moldovan state face pressure from Transnistrian authorities.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of 1 / surveillance or retribution? 4

Legal restrictions on certain kinds of speech discourage free discussion. Among other provisions related to defamation or insult of the authorities, the criminal code penalizes public expression of disrespect for the Russian peacekeeping mission.

The de facto authorities prosecute dissidents, civic activists, and ordinary social media users, inhibiting expression by other residents. In June 2021, the Apriori Center, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that provides legal advice and education, reported on several cases where territorial authorities lodged criminal cases against journalists, authors, and ordinary residents during its 2017–21 reporting period; in one of these cases, resident Pavel Dogar faced charges for commenting on the presence of Russian peacekeepers via social media.

Pensioner Serghei Mirovici, who received a three-year prison sentence for “extremism” and “insulting the president” via social media in 2019, remained imprisoned in 2021. Mirovici began a hunger strike in November.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 0 / 4

Freedom of assembly is tightly restricted. Authorities consistently reject applications for permits to hold meetings and protests, and participants in unauthorized actions face administrative penalties or criminal prosecution.

Territorial authorities reportedly pressured the organizers of a film festival to cancel their July and August 2021 activities in Transnistria. Events scheduled within the territory were cancelled and organizers moved their activities to Chişinău.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human 1 / rights- and governance-related work? 4

NGOs and civic activists operate in a repressive environment. Groups that work on human rights issues or other topics deemed politically sensitive are subject to surveillance and harassment.

A 2018 law requires more burdensome reporting by NGOs, including on foreign funding, and prohibits foreign-backed NGOs from engaging in broadly defined “political activities.” In May 2021, the Apriori Center announced that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) would hear its complaint against the NGO law; territorial prosecutors had found that Apriori was engaging in proscribed “political activities.”

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 0 / 4

The trade union system in Transnistria has not been reformed since the Soviet era, and unions are manipulated by the political leadership in practice. Independent labor activism is not tolerated.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 0 / 4

The judiciary serves the interests of the political authorities and Sheriff Enterprises. The ECHR has asserted that Moscow is responsible for the decisions of Transnistrian courts, which do not meet minimum standards of fairness.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 0 / 4

Security and law enforcement agencies in Transnistria regularly engage in arbitrary arrests and detentions and deny detainees access to attorneys. Trials and other criminal proceedings lack safeguards for due process and are frequently held without public scrutiny, with the outcomes announced after the fact.

Adrian Glijin was abducted by territorial security forces in 2020 and was accused of treason. Glijin’s family were not informed of Adrian’s condition, while his mother was only allowed to meet him in December 2021.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 1 / 4

Police mistreatment of suspects is common, and physical abuse is employed to obtain confessions. Prison conditions remain poor; denial of proper medical care has been reported. The authorities have been accused of engaging in forced disappearances and abductions in recent years.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 1 / 4

While the Transnistrian constitution guarantees people's rights and freedoms "without distinction as to sex, race, nationality, language, religion," and other such categories, these protections are frequently violated with impunity. Members of certain minorities, including Moldovan speakers and most notably Roma, face discrimination and harassment. Women are also subject to discrimination in practice; among other problems, they are formally excluded from numerous occupations that are considered hazardous or physically difficult. Same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Transnistria, and members of the LGBT+ community generally do not identify themselves publicly due to widespread government and societal discrimination.

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, 2 / employment, or education? 4

Approximately 300,000 people in Transnistria hold Moldovan citizenship and can travel freely to European Union countries. Since 2018, Transnistria residents have been able to obtain neutral license plates for use on international roads. Moldovan authorities began recognizing Transnistrian educational documents that year.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without 1 / undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4

Full private property rights are only recognized for housing; other property rights, including land ownership, remain restricted. Procedures for establishing a private business are hampered by bureaucratic impediments.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, 1 / protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4

Same-sex marriage is not permitted. Domestic violence is a persistent concern, and it is not considered a criminal offense in the absence of serious physical injury. However, the problem has become more public in recent years, including through television reports. Dedicated services, including psychological aid, a hotline for victims, and shelters, are operated by NGOs supported by international donors.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 1 / 4

Economic opportunity remains very limited. Sheriff Enterprises dominates the economy. Despite increased international aid meant to ensure better opportunities for women, many still fall victim to traffickers who subject them to forced labor or sex work.

ecoi.net summary:

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