

Freedom in the World 2022 - Romania

Free

83

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 35 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 48 / 60

Last Year's Score & Status

83 / 100 Free

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

Overview

Romania's multiparty system has ensured regular rotations of power through competitive elections. Civil liberties are generally respected but have come under growing pressure as entrenched political interests push back against civic and institutional anticorruption efforts. Discrimination against minorities and other vulnerable groups is a long-standing problem, as is control of key media outlets by businessmen with political interests.

Key Developments in 2021

- In October, the governing coalition led by Florin Cîțu of the National Liberal Party (PNL) lost a no-confidence vote. In November, Nicolae Ciucă of the PNL formed a new government with the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR).
- In July, the nationalist Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR) announced that it was drafting a bill to restrict the discussion of sexual orientation or identity in educational settings. The AUR and the UDMR committed to introducing such a bill later in the year.
- Romania, which saw a relatively low COVID-19 vaccine uptake, faced a new wave of infections in October, prompting the government to restrict access to nonessential medical treatment. Authorities reported 1.1 million cases and 43,000 deaths to the World Health Organization for the year.

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

The president, who holds some significant powers in Romania's semipresidential system, is directly elected for up to two five-year terms. The president appoints the prime minister in consultation with the parliamentary majority, and the prime minister's government requires the confidence of Parliament. Presidential and parliamentary elections held since 1991 have been generally free and fair. Klaus Iohannis, a centrist who had belonged to the PNL, was reelected in November 2019, winning 66.1 percent of the vote in a runoff. Viorica Dăncilă of the PSD won 33.9 percent.

Florin Cîțu of the PNL became prime minister in December 2020. His government, which was originally supported by the Save Romania Union (USR) and the UDMR, lost a no-confidence vote in October 2021; the USR had withdrawn its support in September. Nicolae Ciucă of the PNL became prime minister in November, after he formed a coalition with the PSD and UDMR.

A2 0-4 pts

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

Members of the bicameral Parliament, consisting of a 136-seat Senate and a 330-seat Chamber of Deputies, are elected to four-year terms in a closed party-list proportional system.

Elections for both houses were held in December 2020, though electoral campaigns were affected by COVID-19-related restrictions. Turnout for the Chamber of Deputies contests stood at a record-low 33.3 percent. The PSD won 28.9 percent of the vote and 110 seats, while the PNL won 25.2 percent and 93 seats. The 2020 USR-PLUS Alliance—which consisted of the USR and the Party of Liberty, Unity, and Solidarity before their merger was officially recognized in April 2021—won 15.4 percent and 55 seats. The UDMR won 5.7 percent and 21 seats. The AUR entered Parliament for the first time, winning 9.1 percent and 33 seats.

In the concurrent Senate elections, the PSD won 29.3 percent of the vote and 47 seats, while the PNL won 25.6 percent and 41 seats. The 2020 USR-PLUS Alliance won 15.9 percent and 25 seats, the AUR won 9.2 percent and 14 seats, and the UDMR won 5.9 percent and 9 seats. Turnout for the Senate elections stood at 31.9 percent.

A3 0-4 pts

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

The legal framework generally provides for fair and competitive elections. The Romanian electoral framework relies on a Central Election Bureau, which includes judges and political representatives, and a Permanent Electoral Authority, which manages voter registration, campaign finance, and logistics.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) observers who monitored the December 2020 parliamentary elections noted the complexity of the legal electoral framework. Observers criticized parliamentarians' fast-tracking of electoral-law amendments that September, limiting public debate. OSCE observers also voiced concerns over the electoral authorities' training efforts, which were affected by the pandemic.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive 4 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

Romania's multiparty system features active competition between rival political parties. Under the 2015 electoral law, the number of signatures needed to create a new party decreased dramatically, leading to the registration of many new parties. Some 217 parties and alliances competed in the September 2020 local elections; 24 parties and individual candidates competed for Senate seats that December, while 82 groups and candidates, including ethnic minority groups, competed for lower-house seats.

Critics have argued that signature thresholds to register candidates for local and parliamentary elections place new and smaller parties at a disadvantage. COVID-19-related legislation reduced the signature requirements for local candidates by half.

B2 0-4 pts

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

Romania has established a record of peaceful transfers of power between rival parties. Since 1996, the PSD and PNL, the country's two largest parties, have regularly alternated in government. However, no party has yet governed for two full consecutive terms. Governments often fall in no-confidence votes; the Cițu government successfully survived a no-confidence effort in June. A September motion was carried in October, however, prompting its fall.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the 3 / political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 4

People are generally free to make political choices without undue pressure from unaccountable actors. However, clientelism in politics remains a problem in local and legislative elections and among ruling and opposition parties. In small towns and villages, mayors retain significant leverage over voters. Local mayors are known to switch parties to secure funding or other resources.

B4 0-4 pts

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

Ethnic, religious, and other minority groups enjoy full political rights under the law. The constitution grants one lower-house seat to each national minority whose representative party or organization wins no seats otherwise, with a maximum of 18 seats allotted in this fashion. President Iohannis, an ethnic German and a Lutheran, is the country's first president from either minority group. The UDMR, which represents the Hungarian minority, participated in the coalitions formed in 2020 and 2021.

Roma, who make up over 3 percent of the population, are underrepresented in politics. Social discrimination against LGBT+ people discourages political advocacy for their rights.

Data collection on gender representation is lacking, as is a policy to encourage female political participation. Women held 19 percent of Chamber of Deputies seats and 18.4 percent of Senate seats as of December 2021.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives 4 / determine the policies of the government? 4

Elected officials are generally able to craft and implement government policy without outside interference.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 2 / 4

High levels of corruption, bribery, and abuse of power persist. Romania maintains a comprehensive anticorruption action plan, though the European Anti-Fraud Office noted that anticorruption bodies face pressure when pursuing high-level cases in a 2020 report.

The National Anticorruption Directorate (DNA) previously won international praise for fairly investigating corruption and securing convictions of powerful figures. However, the 2018 dismissal of DNA chief Laura Codruța Kövesi was seen as a blow to its independence. Kövesi, who currently heads the European Public Prosecutor's Office, won a European Court of Human Rights judgment over her dismissal in 2020.

The Fight against Fraud Department called on an investigation against then deputy premier Dan Barna of the USR over the alleged misuse of EU funds. In June 2021, the DNA elected not to pursue the matter for lack of evidence.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 3 / 4

Citizens have the legal right to obtain public information and can petition government agencies for it. However, processes for soliciting participation and input from various stakeholders and civil society experts are poorly defined, and the government widely utilizes emergency ordinances for legislating. COVID-19-related information was sometimes withheld, or was otherwise disseminated slowly, by authorities.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 3 / 4

Although the media environment is relatively free and pluralistic, key outlets remain controlled by businessmen with political interests, and coverage is highly distorted by their owners' priorities. Media outlets increasingly rely on publicly funded advertising and subsidies.

The government provided funding to media outlets for the purposes of a pandemic-related public campaign. In a June 2021 report, Expert Forum noted that some of the funding was not provided to outlets and that the initiative was impacted by clientelism and electoral concerns.

D2 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public 3 / and private? 4

Religious freedom is generally respected. While the Romanian Orthodox Church (BOR) remains dominant and politically powerful, the government formally recognizes 18 religions, each of which is eligible for proportional state support. Others can register as religious associations. There have been

reports of discrimination and harassment against religious minorities, including vandalism in Jewish cemeteries and media articles referring to Islam and Muslim migrants as threats to Romania. The promotion of antisemitism was banned by legislation adopted in 2018.

Some religious ceremonies were impacted by COVID-19-related measures. In the first half of 2021, the BOR criticized the government's decision to restrict or cancel major pilgrimages. Larger religious ceremonies were allowed to proceed after the government eased some pandemic restrictions in June.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 3 / 4

The government generally does not restrict academic freedom, but the education system is weakened by widespread corruption and politically influenced appointments and financing, including at the local level.

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

People are generally free to express their opinions without fear of retribution, though social media users have received fines after being accused of insulting police.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4

Romania's constitution guarantees freedom of assembly. Public gatherings were restricted under pandemic-related measures in March 2020, though restrictions were loosened that September. Restrictions on assemblies were again loosened beginning in May 2021, though authorities imposed curfews depending on COVID-19 transmission rates.

In October 2021, several thousand people participated in an AUR-organized protest after the government introduced new restrictions on unvaccinated individuals. In a December protest, demonstrators opposing the imposition of pandemic pass tried to enter the Parliament building in Bucharest. Security officers blocked doorways but did not respond with force.

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) operate without major formal restrictions. Nevertheless, many human rights and governance groups face funding shortages as well as hostility from politicians and other actors.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 3 / 4

Workers have the right to form unions, have a limited right to strike, and can bargain collectively, though laws against the violation of these rights are not well enforced. There are legal constraints on the ability of unions to participate in political activity.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 3 / 4

The judiciary is generally independent but faces pressure from the executive and legislative branches. A special prosecution unit focusing on magistrates has been criticized by magistrates' associations and supranational bodies, who feared it would allow for the intimidation of magistrates and other abuses. The unit remained active in 2021, though the Ciucă government vowed to abolish it by March 2022.

The European Commission has more broadly criticized 2017-19 amendments to laws related to the judiciary branch, warning that the amendments have affected the branch's effectiveness and independence. In September 2020, the Justice Ministry introduced proposed amendments to those laws, prompting a six-month public consultation period. In March 2021, the Justice Ministry submitted new draft amendments to the Superior Council of Magistracy.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 3 / 4

The law provides safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention, which are generally respected. However, the right to a fair and timely trial is often undermined by institutional problems including corruption, political influence, staffing shortages, and inefficient resource allocation. Many government officials and lawmakers have retained their positions despite criminal indictments or convictions by exploiting such systemic weaknesses. The hearing of noncriminal matters was slowed down for part of 2021 due to pandemic-related restrictions.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war 3 / and insurgencies? 4

The population faces no major threats to physical security, but prisons and detention centers feature harsh conditions, and the abuse of detainees by police and fellow prisoners remains a problem.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the 3 / population? 4

The law provides broad protections against discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other categories. However, people with disabilities, LGBT+ people, Roma, and HIV-positive children and adults face discrimination in education, employment, medical-service provision, and other areas. In July 2021, the AUR announced that it was drafting a bill that would restrict the discussion of sexual orientation or identity in educational settings; it and the UDMR later committed to introducing such a bill.

The constitution guarantees women equal rights, but gender discrimination remains a problem in many aspects of life.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of 4 / residence, employment, or education? 4

Citizens generally face no significant restrictions on freedom of movement, whether for internal or external travel, and can freely change their place of employment or education. Romanians returning to the country were sometimes subject to quarantine or isolation rules which loosened as 2021 progressed.

G2 0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private 2 / businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4

Property rights are protected by law, but despite significant progress, the country has struggled to adjudicate restitution claims for property confiscated during the communist era. Bureaucratic barriers, corruption, and broader weaknesses in the rule of law hamper private business activity.

G3 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and 3 / size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4

While personal social freedoms are generally protected, domestic violence remains a serious problem, and laws meant to combat it are poorly enforced. Same-sex marriages are not permitted under Romanian law. However, in 2018, the Constitutional Court recognized the residency rights of same-sex couples married elsewhere, provided that one spouse is an EU citizen.

Some political actors employ antigay rhetoric to galvanize conservative parts of society against political adversaries. The AUR, which entered Parliament in 2020, engages in anti-LGBT+ rhetoric.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 3 / 4

The law provides basic protections against exploitative working conditions, though they are unevenly enforced, particularly in the large informal economy. Economic opportunity varies widely between urban and rural areas, and such disparities limit social mobility for some. Human trafficking for the purpose of forced labor and prostitution remains a serious problem. Women and Roma children are especially vulnerable to forced begging.



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