



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2025

# Slovakia

**89**

/100

FREE

<u>Political Rights</u>	<b>36</b> /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	<b>53</b> /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

**90 /100**    **Free**

A country or territory's Freedom in the World status depends on its aggregate Political Rights score, on a scale of 0–40, and its aggregate Civil Liberties score, on a scale of 0–60. See the methodology.



## Overview

Slovakia's parliamentary system features regular multiparty elections and peaceful transfers of power between rival parties. While civil liberties are generally protected, entrenched discrimination against Roma and political hostility toward LGBT+ individuals persist. Political corruption remains a problem, and recent years have featured increasing pressure on media and civil society.

## Key Developments in 2024

- In April, Peter Pellegrini of Hlas-Social Democracy (Hlas) won the presidential election, defeating an opposition-backed independent candidate, Ivan Korčok, in a runoff. Outgoing President Zuzana Čaputová did not run for reelection.
- In May, Prime Minister Robert Fico was seriously injured after being shot multiple times in an assassination attempt. A gunman was arrested and charged with attempted murder. Shortly after, the Slovak parliament voted unanimously to condemn political violence. In an increasingly polarized environment, Fico and his allies blamed the opposition and media for creating a climate of “political hatred.”
- Using an accelerated legislative procedure, the parliament amended the penal code, reducing penalties for corruption-related offenses and shortening the statute of limitations. It additionally dissolved the Special Prosecutor's Office, which handled high-profile corruption cases. Those cases were reassigned to the Prosecutor General's Office without provisions to maintain specialized expertise.
- The parliament, again using an accelerated legislative procedure, abolished the public broadcaster RTVS and replaced it with a new entity, Slovak Television and Radio (STVR). Members of the broadcaster's new oversight council, appointed by the culture minister and parliamentary majority, will choose a new director for STVR. The opposition and journalists' organizations argued that the move left the broadcaster susceptible to politicization.

## 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**

Slovakia is a parliamentary republic whose prime minister leads the government. A directly elected president has limited executive powers, including overseeing the country's foreign policy, nominating the prime minister, appointing individuals to high-ranking state positions, and exercising veto power over new legislation.

After the September 2023 snap elections, a new three-party coalition was formed, led by Prime Minister Robert Fico of the Smer-SD party and also composed of the Hlas party and the Slovak National Party (SNS). In April 2024, former Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini defeated an opposition-backed independent candidate, Ivan Korčok, to be elected president of Slovakia. Pellegrini took 54 percent of the vote to Korčok's 46 percent. An Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitoring mission called the poll "competitive and pluralistic," but noted "blurring of the line between the duties of public officials and campaigning" and deficiencies in campaign-finance transparency.

**A2** 0-4 pts

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

**4/4**

The 150 members of the unicameral parliament, the National Council, are directly elected to four-year terms in a single national constituency by proportional representation. In the September 2023 parliamentary elections, the leftist-populist Smer-SD party received a plurality of votes, at 23 percent, followed by the liberal Progressive Slovakia (PS) with 18 percent. Smer-SD, led by three-time prime minister Fico, entered a coalition agreement with Hlas and the SNS. The Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OL'aNO) party, the liberal Freedom and Solidarity (SAS) party, and the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) also secured parliamentary representation. The vote took place peacefully, and its results were accepted by stakeholders and the public and certified by the state's election management body. Voter turnout was 68.5 percent.

**A3** 0-4 pts

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

**4/4**

The legal framework for elections is considered fair. A 14-member electoral commission oversees party financing and elections. Ten members are appointed by the parties in parliament and four are chosen by other institutions.

## **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**

Citizens can freely organize in political parties and movements. In 2023, 25 parties competed in elections and 6 of them entered parliament.

In May 2024, Prime Minister Robert Fico was seriously injured after being shot multiple times in an assassination attempt. A gunman was arrested and charged with attempted murder. Shortly after, the Slovak parliament voted unanimously to condemn political violence. In an increasingly polarized environment, Fico and his allies blamed the opposition and media for creating a climate of “political hatred.”

**B2** 0-4 pts

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

**4/4**

There have been regular transfers of power between parties in the last three decades.

**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**

The citizens of Slovakia are generally able to make political choices free from external pressures. However, there have been reports of vote-buying in Romany settlements for local and regional elections.

**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**

The political rights of various minority groups are generally protected, though some groups experience societal discrimination that hampers their ability to achieve meaningful representation. Most parliamentary parties exhibit open hostility towards the LGBT+ community. Roma are also poorly represented.

Women are generally underrepresented in politics. Slovakia has not ratified the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women, and its legal definition of rape still lacks a consent-based framework.

## **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**

Democratically elected politicians determine public policy.

**C2** 0-4 pts

<b>Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?</b>	<b>2/4</b>
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Corruption has long riddled Slovak institutions.

In February 2024, the parliament implemented criminal-law reforms, which took effect in August. The initiative substantially reduced sentences for corruption and economic crimes and shortened the statute of limitations, and additionally dissolved the Special Prosecutor's Office, which handled high-profile corruption cases. These cases were reassigned to the Prosecutor General's Office without provisions to maintain specialized expertise, potentially jeopardizing ongoing investigations. The reforms were enacted through accelerated legislative procedures with limited public and other consultation from stakeholders, and underwent four revisions before the initial changes took effect. One revision raised penalties for the misuse of European Union (EU) funds, after the European Commission had cautioned the government that the reforms as originally proposed did not adequately protect its financial interests. Separately, in August, authorities disbanded the national crime agency (NAKA), a police unit that investigated high-profile corruption cases.

Also in August, Justice Minister Susko paused the enforcement of former Special Prosecutor Dušan Kováčik's conviction for corruption, providing him with provisional release ahead of the Supreme Court's ruling on his appeal. A court had recently confirmed Kováčik's guilt in accepting a €50,000 (\$54,000) bribe to drop various investigations.

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 because the government weakened the anticorruption framework by amending the penal code to reduce penalties for corruption, and by abolishing specialized anticorruption programs.*

**C3** 0-4 pts

<b>Does the government operate with openness and transparency?</b>	<b>3/4</b>
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The 2006 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) allows citizens to request information from state and public institutions. Slovak authorities often disclose

minimal information in response to FOIA requests, citing the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legislation as a pretext. In 2024, Parliament passed an amendment to the FOIA to extend the deadlines for processing requests and implement fees for submitting them. The opposition and several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) criticized the legislation, arguing that it may restrict access to information.

## Civil Liberties

### D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

**D1** 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	3/4
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Slovak media are generally free, but the sector remains shaken by the 2018 murder of Ján Kuciak, an investigative reporter who was working on corruption and tax fraud cases. In September 2020, a court convicted and sentenced two men for carrying out the murder. The well-known businessman Marian Kočner has been acquitted of involvement twice; prosecutors have appealed, saying they believe he paid the convicted gunman.

In June 2024, through an expedited legislative process, parliament dissolved the public broadcaster, RTVS, and replaced it with a new entity, Slovak Television and Radio (STVR). Members of the broadcaster's new oversight council, appointed by the culture minister and selected by the parliamentary majority, will choose a new director for STVR. The opposition and organizations representing journalists criticized this move, arguing that it left the broadcaster susceptible to politicization and undermined its independence. Separately, journalists at the influential private broadcaster TV Markíza expressed concern during the year that new management was discouraging political coverage and criticism of Fico's government.

Prime Minister Fico and several members of his ruling coalition continued to ignore requests for comments, interviews, and statements from independent media. On multiple occasions, Fico verbally attacked journalists from independent outlets, and has filed lawsuits against several of them in response to critical columns or other work.

**D2** 0-4 pts

<b>Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?</b>	<b>4/4</b>
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Religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution and generally upheld by state institutions.

**D3** 0-4 pts

<b>Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination?</b>	<b>4/4</b>
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Academic freedom is guaranteed by the constitution and upheld by authorities.

**D4** 0-4 pts

<b>Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?</b>	<b>4/4</b>
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People may discuss sensitive or political topics without fear of retribution or surveillance.

## **E. Associational and Organizational Rights**

**E1** 0-4 pts

<b>Is there freedom of assembly?</b>	<b>4/4</b>
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Freedom of assembly is constitutionally guaranteed and upheld by state authorities, and peaceful demonstrations are common.

Following an assassination attempt against Fico in May 2024, the parliamentary majority passed an amendment that grants the authorities the right to prohibit public gatherings near the building where the president works and lives, near buildings used by politicians and state officials, and if there is a risk of clashes between participants in multiple competing events. Critics including the local branch of Amnesty International rejected the measure as an unjustified restriction on the right to free assembly, and criticized it for characterizing public gatherings as a safety threat.

**E2** 0-4 pts

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

**4/4**

NGOs are generally free to operate and to scrutinize state authorities. However, in November 2024, a lawmaker proposed a bill regulating “NGO lobbying,” requiring nonprofits to report finances, donors, and lobbying activity, with penalties including fines or possible dissolution for noncompliance. Civil society groups argued that the proposed measure is unconstitutional and unfairly targets NGOs, as no other sector faces similar lobbying rules.

**E3** 0-4 pts

**Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?**

**4/4**

Trade unions in Slovakia are pluralistic and operate freely.

## **F. Rule of Law**

**F1** 0-4 pts

**Is there an independent judiciary?**

**3/4**

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary. However, there is a widespread perception of a lack of transparency and of corruption within the judicial system. In April 2024, Prime Minister Fico asserted that he would be monitoring the work of Supreme Court judges who had ruled against his allies—statements media reports, other judges, and the opposition described as intimidation.

The European Commission’s 2024 Rule of Law report on Slovakia noted that the new offense of “abuse of law” for judicial decisions could expose judges to prosecution without sufficient protections, and that the prosecutor general’s power to overturn lower prosecutors’ decisions raised concerns about impartiality and independence. It too noted that “statements of government representatives targeting certain judges” raise concerns about interference with judicial independence.”

**F2** 0-4 pts

**Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?**

**3/4**

Due process usually prevails in civil and criminal matters. However, there have been reports of warrantless detentions or detentions otherwise carried out without other appropriate authorization.

**F3** 0-4 pts

**Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?**

**3/4**

While Slovakia is free from war, insurgencies, and high rates of violent crime, police abuse of suspects is a persistent problem.

**F4** 0-4 pts

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

**3/4**

The constitution guarantees fundamental rights for everyone regardless of “sex, race, color, language, belief and religion, political affiliation or other conviction, national or social origin, nationality or ethnic origin, property, descent or any other status.” These guarantees are mostly respected, with some key deficiencies.

Roma face persistent discrimination, including from public officials and in employment. Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Michael O’Flaherty noted after a July 2024 visit to Slovakia that Roma women are often placed in separate maternity wards, ambulances sometimes decline to serve Roma communities, and that Roma remain subject to other severe forms of segregation. Women are underrepresented in senior-level business and government positions. A 2023 report by the European Institute for Gender Equality found that Slovakia falls below the European Union (EU) average and its progress toward gender equality was comparatively slower. Police do not always investigate or take action in cases of discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation.

## 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**

The government respects the freedom of movement and the right of citizens to freely change their place of residence, employment, and education.

**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**

In general, the government does not arbitrarily interfere with citizens’ rights to own property and to establish private businesses.

**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?**

**3/4**

Personal freedoms, including marriage choice, are upheld, but a 2014 constitutional amendment defines marriage as solely between a man and a woman. Parliament has repeatedly failed to enhance the legal standing of same-sex partnerships, a shortcoming highlighted in a 2023 European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance report. The Health Ministry revoked guidelines for administering the gender transition process in late 2023, throwing rules for legal recognition of gender transition into confusion.

Slovakia permits abortions, although conservative and far-right groups in parliament have repeatedly proposed restrictions.

**G4** 0-4 pts

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

**3/4**

Despite progress, disparities in equality of opportunity persist, especially for marginalized groups such as the Roma. Slovakia adheres to EU standards on labor rights, including minimum wage regulations and protections against unfair labor practices. However, enforcement can be inconsistent, particularly for vulnerable populations, such as low-wage workers and seasonal or migrant workers.

Human trafficking remains a problem, and mainly involves the transport of victims to countries in western and central Europe, where they are engaged in forced labor, sex work, and begging.



## On Slovakia

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### *Country Facts*

Population

**5,432,000**

Global Freedom Score

**89/100** Free

### *Other Years*

2024

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