



Freedom in the World 2016 - Belize

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Freedom Status: Free

Aggregate Score: 87

Freedom Rating: 1.5

Political Rights: 1

Civil Liberties: 2

Quick Facts

Capital: Belmopan

Population: 368,000

GDP/capita: \$4,719.10

Press Freedom Status: Free

Net Freedom Status: N/A

OVERVIEW

Political Rights: 36 / 40

Civil Liberties: 51 / 60

In snap elections held in November 2015, the incumbent United Democratic Party (UDP) increased its majority from 17 to 19 seats in the House of Representatives, which has 31 directly elected seats. The opposition People's United Party (PUP) took the remaining 12 seats. The UDP entered an unprecedented third consecutive term in government, with Dean Barrow retaining the seat of prime minister. Observers from the Organization of American States noted that the election was inclusive and conducted in a fair and professional manner. The UDP and PUP dominate Belize's competitive two-party system, but a number of smaller parties are also active. The Belize Progressive Party fielded candidates in 25 districts in the 2015 elections, although it did not ultimately secure seats.

Belize continues to struggle with the negative effects of organized crime, gang violence, drug trafficking, and corruption, although to a much lower extent than its neighbors. In March 2015, the Supreme Court dismissed an appeal case against Elvin Penner, a legislator who was dismissed from his post in 2013 amid suspicions that he had facilitated the illegal issuance of a Belizean passport to a South Korean national. A local NGO had launched the appeal in 2014 after a court dismissed Penner's case for lack of evidence. Separately, authorities continued to investigate how

David Nanes Schnitzer, an international fugitive wanted for involvement in financial crimes, had acquired Belizean citizenship. Police apprehended Schnitzer in November, but he escaped shortly after being released on bail. His whereabouts were unknown at year's end.

Indigenous communities continue to criticize the government for making their lands vulnerable to exploitation by foreign corporations, particularly by granting concessions. In a small victory, in June, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) upheld a 2013 decision by the Belizean Court of Appeals affirming ownership of ancestral lands for members of more than 30 Mayan communities. In another ruling in October, the CCJ ordered the government of Belize to compensate 25 members of the Maya community of the Toledo district for failing to protect their constitutional right to private property.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Belize, see [Freedom in the World 2015](#).

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

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