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Freedom House (Author)

Freedom in the World 2024 - Sweden

FREE

99

/ 100

Political Rights 40 / 40

Civil Liberties 59 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

100 / 100 Free

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

Overview

Sweden hosts free and fair elections and a strong multiparty system. Civil liberties and political rights are legally guaranteed and generally respected in practice, and the rule of law prevails. Recent challenges include increases in violent crime; religiously motivated hate speech and vandalism against Muslim, Jewish, and other targets; and struggles to integrate and create opportunities for foreign-born residents.

Key Developments in 2023

- High levels of gang violence, including fatal shootings, continued across Sweden during the year. The prime minister pledged tougher measures to crack down on the violence, including asking the military for assistance.
- Sweden moved closer to joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) during the year. At year's end, Turkey and Hungary were the only remaining NATO countries that had not yet approved Sweden's accession, which would mark an end to the country's longtime stance of neutrality.

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 prime minister is the head of government and is appointed by the speaker of the freely elected parliament, or Riksdag, and confirmed by the body as a whole. Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, leader of the Moderate Party, was appointed in October 2022 following parliamentary elections that September. King Carl XVI Gustaf, crowned in 1973, is the ceremonial head of state.

A2 0-4 pts

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

The unicameral Riksdag is composed of 349 members who are elected every four years by proportional representation. A party must receive at least 4 percent of the nationwide vote or 12 percent in an electoral district to win a seat. Swedish elections are broadly free and fair.

A right-wing bloc won a thin majority in the September 2022 parliamentary elections, taking 176 seats; the center-left bloc won 173. The populist, anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats (SD) is now the largest right-wing party with 73 seats, up from 62 previously. The Moderates, usually the largest party in the right-wing bloc, won 68 seats.

The Moderate Party, Christian Democrats, and Liberal Party govern in a ruling coalition, including support from the Sweden Democrats via a "confidence-and-supply" agreement.

A3 0-4 pts

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

Elections are regulated by the Swedish Election Authority, which effectively upholds its mandates. The Election Authority is headed by a government-appointed committee. Members of the board are appointed for a specific period and are not political appointments.

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 may form and operate without restriction.

B2 0-4 pts

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

Sweden has a strong multiparty system with a robust opposition. Eight political parties secured representation in the Riksdag in the 2022 elections.

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 actors that are not democratically accountable.

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? 4 / 4

The range of Sweden's religious, ethnic, and immigrant groups are represented in the parliament. Women make up 46 percent of the Riksdag, and there are 11 women cabinet members. However, some parties maintain greater gender parity than others.

Since 1993, the Indigenous Sámi community has elected its own legislature, which has powers over community education and culture and serves as an advisory body to the government. There are calls for the Sámi legislature to have greater political autonomy and influence.

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

Sweden's freely elected representatives are able to develop and implement policy.

C2 0-4 pts

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

Corruption is relatively low in Sweden, and anticorruption mechanisms are generally effective. However, as of November 2023 it had only satisfactorily addressed 2 out of 15 recommendations made by the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). Recommendations that have yet to be fulfilled involve the establishment of a code of conduct and ethics training for senior officials, guidelines for

transitioning from ministerial positions to the private sector, and police anticorruption training, among others.

In a 2023 report, Transparency International criticized five political parties for attempting to circumvent financial rules to obtain donations from anonymous donors prior to the 2022 elections.

C3 0-4 pts

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

The country has one of the most robust freedom of information statutes in the world, and state authorities generally respect the right of both citizens and noncitizens to access public information.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 4 / 4

Sweden's media are independent. Most newspapers and periodicals are privately owned, and media ownership is concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals. The government subsidizes daily newspapers regardless of their political affiliation. Public broadcasters air weekly radio and television programs in several minority languages.

In a 2021 government survey, 67 percent of women journalists and 41 percent of men journalists reported experiencing online hate speech and abuse.

D2 0-4 pts

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

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected. While the state makes efforts to record and investigate religiously motivated hate crimes, they often go unreported. The United Nations (UN) Universal Periodic Review of Sweden in 2020 highlighted numerous such incidents, mainly targeting Muslims and Jews. The United States (US) State Department's 2022 report on religious freedom noted vandalism against Muslim and Orthodox Christian graveyards, antisemitic graffiti on a government building, and antisemitic harassment online.

Anti-Islamic incidents are an ongoing concern, with demonstrations involving the burning of the Quran by far-right extremists and others continuing in 2023. Such incidents sparked protests in Sweden and in majority-Muslim countries; in July, hundreds of protesters stormed the Swedish embassy in Baghdad, Iraq's capital, and Iraq expelled the Swedish ambassador. In September, a Stockholm mosque was burned down in a

suspected arson attack. Members of the second-largest political party, the Sweden Democrats, have expressed anti-Islamic views.

In 2022, the Supreme Administrative Court overturned two municipalities' 2020 bans on hijabs, burqas, niqabs, and other face- and hair-covering garments in preschools and elementary schools. The court ruled that the prohibitions unconstitutionally restricted freedom of expression.

Since 2019 the government has closed most Islamic schools, citing concerns about radicalization. Members of the Muslim community have expressed concern that these decisions are politically motivated and have had a negative impact on religious freedom.

D3 0-4 pts

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

Academic freedom is generally 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

Private discussion is open and vibrant.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4

Freedom of assembly is generally respected in law and in practice.

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) of all kinds function freely.

E3 0-4 pts

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

The rights to strike and organize in labor unions are guaranteed. Trade union federations, which represent approximately 70 percent of the workforce, are strong and well organized.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 4 / 4

The judiciary is independent under the constitution, and it enjoys relatively high support among civilians according to recent polls. Permanent judges are appointed by the government following proposals by the Judges Proposal Board. A permanent judge cannot be dismissed other than for corruption or other wrongdoing. Every district court, court of appeal, administrative court, and administrative court of appeal has lay judges. Lay judges are appointed at the local level and are formally apolitical, though they are appointed by political parties.

In March 2023, two appellate court lay judges resigned, reportedly under political pressure, after a controversial ruling in a child rape case, leading to concerns about judicial independence.

F2 0-4 pts

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

The rule of law prevails in civil and criminal matters. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty, and the state must provide legal counsel to people accused of criminal offenses.

In the first half of 2023, the number of youths aged 15 to 17 charged with serious crimes reached the highest level since 2019. Authorities undertook efforts to limit the imprisonment of minors, instead sending young offenders to group homes and instituting prevention programs.

F3 0-4 pts

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

While Sweden is free from large-scale insurgencies, rising gang violence has emerged as an ongoing and growing concern. The number of deadly shootings and arson and bomb attacks has surged in many Swedish cities in recent years: according to 2021 UN data, Sweden had one of the highest gun death rates in Europe. In June 2023, Justice Minister Gunnar Strömmer said that as many as 30,000 people in Sweden are involved in criminal networks, and that "lethal firearm violence has increased dramatically." As of September, there had been 261 shootings in the country in 2023, with 36 people killed and 73 injured.

The government vowed to step up its efforts to stem the violence. In September, Prime Minister Kristersson began conversations with the military about how Sweden's armed forces could assist in the fight against criminal gangs.

Score Change: The score declined from 4 to 3 due to a significant increase in gang-related violent crime in recent years, including unprecedented numbers of fatal shootings and bombings.

F4 0-4 pts

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

The Swedish state works to ensure equal protection and rights for all members of the population. An equality ombudsman oversees efforts to prevent discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. However, the United Nations has called for the ombudsman's powers to be strengthened and has noted problems with discrimination by police and correctional personnel.

In recent years, multiple reports have emerged of members of the Sweden Democrats and other parties making antisemitic and anti-Muslim remarks. Violent clashes took place during 2023, triggered by anti-Muslim protesters' public burnings of the Quran, and a mosque in Stockholm burned down in a suspected arson attack in September.

After the 2022 elections, right-wing parties forged a coalition pact known as the Tidö Agreement, which included reforms intended to discourage migrants from coming to Sweden. Among the proposed reforms were tougher migration and integration laws, tighter requirements for citizenship, and looser deportation requirements.

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 legally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. Sweden continues to maintain checkpoints on its external borders that were instituted during the 2015 refugee crisis.

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 government respects the rights of individuals to own property and 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? 4 / 4

Same-sex couples are legally allowed to marry and adopt; lesbian couples have the same rights to artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization as heterosexual couples. An individual can legally change their gender identity, though doing so requires a medical assessment.

There are persistently high levels of rape and sexual assault in the country, although the relatively high rates may be due to how rape is recorded and defined compared to other countries.

G4 0-4 pts

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

People in Sweden generally enjoy equality of opportunity. However, unemployment is higher among immigrants, and particularly immigrant women, than it is among people who were born in Sweden. Increasing violence in the less affluent, ethnically diverse suburbs points to a frustration among those residents, many of whom are immigrants, that they do not enjoy the same equality of opportunity as ethnic Swedish citizens. According to official statistics, for the fourth quarter of 2023, the employment rate for foreign-born residents aged 20 to 64 was 74.7 percent, compared with 85.6 percent for Swedish-born residents. The United Nations has also noted that the performance gap between foreign-born and native-born children in school remains high.

Sweden is a destination and, to a lesser extent, a transit point for women and children trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The Swedish government has a proactive antitrafficking program, but the United Nations has pointed out that Sweden lacks robust methods to prevent individuals, especially unaccompanied immigrant children, from falling victim to human trafficking.

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Austrian Red Cross Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)	Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien T +43 1 589 00 583 F +43 1 589 00 589 info@ecoi.net	Contact Imprint & Disclaimer F.A.Q. Data Protection Notice
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