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Freedom House (Author)

Freedom in the World 2023 - Sweden

FREE

100

/ 100

Political Rights 40 / 40

Civil Liberties 60 / 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 2022

- National elections took place in September, resulting in a right-wing government with a slim three-seat majority. The Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberal Party formed a ruling coalition in October, with support from the far-right Swedish Democrats via a "confidence and supply" agreement.
- Gun violence continued to rise during the year, with a record 60 people killed by gunfire. The new government indicated it will pursue a "tough-on-crime" agenda to reduce gun violence.
- Several police officers and civilians were injured in violent clashes across several cities in April, which erupted after a far-right-wing

extremist group held demonstrations at which participants said they intended to burn the Quran. Authorities said the violence appeared to target police and was perpetrated by known criminals.

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 was appointed in October 2022 following parliamentary elections in September. King Carl XVI Gustaf, crowned in 1973, is 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 vote nationwide 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.

Following a month of negotiations, the Moderate Party, Christian Democrats, and Liberal Party formed a ruling coalition, including support from Swedish 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, 4 / and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of 4 these competing parties or groupings?

Political parties may form and operate without restriction.

B2 0-4 pts

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

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

B3 0-4 pts

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

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, 4 / religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full 4 political rights and electoral opportunities?

The range of Sweden's religious, ethnic, and immigrant groups are represented in the parliament. There are 162 women (out of 349 members) in Parliament and 11 women cabinet members. However, some parties maintain greater gender parity than others.

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

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative 4 / representatives determine the policies of the government? 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 2021 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, police anticorruption training, and a mechanism for publishing corruption complaints, among others.

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 UN Universal Periodic Review of Sweden in 2020 highlighted numerous such incidents, mainly targeting Muslims and Jews. The 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. Members of the second-largest political party, the Swedish Democrats, have expressed anti-Islamic views.

In December, 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.

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. However, in April 2022, violence erupted in several cities after a far-right extremist group held demonstrations, sanctioned by the police, at which participants indicated that they planned to burn the Quran. Several police officers and private individuals were reportedly injured during two days of clashes, which the national police commissioner blamed on "criminal individuals" who targeted police and were known to authorities.

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 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.

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.

F3 0-4 pts

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

While Sweden is free from large-scale insurgencies, rising street violence has emerged as a growing concern. Deadly shootings, arson attacks, and explosions caused by hand grenades have taken place in many Swedish cities in recent years, mainly in poor neighborhoods with large immigrant populations. In 2022, at least 60 people were killed by gun violence, a record high. Although shootings are increasing, according to the Swedish Crime Survey, in 2021 only around 2.8 percent of the population were exposed to assault, and only 0.5 percent exposed to serious assault. The new government and in particular the Swedish Democrats are expected to promote a "tough-on-crime" approach to containing gun violence; the party has called for measures such as stripping citizenship from gang members.

In July 2022, Sweden convicted an Iranian official of war crimes and sentenced him to life imprisonment for his participation in the mass execution in Iran of opposition supporters in 1988.

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 Swedish Democrats and other parties making antisemitic and anti-Muslim remarks.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability 4 /
to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 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 4 /
establish private businesses without undue interference from 4
state or nonstate actors?**

The government respects the rights of individuals to own property and establish private businesses. A 2011 Supreme Court ruling granted Sami reindeer herders common-law rights to disputed lands.

G3 0-4 pts

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

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 4 /
economic exploitation? 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 the 2022 Labor Force Survey from Statistics Sweden, the employment rate for foreign-born residents was 64.2 percent compared with 70.5 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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