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## Freedom House (Author)

## Freedom in the World 2024 - Czechia

Free

94

/ 100

Political Rights 36 / 40

Civil Liberties 58 / 60

Last Year's Score &amp; Status

92 / 100 Free

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

## Overview

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy in which political rights and civil liberties are generally respected. The country has recently experienced several corruption scandals and political disputes that have hampered normal legislative activity. Illiberal rhetoric and the influence of powerful business entities in the political arena are visible.

## Key Developments in 2023

- In January, independent candidate Petr Pavel defeated former prime minister and Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) leader Andrej Babiš in a second presidential election round.
- In August, the parliament amended conflict-of-interest laws, prohibiting lawmakers and government officials from owning media outlets, including through trusts. The following month, Babiš's Agrofert Group sold off the publishing house Babiš had previously controlled. Separately, a case against Babiš alleging misuse of EU funds continued during the year.

- After its approval in the parliament, the Whistleblower Protection Act, which aims to shield individuals reporting unlawful activities, was signed by the president in June and took effect in August.
- In August, the family of a Romany man who died after an altercation involving police officers filed a lawsuit against the Czech Republic with the European Court of Human Rights, arguing that a decision to close an investigation into the events was unlawful.

## 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 is the head of state but holds limited powers, and is directly elected to up to two five-year terms. In January 2023, independent candidate Petr Pavel was elected president, defeating former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš in a runoff.

The prime minister is the head of government and holds most executive power. Petr Fiala of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) became prime minister in November 2021, a month after parliamentary elections. Fiala leads a coalition government comprising two pro-EU electoral alliances; one is the Together coalition (SPOLU); the other includes the Czech Pirate Party and centrist Mayors and Independents.

#### A2 0-4 pts

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

The 200 members of the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of Parliament, are elected to four-year terms by proportional representation. The Senate, the upper chamber, which holds limited legislative power, has 81 members elected to six-year terms, with one-third up for election every two years.

The free and fair October 2021 elections saw a voter turnout of 65.4 percent. The ANO won a plurality of 72 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. SPOLU—comprising the ODS, the Christian Democratic Union—Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL), and Tradition, Responsibility, Prosperity 09 (TOP 09)—won 71. The Pirates-Mayors coalition took 37. The populist, anti-immigration Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) party won 20. SPOLU and the Pirates-Mayors group formed a governing coalition.

#### A3 0-4 pts

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

**bodies?**

The electoral framework is robust and generally well implemented by the State Election Commission. However, the body does not always operate with transparency. After the 2021 parliamentary elections, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) expressed disappointment that most of its previous recommendations went unaddressed, including ones on ensuring suffrage for people with disabilities, media ownership, and maintenance of voter rolls.

**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 are free to form and operate.

Presidential candidates can qualify for the ballot after receiving 50,000 signatures or securing the support of 20 deputies or 10 senators. However, the law is unclear as to whether a candidacy submitted by outgoing lawmakers is permissible.

**B2 0-4 pts**

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

Power rotates between parties regularly. In October 2021 parliamentary elections, the two opposition party alliances replaced a two-party minority coalition government.

**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?**

The influence of politically connected media outlets has been a notable concern. In recent years, critics have accused Babiš of using *MF Dnes* and *Lidové noviny*, newspapers he placed in a trust during his premiership, to advance his political and business interests. The parliament passed legislation in August 2023 amending the law on media ownership so that government officials and parliamentarians are prevented from owning media outlets. Crucially, it will apply to the true owner of the media, not just the controlling individual—meaning that government officials cannot disassociate themselves from their media holdings by placing them in a trust.

**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

By law, all citizens have full political rights and electoral opportunities. However, Roma lack meaningful political representation. Women are underrepresented in electoral politics and appointed positions.

Late in 2023, the parliament was discussing a civil-code amendment that would allow same-sex marriages. Dozens of major Czech companies and banks in an open letter urged the government to support the proposed marriage-equality law, arguing that unequal treatment of LGBT+ individuals incurs costs for employers and substantial economic losses for society.

## 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

Elected officials are duly installed and generally able to craft and implement policy.

**C2 0-4 pts**

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

Corruption remains a problem in Czech politics. In 2017, Czech police and the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) began investigating Babiš following allegations of improprieties regarding the disbursement of EU subsidies to Agrofert, a company Babiš maintained de facto ownership of. In 2018, OLAF concluded that the subsidies were obtained in a manner that may have broken Czech law. A Prague court acquitted him of all charges in January 2023, but in November, the Prague High Court overturned the acquittal due to insufficient and erroneous evidence, and ordered a new trial.

After its approval in the parliament, the Whistleblower Protection Act was signed by the president in June and took effect in August. This act aims to shield individuals reporting unlawful activities, particularly from possible retaliation by employers. It covers both serious misdemeanors and criminal offenses.

**C3 0-4 pts**

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

The government often fails to proactively publish information about procurement processes, public officials' salaries, and public spending. Members of the public must request a time-sensitive password to view asset declarations online. Under a 2018 law, the "ultimate beneficial owners" of companies and trust funds must be disclosed in a register.

That register is not available to the public, though law enforcement agencies, the courts, and several other entities can access it.

The parliament passed legislation in August 2023 amending the law on media ownership so that government officials and parliamentarians are prevented from owning media outlets, including through trusts. In 2022, an amended version of the 1999 Act on Free Access to Information took effect, requiring more partially state-owned firms to abide by its provisions. The law also expands the provision of information regarding public-sector compensation.

## Civil Liberties

### D Freedom of Expression and Belief

#### D1 0-4 pts

**Are there free and independent media? 4 / 4**

The media operate relatively freely, and the government does not place undue restrictions on content.

Legislation protects private ownership of media outlets, but concerns remain about the extent to which the media is controlled by wealthy business figures. Critics had accused Babiš's newspapers of providing biased coverage and acting as tools to advance his political interests. In reaction to the amended law on the conflict of interests, passed in August 2023, it was announced the next month that the Agrofert company controlled by Babiš would sell the Mafra publishing house. The transaction, pending approval by the antitrust agency, would end a decade-long period of concentration of political and media power in Babiš's hands.

#### D2 0-4 pts

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

The government generally upholds freedom of religion. Tax benefits and financial support are provided to registered religious groups. In 2012, the government passed a law to facilitate the return of land confiscated from churches by the former communist regime. In 2019, the Constitutional Court ruled that churches cannot be taxed for returned land.

Islamophobic rhetoric among some politicians and in society spiked during and after the 2015 European refugee crisis.

*Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because there have been no restrictions on free religious practice in recent years.*

#### D3 0-4 pts

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

Academic freedom is respected. Ceremonial presidential approval is required for rectors of public universities.

**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 able to express controversial or political opinions without fear of surveillance or retribution.

## **E Associational and Organizational Rights**

**E1 0-4 pts**

**Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4**

Freedom of assembly is upheld in practice, and demonstrations take place frequently and without incident. In November 2023, extensive protests erupted against the government's austerity measures. Trade unions, teachers' associations, and medical professionals criticized multiple aspects of the consolidation package that was approved by the parliament.

**E2 0-4 pts**

**Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work? 4 / 4**

Tens of thousands of registered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in the country, generally without interference.

**E3 0-4 pts**

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

Trade unions and professional associations function freely, though they are weak in practice. Workers have the right to strike, though this right is limited for essential public employees, such as hospital workers and air traffic controllers.

## **F Rule of Law**

**F1 0-4 pts**

**Is there an independent judiciary? 4 / 4**

The judiciary is largely independent, though its complexity and multilayered composition have led to slow delivery of judgments. In recent years, the judiciary and its leading figures have consistently demonstrated their independence.

In 2019, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Administrative Court revealed that former President Miloš Zeman had exerted pressure on him to rule in the president's favor in a pending case. The justice claimed that the president hinted at rewarding him with an appointment to the Constitutional Court.

*Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because Czech court rulings and other activities have consistently demonstrated the judiciary's independence.*

## **F2 0-4 pts**

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

The rule of law generally prevails in civil and criminal matters. Despite corruption and political pressure within law enforcement agencies, the office of the public prosecutor has become more independent in recent years.

## **F3 0-4 pts**

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

The Czech Republic is free from war and insurgencies. However, prisons are overcrowded and at times unsanitary.

In June 2021, police intervened in a fight involving Stanislav Tomáš, a Romany man, pinning him to the ground while kneeling on his back; Tomáš later died in an ambulance. In 2022, the police announced that they had ended an investigation of the officers involved, and the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office confirmed that the police decision was lawful. The Constitutional Court in April 2023 dismissed a constitutional complaint against the verdict brought by the European Roma Rights Centre and the Forum for Human Rights. Tomáš's relatives filed a lawsuit with the European Court of Human Rights against the Czech Republic in August.

## **F4 0-4 pts**

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

The 2009 Antidiscrimination Act provides for equal treatment regardless of sex, race, age, disability, belief, or sexual orientation. Roma face discrimination in the job market and significantly poorer housing conditions than non-Roma, as well as occasional threats and violence from right-wing groups. Many Roma children attend ethnically segregated schools. Victims of unlawful sterilizations between 1966 and 2012, a majority of whom are Roma, have been able to request financial compensation from the state. As of November 2023, the Ministry of Health had received over 1,500 requests for compensation and ruled in favor of granting compensation in 500.

Women are underrepresented at the highest levels of business and suffer a large pay gap more generally.

Anti-Muslim attitudes have increased in recent years amid a legal battle between Prague and the EU over refugee quotas. The SPD has used Islamophobic rhetoric, characterizing Islam as "incompatible with freedom and democracy." According to 2022 statistics from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the country had more refugees per capita than any country in Europe. The country has been relatively welcoming to Ukrainians, with about 370,000 holding temporary protection status in 2023.

## 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

Individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or 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

The rights to own property and operate private businesses are established in the law and upheld in practice.

### 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

Authorities generally do not restrict social freedoms. Same-sex marriages are not legally recognized, though same-sex partners can enter civil unions. While gender discrimination is legally prohibited, sexual harassment in the workplace is fairly common. Reports show that only a small number of perpetrators of gender-based violence face criminal charges.

Late in 2023, the parliament was discussing a civil-code amendment that would allow same-sex marriages.

Parliament has not ratified the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women, though the government signed the treaty in 2016.

### G4 0-4 pts

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



Human trafficking remains a problem as organized criminal groups use the country as a source, transit, and destination point; women and children are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The government has made serious efforts to fund protective services and other resources for survivors and to prosecute perpetrators.

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