



Document #2088557

Freedom House (Author)

Freedom in the World 2023 - Slovenia

FREE

95

/ 100

Political Rights 39 / 40

Civil Liberties 56 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

90 / 100 Free

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

Overview

Slovenia is a parliamentary republic with a freely elected government that generally respects political rights and civil liberties. A right-wing government that sought to undermine the rule of law was replaced by a left-liberal coalition after the April 2022 parliamentary elections. Corruption remains an issue, while cases of economic exploitation have become more prominent. The judiciary has established a record of independent rulings.

Key Developments in 2022

- The ruling Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) was defeated in the April parliamentary elections, with the Freedom Movement (GS) becoming the lower house's single largest party. Robert Golob of the GS became prime minister in May, succeeding Janez Janša of the SDS; a GS-led coalition was formally seated in June.
- In July, the Constitutional Court ruled that legislation banning same-sex marriage and adoption was unconstitutional, immediately legalizing both. The parliament amended the family code to comply with the ruling in October.

- Lawyer Nataša Pirc Musar, who was backed by center-left parties, won the two-round presidential election that concluded in November. Pirc Musar defeated former foreign minister Anže Logar, who was backed by the SDS. Pirc Musar, the first woman to become head of state, took office in late December.
- In November, Slovenian voters backed a government proposal that would create a single supervisory board for public broadcaster Radio-television Slovenia (RTV SLO); its members would be selected by the broadcaster's staff and civil society instead of the parliament. The proposal is due for implementation in 2023.

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 holds the ceremonial position of head of state and is directly elected for up to two five-year terms. Slovenian voters participated in a two-round presidential election in October and November 2022. Former foreign minister Anže Logar won a plurality in the first round but was defeated by lawyer Nataša Pirc Musar in the November runoff. Both candidates ran as independents, though center-left parties backed Pirc Musar and the SDS endorsed Logar. Pirc Musar took office in late December, succeeding the term-limited Borut Pahor.

The prime minister heads the executive branch and is appointed by the National Assembly (Državni Zbor) for a four-year term. Janez Janša of the SDS became prime minister in early 2020 but his government was ousted in the April 2022 parliamentary elections. Robert Golob of the GS was formally selected by the new parliament to succeed Janša in May.

A2 0-4 pts

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

The legislature is composed of the 40-seat National Council (Državni Svet) elected indirectly, and a 90-seat National Assembly. Of the National Assembly members elected to four-year terms, 88 are elected by a system of proportional representation. Two additional seats are reserved for lawmakers representing Hungarian and Italian minorities.

The GS became the National Assembly's largest party in the April 2022 elections, winning 41 seats and 34.5 percent of the vote. The SDS won 27 seats and 23.5 percent of the vote. The New Slovenia-Christian Democrats won 8 seats and 6.9 percent, the Social Democrats (SD) won 7 seats and 6.7 percent, and the Left (Levica) won 5 seats and 4.5 percent. Turnout

stood at 71 percent, far higher than the 52.6 percent turnout seen in the 2018 polls. A GS-SD-Left coalition formally took power in June. In their December report, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitors deemed the parliamentary elections free and fair.

Slovenian voters participated in local elections in November and December 2022. Independent and conservative candidates reportedly performed well. Council of Europe observers called the November round orderly. Turnout for that round stood at 47.5 percent. A runoff was held in 47 municipalities in December.

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 National Election Commission (DVK) is an independent and impartial body that supervises free and fair elections and ensures electoral laws are properly implemented.

Slovenian voters residing abroad have encountered difficulties in receiving and returning postal ballots. In April 2022, DVK director Dušan Vučko called for electoral-law revisions to account for postal return times. That same month, the DVK disclosed that several hundred ballots meant for voters residing in Argentina were lost; it sent electronic versions to affected individuals.

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

The constitutional right to organize in different political parties is upheld in practice. Parties need to pass a 4 percent threshold to win a seat in the parliament. Parties winning more than 1 percent of the vote are eligible for a proportional share of funds from the national budget.

B2 0-4 pts

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

Political power frequently rotates between parties.

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 free from domination by powerful groups 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

Citizens enjoy full political rights and electoral opportunities. Hungarian and Italian minorities each elect their own lawmaker to the National Assembly. Roma councilors sit on 20 municipal councils.

A 35 percent gender quota is mandated by law. Noncompliant political parties have had their lists rejected. Gender quotas are enforced at the precinct level. Newer parties have included more women in their party lists, while older parties' lists include men more often. Female political representation markedly improved after the 2022 parliamentary and presidential elections. Some 40 percent of National Assembly members elected in April are women, the highest share in Slovenian history. Urška Klakočar Zupančič of the GS became the National Assembly's first female president in May. President Pirc Musar, meanwhile, is the first woman to serve as head of state.

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 free to set and implement government policy without undue interference.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 3 / 4

Corruption in Slovenia largely takes the form of conflicts of interest between public officials and private businesses. Anticorruption efforts had been diminished by the Janša government's failure to appoint public prosecutors, though the Golob government appointed 13 in June 2022. Journalists proactively expose allegations of corruption.

Concerns over corruption persisted in 2022. In April, the Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (KPK) said that then prime minister Janša did not follow conflict-of-interest procedures when making one of his associates a nonexecutive director of the Bank Assets Management Company. The Slovenian chapter of Transparency International (TI) called on officials to address conflict-of-interest concerns in response to the KPK report. Also in April, the KPK criticized officials for implying that anticorruption legislation could be ignored. In July, TI's Slovenian chapter publicly supported a bill protecting whistleblowers—a draft of which was

accepted by the Golob government in October—and called for greater integrity in local government. In December, Interior Minister Tatjana Bobnar resigned, accusing Prime Minister Golob of undue interference over her desired appointments to the police force. Bobnar vowed to share allegations with the KPK and prosecutors.

C3 0-4 pts

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

The government generally operates with openness.

In July 2022, the European Commission (EC) reported that Slovenia placed ahead of the average for European Union (EU) member states in its Digital Economy and Society Index; the EC specifically noted that Slovenia's share of e-government users was larger than the EU average.

The GS-led coalition sought to improve government transparency on health-care issues in 2022. In June, the National Assembly backed an amended Communicable Diseases Act (ZNB) that allowed for greater parliamentary oversight over health-related restrictions; the Janša government had amended the ZNB to pass coronavirus-related restrictions by decree and without public consultation in 2021. In July 2022, the National Assembly abolished public procurement rules dating back to 2021 via new health care legislation. The Janša-era rules were criticized for reducing the transparency of public tenders.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because the new government amended problematic procurement legislation that had been passed by decree and has otherwise strengthened parliamentary oversight of government actions.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 2 / 4

Press freedom is constitutionally guaranteed, but defamation remains a criminal offense. State-owned enterprises maintain stakes in several media outlets, leaving them vulnerable to government intervention. Media ownership is sometimes opaque, and local outlets have been abused as propaganda tools favoring incumbent mayors. Journalists are subject to pressure from powerful business interests and occasional harassment due to their coverage.

In recent years, public media outlets have faced persistent interference by Janša-era appointees. In late December 2021, the Janša government secured a majority on the RTV SLO Programming Council through a tranche of appointments, despite opposition concerns over their legality.

In March 2022, RTV SLO director general Andrej Grah Whatmough, a Janša appointee, named Jadranka Rebernik editor in chief of the flagship news program at TV Slovenia, RTV SLO's television arm, over near-unanimous staff objections. In a video that surfaced in May, Slavko Kmetič, a member of the RTV SLO Programming Council and an SDS activist, was recorded discussing purges of journalists deemed critical of the party. In July, Uroš Urbanija, who led the Government Communication Office under Janša and had voiced hostility towards public media, was named director of TV Slovenia. In September, a group of RTV SLO employees said that managers were applying partisan pressure on them, including through disciplinary action.

After taking office, the Golob government introduced a bill that would replace RTV SLO's two governing boards with a single supervisory board. Its members would be selected by staff members and civil society instead of the National Assembly. The SDS provided enough signatures to force a referendum on the matter in October 2022. The government's proposal was backed by voters in November and is due for implementation in 2023.

D2 0-4 pts

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

The Slovenian constitution guarantees religious freedom and contains provisions prohibiting incitement of religious intolerance or discrimination. The government dissolved the Office for Religious Communities in 2021, leaving no overarching framework for dialogue between the government and many religious communities.

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

Individuals are generally free to express their personal beliefs without fear of reprisal. Defamation remains a criminal offense, though officials may no longer press charges through the state prosecutor.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4

Assembly and association rights are guaranteed by the constitution and generally respected in practice. Assemblies must be registered with the authorities in advance and sometimes require permits.

After taking office, the Golob government sought to reverse the previous administration's assembly restrictions. In June 2022, it announced that it would not pursue the previous administration's lawsuits seeking reimbursement from the organizers of spontaneous rallies. That same month, the National Assembly amended the ZNB, which had been used to restrict public assembly. In August, an inquiry found that Slovenian police acted disproportionately in response to antigovernment protests held in 2021 and substantiated four complaints lodged that year. The Interior Ministry reversed the previous government's guidelines in response, underlining that spontaneous assemblies enjoy equal protection under the law. In a December report, the Interior Ministry noted that police officers had engaged in misconduct and used excessive crowd control tactics during an antigovernment protest held in October 2021, making a referral to public prosecutors.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because the new government rejected the previous administration's assembly restrictions under health care legislation and sought to address security forces' misconduct during rallies.

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) operate freely and play a role in policymaking.

While the Janša government maintained an adversarial relationship with civil society, the current government has refrained from imposing restrictions on NGOs. In June 2022, it established a working group for civil society collaboration.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because the new government has not imposed restrictions on NGO activities.

E3 0-4 pts

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

Workers may establish and join trade unions, strike, and bargain collectively. RTV SLO staff held three strikes in 2022, citing partisan pressure as well as concerns over pay.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 4 / 4

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary. Since taking office, the GS-led coalition has declared its intention to respect the branch's

independence. In September 2022, the government proposed a constitutional amendment that would empower the president to provide final approval for many judicial appointments, though the National Assembly would retain the power to approve Constitutional Court judges.

Public perception of the judiciary has improved in recent years; according to a survey conducted in 2021 and released in September 2022, 28 percent of respondents voiced distrust in the branch, an improvement over the 43 percent figure recorded in 2019. The 2022 edition of the EU Justice Scoreboard also showed that public increasingly trusts the Slovenian judiciary.

Judicial efficiency has also improved, though minimal progress in addressing a backlog has been achieved. Judges usually rule in a timely manner. Those working in the judicial branch have complained about inadequate infrastructure and working conditions.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because the new government has not resisted independent judicial rulings.

F2 0-4 pts

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

The rule of law is respected in civil and criminal matters. Programs aimed at reducing court backlogs have seen some success.

F3 0-4 pts

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

People in Slovenia are generally free from threats of physical force. However, the national police noted an increase in murder and manslaughter in its August 2022 report, which covered the first half of the year. Prison conditions meet international standards, though overcrowding has been reported.

F4 0-4 pts

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

Some deficiencies impede the protection of equal rights in Slovenia. Roma face widespread poverty, are subjected to hate speech, are socially marginalized, and lack access to early and secondary education, legal housing, and basic utilities.

Though legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation exist, anti-LGBT+ discrimination remains a challenge. Ahead of the June 2022 Ljubljana pride parade, posters from an LGBT+ outreach campaign were defaced with anti-LGBT+ messages, some of which called for violence against LGBT+ people. Organizers also reported that threatening messages were shared on social media ahead of the parade.

Students with disabilities have difficulty accessing educational services. In July 2022, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality reported that only a quarter of the country's high schools were fully accessible to those with impaired mobility.

In February 2022, then president Pahor offered a formal apology to the Erased, referring to 25,000 people whose residency documents were deleted by authorities in 1992; the affected people were citizens of the former Yugoslavia who had not applied for Slovenian citizenship after independence. The Slovenia Peace Institute welcomed Pahor's apology but noted that some of the Erased have not received compensation.

While the previous government restricted the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, the current administration has begun consultation on a new migration policy, which it says will address asylum practices. Some 8,200 Ukrainian refugees and 7,800 Ukrainians registered for temporary protection resided in Slovenia as of September 2022, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR lauded Slovenia as a "welcoming environment for refugees," but warned that the country was under strain due to the number of refugees and asylum seekers. In November, the government extended its temporary protection scheme for Ukrainians through March 2024.

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

Citizens enjoy the right to change their residence, employment, and place of 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

Individuals may exercise the right to own property and establish private business 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

Individuals generally enjoy personal social freedoms. In July 2022, the Constitutional Court ruled that legislation banning same-sex marriages and adoptions was unconstitutional, immediately legalizing both practices. The court instructed the National Assembly to amend the family code within six months, which it did in October.

In its August 2022 report, the national police reported a slight decrease in domestic violence cases but noted increases in other forms of sexual violence and harassment. Also in August, police launched an investigation into Dušan Josip Smodej, a Ljubljana artist who was accused of sexually abusing several women, after allegations surfaced on an Instagram channel; the police called on survivors to notify the authorities. In September, the public e-administration portal was updated to allow individuals to report incidents anonymously.

Score Change: The score improved from 3 to 4 because same-sex marriage and adoption were legalized during the year, and because few other restrictions on personal social freedoms exist.

G4 0-4 pts

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

Authorities actively prosecute suspected human traffickers and work to identify victims.

Foreign workers are at risk of exploitation in Slovenia. Migrant workers lack an effective framework for protection, and civil society has warned that official statistics on the state of migrant workers are lacking. In June 2022, prosecutors filed charges against the owners of a fish-packing plant who were accused of exploiting their workers. In August, TV Slovenia reported that Indian workers employed at a Ljubljana car-washing business were paid less than the minimum wage and had their passports confiscated. In September, Labor Minister Luka Mesec announced that the head of a labor rights NGO would join a restructured management team at the Labour Inspectorate.

Trade unions have criticized the treatment and pay of gig workers. In July 2022, unions called on the parliament to better protect their rights via legislation.

ecoi.net description:

Annual report on political rights and civil liberties in 2022

Country:

Slovenia

Source:

[Freedom House](#) (Author)

Original link:

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/slovenia/freedom-world/2023>

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:
English

Published:
2023

Available on ecoi.net since:
10 March 2023

Document ID:
2088557

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