



Freedom in the World 2017 - Croatia

Freedom Status: Free.



Quick Facts

Population: 4,200,000.

Capital: Zagreb.

GDP/capita: \$11,536.

Press Freedom Status: Partly Free.

Freedom in the World Scores

Aggregate Score 87/100

(0=Least Free, 100=Most Free)

Freedom Rating: 1.5/7

Political Rights: 1/7

Civil Liberties: 2/7

(1=Most Free, 7=Least Free)

Overview:

Croatia is a parliamentary republic that regularly holds free elections. Civil and political rights are generally respected, though there are serious problems with corruption in the public sector. Minority rights have improved over the last two decades, though the Roma minority faces discrimination, and tensions between the members of the ethnic Croat majority and ethnic Serb minority persist.

Key Developments in 2016:

- Snap parliamentary elections held in September saw low turnout.
- Corruption and bribery cases against prominent figures proceeded during the year, but key verdicts have yet to be handed down.
- The interior minister threatened to remove “false Serb” residents of Vukovar from population lists, amid tensions related to the ethnic Serb minority’s use of the Cyrillic alphabet. The remarks drew criticism from officials in both Croatia and Serbia.

Executive Summary:

Snap parliamentary elections in September 2016—which were held after the previous prime minister lost a confidence vote, and were the second legislative polls in less than a year—were marked by low turnout, with just over 52 percent of eligible voters casting ballots, compared to 61 percent in the last elections. The conservative Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) won the most seats. Andrej Plenković became the new prime minister after the party formed a coalition with the reformist Most party, whose popularity in recent years is seen as reflecting growing dissatisfaction with the mainstream HDZ and center-left Social Democratic Party (SDP).

Corruption and bribery proceedings against former president Ivo Sanader continued in 2016. Corruption proceedings also continued against Zagreb mayor Milan Bandić, while new proceedings were opened against Đuro Gavrilović, the owner of one of Croatia's largest companies, on allegations of abuse of office and war profiteering during the early 1990s. Such proceedings have been slow, due in part to multiple levels of appeals processes.

Relations between members of Croatia's ethnic Croat majority and ethnic Serb minority are sometimes fraught due to the sensitive legacy of the 1991–95 war in Croatia. In August 2016, amid increasing tensions over the use of the Cyrillic alphabet by ethnic Serbs in Vukovar, Interior Minister Vlaho Orepić announced that following a survey of Vukovar residents' ethnicities, "false Serbs" would be deleted from population lists. Under Croatian law, minority populations have the right to signage in their own language in towns and cities where they comprise at least 30 percent of the population, and thus the removal of Serbs from population lists could permit the removal of Cyrillic signage from the city. Other Croatian officials condemned the comments, as did figures in Serbia.

Croatia experienced an unprecedented wave of migration in 2015, with hundreds of thousands of people—primarily asylum seekers—arriving in the country, mostly with the intent of continuing on to other European Union (EU) countries. It is expected that thousands of those asylum seekers subsequently denied asylum in other countries will be returned to Croatia—which under treaty obligations is responsible for their registration, but lacks housing and other infrastructure to support them.

Political Rights

Political Rights 37 / 40

A. Electoral Process 12 / 12

- A1. Is the head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?
- A2. Are the national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?
- A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair?

B. Political Pluralism and Participation 15 / 16

- B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?

B2. Is there a significant opposition vote and a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?

B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?

B4. Do cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

C. Functioning of Government 10 / 12

C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

C2. Is the government free from pervasive corruption?

C3. Is the government accountable to the electorate between elections, and does it operate with openness and transparency?

Civil Liberties

Civil Liberties 50 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief 14 / 16

D1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression?

D2. Are religious institutions and communities free to practice their faith and express themselves in public and private?

D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free of extensive political indoctrination?

D4. Is there open and free private discussion?

E. Associational and Organizational Rights 12 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion?

E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations?

E3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?

F. Rule of Law 11 / 16

F1. Is there an independent judiciary?

F2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Are police under direct civilian control?

F3. Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies?

F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights 13 / 16

G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of travel or choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher education?

G2. Do individuals have the right to own property and establish private businesses? Is private business

activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, political parties/organizations, or organized crime?

G3. Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family?

G4. Is there equality of opportunity and the absence of economic exploitation?

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

Explanatory Note:

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2017. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Croatia, see Freedom in the World 2016.

Source: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2017/croatia>