

Freedom in the World 2024



header1 Overview

Dominica is a parliamentary democracy and has been governed by the Dominica Labor Party (DLP) since 2000. While the country is committed to democratic governance and civil liberties are generally upheld, several concerns persist; these include effective management of elections, judicial efficiency, and government corruption—notably relating to the country's Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program.

header2 Key Developments in 2023

- Dominica's CBI program came under sustained criticism during the year. In October, a group of international media and nonprofit organizations published an independent investigation into the CBI program; the investigation found that Dominican authorities

had permitted individuals with actual or alleged criminal backgrounds to purchase Dominican passports.

- The new president of the Commonwealth of Dominica, Sylvanie Burton, was elected by the parliament in September and sworn into office in October. Burton is both the first woman and the first Indigenous person to be elected as president in Dominica.

PR Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?

4.004

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The president, who is the ceremonial head of state, is nominated by the prime minister and opposition leader and elected by the House of Assembly for a five-year term. The prime minister is head of government and is appointed by the president.

The leader of the ruling DLP, Roosevelt Skerrit, retained his position as prime minister after his party won most of the parliamentary seats in the December 2022 snap general election. Despite the poll's overall credibility, the election was marred by low voter turnout amid an opposition-led boycott over an alleged lack of progress on electoral reform.

In September 2023, the parliament elected Sylvanie Burton as president, and she was sworn in the following month. Burton is the first woman and first Indigenous person elected to the position.

A2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

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

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Dominica's unicameral House of Assembly consists of 30 members who serve five-year terms; 21 members are directly elected, 5 senators are appointed by the prime minister, and 4 are appointed by the opposition leader. There are two ex officio members: the House speaker and the clerk of the House.

In November 2022, Prime Minister Skerrit called for snap general elections to be held that December. The DLP won 19 seats in the 2022 general elections, while independents captured 2. The elections were considered peaceful and orderly by election monitors. However, two leading opposition parties, the United Workers' Party (UWP) and the Dominica Freedom Party (DFP), along with the smaller Alternative Peoples' Party (APP), boycotted the elections, citing the government's failure to make progress on enacting electoral reforms. DLP candidates ran uncontested for six seats, resulting in those seats being allocated to the party in late November, ahead of the December elections. Both the boycott and the DLP's uncontested victories may have contributed to a historically low 31.6 percent voter turnout for the December elections.

A3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

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

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The Electoral Commission manages and organizes the election process, and the electoral laws are generally fair. However, concerns persist. Both the opposition and members of the Dominican

diaspora have campaigned for electoral reforms, such as updating voter rolls and issuing voter identification cards.

After the 2019 polls, the Organization of American States (OAS) recommended a series of changes, including issuing photo identification cards to voters, introducing an electronic voting system, undertaking a voter-list review, and introducing party and campaign finance legislation. Despite the DLP government's repeated promises to enact such reforms, no changes were made in 2023. An independent report on electoral reform was published in June 2023 listed a range of recommendations, such as expanding representation on the Electoral Commission to include a broader range of stakeholders.

In December 2019, the opposition challenged the results of that year's elections in 10 constituencies, alleging they were affected by fraud and bribery. In July 2022, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) dismissed the case. However, the CCJ noted that "areas of grave concern" about the conduct of the 2019 elections remained, and should be addressed before the country's future elections.

A separate case relating to the 2014 election remains open. The allegations focus on two concerts organized by the DLP in the run-up to the election, which the complainants say were meant to improperly influence its outcome.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 1.00-4.00 pts 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?	4.004 4.004
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Political parties are free to organize and operate. The effects of the country's first-past-the-post electoral system has entrenched two-party politics.

B2 1.00-4.00 pts 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?	4.004 4.004
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Opposition parties are unencumbered by formal restrictions and are generally free to operate. There has not been a change of party in government since 2000, mostly due to the weakness of the opposition.

B3 1.00-4.00 pts 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?	4.004 4.004
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Voters and candidates are generally able to express their political choices without undue influence from actors that are not democratically accountable.

B4 1.00-4.00 pts 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?	4.004 4.004
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All adult citizens may vote. Women are underrepresented in politics generally. Out of 45 candidates in the 2022 elections, 15 were women, and 10 won seats—an improvement from the 2019 elections. Independent legislator Jesma Paul was sworn in as leader of the opposition in December 2022. LGBT+ people face discrimination and are marginalized, impacting their ability to engage fully in political processes.

The Indigenous Carib-Kalinago population participates in the political process, with members generally supporting one of the two major political parties.

In September 2023, Sylvanie Burton was elected president; she was sworn into office in October, becoming Dominica's first woman and first Indigenous president.

C Functioning of Government

C1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?	4.004
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The freely elected prime minister, cabinet, and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government.

C2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?	3.003	4.004
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While the government generally implements anticorruption laws effectively, domestic and international observers have raised concerns over corruption within Dominica's Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program, which allows foreigners to gain citizenship through an economic investment in the country.

The US State Department said in its 2022 *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* that "Dominica sometimes issues passports despite adverse information uncovered during vetting."

C3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	3.003	4.004
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The government of Dominica generally operates with openness and transparency, though there are concerns that the long-incumbent DLP has been less forthcoming in recent years with information on some programs, including CBI. Government officials are required to submit financial accounts, but these accounts are frequently incomplete. Access to information is not protected by law.

In October 2023, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) published *Dominica: Passports of the Caribbean*, a cross-border investigation into the CBI program involving more than a dozen international media outlets. The investigation found that passports had been sold to individuals with actual or alleged criminal backgrounds—for example, one buyer granted citizenship had been publicly accused of war crimes. The project also alleged that Dominica's government may have issued thousands of passports through the CBI program that were never publicly disclosed, prompting questions about government transparency as related to the program. The European Commission also released a report on the sale of passports in Caribbean countries in October; the report expressed the body's concerns about the security implications of Dominica's CBI program and called for restrictions on visa-free travel to the European Union (EU) for passport-holders from countries that sell citizenship.

CL Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? | 3.003 4.004

Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed, and the press is generally free in practice. However, defamation remains a criminal offense punishable by imprisonment or fines. Defamation lawsuits and threats of lawsuits are commonly used by the Skerrit government against members of the media, resulting in some self-censorship. In July 2022, the CCJ alleged that the opposition's access to some state-owned media, including the national radio station, has been restricted.

D2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

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

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Freedom of religion is protected under the constitution and other laws and is generally respected in practice.

D3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

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

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Academic freedom is generally respected.

D4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?

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Individuals are generally free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? | 3.003 4.004

Freedom of assembly is guaranteed under the constitution, and the government has generally respected these rights. However, protests sometimes become violent, or give way to looting or acts of vandalism.

Some unrest took place at opposition protests in 2017, and Prime Minister Skerrit branded them as threats to state security. Later, several UWP members, including leader Lennox Linton, were charged with incitement and obstruction. The trials remained ongoing as of December 2023.

In March 2022, social activist Atherton Martin began leading weekly walks for "peace, justice, and prosperity in Dominica" in the capital, Roseau. Martin did not seek permission for the walks, as he claimed they were not public processions and therefore did not require official approval. In May

2022, ten participants in the walks, including Linton, were charged for participating in unapproved protests. The case reportedly remained ongoing during 2023.

E2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work?	4.004 4.004
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Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups generally operate without interference.

E3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?	4.004 4.004
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Workers have the right to organize, strike, and bargain collectively, and laws prohibit antiunion discrimination by employers. However, the country's definition of "essential" workers is broad, extending to those in the agricultural sector, and there are burdensome restrictions on the ability of these workers to strike.

F Rule of Law

F1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	4.004 4.004
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An independent judiciary is provided for in the constitution, and judicial independence is generally respected. Courts are subordinate to the interisland Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (ECSC) and the CCJ.

F2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	4.004 4.004
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The constitution provides for due process rights, and these are generally observed in practice. While the judicial system generally operates efficiently, staffing shortages remain a problem and can result in prolonged pretrial detention.

F3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?	4.004 4.004
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Residents of Dominica generally enjoy freedom from the illegitimate use of force. However, the level of violent crime in the country has risen in recent years. In early October 2023, the government introduced a one-month gun and ammunition amnesty in an attempt to induce people to turn in illegal weapons; the amnesty was later extended through November.

Prison overcrowding is a problem.

F4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?	3.003 4.004
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Women's rights are not fully protected. Laws on sexual harassment are weak. Cases of rape are underreported, with significant stigma attached to the crime and little support available for victims.

Same-sex sexual relations are illegal, though the relevant provisions of the Sexual Offences Act are not enforced, a position that has been made clear by Prime Minister Skerrit. In 2022, the country's High Court heard a constitutional challenge to two sections of the Sexual Offences Act that outlaw consensual same-sex relations. A ruling on the challenge had not been issued by year-end 2023.

Members of the small Indigenous population, the Carib-Kalinago, face discrimination and a variety of accompanying challenges, including high poverty levels and difficulties in obtaining loans from banks. Rastafarians have reported discrimination and profiling by police.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education?

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Individuals in Dominica generally enjoy freedom of movement, though those outside the established Carib-Kalinago community must apply for special access to the Carib Reserve area, which is granted by the Carib Council. There are no restrictions on people's ability to change their place of employment or education.

G2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?

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The government of Dominica supports both domestic and foreign investment. Property rights are generally safeguarded. However, women have more limited rights because property is traditionally deeded to the head of household, who is usually a man.

G3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

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

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Women and children have some limitations on their personal freedoms, including freedom from violence. The parliament passed the Domestic Violence Act in April 2023; the new legislation is intended to strengthen protections for victims of domestic violence, and includes provisions giving police increased authority to intervene in cases of suspected domestic violence.

G4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

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

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Revisions to labor laws have strengthened worker protections in recent years, though violations of overtime laws in the tourism sector have occurred. The labor commissioner operates within the Justice Department and is underresourced. The government has made efforts to address poverty and unemployment, including in the wake of Hurricane Maria, which devastated the island in 2017. The government implemented minimum-wage increases in 2021.

In its 2022 *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* report, the US Labor Department found no evidence of child labor in Dominica but warned that the government had only made “minimal advancement” in efforts to prevent the practice. Carib-Kalinago children face barriers to education, making them more vulnerable.