

Marshall Islands

Country:

Marshall Islands

Year:

2016

Freedom Status:

Free

Political Rights:

1

Civil Liberties:

1

Aggregate Score:

92

Freedom Rating:

1.0

Overview:

Political Rights: 37 / 40 (+1) [[Key](#)]

Civil Liberties: 55 / 60

Parliamentary elections held in November 2015 featured significant turnover, with 14 of 33 seats in the unicameral legislature changing hands. The results were a blow to the government of President Chris Loeak, who saw about half of his cabinet members voted out of office. While the incumbent government was supported by the Aelon Kein Ad (AKA) party and the Kien Eo Am (KEA) group was in opposition, elections are officially nonpartisan, and lawmakers are free to form alliances and change affiliations. The new legislature was set to hold a presidential election in January 2016.

There were no reports of violence or complaints of fraud or irregularities. Voter turnout was lower than usual at 46 percent, though some observers suggested that the list of registered voters was inflated with deceased citizens, making the turnout figure artificially low. Naturalized citizens were allowed to run as candidates under a February court ruling, which found that a 1980 law requiring parliamentary candidates to have at least one Marshallese parent and traditional land rights was unconstitutional.

Corruption and lack of transparency remained problems in 2015. In August, the auditor general reported to the parliament that national and local government officials were obstructing his work, forcing him to use subpoenas to obtain meetings and routine documents.

A 2015 UN human rights review called on the Marshall Islands to form a national human rights commission and step up efforts to address domestic violence, child abuse, and discrimination

against women. In October, the country adopted a law prohibiting the domestic and transnational trafficking of children. Local and foreign women and children are vulnerable to forced prostitution in a trade serving the crews of visiting foreign vessels, and the government rarely investigates or prosecutes cases.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands has close relations with the United States under a 1986 Compact of Free Association, which allows the U.S. military to operate in the country in exchange for defense guarantees and development assistance. A component of the compact in force through 2023 calls for the United States to provide about \$70 million in annual aid, including contributions to a trust fund for the country.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in the Marshall Islands, see Freedom in the World 2015.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

Full Methodology

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