

## Norway

**Country:**

[Norway](#)

**Year:**

2016

**Freedom Status:**

Free

**Political Rights:**

1

**Civil Liberties:**

1

**Aggregate Score:**

100

**Freedom Rating:**

1.0

**Overview:**

In local elections held in September 2015, the ruling Conservative Party and the right-wing Progress Party lost a significant share of votes. The polls were held amid contested discussion of immigration and asylum, as Norway—along with other European countries—confronted an influx of refugees and other migrants during the year. Separately, in a landmark case against bribery in foreign business transactions, a court in July found former executives of the fertilizer company Yara guilty of corruption.

**Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

**Political Rights: 40 / 40 [Key]**

**A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12**

Norway's unicameral parliament, the Storting, has 169 members who are directly elected for four-year terms through a system of proportional representation. The constitutional monarch, currently King Harald V, appoints the prime minister, who is the leader of the majority party or coalition in the Storting. While the monarch is officially the head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces, his duties are largely ceremonial.

The Conservative Party gained the most ground in the 2013 parliamentary elections, winning 48 seats—an increase of 18 seats over the 2009 election. The Progress Party lost 12 seats, but retained 29, which helped it enter into a ruling coalition with the Conservatives. The Labor Party remains the largest party in the parliament with 55 seats, though its loss of 9 seats prompted it to form a coalition with opposition members for the first time in eight years. Conservative Party leader Erna Solberg became prime minister.

In local elections in September 2015, the Labor Party took 33 percent of the vote, a gain of 1 percent from polls in 2011. The Conservative Party's share of the vote dropped from 28 percent to 23.2 percent in 2015. The Conservatives lost the mayoralties of Bergen and Oslo, the most populous cities in Norway. The nationalist and anti-immigration Progress Party gained only 9.5 percent of the vote, down from 11.4 percent in 2011. These results stood out in a regional context, as right-wing parties in several neighboring states have seen surging voter support amid growing concerns about immigration and security.

Elections are regulated by the constitution and the Representation of the People Act of 2002. The king elects members of the National Electoral Committee, which oversees the conduct of elections with the support of county-level committees.

## **B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16**

A range of political parties operate freely in Norway. Generally, political power has alternated between the Labor Party and Conservative-led coalitions.

The indigenous Sami population, in addition to participating in the national political process, has its own legislature, the Sameting, which has worked to protect the group's language and cultural rights and to influence the national government's decisions about Sami land and resources. The Sameting is comprised of 39 representatives who are elected for four-year terms. The national government has a deputy minister charged specifically with handling Sami issues. The Sami are the only group in Scandinavia recognized as an indigenous people by international conventions.

## **C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12**

Norway remains one of the least corrupt countries in the world, and was ranked 5 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. Isolated incidents of bribery and misconduct have occurred, and Norway's role in the international energy and mining industries has been subject to particular scrutiny. In July 2015, a Norwegian court found four former executives of the Oslo-based fertilizer producer Yara guilty of paying bribes to officials in Libya and India, giving them prison sentences ranging from two to three years. Officials fined Yara, in which the Norwegian government owns a 36.2 percent stake, 295 million Norwegian kroner (\$48 million) in 2014—roughly four times the amount that the company paid in bribes. The case was lauded as an important step toward boosting accountability and enforcing foreign bribery laws.

In 2014, senior police superintendent Eirik Jensen was arrested and charged with gross corruption and complicity in narcotics-related crimes. Jensen allegedly helped smuggle thousands of pounds of cannabis into Norway and accepted bribes from criminal elements in the process. The Norwegian Bureau for the Investigation of Police Affairs launched an inquiry into the case, which was ongoing in 2015.

## **Civil Liberties: 60 / 60**

### **D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16**

Freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed and respected in practice. In an effort to promote political pluralism, the state subsidizes many newspapers, the majority of which are

privately owned and openly partisan. The government does not impede internet access.

Freedom of religion is protected by the constitution and respected in practice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway counts 75 percent of Norwegians as members. A 2012 constitutional amendment separated church and state, placing the Lutheran Church on par with all other denominations in Norway, and absolving the requirement that half of cabinet be members of the Lutheran Church. All religious groups must register with the state to receive financial support, which is determined by size of membership. Students must take a course on religion and ethics focusing on Christianity.

Ubaydullah Hussain, former spokesperson for the Prophet's Umma, a radical Norwegian religious group, was convicted of threatening journalists and committing hate speech in February 2014 and sentenced to 120 days in prison; half of his sentence was suspended, and he was released after the trial due to time served in pretrial detention. In a separate case, Hussain was charged with incitement to violence by the Oslo District Court in July 2014, but acquitted in October 2014. A higher court upheld both rulings in June 2015. Hussain was arrested again in December and charged with recruiting fighters for the Islamic State (IS) militant group.

While official statistics do not distinguish among different religious groups that are targeted in religion-based hate crimes, anecdotal evidence indicates a rise in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim violence and harassment. A new special police unit in Oslo was founded in 2014 to strengthen efforts against hate crimes; the first convictions as a result of its work occurred in March 2015. In 2015, Oslo police reviewed 143 hate crimes, roughly double the number in 2014. The actual number is assumed to be significantly higher, as many incidents are not reported or are miscategorized by police. Norway still lacks a comprehensive national approach to hate crime, for which it received criticism from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in August 2015.

Academic freedom is respected, and private discussion is free and vibrant.

## **E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12**

The constitution guarantees freedoms of assembly and association. In February 2015, following a terrorist attack on a synagogue in Copenhagen, about 1,000 Norwegians assembled to view a "ring of peace" around an Oslo synagogue organized by local Muslim youth to show solidarity with the Jewish community. Separately, in May, hundreds of demonstrators marched in Oslo to protest perceived abuses by Norway's child welfare agency, accusing the body of mishandling removals of children—particularly of immigrant families—from parental care.

Norwegians are very active in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which are able to form and operate without undue restrictions.

Labor unions play an important role in consulting with the government on social and economic issues, and just over half of the workforce is unionized. The right to strike is legally guaranteed, except for members of the military and senior civil servants, and is generally practiced without restriction. All workers have the right to bargain collectively. In March 2015, 700 members of the Norwegian Pilots' Union went on strike, affecting roughly 35,000 passengers; the strike was resolved within 11 days.

## **F. Rule of Law: 16 / 16**

The judiciary is independent, and the court system, headed by the Supreme Court, operates fairly at the local and national levels. The king appoints judges on the advice of the Judicial Appointments Board, which is composed of legal and judicial professionals as well as representatives of the public. The police are under civilian control, and human rights abuses by law enforcement authorities are rare. Prison conditions generally meet international standards and, in many cases, exceed them. However, capacity has not been sufficient, with more than 1,000 prisoners waiting to serve their sentences in recent years. In March 2015, Norwegian authorities signed a controversial deal with the Netherlands to allow Norwegian prisoners to serve their time in Dutch prisons. Norway's recidivism rate of 20 percent is one of the lowest in the world.

Security threats, primarily linked to IS extremists, remained a concern in 2015. In July 2014, in response to intelligence about a planned attack by the militant group, Norwegian authorities acutely increased national security measures, including by closing airspace, tightening border controls, and bolstering the presence of armed police in public spaces. No similar incidents were reported in 2015.

Immigration to Norway has increased fivefold since the 1970s, and 13 percent of Norway's population in 2015 was foreign-born. Like other European countries, Norway has struggled to cope with the recent surge in arrivals of asylum seekers and other migrants. Authorities have experienced difficulties in providing shelter and other services. Volunteers have helped fill some shortfalls, particularly by assisting in the distribution of food and other necessities. In 2015, Norway received asylum applications from 31,000 people, primarily from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan; this was a significant increase from the 11,000 applications received in 2014. The controversial practice of refoulement continued in 2015, affecting more than 1,000 people by the end of October.

The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman is responsible for covering all forms of discrimination and for enforcing the country's Gender Equality Act, the Anti-Discrimination Act, and other laws against discrimination. The national government supports Sami-language instruction, broadcast programs, and subsidized newspapers in Sami regions.

## **G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 16 / 16**

Although Norway is not a member of the European Union (EU), citizens within the European Economic Area (which includes all EU states as well as Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein) do not need a residence permit to work in Norway.

The Gender Equality Act provides equal rights for men and women. A 2013 law that took effect in 2015 mandates gender-neutral conscription for the armed forces, making Norway the first North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member to include women in the draft. In 2013, women won nearly 40 percent of seats in the parliament.

A gender-neutral marriage act passed in 2009 granted Norwegian same-sex couples identical rights as opposite-sex couples, including in adoption and assisted pregnancies.

Norway is a destination country for human trafficking for the purposes of labor and sexual exploitation. According to the U.S. State Department's 2015 *Trafficking in Persons* report, the country complies with international antitrafficking standards and offers victims a range of services and protections; however, the report noted that prosecution of trafficking crimes remains weak.

**Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)**

**X = Score Received**

**Y = Best Possible Score**

**Z = Change from Previous Year**

**Full Methodology**

**Source URL:** <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/norway>