

St. Kitts and Nevis

Country:St. Kitts and Nevis**Year:**

2016

Freedom Status:

Free

Political Rights:

2

Civil Liberties:

1

Aggregate Score:

88

Freedom Rating:

1.5

Overview:**Political Rights: 35 / 40 (-2) [Key]****Civil Liberties: 53 / 60**

In general elections held in February 2015, the opposition Team Unity defeated the Labor Party (SKNLP), which had been in government for two decades. Team Unity, an alliance of three parties led by former foreign minister Timothy Harris, took seven of the 11 directly elected seats in the National Assembly, while the SKNLP and an ally won the remainder. Although the vote was generally considered to be free and fair, a number of factors caused concerns about its quality. Opposition candidates as well as observers criticized the lack of campaign finance legislation, and the Organization of American States (OAS) noted that the difference between state resources and SKNLP financing was not always clear. Some observers also noted that the government enjoyed disproportionate access to state-owned media for campaign purposes. Additionally, a delay in reporting results led to questions about the independence of the election commission.

The lead-up to the vote featured uncertainty surrounding boundary delineation, with the SKNLP government advocating for the use of new electoral boundaries in February. The government introduced the changes in January, eliciting strong criticism from the opposition, which claimed that the changes did not follow constitutional procedure and unfairly favored incumbents. Opposition politicians initiated a legal challenge to the new boundaries, but local courts dismissed their claims. The plaintiffs took the case to the Privy Council in London, the highest court of appeal for Saint Kitts and Nevis. The judicial committee of the Privy Council overturned the decision to use new boundaries on February 12, four days before the elections.

The country continued to grapple with a high incidence of violent crime in 2015. In July, the national police force unveiled a six-part plan for combatting crime and improving public safety. The plan calls for more proactive policing of public spaces, engagement with communities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and closer cooperation with other government agencies, among other things.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Saint Kitts and Nevis, 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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