

St. Vincent and Grenadines

Country:St. Vincent and Grenadines**Year:**

2016

Freedom Status:

Free

Political Rights:

1

Civil Liberties:

1

Aggregate Score:

91

Freedom Rating:

1.0

Overview:**Political Rights: 37 / 40 (+1) [Key]****Civil Liberties: 54 / 60**

In December 2015, the social-democratic Unity Labour Party (ULP) won its fourth consecutive victory in parliamentary elections, taking 8 seats in a narrow victory over the conservative New Democratic Party (NDP), which won the remaining 7. The Commonwealth Election Observer Team noted irregularities in the voting, but said they were not significant enough to discredit the elections.

However, the NDP, alleging electoral fraud, refused to accept the results and staged a series of public protests, including one in which demonstrators unsuccessfully attempted to prevent incumbent prime minister Ralph Gonsalves from taking office by blocking the road to the government building where he was to be sworn in. The arrest amid unclear circumstances of opposition member Ben Exeter in late December additionally inflamed tensions. An opposition boycott of the parliament was in effect at the year's end, as protests continued.

The constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and of the press, but these protections are not always enforced, and many media outlets are openly partisan. Shortly after the December elections, Douglas De Freitas, the owner and operator of Nice Radio, was arrested on allegations of inciting violence after he claimed on the air that the ULP planned to tamper with ballot boxes. He was released shortly afterward, but an investigation against him was continuing at the year's end. An access to information law makes public information available to residents, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) assist with such requests. The Public Accounts Committee occasionally raises public awareness of government irregularities.

Domestic violence remains a serious problem. While not itself a criminal offense, instances of domestic violence can be prosecuted under existing laws prohibiting assault or battery; however, police do not always act when such instances are reported. In April 2015, the government approved a law that provided greater protections for victims; broadened the definition of domestic violence to include stalking, intimidation, and psychological abuse, among other things; and obligated certain medical workers to report instances of domestic abuse. The law also required medical professionals to report instances in which minors have become pregnant or have given birth.

This country report has been abridged for Freedom in the World 2016. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 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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