

Sweden

Country:

Sweden

Year:

2016

Freedom Status:

Free

Political Rights:

1

Civil Liberties:

1

Aggregate Score:

100

Freedom Rating:

1.0

Overview:

More than 160,000 people—the vast majority fleeing violence in Syria and Iraq—applied for asylum in Sweden in 2015, placing severe pressure on the country's ability to process applications and accommodate new arrivals. Meanwhile, the 2014 agreement between the social-democratic government and center-right opposition on budget proposals, designed to curb the controversial right-wing Sweden Democrats party, was broken in October, expanding the Sweden Democrats' capacity to influence the response to the refugee crisis and other national policies.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 40 / 40 [Key]

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

Sweden's unicameral parliament, the Riksdag, is comprised of 349 members who are elected every four years by proportional representation. A party must receive at least 4 percent of the vote nationwide or 12 percent in an electoral district to win representation. The prime minister is appointed by the speaker of the Riksdag and confirmed by the body as a whole. King Carl XVI Gustaf, crowned in 1973, is the ceremonial head of state.

In the 2014 parliamentary elections, the Social Democratic Party (SAP) won 113 seats, and SAP leader Stefan Löfven became prime minister in a minority government with the Green Party, which won 25 seats. The Moderates took 84 seats, the Center Party secured 22 seats, the Liberal People's Party won 19 seats, and the Christian Democrats gained 16 seats, all suffering losses compared with the results of the 2010 elections. The Left Party won 21 seats, a slight increase from 2010. The Sweden Democrats made the most significant gains, increasing their representation from

20 seats to 49 seats and becoming the third biggest party in the Riksdag. To avert snap elections amid disagreements about the proposed national budget, in late 2014 the SAP-led government reached a historic budget deal with the opposition parties of the center-right Alliance—the Moderates, the Center Party, the Liberals, and the Christian Democrats. The so-called December Agreement committed the Alliance to vote for all government budget proposals until 2022. However, the agreement collapsed in October 2015 when the Christian Democrats decided to leave it, leading the rest of the Alliance parties to also nullify the deal.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

For the majority of the last century, the SAP ruled with the support of the Left Party and, in later decades, with the support of the Greens. Eight political parties gained representation in the Riksdag in 2014, with the SAP, the Moderates, and the Sweden Democrats holding the most seats. The Sweden Democrats, who first gained political footing in the 2006 parliamentary elections, maintain a far-right platform with a strong stance against immigration. Although the 2014 December Agreement diminished the party's ability to participate in the political process, its popularity has continued to rise, and is particularly strong in the country's southern constituencies. A December 2015 poll conducted by the government statistical agency showed support at nearly 20 percent, up from 14.5 percent in May.

The country's principal religious, ethnic, and immigrant groups are represented in the parliament. Since 1993, the indigenous Sami community has elected its own legislature, which has significant powers over community education and culture and serves as an advisory body to the government.

C. Functioning of Government: 12 / 12

Corruption rates are low in Sweden, which was ranked 3 out of 168 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index. The country has one of the most robust freedom of information statutes in the world, and state authorities respect the right of both citizens and noncitizens to access public information. However, Sweden has faced criticism for insufficient enforcement of foreign bribery laws. In 2015, the telecommunication giant TeliaSonera, in which the Swedish state has a 37 percent stake, remained embroiled in a corruption scandal related to its dealings in Uzbekistan. TeliaSonera faces allegations that it paid heavy bribes to a company with ties to Uzbekistan's ruling family in order to secure business there. Swedish and U.S. prosecutors continued to investigate the claims in 2015.

Civil Liberties: 60 / 60 (+1)

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16 (+1)

Sweden's media are independent. Most newspapers and periodicals are privately owned, and the government subsidizes daily newspapers regardless of their political affiliation. Public broadcasters air weekly radio and television programs in several immigrant languages. The ethnic minority press is entitled to the same subsidies as the Swedish-language press.

Freedom of speech is guaranteed by law, and the government does not restrict access to the internet. Hate-speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt based on race, color, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, or sexual orientation. In June 2015, local media reported that Sweden's attorney general had launched an investigation into the editor of Nordfront, a website

owned and run by the Swedish arm of the Nordic Resistance Movement, a neo-Nazi organization with a reputation for violence. The editor, Martin Saxlind, faced allegations of incitement to racial hatred in connection to an article published on the website praising Adolf Hitler. The attorney general formally charged Saxlind in September, but the status of the case remained unclear at year's end. Also in September, Saxlind was sentenced to six months in prison in a separate case for rioting against antiracism demonstrators in 2013; he planned to appeal the verdict, claiming that he was at the demonstration as a journalist and did not engage in violence.

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and respected by the government. Although the population is 66 percent Lutheran, all churches, as well as synagogues and mosques, receive some state financial support. A number of mosques were vandalized in 2015, and anti-Semitic crimes also continued. State authorities make great efforts to document religion-based hate crimes, investigate and prosecute cases, and provide adequate resources for victims. The police force includes a permanent unit trained to handle hate crimes.

Academic freedom is ensured for all, and private discussion is open and vibrant. The 2008 Signals Intelligence Act regulates the monitoring of cross-border communications, overseen exclusively by the National Defense Radio Establishment, and the Electronic Communication Act regulates domestic surveillance by security forces. There were no reports in 2015 of authorities engaging in unlawful surveillance of private communications.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are respected in law and practice. There is heavy police presence at demonstrations organized by far-right groups as well as at counterdemonstrations, some of which have become violent in the past. In September and October 2015, Swedish and Finnish activists organized a number of public gatherings near the twin border cities of Haparanda (on the Swedish side) and Tornio (on the Finnish side), where many asylum seekers entered Finland during the year. Most demonstrators, gathered primarily in Tornio, were rallying against the border crossing, while others were gathered in support of the refugees. The events concluded peacefully.

The rights to strike and organize in labor unions are guaranteed. Trade union federations, which represent approximately 80 percent of the workforce, are strong and well organized.

F. Rule of Law: 16 / 16

The judiciary is independent, and the rule of law prevails in civil and criminal matters. Conditions in prisons and temporary detention facilities are adequate. Swedish courts have jurisdiction to try suspects for genocide committed abroad.

In 2011, Sweden sought the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange so that he could be questioned regarding four allegations—one of rape, one of unlawful coercion, and two of sexual molestation—stemming from two incidents in Stockholm in 2010. Sweden's chief prosecutor, Marianne Ny, faced criticism in June 2015 for requesting but promptly cancelling an interview with Assange at the Ecuadorian embassy in London, where he has lived since 2012 in order to avoid extradition. Assange cannot be charged before he is interrogated, according to Swedish law. The statutes of limitation on the three lesser allegations of sexual misconduct expired in August, but prosecutors have the authority to investigate the more serious charge of rape until 2020. Ecuador and Sweden began bilateral talks in August to resolve the situation and reached an agreement in

December to allow Swedish police to question Assange in the embassy; an interrogation was expected to take place in 2016.

Approximately 50,000 Roma reside in Sweden, and the government in 2015 continued implementation of a national integration plan for Roma, set to conclude in 2032. The Swedish state is highly active in ensuring equal protection and rights for all members of the population. An equality ombudsman oversees efforts to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation.

An unprecedented influx of asylum seekers in 2015, mostly from the Middle East, led to political tension as well as a strain on government resources; the country's Migration Agency struggled to process applications for asylum in a timely manner, and a housing shortage led to inadequate living conditions for some arrivals. The Swedish government maintained an open-door policy for the majority of the year while participating in European Union (EU) discussions about quotas for the intake and resettlement of refugees. In 2015, the country received more asylum seekers per capita than any other EU member, and its approval rate of over 70 percent for asylum applications was among the highest in the bloc. In November, however, the government introduced tighter border controls and entry requirements in order to stem the flow of migration.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 16 / 16

Freedom of movement is legally guaranteed and respected in practice. The government also respects the rights of individuals to own property and establish a private business. A 2011 Supreme Court ruling granted Sami reindeer herders common-law rights to disputed lands.

Sweden is a global leader in gender equality. Approximately half of Riksdag members and the same proportion of government ministers are women. More than 70 percent of women work outside the home, earning the equivalent of 94 percent of men's wages, when differences in age, sector, and experience are taken into account.

Same-sex couples are legally allowed to marry and adopt; lesbian couples have the same rights to artificial insemination and in-vitro fertilization as heterosexual couples. The Lutheran Church allows same-sex marriage ceremonies.

Sweden is a destination and transit point for women and children trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, but the Swedish government is proactive in combatting the problem. The 2004 Aliens Act helped to provide more assistance to trafficking victims, and a special ambassador aids in combating human trafficking.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

Full Methodology

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