

Vanuatu

Country:

Vanuatu

Year:

2016

Freedom Status:

Free

Political Rights:

2

Civil Liberties:

2

Aggregate Score:

78

Freedom Rating:

2.0

Overview:

Political Rights: 31 / 40 (-1) [Key]

Civil Liberties: 47 / 60

Like many Pacific island states, Vanuatu is threatened by rising sea levels and other effects of climate change. A powerful cyclone struck the region in March 2015, killing at least two dozen people, displacing many more, and destroying nearly all crops across the country. To raise funds for the recovery, the government expanded its programs granting Vanuatu passports in exchange for investments in the country. The schemes have largely targeted Chinese nationals seeking tax benefits or easy access to European countries.

In June, Prime Minister Joe Natuman, in office since May 2014, was ousted in a no-confidence vote after three government lawmakers shifted support to the opposition. Former prime minister Sato Kilman was chosen to replace him, marking the ninth change of government in seven years. Political uncertainty deepened in October, when 15 government lawmakers were convicted of bribery charges, leaving Kilman vulnerable to another no-confidence motion. Speaker Marcellino Pipite, one of those convicted, pardoned himself and 13 of the others while serving as acting head of state during an overseas trip by President Baldwin Lonsdale; the remaining member had pleaded guilty and was not pardoned. Lonsdale revoked the pardons after returning, and the convicted lawmakers received prison sentences of three to four years.

Important legislative business ground to a halt as Kilman, left with a weak minority government, pushed for early elections, while the opposition sought a government of national unity. The president ultimately called elections for late January 2016.

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