



Published on *Freedom House* (<https://freedomhouse.org>)

[Home](#) > Italy

## Italy

**Country:**

[Italy](#)

**Year:**

2018

**Freedom Status:**

Free

**Political Rights:**

1

**Civil Liberties:**

1

**Aggregate Score:**

89

**Freedom Rating:**

1.0

**Overview:**

Italy's parliamentary system features competitive multiparty elections. The Vatican has traditionally held significant influence over the country's politics, and ties between organized crime and public officials persist. Civil liberties are respected, though the judicial system is undermined by long trial delays.

**Political Rights and Civil Liberties:**

### **POLITICAL RIGHTS: 36 / 40**

#### **A. ELECTORAL PROCESS: 12 / 12**

##### **A1. Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4**

Parliament and regional representatives elect the president, whose role is largely ceremonial but sometimes politically influential, for a seven-year term. The legitimacy of the presidential vote rests largely on the fairness of legislative elections.

The president appoints the prime minister, who serves as head of government and is often, but not always, the leader of the largest party in the Chamber of Deputies, Italy's

lower house. The prime minister proposes a Council of Ministers that requires confirmation by Parliament.

Since December 2016, Paolo Gentiloni has served as prime minister. He took office after the defeat of a 2016 constitutional referendum prompted the resignation of then prime minister Matteo Renzi.

**A2. Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 4 / 4**

The bicameral Parliament consists of the 630-member Chamber of Deputies and the 322-member Senate; most members of both houses were popularly elected to five-year terms. International observers generally praised preparations for the 2013 polls. The center-left Italy Common Good coalition won the most votes and claimed 345 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 112 of the 315 directly elected seats in the Senate. Local elections held in June 2017 saw gains by the center-right opposition coalition, and political leaders acknowledged the elections' results without objection.

In December 2017, President Sergio Mattarella dissolved the parliament and set a new election for March 2018, which will be held under a new electoral system.

**A3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 4 / 4**

While Italy's electoral framework and campaign finance regulations are complex, the country has consistently held credible elections under them.

Recent years have seen controversial reforms and court rulings affecting electoral laws, and such developments continued in 2017. In January, the Constitutional Court struck down part of the "Italicum" electoral law, which had been initiated by Renzi and approved by the parliament in 2015. The law was designed to encourage majorities and avoid postelection deadlock by mandating a two-round system that awarded a supermajority of 340 seats in the lower house to a single party. However, the Constitutional Court found it was partly unconstitutional because it could give rise to a situation where a supermajority is awarded to a party that posted a relatively weak showing in the first of the two election rounds. The court preserved other parts of the law, ultimately leaving a system in which a 340-seat supermajority would be awarded to a party that won more than 40 percent of the vote in a single election round.

However, in November, the Italian parliament adopted a new electoral law that replaced Italicum, which introduced a mixed electoral system in both houses. Under the law, 36 percent of seats are allocated using the first-past-the-post system, and 64 percent using a proportional, party-list method. Unlike Italicum, the new law was viewed as encouraging coalitions. Parliamentary elections are expected in 2018.

**B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 14 / 16**

**B1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 4 / 4**

Political parties are generally able to form and operate freely, and the political landscape features a high level of pluralism and competition. Since the beginning of the 1990s, politics have been characterized by unstable coalitions and the frequent emergence of new parties. The most prominent example is the Five Star Movement, whose rise in 2013 elections changed the Italian party landscape into a tripolar system.

**B2. Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 4 / 4**

Political alternation has been the rule since the beginning of the 1990s. The antiestablishment Five Star Movement and the center-right opposition coalition posted strong performances in 2016 and 2017 local elections, respectively.

**B3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group that is not democratically accountable? 3 / 4**

Historically, the Vatican has held significant influence over politics in Italy, a heavily Catholic country. Ties between organized crime and public officials persist and fuel concerns about undue pressure on government, especially at the local level.

**B4. Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, religious, gender, LGBT, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 3 / 4**

Electoral laws contain some provisions designed to bring linguistic minorities into the parliament. Women's interests are not well represented in politics. Issues of concern to ethnic minorities play only a marginal role in national and local political agendas, and some municipal policies aggravate the exclusion of Roma.

The parliament failed to vote in 2017 on divisive citizenship reforms that, if adopted, would facilitate new pathways for noncitizen minors to gain citizenship.

## **C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 10 / 12**

**C1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 4 / 4**

Italy's elected representatives are able to freely craft and implement policy.

**C2. Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 3 / 4**

Corruption remains a serious problem, and ties between organized crime and public officials persist. Government efforts to combat corruption continued in 2017. In October, the parliament approved a new antimafia law intended to make some anticorruption procedures more efficient, and which created a government department to oversee assets confiscated in anticorruption cases. A major corruption prosecution concluded in July, when 2 organized crime figures and some 40 politicians and businesspeople were convicted of involvement in a scheme through which public contracts were awarded improperly.

**C3. Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 3 / 4**

A 2013 legislative decree established greater transparency of information within public administration. The government regularly complies with requests for information, though delayed responses have been reported.

**CIVIL LIBERTIES: 53 / 60****D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 15 / 16****D1. Are there free and independent media? 3 / 4**

Freedoms of expression and the press are constitutionally guaranteed. Despite the rapid growth of the online news industry, traditional media still play a large role in news consumption. There are more than 100 daily newspapers, most of them locally or regionally based, as well as political party papers, free papers, and weekly publications. Concentration of media ownership remains a major concern, but many viewpoints are available in the country's media. Internet access is generally unrestricted.

Threats against journalists remain a problem. In 2017, almost 200 journalists received police protection, according to the interior ministry, often in connection with threats from figures involved in organized crime.

**D2. Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 4 / 4**

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed and respected in practice. There is no official religion, though Roman Catholicism is the dominant faith, and the state grants some privileges to the Catholic Church.

**D3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 4 / 4**

Academic freedom is generally respected.

**D4. Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 4 / 4**

People are generally able to discuss controversial or sensitive topics in public without fear of surveillance or retribution.

**E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 12 / 12****E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4**

Italian citizens are free to assemble and to organize demonstrations. Demonstrations on a variety of issues—including a large antimafia march in Locri, and a protest in Rome in which participants called on authorities to protect the rights of refugees—took place peacefully in 2017. However, in March, some participants of a demonstration in Naples

against the Northern League, an anti-immigrant political party, threw objects including Molotov cocktails at police, who responded with water cannons and tear gas.

**E2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work? 4 / 4**

NGOs are generally free to organize and operate. However, in 2017, the government approved a new code of conduct for NGOs involved in rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea, where thousands of migrants and refugees die each year as they attempt to reach Europe from North Africa. Five NGOs, including Doctors Without Borders (MSF) refused to sign the code, citing concerns over mandates that would allow police officers to board their vessels, and which could limit their ability to transport migrants from their own vessels to other ships.

**E3. Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 4 / 4**

Trade unions are generally free to organize and operate. The constitution recognizes the right to strike but places restrictions on strikes by employees of essential sectors like transportation, sanitation, and health, as well as on some self-employed individuals, including lawyers, doctors, and truck drivers.

**F. RULE OF LAW: 12 / 16**

**F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 3 / 4**

While the judiciary is generally independent, problems with judicial corruption persist.

**F2. Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 3 / 4**

Due process rights are generally upheld, though judicial procedures are often characterized by lengthy delays. Italy has one of the lowest numbers of judges per capita in the European Union (EU).

Italy is a major entry point for migrants and refugees trying to reach Europe, and the government has been criticized for denying detained migrants access to lawyers.

**F3. Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies? 3 / 4**

There have been reports of excessive use of force by police, particularly against people in the country illegally. Refugees and undocumented migrants have been held in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions.

In July 2017, the parliament approved a law criminalizing torture, though rights groups criticized it for defining torture narrowly and mandating a relatively short statute of limitations, which they identified as problematic in light of delays that plague the justice system.

**F4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 3 / 4**

Italy continued to experience large-scale migration by sea during 2017, though the rate of entries decreased during the second half of the year, due in part to Italian cooperation with and investments in the Libyan coast guard. Immediate emergency services for arriving migrants, many of whom were asylum seekers, were routine and included medical treatment, food, water, and temporary shelter. However, the authorities struggled to provide long-term services such as housing and timely processing of asylum applications.

LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people face societal discrimination and occasional acts of violence. Members of the Roma minority have unequal access to housing, and many live in segregated settlements that lack adequate infrastructure.

**G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: 14 / 16****G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 4 / 4**

Italian citizens are generally free to travel and to choose their place of residence, employment, and education. The right to education is guaranteed by the constitution.

**G2. Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 3 / 4**

Corruption and organized crime can hinder normal business activity, as can highly bureaucratic regulatory structures. Delays in court proceedings often undermine enforcement of protections for property rights.

**G3. Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4 / 4**

Gender-based discrimination is prohibited by law. However, Italian women face serious obstacles in both labor force participation and wage equality. Violence against women is a persistent problem, though public awareness of the issue is increasing due to various advocacy campaigns.

The parliament approved same-sex civil unions in 2016. The law provides civil unions with almost all rights of marriage. However the possibility of step-child adoption was removed from the measure's provisions following parliamentary debate.

**G4. Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 3 / 4**

Human trafficking, particularly the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation, remained a concern in 2017. The many migrants and asylum seekers who have entered Italy in recent years are particularly susceptible to exploitation. However, the government actively works to identify and prosecute traffickers, and funds services for victims.

**Source URL:** <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2018/italy>