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Norway

Country:

Norway

Year:

2018

Freedom Status:

Free

Political Rights:

1

Civil Liberties:

1

Aggregate Score:

100

Freedom Rating:

1.0

Overview:

Norway is one of the most robust democracies in the world. Elections are free and fair, and power regularly rotates between parties. Civil liberties are upheld, and media and civil society actors hold the government to account. Societal discrimination against Roma populations remains a problem.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

POLITICAL RIGHTS: 40 / 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

The constitutional monarch, currently King Harald V, appoints the prime minister, who is the leader of the majority party or coalition in Norway's unicameral parliament. While the monarch is officially the head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces, his duties are largely ceremonial. Conservative leader Erna Solberg continued on as prime minister following the victory of her center-right coalition in the 2017 general elections.

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

Norway's unicameral parliament, the Storting, has 169 members who are directly elected for four-year terms through a system of proportional representation.

The center-right coalition of Høyre and FrP maintained power in the September 2017 general elections, marking the first time a conservative government won a second consecutive term since 1985. At the end of 2017, the Liberal Party (Venstre) had agreed to enter into negotiations with Høyre and FrP on joining their coalition government.

An election monitoring mission from the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) concluded that the elections were well conducted, offering notable praise for the country's early voting mechanisms. However, the mission noted that visually impaired voters experience some difficulties.

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

Elections are regulated by the constitution and the Representation of the People Act of 2002. The king elects members of the National Electoral Committee, which oversees the conduct of elections with the support of county-level committees. The 2017 OSCE election monitoring mission noted a high degree of public confidence in the country's electoral infrastructure.

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION: 16 / 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

A range of political parties operate freely in Norway.

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

Generally, political power has alternated between the Labor Party and Conservative-led coalitions. Norway has a long history of democratic and peaceful power transfers after elections.

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? 4 / 4

Voters are generally free from undue interference in their political choices, and no military, foreign, or religious entities exert undemocratic influence over the vote. However, the 2017 OSCE election monitoring mission noted a sharp increase in private donations to political candidates ahead of the 2017 polls, and expressed concern that wealthy donors may be exerting outsized influence over Norwegian politics.

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

Women and minority groups enjoy full political rights and electoral opportunities. The indigenous Sami population, in addition to participating in the national political process, has its own legislature, the Sameting, which has worked to protect the group's language and cultural rights and to influence the national government's decisions about Sami land and resources. The national government has a deputy minister charged specifically with handling Sami issues.

Women are well represented in Norwegian politics. The posts of prime minister, foreign minister, and defense minister were all held by women in 2017. The political representation of minorities and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people is reflected in robust antidiscrimination laws and various protections for same-sex couples.

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT: 12 / 12

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

The freely elected government is able to develop and implement policy without undue influence from actors who are not democratically accountable.

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

Provisions of the penal code criminalizing corrupt activity are generally upheld. Official corruption is not viewed as a significant problem in Norway.

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

The government generally operates with transparency. Several audits of public grants and other government spending were conducted in 2017, with auditors turning up some evidence of inadequate management; the findings were duly reported by officials. The 2006 Freedom of Information Act provides for access to government documents, though it contains exemptions for some information pertaining to national security and foreign policy. Investigative journalists have in the past complained that senior government officials use various tactics to avoid or delay inquiries that would expose negligence or wrongdoing.

CIVIL LIBERTIES: 60 / 60

D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF: 16 / 16

D1. Are there free and independent media? 4 / 4

Freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. However, in recent years the courts have grappled with legal questions related to the protection of journalists' sources in criminal cases. In 2017, the European Court of Human

Rights (ECHR) ruled that the Norwegian government could not compel a journalist to reveal their source, even if the source had come forward independently. The ECHR case was filed by a journalist who was fined in 2012 for defying a legal order to discuss contacts with a source who had passed along information about problems at the Norwegian Oil Company.

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

Freedom of religion is protected by the constitution and is generally respected in practice. However, in June 2017, the Norwegian government proposed a bill that would ban face coverings, including the niqab and burqa, in nurseries, schools, and universities. The bill was under consideration at year's end.

According to the U.S. State Department's most recent statistics, there was an increase in reports of religiously motivated hate crimes in Norway in 2016, when 97 such reports were counted, compared to 2015, when 79 were registered; most such crimes targeted Muslims.

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

Private discussion in Norway is free and vibrant.

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS: 12 / 12

E1. Is there freedom of assembly? 4 / 4

The right to freedom of assembly is respected in the majority of cases. There have been tensions in recent years over demonstrations by extremist groups, and about risks to public security that could result from them. For example, in July, a neo-Nazi group was given permission by authorities to march in Fredrikstad. However, due to security concerns, including those involving a counterprotest by left-wing groups, the event was later prohibited. The Neo-Nazi group subsequently held a march in Kristiansand. Police permitted that march to go forward, prompting some public criticism.

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

Norwegian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are able to form and operate without undue restrictions.

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

The right to strike is legally guaranteed—except for members of the military and senior civil servants—and is generally respected in practice. All workers have the right to engage in collective bargaining.

F. RULE OF LAW: 16 / 16

F1. Is there an independent judiciary? 4 / 4

The judiciary is generally considered independent, and the court system, headed by the Supreme Court, operates fairly at the local and national levels. The king appoints judges on the advice of the Judicial Appointments Board, which is composed of legal and judicial professionals as well as representatives of the public.

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

The police are under civilian control, and human rights abuses by law enforcement authorities are rare.

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

Prison conditions generally meet international standards and, in many cases, exceed them.

In March 2017, a Norwegian appeals court overturned a 2016 ruling that the rights of Anders Behring Breivik, a convicted mass murderer and right-wing terrorist, had been violated in connection with his placement in solitary confinement. The Norwegian Supreme Court in June declined to hear Breivik's appeal.

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

The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman is responsible for enforcing the country's Gender Equality Act, the Anti-Discrimination Act, and other laws against discrimination. The national government supports Sami-language instruction, broadcast programs, and subsidized newspapers in Sami regions.

However, the Council of Europe has encouraged Norwegian authorities to address widespread discriminatory attitudes towards Roma communities, and to ensure that Roma people have equal access to education and employment.

While the number of people seeking refuge in Norway declined dramatically in 2017 compared to the previous years, concerns about the refoulement of refugees continued, notably of Afghan nationals. In November, the parliament approved legislation that would allow asylum seekers who came to Norway as minors, but were due to be deported following their 18th birthdays, to file new asylum applications. Many of those affected by the law had fled to Norway from Afghanistan.

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS: 16 / 16

G1. Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, employment, or education? 4 / 4

Freedom of movement in Norway is generally respected. People have the ability to change their place of residence, employment, and education.

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

The right to own property and to establish private business is established in Norwegian law and upheld in practice.

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

The government generally does not restrict social freedoms. The Gender Equality Act provides equal rights for men and women.

Domestic violence is a problem, though the government has worked to uphold criminal penalties for offenders and provide services to victims.

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

In principle, equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation is upheld, however there are cases of discrimination, mainly concerning Roma communities.

The government proactively works to provide services to victims of labor and sex trafficking, but the number of criminal trafficking convictions is relatively low. The U.S. State Department has recommended that Norwegian authorities implement trainings for police, prosecutors, and others on identifying and handling trafficking cases.

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