

Paraguay's political institutions regained a level of stability in 2014 following a period of upheaval that began with the ouster of President Fernando Lugo in 2012. Horacio Cartes, a tobacco magnate and political newcomer who was elected president in 2013, completed his first full year in office.

In June, the government passed a law returning historic land to the indigenous Sawhoymaxaxa group, ending a 20-year legal battle.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

### **Political Rights: 27/ 40 (+1) [Key]**

#### **A. Electoral Process: 10 / 12**

Paraguay's 1992 constitution provides for a president, a vice president, and a bicameral Congress consisting of a 45-member Senate and an 80-member Chamber of Deputies, all elected for five-year terms. The president is elected by a simple majority vote, and reelection is prohibited. Congress is elected by proportional representation. The constitution bans active-duty military from engaging in politics.

While the congressional vote impeaching Lugo in 2012 was technically constitutional, the process was sudden and lasted just a few hours, leading some international leaders to characterize the ouster as a coup. Presidential elections held in 2013 brought the Colorado Party's Cartes to office with 46 percent of the vote, against 37 percent for his principal opponent, Efraín Alegre of the Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico (PLRA). In concurrent legislative elections, Colorado captured 19 Senate seats and 44 seats in the Chamber of Deputies, while the PLRA won 12 and 27 seats in the respective bodies. Several small parties also hold a handful of seats. The elections were marred by allegations of vote-buying.

#### **B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 12 / 16**

Paraguay's system is open to the rise of different political parties. Before President Lugo and the Alianza Patriótica por el Cambio (APC) came to power in 2008, the center-right Colorado Party had ruled Paraguay for more than 60 years. After a truncated presidency by the left-leaning Lugo, the Colorados returned to power in the 2013 elections. The liberal PLRA is the other major political party. Smaller parties with congressional representation include the Patria Querida, the Unión Nacional de Ciudadanos Éticos, and the Partido Encuentro Nacional.

#### **C. Functioning of Government: 5 / 12 (+1)**

After a period of volatility in 2012 and 2013 following the impeachment of Lugo, Paraguay's government institutions regained stability in 2014.

Corruption is widespread in Paraguay, particularly in the eastern part of the country, Ciudad del Este. Corruption cases languish for years in the court system without resolution, and offenses often go

unpunished due to political influence in the judiciary. Cartes has vowed to address the country's endemic corruption. After taking office, his administration began bypassing Congress when awarding government contracts to prevent conflicts of interest. Cartes has also avoided appointing political insiders to cabinet posts. Some, however, have criticized Cartes's anticorruption measures for relying too heavily on executive power, arguing that Paraguay's corruption problem cannot be resolved without involvement from Congress. Little progress was made against corruption in 2014.

In September 2014, Paraguay passed the Access to Public Information and Transparency Law, which guarantees public access to government financial records. The law will go into effect in 2015. The law has faced criticism over its reduction in penalties—the original proposal had included the possibility of imprisonment, while the final version only included five years' administrative leave. Paraguay was ranked 150 out of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

## **Civil Liberties: 38 / 60 (+3)**

### **D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 12 / 16**

The constitution provides for freedoms of expression and the press, but these rights are compromised in practice. Direct pressure by criminal groups and corrupt authorities lead journalists to censor themselves, especially in remote border areas, and threats against journalists are common. In April 2014, the Inter-American Commission on human rights released a report calling on Paraguay to prevent and investigate violations of journalists' freedom of expression. The government does not restrict access to the internet.

Three journalists were murdered in 2014. In May, radio journalist Fausto Gabriel Alcaraz was shot and killed on the Brazilian border; he had named alleged drug traffickers on the air. A Brazilian national was arrested the following month in possible connection to the murder. In June, journalist Edgar Pantaleón Fernández Fleitas was killed in Concepción. Fernández Fleitas had accused local officials of having links to drug trafficking. A suspect was apprehended shortly after the killing. In October, journalist Pablo Medina and his assistant were killed in an ambush. Medina had been investigating links between politicians and drug producers. Four alleged assailants were arrested after the murders. Despite the arrests, impunity for attacks against journalists has been common.

The government generally respects freedom of religion and does not generally restrict academic freedom. The Scholars at Risk network lists one incident of a student being detained in October 2014 in connection to a demonstration by the Ministry of Education.

### **E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 8 / 12**

The constitution guarantees freedoms of association and assembly, and these rights are generally respected.

A number of trade unions operate in the country, but their rights are not always respected in practice. In 2014, unions organized for Paraguay's first general strike in 20 years. Demonstrators criticized the increased investment of private companies in the nation's infrastructure, a move they considered to be a step toward privatization. Although Cartes raised Paraguay's minimum wage, the strike continued. In

September, education workers went on strike to demand higher compensation and an increase in the government's education budget. The strikers were met with a violent reaction from police.

## **F. Rule of Law: 7 / 16 (+2)**

Following the political upheaval of 2012 and 2013, Paraguay's judiciary was generally stable in 2014. While nominally independent, the judiciary is corrupt, leading to trial delays and extended pretrial detention. Illegal detention by police and torture during incarceration still occur, particularly in rural areas. Overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and mistreatment of inmates are serious problems in the country's prisons.

Paraguay is a regional hub for money laundering, drug trafficking, and organized crime. The government has clashed with the Paraguayan People's Army (EPP)—a nationalist guerilla group—since it renewed its insurgency in 2012 after a six-year lull. The EPP has employed tactics such as kidnapping and attacks on electrical towers. The military offensive has left many guerrillas dead.

The constitution provides Paraguay's estimated 108,000 indigenous people with the right to participate in the economic, social, and political life of the country. While same-sex sexual activity is legal, members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community face legal and de facto discrimination. In November, the Senate rejected a law that would have banned religious, sexual, and political discrimination. Although the law did not specifically mention same-sex rights, opponents of the law characterized it as pertaining to them.

## **G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 11 / 16 (+1)**

The law protects freedoms of movement and travel, which are generally respected in practice.

A 20-year legal battle culminated in a major victory for the traditionally marginalized Sawhoyamaza people in June 2014 when Cartes signed a law that returned more than 55 square miles to them. Although ranchers and farmers challenged the law in the courts, the Supreme Court upheld it in October. Various other cases pertaining to the land rights of indigenous groups are pending in the court system.

Sexual and domestic abuse of women continues to be a serious problem. In August 2014, however, Lucia Sandoval, who had been arrested for defending herself against an abusive husband, was released from prison. The Paraguayan government has worked to combat the worst forms of child labor, but children continue to work hazardous jobs in agriculture and domestic service.

Paraguay has a constitutional ban against the recognition of same-sex relationships, and opposed a 2014 proposal from the Organization of American States that called for member states to refrain from interfering in the private lives of LGBT people. In June, police clashed with LGBT advocates protesting Paraguay's position on the proposal.

## **Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)**

**X = Score Received**

**Y = Best Possible Score**

**Z = Change from Previous Year**

**[Full Methodology](#)**