

FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2017

Laos

12

NOT FREE

/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	1 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	11 /60

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)



Overview

Laos is a one-party state in which the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) dominates all aspects of politics and government and harshly restricts civil liberties. There is no organized opposition and no truly independent civil society. News coverage of the country is limited by the remoteness of some areas, repression of domestic media, and the opaque nature of the regime. Economic development has led to a rising tide of disputes over land and environmental issues, as well as corruption and the growth of an illegal economy. Such disputes frequently lead to violence, including by the security forces.

Key Developments in 2016

- Tightly controlled legislative elections in March resulted in a new National Assembly, which chose incumbent vice president Bounnhang Vorachith as the new president in April. He had been named LPRP general secretary at a party congress in January.
- In February and March, security forces arrested three Laotian citizens who had used social media to criticize the state while working in Thailand. They were detained upon returning to Laos to renew their passports and reportedly remained in custody at year's end.
- Laos hosted the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in September, but it refused to host a related civil society gathering, which was held in Timor-Leste instead.
- Violence increased in central and northern Laos during the year, particularly in areas with a history of conflict between security forces and ethnic Hmong militants.

Executive Summary

The LPRP selected new leaders through an opaque process at a party congress in January. Vice President Bounnhang Vorachith, who became general secretary of the

party, was then elected as state president by the National Assembly in April following legislative elections in March. Thongloun Sisoulith, previously the deputy prime minister and foreign minister, was promoted to prime minister. The LPRP won 144 of 149 seats in the legislative elections, with the remainder going to carefully vetted independents.

The Laotian government continued to tighten its control over domestic dissent in 2016, partly by monitoring citizens' activity on social media. In at least three cases, individuals were apparently arrested for comments they posted while working abroad. The authorities also suppressed independent civil society activity. Although Laos hosted the annual ASEAN summit in September, it would not host the parallel ASEAN People's Forum, a gathering of regional civil society groups. The forum was held in Timor-Leste instead, and participants reported that the Laotian delegation was hand-picked and pressured by the Laotian government to minimize criticism of its record.

Political and ethnic violence surged during the year. There were a series of attacks on buses and trucks in areas of central and northern Laos that have been plagued by banditry and violent Hmong opposition groups. There were also numerous attacks on Chinese nationals in Vientiane, Xaisomboun, and other parts of the country. The government remained largely silent about the violence, including the possible identities and motives of the perpetrators. Some observers suggested that local anger at the environmental destruction caused by foreign-owned mining, logging, and farming concessions contributed to the attacks on Chinese nationals.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

F. Rule of Law

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

This country report has been abridged for *Freedom in the World 2017*. For background information on political rights and civil liberties in Laos, see *Freedom in the World 2016*.



On Laos

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Country Facts

Global Freedom Score

13/100 ● Not Free

Other Years

2024



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