

Just Released: Freedom in the World 2026



FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2025

Taiwan

FREE

94

/100

| | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| <u>Political Rights</u> | 38 /40 |
| <u>Civil Liberties</u> | 56 /60 |

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

94 /100 **Free**

A country or territory's Freedom in the World status depends on its aggregate Political Rights score, on a scale of 0–40, and its aggregate Civil Liberties score, on a scale of 0–60. See the methodology.

Overview

Taiwan's vibrant and competitive democratic system has allowed for regular peaceful transfers of power since 2000, and protections for civil liberties are generally robust. Ongoing concerns include inadequate safeguards against the exploitation of migrant workers and the Chinese government's efforts to influence policymaking, media, and the democratic infrastructure.

Key Developments in 2024

- In January, Vice President Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected president, defeating Hou Yu-ih of the Kuomintang (KMT) and Ko Wen-je of the Taiwan People's Party (TPP). Lai succeeded term-limited Tsai Ing-wen.
- In legislative elections held concurrently with the presidential contest, the KMT won 52 seats, becoming the largest party in the Legislative Yuan. The DPP won 51 seats, while the TPP won 8 seats. Two independents who caucus with the KMT were also elected.
- In May, the Legislative Yuan passed amendments allowing it more investigative powers over the executive, among other things. The amendments also made "contempt of parliament" an offense punishable by fines or imprisonment. In October, the Constitutional Court overruled vital provisions of the amendments, including the "contempt of parliament" offense.
- In December, KMT and TPP lawmakers amended the Constitutional Court Procedure Act (CCPA), requiring the court to abide by a stricter quorum to make rulings. Later in December, opposition lawmakers rejected most of President Lai's nominees to that court, leaving it short of the revised quota. The revised law was not implemented by year's end.

Political Rights

A. Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? | 4/4 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

The president, who is directly elected for up to two four-year terms, appoints the premier with the consent of the legislature. Members of the Executive Yuan, or cabinet, are appointed by the president on the recommendation of the premier. In practice, the president holds most executive authority.

Presidential elections have generally been considered credible. In January 2024, Vice President Lai Ching-te of the DPP was elected with 40 percent of the vote, while Hou Yu-ih of the KMT won 33.5 percent and Ko Wen-je of the TPP won 26.4 percent. Lai succeeded Tsai Ing-wen of the DPP, who was term-limited. Lai took office in May. The campaign period featured online disinformation and influence operations that were attributed to the Chinese government, with negative or misleading content targeting the democratic process. However, no major anomalies occurred during the election, nor were there overt acts of interference from Beijing.

A2 0-4 pts

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? | 4/4 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

The unicameral Legislative Yuan has 113 members who serve four-year terms. Of these members, 73 are directly elected in single-member constituencies, 34 are elected by proportional representation, and 6 are elected by Indigenous voters in two multiseat constituencies.

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51 seats, while the TPP won 8 seats. Two independents who caucus with the KMT were also elected.

A3 0-4 pts

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

4/4

The Central Election Commission (CEC) administers elections in Taiwan. No political party may hold more than one-third of the CEC's seats, and it operates impartially in practice.

A 2023 legal amendment permanently bars candidates with criminal records—including those who have engaged in fraud, money laundering, drug and gun trafficking, and the divulging of classified state secrets to foreign entities—from running in elections. Electoral ads are now required to list their sources of funding and can no longer be sponsored by foreign entities.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

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

The multiparty political system features vigorous competition between the two major parties, the DPP and KMT. Third parties also play a significant role in national and local contests. Former Taipei mayor Ko Wen-je formed the TPP in 2019; it won eight Legislative Yuan seats in 2024.

B2 0-4 pts

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

4/4

Taiwan enjoys regular democratic transfers of power between rival parties, though President Lai's 2024 election marked the third consecutive presidential victory for a DPP candidate. Parties in opposition at the national level often control key municipal governments, and power regularly rotates at the local level.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?

3/4

Chinese interference in Taiwan's elections, largely through disinformation campaigns and influence over certain media outlets and local agents, remains a serious concern. Beijing has historically sought to indirectly influence elections through third parties and to undermine public confidence in the Taiwanese political system. Beijing sought to influence the 2024 elections by sponsoring travel for local officials to mainland China as part of its efforts to mobilize an anti-DPP coalition.

The Anti-Infiltration Act prohibits foreign powers from funding or directing lobbying efforts, election campaigns, or election-related disinformation in Taiwan, with penalties of up to five years in prison. In November 2024, Chang Meng-chung and his wife, Hung Wen-ting, both members of the China Unification Promotion Party, were accused of violating the law by producing pro-Beijing propaganda.

B4 0-4 pts

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

4/4

Taiwan’s constitution grants all citizens the right to vote, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity. The constitution and electoral laws also include gender quotas for local councils and at-large Legislative Yuan seats. Women won 41.6 percent of the legislature’s seats in 2024. The DPP’s Huang Jie, who was elected to the Legislative Yuan in the 2024 elections, became its first member to openly identify as LGBT+.

Six Legislative Yuan seats are reserved for Indigenous candidates elected by Indigenous voters. Members of Taiwan’s 16 Indigenous groups make up roughly 2 percent of the population.

C. Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?

4/4

Elected officials set and implement policy without undue interference from foreign or other unelected actors, though consideration of China plays a significant role in Taiwanese policymaking. Legislators sought to limit the executive’s powers as Lai took office. In May 2024, the Legislative Yuan passed amendments allowing it more investigative powers over the executive and more budgetary powers, among other things; the amendments also made “contempt of parliament” an offense punishable by fines or imprisonment. The amendments met with public opposition. In an October decision, the Constitutional Court overruled vital provisions of the amendments, including the “contempt of parliament” offense.

Pressure from Beijing continues to threaten Taiwan’s sovereignty and its open democratic system. As of the end of 2024, Taiwan was diplomatically recognized by 12 countries, including the Holy See; in January, Nauru shifted its diplomatic recognition to Beijing.

C2 0-4 pts

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? | 3/4 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

Corruption is significantly less pervasive than in the past, but it remains a concern. Corruption charges have been lodged against officials from multiple parties in recent years. Taiwanese widely perceive official corruption as a problem. Corruption and criminal behavior are perceived as persisting in local government, particularly with regards to urban development projects.

In July 2024, former Vice Premier Cheng Wen-tsan of the DPP was detained for allegedly taking a bribe while serving as the mayor of Taoyuan. Cheng was formally indicted on corruption charges in August and his trial began in December. In late December, Ko Wen-je was indicted for allegedly embezzling campaign funds during the 2024 presidential election and over suspected corruption over real-estate transactions during his tenure as Taipei's mayor.

C3 0-4 pts

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Does the government operate with openness and transparency? | 4/4 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

The 2005 Freedom of Government Information Law enables public access to financial audit reports, documents about administrative guidance, and other officially held documents. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are typically able to comment on and influence pending policies and legislation.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?**4/4**

The news media are generally free, reflecting a diversity of views and reporting aggressively on government policies, though many outlets display strong party affiliation in their coverage.

Beijing has historically exerted influence on the Taiwanese media and supported disinformation campaigns. Pro-China companies and businessmen with significant interests in China own media outlets that self-censor or otherwise avoid subjects Beijing deems sensitive, like human rights. The National Communications Commission (NCC) has at times blocked the expansion of such enterprises to ensure competition and pluralism and has fined television news channels for airing false reports.

In April 2024, KMT and TPP legislators said they would oppose DPP nominees to serve on the NCC, alleging that the DPP allowed a businessman to influence one of the nominations. In June, legislators amended the NCC Organization Act to stop chairpersons from extending their terms. NCC Vice Chairman Wong Po-tsung was then named the commission's acting chairman by the Executive Yuan. KMT and TPP legislators amended the NCC Organization Act again in November, in a way that would force Wong to step down.

Under Taiwan's libel laws, those who disseminate a fact that will "injure the reputation of another" can face criminal prosecution, with sentences of up to two years in prison or a fine. The risk of criminal libel charges or demands for compensation could inhibit journalists in their reporting, even if courts ultimately rule in their favor.

D2 0-4 pts**Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private?****4/4**

Individuals of all faiths can worship freely. Religious organizations that choose to register with the government receive tax-exempt status.

D3 0-4 pts

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? | 4/4 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

Educators in Taiwan generally operate without interference, and past practices—including prosecutions—aimed at restricting academics’ political activism have become rare.

D4 0-4 pts

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

Personal expression and private discussion are largely free of improper restrictions, and the government is not known to illegally monitor online communications. However, the government faces the growing challenge of combating online disinformation—usually disseminated via social media from China or by pro-China actors in Taiwan—while upholding freedom of expression.

Human rights experts have recommended improvements to laws meant to combat false information, which contain vague terms that have the potential to limit legitimate speech. Such laws are enforced against social media users, though cases rarely lead to convictions, and those found guilty are typically ordered to pay small fines.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

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|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Is there freedom of assembly? | 4/4 |
|--------------------------------------|------------|

The 1988 Assembly and Parade Act enables authorities to prosecute protesters who fail to obtain a permit or follow orders to disperse and includes some restrictions on the location of protests. Nevertheless, freedom of assembly is respected in practice and protests are regularly held.

E2 0-4 pts

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

Registration for NGOs is freely granted. NGOs typically operate without harassment or undue interference.

E3 0-4 pts

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? | 3/4 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

Trade unions are independent and most workers enjoy freedom of association, though the government strictly regulates the right to strike. Teachers, defense-industry workers, civil servants, and those who provide services deemed critical in labor legislation, including hospital activities, are either prohibited from striking or otherwise face restrictions on their ability to do so. Workers hired through temporary agencies cannot organize or participate in collective bargaining.

Under the Labor Incident Act, special courts can adjudicate labor issues, including union disputes.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

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|-------------------------------------------|------------|
| Is there an independent judiciary? | 4/4 |
|-------------------------------------------|------------|

Taiwan's judiciary is normally independent. Court rulings are generally free from political or other improper interference.

Lawmakers sought to alter the functioning of the Constitutional Court in 2024. In December, KMT and TPP lawmakers amended the Constitutional Court Procedure Act (CCPA), requiring that at least 10 judges participate in a case for the court to rule on it, a stricter quorum than in the past. Later in December, KMT and TPP lawmakers rejected most of President Lai's nominees to fill vacant seats on the court, leaving it short of quorum needed under the revised CCPA. The amendments were not implemented by year's end, however.

F2 0-4 pts

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|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? | 4/4 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

Constitutional guarantees concerning due process and defendants' rights are generally upheld, and police largely respect safeguards against arbitrary detention. Although prosecutors and other law enforcement officials have engaged in abusive practices in the past, such violations have been less common in recent years.

F3 0-4 pts

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

Both criminal violence and excessive use of force by police are rare, and attorneys are allowed to monitor interrogations to prevent torture.

Capital punishment is rarely implemented in Taiwan. Since 2016, only three executions were carried out. In September 2024, the Constitutional Court ruled that

the death penalty was constitutional but imposed restrictions on its use. Under the September ruling, inmates with mental health conditions could not be executed and court rulings imposing the death penalty must now be unanimous.

F4 0-4 pts

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? | 3/4 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|

The constitution provides for the equality of all citizens before the law, although Indigenous people continue to face social and economic discrimination, leading to high unemployment, lower wages, and barriers to education and social services. The 2017 Indigenous Languages Development Act designated the languages spoken by 16 officially recognized Indigenous groups as national languages and authorized their formal use in legislative and legal affairs.

Despite constitutionally enshrined equal-rights protections, women face discrimination in employment and compensation. Taiwanese law prohibits discrimination in employment and education based on sexual orientation, and violence against LGBT+ people is adequately addressed by police.

Taiwanese law does not allow for asylum or refugee status. The government has provided temporary visas and humanitarian services to people fleeing persecution in Hong Kong but has reportedly been more restrictive in granting permanent-residency requests.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

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

Taiwan's residents enjoy freedom of movement, and the government has gradually eased restrictions on travel between Taiwan and China in recent years. However, despite laws and guidelines meant to protect them, some migrant workers routinely experience illegitimate movement restrictions, such as the withholding of travel documents by employers. Contractual restrictions make it difficult in practice for many migrant workers to change employers.

G2 0-4 pts

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p>Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without undue interference from state or nonstate actors?</p> | <p>3/4</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

Although property rights are generally respected, urban renewal and industrial projects have been criticized for unfairly displacing residents. Housing advocates have called for legal amendments to clarify residency rights, including protections against forced eviction, and the establishment of an appeals system to review alleged violations.

Indigenous groups argue that government efforts to recognize their claims to ancestral lands are inadequate, as they apply only to state-owned land and exclude large segments of privately owned territory.

G3 0-4 pts

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <p>Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?</p> | <p>4/4</p> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|

There are no major restrictions on personal status matters such as marriage and divorce, although Chinese nationals who are married to Taiwanese nationals must wait six years before becoming eligible for citizenship; spouses of other nationalities need only wait four years. Same-sex marriages have been legal in Taiwan since 2019.

Rape and domestic violence remain serious problems. While the law permits authorities to investigate complaints without victims pressing charges, cultural norms inhibit many women from reporting these crimes to the police.

The #MeToo movement erupted in Taiwan in 2023, and three new and reformed laws passed after a string of high-profile reports of past sexual harassment and assault cases in politics and the entertainment industry. The laws sought to expand the range of punishable offenses, enhance supervisory mechanisms, and extend the statute of limitations.

With the support of NGOs, the Ministry of Health and Welfare worked to revise the Assisted Reproduction Act in 2024. In May, the ministry released a draft of its revisions which would allow single women and same-sex couples greater access to artificial insemination and would address surrogacy. In December, the ministry said it would remove revisions on surrogacy (which is currently illegal) from its draft after receiving opposition from civil society and within the Legislative Yuan.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?

3/4

Protections against exploitative working conditions in Taiwan are relatively strong overall, and NGOs actively expose abuses and advocate for policy improvements. Amendments to the Labor Standards Act (LSA) instituted in 2018 allowed employers to schedule more consecutive workdays and shorter breaks between shifts, which was considered a setback for workers.

Many of Taiwan's 700,000 migrant workers are mistreated or exploited by employers, despite 2018 amendments to the Employment Services Act that were meant to address abuses. These workers are often indebted to brokers. The LSA does not cover foreign domestic workers or fishery workers; they are subjected to the withholding of wages, long working hours, physical and sexual abuse, lack of food or medical care, denial of sleep, substandard safety equipment, poor living conditions, and extortion or fraud by recruitment and brokerage agencies.

In July 2024, the Legislative Yuan amended the LSA, allowing workers reaching retirement age to remain in their posts after negotiating with their employers, who are obligated to maintain pension contributions and labor-insurance coverage. Labor groups had called for the LSA to be amended, saying that employers had dismissed and rehired retirement-age employees on poorer terms.



On Taiwan

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Country Facts

Population

23,570,000

Global Freedom Score

93/100 Free

Internet Freedom Score

79/100 Free

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Other Years

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