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Bahamas

Country:

Bahamas

Year:

2015

FIW Status:

F

PR Rating:

1

CL Rating:

1

Aggregate Score:

96

Combined Freedom Score:

1.0

Overview:

Following years of economic challenges in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, reports in 2014 indicated signs of recovery in the Bahamas. The tourism industry, while vulnerable, enjoyed moderate growth throughout the year, showing a move toward stability. However, the country's sovereign debt remains a serious issue.

Homicide rates increased in 2014, while other serious crimes like sexual assault and armed robbery remained prevalent. Authorities continued taking steps to combat transnational organized crime, including the activities of drug trafficking groups.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties:

Political Rights: 38 / 40 **[Key]**

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The Bahamas is governed under a parliamentary system, and the governor general is appointed by the British monarch as head of state. The lower house of the bicameral Parliament, the 38-member House of Assembly, is directly elected for five-year terms. The 16 members of the upper house, the Senate, are appointed for five-year terms by the governor

general based on recommendations made by the prime minister and the opposition leader. The head of the majority party or coalition in Parliament typically serves as prime minister.

In general elections held in 2012, the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) took 29 seats in the House of Assembly, while the Free National Movement (FNM) captured 9 seats. Following the elections, Perry Christie, who had been prime minister in the 2000s, resumed the post.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 16 / 16

Political parties can organize freely, and a large number operate unhindered. Protests and criticism against government policies are respected. A referendum, proposed in 2012 but delayed until 2015, will address gender-based inequalities in constitutional provisions that address the acquisition of citizenship.

C. Functioning of Government: 10 / 12

The country's anticorruption mechanisms are relatively weak, and there is no agency specifically empowered to handle allegations of government corruption. The Bahamas was ranked 24 of 175 countries and territories surveyed in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Although the legislature passed the Freedom of Information Act in 2012, the law was never enforced, and citizens have few mechanisms through which to gain access to public records. Legislators and other high-ranking public officials are required to disclose their income and assets under the Public Disclosure Act of 1976.

Civil Liberties: 58 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 16 / 16

Press freedom in the Bahamas is constitutionally guaranteed and respected in practice. The country's privately owned daily and weekly newspapers freely express a variety of views, as do the government-run radio station and four privately owned radio broadcasters. Access to the internet is not restricted, and religious and academic freedoms are respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are generally protected. A variety of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in Bahamas, including groups that focus on human rights issues. A proposed law, the Civil Society Organization Encouragement Act, remained pending in 2014. The legislation aims to reform registration procedures for civil society organizations, which are currently governed by the Companies Act.

Labor, business, and professional organizations are generally free from government

interference. Unions have the right to strike, and collective bargaining is prevalent.

F. Rule of Law: 15 / 16

The independent judicial system is headed by the Supreme Court and a court of appeals, with the additional right of appeal to the Privy Council in London under certain circumstances.

The Correctional Services Act was passed in 2014. Focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration into society, the act was designed to create systems for the provision of academic, vocational, and technical training to inmates.

There was a dramatic rise in murder rates in 2014, which authorities have attributed to an increase in violence related to gangs and drug traffickers. The Prime Minister's press secretary, Latore Mackey, was shot and killed while driving in Nassau in August 2014. The government has made efforts to confront the prevalence of crime through coordination with the police commissioner and the minister of national security.

In 2013, there were reports of mistreatment of Cuban refugees by the guards of the Carmichael Road Detention Center. Bahamian officials continued to investigate the reports in 2014.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is not prohibited by law. Although same-sex sexual activity is legal, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) people report discrimination in employment and housing. In August 2014, the organizers of an LGBT pride event received death threats.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 15 / 16

The freedom of movement is protected, and people are free to choose their place of residence and institution of higher education. Violence against women, including domestic violence, continues to be a serious issue. The government has made attempts to increase awareness about the problem by holding public workshops.

The Bahamas is a source, destination, and transit country for men, women, and children for forced labor and sexual exploitation. The government complies with minimum international standards to address the problem.

Migrant workers, many of whom arrive in the Bahamas to work in agricultural and domestic service industries, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received

Y = Best Possible Score

Z = Change from Previous Year

Full Methodology

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