

Laos 2010



Total: 6.67

Quick facts

Population:	6.37 million
Population growth:	1.71 %
Unemployment rate:	2.5 %
GDP:	15.42 billion \$
GDP growth rate:	7 %
GDP per capita:	2400 \$

Political Freedom

Free and Fair Elections : 0

Elections are neither free nor fair. When the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) came to power in 1975, it abolished all political parties and installed a single-party system labeled "œdemocratic centralism". Elections for the National Assembly are held every five years but the LPRP scans all candidates closely. (Nearly all of them are members of the party anyway.) This ensures that all policy matters remain strictly under the influence of the LPRP. Voting is compulsory. The last elections were held in 2006 and the only visible sign that people expressed their will was that merely 44 of 115 deputies were re-elected. This suggests that the population was at least prepared to vote those out of office whom they believed incapable of representing their interests. Regarding political participation and pluralism, a similar picture evolves: There are no political civic organisations and consequently political participation is very low in Laos. Freedom of assembly is constitutionally granted but does not exist in practice. Every formal gathering requires a permission which is hardly ever granted. All in all, the electoral system in Laos with regard to free and fair elections and political pluralism and participation can only be evaluated as defective.

Absence of Unconstitutional Veto Players : 0

The LPRP de-facto runs the country while the elected members of the National Assembly more or less fulfil a ceremonial role. Since the LPRP holds all power and the constitution does not provide

for its strong position, the party can be considered a powerful veto player in Lao politics. Besides, the government can by no means be held accountable by the public and government actions generally are neither transparent nor open.

Freedom of Press : 1.6

All media in Laos is strictly controlled and censored by the government. Any criticism of the government or any discussion of controversial political issues are severely punished. Moreover, all media (including the three national newspapers) is state-owned. The same applies to the internet: Not only is the content heavily restricted and censored, basic internet access is impossible for the majority of the population. However, people in the border regions can access foreign sources of information. Private criticism of the government is tolerated as long as it does not form part of any movement of dissent.

Rule of Law

Independence of the Judiciary :

No data available.

Corruption : 2

Corruption is widespread in Laos. The government regulates nearly every facet of its citizens' lives and there are countless occasions where bribing government officials is not only useful, but even necessary. Laws, some of them just recently introduced, aim to target this problem but they are hardly ever enforced. Corruption is indeed so far spread that it negatively affects the economy: A considerable amount of state resources vanishes in private pockets.

Protection of Human Rights : 3.07

The situation of human rights in Laos is precarious: Even though Laos is party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and ratified the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in September 2009, violations of human rights occur frequently. For example, there is no freedom of religion and belief: The Christian minority in Laos is systematically discriminated against. Scores have been detained and the government bars them from celebrating Christian holidays. Ethnic minorities, particularly the Hmong, experience similar circumstances. Gender-based discrimination is widespread and women's access to education, employment, and work benefits is usually restricted. Moreover, the death penalty still exists in Laos. It is mainly imposed on drug-related crimes.

Economic Freedom

Security of Property Rights :

No data available.

Size of Government: Expenditures, Taxes, and Enterprises :

No data available.

Regulation of Credit, Labour, and Business :

No data available.

Freedom to Trade Internationally :

No data available.