

Laos 2011



Total: 6.46

Quick facts

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| Population: | 6.48 million |
| Population growth: | 1.68 % |
| Unemployment rate: | 2.5 % |
| GDP: | 15.69 billion \$ |
| GDP growth rate: | 7.7 % |
| GDP per capita: | 2500 \$ |

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 known as "democratic centralism". Elections for the national assembly are held every five years; voting is compulsory and, in order to ensure the party's influence, candidates have to be approved by the LPRP. The April 2011 elections for the national assembly saw 190 candidates - among them five independents - contest for 132 seats. State media put the voter turnout at 99.6% and celebrated that "voters showed great enthusiasm in exercising their political rights to ensure qualified personnel elected to the national assembly". However, the role of the national assembly elections is a minor one; the real policy makers were elected by 576 delegates at the party congress one month earlier.

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, with regard to free and fair elections, and political pluralism and participation, Laos can only be evaluated as particularly defective, explaining the achievement of a score of 0.00 in this section.

Absence of Unconstitutional Veto Players : 0

All power lies within the politburo of the LPRP; the elected members of the National Assembly, in fact, are powerless. Since it is the LPRP alone that exercises power, and as the constitution does not provide for its strong position, the LPRP can be considered a very strong veto player in the political system of Laos. Besides, the public by no means can hold the government accountable and, generally, government actions are neither transparent nor open.

Freedom of Press : 1.5

All media in Laos is strictly controlled and censored by the government. Any criticism of the government or discussion of any controversial political subject may be 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, but basic internet access is impossible for the majority of the population. However, people in the border regions can access foreign information sources. 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 : 2.1

Corruption is widespread in Laos. The government regulates nearly every facet of its citizens' lives, and there are countless occasions where the bribing of government officials is not only useful, but even necessary. Laws, some of them just recently introduced, aim to target this problem but are rarely 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 : 2.86

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 of Christians continue to be detained, and the government bars the celebration of Christian holidays. Ethnic minorities, particularly the Hmong, experience similar circumstances. Gender-based discrimination is widespread and access for women to education, employment, and work benefits is usually restricted. Moreover, the death penalty, mainly being imposed on drug-related crimes, still exists in Laos.

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.