

Laos 2012



Total: 6.96

Quick facts

Population:	6.59 million
Population growth:	1.65 %
Unemployment rate:	2.5 %
GDP:	17.66 billion \$
GDP growth rate:	8.3 %
GDP per capita:	2700 \$

Political Freedom

Free and Fair Elections : 0

Elections in Laos 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 "œdemocratic centralism." Elections for the National Assembly are held every five years. However, 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, including five independents, contest for 132 seats. State media put the voter turnout at 99.6% and highlighted voters'™ great enthusiasm in exercising their political rights to ensure qualified candidates win the seats. However, the role of the National Assembly in elections is minimal, not least because the real policy makers had been elected by 576 delegates at the Party Congress one month earlier.

This electoral system is based on the 1991 Constitution that instates the LPRP as the sole legitimate political party and provides for the LPRP to take the leading role at all levels of government.

In line with the Laotian political system, the level of political participation and pluralism is low. There are no political civic organisations. Freedom of assembly is constitutionally provided for, but does not exist in practice. Every formal gathering requires permission, which is hardly ever granted.

Absence of Unconstitutional Veto Players : 0

All power lies within the Politburo of the LPRP; the elected members of the National Assembly are in fact powerless. The armed forces are completely under the control of the LPRP, and there is no other power in Laos strong enough to even remotely challenge the dominance of the ruling party. What is more, the public has no means to hold the government accountable, and government actions are generally neither transparent nor open.

Freedom of Press : 1.6

All media in Laos are state-owned. The Ministry of Information and Culture strictly controls everything that is published and broadcasted in the country. Any criticism of the government or discussion about controversial political subjects may lead to severe punishment. Very few people in Laos have access to the Internet. Worse yet, the Lao government has recently been provided with the latest technology to censor online communication by the Chinese government, and this eliminates any effect the Internet could have on civil society. Only people living in the border regions can access information and news from foreign sources.

Rule of Law

Independence of the Judiciary :

No data available.

Corruption : 2.2

Laos is heavily burdened by high levels of corruption. Rarely are laws aimed at tackling graft enforced. Moreover, the fact that the government controls virtually every aspect of a citizen's life only increases opportunities for bribery. Furthermore, the rapid expansion of logging, mining and other extractive industries, and the influx of a large number of Chinese and Vietnamese companies foster greater corruption, as these businesses are reported to have bribed local officials for access to land. Laos was placed at the 154th position out of 183 countries listed in Transparency International's 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Protection of Human Rights : 3.16

Human rights remain limited in Laos. State control over most of the facets of life means that freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly are severely restricted. Some domestic non-governmental welfare and professional groups exist, but they are prohibited from pursuing political agendas and are strictly controlled by the state. Religious freedom is constrained: the LPRP controls the training of Buddhist clergymen and supervises their temples, and Christians are often jailed or expelled from villages for proselytising. Academic freedom is not respected: university professors cannot teach or write about politically sensitive issues. Government surveillance of the population has been scaled back in recent years, but searches

without warrants still occur. Members of ethnic minority tribes, particularly the Hmong, are constantly vulnerable to discrimination and harsh treatment. Although laws guarantee gender equality, gender-based discrimination and abuses are rampant. Tradition and religious practices have put women in an inferior position in terms of education, employment opportunities and benefits. The death penalty remains a mandatory punishment for some drug offences, although no official statistics on this are revealed to the public.

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.