

Polity IV Country Report 2006: Latvia

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2005</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>15</td> <td></td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> <td colspan="2"></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2005	2006	Change			Polity:	8	8	0			Democ:	8	8	0			Autoc:	0	0	0			Durable:		15				Tentative:		No				<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Authority Trends, 1991-2006: Latvia</p> </div>
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SCODE	LAT	CCODE	367	Date of Report	1 December 2007																																
Polity IV Component Variables																																					
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																																
2	2	4	7	2	4																																
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																																					
End Date			Begin Date																																		
			6 September 1991 (Ind.)																																		
Polity Fragmentation: No																																					
Constitution																																					
1993 (reinstatement of 1922 Constitution)																																					
Executive(s)																																					
President Valdis Zatlers (non-partisan); elected by parliament, 31 May 2007 Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis (TP); appointed by President, 2 December 2004																																					
Legislature																																					
Unicameral: Saeima (100 seats; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 7 October 2006) People's Party (TP): 23 New Era Party (JL): 18 Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS): 18 Harmony Center (SC): 17 Latvia First Party-Latvia's Way (LPP-LC): 10 For Fatherland and Freedom-Latvian National Independence Movement (TB/LNNK): 8 For Human Rights in a United Latvia (PCTVL): 6																																					
Judiciary																																					
Supreme Court; Constitutional Court																																					

Narrative Description:

Executive Recruitment: Transitional or Restricted Elections (7)

Under the terms of the Latvian constitution, the president is elected by parliament while the prime minister is appointed by the president with the approval of parliament. While electoral competition is a necessary component of the executive recruitment, this process functions within the broad confines of a fragile power-sharing arrangement among rival political elites. Latvia has had more than 12 different governments in 15 years of independence. A significant obstacle to fully competitive elections in Latvia remains the persistence of discriminatory practices against Russian residents of this former Soviet republic. Riga, the

largest and most cosmopolitan city in the Baltics, was a favorite Soviet-era retirement destination for middle-class Russians who could not afford the high rents in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev. Far more Russians migrated to Latvia in Soviet times than to neighboring Estonia and Lithuania, and ethnic Russians currently make up a third of the population. New legislation passed in 2006 specifies that candidates for citizenship who fail a Latvian language test three times would be denied legal national citizenship status. People without citizenship are entitled neither to vote nor to obtain an EU passport. Government data shows that half of the 650,000 ethnic Russians living in Latvia now have Latvian citizenship. Over 18% of the population of Latvia continues to be non-citizens.

Latvia's party structure is highly fragmented and coalitions are generally fragile. Following the 1995 legislative elections, a government was formed by a six-party coalition which collapsed by mid-1997 and was replaced by a five-party coalition government. Legislative elections in 1998 resulted in a four-party coalition formed by the TP, LC, JP, and TB-LNNK. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Latvia's first female president, was nominated for the presidency only a year after she renounced her Canadian citizenship and returned to Latvia as a political unknown; her election by 53 votes in the 100 seat parliament came after five other candidates failed to win enough votes in earlier balloting. A dispute over privatization led to former Prime Minister Andris Skele's resignation and replacement by Andris Berzins. Legislative elections in October 2002 saw the newly formed (February 2002) New Era party become the largest party in the Saeima (but only by one seat). The election of candidates representing the New Era (JL) party, led by Einars Repse, resulted in electoral defeat for all three of the former coalition partners (LC, TP, and TB-LNNK); second place went to the For Human Rights in a United Latvia (PCTVL) alliance, which included the National Harmony and Socialist parties and drew much of its support from the large ethnic Russian minority. On 4 November 2002 New Era, the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS), the Christian-oriented Latvia First Party (LPP), and the conservative Fatherland and Freedom Union (TB-LNNK) formed a coalition government. In January 2004, the Latvia First Party withdrew from the coalition, resulting in a loss of parliamentary majority for the coalition government. Prime Minister Repse submitted the resignation of his coalition government on 5 February 2004; President Vike-Freiberga asked Indulis Emsis of the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS) to form a new government. His minority coalition government, composed of ZZS, the Latvia First Party (LPP), and the People's Party (TP), collapsed in October 2004. The President appointed Aigars Kalvitis to the post of Prime Minister on 2 December 2004; that government was formed by a JL, TP, LPP, and ZZS center-right coalition which managed to take a majority of seats in October 2006 elections to become the first sitting government to be returned to power since the state broke away from the Soviet Union (despite a dispute that led to the withdrawal of the JL in April 2006). In November 2006 the ruling coalition expanded to include the Fatherland and Freedom Union (TB-LNNK). A special session of the legislature on 31 May 2007 elected Valdis Zatlers to succeed Vaira Vike-Freiberga as president.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

The president, who serves as head of state and the military commander-in-chief, is elected by a majority vote of the legislature; he or she also exercises limited power over the Saeima, including the right to veto legislation. Cabinet ministers are responsible to the Saeima. The appointment of the prime minister is based on an agreement among the parties in the Saeima. The judiciary is independent but not well-trained, efficient, or free from corruption.

Political Participation: Political Liberalization: Limited and/or Decreasing Overt Coercion (9)

Latvia is performing a relatively peaceful transition to institutionalized competitive participation. The country's legislative elections in the post-Soviet era have largely been deemed free and fair by international observers. However, the country's political parties continue to be relatively weak and fluid. Moreover, the tension between Latvians and ethnic Russians, while less severe than in the early years of independence, continues to be a source of political factionalism. About 800,000 Russians arrived in Latvia during the period of Soviet occupation, which reduced the number of ethnic Latvians to 52% in 1989 (down from 77% prior to WWII). Since regaining its independence in the early 1990s, language and citizenship laws tailored to preserve the disappearing Latvian national identity has been the cornerstone of post-Soviet Latvian politics. While in recent years the government has taken halting steps to eliminate discrimination against the country's large Russian-speaking minority and bring its citizenship and language laws in accordance with the European Union standards, nonetheless, many Russian-speakers continue to claim that they face significant political discrimination.

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