

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Latvia

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>8</td> <td>8</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td colspan="3">16</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	8	8	0	Democ:	8	8	0	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:	16			Tentative:	No			
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SCODE	LAT	CCODE	367	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
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:¹

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

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

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 14 different governments in 16 years of independence. Latvia's party structure is highly fragmented and coalitions are generally fragile. Ivars Godmanis was voted in as head of a new four-party center-right government in December 2007 after the cabinet of outgoing Prime Minister Algars Kalvitis resigned amid a series of scandals and anti-government protests. Kalvitis stepped down after anti-government protests erupted in Riga in the wake of his efforts to sack the country's anti-corruption chief, Aleksejs Loskutovs. Critics of the Prime Minister accused him of overstepping his constitutional powers by engaging in a personal vendetta against Loskutov after he started to investigate the Prime Minister's party for campaign violations.

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 little less than one-third of the population. Most ethnic Russians live in the urban areas of the country (Russians make up 42% of the population in the capital Riga and 53% in the country's second largest city, Daugavpils). 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 from 2007 indicates that 56.5% 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. Despite this ethnic cleavage, since Latvia joined the EU and NATO in 2004, concern over threat posed by Russian-speaking residents has begun to wane. While government reforms introduced in 2004 to restrict the use of the Russian language in schools remains highly controversial, nonetheless, in recent years there has been increasing support in Latvia for making Russian a "minority language". This idea would have been viewed as politically impossible five years ago.

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.