



Human Rights Measurement Initiative

HRMI 2021 Annual Survey & People Data Report

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2021 Annual Survey and People Data Report

The Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) uses an expert survey to develop some of its metrics for human rights. Specifically, the 2021 survey contributed to (1) measures of overall respect for, and indicators of who experienced violations of, seven civil and political rights (i.e. Freedom from Torture and Ill-treatment, Freedom from Extrajudicial Killing, Freedom from Death Penalty Execution, Freedom from Arbitrary or Political Arrest and Imprisonment, Freedom from Disappearance, Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Freedom of Political Participation, and Freedom of Assembly and Association), (2) indicators of who experienced a lack of enjoyment of five economic and social rights (i.e. Right to Food, Health, Housing, Work, and Education), (3) scores on the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on human rights in 2020, and (4) additional indicators on human rights concerns in the Pacific.

In this report, we will describe why HRMI uses an expert survey to produce human rights data, the pool of respondents that participated in that survey, the design of the survey, and the indicators that come from that survey to make up our “People at Risk” data. To learn more about why we use an expert survey and what sets HRMI’s scores apart for other human rights metrics, we encourage you to read and cite:

- K. Chad Clay, Ryan Bakker, Anne-Marie Brook, Daniel W. Hill, and Amanda Murdie. 2020. [Using practitioner surveys to measure human rights: The Human Rights Measurement Initiative’s civil and political rights metrics](#). *Journal of Peace Research* 57 (6): 715-727.
- Anne-Marie Brook, K. Chad Clay, and Susan Randolph. 2020. [Human rights data for everyone: Introducing the Human Rights Measurement Initiative \(HRMI\)](#). *Journal of Human Rights* 19 (1): 67-82.

Why an expert survey?

Obtaining reliable, unbiased, and comprehensive information is perhaps the most serious impediment to the collection of human rights data. When violations are reported, the perpetrators often attempt to frame the abuse as either necessary or carried out by agents without permission. Many violations of human rights take place in secret, with the violator seeking to conceal their actions entirely.

Because objective statistics on levels of respect for most human rights are either unavailable or unreliable, HRMI collects information on the scope and intensity of abuse using an expert survey approach. HRMI also collects information from survey respondents about the people who are most at risk for violations or restrictions of their rights. Overall, this approach allows us to:

- Directly collect previously inaccessible information from human rights researchers and practitioners (in their own language wherever possible) who are actively gathering information and monitoring human rights issues in each country.
- Collect data not only on the type and intensity of abuse, but on the range of abuse as well, i.e. information on which groups of people are particularly vulnerable to each type of abuse within each country.

- Produce internationally comparable measures of the overall level of respect for several human rights for which objective international statistics are not produced and unlikely to become available.

Which countries are included in the survey?

The 2021 survey was our fourth time distributing the HRMI annual survey to human rights experts around the globe, with our most expansive country coverage yet. In our 2017 pilot, we rolled out our expert survey to human rights experts in the following 13 countries: Angola, Australia, Brazil, Fiji, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom. For the 2019 HRMI expert survey, we added the Democratic Republic of Congo, Jordan, South Korea, the United States, and Vietnam. In 2020, we expanded our administration of the survey to a total of 39 countries and territories, focusing the expansion on Pacific countries: American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna. Finally, in 2021, we added three more East Asian countries: Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Taiwan. We expect that the survey will continue to be conducted annually and, over time, will expand to cover most countries in the world.

Who are the experts that can respond to the survey?

Thus far, we have focused primarily on human rights practitioners directly monitoring the civil and political rights situation in each country. These experts are often working for an international or domestic non-governmental organisation or a civil society organisation. However, we also allowed for participation by human rights lawyers, journalists covering human rights issues, and staff working for national human rights institutions if that institution has been given A-level accreditation by the International Coordinating Committee and its Sub-Committee on Accreditation, showing that it is rated as fully compliant with the Paris Principles (United Nations, 2010; GANHRI, 2020). Many of our respondents serve in several of these roles simultaneously.

Wherever possible we rely on respondents who are located within the country on which they provide information. In cases of more closed and repressive countries, it has been necessary to rely on a higher proportion of respondents that are based outside of the country of interest. The 2021 survey was available to take in ten languages (Arabic, Chinese (Traditional), English, French, Korean, Nepali, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese) ensuring that it was accessible to as many human rights experts in our sample as possible. This approach ensures that our expert survey is serving as a tool that gives a voice to experts located in countries around the world, to share their knowledge with the outside world in the form of quantitative scores of civil and political rights. Table 1 below shows the percentage of our respondents taking the survey in each language.

Table 1. 2021 Survey Respondent Languages

Language	Percentage of Respondents
Arabic	1.8%
Chinese (Traditional)	9.8%
English	56.1%
French	7.9%
Korean	1.6%
Nepali	0.7%
Portuguese	9.1%
Russian	6.6%
Spanish	5.5%
Vietnamese	0.9%

This is especially valuable for human rights experts from outside of the oft over-represented “Western” and high-income countries. Our main goal is to collect information from respondents who are first points of contact for human rights information in the country of interest and who often have access to primary sources. As such, we did not invite people who only work as academics that are rarely involved in the collection of primary information and tend to rely more heavily on secondary sources to be respondents. In countries with populations greater than 120,000, staff at government-organised NGOs and government officials outside of A-level national human rights institutions were also excluded.

Starting with the 2020 survey, we began to allow for the participation of a limited set of government employees ONLY in countries and territories with a population under 120,000 people. Given the nature of less-populated states, it is often difficult to find many local human rights experts who have absolutely no government affiliation. As such, for these small population countries, we allow respondents with some government involvement, but still a low conflict of interest, to participate. Individuals who work with or for the government and have very high conflicts of interest on our human rights questions (e.g. police, politicians, military) are never permitted to participate in the survey, regardless of population size. Further, when finding survey respondents for countries and territories with smaller populations, we still prioritise the recruitment of non-government affiliated respondents as often as possible in these small population states.

Who can participate in HRMI expert survey?

Countries/territories with a **population under 120,000**



We relied on input from HRMI country ambassadors as well as self-reporting questions in the survey to gauge the level of government involvement of survey respondents. In addition, we collect information from every potential survey respondent's nominator on whether the respondent in question is completely independent of the government or has some level of involvement. Based on this information, we filter out potential respondents who have a high level of government involvement that may cause a large conflict of interest. For all other countries we surveyed with populations greater than 120,000, government employees continued to be ineligible to participate in the survey.

We carefully evaluated the data to determine whether there is any difference in responses between those with no government connection and those with some degree of government connection and found no significant effects. Nevertheless, for complete transparency, countries that include government respondents in their samples are denoted with a "g" on our Rights Tracker.

Bearing in mind that many of our respondents worked in more than a single capacity, 60% of the respondents to the 2021 HRMI Expert Survey work as human rights practitioners or advocates, 21% work as lawyers, 11% work as journalists, 4% primarily work for NHRIs, and 4% of respondents worked in government (only in countries with populations less than 120,000). Finally, 12% of our respondents primarily work in human rights via another related field, such as social work, medicine, or education.

As mentioned previously, we have distributed the HRMI survey four times; however, the first survey in 2017 was a pilot that measured issues on a different time scale from our annual data that we now collect. As such, only data from three surveys currently contribute to the data found on the Rights Tracker. Table 2 shows this breakdown of the number of respondents from each country that contributed to the HRMI data found on the 2021 version of the Rights Tracker.

Table 2
HRMI Expert Survey Respondents by Country and Survey Year

Country	2019 Survey	2020 Survey	2021 Survey
Angola	13	16	15
Australia	19	16	29
Brazil	15	25	22
Congo, Dem. Rep.	6	23	21
Fiji	14	19	17
Jordan	6	12	13
Kazakhstan	18	29	26
Korea, Rep.	12	7	9
Kyrgyz Republic	20	14	12
Liberia	18	19	14
Mexico	10	14	16
Mozambique	11	19	19
Nepal	15	16	19
New Zealand	17	27	19
Saudi Arabia	10	8	10
United Kingdom	7	12	11
United States	14	14	17
Venezuela	10	13	24
Vietnam	20	14	17
American Samoa		4	6
Cook Islands		6	8
French Polynesia		4	7
Guam		9	5
Kiribati		1	6
Marshall Islands		3	8
Micronesia, Fed. Sts.		5	6
Nauru		6	5
New Caledonia		10	21
Niue		6	4
Northern Mariana Islands		5	5
Papua New Guinea		15	21
Samoa		5	7
Solomon Islands		7	7
Tonga		19	12
Tuvalu		1	5
Vanuatu		5	10
Hong Kong			16
Malaysia			17
Taiwan			52
Total	255	428	558
Average	13.4	11.9	14.3

The 2021 HRMI Expert Survey

The 2021 HRMI Expert Survey was designed around collecting information in three areas: (1) the intensity of government respect for civil and political rights, (2) the people at risk for violations or a lack of enjoyment in civil and political or economic and social rights, respectively, (3) the effects of Covid-19 on human rights practices in 2020, and (4) additional human rights issues in the Pacific, as advised by consulted human rights practitioners in the Pacific. You can view the expert survey questionnaire used in the 2021 study [here](#). Note that this is a link to a preview of the survey only, and any responses you make will not be collected.

In this section, we will discuss the survey components that currently contribute to the data found on the Rights Tracker, i.e. (1) and (2) above. A future guide will discuss the details surrounding the Pacific Module and Covid-19 surveys and data.

Civil & Political Rights Intensity Questions

In 2021, the goal for civil and political rights was to collect information on government respect for eight different civil and political rights in 2020 and 2019. The definition of each right is connected directly to language contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and other relevant international law. These are: the right to be free from torture and ill-treatment (Article 7 and the Convention against Torture), the right to be free from extrajudicial execution (Article 6), the right to be free from death penalty execution (the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR), the right to be free from arbitrary or political arrest and detention (Articles 2, 9, 11, 18, 19, 21, 22, and 26), the right to be free from disappearance (Articles 9 and 10, and the International Convention on Enforced Disappearances (CED)), the right to political participation (Article 25), the right to opinion and expression (Article 19), and the rights to assembly (Article 21) and association (Article 22). As such, we designed our survey to have a section for each of these eight rights. Each section contains:

1. a definition of the right under consideration,
2. questions related to the intensity of respect for that right in 2020 and 2019,
3. descriptions of, and questions about, respect for the right in three different imaginary countries.

The definition of each right was determined on the basis of international law and its interpretation by the appropriate treaty bodies at the United Nations. For instance, the definition of torture and ill-treatment is broadly based on the definition found in Article 2 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). The following is taken directly from our survey:

About Torture and Ill-treatment

All people have the right to be free from **torture and ill-treatment**.

Any time someone intentionally inflicts severe physical or mental pain or suffering on a person, they are engaging in **torture or ill-treatment**. These acts may be committed for any reason, including (but not limited to):

- trying to get information or confessions,
- punishment,
- intimidation,
- coercion,
- and discrimination.

Torture and ill-treatment carried out by people working for or with the government can also take many different forms, including (but not limited to):

- beatings by police officers,
- sexual assaults by prison guards,
- waterboarding by members of the military,
- intentional mental abuse of those in custody,
- military hazing,
- abuse of people in government-operated care facilities or schools,
- and other similar or comparable actions.

We proceed in a similar fashion for all other rights in the survey, drawing on the ICCPR, the CAT, the CED, the Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, and general comments from the Human Rights Committee.

Next, we ask our respondents about the intensity of violations by state actors. For instance, in the case of torture and ill-treatment in 2020, we ask:

In 2020, how many people had their right to be free from **torture or ill-treatment violated** by **government agents** (such as soldiers, police officers, or others working for or with the government)?

None

Few

Some

Many

A great many

An extremely large number

When then follow up by asking respondents to answer the same question for 2019.

Finally, for each right, we end the section of the survey by asking our respondents to score the intensity of three hypothetical countries on their respect for the rights under consideration. These hypothetical cases are included to account for differences in the interpretation of the six-point intensity scale described above. The respondents' answers to these questions contribute meaningfully to the final intensity scores produced for each country in the manner described in the Civil and Political Rights Methodology Note.

People at Risk Questions

We also ask our respondents to provide us with information about the *particular groups of people* who were likely to experience rights violations (in the case of civil and political rights) or a lack of enjoyment of rights (in the case of economic and social rights) in a country in 2020. For these sections, we group the rights into three broad categories: "Safety from the State" (i.e. the physical integrity rights to be free from forced disappearance, extrajudicial killing, death penalty execution, arbitrary or political arrest and imprisonment, and torture and ill-treatment), "Empowerment" (the rights to participate in government, assembly and association, and opinion and expression), and "Economic and Social Rights" (the rights to food, health, work, housing, and education). For both Safety from the State and Empowerment Rights, we first ask a question like the following:

In 2020, which people, if any, were especially likely to experience **torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary and political arrest and detention, extrajudicial execution, death penalty execution, or disappearance by government agents**, such as soldiers, police officers, and other state actors, in [Country]. (Select all that apply. You will have the opportunity to provide more detail on the next page.)

In response to this question, respondents can select from 39 identifiers pre-imported into the survey or provide us with other potential identifiers that we did not have the foresight to include. The options, as they appear in the survey, are:

No one was at noticeable risk	People with particular political affiliations or beliefs
All people were at noticeable risk	Human rights advocates
Indigenous people	Members of labour unions and/or workers' rights advocates
People of particular ethnicities	People who protest or engage in non-violent political activity
People of particular races	People suspected of political violence
People from particular cultural backgrounds or castes	People suspected of terrorist activity
People with particular religious beliefs or practices	Detainees or people accused of crimes
People of particular nationalities	Migrants and/or immigrants

People in particular geographic locations	Refugees or asylum seekers
People in other countries outside of United States	Internally displaced people
People affected by climate change	People without a legal identity
Women and/or girls	People with low social or economic status
Men and/or boys	People who are homeless
LGBTQIA+ people	Street children or homeless youth
Children	People with less education
Single parent families	Academics
Older people	Students
People with disabilities	Professionals (e.g. doctors, lawyers, teachers)
People with specific health conditions	Members of the military
Journalists	Other (Please Specify)

For each category that a respondent selects, a follow-up question is provided asking for which specific right that group is at most risk, like the following:

Which violations were **government agents** especially likely to commit against **people suspected of terrorist activity** in United States during 2020? (**Select all that apply.**)

Torture and Ill-treatment

Arbitrary or Political Arrest and Detention

Extrajudicial Killing

Death Penalty Execution

Disappearance

For economic and social rights, these questions appear slightly differently. Since these rights have not been previously defined in the survey, the rights are each defined immediately prior to asking a question about who was at risk to experience limitations of their enjoyment of the right, rather than explicitly focusing on government violations. For instance in the case of the right to food, we define the right based on Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and CESR General Comment Number 12 on the Right to Adequate Food (CESCR 1999), stating:

All people have the right to food. The right to food ensures that all people:

- have enough food of high enough quality to satisfy their dietary needs,
- have food that is free from adverse substances
- have food that is acceptable within their culture
- have food that is accessible in ways that are sustainable

We then ask:

In 2020, which people, if any, were particularly unlikely to have food that satisfies all the requirements of the **right to food** listed above? (**Select all that apply**)

The respondent then can select from the same 40 identifiers listed above.

Finally, for each of the 13 rights about which we ask questions in the survey, we ask respondents open-ended questions about the “specific identities, affiliations, groups, activities, locations, or

other attributes” that made one likely to experience the rights violation or lack of enjoyment described. This allows us to collect more specific information than the generic identifiers discussed above, which is then aggregated and summarised on the rights tracker as discussed in the “People at Risk Data” section below.

People at Risk Data

As discussed in the previous section, one of the primary outputs of our annual expert survey are our People at Risk data. Quantitative data on which pre-generated identifiers were selected by our respondents as making one likely one likely to experience rights abuse or lack of enjoyment our downloadable data file on the Rights Tracker (rightstracker.org). In particular, we report the total number of respondents that answered the question for each right, and for each group of people at risk of not enjoying each right, we report both the total number and the overall proportion of respondents that selected those people as being at risk to lack enjoyment of the right. For more information on this, see the “HRMI 2021 Codebook,” which is downloaded alongside the data file from the Rights Tracker.

People at risk for

Right to freedom from torture

Interpretation: Larger text = more human rights experts identified this group as being at risk.

76% of our human rights experts identified **People of particular races** as being at risk of having this right violated.



Source: HRMI 2021 rightstracker.org

On the Rights Tracker itself, we present information on People at Risk in two different ways. First, for each right, we generate word clouds that are ordered by the percentage of the respondents for that country and right that said a particular pre-generated group was at risk for experiencing violations of the right. For instance, above, one can view the 2020 word cloud for the United States covering those most likely to experience violations of their right to freedom from torture. The word clouds allow you to select individual groups in the cloud, which allows you to view the percentage of respondents that stated that the particular group was at risk. In this example, we have selected “People of particular races,” which was identified by 76% of our United States experts as a group particularly at risk for torture by US state agents in 2020.

Then, under each word cloud, the Rights Tracker provides summaries of the respondents’ open-ended responses. For instance, under the word cloud shown above, one can find this information:

When asked to provide more context about who was especially vulnerable to torture and ill-treatment by government agents in 2020, our respondents mentioned all of the following:

- Covid-19 put prisoners and detainees at particular risk
- Prisoners or detainees, particularly those who are not white
- People belonging to racial minorities, including Black and Latinx people
- Migrants, particularly those of African or Latinx descent and especially those who are undocumented
- Anybody who is not white
- Protesters or demonstrators, particularly those affiliated with Black Lives Matter
- People struggling with addiction
- People with learning disabilities
- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Native Americans

Conclusion

This iteration of the HRMI Expert Survey has undoubtedly been our most ambitious expansion to date. Not only were we able to continue developing and producing scores on the same sets of rights that we have surveyed human rights practitioners across the past few years, but we were able to add additional questions that granted us insight into the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on human rights in 2020. Moreover, these data continue to tell us *who* is at risk for rights abuses.

HRMI’s work to produce human rights scores never stops. As we expand each year to include more countries and/or regions, we aim to do so in a way that fosters cultural reciprocity, respect, inclusiveness, and sensitivity. In working to develop measures useful for human rights advocates and practitioners, while simultaneously expanding country coverage, we believe this must be done in a way that captures the state of human rights in these countries. This means developing meaningful relationships with human rights workers, local communities, and activists on the ground to include their voices in as many ways as possible: survey participation, establishing new partnerships, developing new rights workstreams, and discussing ways to improve or add to the HRMI survey to produce data on the specific human rights contexts to their areas.