

For immediate release

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Research: Contrasting Success and Struggles in Asia's Human Rights Landscape

- New data show that South Korea and Taiwan are among the best performing countries in the protection and promotion of civil and political rights
- Many people are not safe from the government nor enjoying their civil liberties and political freedoms in China, India, Hong Kong, Bangladesh, and Vietnam
- Arbitrary arrests are identified as some of the most rampant violations in Asia; with Kazakhstan, India, Bangladesh, and Vietnam's scores among the worst
- Latest data measuring up to 14 rights across 196 countries, and identifying 41 groups of people particularly at risk of rights violations, are now available on the Rights Tracker

Research reveals that South Korea and Taiwan emerged as top performers across eight human rights themes measuring empowerment and safety from the state in 2022. In the latest data published by the Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI), up to 14 internationally recognised human rights were measured in 196 countries.

"South Korea and Taiwan's high scores for Safety from the State show that most people are protected from government abuse. Their scores are the highest among all 30 countries in our sample for these civil and political rights," said Thalia Kehoe Rowden, HRMI Global Spokesperson.

Taiwan received a particularly high score of 9.5 out of 10 on the right to freedom of religion and belief in HRMI's first ever measurement of this right.

"Despite having relatively robust protections of civil and political rights, inequities remain, and our data also show that a significant number of people in both Taiwan and South Korea are unable to fully enjoy their rights. Local human rights experts in Taiwan say that people accused of crimes are especially vulnerable to torture and ill-treatment. In South Korea, labour union members have been identified as particularly at risk of having their right to assembly and association violated," said Kehoe Rowden.

China, Vietnam, and Hong Kong's scores are among the worst in Empowerment Rights. All three have scores that have fallen within the 'very bad' range for three consecutive years.

Vietnam scored particularly low on the right to political participation. Its score of 2.5 out of 10 indicates that many people are unable to freely take part in the conduct of public affairs.

"Human rights experts identified people who oppose or criticise the government as being particularly at risk of having their right to freedom of association violated, including their right to form or join political parties. The targeting of this group also puts them at particular risk of arbitrary arrest, forced disappearance, torture, and other violations," said Michaëlle Phoenix Yeo, HRMI East and Southeast Asia Lead.

China's scores were also among the worst in Safety from the State, with several scores falling in the 'very bad' range. Its lowest score is in the right to freedom from the death penalty.

"China's extensive use of the death penalty is veiled in secrecy. Through our research, human rights experts have identified people who are accused of crimes, terrorism, or political violence as being at particular risk. They also reported that death penalty executions are often applied after unfair trials, placing anyone accused of such offences in jeopardy," said Yeo.

Bangladesh and India's scores of 3.4 and 3.3 out of 10 respectively in the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest — the lowest among their other scores — show that many people are not safe from this violation in either country.

"Both countries are dangerous for people to be critical of the government. Our research shows that human rights advocates, journalists, and members of opposition parties are arrested for opposing their governments. Experts suggested that religious, caste, and Indigenous identities further heighten the risk of these violations in India," said HRMI's South Asia Team.

"In Bangladesh, 100 per cent of local human rights experts identified people who are members or supporters of the political opposition as being at increased risk of arbitrary arrest and extrajudicial execution," said HRMI's South Asia Team.

Arbitrary arrests are also rampant in Kazakhstan. The country's freedom from arbitrary arrest score plummeted to 2.5 out of 10, categorically placing it among some of the worst scores in the study's sample size of 30 countries.

"Local rights experts noted that people who participated in the mass oil price protests in January 2022 are among some most at risk of arbitrary arrests. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan performed worse than average on empowerment rights and safety from the state, with most of their scores falling with the 'bad' range," said Yeo.

HRMI's robust research methods track the progress of countries over time and demonstrate any improvement or deterioration in governments' respect for human rights. Because HRMI's research comes directly from local human rights experts, it is an important supplement to incomplete official reporting.

"Hard numbers are useful tools to put in the hands of human rights advocates, media, the private sector, and researchers. We have the evidence to support civil society's calls across Asia to do better in fulfilling countries' international obligations in respecting civil and political rights. The full set of HRMI's latest data is now available on the [Rights Tracker](#)," said Kehoe Rowden.

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About the Rights Tracker: The Rights Tracker is a global project to track the human rights performance of countries systematically. The 2023 data set launched today includes annual data on eight civil and political rights for up to 41 countries from the years 2017 to 2022, with Bangladesh, Thailand, and the Maldives added this year. The data also includes inaugural scores on the right to freedom of religion and belief in a pilot of seven countries across Asia. Annual data on five economic and social rights for 196 countries (depending on the right) from 2007 to 2012, based on the award-winning SERF Index methodology, is also available. Please visit rightstracker.org for the freely available data set.

About HRMI: The Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) is an independent non-profit organisation part of a global movement building a world where all people can flourish. We track the human rights progress of countries, producing robust data that anyone can use to push for improvements in how governments treat people. What gets measured gets improved: if something isn't being systematically measured, it can be more easily overlooked and undervalued. HRMI data make it easier for decision-makers to monitor their progress, and prioritise human rights. Advocacy based on sound information is one of the key drivers of change. www.humanrightsmeasurement.org

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