



Human Rights Measurement Initiative

HRMI 2023 Annual Survey & People Data Report

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2023 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 2023 survey contributed to (1) measures of overall respect for, and indicators of who experienced violations of, nine 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, Freedom of Assembly and Association, and Freedom of Religion and Belief), (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), and (3) 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 2023 survey was our sixth time distributing the HRMI annual survey to human rights experts around the globe, expanding to ever broader country scopes than previous rounds. 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, 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. In 2021, we added three more East Asian countries: Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Taiwan. In 2022, we added India and China. Finally, in 2023, we expanded to include Bangladesh, Maldives, and Thailand for a grand total of 47 countries. 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 2023 survey was available to take in fourteen languages (Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional), English, French, Hindi, Korean, Nepali, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Thai, 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. 2023 Survey Respondent Languages

Language	Percentage of Respondents
Arabic	1.3%
Bengali	0.1%
Chinese (Simplified)	5.6%
Chinese (Traditional)	6.3%
English	57.7%
French	6.9%
Hindi	0.9%
Korean	2.2%
Nepali	0.5%
Portuguese	8.3%
Russian	5.7%
Spanish	1.9%
Thai	1.4%
Vietnamese	1.1%

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, 61% of the respondents to the 2023 HRMI Expert Survey work as human rights practitioners or advocates, 17% work as lawyers, 12% work as journalists, 5% work for NHRIs, and 2% of respondents worked in government (only in countries with populations less than 120,000). Finally, 17% 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 five 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 four 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 2023 version of the Rights Tracker.

Table 2: HRMI Expert Survey Respondents by Country and Survey Year

Country	2019 Survey	2020 Survey	2021 Survey	2022 Survey	2023 Survey
Angola	13	16	15	15	17
Australia	19	16	29	14	18
Brazil	15	25	22	21	21
Congo, Dem. Rep.	6	23	21	27	34
Fiji	14	19	17	33	27
Jordan	6	12	13	10	14
Kazakhstan	18	29	26	21	21
Korea, Rep.	12	7	9	12	16
Kyrgyz Republic	20	14	12	22	18
Liberia	18	19	14	14	19
Mexico	10	14	16	11	6
Mozambique	11	19	19	15	22
Nepal	15	16	19	12	25
New Zealand	17	27	19	12	22
Saudi Arabia	10	8	10	10	9
United Kingdom	7	12	11	14	24
United States	14	14	17	8	11
Venezuela	10	13	24	9	12
Vietnam	20	14	17	26	25
American Samoa		4	6	4	2
Cook Islands		6	8	15	5
French Polynesia		4	7	5	3
Guam		9	5	2	1
Kiribati		1	6	5	3
Marshall Islands		3	8	14	2
Micronesia, Fed. Sts.		5	6	3	0
Nauru		6	5	1	0
New Caledonia		10	21	15	7
Niue		6	4	2	0
Northern Mariana Islands		5	5	1	0
Papua New Guinea		15	21	14	9
Samoa		5	7	10	11
Solomon Islands		7	7	12	8
Tonga		19	12	24	17
Tuvalu		1	5	6	1
Vanuatu		5	10	8	7
Wallis and Futuna			0	1	0
Hong Kong			16	22	14
Malaysia			17	6	15
Taiwan			52	32	30
China, People's Republic				79	53
India				39	48
Bangladesh					14
Maldives					10
Thailand					15
Total	255	428	558	626	636
Average	13.4	11.9	14.3	14.9	14.2

Table 3: HRMI CPR Model Expert Contributors by Country and Survey Year

Country	2020 Survey	2021 Survey	2022 Survey	2023 Survey
Angola	9	9	4	6
Australia	16	27	12	8
Brazil	28	19	11	7
Congo, Dem. Rep.	18	12	13	10
Fiji	18	13	24	8
Jordan	10	9	6	6
Kazakhstan	25	26	14	11
Korea, Rep.	6	8	10	9
Kyrgyz Republic	10	9	12	9
Liberia	10	8	4	6
Mexico	14	15	11	6
Mozambique	13	13	7	8
Nepal	11	13	4	10
New Zealand	29	19	11	12
Saudi Arabia	8	9	8	6
United Kingdom	14	13	12	18
United States	13	17	8	8
Venezuela	14	23	7	7
Vietnam	15	17	25	20
American Samoa		4		
Cook Islands	6	8	11	
French Polynesia		5	5	
Guam	9	5		
Kiribati		6	5	
Marshall Islands		4		
Micronesia, Fed. Sts.		4		
Nauru	6			
New Caledonia	10	16	11	
Niue	6	4		
Northern Mariana Islands	4	5		
Papua New Guinea	12	15	9	5
Samoa	5	7	6	5
Solomon Islands	5			
Tonga	12	6	17	6
Tuvalu			4	
Vanuatu		5		
Wallis and Futuna				
Hong Kong		16	20	13
Malaysia		15	5	12
Taiwan		52	31	25
China, People's Republic			69	43
India			20	22
Bangladesh				12
Maldives				8
Thailand				13
Total	356	456	416	339
Average	12.3	12.7	13	11.3

The 2023 HRMI Expert Survey

The 2023 HRMI Expert Survey was designed around collecting information in four 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 effect of the private sector on government human rights practices, 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 2023 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. Future materials and releases will discuss the details surrounding the Pacific Module and the private sector data.

Civil & Political Rights Intensity Questions

In 2023, the goal for civil and political rights was to collect information on government respect for eight different civil and political rights in 2022 and 2021. 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 forced 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), the rights to assembly (Article 21) and association (Article 22), and the right to freedom of religious belief (Articles 18 and 27). 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 2022 and 2021,
3. questions about the particular groups of people who were likely to experience rights violations in 2022.

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 2022, we ask:

In 2022, how many people did **government agents torture or ill-treat**? Government agents include soldiers, police officers, or others working for or with the government.

None

Few

Some

Many

A great many

An extremely large number

We then follow up by asking respondents to answer the same question for 2022. The people at risk questions, as described below, and a question about the respondent’s certainty in their answers on this particular right end each civil and political right’s section.

Finally, at the end the section of the survey dedicated to each group of civil and political rights, i.e. the “Safety from the State” rights (freedom from torture and ill-treatment, extrajudicial execution, arbitrary or political arrest and detention, and forced disappearance) and the “Empowerment” rights (assembly and association, opinion and expression, and political participation), we ask our respondents to score the intensity of three hypothetical countries on their respect for the rights under consideration.¹ 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 2022. For each of the civil and political rights, we ask a question at the end of that right’s section, like this one on torture and ill-treatment:

¹ Because most countries in our data have banned death penalty execution, and its use is somewhat unique compared to the other “safety from the state” rights, the death penalty section of the survey is structured slightly differently. We first ask respondents if their country uses the death penalty, allowing users from countries that have banned the death penalty to skip the remainder of death penalty questions. Second, death penalty execution has its own set of hypothetical cases.

In 2022, which groups of people, if any, were especially vulnerable to **torture and ill-treatment by government agents**? Government agents include soldiers, police officers, and other state sanctioned actors (**Select all that apply**).

In response to this question, respondents can select from 40 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 for New Zealand, are:

- No one was at particular risk
- All people were at risk
- Indigenous people
- People of particular ethnicities
- People of particular races
- People from particular castes or communities discriminated against on the basis of work or descent
- People from particular social or cultural backgrounds
- People with particular religious beliefs or practices, including religious sects
- People of particular nationalities
- People in particular geographic locations
- People affected by climate change
- Women and/or girls
- Men and/or boys
- LGBTQIA+ people
- Children
- Single parent families
- Older people
- People with disabilities
- People with specific health conditions
- Journalists
- People in other countries outside of one's selected country
- People with particular political affiliations or beliefs
- Human rights advocates
- Members of labour unions and/or workers' rights advocates
- People who protest or engage in non-violent political activity
- People suspected of political violence
- People suspected of terrorist activity
- Detainees or people accused of crimes
- Migrants and/or immigrants
- Refugees or asylum seekers
- Internally displaced people
- People without a legal identity, including stateless people
- People with low social or economic status
- People who are homeless
- Street children or homeless youth
- People with less education
- Academics
- Students
- Professionals (e.g. doctors, lawyers, teachers)
- Members of the military
- Sex workers
- Other (Please Specify)

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 2021, 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 14 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 2023 Codebook,” which is downloaded alongside the data file from the Rights Tracker.

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, below, one can view the 2022 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 78% of our United States experts as a group particularly at risk for torture by US state agents in 2022.

Which people in the United States were identified by human rights experts to be particularly at risk of having their **Right to freedom from torture and ill-treatment**  violated?

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

78% of our human rights experts identified **People of particular races** as being at risk of having this right violated.



Source: HRMI 2023 rightstracker.org

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 2022, our respondents mentioned all of the following:

- Prisoners and detainees, especially people considered to be foreign enemies of the state, Black, Latin, and Indigenous people
- Black people, especially Black men
- Immigrants detained at the southern United States border
- Immigrants, especially those detained by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, particularly women

Conclusion

This year's version HRMI Expert Survey represents a milestone – not only adding additional country coverage, but adding a new right to our yearly produced metrics. However, 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.