

Mauritania - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Mauritania, officially the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, is a country situated in the Maghreb region of western Africa. It is the 11th largest country in Africa.² The country received independence in 1960 from France. Since independence, Mauritania has lived under a number of dictatorships and coups. The last 15 years have been particularly turbulent. The current president took power via a coup in 2008, then won an election in 2009, and has been in power ever since.

Capital: Nouakchott

Official language: Arabic

Ethnic groups: 30% Bidhan; 40% Haratin (descendants of former slaves); 30% mix of various ethnic groups of West African Descent.

Government: Presidential Republic

- Head of State: Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz
- Head of Government: Yahya Ould Hademine

Death penalty: Imposed until today

Population: 3,677,293 million

Life expectancy: 63 years

Under-5 mortality: 53.3 per 1000

Adult literacy: 52.1 percent



Section 1: Overall Development

The overall development of a country – considering education, health, income, and other factors – is a strong indicator of whether average citizens have a reasonable chance to enjoy social and economic well-being and mobility.

Human Development (UNDP Human Development Index (HDI)) ³



0.506 – Low Human Development ⁴

According to the UNDP, Mauritians enjoyed a gross national income per capita of \$3,560, and could expect to have on average 8.5 years of schooling. However, other countries with comparable gross national income per capita tend to have a much higher HDI.

Section 2: Respect for the Integrity of the Person

Respect for the integrity of the individual is the most fundamental of human rights groupings. It guarantees protection of the person to ensure the right to life, and freedom from torture. It also prevents arbitrary detention, and disappearances, and ensures the right to a free and fair trial when accused.

Freedom from arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life



Respected ⁵

There were no reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

Freedom from disappearance



Respected ⁶

There are no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

Freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment



Largely disrespected ⁷

Various reports of local and international human rights organizations have condemned the Mauritanian security forces for torture. Subsequently, the government adopted a law against torture, but is not yet clear that the practice of torture has significantly abated.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Largely disrespected ⁸

Authorities do not observe the prohibitions of arbitrary arrest and detention. Degrading conditions in prisons and detention centers are prevalent. There have been efforts to improve prison conditions by further providing basic medical services to the prisoners, but conditions remain grim.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Largely disrespected⁹

The executive branch continues to exercise significant influence over the judiciary by appointing and removing judges, allowing corrupt and unskilled judges to serve.

Freedom from arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence



Respected¹⁰

The constitution prohibits such actions, and there were no reports the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

Section 3: Respect for Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are a basic category of internationally recognized human rights. They include the freedoms of expression, assembly, association, education, and religion. These are inalienable rights which should not be breached by government, and should ensure the rights of all, including women and minority groups.

Freedom of speech and press (*Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index*)¹¹



Score: 25.27, Rank: 48 / 181 – Partially Free, diverse and independent¹²

In recent years, media freedom has progressed in Mauritania and there has been a significant decrease in violence and intimidation against journalists. Fear of reprisals makes most journalists censor themselves when they cover such subjects as corruption, the military, Islam or slavery.

Freedom from academic censorship



Respected¹³

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association



Respected¹⁴

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly. The law provides for freedom of association, and the government generally respected this right. Police occasionally took action against what it called unauthorized events.

Freedom of religion



Partially respected¹⁵

Some journalists are imprisoned for criticizing the prophet Mohammad or the establishment of the country's religious establishment.

Freedom of movement



Partially respected¹⁶

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration and repatriation. The government generally respected these rights, but there are exceptions.

Protection of refugees and stateless persons



Respected¹⁷

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection for refugees. The law allows children born outside the country to Mauritanian mothers and foreign men to obtain Mauritanian nationality at age 17.

Overall protection of civil liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)^{18 19}



5.5/ 7 – Not free²⁰

Even though the government adopted news laws that address abuses such as slavery and torture, Mauritanian authorities continue to jail antislavery activists and harass journalist who report on politically sensitive topics.

Section 4: Respect for Political Rights

Political rights ensure all members of society are able to influence the political process. The assessment of political rights includes an examination of the electoral process and the selection of representatives, the political empowerment of the general public, the tolerance of dissent, the accountability of government, etc.

Overall protection of political rights (*FreedomHouse Political Rights Index*)²¹



5.5/ 7 – Not free²²

Political parties are free to operate, but Mauritania's party system is poorly developed, and clan and ethnic loyalties, as well as the military, strongly influence the country's politics. The system is dominated by the president.

Section 5: Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

The civil, political, economic and social rights exercised within a country are often modulated by the degree of transparency and freedom from corruption. Various international metrics assess transparency and corruption, including the OECD anti-bribery convention, the Bribe Payers Index, and the Open Budget Index.

Transparency and freedom from corruption (*Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index*)²³



Score: 31%, Rank: 112 /168 – Highly corrupt²⁴

In Mauritania, corruption and lack of fiscal transparency are serious problems, especially in bank loans, fishing licenses, land distribution, government contracts and tax payments.

Section 6: Governmental Response to Criticism

This section deals specifically with the response heads of state have to civil society or international human rights reports.

Governmental attitudes vis-à-vis independent investigations of alleged human rights violations



Respected²⁵

Human rights groups generally operate without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. The government is cooperative to such views, and meets with human rights organizations (Amnesty International, UN High Commissioner for HR etc.).

Section 7: Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Legal and social discriminatory practices related to sex, race, creed or sexual orientation, are violations of human rights. Countries with strong civil liberty traditions should have a fair legal system that ensures the rule of law, allows free economic activity, and ensures equality of opportunity for all.

Endangered Minorities (*Peoples Under Threat – Minority Rights Group International*)²⁶



No threat listed – Limited dangers to minorities²⁷

According to Minorities Rights Group International, Mauritania does not have any minorities which face an immediate threat of violence.

Rights of women (*World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index*)²⁸



Score: 62.4%, Rank: 129 / 144 – Very unequal rights²⁹

Women in Mauritania face widespread discrimination. Divorced women can lose custody over their child if they remarry. The law considers women to be minors and not capable to lead a life without parental or spousal consent.

Rights of Children (*KidsRights Index Overall Score*)³⁰



Score: 62.8%, Rank: 120 / 163 – Somewhat protected³¹

By law, a person derives citizenship from one's father and also derives citizenship from one's mother (two conditions are applicable prior to that).

Rights of persons with disabilities



Partially respected³²

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with physical, sensory, intellectual and mental disabilities in employment, education, air travel and other transportation, access to health care and the provision of other services. However the government did not effectively enforce the law.

Rights of national/racial/ethnic minorities (e.g. discrimination, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism etc.)



Largely disrespected³³

Some ethnic groups faced governmental discrimination. Issuance of national identification cards, which are required for voting, to Western Saharans of Beydane ethnicity protected the interests of dominant Beydane minority group at the expense of other groups.

Freedom from abuse and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity



Largely disrespected^{34 35}

No laws protect LGBTI persons from discrimination. The LGBTI community was rarely identified or discussed, which observers attributed to the severity of the stigma and legal penalties attached to such labels.

Section 7: Workers' Rights

Workers' rights are a group of legal rights relating to labour relations between workers and their employers. At their core are things like the ability to negotiate pay, benefits, terms of employment, and safe working conditions. These rights often devolve from the right to unionize and access to collective bargaining.

Rights to freedom of association and to collective bargaining



Respected³⁶

The law allows all workers, except members of police, armed forces, and foreign and migrant workers, to form and join independent unions of their choice at the local and national levels. It also provides for the right to conduct legal strikes and to bargain collectively.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Largely disrespected³⁷

The law prohibits all forms of forced and compulsory labour. It also criminalizes the practice of slavery and imposes penalties both on government officials and the beneficiaries of forced labour. However, slavery remains a severe problem.

Freedom from forced labour for children, and a minimum age of employment



Largely disrespected³⁸

Minimum age of employment and protection of children from child labour is generally respected. However, according to UNICEF report, 21.5% of children ages five to 14 were engaged in labour.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Respected³⁹

There is a minimum wage for workers and a maximum numbers of hour per week. Overtime is paid accordingly. The law provides that all employees be given at least 24-hour period of rest per week.

Right to employment



30.78% - Extreme unemployment⁴⁰

Very high unemployment rate. Employment opportunities are scarce.

¹ A hybrid human rights and freedoms model, leveraging both legal principles and intuitive classifications, has been used for this human rights assessment. The CJPME Foundation has sought to integrate as many independent sources and metrics into its summary analysis as possible. In many cases, for qualitative material pertaining to the respect for a particular right in a country, the CJPME Foundation has drawn on material from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department country reports. Human Rights Watch (HRW) publishes a World Report which assesses the respect for human rights in each country. HRW uses a methodology of local reporting and interviewing, combined with research and analysis to assess the level of respect of human rights. The U.S State Department keeps an updated publication on the state of human rights internationally. Their system of research and accountability draws from the research of official US State Department officials, as well as local civil-society and international human rights organizations.

² Commonly-known information on the country is drawn from various Internet sources, including Google country pages, and Amnesty International. For death penalty see: "Death sentences and executions in 2013." Amnesty International. March 24, 2014. Accessed May 15, 2015. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act50/001/2014/en/>.

³ The UN Development Program HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone. The HDI can also be used to question national policy choices, asking how two countries with the same level of GNI per capita can end up with different human development outcomes. These contrasts can stimulate debate about government policy priorities. The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. Accessed Jan. 8, 2017 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>

⁴ "Table 1: Human Development Index and its components, Mauritania" UNDP, based on 2014 or the most recent year available. Accessed Jan. 8, 2017. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

⁵ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015 Mauritania." U.S Department of State. 2015. Accessed January 2017. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State. For purposes of the present analysis, a "disappearance" is different than simple arbitrary detention because a "disappearance" is considered permanent.

⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁹ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁰ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹¹ The Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders ranks the level of freedom of information in 180 countries. This is determined through the polling of local NGOs and freedom of expression civil society organizations across the globe. This index is also determined by local correspondents and follow-up work done on reports of infringement to press freedom where ever it takes place. Their methodology looks at six different indicators: 1) Media pluralism, 2) Media independence, 3) Media atmosphere and self-censorship, 4) the Law around media, 5) Media transparency, and 6) Media infrastructure. The score from these six indicators is combined with a rating for the violence against journalists in the country to create an overall score. The CJPME Foundation classifies the Press Freedom Index as follows: 0 – 14.99 (16 countries), Largely free, diverse and independent; 15 – 24.99 (37 countries), Mostly free, diverse and independent; 25 – 29.99 (31 countries), Partially free, diverse and independent; 30 – 39.99 (39 countries), Partially controlled, limited or intimidated; 40 & higher (57 countries), Highly controlled, limited or intimidated.

¹² "World Press Freedom Index." Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2015. Accessed January, 2017. <http://rsf.org/index2015/en-index2015.php>.

¹³ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015 Mauritania." U.S Department of State. 2015. Accessed January, 2017. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

¹⁴ "Mauritania." U.S Department of State. 2015. Accessed January, 2017. <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>

¹⁵ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁸ Freedom House is an internationally recognized NGO based in the U.S which documents and rates the quality of democratic practice in a given country. Freedom House splits its grading system between the two areas of civil and political rights in a country. On each scale, the Freedom House rating is 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free).

¹⁹ Freedom House's Civil Liberties index measures things such as a) freedom of expression and belief, b) associational and organizational rights, c) the rule of law, and d) personal autonomy and individual rights. Freedom House rates countries as 1-2.5 (free), 3-5.5 (partly free) and 6-7 (not free). Accessed January 2017 <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/mauritania>

²⁰ "Mauritania." Freedom in the World 2014: Mauritania. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/Mauritania-0#.VIIHLzGG9e8>.

²¹ See footnote about the Freedom House organization above. The Freedom House Political Rights assessment looks at a) the electoral process, b) political pluralism and participation, and c) the functioning of government. Accessed Dec. 9, 2014 <https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>

²² "Mauritania." Freedom in the World 2014: Mauritania. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/Mauritania-0#.VIIHLzGG9e8>.

²³ Transparency International (TI) publishes a "Corruption Perceptions Index" annually, which is based on independent research and polling. The main categories of corruption are broken down within the index to provide particulars on issues including things such as perceptions of corruption, control of corruption, and financial secrecy. A country receives a score on 100; the higher the score, the less corrupt the society. The CJPME foundation has classified them into categories as follows: 80-100 (11 countries): Very limited corruption; 60-79 (27 countries): Limited corruption; 40-59 (41 countries): Some corruption; 20-39 (80 countries): Highly corrupt; 0-19 (15 countries): Extremely corrupt

²⁴ "Mauritania." Corruption by Country. January, 2015. Accessed January, 2017. <http://www.transparency.org/country/MRT#>.

²⁵ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015 Mauritania." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2017. Accessed January, 2017. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

²⁶ The Peoples under Threat assessment by Minority Rights Group International highlights countries most at risk of genocide and mass killing. The ranking is created by compiling data on the known antecedents to genocide or mass political killing. Accessed Jan. 8, 2017 <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.

²⁷ "Mauritania." Peoples under Threat, Minority Rights Group International. 2015, or most recent data. Accessed Jan. 8, 2017. <http://peoplesunderthreat.org/>.

²⁸ This metric is based on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. 0.00 denotes inequality between the sexes, and 1.00 denotes fully equality between the sexes. This index looks at four subdomains: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. The CJPME Foundation classed the percentages as follows: 80-100% (5 countries): Almost equal rights; 70-79% (60 countries): Somewhat unequal rights; 0-69% (77 countries): Very unequal rights

²⁹ "Mauritania." World Economic Forum. January 1, 2016. Accessed January, 2017. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/economies/#economy=MRT>

³⁰ This metric is based on the KidsRights Index Overall Score. This index has five subdomains: life expectancy and maternal mortality; health; education; protection; and child rights environment. Each country is given a percentage score; the higher the percentage, the better the protections. KidsRights classes the countries according to these percentages, and the CJPME Foundation has given each class a term as follows: 70-100% (77 countries): Protected; 60-70% (29 countries): Somewhat protected; 45-50% (33 countries): Slightly vulnerable; 30-45% (12 countries): Highly vulnerable; Lower than 30% (11 countries): Extremely vulnerable

³¹ "The KidsRights Index: Overall Ranking." The KidsRights Index. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>

³² "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013 Mauritania." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed November 23, 2014. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

³³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁴ "ILGA World Map." International Lesbian Gay and Intersex Association. January 1, 2014. Accessed January, 2017. <http://ilga.org/>. See also Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁵ ILGA, the International, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, was founded in 1978 on the principle of highlighting state sponsored homophobia where it exists around the world. ILGA annually publishes a map with an accompanying report on sexual and gender based harassment, which focuses on both the legal and non-legal acts of state sponsored discrimination.

³⁶ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015 Mauritania." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2013. Accessed January, 2017. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

³⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁹ Ibid. U.S Department of State. See also a well-done Wikipedia comparison of wage, income and work week metrics across countries at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_minimum_wages_by_country

⁴⁰ "Global Employment Trends." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2013. Accessed December 7, 2014. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang--en/index.htm.