

Paraguay - Human Rights Scorecard¹

Paraguay is a landlocked country which borders Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia in South America. Spanish conquistadores arrived in 1524, and Paraguay gained independence in the early 19th century. After that, Paraguay was ruled by a series of authoritarian governments and military dictatorships until its last dictator was toppled in 1989, and a “democratic era” began. Although general elections are considered to be free and fair, there is widespread corruption in the government. Still, Paraguayans are considered to be some of the happiest and most easy-going people in the world.

Official language: Spanish; Guaraní

Ethnic groups: 95% Mestizo; 5% other

Government: Unitary dominant-party presidential republic

- President: Mario Abdo Benítez

- Vice President: Hugo Velázquez

Death penalty: Abolitionist for all crimes

Population: 7.15 million

Life expectancy: 74.2 years

Under-5 mortality: 20.2 per 1000

Adult literacy: 94.65 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))²



0.724 – High Human Development³

According to the UNDP, Paraguay has a gross national income per capita of \$11,720 and could expect to have on average 12.7 years of schooling. However, other countries with comparable gross national income per capita tend to have a 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



Respected⁴

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

Freedom from disappearance



Respected⁵

There have been no reports of disappearances in Paraguay.

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



Partially respected⁶

The law prohibits such practices and the government generally respects the law, but there were some reports that some government agents used torture. There are pending investigations into the reports.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Partially respected⁷

Arbitrary detentions and arrests are prohibited by law, and each person is allowed to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest in court. However, the government did not always respect the law.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Largely disrespected⁸

The constitution provides for an independent judicial system, but courts are often externally influenced and subject to corruption. The selection of judges is very politicized.

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



Respected⁹

The constitution prohibits such practices, and the government generally respects 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*)¹⁰



Score: 32.40, Rank: 99 / 180 – Partially controlled, limited or intimidated¹¹

Journalists and radio stations are frequently harassed and subjected to threats by criminal organizations or officials. Journalists are often violently harassed at demonstrations.

Freedom from academic censorship



Respected¹²

There have been no reports of government restrictions on academic freedom.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and association



Respected¹³

The law protects the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government continues to respect such rights.

Freedom of religion



Partially respected¹⁴

The constitution provides for freedom of religious practice and belief and prohibits religious discrimination. However, the government gives the Catholic church advantage over other religious groups and disproportionately subsidizes teacher salaries at Catholic schools.

Freedom of movement



Respected¹⁵

The law protects the freedom of movement, international travel and emigration, and the government respects these freedoms.

Protection of refugees and stateless persons



Respected¹⁶

The government has a system for providing protection for refugees. It also provides other migration options for those who have been refused asylum.

Overall protection of civil liberties (*FreedomHouse Civil Liberties Index*)^{17 18}



37/60 – Partly free¹⁹

Freedom of the press is not upheld. Individuals can engage in free and open discussion and can demonstrate, although demonstrations are sometimes repressed. The judiciary is subject to corruption and due processes or poorly upheld. Paraguay has a strong culture of NGOs.

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*)²⁰



28/40 – Partly free²¹

The president is elected for a five-year term, but there are reports of vote buying and limitations on indigenous voting. Different parties are allowed to participate. Corruption is a serious problem, and anticorruption laws are not efficiently implemented.

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*)²²



Score: 28%, Rank: 137/180 – Highly corrupt²³

Although the law penalizes corruption by officials, the government does not uphold the law effectively. Government officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with no accountability. There is a major lack of transparency in many levels of government.

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



Partially respected²⁴

Several local and international human rights groups operate without restriction from the government. However, government officials were not always responsive and cooperative. There are reports that anticorruption protesters were attacked.

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*)²⁵



Listed – Dangers faced by minorities²⁶

Indigenous people face discrimination and lack of access to employment, healthcare, education, and shelter. Indigenous workers earn lower wages, work longer hours, and had no retirement benefits.

Rights of women (*World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index*)²⁷



Score: 68.3%, Rank: 100/153 – Very unequal rights

There is no comprehensive law against gender discrimination. Femicide is a serious and widespread problem. Sexual harassment is punished by two years in prison or a fine, so it remains a widespread issue, especially in the workplace.

Rights of Children (*KidsRights Index Overall Score*)²⁸



Score: 63.9%, Rank: 116/165 – Somewhat protected²⁹

Violence against children is widespread. Last year, a man who sexually abused his seven-year-old daughter was released after 8 months. There have been no reports of forced marriage.

Rights of persons with disabilities



Largely disrespected³⁰

Discrimination based on disability is prohibited by law. However, persons with disabilities often face discrimination and lack of access to employment and education. More than 50% of children with disabilities did not attend school due to lack of public transportation.

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



Largely disrespected³¹

Ethnic minorities face discrimination in finding employment, receiving equal pay, owning businesses, and accessing housing and education. There are no ethnic minorities in congress, cabinet, or Supreme Court.

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



Largely disrespected^{32 33}

There are no laws that prohibit discrimination against LGBTI persons. There have been many reports of police harassment and discrimination against LGBTI persons.

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



Partially respected³⁴

The law protects most workers' rights to join unions, bargain collectively, and strike. However, the government does not efficiently penalize discrimination against unions. The government does not always protect unions' freedom of association and right to bargain collectively.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Largely disrespected³⁵

The law prohibits any form of forced or compulsory labor, but the government does not enforce the law effectively. Forced child labor and trafficking is a serious and widespread problem in Paraguay.

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



Largely disrespected³⁶

The law prohibits the worst forms of child labor, but the government does not effectively enforce laws that protect children from workplace exploitation. Many children are victims of forced labor and trafficking. Malnourished and abused children work in unhealthy conditions.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Largely disrespected³⁷

Although there is a national minimum wage above the poverty income level, the government does not effectively enforce labor laws. Enforcement of appropriate health and safety standards is inadequate. There are many reports of violations of labor laws by employers.

Right to employment



6.6% - Reasonable unemployment³⁸

The unemployment rate in Paraguay is reasonably low. Unemployment was at 5.4% among men and 8.3% among women.

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 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>

³ "Table 1: Human Development Index and its components, Paraguay" UNDP, based on 2014 or the most recent year available. Accessed April 15, 2020. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

⁴ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Paraguay." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 15, 2020. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁸ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

⁹ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ “World Press Freedom Index.” Reporters Without Borders: For Freedom of Information. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 15, 2020. <http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>.

¹² “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Paraguay.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 15, 2020. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

¹³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁴ “Paraguay.” International Religious Freedom Report for 2019. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 15, 2020.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>.

¹⁵ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Paraguay.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 15, 2020.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

¹⁶ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Paraguay.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 15, 2020.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

¹⁷ 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).

¹⁸ 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 Dec. 9, 2014

<https://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2014/methodology#.VldwWzHF98F>

¹⁹ “Paraguay.” Freedom in the World 2014: Paraguay. January 1, 2014. Accessed April 15, 2020. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/bahrain-0#.VIIHLzGG9e8>.

²⁰ 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>

²¹ “Paraguay.” Freedom in the World 2014: Paraguay. January 1, 2014. Accessed April 15, 2020. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/bahrain-0#.VIIHLzGG9e8>.

²² 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

²³ “Paraguay.” Corruption by Country. January 1, 2014. Accessed April 15, 2020. <http://www.transparency.org/country#BHR>.

²⁴ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Paraguay.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 15, 2020.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

²⁵ 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/>.

²⁶ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Paraguay.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 15, 2020.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

²⁷ 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

²⁸ 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

²⁹ “The KidsRights Index: Overall Ranking.” The KidsRights Index. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>

³⁰ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Paraguay.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 15, 2020.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

³¹ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³² “ILGA World Map.” International Lesbian Gay and Intersex Association. January 1, 2014. Accessed April 15, 2020. <http://ilga.org/>. See also Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³³ 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.

³⁴ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Paraguay." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 15, 2020.

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/#wrapper>.

³⁵ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁷ 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

³⁸ "Global Employment Trends." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2013. Accessed April 15, 2020. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang--en/index.htm.