

Papua New Guinea - Human Rights Scorecard ¹

Papua New Guinea, located in Oceania, occupies half the island of New Guinea and islands in Melanesia. It gained independence in 1975 after having been ruled by Australia for 60 years, and by other external powers for the years before. It became a member of the Commonwealth with Elizabeth II as its queen. 40% of its population lives a self-sustainable lifestyle with no access to global capital and most of its population lives in rural areas. Violence by security officials remains a major problem in Papua New Guinea.

Official language: English; Hiri Motu; PNG Sign Language; Tok Pisin

Ethnic groups: Papuan

Government: Unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy

- Monarch: Elizabeth II
- Prime Minister: James Marape
- Governor-General: Bob Dadae

Death penalty: Abolitionist in practice

Population: 8.6 million

Life expectancy: 65.54 years

Under-5 mortality: 47.8 per 1000

Adult literacy: 61.6 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



0.543 – Low Human Development ³

According to the UNDP, Papua New Guinea has a gross national income per capita of \$3,686 and could expect to have on average 10 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



Largely Disrespected ⁴

There have been several reports that government agents have committed unlawful killings. There is widespread fear of police and military violence among civilians.

Freedom from disappearance



Respected ⁵

There have been no reports of disappearances in Papua New Guinea.

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



Largely Disrespected ⁶

Although such practices are prohibited by law, the police frequently abuse citizens, particularly young detainees. For example, one teenager was fatally beat by eight policemen.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Largely Disrespected ⁷

The law prohibits such practices, but the police frequently detains citizens arbitrarily. In many cases, the police detain then steal from citizens. Citizens have the right to challenge their arrest, but the government does not always respect that right.

Freedom from denial of fair public trial



Respected⁸

The law provides for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respects that law.

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



Largely disrespected⁹

The constitution prohibits such practices, but there were several instances of violent police raids, searched, and forced evictions. There were also reports of property destruction. Police officers have also threatened or harmed family members of offenders.

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: 24.70, Rank: 38 / 180 – Mostly free, diverse and independent¹¹

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and the government respects these rights. Journalists usually self-censor when covering controversial political events.

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



Respected¹⁴

The constitution provides for freedom of religious practice and belief, and the government generally respects these freedoms. 98% of the population identifies as Christian.

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



Largely disrespected¹⁶

The government has a system for providing protection for refugees. However, refugees and asylum seekers have been subjected to abuse by both government agents and locals.

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



39/60 – Partly free¹⁹

Freedom of the press is respected. The judiciary is generally independent, but some governments have pressured the court system. Due process is not properly upheld. The constitution guarantees equality, but same-sex sexual relations are illegal.

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



23/40 – Partly free²¹

The prime minister is elected in parliament. The largest political party in a general election nominates the prime minister. There is a fair electoral process. However, some local leaders and politicians control balloting and deny some citizens the right to vote. Corruption is pervasive.

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 in this area. 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. Civil society is weak in Papua New Guinea.

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

According to Minorities Rights Group International, inter-tribal attacks and violence during elections are persisting issues.

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



Score: 63.5%, Rank: 127/153 – Very unequal rights²⁸

Women have the right to participate politically, but this right is limited by the patriarchal culture embedded in society. Gender-based violence is a widespread problem. One man beat his wife to death and posted bail pending a court hearing.

Rights of Children (*KidsRights Index Overall Score*)²⁹



Score: 32.6%, Rank: 159/165 – Highly vulnerable³⁰

Education is free and compulsory through 10th grade. According to Save the Children, 75% of children in Papua New Guinea faces physical or emotional violence, and 50% faced sexual or family violence at home.

Rights of persons with disabilities



Largely disrespected³¹

Discrimination based on disability is prohibited by law. However, persons with disabilities often face discrimination and lack of access to employment and education. The law does not provide for equal access for persons with disabilities.

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



Respected³²

There were reports of national, racial, or ethnic discrimination in Papua New Guinea.

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



Largely disrespected^{33 34}

Same-sex sexual relations between males are illegal and punishable by up to 14 years of imprisonment. LGBTI persons are vulnerable to social stigmatization.

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 respected³⁵

The law protects most workers' rights to join unions, bargain collectively, and strike. However, governments can and do intervene in labor disputes, often forcing arbitration before workers could strike. The government does not effectively enforce labor law.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Partially respected³⁶

The law prohibits any form of forced or compulsory labor, but the government does not enforce the law effectively. There were reports that locals and children were subjected to forced labor.

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



Largely disrespected³⁷

The law does not prohibit the worst forms of child labor. There is high prevalence of child labor in hazardous occupations.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Largely disrespected³⁸

Although there is a national minimum wage above the poverty income level, the government does not effectively enforce labor laws. There are many violations of wage, overtime, and occupational health and safety laws and regulations.

Right to employment



2.0% - Reasonable unemployment³⁹

The unemployment rate in Papua New Guinea is low. Unemployment was at 2.7% among men and 1.3% 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, Papua New Guinea" UNDP, based on 2014 or the most recent year available. Accessed April 8, 2020. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

⁴ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Papua New Guinea." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 8, 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 8, 2020. <http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>.

¹² “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Papua New Guinea.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 8, 2020.

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

¹³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁴ “Papua New Guinea.” International Religious Freedom Report for 2019. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 8, 2020.

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

¹⁵ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Papua New Guinea.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 8, 2020.

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

¹⁶ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Papua New Guinea.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 8, 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 “Papua New Guinea.” Freedom in the World 2014: Papua New Guinea. January 1, 2014. Accessed April 8, 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 “Papua New Guinea.” Freedom in the World 2014: Papua New Guinea. January 1, 2014. Accessed April 8, 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 “Papua New Guinea.” Corruption by Country. January 1, 2014. Accessed April 8, 2020. <http://www.transparency.org/country#BHR>.

²⁴ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Papua New Guinea.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 8, 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 Papua New Guinea.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 8, 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 “Bahrain.” World Economic Forum. January 1, 2014. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/economies/#economy=BHR>.

²⁹ 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

³⁰ “The KidsRights Index: Overall Ranking.” The KidsRights Index. Accessed November 25, 2014. <http://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>

³¹ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Papua New Guinea.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 8, 2020.

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

³² Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³³ “ILGA World Map.” International Lesbian Gay and Intersex Association. January 1, 2014. Accessed April 8, 2020. <http://ilga.org/>. See also Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁴ 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.

³⁵ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Papua New Guinea." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed April 8, 2020.

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

³⁶ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁷ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

³⁸ 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

³⁹ "Global Employment Trends." International Labour Organization. January 1, 2013. Accessed April 8, 2020. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang-en/index.htm.