

Trinidad and Tobago - Human Rights Scorecard¹

Trinidad and Tobago is an island country in the Caribbean. It consists of the island of Trinidad, the island of Tobago, and other smaller islands. It was colonised by the Spanish, British, French, Dutch and Courlander empires until it gained independence from the British in 1962. Its high-income economy relies mostly on oil and natural gas. It has the third-highest GDP per capita in the Americas, after the US and Canada. Trinidad and Tobago has a mandatory death sentence for murder.

Official language: English

Ethnic groups: 37.6% Indo-Trinidadian and Tobagonian; 36.3% Afro-Trinidadians and Tobagonians; 24.4% Mixed; 7.66% Dougla; 0.65% White Trinidadian and Tobagonian

Government: Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic

- President: Paula-Mae Weekes

- Prime Minister: Keith Rowley

Death penalty: Retentionist

Population: 1.36 million

Life expectancy: 73 years

Under-5 mortality: 18.3 per 1000

Adult literacy: 98.7 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



0.799 – High Human Development³

According to the UNDP, Trinidad and Tobago has a gross national income per capita of \$28,497 and could expect to have on average 13 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



Respected⁴

There have been no reports that the government or government agents have committed arbitrary and unlawful killings.

Freedom from disappearance



Respected⁵

There have been no reports of disappearances in Trinidad and Tobago.

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



Partially respected⁶

Although such practices are prohibited by law, there have been some reports that police officers or prison guards used excessive force.

Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention



Respected⁷

The law prohibits such practices, and the government has generally observed the law.

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



Respected⁹

The law prohibits such practices, and there have been no reports that the government failed to uphold the law.

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: 24.74, Rank: 39 / 180 – Mostly free, diverse and independent¹¹

The constitution provides for freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and the government respects these rights. The government promotes an independent press.

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 outlaws religious discrimination. The government funds and Inter-Religious Organization which represents different religions for the promotion of religious tolerance.

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

Trinidad and Tobago does not have a system in place for protecting refugees. The island does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status.

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



49/60 – Free¹⁹

Freedom of the press is upheld by the government. Individuals are free to express their opinions, assemble, and form labor unions. Although there is an independent judiciary, it is sometimes subject to political corruption.

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



33/40 – Free²¹

The president is elected by the parliament, and electoral laws are fair. There are several political parties that exist, and all ethnic groups have full political and participation rights. However, women's political participation remains low.

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: 40%, Rank: 85/180 – Some corruption²³

Although the law penalizes corruption by officials, the government does not implement the law effectively in this area. There have been reports of corruption by officials in several 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



Respected²⁴

Several local and international human rights groups operate without restriction from the government. The government was responsive to the findings and reports.

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



No threat listed – Limited danger to minorities²⁶

According to Minorities Rights Group International, no minorities under threat.

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



Score: 75.6%, Rank: 24/153 – Somewhat unequal rights²⁸

Women in Trinidad and Tobago have political rights that are protected and upheld by the government. Although rape is illegal. It remains a serious problem. The law does not protect against sexual harassment.

Rights of Children (KidsRights Index Overall Score)²⁹



Score: 73%, Rank: 90/165 – Somewhat protected³⁰

The law protects children against abuse, but child abuse remains a problem in many homes. Education is free and compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 16. The minimum age of employment is 16.

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 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 Trinidad and Tobago.

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



Largely disrespected^{33 34}

Same-sex conduct is a criminal act under the law, but the government does not enforce this law. The law also does not protect LGBTI persons from discrimination, and there were many reports of 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 respected³⁵

The law protects most workers' rights to join unions, bargain collectively, and strike. However, unions require the support of an absolute majority of workers in order to have bargaining rights. This greatly limits the right to collective bargaining.

Freedom from forced or compulsory labour



Respected³⁶

The law prohibits any form of forced or compulsory labor, and the government enforces it effectively.

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



Respected³⁷

By law, the minimum age for employment is 16. The government is usually effective in enforcing child labor laws.

Right to acceptable conditions of work



Partially respected³⁸

There is a national minimum wage that is higher than the poverty income level. The law does not prohibit excessive or compulsory overtime, and there have been many reports of labor law violations. Although minimum wage is enforced, many other labor laws are not properly enforced.

Right to employment



3.2% - Reasonable unemployment³⁹

The unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago is low. Both men and women share the same unemployment rate at 3.2%.

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, Trinidad and Tobago" UNDP, based on 2014 or the most recent year available. Accessed March 30, 2020. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>.

⁴ "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Trinidad and Tobago." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed March 30, 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 March 30, 2020. <http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>.

¹² “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Trinidad and Tobago.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed March 30, 2020.

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

¹³ Ibid. U.S Department of State.

¹⁴ “Trinidad and Tobago.” International Religious Freedom Report for 2019. January 1, 2019. Accessed March 30, 2020.

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

¹⁵ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Trinidad and Tobago.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed March 30, 2020.

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

¹⁶ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Trinidad and Tobago.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed March 30, 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 “Trinidad and Tobago.” Freedom in the World 2014: Trinidad and Tobago. January 1, 2014. Accessed March 30, 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 “Trinidad and Tobago.” Freedom in the World 2014: Trinidad and Tobago. January 1, 2014. Accessed March 30, 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 “Trinidad and Tobago.” Corruption by Country. January 1, 2014. Accessed March 30, 2020. <http://www.transparency.org/country#BHR>.

²⁴ “Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 Trinidad and Tobago.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed March 30, 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 Trinidad and Tobago.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed March 30, 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 Trinidad and Tobago.” U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed March 30, 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 March 30, 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 Trinidad and Tobago." U.S Department of State. January 1, 2019. Accessed March 30, 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 March 30, 2020. http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/global-employment-trends/2014/WCMS_233936/lang-en/index.htm.