



Freedom in the World 2014 - Mauritius

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2014 Scores

Status: Free

Freedom Rating (1 = best, 7 = worst): 1.5

Civil Liberties (1 = best, 7 = worst): 2

Political Rights (1 = best, 7 = worst): 1

OVERVIEW

Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam's government faced opposition to the implementation of new biometric identity cards. The two main opposition parties, the Militant Socialist Movement (MSM) and the Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM), highlighted privacy and security concerns, as well as soaring costs.

In April 2013 the Supreme Court rejected MSM leader Pravind Jugnauth's appeal to remove conflict of interest charges. The case, related to an inflated government bid on a hospital owned by Jugnauth's brother-in-law while Jugnauth was finance minister in 2010, remained pending at year's end.

POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

Political Rights: 38 / 40

A. Electoral Process: 12 / 12

The president, whose role is largely ceremonial, is elected by the unicameral National Assembly. Executive power resides with the prime minister, who is appointed by the president from the party or coalition with the most seats in the legislature. Of the National Assembly's 69 members, 62 are

directly elected and 7 are appointed from among unsuccessful candidates who gained the largest numbers of votes. All members and the president serve five-year terms. Decentralized structures govern the country's small island dependencies. The largest of these, Rodrigues Island, has its own government and local councils, and two seats in the National Assembly.

In the 2010 legislative elections, Ramgoolam's Alliance of the Future – which included his Mauritian Labour Party (MLP), the MSM, and the Mauritian Social Democratic Party (PMSD) – captured 45 seats. Former prime minister Paul Bérenger's Alliance of the Heart – a coalition of the MMM, the National Union, and the Mauritian Social Democratic Movement – took 20. Three small parties hold the remaining 4 seats. Ramgoolam retained the premiership. In 2012, President Anerood Jugnauth resigned and the MSM formed a new coalition with the MMM, leaving the MLP and the PMSD with a 5-seat majority.

In 2012, the United Nations Human Rights Commission ruled that a law requiring potential candidates to declare their ethnic and religious status constitutes a human rights violation. While Prime Minister Ramgoolam said he supported electoral reforms, no changes were enacted by year's end.

B. Political Pluralism and Participation: 15 / 16

Political parties operate freely and the two highest political positions, the president and prime minister, have rotated between the three largest parties – the MLP, the MSM, and the MMM. All three parties champion democratic socialist doctrine. Smaller parties are often included in governing coalitions.

C. Functioning of Government: 11 / 12

The country's generally positive reputation for transparency and accountability has been damaged by the ongoing scandal surrounding the 2010 government purchase of a private hospital, as well as MSM allegations that the ruling MLP is using the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) as a political tool. In August 2013, the ICAC launched an investigation into corruption allegations against Minister of Higher Education Rajesh Jeetah involving conflicts of interest in the operation of a local university branch. Mauritius was ranked 52 out of 177 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index, and the country has been ranked first in the Ibrahim Index of African Governance since its inception in 2007.

Civil Liberties: 52 / 60

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: 15 / 16

The constitution guarantees freedom of expression. Several private daily and weekly publications criticize both the ruling and opposition parties, but the state-owned Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation's radio and television services generally reflect government viewpoints. A small number of private radio stations compete with the state-run media. In 2012, the editor of the *Sunday Times*, Imran Hosany, was arrested and charged with outraging public and religious morality after publishing photographs of the dead body of a murdered tourist; in May 2013, Hosany was convicted and fined Rs 50,000 (\$1,600). The internet is available and unrestricted by the government.

Religious and academic freedoms are respected.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights: 12 / 12

Freedoms of assembly and association are honored, though police have occasionally used excessive force in response to riots. There are more than 300 unions in Mauritius. However, tens of thousands of foreign workers employed in export processing zones suffer from poor living and working conditions, and their employers are reportedly hostile to unions. In September 2013, striking Bangladeshi textile workers demanding better working conditions clashed with riot police. Subsequently, the minister of labor issued a moratorium on visas for foreign construction workers.

F. Rule of Law: 13 / 16

The generally independent judiciary, headed by the Supreme Court, administers a legal system that combines French and British traditions and is considered transparent and nondiscriminatory. Mauritius has maintained the right of appeal to the Privy Council in London. Civil rights are largely respected, though individual cases of police brutality have been reported. Various ethnic cultures and traditions coexist peacefully, and constitutional prohibitions against discrimination are generally upheld. However, Mauritian Creoles – descendants of African slaves who comprise about a third of the population – are culturally and economically marginalized. Tensions between the Hindu majority and Muslim minority persist. In a 2011 report, the Truth and Justice Commission (TJC) – established to examine the country's history of slavery and indentured labor – recommended measures to encourage national reconciliation, such as promoting increased economic and political participation by non-Hindu Mauritians. Although in 2012 the chair of the ministerial committee of the TJC expressed disappointment that only 3 of the 19 measures recommended for immediate implementation had been adopted, the prime minister claimed that all 19 measures were being implemented as of September 2013.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: 12 / 16

Women comprise about 36 percent of the labor force, but they receive less compensation than men for similar work. Women hold only 13 seats in the National Assembly and 2 cabinet posts. A 2012 gender quota law mandates that at least one-third of candidates in local elections be women, and women's representation at the local government level is 26 percent. However, Prime Minister Ramgoolam's plan to extend the quota to the national parliament for the 2015 elections has yet to be approved. Rape and domestic violence remain major concerns.

"Sodomy" is officially illegal, but the 2008 Equal Opportunities Act prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. Faced with a complaint to the Equal Opportunities Commission, in October 2013 the Ministry of Health removed a controversial measure requiring blood donors to report their sexual orientation. Attacks on the elderly are a growing problem: the Elderly Persons Protection Unit reported 544 cases of abuse from January to August 2013, up from 726 cases in 2012.

Scoring Key: X / Y (Z)

X = Score Received
Y = Best Possible Score
Z = Change from Previous Year

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