

# Brunei 2012



**Total: 15.62**

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## Political Freedom

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### **Free and Fair Elections : 1.07**

There has been little political change in Brunei. The country remains under the absolute rule of Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah Muâ€™izzaddin Waddaulah and his family. The last legislative elections were held in 1962, the results of which were annulled. The state of emergency that was declared back then has never been lifted since.

The mostly appointed Legislative Council completed its five-year term in March 2011. The 29-member Council included five indirectly elected members from village councils, but the majority of the Council comprised either family members of the Sultan or loyalists. In June 2011, the Sultan replaced it with an entirely appointed and expanded 33-member council. Nonetheless, he initiated a significant reorganisation of the Cabinet of Ministers in May 2010 which was widely perceived as a small step towards improving governance, although the principal aim was to attract foreign investment.

Overall, demands for political reform remain low as the countryâ€™s rich oil and gas reserves allow the government to sustain high employment and low tax rates, and to grant various benefits so as to keep the population content.

### **Absence of Unconstitutional Veto Players : 2.5**

There are no veto players in the political system of Brunei. The Sultan is the only and absolute ruler. Moreover, there is basically no genuine political activism or pluralism. The only political party is the ruling National Development Party as all other parties were disbanded during 2007-2008. With regards to non-governmental organisations, most operating in Brunei are business or professional interest groups. Any organisation with more than ten members is required to register with the government; yet, registration can be denied for any reason. Thus, Brunei achieves a very low score in this section.

### **Freedom of Press : 2.5**

Brunei saw some minor improvements in terms of press freedom during the last year. But journalists still face substantial restrictions. They are subject to a fine or even imprisonment if their reports are considered "false and malicious." Any criticism of the Sultan and his family is strictly forbidden and officials are legally allowed to shut down newspapers that are suspected to

be too critical. However, apart from the main national newspaper, there are newspapers in the Malay and Chinese languages. Citizens may also access Malaysian-based television and satellite channels. Access to the internet is relatively free, but content perceived to be subversive may not be published online.

## Rule of Law

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### **Independence of the Judiciary :**

No data available.

### **Corruption : 5.2**

The government of Brunei claims it will not tolerate corruption of any kind. The law stipulates criminal penalties for official corruption, and the government generally implements them effectively. Its anti-corruption bureau has successfully prosecuted a number of lower-ranking officials over the past few years. However, some officials engage in corrupt practices with impunity. Nevertheless, in the 2011 Corruption Perceptions Index surveyed by Transparency International, Brunei was ranked the second least corrupt nation in asean after Singapore and at 44th place out of 183 countries – an impressive standing given that it is ruled by an absolute monarchy.

### **Protection of Human Rights : 4.35**

Amongst the most pressing human rights issues facing Brunei are restrictions on religious freedom and limitations on freedoms of speech, press, assembly and association. An inability of citizens to change their government, human trafficking, discrimination against women and exploitation of foreign workers are also causes for concern. However, there were no reported cases of government officials directly committing human rights violations. Although death sentences continue to be passed in Brunei, the last execution was carried out in 1957.

## Economic Freedom

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### **Security of Property Rights :**

No data available.

### **Size of Government: Expenditures, Taxes, and Enterprises :**

No data available.

## **Regulation of Credit, Labour, and Business :**

No data available.

## **Freedom to Trade Internationally :**

No data available.