

Opinion

Freedom House – The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Christopher Walker, New York

Through a number of analytical publications, Freedom House calls attention to global trends in freedom and democracy. Beginning in 1973 with *Freedom in the World*, Freedom House's annual survey of political rights and civil liberties, Freedom House has published comparative surveys and special reports focused on the state of democracy and human rights around the world. Freedom House also publishes *Freedom of the Press*, an annual report on media independence around the world; *Nations in Transit*, which examines democratic development in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union; and *Countries at the Crossroads*, which examines democratic governance in 60 key countries that are at a crossroads in determining their political future. These surveys and reports are produced by a team of regional and country experts, consultants, and staff editors. Each survey is the product of a rigorous methodology developed by prominent experts in political science, economics, human rights, and press freedom.

Freedom in the World evaluates the condition of freedom in each of the world's 193 countries. The survey enables scholars and policymakers to assess the state of freedom in specific countries, along regional lines, and globally.

Freedom in the World includes both analytical reports and numerical ratings for 193 countries and 14 territories. Each country and territory report includes an overview section, which provides historical background and a brief description of the year's major developments, as well as a section summarizing the current state of political rights and civil liberties. In addition, each country and territory is assigned a numerical rating—on a scale of 1 to 7—for political rights and an analogous rating for civil liberties; a rating of 1 indicates the highest degree of freedom and 7 the least amount of freedom. These ratings, calculated through an extensive methodological process, determine whether a country is classified as Free, Partly Free, or Not Free by the survey. The survey findings are reached after a multi-layered process of analysis and evaluation by a team of regional experts and scholars.

Freedom House makes available the scores of the seven broad categories that make up the backbone of the survey methodology. These subdata scores enable scholars and the policy community to assess specific categories of democratic performance, thus enabling readers to identify the reasons for a country's forward movement or decline as well as its broad trajectory. These data can be found at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=276>

The survey measures such traditional indicators of democracy as press freedom, freedom of belief, and freedom of assembly, and measures such essential freedom components as judicial independence and the de-

gree of openness and competitiveness in elections in a society. To ensure credibility and rigor, each edition of *Freedom in the World* undergoes several layers of review by noted scholars in the fields of human rights, democratization, and regional area studies.

This survey covers developments over the course of a calendar year. The research and ratings process involved two dozen analysts and more than a dozen senior-level academic advisors. The analysts used a broad range of sources of information—including foreign and domestic news reports, academic analyses, non-governmental organizations, think tanks, individual professional contacts, and visits to the region—in preparing the reports.

The country ratings are proposed by the analyst responsible for each related report. The ratings are reviewed individually and on a comparative basis in a series of six regional meetings—Asia-Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Western Europe—involving the analysts, academic advisors with expertise in each region, and Freedom House staff. These reviews are followed by cross-regional assessments in which efforts were made to ensure comparability and consistency in the findings.

The release of findings from the 2007 edition (which evaluates events for the year 2006) of *Freedom in the World* was met with some controversy in Russia. A number of Russian media reports mistakenly characterized Russia's freedom rating in *Freedom in the World*. The Russian press incorrectly reported that Freedom House downgraded Russia in its latest assessment, and declared the state of freedom in Russia to be identical to that of North Korea and Libya.

However, Russia received the exact same rating in 2006 as it did in 2005—a 6 for political rights and 5 for civil liberties (on a scale of 1 to 7, with the lowest score being 7.) Russia has been included in the Not Free category since 2004, as a function of the systematic erosion of rights, including the flawed nature of Russia's parliamentary elections in December 2003 and presidential elections in 2004, the further consolidation of state control of the media, and the imposition of official curbs on opposition political parties and groups within that country. In the latest survey, Freedom House did note with concern that the inde-

pendent media, civil society groups and political opposition, among other independent actors, have come under further repression from the Russian authorities in the last year.

A total of 45 countries—representing a wide range of performance in political rights and civil liberties—are in the Not Free category this year. North Korea and Libya are given the lowest possible scores within that category, a 7 for political rights and civil liberties, and are therefore considered among the world's most repressive regimes.

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Opinion

Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI)

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Since 2003, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) has measured the progress made by 119 (as of the next issue, 124) transition and developing countries on their path to becoming democracies with rule of law and socially responsible free-market economies. The index also assesses the quality of political governance. So far, there have been two issues of this index (BTI 2003 and BTI 2006), which is intended as a metric of political and economic system transformation. Compared to other indices, the BTI stands out by virtue of its broad analytical approach.

The BTI is published every two years, though one year late in 2006. It is characterized by a clear normative orientation along the guidelines of democracy, the rule of law, and a socially responsible free-market economy; it is based on expert investigative methods that not only collate the available data and information, but also interpret it contextually; and it provides full transparency in terms of data and individual results. Adopting a comprehensive perspective, the BTI not only investigates the political and economic aspects of transformation (status index), but also evaluates the consistency and efficiency with which political actors have implemented reform projects in the individual countries, taking into account the various external preconditions (management index).

The three composite indices of the BTI consist of five criteria relating to political and seven criteria relating to economic transformation (status index) as well as four criteria for political governance (manage-

ment index). The category "political transformation" encompasses more than 18 indicators for the criteria of statehood, political participation, rule of law, stability of democratic institutions, as well as political and social integration. The BTI's measurement of the level of democracy, compared to that of other studies, is based on a conception of democracy that goes far beyond holding free and fair elections and also takes into account the degree of civil society participation and rule of law. The analysis of free-market transformation includes more than 14 indicators for the criteria of socio-economic development levels, regulation of markets and competition, stability of currencies and prices, private property, social order, performance of the national economy, and sustainability. Here, the BTI does not rely only on a set of established core data for macro-economic indicators, but also investigates social and sustainable aspects of economic development.