

## ***Freedom in the World 2016:*** **Frequently Asked Questions**

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### **What is *Freedom in the World*?**

*Freedom in the World* is an annual global report on political rights and civil liberties that has been produced since 1973. The report is composed of numerical ratings and descriptive texts for 195 countries and 15 territories. Countries and territories are assessed by staff or contract analysts, primarily using news articles, NGO reports, other open-source information, and in-country contacts. The analysts' conclusions are then vetted by expert advisers. The final product represents the consensus of the analysts, Freedom House staff, and the outside advisers.

### **What is the report's coverage period?**

Each annual edition of *Freedom in the World* assesses conditions and events in the previous calendar year, meaning *Freedom in the World 2016* covers the period from January 1, 2015, through December 31, 2015. However, in past decades the coverage period has shifted from time to time, for example covering the last two months of one calendar year and the first 10 months of the next.

### **How far back in time does *Freedom in the World* go?**

The first edition covered the year 1972.

### **Where can I view all the past years' ratings?**

The historical data are available in Excel format on the *Freedom in the World* [landing page](#).

### **How does the rating system work?**

*Freedom in the World* uses a three-tier rating system, consisting of scores, ratings, and status. At the **score** level, a country/territory is awarded 0 to 4 points on each of 25 indicators, for a maximum total of 100 points. These indicators, which take the form of questions, are grouped into 7 topical subcategories (A through G) that each carry a maximum of either 12 or 16 points. The first 3 subcategories fall under the category of Political Rights, and the last 4 subcategories fall under the category of Civil Liberties. A country/territory is assigned a **rating** (7 to 1) for each of these two categories based on its scores. (Click [here](#) for the score ranges associated with each rating level.) The average of a country/territory's Political Rights and Civil Liberties ratings is called the Freedom Rating, and it is this figure that determines the country/territory's **status** of Free (1.0 to 2.5), Partly Free (3.0 to 5.0), or Not Free (5.5 to 7.0).

See the [Methodology](#) document for a more complete explanation of this system.

### **What topics do the scores cover?**

The [Methodology](#) document used by analysts is the best summary of the issues covered by *Freedom in the World*, but here is a quick overview of the 7 topical subcategories:

- A. Electoral Process: executive and legislative elections, and electoral framework
- B. Political Pluralism and Participation: party system, competition, and minority voting rights
- C. Functioning of Government: corruption, transparency, and ability of elected officials to govern in practice
- D. Freedom of Expression and Belief: media, religious freedom, academic freedom, and free private discussion
- E. Associational and Organizational Rights: free assembly, civic groups, and labor unions
- F. Rule of Law: independent judges and prosecutors, due process, crime and disorder, and legal equality
- G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights: freedom of movement, property rights, women's and family rights, and freedom from economic exploitation

### **What is the best score a country or territory can get?**

The optimal result at the score level—the bottom tier of the rating system—is 100, meaning the country/territory received 4 points on all 25 indicators, for a total of 40 in the Political Rights category and 60 in the Civil Liberties category. These scores would lead to a Freedom Rating of 1.0, and a status of Free.

Note that there is an optional Political Rights indicator designed to give some credit to absolute monarchies with meaningful consultative mechanisms, but because it applies only to countries that would receive low scores on multiple electoral indicators, it cannot lead to a total score of more than 100.

### **What is the worst score a country/territory can get?**

The worst possible result at the score level is -4. To achieve this, a country/territory would need to receive a 0 for all 25 of the normal indicators, as well as a -4 on an optional indicator designed to capture “ethnic cleansing” campaigns by subtracting points from the Political Rights total. Such abysmal scores would lead to a Freedom Rating of 7.0, and a status of Not Free.

### **Where can I view all the past years' scores?**

Freedom House began releasing the total Political Rights (40) and Civil Liberties (60) scores in 2004, meaning the earliest available totals cover the year 2003. We began releasing the subcategory (A through G) scores in 2006, meaning the earliest available numbers cover the year 2005. All of these data, as well as the ratings and status designations going back to 1972, can be viewed in Excel format at the *Freedom in the World* [landing page](#).

### **How do the analysts decide on scores?**

The analyst grants a country/territory 0 to 4 points on each of the scoring indicators based on the conditions and events within that country/territory during the coverage period. They are guided by the main 25 checklist questions (see [Methodology](#)) as well as supplemental questions designed to provide more detail on the types of issues covered under that indicator. The analyst's proposed scores are discussed and defended at annual review meetings, organized by region and attended by Freedom House staff and a panel of expert advisers. The final scores represent the consensus of the analysts,

staff, and advisers, and are intended to be comparable from year to year and across countries and regions.

### **How many people are involved in the analysis process?**

This year there were nearly 100 lead country/territory analysts and nearly 30 expert advisers. Freedom House staff provide input, and analysts consult with contacts in the countries under review.

### **What does a trend arrow mean?**

Freedom House assigns countries and territories upward or downward trend arrows in order to highlight developments of major significance or concern. These developments may include a positive or negative shift over multiple years, an especially notable change in a single year, or an important event in a country that is particularly influential in its region or the world. Trend arrows are always linked to a specific change or changes in score. In *Freedom in the World 2016*, a country or territory may receive both a trend arrow and a ratings or status change. However, most score changes and even some ratings or status changes do not warrant trend arrows. Trend arrows are determined by Freedom House staff, after consultation with analysts and expert advisers.

### **What do you mean by “Countries to Watch”?**

Freedom House identified 10 countries whose democratic trajectories are ripe for change in 2016, designated “Countries to Watch.” In some cases the momentum is positive; others may be on the cusp of serious democratic declines. The listed countries are highly diverse, and are not intended to be compared against one another.

### **What qualifies as an “electoral democracy”?**

According to the *Freedom in the World* [methodology](#), an “electoral democracy” designation requires a score of 7 or better in subcategory A (Electoral Process) and an overall Political Rights score of 20 or better.

### **Does a country/territory’s foreign policy affect its scores?**

Typically not. The scores are meant to capture conditions on the ground within a given country/territory’s borders, and these conditions can be influenced by state, nonstate, or foreign government actors. For example, if a state carries out air strikes in another country/territory, any effects on the enjoyment political rights and civil liberties will be felt—and therefore scored—primarily in the second country/territory.

### **How do you guard against political bias in the analysis process?**

Freedom House thoroughly vets analysts prior to contracting them in order to reduce political bias or a lack of methodological rigor as much as possible. Once selected, analysts are asked to ground any proposed score changes in the real-world events of the year under review, typically as reported in reputable news media or by credible nongovernmental organizations. After analysts submit their proposed scores and draft narrative reports, all submissions are fully reviewed and discussed by fellow

analysts, Freedom House staff, and outside experts, and compared with the scores of other countries in the region and the world to ensure that they are rational and proportional.

### **Does the index judge non-Western countries according to Western values?**

The set of indicators measured by *Freedom in the World* is derived from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. Freedom House believes that all people are entitled to freely choose their own leaders; form competing political parties; have a government free of corruption; obtain information from a free press; worship and study freely; engage in peaceful assembly and association; benefit from the rule of law and legal equality; and make their own choices about travel, economic engagement, and family life. History has shown that despite prejudiced assertions to the contrary, people of all regions and cultures desire these rights and are capable of exercising them responsibly.

### **Is the methodology biased against developing countries, where poverty may be a greater concern than political rights?**

The report's indicators encompass a number of issues that are directly relevant to poverty, income inequality, and economic development. For example, anticorruption mechanisms, labor union rights, property rights, and independent courts are all essential for addressing these challenges. However, other factors play an equally important if indirect role in development. Free elections provide long-term political stability and allow citizens to peacefully replace ineffective or corrupt leaders. And independent media provide a check on government, verifying official claims of success and exposing abusive practices. In any case, there is no valid reason for people in developing countries to postpone their enjoyment of basic freedoms to some indefinite future date, determined by incumbent leaders, in exchange for the promise of economic growth.

### **Why does *Freedom in the World* cover certain territories separately and not others?**

Freedom House covers certain related and disputed territories separately from independent countries. In the 2015 edition, it covered 15 such territories. Freedom House determines which territories to cover in *Freedom in the World* based on the following criteria:

- Whether the territory is governed separately from the rest of the relevant country or countries, either de jure or de facto.
- Whether conditions on the ground for political rights and civil liberties are significantly different from those in the rest of the relevant country or countries, meaning a separate assessment is likely to yield different ratings.
- Whether the territory is the subject of enduring popular or diplomatic pressure for autonomy, independence, or incorporation into another country.
- Whether the territory's boundaries are sufficiently stable to allow an assessment of conditions for the year under review, and whether they can be expected to remain stable in future years so that year-on-year comparisons are possible.
- Whether the territory is large and/or politically significant.

Assessment of a territory does not imply an endorsement of any side in a dispute over sovereignty. Freedom House typically takes no position on these disputes as such, focusing instead on the level of political rights and civil liberties in a given geographical area.

**Is it really possible to measure freedom?**

*Freedom in the World's* approach entails a comparative examination of concrete examples, holding up country/territory against country/territory and year against year. While this is not an exact science, it is rather clear, for instance, that people in North Korea are less free than people in Finland. It is also clear that Poland was more free in 2005 than it was in 1985. Different settings can thus be arranged along a continuum using fixed criteria, with specific institutions, laws, conditions, and events cited to justify each placement. This is the work of *Freedom in the World*.