
Gains for Freedom Amid Terror and Uncertainty

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In 2003, freedom's gains outpaced setbacks by a margin of nearly two to one. Despite deadly, sporadic terrorism around the world and a year of significant political volatility, in all, 25 countries showed significant improvements (with three making gains in their freedom category and 22 improving their numerical scores). The year also saw 13 countries suffer significant erosion of their freedom (with five dropping in category status and eight declining in their numerical scores). Freedom categories—Free, Partly Free, and Not Free—represent a broad assessment of a country's level of freedom, while numerical changes in political rights and civil liberties represent a more nuanced 1 to 7 scale, with 1 representing the highest levels of freedom and 7 representing the most repressive practices.

As 2003 drew to a close, there were 88 Free countries (one less than last year). There were 55 Partly Free countries, the same as last year. And there were 49 Not Free countries, an increase of one from the previous year.

The globe's 88 Free countries account for 46 percent of the world's 192 sovereign states. In 2003, 2.780 billion people (44 percent of the world population) live in Free countries, where rule of law prevails, basic human rights are protected, and there is free political competition. The sole entrant into the ranks of Free countries this year was Argentina, where democratic elections marked the return of rule by a popularly elected president, Néstor Kirchner. The preceding elected president, Fernando de la Rúa, had been forced from office by violent protests in late 2000 and replaced by his main rival in a constitutional process. Argentina's improved status was also a consequence of progress in fighting corruption and military and police impunity.

The world's 55 Partly Free countries account for 29 percent of all states. In Partly Free states, which account for 1.324 billion people (21 percent of the world population), there are some basic political rights and civil liberties, but these are eroded by some or many of the following factors: rampant corruption, weak rule of law, and religious, ethnic, or other communal strife. In many cases, a single party dominates politics behind a façade of limited pluralism. Burundi and Yemen improved their rankings from Not Free to Partly Free. Yemen's progress reflected increased vibrancy in its political life. Burundi made progress as a result of incremental improvements in political rights that resulted from the integration into government of political groups that represent the majority Hutu population. The broadening of Burundi's government helped to improve interethnic relations and increase pluralism in a state emerging from a genocidal civil war. Formerly Free Bolivia and Papua New Guinea are now Partly Free. In Bolivia, the decline is the result of the resignation of the country's

Freedom in the World—2004

The population of the world as estimated in mid-2003 is 6,296.0 million persons, who reside in 192 sovereign states. The level of political rights and civil liberties as shown comparatively by the Freedom House Survey is:

Free: 2,780.1 million (44.03 percent of the world's population) live in 88 of the states.

Partly Free: 1,324.0 million (20.97 percent of the world's population) live in 55 of the states.

Not Free: 2,209.9 million (35.00 percent of the world's population) live in 48 of the states.

A Record of the Survey (population in millions)

Year under Review	FREE	PARTLY FREE	NOT FREE	WORLD POPULATION
Mid-1992	1,352.2 (24.83%)	2,403.3 (44.11%)	1,690.4 (31.06%)	5,446.0
Mid-1993	1,046.2 (19.00%)	2,224.4 (40.41%)	2,234.6 (40.59%)	5,505.2
Mid-1994	1,119.7 (19.97%)	2,243.4 (40.01%)	2,243.9 (40.02%)	5,607.0
Mid-1995	1,114.5 (19.55%)	2,365.8 (41.49%)	2,221.2 (38.96%)	5,701.5
Mid-1996	1,250.3 (21.67%)	2,260.1 (39.16%)	2,260.6 (39.17%)	5,771.0
Mid-1997	1,266.0 (21.71%)	2,281.9 (39.12%)	2,284.6 (39.17%)	5,832.5
Mid-1998	2,354.0 (39.84%)	1,570.6 (26.59%)	1,984.1 (33.58%)	5,908.7
Mid-1999	2,324.9 (38.90%)	1,529.0 (25.58%)	2,122.4 (35.51%)	5,976.3
Mid-2000	2,465.2 (40.69%)	1,435.8 (23.70%)	2,157.5 (35.61%)	6,058.5
Mid-2001	2,500.7 (40.79%)	1,462.9 (23.86%)	2,167.1 (35.35%)	6,130.7
Mid-2002	2,717.6 (43.85%)	1,293.1 (20.87%)	2,186.3 (35.28%)	6,197.0
Mid-2003	2,780.1 (44.03%)	1,324.0 (20.97%)	2,209.9 (35.00%)	6,314.0

* The large shift in the population figure between 1997 and 1998 is due to India's change in status from Partly Free to Free.

democratically elected president, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, after violent street protests and a bloody police response in October 2003. Papua New Guinea declined from Free to Partly Free as a result of growing corruption and rampant violent crime.

The 49 Not Free countries represent 25 percent of the world's states. There are 2.210 billion people (35 percent of the global population) who live in Not Free countries. In Not Free countries, basic political rights are absent and basic civil liberties are widely and systematically denied. Three formerly Partly Free countries saw their status decline to Not Free. The Central African Republic became Not Free after a March 2003 military coup ousted a civilian president and suspended the National Assembly. Mauritania entered the ranks of Not Free countries amid further erosion in political rights, including signs of pressure on the opposition that further reduce the chances for competitive electoral politics. Azerbaijan entered the ranks of Not Free states after manifestly unfair presidential balloting and a massively fraudulent vote count in October 2003 resulted in Ilham Aliyev succeeding his ailing father as president of the Turkic-speaking, oil-rich former Soviet republic.

While few countries changed their freedom category (three states made gains: Argentina from Partly Free to Free; Burundi and Yemen from Not Free to Partly Free; and five states declined in freedom category: Bolivia and Papua New Guinea from Free to Partly Free; Azerbaijan, Central African Republic, and Mauritania from Partly Free to Not Free), there were significant improvements in political rights and civil liberties in 22 other countries and a decline in freedoms in 8 other states. Although these changes were significant, they fell short of affecting the overall freedom status rating. Together, changes in both freedom status and numerical ratings meant that in all, 25 countries registered gains, while 13 suffered setbacks in political rights and civil liberties—a ratio of nearly 2 to 1.

FREEDOM IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Significantly, this year's *Freedom in the World* survey demonstrates that liberty is not the exclusive province of prosperous and wealthy countries. While as a group low-income countries have significantly lower freedom rankings than middle- and high-income countries, there is nevertheless a surprisingly high number of poor and developing countries that manifest a strong record of respect for political rights and civil liberties. In all, our survey data show there are 38 Free countries with an annual gross national income per capita (GNPpc) of \$3,500 dollars or less.¹ Of these, 15 have a per capita income of less than \$1,500. As importantly, the survey shows little significant difference in the level of freedom registered by middle income countries (\$1,500-\$6,000 GNIpc; with a median of \$2,960) and high income countries (\$6,000-\$40,000 GNIpc; with a median of \$19,570).

The Global Trend

	Free	Partly Free	Not Free
1973	44	42	65
1983	52	56	58
1993	72	63	55
2003	88	55	49

Tracking Electoral Democracy

Year Under Review	Number of Electoral Democracies
1993	108
1998	117
2003	117

FREEDOM AND TERRORISM

The *Freedom in the World* findings incorporate the impact on the erosion of freedoms that is caused by the actions of terrorist movements. The findings also take into account the impact of efforts to combat terrorism. Clearly, terrorist actions have negative impact on individual freedoms in a number of countries around the world. Conversely, successful strategies to combat worldwide terrorism must include a vigorous effort to expand freedom in order to change the environment in which terrorism thrives.

On balance, however, the survey finds that since September 2001, 51 countries have made overall gains in their level of freedom and 27 have registered overall setbacks. There has been a net increase of two in the number of Free countries in this period.

Improvements in freedom have generally occurred in settings that have not been the main breeding grounds of global terrorists. Freedom registered most of its gains in the post-9/11 world in East Central Europe, East Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. In the Middle East and North Africa, a breeding ground for global terrorism, on the other hand, downward trends have outpaced gains post-9/11. In this part of the world over the last three years, there have been overall setbacks to freedom in Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates, and modest progress in Bahrain, Iraq (post-Saddam), and Yemen. Many of the region's politically closed states—Algeria, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, for example—remain frozen in patterns of repression. Indeed, the war on terrorism has also enabled some of the world's most repressive states—such as Uzbekistan in Central Asia and the People's Republic of China—to invoke counterterrorism as an explanation for their ongoing harsh and unjustifiable repression and intimidation of dissent.

Despite pressures on civil liberties that efforts to combat terrorism have created in North America and Europe, on balance, the survey has found that these long-standing and durable democracies have to date preserved a broad array of freedoms as a result of a complex interplay between executive power, legislative oversight, judicial influence, civic action, independent media, and vigorous efforts by civil liberties groups. Among stable democracies, the greatest potential impact of anti-terror legislation on freedom was to be found in the United States. Many civil liberties organizations have been highly critical of aspects of the USA PATRIOT Act, which grants federal law enforcement agencies additional powers to investigate those suspected of involvement in terror plots and of measures that, some contend, discriminate against immigrants. The survey, however, has found that while U.S. government policies pose a threat to some aspects of civil liberties, the United States has to date been able to preserve a broad array of rights and liberties. An important factor has been the vigorous ongoing role of the judiciary, the press, and civil society organizations that are working to mitigate the impact of the most problematic actions.

RELIGION AND FREEDOM

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, brought enhanced scrutiny and debate about the political character of countries with Muslim majorities, which some refer to as the Islamic world. Current counterterrorism efforts have been largely directed against fanatical political movements of extremist Islamists who have misappropriated the language of Islam to further their own political objectives. However, in the last two years, events have prompted a vigorous debate among Muslims and non-Muslims alike on whether the lack of freedom in many Muslim-majority countries is caused by the presence of Islam itself.

It is true the religious extremism of any stripe poses a danger to individual freedoms. However, a particular religious background of people is not deterministic in the existence of freedom within societies. While religion and culture play a role in molding politics within countries, cultures have proven far less immutable than experts and scholars have argued. Cultures can and do change, and progress toward democratization has occurred in societies with diverse religious backgrounds. In the 1970s, for example, the survey found low levels of freedom in majority-Catholic countries. Many scholars at that time argued that Catholic countries were unlikely candidates for further democratic progress. Yet by the 1990s, a wave of democratization had swept and transformed the majority-Catholic world. Similarly, a specific political interpretation of “Confucianism”—in which individual freedoms were urged to be subsumed to the needs of the community—also lost legitimacy as democratization progressed in many East Asian countries.

Countries with significant Muslim populations are diverse and significant numbers of Muslims can be found throughout the world. Indeed, today, about half of the world’s 1.5 billion Muslims live under democratically elected governments. The largest populations of Muslims are found in such states as India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Turkey, and Nigeria, as well as the Muslim minorities that participate in the democratic life of Western Europe and North America. It is only in the Arab world that democracy is completely absent.

In 2003, the survey finds an ongoing freedom gap between countries with a Muslim majority and the rest of the world. There are currently two Free countries

with Muslim majorities, Mali and Senegal. There are 17 Partly Free majority-Muslim countries—a drop of one from last year—and 28 Not Free countries, up one from last year. Yemen improved from Not Free to Partly Free, while Azerbaijan and Mauritania declined from Partly Free to Not Free. This contrasts dramatically with the rest of the world, where the number of Free countries stands at 86, the number of Partly Free states is 38, and the number of Not Free states is 21.

All of this, however, should not suggest some kind of inexorable link between Islam and tyranny. Explanations for the continued lack of freedom in many of these countries—which are in diverse regions including Africa, the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia—are many and complex. The survey data shows no causal linkage between choice of religion of the majority of the population and level of individual freedom within societies.

ELECTORAL DEMOCRACIES

In addition to tracking a broad range of political rights and civil liberties, the Freedom House survey monitors the state of electoral democracy around the world. The annual list of electoral democracies reflects a judgment by Freedom House staff using a list of criteria (see accompanying box) to determine whether the last major national elections within a country were considered to meet the established international standards of “free and fair.”

In 2003, of the 192 governments, 117 or 61 percent are considered to be electoral democracies. Of that total, 88 countries are considered also to be “Free,” i.e., liberal democracies. In addition, 29 countries considered to be electoral democracies are only rated Partly Free. Many of the Partly Free electoral democracies (sometimes referred to as “illiberal democracies” by analysts and scholars) have deficiencies in the other areas of civil liberties and political rights—rule of law, human rights, discriminatory practices—that persist despite gains in the electoral arena.

The number of electoral democracies has declined from last year. Tainted national elections in Georgia and Armenia, a putsch against the freely elected president in Guinea-Bissau, and constraints on the voting rights of nonindigenous citizens of Fiji, who were excluded from participation in the governance of the country, led to their being removed from the electoral democracy list. (Note: While the failure to hold free and fair elections as of November 2003 [the survey cutoff date] meant that Georgia was removed as an electoral democracy, there was significant hope that the country would reclaim its place among electoral democracies during the elections scheduled for January 4, 2004.)

In addition, a number of countries make this list by only a very narrow margin. Two such countries on the edge—as of the survey’s November 30, 2003, cutoff date—include Russia and Ukraine, where control of mass media by those in power and pressures against opposition politicians by the state security structures, are threatening their status as electoral democracies.²

REGIONAL PATTERNS

In Western and Central Europe, all 24 of the states are rated Free. Turkey, which is included in the roster of European states, is rated Partly Free—the only NATO member to belong to that category. All 25 European countries, Turkey included, are electoral democracies.

In the Americas and the Caribbean there are 23 Free Countries, 10 Partly Free, and 2 (Haiti and Cuba) Not Free. With the exception of Antigua and Barbuda, Cuba, and Haiti, the remaining 32 Western Hemisphere countries are electoral democracies.

In the Asia-Pacific region there are 17 Free countries (a decrease of one from the previous year), while Partly Free and Not Free states number 11 (an increase of one) and 11, respectively. Twenty-three of the 39 Asia-Pacific states are electoral democracies.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia there are today 12 Free countries, 8 are Partly Free (a decrease of one), and 7 are Not Free (an increase of one). Dramatic progress in terms of rights has been registered primarily in the East European states, however, where there are 12 Free and 3 Partly Free states. The significant progress that these states have made has been confirmed and reinforced by their rapid integration into the security and economic structures of Europe and the Euro-Atlantic community. By contrast, aside from the three Baltic republics, among the states that once formed the USSR, there is not a single Free country, and Not Free post-Soviet lands outnumber their Partly Free neighbors 7 to 5 in a year that saw Azerbaijan's decline to Not Free status. Seventeen of the regions 27 countries are electoral democracies as of November 30, 2003.

In sub-Saharan Africa, 11 countries are Free, 20 are Partly Free (a decrease of one), and 17 are Not Free (an increase of one). Africa continues to register the greatest variations of any region year-to-year. It has seen significant instability, with steps forward in some countries often followed by rapid reversals. Nineteen of the region's 48 states are electoral democracies.

Among the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, Israel remains the region's sole electoral democracy and Free country. There are 5 Partly Free and 12 Not Free states, an increase of one Partly Free state (Yemen, which was formerly rated Not Free).

COUNTRY TRENDS: The Year's Gains in Freedom

In addition to Argentina, which went from Partly Free to Free, and Yemen and Burundi, which raised their status from Not Free to Partly Free, 22 countries registered improvements in freedom that were significant but not large enough to warrant a change of category. Brief, alphabetically arranged, summaries follow.

Improvements in democratic Benin's electoral processes, as signified by vigorously contested free and fair legislative elections, led to improvements in political rights.

The island country of Cape Verde, one of Africa's more vibrantly free countries, registered improvements in the rights of women and an increased public awareness of the legal protections that women now enjoy. The year also saw increased private-sector vibrancy and increased business opportunities. These factors led to a cumulative gain in civil liberties.

Chile's ongoing democratic consolidation saw further improvements in political rights as the military's once-overarching political influence waned.

In Congo (Brazzaville), political rights improved as a consequence of the signing of a lasting cease-fire agreement that helped stabilize the country's fragile political environment.

Côte d'Ivoire's civil liberties improved after an internationally negotiated settlement to a civil war. A fragile government of national unity offered hope for an end to a period of extreme violence and strife.

Ghana's civil liberties consolidated and deepened in a year that saw increased openness in civic discourse and general improvements in respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Postwar and post-Saddam Iraq, while ravaged by terrorism and rampant crime, nevertheless saw a relaxation of the former Ba'athist state's controls on independent civic life, more open public and private discussion, and a range of newspapers and broadcast media, which today—despite limited controls by the U.S.-led occupation—are among the most diverse in the Arab world. All these factors on balance contributed to improvements in civil liberties.

Jordan's political rights made modest gains with the restoration of a national legislature with limited powers that was elected in a relatively open election.

The effects of Kenya's free and fair 2002 national elections continued to be felt in 2003, as official transparency and accountability improved while civic and political life showed increased vibrancy. All these factors contributed to incremental improvements in political rights and civil liberties.

Civil liberties in Madagascar improved as normalcy and calm returned to the country's civic, political, and associational life after violence that disrupted and destabilized the country following the bitterly contested elections of December 2001.

Malawi's democratic political rights improved on the nullification of a law that had eroded the rights of legislators and the defeat of a controversial effort to lift term limits for the presidency.

Malaysia's civil liberties improved amid signs of greater resilience in academic freedom and improvements in personal autonomy.

Mali's democracy scored modest improvements in civil liberties as a result of further consolidation of democracy and incremental changes in public discourse.

Nigeria's civil liberties improved as a result of the abatement in intercommunal violence that had beset the country in 2002.

Paraguay showed gains regarding political rights via a free and fair April 2003 election that brought Nicanor Duarte to the presidency and helped to boost official transparency.

Political rights in the genocide-ravaged land of Rwanda improved after multi-party presidential and legislative elections that led to increased political discourse in a setting of circumscribed political choice.

An improved security environment and increased pressures to punish those guilty of civil war atrocities led to modest gains in Sierra Leone's civil liberties.

Sri Lanka's political life may have been shaken by the president's dismissal of three cabinet ministers and a temporary suspension of parliament. However, its civil liberties improved as a result of a significant decline in violence and modest improvements in the rule of law resulting from an ongoing, though tenuous, cease-fire with the Tamil rebels.

Uganda made modest gains in political rights after a Constitutional Court ruling that removed restrictions on political party activity, potentially opening the door to multiparty politics in what has heretofore been a one-party state dominated by long-ruling president Yoweri Museveni.

The survey also recorded upward adjustments in the civil liberties scores of the Pacific Island states of Micronesia, Nauru, and Palau. The Freedom House survey team made these adjustments after refining its evaluation of the scope of freedoms enjoyed by trade unions, media organs, and nongovernmental organizations in these three countries.

COUNTRY TRENDS: Declines in Freedom in 2003

In addition to category declines in the freedom of Bolivia and Papua New Guinea (from Free to Partly Free) and Azerbaijan, the Central African Republic, and Mauritania (from Partly Free to Not Free), eight countries saw an erosion of political rights, civil liberties, or both.

Djibouti's political rights declined after unfair elections in which the incumbent government had exploited the advantages of office to secure victory.

In the Dominican Republic, corruption scandals and a growing rejection of transparency by the government of President Hipolito Mejia resulted in the erosion of political rights.

Guinea-Bissau registered a decline in political rights as a military coup toppled the unpopular president Kumba Yala. Paradoxically, the military reversed some of the constraints on the country's civil liberties by releasing some opposition members Yala had jailed. Nevertheless, on balance the new dominance of the military in the country's political life represented a net setback for freedom.

In an environment beset by an ongoing Maoist insurgency, Nepal's political rights declined as a result of the continued suspension of an elected parliament and the failure of the King to schedule new national elections.

Political rights in impoverished Sao Tome and Principe declined after a brief coup led to the temporary displacement of that island country's government. The coup was quickly reversed as a result of the active and resolute engagement of Nigeria and its president, Olusegun Obasanjo. Still, the coup attempt traumatized political life in what had previously been an open and successful democracy.

The already-limited political rights enjoyed by the people of Swaziland took another hit from constitutional changes designed to entrench more deeply the institution of rule by royal decree.

The survey also recorded a decline in Vanuatu's political rights rating as a result of a technical reevaluation of the country's political life, rather than from specific changes that occurred in 2003, as well as a decline in the civil liberties rating for the United Arab Emirates due to a reassessment of the state of personal autonomy and equality of opportunity in the country.

FREEDOM, WEALTH, AND POVERTY

The volatility of politics in poverty-riddled Africa—which experienced two military coups and a failed coup attempt—reinforces by counterexample the impression that prosperity correlates well with stability, democracy, and freedom.

This year's survey examines the relationship between income and levels of freedom in 192 countries. To no one's surprise, the data confirm that the world's most prosperous states are as a group freer than the world's poorest countries. But the correlations also show that countries of middling wealth, including a broad array of developing nations, do nearly as well in terms of freedom as high-income countries.

Freedom and Economic Development			
	FREE	PARTLY FREE	NOT FREE
Low-Income Countries GNI per capita less than \$1,500	15 (16 percent)	39 (43 percent)	37 (41 percent)
Middle-Income Countries GNI per capita between \$1,500 and \$6,000	35 (66 percent)	11 (21 percent)	7 (13 percent)
High-Income Countries GNI per capita greater than \$6,000	38 (79 percent)	5 (10 percent)	5 (10 percent)
GNI per capita = gross national income per capita			

Moreover, our examination shows that a low level of economic development need not always condemn a society to an absence of freedom. Indeed, there is a large cohort of low- and low-middle-income countries that guarantee their inhabitants a broad range of political and civil liberties. Indeed, 38 countries with a per capita annual income of \$3,500 or less are rated Free.

As noted above, the biggest cluster of Free countries is found among high-income countries, defined as those with a gross national income per capita (GNIPc) of more than US\$6,000 per year. In this group, whose median GNIPc is \$19,570 per year, 38 countries are Free, 5 are Partly Free, and 5 are Not Free. The five Not Free countries in this group (Brunei, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) derive the vast proportion of their wealth from natural energy resources and investment income derived from these resources. Two Partly Free countries (Bahrain and Kuwait) have wealth that derives from similar natural resource origins. Thus, among upper-income countries that derive the vast proportion of their wealth from enterprise and knowledge, 38 are Free and only 3 are Partly Free. Societies that are most successful in producing wealth are almost uniformly Free.

Among middle-income countries—i.e., those with an annual GNIPc of \$1,500 to \$6,000—35 are Free, 11 are Partly Free, and 7 are Not Free. With a median GNIPc of only slightly less than \$3,000 per year, this is far from a prosperous set of countries. Yet 66 percent of medium-income countries are Free, a proportion that does not dramatically differ from that of high-income countries (where 79 percent are Free). At the same time, the proportion of Not Free states among middle-income countries stands at 13 percent compared to 10 percent of high-income states—again, only a modest difference. Yet the incidence of freedom among the lower-middle and middle-income states is impressive, and only slightly lower than that boasted by the richest set of countries.

Among the poorest countries, however, where GNIPc is under \$1,500 per year, the level of freedom is significantly lower. This lowest-income cohort has only 15 Free countries, 39 Partly Free countries, and 37 Not Free countries. And among the poorest of the poor in this cohort (i.e., the 29 countries with a GNIPc of \$300 or less), only three—Ghana, Mali, and Sao Tome—are Free.

Among the 88 Free countries, 38 (or 43 percent) are high-income, 35 (or 40 percent) are middle-income, and 15 (or 17 percent) are low-income. Of the 55 Partly Free countries, 5 (or

9 percent) are wealthy, 11 (or 20 percent) are middling, and 39 (or 71 percent) come from the poorest group. Among the world's 49 Not Free states, 5 (or 10 percent) are high-income, 7 (or 14 percent) are middle-income, and 37 (or 76 percent) are low-income.

Such data indicate that the lowest income levels correlate with significantly lower levels of freedom. But our look at incomes and freedom levels also reveals that low-income countries are fully capable of establishing strong democratic practices and respect for civil liberties rooted in the rule of law. Out of 128 countries with an annual GNIpc of \$ 3,500 or less, 38 are rated Free by the survey.

FREEDOM'S TENURE

This year, we have also taken a closer look at what the survey shows in terms of the tenure of freedom in the world's politics. While 88 countries stand rated as Free at the end of 2003, for the bulk of them, freedom—and in some cases sovereign statehood—is a recent arrival. Indeed, long-term uninterrupted freedom has been rare for most countries. Of the globe's 192 states, only 24 (or 12.5 percent) have been Free throughout the entire 31 years spanned so far by the Freedom House survey. An additional 20 of today's Free countries have had 15 to 30 years of uninterrupted freedom. This means that 44 of the world's Free states have had high levels of freedom for fewer than 15 years.

Our time-series data show that over the last 31 years, a total of 112 countries have been rated free and experienced at least some period of democratic governance in an environment of broad respect for human rights. Significantly, of this group of 112 that have at any time in their history been Free, 88 are Free today; while only 2 today are Not Free. This means that 79 percent of all countries that have ever in the last 31 years known high levels of freedom are Free today. As importantly, when a country attains a high degree of freedom (or in other words, merits being ranked as Free in the survey), it rarely slips back into the kind of severe and systematic repression denoted by a Not Free ranking. Indeed, out of the 112 countries that have attained high levels of respect for both political rights and civil liberties, only 14 have ever seen their rights status lapse back to Not Free.³

Conversely, among the 109 states that have at any time in their history lived under the denial of most basic freedoms as indicated by a Not Free rating, 28 are today Free, 32 are Partly Free, and 49 are Not Free.

The time-series record shows that 80 countries have not experienced broad-based freedom at any time during the 31-year record of the survey.

In all but the few worst cases, even highly repressive Not Free countries have been unable to rob their people completely and lastingly of all civil liberties and political rights. Out of 109 countries that have been rated Not Free in the history of the survey, only 13 (or 12 percent) have sustained in every year the high levels of political control and repression represented by the Not Free rating. These 13 countries are Burma, Chad, China, Congo (Kinshasa), Cuba, Equatorial Guinea, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and Vietnam. This suggests that over time, even the most repressive rulers find themselves hard-pressed to succeed at constantly suppressing their citizens' desires for a broad array of political rights and civil liberties.

CONCLUSIONS

A year of significant momentum for freedom—despite the threats to liberty posed

by widespread global terrorism—is encouraging. So, too, is the evidence that suggests political rights and civil liberties can thrive even in conditions of significant economic privation. We also can derive some comfort from evidence in this year’s review of long-term data that suggests that countries and populations that have experienced a high degree of freedom find ways of protecting that freedom and preventing its reversal.

At the same time, the survey’s findings show that while there is much heartening news this year, important challenges remain. Many states—particularly the Partly Free countries—appear unable to make the transition to stable democratic rule rooted in the rule of law. Other states—a broad array of Not Free countries—have proved resistant to democratic change. Given the fact that Free societies account for 89 percent of the world’s wealth, they have the capacity to help solidify and deepen democracy where it is fragile. They also have the capacity and the resources to significantly assist indigenous movements that seek to bring democratic change to closed societies.

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NOTES

1. Economic data are for 2001 and come from World Bank Development Indicators and www.internetworldstats.com and are compared with *Freedom in the World* ratings of events through November 30, 2003.
 2. Although the current survey reflects findings and trends of events through November 30, 2003, Russia’s elections of December 7, 2003, were neither free nor fair, and Russia would no longer remain on Freedom House’s list of electoral democracies.
 3. These are Argentina, Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), Chile, the Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Lebanon, the Maldives, Nigeria, Seychelles, Suriname, and Thailand.
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