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WORST OF THE WORST 2012:

THE WORLD'S MOST REPRESSIVE SOCIETIES

FREEDOM HOUSE

Introduction
The Worst of the Worst: The World's Most Repressive Societies 2012

Autocratic rule remains widespread and persistent in 2012. Almost one in four people in the world live in countries with the worst records of political and civil rights, and these countries have suffered under brutal dictatorships for decades. However, change is possible even in the world's most repressive societies. The number of dictatorships has declined in recent decades, and events in several countries during the last year have raised further prospects for greater freedom.

This special report, *The Worst of the Worst: The World's Most Repressive Societies 2012*, assesses the countries with the lowest ratings for political rights and civil liberties. It is a companion to Freedom House's annual report, *Freedom in the World*, and provides summary reports, tables, and graphical information on the countries where political life and fundamental freedoms are most restricted.

More than 1.6 billion people—23 percent of the world's population—have no say in how they are governed and face severe consequences if they try to exercise their most basic rights, such as expressing their views, assembling peacefully, and organizing independently of the state. Citizens who dare to assert their rights in these repressive countries typically suffer harassment and imprisonment, and often are subjected to physical or psychological abuse. State control over public life is pervasive, and individuals have little if any recourse to justice for crimes the state commits against them.

The purpose of this report is to highlight the plight of citizens living under intensely repressive rule and to call on international organizations, democratic governments, and civil society around the world to use their influence to improve respect for human rights in these countries. The report seeks to direct the attention of the UN Human Rights Council to the states and territories that deserve investigation and condemnation for their widespread, systemic violations of fundamental freedoms.

Worst of the Worst

Nine countries were designated as the Worst of the Worst for calendar year 2011: **Equatorial Guinea**, **Eritrea**, **North Korea**, **Saudi Arabia**, **Somalia**, **Sudan**, **Syria**, **Turkmenistan**, and **Uzbekistan**. Two disputed territories, **Tibet** and **Western Sahara**, were also among the Worst of the Worst. All of these countries and territories received *Freedom in the World*'s lowest ratings: 7 for political rights and 7 for civil liberties (based on a 1 to 7 scale, with 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free). Within these entities, political opposition is banned, criticism of the government is met with retribution, and independent organizations are suppressed.

On the Threshold

Seven other countries fall just short of the bottom of Freedom House's ratings: **Belarus**, **Burma**, **Chad**, **China**, **Cuba**, **Laos**, and **Libya**. The territory of **South Ossetia** also is part of this group. All eight, which received ratings of 7 for political rights and 6 for civil liberties, offer very limited scope for independent discussion. They severely suppress opposition political activity, impede independent organizations, and censor or punish criticism of the state.

Eritrea: President Isaias Afwerki has held office since independence in 1993. National elections have never taken place. The government controls all broadcasting outlets and bans all privately owned newspapers. Political arrests, arbitrary detentions, and torture are common. In some prisons, inmates are held in metal shipping containers or underground cells in extreme temperatures.

North Korea is a one-party state that has changed its supreme leader only through dynastic succession. All media outlets are run by the state, and televisions and radios are fixed to state channels. An extensive network of informers monitors nearly all forms of private communications. An estimated 200,000 political prisoners are held in "total control camps," where hunger and abuse are common. Entire families, including children, are imprisoned for guilt by association.

Saudi Arabia is ruled by the Saud royal family. Political parties are forbidden and no organized political opposition exists inside the country. Citizens who stage demonstrations usually are detained. Religious freedom is nonexistent: all Saudis are required by law to be Muslims; and public practice of any other religion is prohibited. Many laws discriminate against women, who may not legally drive cars or travel without a male relative.

Uzbekistan: President Islam Karimov has ruled the country since independence in 1991. His government suppresses all political opposition, constrains freedom of association, and controls major media outlets. The few civic activists and critical journalists in the country face prosecution and arbitrary detention. The state exercises strict control over Islamic worship, including the content of sermons. Neighborhood committees function as an official system for public surveillance and control.

Brutal Dictatorships

With the exception of **Somalia**, which is a failed state, the Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries are brutal dictatorships. Some are ruled by a collective leadership, while others are dominated by a single tyrant. Some offer an ideological justification for their rule, as in **Cuba**; others are under a brazen strongman rule, such as **Equatorial Guinea** and **Uzbekistan**. The common thread among these countries is an individual or collective dictatorship that rests on a very narrow elite and uses extreme forms of repression to hold on to power.

In the Worst of the Worst and Threshold territories, repression serves to stifle political action or discussion on the territorial dispute by the people who are the most directly affected. China crushes dissent in **Tibet**, as Morocco does in **Western Sahara**, to clamp down on strong local demands for self-rule. In **South Ossetia**, repression is reinforced by Russian influence to keep the breakaway republic separate from Georgia.

Entrenched Repression

The degree of repression among this year's Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries has varied over time, but has remained high for long periods. One country, **North Korea**, has stayed at the very bottom of the ratings scale since the *Freedom in the World* survey began nearly 40 years ago, and **Somalia** has rated at the bottom or one step above for every year. However, almost three-fourths of these countries have spent over 25 years in the Worst of the Worst or Threshold categories, either consecutively or at different times.

Repressive rule is deeply entrenched in many of the countries covered in this special report. With few exceptions, they have spent decades at or near the bottom of the *Freedom in the World* ratings. These countries have made little if any progress over the years in improving political and civil rights for their citizens. Few among this year's Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries have risen above the Not Free rating in *Freedom in the World* for more than a few years. Of those that were Partly Free for any length of time,

Belarus has received a Not Free rating since 1996, within two years of Alyaksandr Lukashenka becoming president; Eritrea has received the lowest possible ratings (6 or 7 out of 7) for political rights since independence in 1993; and Sudan has remained a Worst of the Worst country for every year since 1989, when a military coup brought the current leader, Omar al-Bashir, to power.

The Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries tend to have deep-rooted regimes. These regimes have endured on average for 37½ years without any transfer of power between competing political parties or forces. When power was transferred, it either remained within the ruling party or was handed down to a new despot through a dynastic succession. The longevity of these dictatorial regimes, and the intensity of their repression, suggests that repression is integral to their survival. These regimes have managed to stay in power for decades by eliminating effective political opposition, severely circumscribing civil society, and silencing their critics.

Events over the past year indicate that repression in several of the Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries is likely to persist, if not intensify. In **China**, as a sensitive change of leadership approaches later this year, the government has committed increased resources to internal security forces, engaged in systematic enforced disappearances of dozens of human rights lawyers and bloggers, and enhanced controls over online social media. In **Tibet**, authorities have continued to restrict basic freedoms and impose harsh security measures on monasteries as an ongoing wave of self-immolations has brought the total number of Tibetans who have set themselves on fire to at least 38 since 2009.

Cuba experienced a sharp spike in short-term detentions of dissidents and civil society activists, including around the time of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the island in March 2012. **Sudan**'s government launched a harsh crackdown on any sign of dissent in response to the threat of political spillover from the popular Arab uprisings and to the economic crisis triggered by the secession of oil-rich South Sudan. In the conflict that erupted with rebels in the border states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, Sudanese government forces conducted indiscriminate bombings and other abuses against civilians. **Syria**'s regime responded to a popular uprising with a violent crackdown that has claimed the lives of more than 10,000 citizens and has included sniper fire at peaceful protesters, bombings of civilians, and execution-style killings of women and children.

Prospects for Change

Despite the persistence of repressive rule in the Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries, significant improvements have taken place over the nearly four decades since the annual *Freedom in the World* ratings of political rights and civil liberties first came out in 1972. The number of Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries has risen and fallen over the years, but the long-term trend is downward. From a peak of 38 such countries in 1984, the number declined to 15 countries in 2003, and stood at 16 countries for 2011. This decline was associated in large part with the move from one-party states and military dictatorships to multiparty systems in Africa and the collapse of communism in Europe.

Political transformations over the past year show further possibilities for change among the Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, President Laurent

Gbagbo had refused to accept defeat in the November 2010 election and instigated a wave of violence to hold on to power. However, he came under intense international pressure and was arrested in April 2011 by forces loyal to the legitimate president, Alassane Ouattara. The end of the civil conflict and Ouattara's assumption of power represented a significant improvement in political and civil rights in Côte d'Ivoire and raised the country off the Threshold list.

In the *Freedom in the World* ratings for calendar year 2011, both **Burma** and **Libya** remained among the Threshold countries but registered improvements in civil liberties. A political opening in **Burma** began in late 2011 and has expanded in 2012, although the regime has ceded little power to the opposition and substantial human rights abuses continue to take place, particularly in ethnic minority areas. In **Libya**, the collapse of Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi's autocracy opened the way for major change, and the transitional authority is moving the country toward competitive elections later this year. While the risks of instability and new forms of authoritarian rule are still significant, Libya seems headed in a positive direction.

The revolt against al-Qadhafi, and the popular uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa, showed how brittle dictatorships can be. Autocrats who previously seemed invincible suddenly looked shaky in the face of widespread demands for change. After the fall of Tunisian president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak in early 2011, dictators in the Arab world and elsewhere tended to respond to public protests with harsh crackdowns, rather than genuine reform, but they still looked vulnerable, and their survival became open to question.

A Call to Action

The Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries perpetrate the most egregious human rights abuses in the world and thus merit close scrutiny by the international community. They should remain high on the international human rights agenda. Democratic governments and international organizations, particularly the UN Human Rights Council, should keep a spotlight on these countries and press them to live up to universal human rights norms.

The UN Human Rights Council has of late stepped up its efforts to address conditions in the Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries, but it could do more. Undemocratic countries still make up a significant share of the council's membership, and the council includes four of the Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries—China, Cuba, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. Since council members pledge to "uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights," no repressive governments belong on the council.

Membership on the UN Human Rights Council still tends to shield repressive regimes from scrutiny. The council suspended Libya's membership in March 2011 after Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi's forces fired on protesters, and he threatened to purge the country "house by house" of regime opponents, whom he called "rats." China, Cuba, and Saudi Arabia, however, have avoided criticism at the council. There are no special mandates for these three countries, and the council has never adopted a country-specific resolution to condemn human rights abuses committed by these governments in the six years since it was established.

Since January 2011, the UN Human Rights Council has adopted resolutions on almost

half of the Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries—on Belarus, Burma, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Syria, and Sudan. The other half merit condemnation as well for their human rights abuses. The council might start with resolutions on Cuba, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, and Uzbekistan.

The UN Human Rights Council should also provide special procedures mandates to investigate and report on the human rights situation in more Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries. The current country mandates include special rapporteurs for Burma, North Korea, and Syria, and independent experts for Somalia and Sudan. The council should create mandates for special rapporteurs on Belarus (which is currently under consideration), China, and Saudi Arabia.

Regional intergovernmental organizations, particularly the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, need to give greater attention to the countries with the worst human rights records. Each of these organizations has institutions to protect fundamental freedoms and includes both free countries and Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries among its member states. The free countries should more vigorously press the Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries to live up to their commitments under these regional organizations to respect fundamental rights.

Governments of long-established democracies and newly democratic states should take the lead in increasing international scrutiny of the world's most repressive regimes and should challenge the abuses of these regimes through bilateral diplomacy and foreign aid. They should give priority in their foreign policy to support the expansion of fundamental freedoms in the Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries. Heads of government and foreign ministers should publicly condemn the human rights abuses committed by the world's harshest dictatorships. Ambassadors of democratic states in the Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries should meet regularly with political opposition leaders, civil society activists, and independent journalists to highlight the importance of a pluralistic society. Foreign aid to these countries should be directed in ways that bolster fundamental freedoms.

Civil society globally has a critical role to play as well. It can direct a spotlight toward ongoing repression in Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries that tend to escape media attention. Civil society can also provide documentation of the abuses committed by the world's most repressive regimes and maintain pressure on democratic governments to forcefully address these abuses.

The denial of fundamental rights in Worst of the Worst and Threshold countries is so ingrained as to seem almost routine, yet it remains a blight on humanity. It calls out for redress. The international community needs to bolster its efforts to promote respect for fundamental rights in the countries that are most lacking in freedom.

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Scott Zuke provided research assistance for this report.

Worst of the Worst 2012:

The World's Most Repressive Societies

Independent Countries

Country	PR	CL	Freedom Rating	Freedom Status
Belarus	7	6	6.5	Not Free
Burma	7	6▲	6.5	Not Free
Chad	7	6	6.5	Not Free
China	7	6	6.5	Not Free
Cuba	7	6	6.5	Not Free
Equatorial Guinea	7	7	7	Not Free
Eritrea	7	7	7	Not Free
Laos	7	6	6.5	Not Free
Libya	7	6▲	6.5	Not Free
North Korea	7	7	7	Not Free
Saudi Arabia	7	7▼	7	Not Free
Somalia	7	7	7	Not Free
Sudan	7	7	7	Not Free
Syria	7	7▼	7	Not Free
Turkmenistan	7	7	7	Not Free
Uzbekistan	7	7	7	Not Free

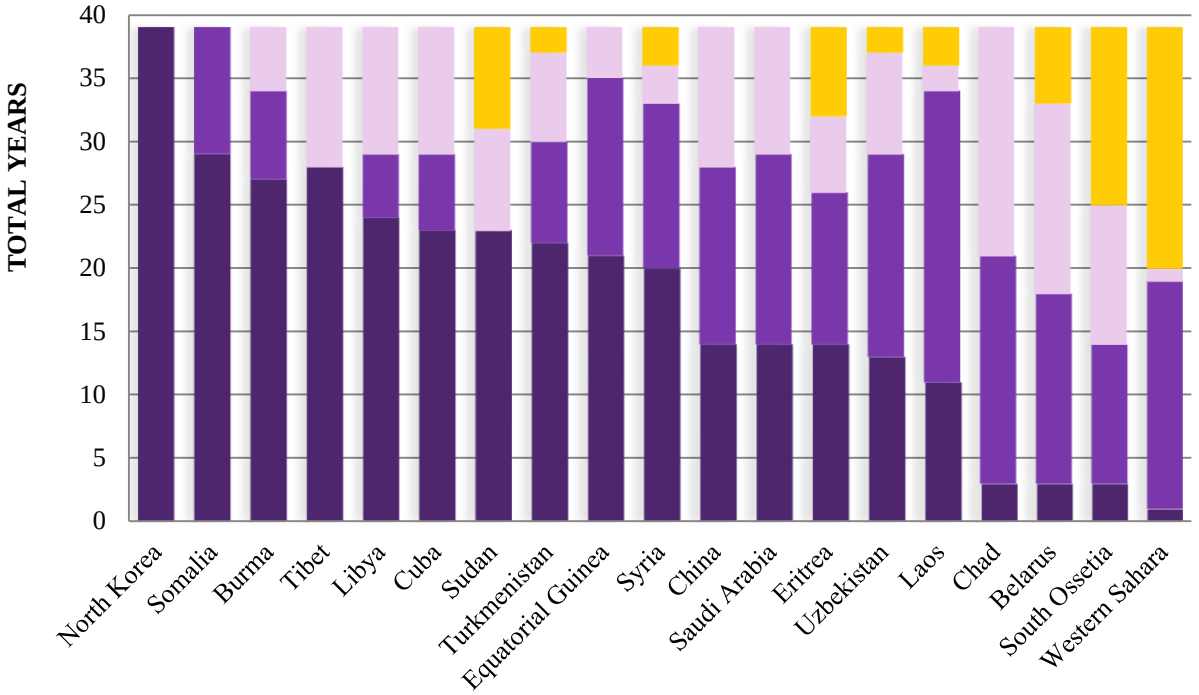
Related and Disputed Territories

Territory	PR	CL	Combined Average Rating	Freedom Status
South Ossetia	7	6	6.5	Not Free
Tibet	7	7	7	Not Free
Western Sahara	7	7▼	7	Not Free

PR and CL stand for political rights and civil liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating. The ratings reflect an overall judgment based on survey results.

▲ ▼ up or down indicates a change in political rights, civil liberties, or status since the last survey.

Current Worst of the Worst and Threshold Countries and Territories
Historical Data, 1973 to 2012



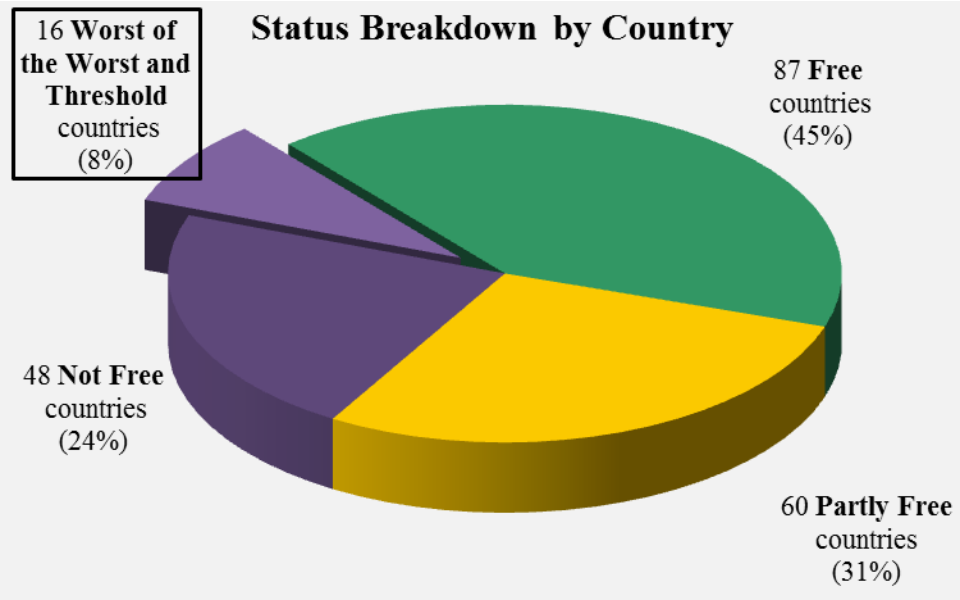
- Combined Average Rating of 3–5 (Partly Free country or territory)
- Combined Average Rating of 5.5–6 (Not Free country or territory)
- Combined Average Rating of 6.5 (Threshold country or territory)
- Combined Average Rating of 7 (Worst of the Worst country or territory)

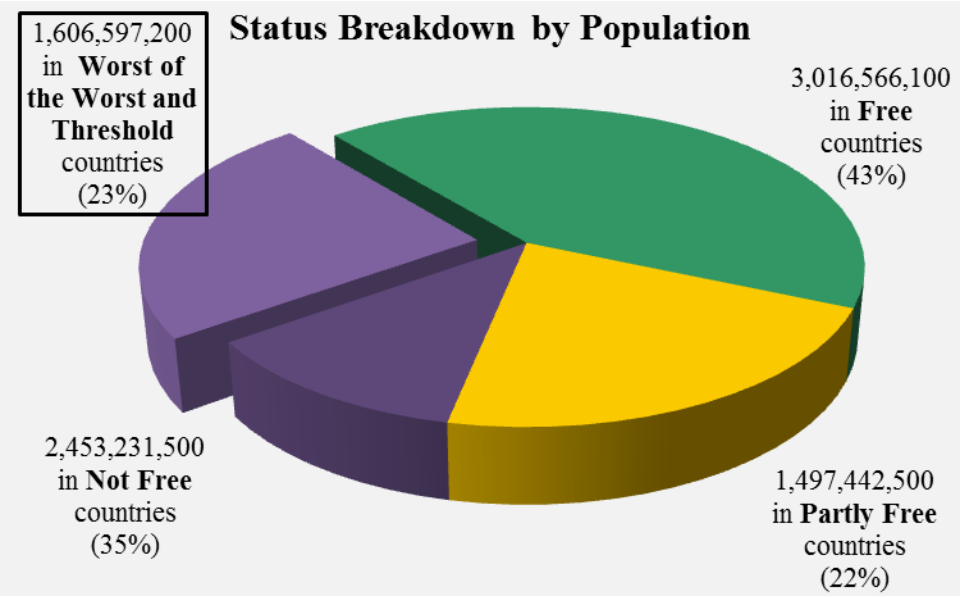
All countries and territories with a Combined Average Rating of 5.5–7 are Not Free.

Notes:

- Tibet: Total number of years includes the rankings for China from 1973 to 1990.
- Turkmenistan: Total number of years includes the rankings for the U.S.S.R. from 1973 to 1991.
- Eritrea: Total number of years includes the rankings for Ethiopia from 1973 to 1993.
- Uzbekistan: Total number of years includes the rankings for the U.S.S.R. from 1973 to 1991.
- Belarus: Total number of years includes the rankings for the U.S.S.R. from 1973 to 1991.
- South Ossetia: Total number of years includes rankings for the U.S.S.R. from 1973 to 1991 and Russia from 1992 to 2008.
- Western Sahara: Total number of years includes the rankings for Morocco from 1973 to 1989.

Freedom in the World 2012





Of the 195 countries evaluated by Freedom House in the *Freedom in the World 2012* survey, 48 are designated as Not Free. Of the 48 Not Free countries, 16 qualify as the world's most repressive societies, with average combined political rights and civil liberties ratings of 6.5 or 7. They comprise 8 percent of the world's countries and 23 percent of the world's population.

Belarus

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	9,500,000
Civil Liberties:	6	**Capital:**	Minsk
Status:	Not Free		

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	6,6,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

2011 Key Developments: Public protests following the deeply flawed December 19, 2010, presidential election led incumbent Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who claimed to have won a new term, to orchestrate an extensive crackdown on all forms of dissent. Most visibly, three former presidential candidates received prison terms of five years or more for their roles in the demonstrations. Protesters continued to come into the street during 2011, but they faced prison terms even for mild forms of expression like wordlessly clapping hands. The regime also continued to harass the media and attempted to gain tighter control over the internet. Ethnic Poles and their leaders similarly faced official harassment during the year.

Political Rights: Belarus is not an electoral democracy. Serious and widespread irregularities have marred all recent elections, including the December 2010 presidential poll. The constitution vests most power in the president, giving him control over the government, courts, and even the legislative process by stating that presidential decrees have a higher legal force than ordinary legislation. The National Assembly serves largely as a rubber-stamp body. The president is elected for five-year terms, and there are no term limits. Opposition parties have no representation in the National Assembly, while pro-presidential parties serve only superficial functions. During the local elections in April 2010, approximately 360 opposition candidates competed for the 21,000 seats, but many withdrew, claiming that the authorities obstructed their campaigns. Corruption continues to be a serious problem and is fed by the state's dominance of the economy and the overall lack of transparency and accountability in government.

Civil Liberties: Lukashenka's government systematically curtails press freedom. Libel is both a civil and a criminal offense, and an August 2008 media law gives the state a monopoly on information about political, social, and economic affairs. The law gives the cabinet control over internet-based media. State media are subordinated to the president, and harassment and censorship of independent media are routine. A June 2010 presidential decree requires internet cafe owners to identify users and track their online activities. Despite constitutional guarantees that "all religions and faiths shall be equal before the law," government decrees and registration requirements have increasingly restricted religious activity. The Lukashenka government restricts freedom of assembly for critical independent groups. Protests and rallies require authorization from local authorities, who can arbitrarily withhold or revoke permission. When public demonstrations do occur, police frequently break them up and arrest participants. Freedom of association is severely restricted, with more than a hundred of the most active nongovernmental organizations forced to close down between 2003 and 2005. Although the country's constitution calls for judicial independence, courts are subject to significant executive influence. The right to a fair trial is often not respected in cases with political overtones. An internal passport system, in which a passport is required for domestic travel and to secure permanent housing, limits freedom of movement and choice of residence. Ethnic Poles and Roma often face discrimination. There are significant discrepancies in income between men and women, and women are poorly represented in leading government positions. As a result of extreme poverty, many women have become victims of the international sex trade.

Burma (Myanmar)

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	53,400,000
Civil Liberties:	6 ↑	**Capital:**	Rangoon [Note: Nay Pyi Taw serves as the administrative capital.]
Status:	Not Free		

Ratings Change: Burma's civil liberties rating improved from 7 to 6 due to an increase in public discussion and media coverage of news and politics, as well as reduced restrictions on education.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,6,NF

2011 Key Developments: In 2011, opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been released from prolonged house arrest in late 2010, entered into a dialogue with the government, traveled around the country to rebuild her political party, and gave interviews to the domestic media for the first time in at least 20 years. Although the new parliament elected in November 2010 was dominated by allies of the military, the new, nominally civilian president appointed a series of reformist advisers, and some independent lawmakers raised human rights issues in the parliament for the first time in decades. The government released thousands of prisoners during the year and promised to relax censorship. The National League for Democracy registered to participate in parliamentary by-elections scheduled for early 2012, and Aung San Suu Kyi planned to run for a seat. Burma also began repairing its relations with foreign countries including the United States. Despite these initial signs of progress, it was unclear how far the reforms would go, and numerous conflicts between the government and the country's ethnic minority militias remained unresolved.

Political Rights: Burma is not an electoral democracy. The military junta long ruled by decree; it controlled all executive, legislative, and judicial powers, suppressed nearly all basic rights, and committed human rights abuses with impunity. It carefully rigged the electoral framework surrounding the 2010 national elections, which were neither free nor fair. Although the 2008 constitution, which the 2010 elections put into effect, establishes a parliament and a civilian president, it also entrenches military dominance, and allows the military to dissolve the civilian government if it determines that the "disintegration of the Union or national solidarity" is at stake. The military retains the right to administer its own affairs, and members of the outgoing military government received blanket immunity for all official acts. Given the lack of transparency and accountability, corruption and economic mismanagement are rampant at both the national and local levels.

Civil Liberties: The government restricts press freedom. The market for private publications and blogs is growing, and while the government censors private periodicals before publication, in 2011 it stopped censoring those that did not explicitly deal with politics. It also relaxed many restrictions on the internet and access to foreign news sources, and allowed for the appearance of Aung San Suu Kyi and other opposition leaders in the press. However, the authorities closely watch internet cafes, slow or shut down internet connections during periods of internal strife, and regularly jail bloggers. The 2008 constitution provides for freedom of religion. It distinguishes Buddhism as the majority religion but also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and animism. At times the government interferes with religious assemblies and attempts to control the Buddhist clergy. Buddhist temples and monasteries have been kept under close surveillance since the 2007 monk-led protests and crackdown. Academic freedom has been severely limited. Teachers are subject to restrictions on freedom of expression and are held accountable for the political activities of their students. The junta has sporadically closed universities and relocated many campuses to relatively isolated areas to disperse the student population. The judiciary is not independent. Judges are appointed or approved by the government and adjudicate cases according to its decrees. Some of the worst human rights abuses take place in areas populated by ethnic minorities, who comprise roughly 35 percent of Burma's population. In these border regions the military arbitrarily detains, beats, rapes, and kills civilians. Burmese women have traditionally enjoyed high social and economic status, but domestic violence and trafficking are growing concerns.

Chad

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	11,500,000
Civil Liberties:	6	**Capital:**	N'Djamena
Status:	Not Free		

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2020	2011
Rating	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,5,NF	6,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

2011 Key Developments: In April 2011, longtime president Idriss Déby was reelected with 89 percent of the vote, but the balloting was boycotted by the three main opposition candidates. In parliamentary elections in February, Déby's Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS) party had retained its absolute majority in the National Assembly amid allegations of fraud by the opposition. The security situation improved during the year, though bandit attacks continued throughout the country.

Political Rights: Chad is not an electoral democracy. The country has never experienced a free and fair transfer of power through elections. The president is elected for five-year terms, and a 2005 constitutional amendment abolished term limits. The legislative elections held in 2011 had originally been scheduled for 2006, but were repeatedly postponed due to insufficient equipment and staffing and delays in voter registration. The European Union praised the peaceful and fair conduct of the elections, despite some logistical problems. However, the opposition claimed that irregularities occurred both before the vote—due to the government's media dominance and the use of state resources to benefit the ruling party—and during the elections, including irregularities with electoral rolls and voter registration cards. There are more than 70 political parties, although a number were created by the government to divide the opposition. Only the ruling MPS has significant influence. Despite rivalries within Déby's northeastern Zaghawa ethnic group, members of that and other northern ethnic groups continue to control Chad's political and economic systems, causing resentment among the country's more than 200 other ethnic groups.

Civil Liberties: Freedom of expression is severely restricted, and self-censorship is common. Broadcast media are controlled by the state. In August 2010, the National Assembly passed a media bill that eliminated imprisonment as a punishment for libel, slander, or insulting the president, but prescribed heavy fines or prison sentences for inciting racial and ethnic hatred and "condoning violence." Although Chad is a secular state, religion is a divisive force. Muslims, who make up slightly more than half of the population, hold a disproportionately large number of senior government posts, and some policies favor Islam in practice. At the same time, the authorities have banned Muslim groups that are seen as promoting violence. The government does not restrict academic freedom. Despite the constitutional guarantee of free assembly, the authorities ban demonstrations by groups thought to be critical of the government. Insecurity has severely hindered the activities of humanitarian organizations in recent years. The constitution guarantees the rights to strike and unionize, but a 2007 law imposed new limits on public-sector workers' right to strike. The rule of law and the judicial system remain weak, with courts heavily influenced by the political leadership. Human rights groups credibly accuse the security forces and rebel groups of killing and torturing with impunity. In June 2011 the government signed an action plan with the United Nations to end the use of child soldiers by the country's security forces, but Chad remains a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking. Chadian women face widespread discrimination and violence. Female genital mutilation is illegal but routinely practiced by several ethnic groups.

↓ China

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	1,338,100,000
Civil Liberties:	6	**Capital:**	Beijing
Status:	Not Free		

Trend Arrow: China received a downward trend arrow due to increased Communist Party efforts to restrict public discussion of political, legal, and human rights issues, including through the disappearance of dozens of activists and lawyers and growing online censorship among domestic social-networking services.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

2011 Key Developments: With a sensitive change of leadership approaching in 2012 and popular uprisings against authoritarian regimes occurring across the Middle East, the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) showed no signs of loosening its grip on power in 2011. Despite minor legal improvements regarding the death penalty and urban property confiscation, the government stalled or even reversed previous reforms related to the rule of law, while security forces resorted to extralegal forms of repression. Growing public frustration over corruption and injustice fueled tens of thousands of protests and several large outbursts of online criticism during the year. The party responded by committing more resources to internal security forces and intelligence agencies, engaging in the systematic enforced disappearance of dozens of human rights lawyers and bloggers, and enhancing controls over online social media.

Political Rights: China is not an electoral democracy. The CCP has a monopoly on political power; its nine-member Politburo Standing Committee sets government policy. A 3,000-member National People's Congress remains subordinate to the party and meets for just two weeks a year. The only competitive elections are for village committees and urban residency councils, but these are often closely controlled by local party branches. Opposition groups are suppressed, and activists publicly calling for reform of the one-party political system risk arrest and imprisonment. In addition to Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, who is serving an 11-year prison sentence related to the prodemocracy manifesto Charter 08, tens of thousands of others are thought to be held in prisons and extrajudicial forms of detention for their political or religious views. Despite thousands of prosecutions launched each year, corruption remains endemic, particularly at the local level.

Civil Liberties: China's media environment remains extremely restrictive, and 2011 featured one of the worst crackdowns on activists in recent memory. Party directives in 2011 curbed reporting on uprisings in the Middle East, an oil spill, public health issues, labor unrest, and particular human rights activists, journalists, and lawyers. Journalists who fail to comply with official guidance are harassed, fired, or jailed. New restrictions were imposed on television entertainment programming, and several periodicals known for investigative journalism faced closure, dismissals, or tighter supervision. China's population of internet users, estimated at over 500 million, remained the world's largest. However, the government maintains an elaborate apparatus for censoring and monitoring internet and mobile-telephone communications. Religious freedom is sharply curtailed, and religious minorities remain a key target of repression. All religious groups must register with the government, which regulates their activities and guides their theology. Some faith groups are forbidden, and their members face harassment, imprisonment, and torture. Freedoms of assembly and association are severely restricted. In early 2011, security forces swarmed locations proposed in anonymous, online calls for Tunisian-style prodemocracy protests, preventing any demonstrations. The only legal labor union is government controlled, and independent labor leaders are harassed. The CCP controls the judiciary and directs verdicts and sentences, particularly in politically sensitive cases. Torture remains widespread, with coerced confessions routinely admitted as evidence. Serious violations of women's rights continue, including domestic violence, human trafficking, and the use of coercive methods to enforce the one-child policy.

Cuba

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	11,300,000
Civil Liberties:	6	**Capital:**	Havana
Status:	Not Free		

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

2011 Key Developments: In 2011, the government continued its negotiated release of the 52 remaining political prisoners from a 2003 crackdown on democratic activists. In total, 166 political prisoners were freed under an agreement with the Roman Catholic Church and the Spanish government, though a sharp increase in politically motivated short-term detentions was reported during the year. In April, the ruling Cuban Communist Party held its Sixth Congress, at which President Raúl Castro formally replaced his brother, former president Fidel Castro, as the party's first secretary. In October, as part of the government's incremental relaxation of long-standing economic restrictions on individuals, Cubans obtained greater leeway to buy and sell privately owned cars and houses.

Political Rights: Cuba is not an electoral democracy. Longtime president Fidel Castro and his brother, current president Raúl Castro, dominate the one-party political system, in which the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) controls all government institutions. All political organizing outside the PCC is illegal. Political dissent, whether spoken or written, is a punishable offense, and dissidents frequently receive years of imprisonment for seemingly minor infractions. The absolute number of politically motivated short-term detentions in Cuba increased from 2,078 in 2010 to 4,123 in 2011. Meanwhile, the total number of longer-term political prisoners decreased from 167 as of July 2010 to an estimated 73 as of December 2011. In December 2011, the Cuban government released 2,999 prisoners who had mostly fulfilled their sentences, but only seven of those had been imprisoned for political reasons. Official corruption remains a serious problem.

Civil Liberties: The news media are owned and controlled by the state. The government considers the independent press to be illegal and uses Ministry of Interior agents to infiltrate and report on the outlets in question. Independent journalists, particularly those associated with the dozen small news agencies that have been established outside state control, are subject to harassment by state security agents. Foreign news agencies may only hire local reporters through government offices. Access to the internet remains tightly controlled, and it is difficult for most Cubans to connect from their homes. The estimated internet penetration rate is less than 3 percent. Websites are closely monitored, and while there are state-owned internet cafes in major cities, the costs are prohibitively high for most residents. The Catholic Church has been playing an increasingly important role in civil society, mediating in the case of the 2003 political prisoners, enabling discussion of topics of public concern, and offering material assistance to the population, especially in the countryside. Nevertheless, official obstacles to religious freedom remain substantial. Churches are not allowed to conduct ordinary educational activities, and many church-based publications are subject to censorship by the Office of Religious Affairs. The government restricts academic freedom. Teaching materials for subjects including mathematics and literature must contain ideological content. Limited rights of assembly and association are permitted under the constitution. However, as with other constitutional rights, they may not be "exercised against the existence and objectives of the Socialist State." The unauthorized assembly of more than three people, even for religious services in private homes, is punishable with up to three months in prison and a fine. This rule is selectively enforced and is often used to imprison human rights advocates. The Council of State, led by Raúl Castro, controls the courts and the judicial process as a whole. Freedom of movement and the right to choose one's residence and place of employment are severely restricted. Attempting to leave the island without permission is a punishable offense. The Cuban constitution establishes full equality of women. About 40 percent of all women work in the official labor force, and they are well represented in most professions.

Equatorial Guinea

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	720,200
Civil Liberties:	7	**Capital:**	Malabo
Status:	Not Free		

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: The African Union selected Equatorial Guinea to host its 17th summit in 2011, despite the country's reputation as one of the most repressive states in sub-Saharan Africa. The event highlighted the abuse practices of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo's regime, with security forces reportedly detaining hundreds of suspected dissidents during the lead-up to the summit. In a process described by watchdog organizations as flawed, a constitutional referendum approved in November granted the president increased powers.

Political Rights: Equatorial Guinea is not an electoral democracy. The 2009 presidential election, which resulted in Obiang securing another seven-year term, reportedly featured intimidation and harassment of the opposition by security forces and restrictions on foreign observers. President Obiang dominates the political system. The 100 members of the unicameral House of People's Representatives wield little power, and 99 seats are held by the ruling pro-presidential coalition. A 2011 referendum approved the creation of a new bicameral parliament in which each body is to be directly elected for five-year terms, but the president will be able to appoint a still-undetermined number of members to the upper house. The activities of the few opposition parties are closely monitored by the government. Equatorial Guinea is considered one of the most corrupt countries in the world, and most major business transactions cannot go forward without the inclusion of an individual connected to the regime. Obiang and members of his inner circle continue to amass huge personal fortunes stemming from the oil industry.

Civil Liberties: Although the constitution guarantees press freedom, the 1992 press law authorizes government censorship. Libel remains a criminal offense, and all journalists are required to register with the government. The state holds a monopoly on broadcast media, with the exception of RTV-Asonga, a private radio and television outlet owned by the president's son. In February 2011, the regime forbade media outlets from reporting on the political unrest in the Arab world. A radio host was suspended for mentioning Libya during a broadcast, and was reportedly assaulted by a state official's bodyguard while leaving the station. The constitution protects religious freedom, though in practice it is sometimes affected by the country's broader political repression, and official preference is given to the Roman Catholic Church and the Reform Church of Equatorial Guinea. Freedoms of assembly and association are severely restricted, and political gatherings must have official authorization to proceed. The few international nongovernmental organizations in the country promote social and economic improvements rather than political and civil rights. The constitution provides for the right to organize unions, but there are many legal barriers to collective bargaining. The judiciary is not independent. Civil cases rarely go to trial, and military tribunals handle national security cases. Prison conditions are deplorable, and the country has been internationally condemned for holding detainees in secret, denying them access to lawyers, and jailing them for long periods without charge. All citizens are required to obtain exit visas to travel abroad, and some members of opposition parties have been denied such visas. Constitutional and legal guarantees of equality for women are largely ignored, and violence against women is reportedly widespread. Women hold just 6 percent of the seats in the House of People's Representatives; however, the 2011 referendum explicitly commits the government to adopting measures to increase women's representation and participation in institutional functions.

Eritrea

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	5,939,000
Civil Liberties:	7	**Capital:**	Asmara
Status:	Not Free		

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: The Eritrean government's suppression of the basic political rights and civil liberties of its citizens continued in 2011. Plans for national elections remained on permanent hold 18 years after independence, and a ban on independent media and foreign organizations remained in place during the year. Meanwhile, a UN report accused Eritrea of planning a terrorist attack against neighboring Ethiopia.

Political Rights: Eritrea is not an electoral democracy. The only legal political party, the Popular Front for Democracy and Justice, maintains complete dominance over the country's political life and has become harshly authoritarian since the end of the war with Ethiopia. The constitution provides for an elected legislature that would choose the president from among its members by a majority vote, but this system has never been implemented, as national elections have been postponed indefinitely. President Isaias Afwerki has remained in office since independence. Corruption continues to be a problem. Senior military officials have been accused of profiting from the smuggling and sale of scarce goods such as building materials, food, and alcohol; charging fees to assist the growing number of Eritreans who wish to flee the country; and using conscript labor for private building projects.

Civil Liberties: The government controls all broadcasting outlets and banned all privately owned newspapers in a 2001 crackdown. A group of journalists arrested in 2001 remain imprisoned without charge, and as many as half of the original 10 are believed to have died in custody. There was a fresh wave of arrests in 2009, and at least 28 journalists were known to be in prison in 2011. The government places significant limitations on the exercise of religion. It officially recognizes only four faiths: Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Lutheranism as practiced by the Evangelical Church of Eritrea. Persecution of minority Christian sects has escalated in recent years. As many as 3,000 people from unregistered religious groups are currently in prison because of their beliefs; the majority are Pentecostal or Evangelical Christians. Three Christians incarcerated at a military detention center reportedly died from mistreatment during 2011. Freedom of assembly is not recognized. Independent nongovernmental organizations are not tolerated, and international human rights groups are barred from the country. In September 2011, Eritrea accused Amnesty International of infiltrating the country to try to foment a North African–style revolution. The judiciary has never issued rulings significantly at variance with government positions, and constitutional due process guarantees are often ignored in cases related to state security. Torture, arbitrary detentions, and political arrests are common. In some facilities, inmates are held in metal shipping containers or underground cells in extreme temperatures. Prisoners are often denied medical treatment. The government maintains a network of secret detention facilities. The Kunama people, one of Eritrea's nine ethnic groups, reportedly face severe discrimination. Freedom of movement is heavily restricted. Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers who are repatriated from other countries are detained, and a number of repatriated Eritreans disappeared while in custody in 2011. Eritrea has been identified as a source country for human trafficking for the purposes of forced labor and sexual exploitation. The government has made various attempts to promote women's rights, but traditional societal discrimination against women persists in rural areas. While female genital mutilation was banned by the government in 2007, the practice remains widespread in the countryside.

Laos

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	6,259,000
Civil Liberties:	6	**Capital:**	Vientiane
Status:	Not Free		

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

2011 Key Developments: Laos held elections in 2011 for its one-party legislature, which reelected Choummaly Sayasone for a second term as the country's president. Popular anger over plans for a major dam on the Mekong River in Laos led a four-country regional body to postpone approval for the project, but construction activity reportedly continued during the year. Meanwhile, a group of ethnic Hmong refugees who were repatriated from Thailand in 2009 and 2010 remained missing despite inquiries by foreign diplomats.

Political Rights: Laos is not an electoral democracy. The 1991 constitution makes the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) the sole legal political party and grants it a leading role at all levels of government. The LPRP vets all candidates for election to the National Assembly, whose members elect the president. In 2011, the legislature was increased in size from 115 members to 132, supposedly to make it more inclusive, but the body continues to hold little real power. Corruption by government officials is widespread, and laws aimed at curbing corruption are rarely enforced. Government regulation of virtually every facet of life provides corrupt officials with ample opportunities to demand bribes.

Civil Liberties: Freedom of the press is severely restricted. Any journalist who criticizes the government or discusses controversial political topics faces legal punishment. The state owns all media. While very few Lao have access to the internet, its content is not heavily censored because the government lacks the capabilities to monitor and block most web traffic. Religious freedom is tightly constrained. Officials continue to jail Christians or expel them from their villages for proselytizing. Several Christian pastors were arrested in Khammouan Province in early 2011, and advocacy groups reported that Lao and Vietnamese troops had killed four ethnic Hmong Christians living near the border in April. Academic freedom is not respected. University professors cannot teach or write about democracy, human rights, or other politically sensitive topics. Government surveillance of the population has been scaled back in recent years, but searches without warrants still occur. The government severely restricts freedom of assembly. Laws prohibit participation in organizations that engage in demonstrations or public protests, or that in any other way cause "turmoil or social instability." While Laos is home to some domestic nongovernmental welfare and professional groups, they are prohibited from pursuing political agendas and are subject to strict state control. All unions must belong to the official Federation of Lao Trade Unions. The courts are corrupt and controlled by the LPRP. Security forces often illegally detain suspects; poor prison conditions and the use of torture remain serious problems. Discrimination against members of ethnic minority tribes is common. The Hmong, who fielded a guerrilla army allied with U.S. forces during the Vietnam War, are particularly distrusted by the government and face harsh treatment. All land is owned by the state, though citizens have rights to use it. On some occasions, the government has awarded land to certain citizens with government connections, money, or links to foreign companies. With no fair or robust system to protect land rights or ensure compensation for displacement, development projects often spur public resentment. The 2011 decision to delay approval for the Xayaburi dam was considered a milestone for environmental protection and resettlement rights in Laos, but it had little practical effect, as work reportedly continued on the project. Gender-based discrimination and abuse are widespread, and thousands of women and girls are trafficked each year for prostitution. However, the government has made some improvements in combating trafficking over the last five years, including closer cooperation with neighboring governments. A record 33 women were elected to the National Assembly in 2011.

Libya

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	6,600,000
Civil Liberties:	6 ↑	**Capital:**	Tripoli
Status:	Not Free		

Ratings Change: Libya's civil liberties rating improved from 7 to 6 due to increased academic and media freedom, as well as greater freedom of assembly and private discussion, following the rollback and collapse of the highly oppressive Qadhafi regime.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,6,NF

2011 Key Developments: Influenced by uprisings in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt and spurred by the arrest of a human rights activist in Benghazi, citizens in several Libyan cities took to the streets in February 2011 to protest the 42-year rule of Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi. The protesters soon faced violence from regime loyalists and security forces, and a civil war began in the country within days. By March, a NATO-led campaign of airstrikes was under way to aid civilian protesters and rebel militias in their battles against al-Qadhafi's military. Rebels captured Tripoli in August, and al-Qadhafi, having fled the capital, was eventually killed near his hometown of Sirte in October. A National Transitional Council (NTC) that had formed in rebel-held Benghazi in February moved to Tripoli toward the end of the year, but it had little effective control over the country's array of locally organized militias.

Political Rights: Libya is not an electoral democracy. Severe repression under al-Qadhafi has given way to an absence of formal governance institutions and frequent skirmishes among autonomous militias. The NTC, an unelected body of about 50 members, nominally controls all aspects of the national government. It is responsible for maintaining order and stability throughout the country in preparation for elections in mid-2012 and the drafting of a constitution. The 2011 uprising created somewhat more space for free political association and participation in Libya. Under the Qadhafi regime, political parties were illegal, and all political activity was strictly monitored. The NTC has made an effort to include representatives from across the country and from different backgrounds. However, only a handful of political parties have organized, including the Democratic Party of Libya and the New Libya Party.

Civil Liberties: Under the Qadhafi regime, state-owned media largely operated as mouthpieces for the authorities, and journalists worked in a climate of fear and self-censorship. The media environment in rebel-held areas was decidedly different, especially in the eastern cities. Some 130 print outlets representing a wide range of viewpoints had been registered with the NTC by July, and several radio and television stations had been established. In addition, many individual Libyans utilized the internet and social-networking platforms during the year to share information. The Qadhafi regime closely monitored mosques for signs of religious extremism and Islamist political activity, but Muslims of various religious and political strains have been much more free to organize and debate their points of view since his fall. In some cases this has led to verbal and armed clashes. Academic freedom was tightly restricted under al-Qadhafi. Close state supervision has been lifted since his ouster. However, no laws have been drafted to guarantee academic independence, and the education system has yet to resume normal operations in all parts of the country. Freedom of assembly has dramatically increased in light of the events of 2011, but the ongoing presence of militia groups and the proliferation of firearms in the country limited peaceful assemblies and the public expression of dissenting views in certain areas. The role of the judiciary under the NTC remains unclear. No legal framework or fully functioning courts had been established by year's end. Women enjoyed many of the same legal protections as men under the Qadhafi regime, but certain laws and social norms perpetuated discrimination, particularly in areas such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance.

North Korea

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	24,457,000
Civil Liberties:	7	**Capital:**	Pyongyang
Status:	Not Free		

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: North Korea's longtime leader, Kim Jong-il, died in December 2011 and was succeeded by his son and heir apparent, Kim Jong-un. The new leader's relative youth and political inexperience led to speculation about the country's future stability and the direction of its foreign and nuclear policies. At the beginning of 2011, relations with South Korea were near an all-time low, though North Korea made deliberate efforts to improve its relations with China, Russia, and the United States throughout the year.

Political Rights: North Korea is not an electoral democracy. Kim Jong-il led the country following the 1994 death of his father, Kim Il-sung, to whom the office of president was permanently dedicated in a 1998 constitutional revision. Kim Jong-un, Kim Jong-il's youngest son, became the country's new leader after his father's death in December 2011.North Korea's parliament, the Supreme People's Assembly, is a rubber-stamp institution that meets irregularly for only a few days each year. All candidates for office, who run unopposed, are preselected by the ruling Korean Workers' Party and two subordinate minor parties. A delegates' meeting of the Korean Workers' Party convened in September 2010, the first such gathering since 1966, and took actions including the promotion of several members of the Kim family. Kim Jong-un was elected as vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, and was subsequently appointed to the party's Central Committee. Corruption is believed to be endemic at all levels of the state and economy.

Civil Liberties: The constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press, but in practice these rights are nonexistent. All media outlets are run by the state. Televisions and radios are permanently fixed to state channels, and all publications are subject to strict supervision and censorship. Internet access is restricted to a few thousand people with state approval, and foreign websites are blocked. Although freedom of religion is guaranteed by the constitution, it does not exist in practice. Nearly all forms of private communication are monitored by a huge network of informers. Freedom of assembly is not recognized, and there are no known associations or organizations other than those created by the state. Strikes, collective bargaining, and other organized-labor activities are illegal. North Korea does not have an independent judiciary. The UN General Assembly has recognized and condemned severe North Korean human rights violations including the use of torture, public executions, extrajudicial and arbitrary detention, and forced labor; the absence of due process and the rule of law; death sentences for political offenses; and an extensive network of camps for political prisoners. Inmates face brutal conditions, and collective or familial punishment for suspected dissent by an individual is a common practice. There is no freedom of movement, and forced internal resettlement is routine. There have been widespread reports of trafficked women and girls among the tens of thousands of North Koreans who have recently crossed into China.

Saudi Arabia

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	27,897,000
Civil Liberties:	7↓	**Capital:**	Riyadh
Status:	Not Free		

Ratings Change: Saudi Arabia's civil liberties rating declined from 6 to 7 due to new restrictions on the media and public speech as well as the severe treatment of religious minorities, including crackdowns on Shiite Muslim protests.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: In an effort to prevent popular uprisings similar to those that took place elsewhere in the Middle East in 2011, Saudi authorities announced over $130 billion in new social spending. Nevertheless, small protests occurred during the year, including in predominantly Shiite villages in the country's Eastern Province. Saudi women launched a highly visible campaign in May calling for greater freedoms, including the right to drive, and King Abdullah announced that women would be allowed to vote in municipal elections in 2015 and hold seats in the country's Consultative Council. Meanwhile, the king issued a royal decree in April that amended the country's press law to criminalize criticism of religious scholars.

Political Rights: Saudi Arabia is not an electoral democracy. The country's 1992 Basic Law declares that the Koran and the Sunna are the country's constitution. The king appoints the 150-member Consultative Council, which serves in an advisory capacity and has limited powers. The Council of Ministers passes legislation that becomes law once ratified by royal decree. Limited elections for advisory councils at the municipal level were introduced in 2005, and a second round of these elections was held in September 2011. Political parties are forbidden, and organized political opposition exists only outside the country. Corruption is a significant problem. In March 2011, King Abdullah issued a royal decree establishing an anticorruption commission to monitor and observe government departments, though administrative obstacles hindered its success.

Civil Liberties: The government tightly controls the content of domestic media and dominates regional print and satellite television coverage. Government officials have banned journalists and editors who publish articles deemed offensive to the ruling authorities or the country's powerful religious establishment. The regime has blocked access to over 400,000 websites that are considered immoral or politically sensitive. All Saudis are required by law to be Muslims, and the government prohibits the public practice of any religions other than Islam. Religious practices of the Shiite and Sufi Muslim minority sects are restricted. Academic freedom is restricted, and informers monitor classrooms for compliance with curriculum rules, such as a ban on teaching secular philosophy and religions other than Islam. Freedoms of association and assembly are not upheld, and the government frequently detains political activists who stage demonstrations or engage in other civic advocacy. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of Shiite demonstrators took to the streets during 2011, demanding the release of political prisoners and political reform, and expressing support for the uprising in Bahrain. Security forces responded by increasing their presence in Shiite villages in Eastern Province, targeting activists and preventing media from reporting on events in the region. Allegations of torture by police and prison officials are common. Many laws discriminate against women. They may not legally drive cars, their use of public facilities is restricted when men are present, and they cannot travel within or outside of the country without a male relative. In May 2011, Saudi women launched a highly visible campaign demanding the expansion of their rights, including the right to drive. Daughters generally receive half the inheritance awarded to their brothers, and the court testimony of one man is equal to that of two women. However, education and economic rights for Saudi women have improved somewhat, and now more than half of the country's university students are female.

Somalia

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	9,900,000
Civil Liberties:	7	**Capital:**	Mogadishu
Status:	Not Free		

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	6,7,NF	6,7,NF	6,7,NF	6,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: In 2011, a crippling drought in the Horn of Africa converged with continuing insecurity, the lack of an effective central government, and gaps in international aid to put 4 million people in need of emergency assistance in Somalia and created famine conditions in the parts of the south controlled by the main insurgent group, the Shabaab. In June, the international community reluctantly agreed to extend the mandate of the weak Transitional Federal Government (TFG) for another year. After African Union peacekeepers ousted the Shabaab from Mogadishu in August, the group responded by launching its most deadly bomb attack on the capital to date in October.

Political Rights: Somalia is not an electoral democracy. The Somali state has in many respects ceased to exist, and there is no governing authority with the ability to protect political rights and civil liberties. The TFG is recognized internationally but is deeply unpopular domestically, and its actual territorial control is minimal. There are no effective political parties, and the political process is driven largely by clan loyalty. A draft constitution was completed in July 2010 but had not been adopted by the end of 2011. Since 1991, the northwestern region of Somaliland has functioned with relative stability as a self-declared independent state, though it has not received international recognition. The autonomous region of Puntland, in the northeastern corner of the country, has declared a temporary secession until Somalia is stabilized, although calls for full independence have been on the rise. Relations between Puntland and the TFG remained poor in 2011, due in part to frustration with the underrepresentation of Puntland interests in Mogadishu. Corruption in Somalia is rampant, and UN monitors have reported extensive graft at all levels of the TFG.

Civil Liberties: Although Somalia's Transitional Federal Charter calls for freedom of speech and the press, these rights are quite limited in practice. Somalia is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. In September 2011, a Malaysian journalist reporting on the famine was shot and killed, and a colleague injured, when the convoy they were travelling in came under fire from AU troops. In December, Abdisalan Sheikh Hassan of Horn Cable TV was shot in the head by a gunman in military uniform while driving through central Mogadishu. Islam is recognized as the official religion, and nearly all Somalis are Sunni Muslims, but there is a very small Christian community. Freedom of assembly is not respected amid the ongoing violence, and the largely informal economy is inhospitable to organized labor. The conflict has forced the nongovernmental organizations and UN agencies operating in Somalia to either reduce or suspend their activities. There is no judicial system functioning effectively at the national level. The transitional assembly passed a law to implement Sharia (Islamic law) in 2009, but the government has been unable to apply the legislation. In practice, authorities administer a mix of Sharia and traditional Somali forms of justice and reconciliation. The harshest codes are enforced in areas under the control of the Shabaab, where people convicted of theft or other minor crimes are flogged or have their limbs amputated, usually in public. The rights of Somali citizens are routinely abused by the various warring factions. Although outlawed, female genital mutilation is still practiced in some form on nearly all Somali girls. Sexual violence is rampant due to lawlessness and impunity for perpetrators, and rape victims are often stigmatized. While the transitional charter stipulates that women should make up at least 12 percent of the transitional assembly, but there are currently just 37 women among the 550 lawmakers.

South Ossetia

Political Rights: 7 **Population:** 70,000
Civil Liberties: 6
Status: Not Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	--	--	--	--	--	--	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF

2011 Key Developments: As South Ossetia's November 2011 presidential election approached, officials loyal to outgoing president Eduard Kokoity jailed and threatened opposition figures and changed legislation to prevent the registration of certain candidates. Leading opposition candidate Alla Dzhioyeva appeared to come out ahead in a runoff against Moscow-backed candidate Anatoly Bibilov, but the Supreme Court annulled the vote over significant electoral violations and called for a repeat election in March 2012, touching off a series of protests. The parliament rejected the terms of a Russian-brokered compromise, and the dispute remained unresolved at year's end. The political standoff took place in a general atmosphere of intimidation and occasional violence, with both Russian officials and the South Ossetian leadership suggesting the annexation of the territory by Russia.

Political Rights: Elections conducted by the separatist authorities are not monitored by independent observers or recognized by the international community. Most ethnic Georgians have either declined to or been unable to participate in such elections. During the May 2009 parliamentary elections, opposition parties reported significant violations, including mishandling of ballot boxes, restrictions on observer access to polling stations, and alleged coercion of voters in favor of Kokoity's supporters. Opposition representation was reduced as a result of 2008 election laws, which set a 7 percent vote threshold for parties to enter the parliament and required all lawmakers to be elected by proportional representation. The 2011 presidential election campaign period featured violence and other abuses. The leading opposition candidates were prevented from registering after a 10-year residency requirement was added to the constitution in April. Other opposition candidates were beaten or jailed, and one senior member of a recently disqualified candidate's party was murdered in North Ossetia in October. Russia exerts a dominant influence on South Ossetian politics. Russians reputedly endorsed by Moscow held key cabinet positions in 2011, including the premiership. Corruption is believed to be extensive, spurring pressure from Russia and the public to curb the alleged embezzlement of funds earmarked for postwar reconstruction. Before the 2008 war with Georgia, the territory reportedly hosted large-scale smuggling and black-market activities.

Civil Liberties: South Ossetia's electronic and print media are entirely controlled by separatist authorities, and private broadcasts are prohibited. Independent or opposition-oriented journalists in the territory face various forms of intimidation. Freedom of religion has sometimes been adversely affected by the political and military situation. Civil society groups operate under the close scrutiny of the authorities, and activists are subject to intimidation. South Ossetia's justice system has been manipulated to punish perceived opponents of the separatist leadership, while government allies allegedly violate the law with relative impunity. Indiscriminate attacks by both sides in the 2008 war killed and displaced civilians, and Ossetian forces seized or razed property in previously Georgian-controlled villages. Authorities have barred ethnic Georgians from returning to the territory unless they renounce their Georgian citizenship and accept Russian passports. The de facto border with Georgia was tightened in 2011, with several Georgians subjected to detention by Ossetian and Russian border guards. Russian authorities have prevented ethnic Ossetians from entering Georgia, but travel to Russia is unimpeded.

↓ Sudan

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	44,632,400
Civil Liberties:	7	[Note: This figure includes South Sudan.]	
Status:	Not Free	**Capital:**	Khartoum

Trend Arrow: Sudan received a downward trend arrow due to a surge in arrests of opposition political activists and leaders, the banning of a leading political party, the violent response to public demonstrations in Khartoum and other cities, and a crackdown on the activities of journalists.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: Sudan experienced political, economic, and social upheaval in 2011, including the loss of one-third of its territory when South Sudan became independent in July. Faced with the threat of political spillover from popular uprisings in other Arab countries and an economic crisis triggered by the secession of the oil-rich South, the embattled regime launched a harsh crackdown on any sign of dissent. New conflicts erupted in the border states of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, prompting a heavy-handed response by government forces, which were accused of committing war crimes. Meanwhile, the conflict in Darfur continued despite the signing of a peace agreement with one of the rebel groups.

Political Rights: Sudan is not an electoral democracy. Although the first multiparty elections in 24 years were held in 2010, they were plagued by irregularities and failed to meet international standards. The leading opposition parties boycotted the presidential election, and several also withdrew from the legislative polls. The country is governed according to the 2005 interim constitution, but this document is being redrafted following the independence of South Sudan. Members of the opposition and civil society have so far been excluded from consultations over the constitution-writing process and claim that proposed revisions would lead to a more repressive system of governance. Sudan is considered one of the world's most corrupt states. Members of the ruling National Congress Party tightly control the national economy and use the wealth they have amassed in banking and business to buy political support.

Civil Liberties: The news media continue to face significant obstacles. The 2009 Press and Publication Act allows a government-appointed Press Council to prevent publication or broadcast of material it deems unsuitable, temporarily shut down newspapers, and impose heavy fines on those who break the rules. These powers were widely used in 2011. In May, ten journalists were charged with defamation for reporting on the alleged gang rape of a female student by intelligence agents. At least three of the reporters were found guilty, and two spent a month in prison rather than pay a fine. Religious freedom, though guaranteed by the 2005 interim constitution, is not upheld in practice, and the government uses religious laws as a means to persecute political opponents. In July 2011, 150 people from Darfur were rounded up by police in Khartoum. Of those arrested, 129 were charged with apostasy, which carries a maximum sentence of death. They were released in September after agreeing to follow the government's interpretation of Islam. Freedom of assembly is restricted. The government responded violently to student protests and other demonstrations during 2011. In Darfur, government-backed forces and the main rebel groups place restrictions on the movements of aid workers and peacekeepers. The judiciary is not independent. Lower courts provide some due process safeguards, but the higher courts are subject to political control, and special security and military courts do not apply accepted legal standards. Sudanese criminal law is based on Sharia and allows punishments such as flogging. Torture is reportedly common. The government has directed and assisted the systematic killing of tens or even hundreds of thousands of people in Darfur since 2003, including through its support for militia groups that have terrorized civilians. Human rights groups have documented the widespread use of rape, the organized burning of villages, and the forced displacement of entire communities. Islamic law denies women equitable rights in marriage, inheritance, and divorce. Female genital mutilation is widely practiced.

Syria

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	22,500,000
Civil Liberties:	7↓	**Capital:**	Damascus
Status:	Not Free		

Ratings Change: Syria's civil liberties rating declined from 6 to 7 due to increased government efforts to divide the country along sectarian lines, the complete deterioration of the rule of law, and increased restrictions on freedom of movement.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: Responding to persistent popular protests that began in March, the government used the military and other security forces to pursue a violent campaign of repression in 2011, periodically besieging towns and killing several thousand people by year's end. The regime offered some nominal reforms, such as the repeal of the emergency law, but they had little practical effect as authorities continued to attack, detain, and abuse tens of thousands of Syrians, including journalists, political activists, and members of certain ethnic and religious groups.

Political Rights: Syria is not an electoral democracy. The president is nominated by the ruling Baath Party and approved by popular referendum for seven-year terms. In practice, these referendums are orchestrated by the regime, as are elections for the 250-seat, unicameral People's Council, whose members serve four-year terms and hold little independent legislative power. Almost all power rests in the executive branch. The only legal political parties are the Baath Party and its several small coalition partners in the ruling National Progressive Front. The government promised in 2011 to initiate a process of constitutional reform with the aim of easing the Baath Party's political dominance, but constitutional changes made toward year's end took a vague approach to political parties and aimed instead at reinforcing President Bashar al-Assad's own power.

Civil Liberties: Freedom of expression is heavily restricted. It is illegal to publish material that harms national unity, tarnishes the image of the state, or threatens the "goals of the revolution." Many journalists, writers, and intellectuals have been arrested under these laws. Most broadcast media are state owned, and private print outlets are required to submit all material to government censors. However, satellite dishes are common, giving most Syrians access to foreign broadcasts. More than a dozen privately owned newspapers and magazines have sprouted up in recent years, but amid the 2011 turmoil even the most established of them dealt only obliquely with domestic political issues. Journalists frequently went missing or were jailed during 2011. Foreign journalists also faced detention and travel restrictions. Syrians access the internet only through state-run servers, which block more than 200 sites associated with the opposition, Kurdish politics, Islamic organizations, human rights, and certain foreign news services. Social-networking and video-sharing websites are also blocked. Although the constitution requires that the president be a Muslim, there is no state religion in Syria, and freedom of worship is generally respected. However, the government tightly monitors mosques and controls the appointment of Muslim religious leaders. Mosques frequently became sites of violence in 2011, as government forces attempted to prevent gatherings of worshipers from turning into protests. Academic freedom is heavily restricted. University professors have been dismissed or imprisoned for expressing dissent, and some were killed during the 2011 uprising. Public demonstrations are illegal without official permission, which is typically granted only to progovernment groups. All nongovernmental organizations must register with the government, which generally denies registration to reformist or human rights groups. Leaders of unlicensed human rights groups have frequently been jailed for publicizing state abuses. Women hold only 12 percent of the seats in the legislature, though the government has appointed some women to senior positions, including one of the two vice presidential posts. The government provides women with equal access to education, but many discriminatory laws remain in force.

Tibet

Political Rights: 7 **Population:** 3,000,000
Civil Liberties: 7
Status: Not Free

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: The atmosphere of tight security established after an uprising in 2008 was generally maintained during 2011. In the Tibetan areas of Sichuan Province, repression intensified beginning in March, after a young monk set himself on fire to protest Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule. By year's end, eight more Tibetans in Sichuan and one in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) had self-immolated. In response, the authorities detained 300 monks for "patriotic education." Though most were later released, at least three were sentenced to prison terms of over 10 years for aiding one of the self-immolators. During the year, the targets of detention and imprisonment in Tibetan regions continued to expand beyond the monastic and activist community to include musicians or average citizens who circulated songs advocating Tibetan rights or independence. At least 500 political and religious prisoners were in custody as of September. In March, the Dalai Lama retired from his political role in the India-based government-in-exile, and Lobsang Sangay was elected prime minister in April.

Political Rights: Under Chinese rule, Tibetans lack the right to determine their political future or freely elect their leaders. The CCP governs the TAR and Tibetan areas in the nearby provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan through appointed officials. The few ethnic Tibetans who occupy senior positions serve mostly as figureheads, often echoing official statements that condemn the Dalai Lama and emphasize Beijing's role in developing Tibet's economy. In 2011, the top CCP official in Tibet was replaced, though the change appeared unlikely to significantly reduce state repression in the region. Tibetans suffer the same lack of political freedom as China's ethnic Han majority, but those seen to be advocating greater autonomy or political independence for Tibet risk harsher punishment and imprisonment. Corruption is believed to be an extensive problem in Tibet, as in China.

Civil Liberties: Chinese authorities control the flow of information in Tibet, tightly restricting all media and severely limiting access to foreign journalists. Online censorship and cybercafé surveillance in place across China are enforced even more stringently in Tibet. Near the sites of self-immolations in 2011, the government at times cut off the internet entirely and installed security cameras along main roads. The authorities regularly suppress religious activities, particularly those seen as forms of political dissent or advocacy of Tibetan independence. Possession of Dalai Lama–related materials can lead to official harassment and punishment. If implemented, regulations that came into effect in 2011 would further increase government control over the personnel decisions and daily affairs of monasteries. University professors cannot lecture on certain topics, and many must attend political indoctrination sessions. In April, a lockdown was imposed on Kirti monastery in Sichuan following the first self-immolation, sparking protests by local residents. Security forces suppressed the protests, and two Tibetans reportedly died in the clashes. According to overseas Tibetan groups, over 60 writers, intellectuals, and cultural figures have been arrested since 2008, with some sentenced to long prison terms. Human rights, civic groups, and independent trade unions are illegal, and even nonviolent protests are harshly punished. The judicial system in Tibet remains abysmal; most judges lack legal education, defendants have minimal access to legal representation, and trials involving "state security" are held in secret. Torture remains common in practice.

Turkmenistan

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	5,200,000
Civil Liberties:	7	**Capital:**	Ashgabat
Status:	Not Free		

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: All the candidates who registered in 2011 for Turkmenistan's February 2012 presidential election were members of the ruling party, and the tightly controlled process was widely expected to result in a new term for President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov. Also during the year, the authorities sought to silence independent reports of massive explosions at an arms depot in July, and they took greater repressive measures against human rights activists inside and outside the country.

Political Rights: Turkmenistan is not an electoral democracy. The late president Saparmurat Niyazov wielded almost absolute power until his death. None of the country's elections—including the February 2007 vote that gave Berdymukhammedov, Niyazov's successor, a five-year term in office—have been free or fair. Berdymukhammedov has maintained all the means and patterns of repression established by Niyazov. Under a new constitution approved in 2008, the Mejlis (National Assembly) became the sole legislative body and expanded from 50 to 125 seats, with members serving five-year terms. The new charter also gave citizens the right to form political parties, though only the ruling party is officially registered. Berdymukhammedov made several references to the possibility of forming new political parties in 2010 and 2011, but no actual changes had taken place by the end of 2011. Local elections held in July 2009 and December 2010 mimicked the country's previous stage-managed polls amid reports of low voter turnout. Corruption is widespread, with public officials often forced to bribe their way into their positions. The government's lack of transparency affects a variety of public services, including medical care. An April 2010 report by Doctors Without Borders alleged that Turkmen authorities are concealing "a dangerous public health situation."

Civil Liberties: Freedoms of speech and the press are severely restricted by the government, which controls all broadcast and print media. The authorities remain hostile to foreign news services, harassing the few local correspondents. A state-run service provider controls access to the internet and reportedly blocks undesirable websites. The government restricts freedom of religion, and independent groups face persecution. Practicing an unregistered religion remains illegal, with violators subject to fines. The government places significant restrictions on academic freedom, and Niyazov's writings are still used in the school system, although their prominence appears to be declining gradually. The constitution guarantees freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, but these rights are severely restricted in practice. While not technically illegal, nongovernmental organizations are tightly controlled, and Turkmenistan has no civil society sector to speak of. There are no legal guarantees protecting workers' rights to form unions and strike, though the constitution does not specifically prohibit such activities. The judicial system is subservient to the president, who appoints and removes judges without legislative review. The authorities frequently deny rights of due process, including public trials and access to defense attorneys. Prisons suffer from overcrowding and inadequate nutrition and medical care, and international organizations are not permitted to visit prisoners. Employment and educational opportunities for ethnic minorities are limited by the government's promotion of Turkmen national identity. Freedom of movement is restricted, with a reported blacklist preventing some individuals from leaving the country. Traditional social and religious norms, inadequate education, and poor economic conditions limit professional opportunities for women, and anecdotal reports suggest that domestic violence is common.

Uzbekistan

Political Rights:	7	**Population:**	28,463,000
Civil Liberties:	7	**Capital:**	Tashkent
Status:	Not Free		

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: Uzbekistan's government suppressed all political opposition and restricted independent business activity in 2011, and the few remaining civic activists and critical journalists in the country faced prosecution, hefty fines, and arbitrary detention. Nevertheless, the regime continued to improve relations with the United States and Europe as it provided logistical support for NATO operations in Afghanistan.

Political Rights: Uzbekistan is not an electoral democracy. President Islam Karimov uses the dominant executive branch to suppress all political opposition. Karimov's most recent reelection in December 2007 apparently flouted constitutional rules on term limits. Only four political parties, all progovernment, are registered, and no genuine opposition parties function legally. Unregistered opposition groups operate primarily in exile. In October 2011, the exiled opposition group Birdamlik attempted to hold a national event to bring complaints against local officials in several cities. Local activists faced harassment from authorities, and leaders of the campaign reported that the neighborhood committee (*mahalla*) officials threatened residents who wanted to participate.

Civil Liberties: Despite constitutional guarantees, freedoms of speech and the press are severely restricted. The state controls major media outlets and related facilities. The government permits the existence of mainstream religions, including approved Muslim, Jewish, and Christian denominations, but treats unregistered activities as a criminal offense. The state exercises strict control over Islamic worship, including the content of sermons. In 2011, members of legally registered Christian organizations were frequently targeted in raids, with authorities seizing religious literature, and members were arrested for unauthorized private gatherings. In March, the last remaining bookstores legally permitted to sell approved religious literature in Tashkent were raided and closed. The government reportedly limits academic freedom. Bribes are commonly required to gain entrance to exclusive universities and obtain good grades. Open and free private discussion is limited by the *mahalla* committees—traditional neighborhood organizations that the government has turned into an official system for public surveillance and control. Despite constitutional provisions for freedom of assembly, the authorities severely restrict this right in practice. Freedom of association is tightly constrained, and unregistered nongovernmental organizations face extreme difficulties and harassment. Human Rights Watch, the last international monitoring group with a presence in the country, was forced to close its office in March 2011. The judiciary is subservient to the president, who appoints all judges and can remove them at any time. Prisons suffer from severe overcrowding and shortages of food and medicine. As with detained suspects, prison inmates—particularly those sentenced for their religious beliefs—are often subjected to abuse or torture. In May 2011, the president amnestied political prisoner and critical poet Yusuf Juma, who had been sentenced to five years in prison in 2008, allegedly for injuring police during a demonstration. He left for the United States after his release. Restrictions on foreign travel include the use of exit visas, which are often issued selectively. Women's educational and professional prospects are limited by cultural and religious norms and by ongoing economic difficulties. The trafficking of women abroad for prostitution remains a serious problem. Despite legislation passed in 2009 to impose tougher penalties for child labor, the practice reportedly remained widespread during subsequent cotton harvests.

Western Sahara

Political Rights: 7 **Population:** 507,000
Civil Liberties: 7↓
Status: Not Free

Ratings Change: Western Sahara's civil liberties rating declined from 6 to 7 due to the inability of civil society groups to form and operate, as well as serious restrictions on property rights and business activity.

Ten-Year Ratings Timeline for Year under Review
(Political Rights, Civil Liberties, Status)

Year Under Review	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Rating	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,6,NF	7,7,NF

2011 Key Developments: Morocco and the pro-independence Polisario Front failed to make progress in mediated talks on Western Sahara's status in 2011. Informal negotiations failed once again, with no future round scheduled. Meanwhile, Sahrawis continued to be denied basic political, civil, and economic rights.

Political Rights: As the occupying force in Western Sahara, Morocco controls local elections and works to ensure that pro-independence leaders are excluded from both the local political process and the Moroccan Parliament. Reports of corruption are widespread. The territory possesses extensive natural resources, including phosphate, iron-ore deposits, hydrocarbon reserves, and fisheries. Nevertheless, the local population remains largely impoverished.

Civil Liberties: The Moroccan constitution provides for freedom of the press, but this is severely limited in Western Sahara, and there is little independent Sahrawi media activity. Moroccan law bars the media and individuals from challenging Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, leading to self-censorship. The authorities expel or detain Sahrawi, Moroccan, and foreign reporters who attempt to conduct first-hand reporting on the issue. The internet and independent satellite broadcasts are largely unavailable due to economic constraints. Nearly all Sahrawis are Sunni Muslims, and Moroccan authorities generally do not interfere with their freedom of worship. Sahrawis are not permitted to form independent political or nongovernmental organizations, and their freedom of assembly is severely restricted. As in previous years, activists supporting independence and their suspected foreign sympathizers were subject to harassment. Sahrawis are technically subject to Moroccan labor laws, but there is little organized labor activity in the territory. Morocco and the Polisario both restrict free movement in potential conflict areas. Morocco has been accused of using force and financial incentives to alter the composition of Western Sahara's population. Sahrawi women face much of the same cultural and legal discrimination as Moroccan women. The significant reform in 2004 of the Moroccan *Mudawwana*—a law governing issues including marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody—does not appear to have been applied to Western Sahara. Conditions are generally worse for women living in rural areas, where poverty and illiteracy rates are higher.

Freedom in the World 2012
Table of Independent Countries

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Afghanistan	Not Free	6	6	↓
Albania*	Partly Free	3	3	↓
Algeria	Not Free	6	5	
Andorra*	Free	1	1	
Angola	Not Free	6	5	
Antigua and Barbuda*	Free	3	2	
Argentina*	Free	2	2	
Armenia	Partly Free	6	4	
Australia*	Free	1	1	
Austria*	Free	1	1	
Azerbaijan	Not Free	6	5	↓
Bahamas*	Free	1	1	
Bahrain	Not Free	6	6▼	
Bangladesh*	Partly Free	3	4	↓
Barbados*	Free	1	1	
Belarus	Not Free	7	6	
Belgium*	Free	1	1	
Belize*	Free	1	2	
Benin*	Free	2	2	
Bhutan	Partly Free	4	5	
Bolivia*	Partly Free	3	3	
Bosnia and Herzegovina*	Partly Free	4	3	
Botswana*	Free	3	2	
Brazil*	Free	2	2	
Brunei	Not Free	6	5	
Bulgaria*	Free	2	2	
Burkina Faso	Partly Free	5	3	
Burma	Not Free	7	6 ▲	
Burundi	Partly Free	5	5	
Cambodia	Not Free	6	5	↓
Cameroon	Not Free	6	6	
Canada*	Free	1	1	
Cape Verde*	Free	1	1	
Central African Republic	Partly Free	5	5	
Chad	Not Free	7	6	
Chile*	Free	1	1	
China	Not Free	7	6	↓
Colombia*	Partly Free	3	4	
Comoros*	Partly Free	3	4	
Congo (Brazzaville)	Not Free	6	5	
Congo (Kinshasa)	Not Free	6	6	

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Costa Rica*	Free	1	1	
Côte d'Ivoire	Not Free	6 ▲	6	
Croatia*	Free	1	2	
Cuba	Not Free	7	6	
Cyprus*	Free	1	1	
Czech Republic*	Free	1	1	
Denmark*	Free	1	1	
Djibouti	Not Free	6	5	↓
Dominica*	Free	1	1	
Dominican Republic*	Free	2	2	
East Timor*	Partly Free	3	4	
Ecuador*	Partly Free	3	3	↓
Egypt	Not Free	6	5	↑
El Salvador*	Free	2	3	
Equatorial Guinea	Not Free	7	7	
Eritrea	Not Free	7	7	
Estonia*	Free	1	1	
Ethiopia	Not Free	6	6	↓
Fiji	Partly Free	6	4	
Finland*	Free	1	1	
France*	Free	1	1	
Gabon	Not Free	6	5	
The Gambia	Not Free ▼	6	5	
Georgia	Partly Free	4	3	
Germany*	Free	1	1	
Ghana*	Free	1	2	
Greece*	Free	2▼	2	
Grenada*	Free	1	2	
Guatemala*	Partly Free	3▲	4	
Guinea	Partly Free	5	5	
Guinea-Bissau	Partly Free	4	4	
Guyana*	Free	2	3	
Haiti	Partly Free	4	5	
Honduras	Partly Free	4	4	
Hungary*	Free	1	2▼	
Iceland*	Free	1	1	
India*	Free	2	3	
Indonesia*	Free	2	3	
Iran	Not Free	6	6	↓
Iraq	Not Free	5	6	
Ireland*	Free	1	1	
Israel*	Free	1	2	↓
Italy*	Free	1	1▲	
Jamaica*	Free	2	3	

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Japan*	Free	1	2	
Jordan	Not Free	6	5	
Kazakhstan	Not Free	6	5	↓
Kenya	Partly Free	4	3	
Kiribati*	Free	1	1	
Kosovo	Partly Free	5	4	
Kuwait	Partly Free	4	5	
Kyrgyzstan	Partly Free	5	5	
Laos	Not Free	7	6	
Latvia*	Free	2	2	
Lebanon	Partly Free	5	4▼	
Lesotho*	Partly Free	3	3	
Liberia*	Partly Free	3	4	
Libya	Not Free	7	6▲	
Liechtenstein*	Free	1	1	
Lithuania*	Free	1	1	
Luxembourg*	Free	1	1	
Macedonia*	Partly Free	3	3	
Madagascar	Partly Free	6	4	
Malawi*	Partly Free	3	4	↓
Malaysia	Partly Free	4	4	
Maldives*	Partly Free	3	4	
Mali*	Free	2	3	
Malta*	Free	1	1	
Marshall Islands*	Free	1	1	
Mauritania	Not Free	6	5	
Mauritius*	Free	1	2	
Mexico*	Partly Free	3	3	
Micronesia*	Free	1	1	
Moldova*	Partly Free	3	3	
Monaco*	Free	2	1	
Mongolia*	Free	2	2	
Montenegro*	Free	3	2	
Morocco	Partly Free	5	4	
Mozambique	Partly Free	4	3	
Namibia*	Free	2	2	
Nauru*	Free	1	1	
Nepal	Partly Free	4	4	
Netherlands*	Free	1	1	
New Zealand*	Free	1	1	
Nicaragua*	Partly Free	5▼	4	
Niger	Partly Free	3▲	4	
Nigeria	Partly Free	4	4	
North Korea	Not Free	7	7	
Norway*	Free	1	1	

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Oman	Not Free	6	5	
Pakistan	Partly Free	4	5	↓
Palau*	Free	1	1	
Panama*	Free	1	2	
Papua New Guinea*	Partly Free	4	3	
Paraguay*	Partly Free	3	3	
Peru*	Free	2	3	
Philippines*	Partly Free	3	3	
Poland*	Free	1	1	
Portugal*	Free	1	1	
Qatar	Not Free	6	5	
Romania*	Free	2	2	
Russia	Not Free	6	5	
Rwanda	Not Free	6	5	
Saint Kitts and Nevis*	Free	1	1	
Saint Lucia*	Free	1	1	
Saint Vincent and Grenadines*	Free	1	1	
Samoa*	Free	2	2	
San Marino*	Free	1	1	
São Tomé and Príncipe*	Free	2	2	
Saudi Arabia	Not Free	7	7▼	
Senegal*	Partly Free	3	3	
Serbia*	Free	2	2	
Seychelles*	Partly Free	3	3	
Sierra Leone*	Partly Free	3	3	
Singapore	Partly Free	4▲	4	
Slovakia*	Free	1	1	↑
Slovenia*	Free	1	1	
Solomon Islands	Partly Free	4	3	
Somalia	Not Free	7	7	
South Africa*	Free	2	2	
South Korea*	Free	1	2	
South Sudan	Not Free	6	5	
Spain*	Free	1	1	
Sri Lanka	Partly Free	5	4	
Sudan	Not Free	7	7	↓
Suriname*	Free	2	2	
Swaziland	Not Free	7	5	
Sweden*	Free	1	1	
Switzerland*	Free	1	1	
Syria	Not Free	7	7▲	
Taiwan*	Free	1	2	
Tajikistan	Not Free	6	5	
Tanzania*	Partly Free	3	3	

Country	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Thailand	Partly Free	4 ▲	4	
Togo	Partly Free	5	4	
Tonga*	Partly Free	3	3	
Trinidad and Tobago*	Free	2	2	
Tunisia	Partly Free▲	3	4	
Turkey*	Partly Free	3	3	
Turkmenistan	Not Free	7	7	
Tuvalu*	Free	1	1	
Uganda	Partly Free	5	4	↓
Ukraine*	Partly Free	4▼	3	
United Arab Emirates	Not Free	6	6▼	
United Kingdom*	Free	1	1	
United States*	Free	1	1	
Uruguay*	Free	1	1	
Uzbekistan	Not Free	7	7	
Vanuatu*	Free	2	2	
Venezuela	Partly Free	5	5	
Vietnam	Not Free	7	5	
Yemen	Not Free	6	6▼	
Zambia*	Partly Free	3	4	↑
Zimbabwe	Not Free	6	6	

PR and CL stand for political rights and civil liberties, respectively; 1 represents the most free and 7 the least free rating.

▲ ▼ up or down indicates an improvement or decline in ratings or status since the last survey.

↑ ↓ up or down indicates a trend of positive or negative changes that took place but were not sufficient to result in a change in political rights or civil liberties ratings.

***** indicates a country's status as an electoral democracy.

NOTE: The ratings reflect global events from January 1, 2011, through December 31, 2011.

Table of Related Territories

Territory	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Hong Kong	Partly Free	5	2	
Puerto Rico	Free	1	2▼	

Table of Disputed Territories

Territory	Freedom Status	PR	CL	Trend Arrow
Abkhazia	Partly Free	5	5	
Gaza Strip	Not Free	6	6	
Indian Kashmir	Partly Free	4	4▲	
Nagorno-Karabakh	Not Free	6	5	
Northern Cyprus	Free	2	2	
Pakistani Kashmir	Not Free	6	5	
Somaliland	Partly Free	4	5	
South Ossetia	Not Free	7	6	
Tibet	Not Free	7	7	
Transnistria	Not Free	6	6	
West Bank	Not Free	6	5	
Western Sahara	Not Free	7	7▼	

Freedom in the World Methodology

The reports for *Worst of the Worst: The World's Most Repressive Societies* were excerpted from the forthcoming 2012 edition of *Freedom in the World*, an annual Freedom House survey that monitors the progress and decline of political rights and civil liberties in 195 countries and 14 territories. The survey rates each country and territory on a scale of 1 to 7 for both political rights and civil liberties, with 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free, and uses the average of those two ratings to assign each country and territory a status of Free (1.0 to 2.5), Partly Free (3.0 to 5.0), or Not Free (5.5 to 7.0). The ratings process is based on a checklist of 10 political rights and 15 civil liberties questions (please refer to the checklist questions on the following pages). Countries and territories that received ratings of 6 for political rights and 7 for civil liberties, 7 for political rights and 6 for civil liberties, or 7 for both political rights and civil liberties are included in the *Worst of the Worst*. Within these groups there are gradations of freedom that make some more repressive than others.

A change in a country's or territory's political rights or civil liberties rating from the previous year is indicated by an arrow next to the rating in question, along with a brief ratings change explanation accompanying the country or territory report. Freedom House also assigned upward or downward "trend arrows" to certain countries and territories which saw general positive or negative trends during the year that were not significant enough to warrant a ratings change. Trend arrows are placed beside the name of the country or territory in question, and a brief explanatory note accompanies each report.

The *Freedom in the World* ratings are not merely assessments of the conduct of governments, but are intended to reflect the reality of daily life. Freedom can be affected by state as well as nonstate actors. Terrorist movements or armed groups use violent methods that can dramatically restrict essential freedoms within a society. Conversely, the existence of nonstate activists or journalists who work courageously and independently despite state restrictions can positively affect the ability of the population to exercise its freedoms.

The survey enables an examination of trends in freedom over time and on a comparative basis across regions with different political and economic systems. The survey, which is produced by a team of in-house regional experts, consultant writers, and academic advisors, derives its information from a wide range of sources. Most valued of these are the many human rights activists, journalists, editors, and political figures around the world who keep us informed of the human rights situation in their countries. *Freedom in the World*'s ratings and narrative reports are used by policymakers, leading scholars, the media, and international organizations to monitor the ebb and flow of freedom worldwide.

For a more detailed analysis of last year's survey methodology, please consult the methodology chapter from *Freedom in the World 2011*. The methodology for the forthcoming survey edition will be published in *Freedom in the World 2012*.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties Checklist Questions

POLITICAL RIGHTS CHECKLIST

A. ELECTORAL PROCESS

1. Is the head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?
2. Are the national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections?
3. Are the electoral laws and framework fair?

B. POLITICAL PLURALISM AND PARTICIPATION

1. Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system open to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings?
2. Is there a significant opposition vote and a realistic possibility for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections?
3. Are the people's political choices free from domination by the military, foreign powers, totalitarian parties, religious hierarchies, economic oligarchies, or any other powerful group?
4. Do cultural, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups have full political rights and electoral opportunities?

C. FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT

1. Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?
2. Is the government free from pervasive corruption?
3. Is the government accountable to the electorate between elections, and does it operate with openness and transparency?

ADDITIONAL DISCRETIONARY POLITICAL RIGHTS QUESTIONS

1. For traditional monarchies that have no parties or electoral process, does the system provide for genuine, meaningful consultation with the people, encourage public discussion of policy choices, and allow the right to petition the ruler?
2. Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?

CIVIL LIBERTIES CHECKLIST

D. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND BELIEF

1. Are there free and independent media and other forms of cultural expression? (*Note*: In cases where the media are state-controlled but offer pluralistic points of view, the survey gives the system credit.)
2. Are religious institutions and communities free to practice their faith and express themselves in public and private?
3. Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free of extensive political indoctrination?
4. Is there open and free private discussion?

E. ASSOCIATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL RIGHTS

1. Is there freedom of assembly, demonstration, and open public discussion?
2. Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations? (*Note*: This includes civic organizations, interest groups, foundations, etc.)
3. Are there free trade unions and peasant organizations or equivalents, and is there effective collective bargaining? Are there free professional and other private organizations?

F. RULE OF LAW

1. Is there an independent judiciary?
2. Does the rule of law prevail in civil and criminal matters? Are police under direct civilian control?
3. Is there protection from political terror, unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture, whether by groups that support or oppose the system? Is there freedom from war and insurgencies?
4. Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population?

G. PERSONAL AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS

1. Do citizens enjoy freedom of travel or choice of residence, employment, or institution of higher education?
2. Do citizens have the right to own property and establish private businesses? Is private business activity unduly influenced by government officials, the security forces, political parties/organizations, or organized crime?
3. Are there personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family?
4. Is there equality of opportunity and the absence of economic exploitation?

Freedom in the World 2012

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