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Freedom in Africa Today

Those who care about the fate of freedom in our world should focus on its condition in Africa today. Sub-Saharan Africa in 2006 presents at the same time some of the most promising examples of new democracies, wherein fairly elected leaders provide real opportunities for their citizens to live as free men and women, and some of the most disheartening examples of political stagnation, democratic backsliding, and state failure. Overall, the broad trend during the past quarter century has been one of increased freedom and institutional improvement, though setbacks remain all too common.

Since 1972, Freedom House has published an annual report on the state of global political rights and civil liberties, *Freedom in the World*. During its early years, *Freedom in the World* offered a grim picture of human rights and individual liberties on a global scale. Democracy was, by and large, concentrated in Western Europe, North America, and the island nations of the Pacific. Throughout much of the rest of the world, strongmen, commissars, and military juntas held sway.

The condition of freedom was especially bleak in sub-Saharan Africa, where European colonies and minority-ruled states still existed and autocracy or internecine conflict afflicted most of the newly independent states. With the exception of a few bright spots, dictatorships of one political stripe or another ruled the majority of countries on the continent. Coups and counter-coups were commonplace, as were leaders who proclaimed themselves "President for Life." Elections, if held at all, were often used only to validate a current leader's rule.

Much has changed in the ensuing years, in the world and in Africa. The "third wave" of democratization politically transformed southern Europe, Latin America, and the former Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In Africa, it set in motion not only the independence of the Portuguese colonies, but also a series of "national roundtables" that created new political dispensations in a number of African states. If less far-reaching than in some other regions of the world, the gains for freedom in Africa were nevertheless significant. Africa's least-reported story in recent years has been the continuing, if fitful, advance of freedom across the continent.

Freedom in the World 2006, the most recent edition of Freedom House's annual survey, records Africa's gains as well as the distance it still must travel. Among the 48 countries of sub-Saharan Africa, 11 were rated "free" for their performance in 2005, while 23 were rated "partly free" and 14 rated "not free." Two countries, the Central African Republic and Mauritania, saw their ratings improve from "not free" to "partly free," the former because of successful elections and an improvement in the freedoms of expression and assembly, and the latter because of an enhancement in civil liberties following the overthrow of President Taya. In addition, six sub-Saharan African countries (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, and Namibia) showed significant gains in political rights or civil liberties. Burundi, the Central African Republic, and Liberia were designated electoral democracies for the first time in 2005. Demonstrating that each country has its own story and confronts its own set of challenges, three of their neighbors saw notable declines in freedom in the same year. While not warranting a change in their overall freedom ratings (free/partly free/not free), the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Gabon, and The Gambia each experienced declines in political rights or civil liberties.

The following compilation of charts and tables presents these findings, reflecting data from *Freedom in the World* and Freedom House's companion survey of media independence, *Freedom of the Press*. These figures provide a precise summary of the current state of freedom in sub-Saharan Africa as well as the steady—if not spectacular—expansion of African democracy over the past three decades.

Figure 1, comparing *Freedom in the World* 1976 assessments with those made in the most recent 2006 edition, reveals a substantial increase in the proportion of “free” countries (and a related decrease in “not free” societies) in the world. Figure 2 presents the same comparison for sub-Saharan Africa, showing a less impressive but still notable increase in freedom on the continent. The findings of the more recently established *Freedom of the Press* survey are similarly conveyed in Figures 3 and 4, comparing media assessments in 1990 and 2005. In contrast to the *Freedom in the World* charts, these charts reveal a relatively static picture of global press freedom; regarding sub-Saharan Africa, they show a general increase, albeit from a very low starting point. The pie charts are followed by two tables listing Freedom House's most recent, country-specific ratings for sub-Saharan Africa from *Freedom in the World* 2006 and *Freedom of the Press* 2005. In both tables, the countries are listed in order from most to least free.

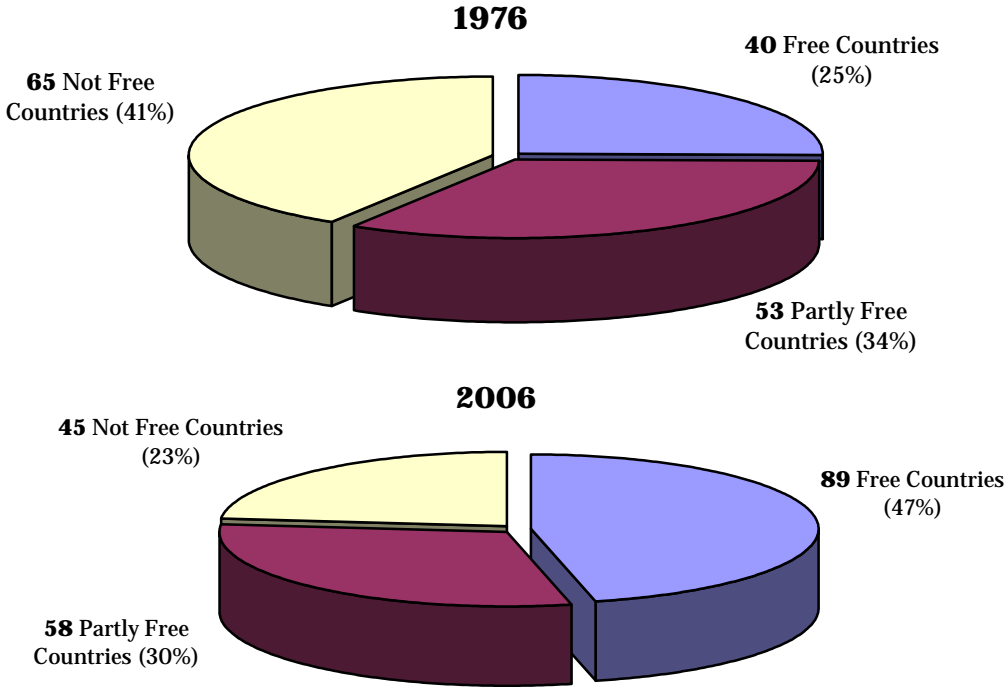
The next set of figures provides several looks at the growth of freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa. Figure 5 displays the number of “free,” “partly free,” and “not free” countries in the region as determined by the 1976, 1986, 1996, and 2006 editions of *Freedom in the World*. Figure 6, limited to the past 15 years, breaks down improvements and declines in African countries' *Freedom in the World* ratings into five-year intervals (this graph measures changes in the countries' “combined average ratings,” the average of the “political rights” and “civil liberties” ratings determined in each edition of *Freedom in the World*). Table 3 presents the same information, further distinguishing among countries that began the period with different levels of freedom. Together, they show that (a) in each of the five-year periods since 1990, the number of countries that made improvements exceeded the number that saw declines; (b) the most dramatic improvements immediately followed the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War (1990 to 1995) although improvements have continued since; and (c) a substantial number of countries have seen no change in their ratings, highlighting the stagnation in political development that also characterizes the region. Figure 7 shows two trend lines: one representing the average regional *Freedom in the World* rating for “political rights,” the other representing the same for “civil liberties.”

Figures 8-20 feature the course of political rights and civil liberties ratings in a series of important sub-Saharan African countries from 1979 to the present. Most of these countries were chosen for this package because they are also examined in the Freedom House companion publication, *Countries at the Crossroads*, and in order to illustrate the dynamic and uneven nature of political change in these societies. On the positive side of the ledger, these figures include: countries that have excelled at the institutionalization of democratic norms over the past 15 years (Mali); countries with recent upward trends but not yet in the democratic consolidation phase (Kenya and Nigeria); and those which recently emerged from devastating internal conflicts (Sierra Leone and Liberia). On the more troubling side are countries whose early upward trajectories have since faded into stagnant middling performance (Zambia and Malawi) and others which have declined markedly, due either to civil strife (as in the case of Cote d'Ivoire) or deliberate government policies of repression (Zimbabwe).

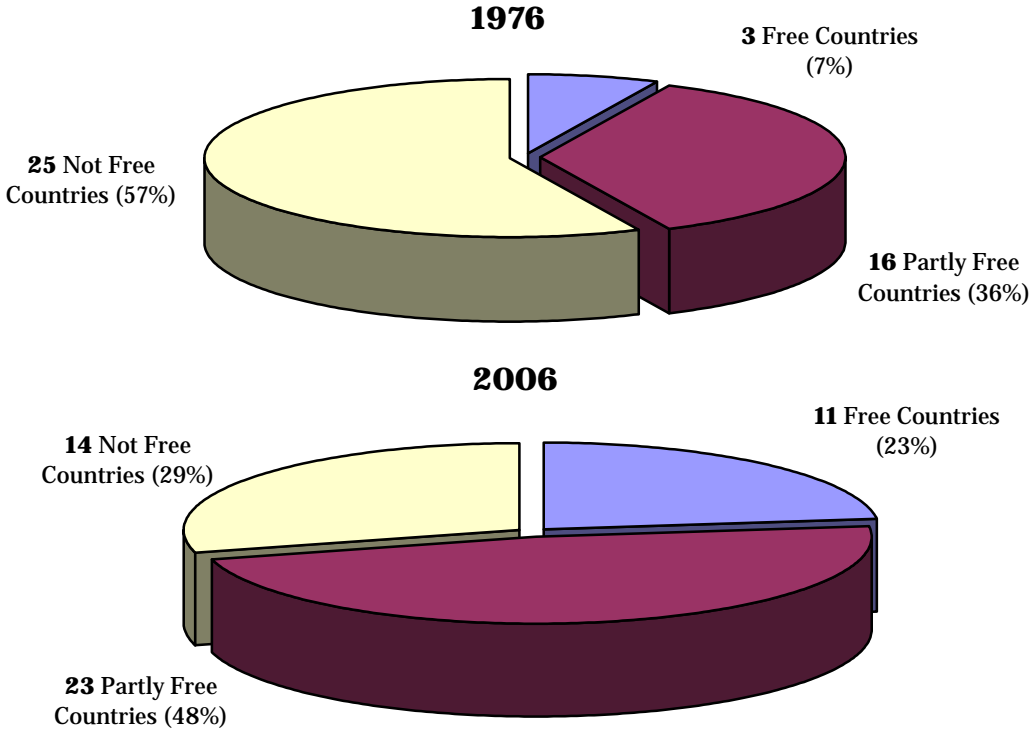
We hope these figures are useful reference points for discussion about freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa. We welcome feedback on this graphic presentation as well as on the larger issues they illustrate.

Jennifer Windsor
Executive Director
Freedom House
March 29, 2006

Freedom in the World (Figure 1)

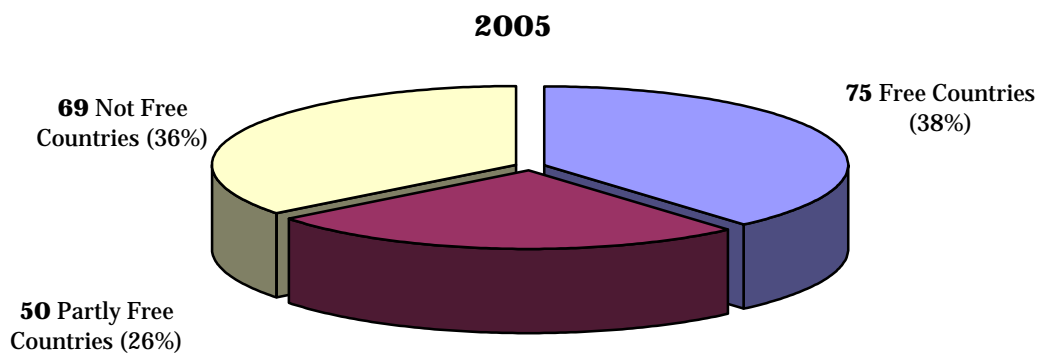
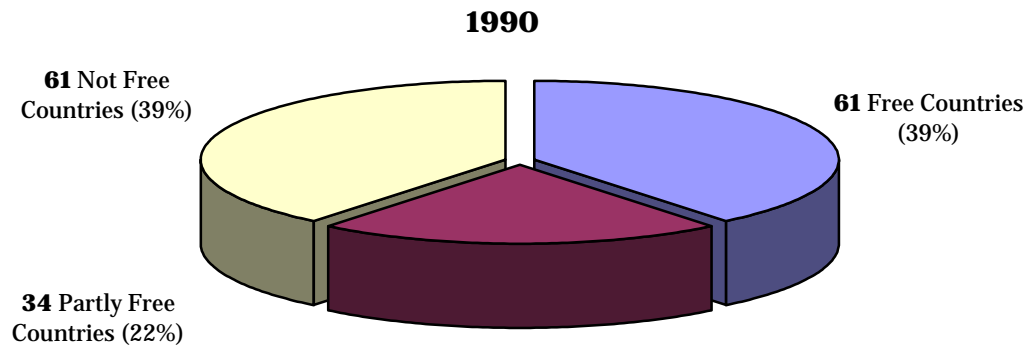


Freedom in Sub-Saharan Africa (Figure 2)

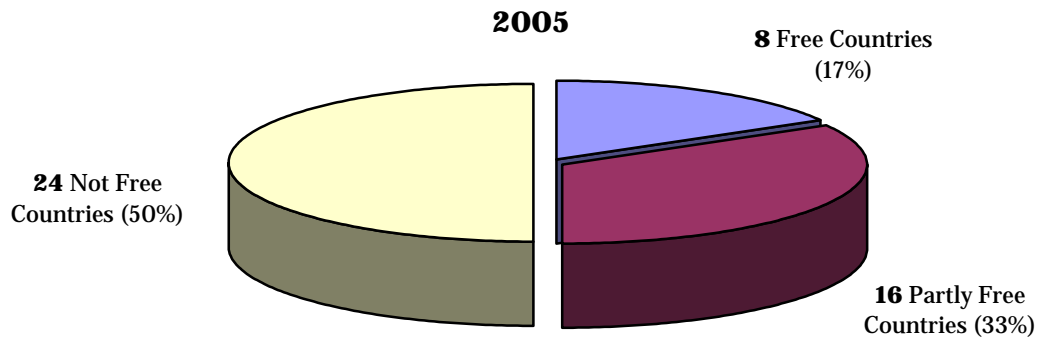
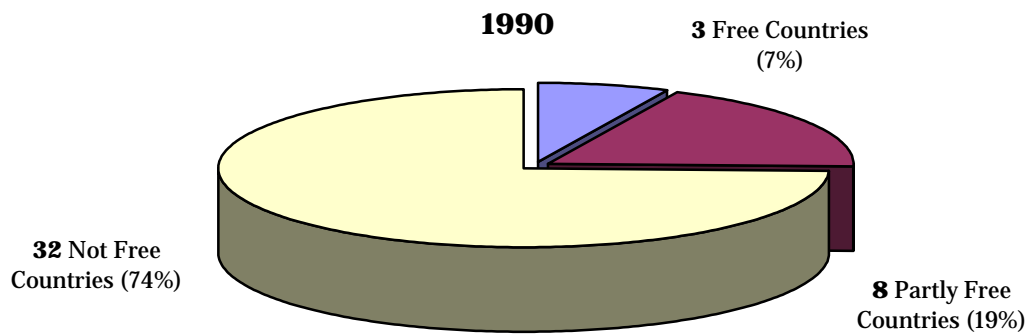


*All years refer to publication editions and reflect the state of freedom in the previous year

Freedom of the Press: Global (Figure 3)



Freedom of the Press: Sub-Saharan Africa (Figure 4)



Freedom in the World 2006: Sub-Saharan Africa (Table 1)

| Country | Political Rights | Civil Liberties | Status |
|----------------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Cape Verde * | 1 | 1 | Free |
| Ghana * | 1 | 2 | Free |
| Mauritius * | 1 | 2 | Free |
| South Africa * | 1 | 2 | Free |
| Benin * | 2 | 2 | Free |
| Botswana * | 2 | 2 | Free |
| Mali * | 2 | 2 | Free |
| Namibia * | 2 | 2 | Free |
| Sao Tome and Principe * | 2 | 2 | Free |
| Lesotho * | 2 | 3 | Free |
| Senegal * | 2 | 3 | Free |
| Kenya * | 3 | 3 | Partly Free |
| Madagascar * | 3 | 3 | Partly Free |
| Niger * | 3 | 3 | Partly Free |
| Seychelles * | 3 | 3 | Partly Free |
| Sierra Leone * | 4 | 3 | Partly Free |
| Tanzania | 4 | 3 | Partly Free |
| Guinea-Bissau | 3 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Mozambique * | 3 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Burkina Faso | 5 | 3 | Partly Free |
| Comoros * | 4 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Liberia * | 4 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Malawi * | 4 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Nigeria * | 4 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Zambia | 4 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Burundi * | 3 | 5 | Partly Free |
| Central African Republic * | 5 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Gambia | 5 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Uganda | 5 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Gabon | 6 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Mauritania | 6 | 4 | Partly Free |
| Congo (Brazzaville) | 5 | 5 | Partly Free |
| Djibouti | 5 | 5 | Partly Free |
| Ethiopia | 5 | 5 | Partly Free |
| Angola | 6 | 5 | Not Free |
| Chad | 6 | 5 | Not Free |
| Guinea | 6 | 5 | Not Free |
| Rwanda | 6 | 5 | Not Free |
| Togo | 6 | 5 | Not Free |
| Swaziland | 7 | 5 | Not Free |
| Cameroon | 6 | 6 | Not Free |
| Congo (Kinshasa) | 6 | 6 | Not Free |
| Cote d'Ivoire | 6 | 6 | Not Free |
| Equatorial Guinea | 7 | 6 | Not Free |
| Eritrea | 7 | 6 | Not Free |
| Zimbabwe | 7 | 6 | Not Free |
| Somalia | 6 | 7 | Not Free |
| Sudan | 7 | 7 | Not Free |

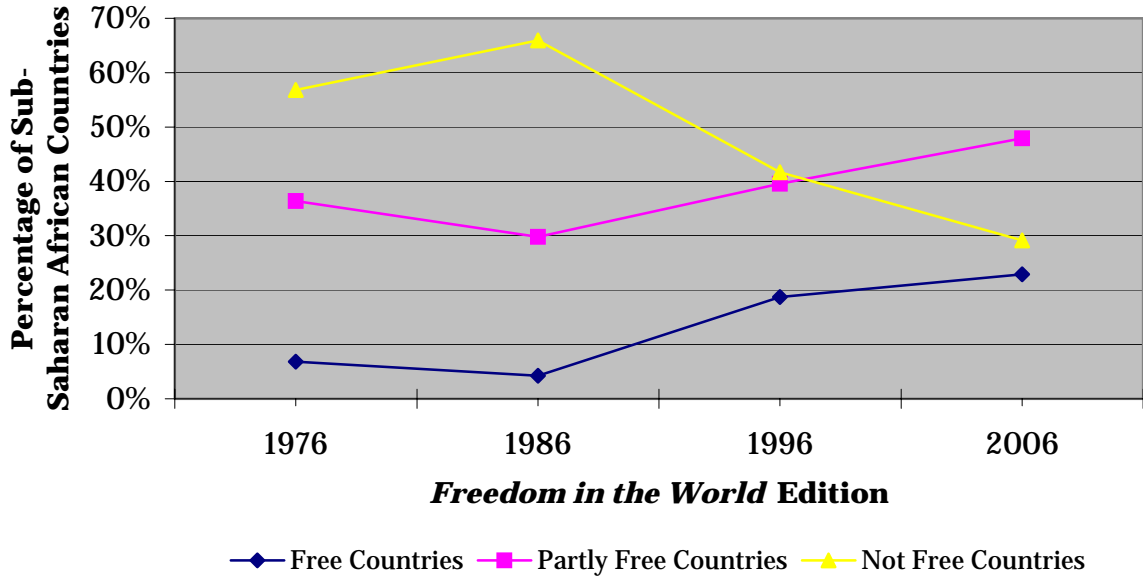
*Electoral Democracy

Freedom of the Press 2005: Sub-Saharan Africa (Table 2)

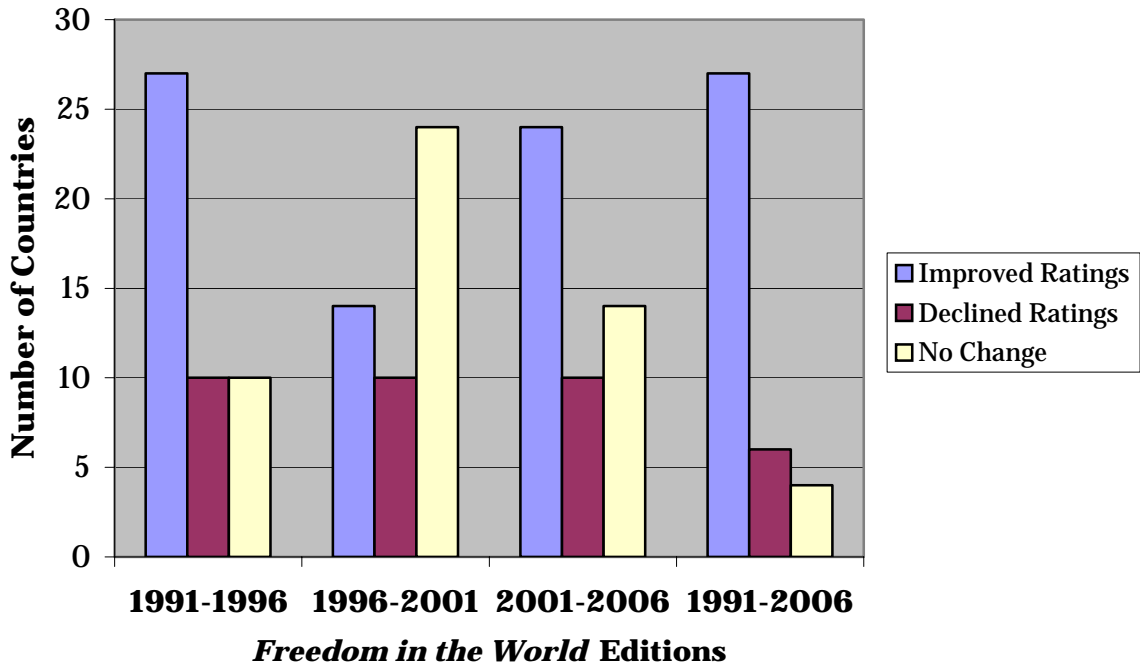
| Rank | Country | Rating | Status |
|------|--------------------------|--------|-------------|
| 1 | Mali | 23 | Free |
| 2 | Ghana | 26 | Free |
| | South Africa | 26 | Free |
| 4 | Mauritius | 28 | Free |
| | Sao Tome and Principe | 28 | Free |
| 6 | Namibia | 29 | Free |
| 7 | Benin | 30 | Free |
| | Botswana | 30 | Free |
| 9 | Cape Verde | 32 | Partly Free |
| 10 | Senegal | 37 | Partly Free |
| 11 | Burkina Faso | 40 | Partly Free |
| 12 | Lesotho | 42 | Partly Free |
| 13 | Comoros | 44 | Partly Free |
| | Uganda | 44 | Partly Free |
| 15 | Mozambique | 45 | Partly Free |
| 16 | Madagascar | 50 | Partly Free |
| 17 | Congo (Brazzaville) | 51 | Partly Free |
| | Tanzania | 51 | Partly Free |
| 19 | Nigeria | 52 | Partly Free |
| | Niger | 53 | Partly Free |
| 21 | Malawi | 54 | Partly Free |
| 22 | Guinea-Bissau | 55 | Partly Free |
| 23 | Seychelles | 58 | Partly Free |
| 24 | Sierra Leone | 59 | Partly Free |
| 25 | Kenya | 61 | Not Free |
| 26 | Central African Republic | 63 | Not Free |
| 27 | Mauritania | 65 | Not Free |
| | Zambia | 65 | Not Free |
| 29 | Angola | 66 | Not Free |
| | Gabon | 66 | Not Free |
| 31 | Djibouti | 67 | Not Free |
| 32 | Cameroon | 68 | Not Free |
| | Ethiopia | 68 | Not Free |
| 34 | Cote d'Ivoire | 69 | Not Free |
| 35 | The Gambia | 72 | Not Free |
| 36 | Chad | 73 | Not Free |
| | Guinea | 73 | Not Free |
| | Liberia | 73 | Not Free |
| | Togo | 73 | Not Free |
| 40 | Burundi | 74 | Not Free |
| 41 | Swaziland | 79 | Not Free |
| 42 | Congo (Kinshasa) | 81 | Not Free |
| 43 | Somalia | 83 | Not Free |
| 44 | Rwanda | 84 | Not Free |
| 45 | Sudan | 86 | Not Free |
| 46 | Equatorial Guinea | 88 | Not Free |
| 47 | Zimbabwe | 89 | Not Free |
| 48 | Eritrea | 91 | Not Free |

Trends in Freedom: Sub-Saharan Africa

Freedom Status, 1976-2006 (Figure 5)



Improvements & Declines in FIW Combined Average Ratings*, 1991-2006 (Figure 6)



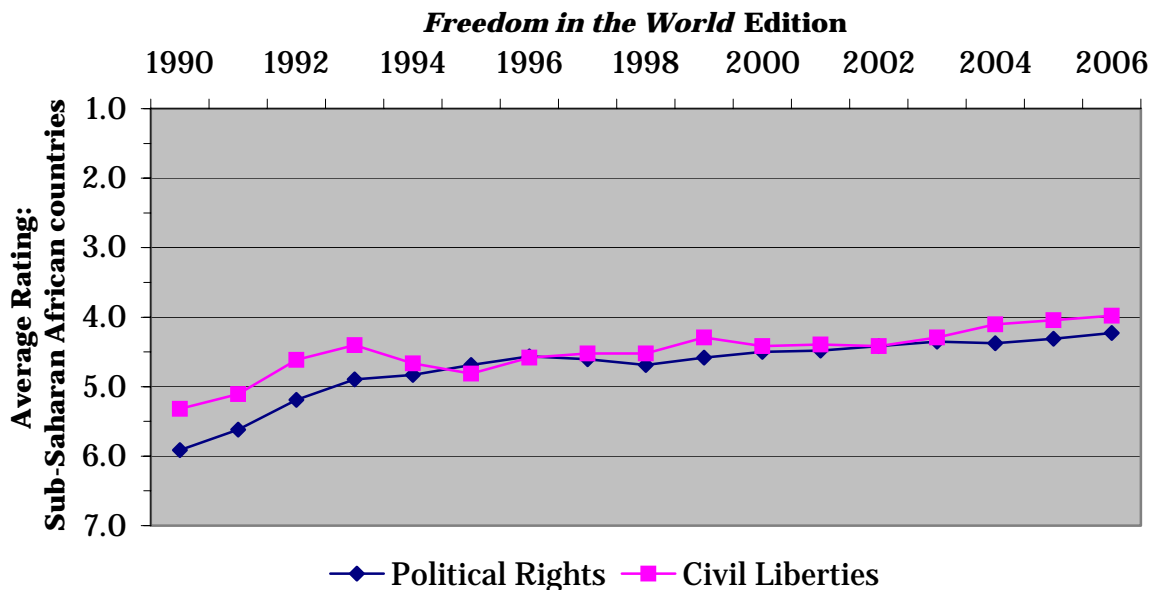
* The average of *Freedom in the World* ratings for Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Trends in African Democratization 1990-2005* (Table 3)

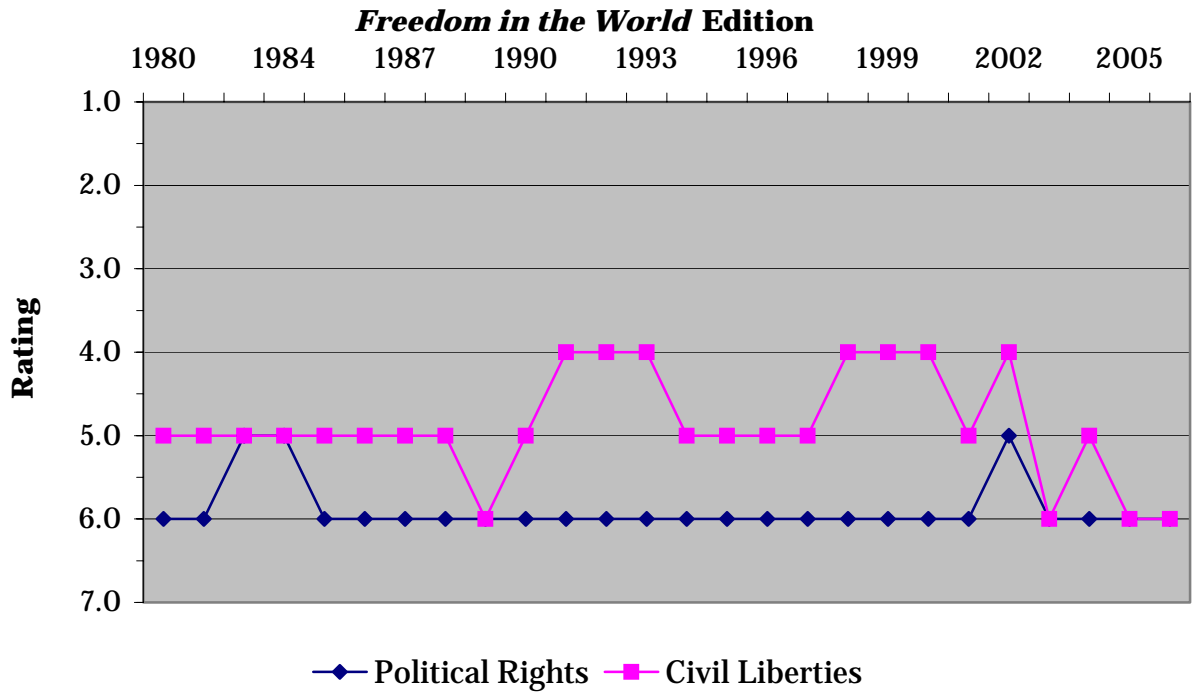
| | | 1990-1995 | 1995-2000 | 2000-2005 | 1990-2005 |
|---|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| All Sub-Saharan Africa | Improvement | 43% | 18% | 23% | 62% |
| | No Change | 51% | 79% | 73% | 34% |
| | Decline | 6% | 6% | 4% | 4% |
| | N | (47) | (48) | (48) | (47) |
| Liberal Democracies (FH 1.0-2.0) | Improvement | 75% | 13% | 13% | 75% |
| | No Change | 25% | 87% | 87% | 25% |
| | Decline | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | N | (8) | (8) | (8) | (8) |
| Electoral and Ambiguous (FH 3.0-4.0) | Improvement | 44% | 25% | 38% | 77% |
| | No Change | 44% | 75% | 56% | 13% |
| | Decline | 12% | 0 | 6% | 0 |
| | N | (16) | (16) | (16) | (16) |
| Competitive and electoral authoritarian (FH 5.0-6.0) | Improvement | 41% | 12% | 24% | 53% |
| | No Change | 53% | 76% | 76% | 41% |
| | Decline | 6% | 24% | 0 | 6% |
| | N | (17) | (17) | (17) | (17) |
| Closed (FH 7.0) | Improvement | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | No Change | 100% | 86% | 86% | 83% |
| | Decline | 0 | 14% | 14% | 17% |
| | N | (6) | (7) | (7) | (6) |

*Prepared by Joel D. Barkan and Eric Kramon from *Freedom in the World* for 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2005, Derived from categorized from Larry Diamond, Hoover Institute.

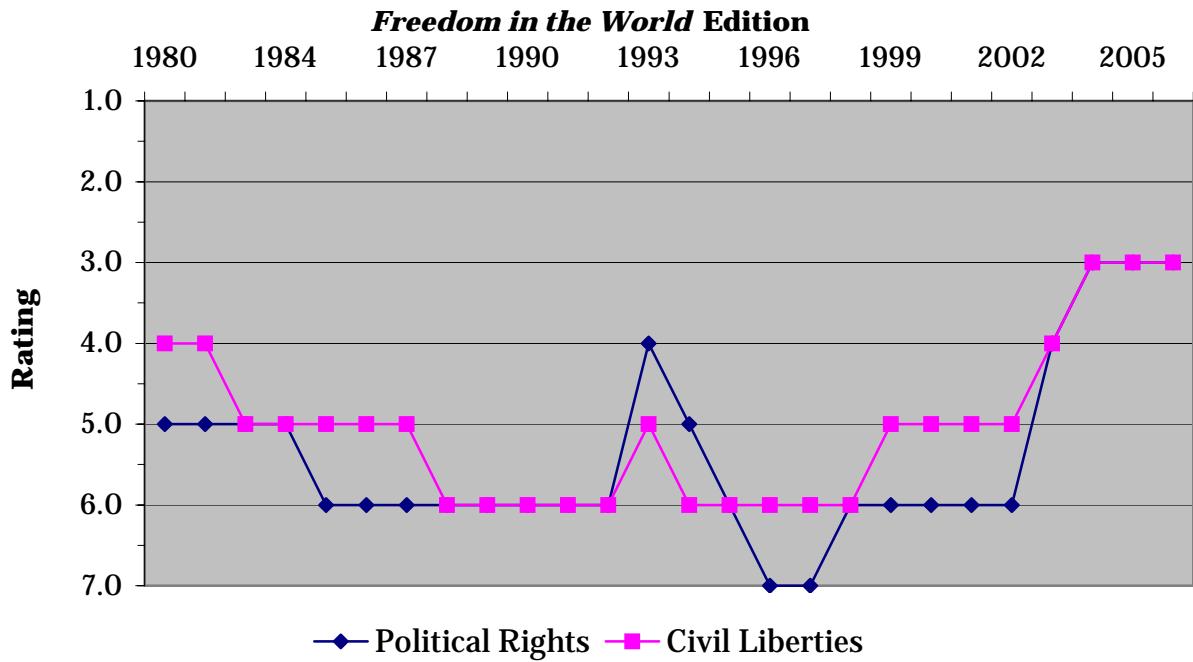
Political Rights & Civil Liberties, 1990-2006 (Fig. 7)



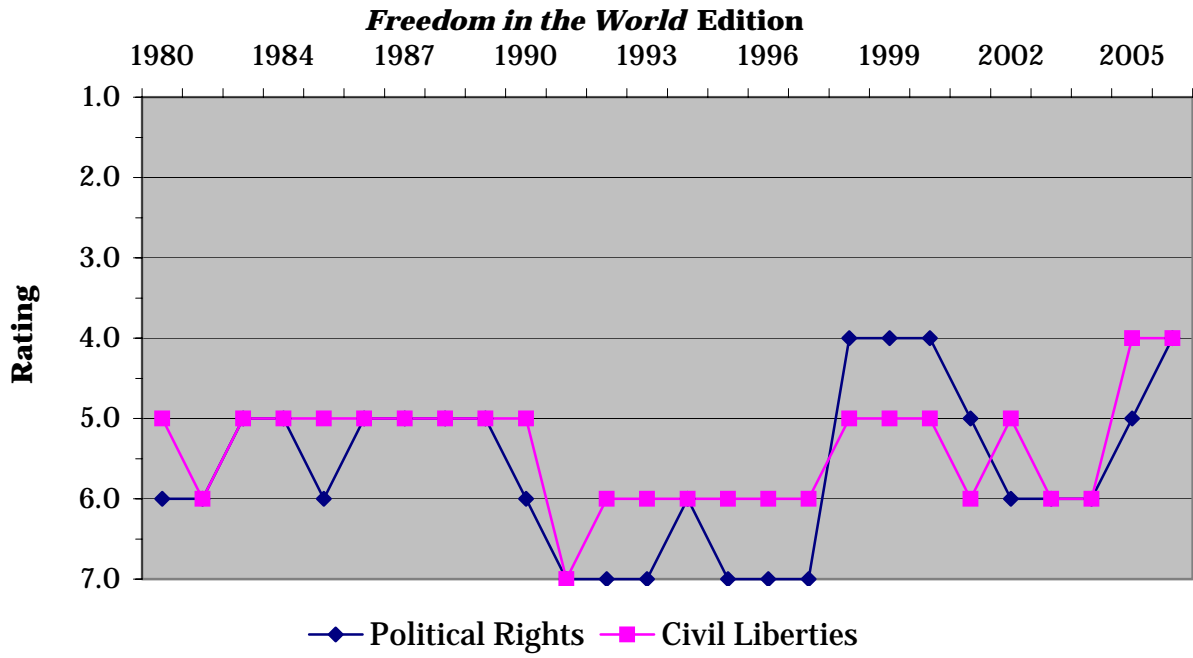
Freedom in Cote d'Ivoire, 1980-2006 (Figure 8)



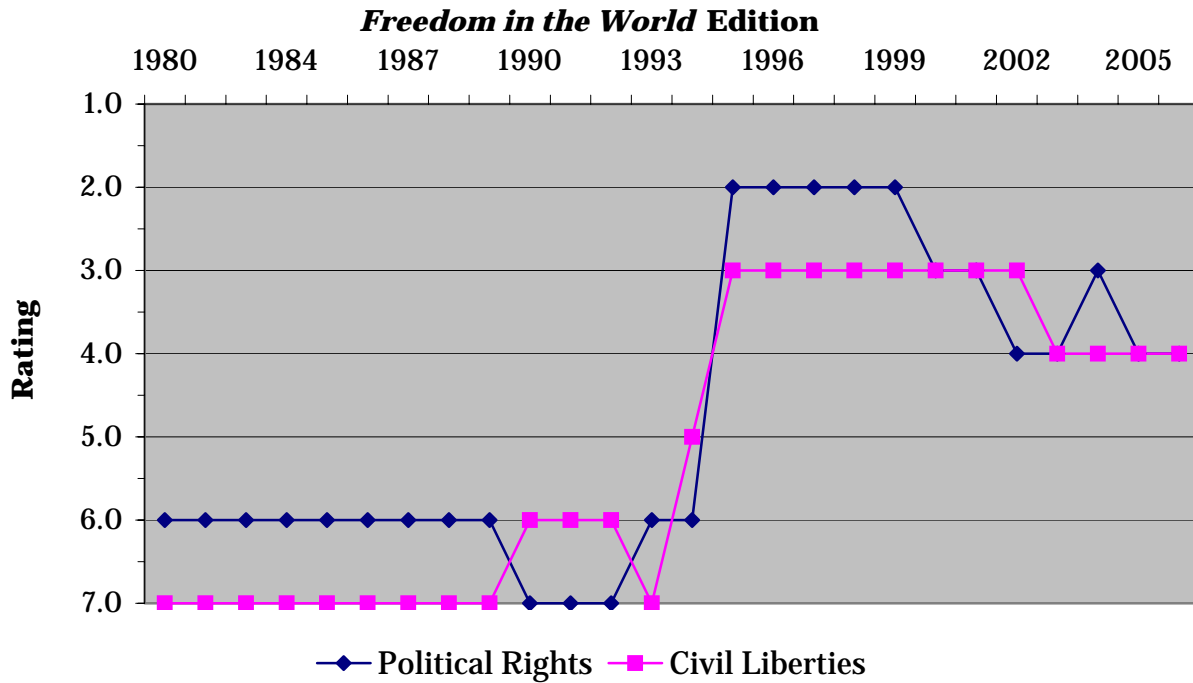
Freedom in Kenya, 1980-2006 (Figure 9)



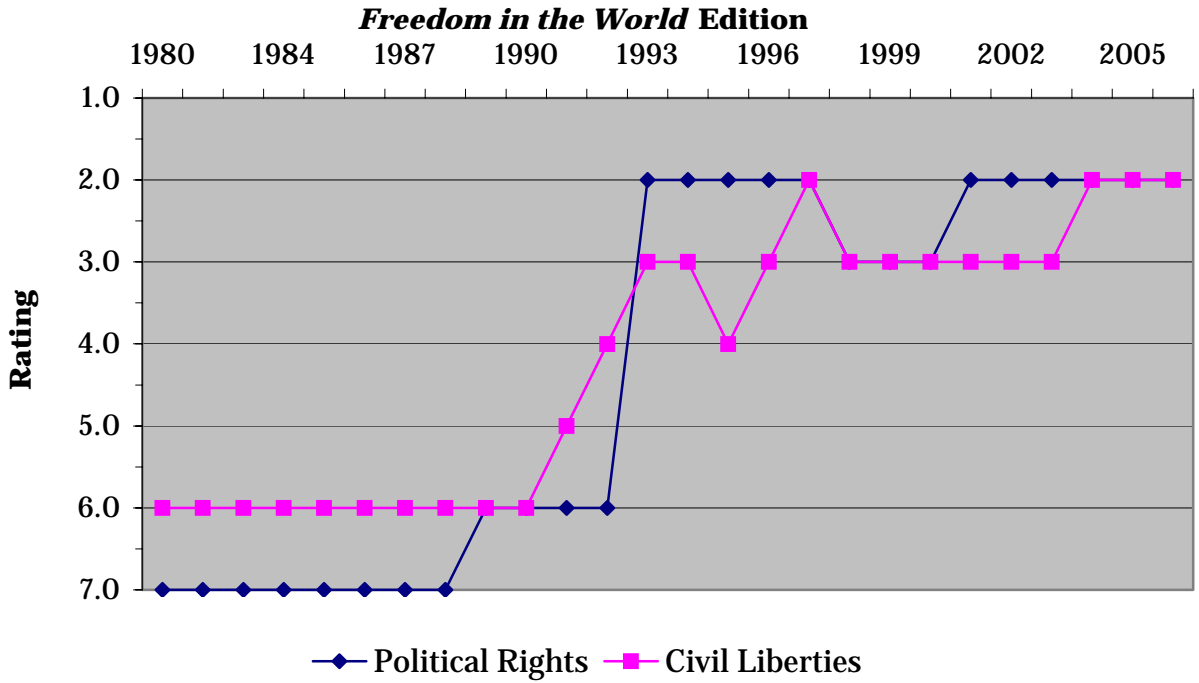
Freedom in Liberia, 1980-2006 (Figure 10)



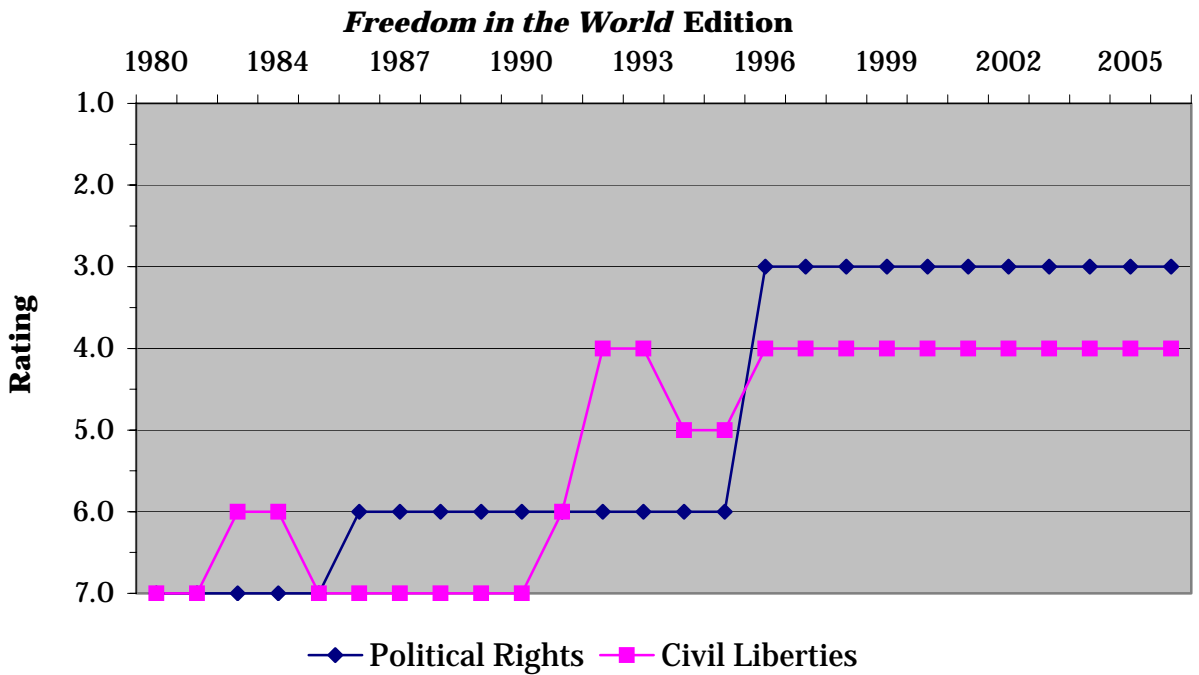
Freedom in Malawi, 1980-2006 (Figure 11)



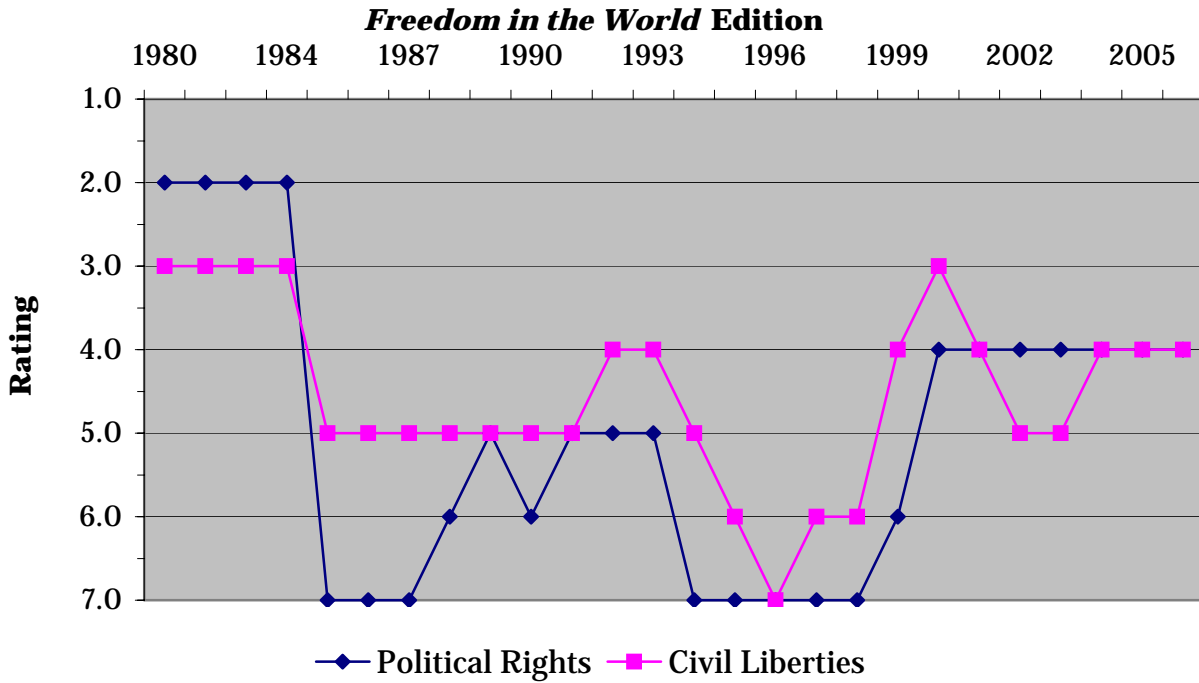
Freedom in Mali, 1980-2006 (Figure 12)



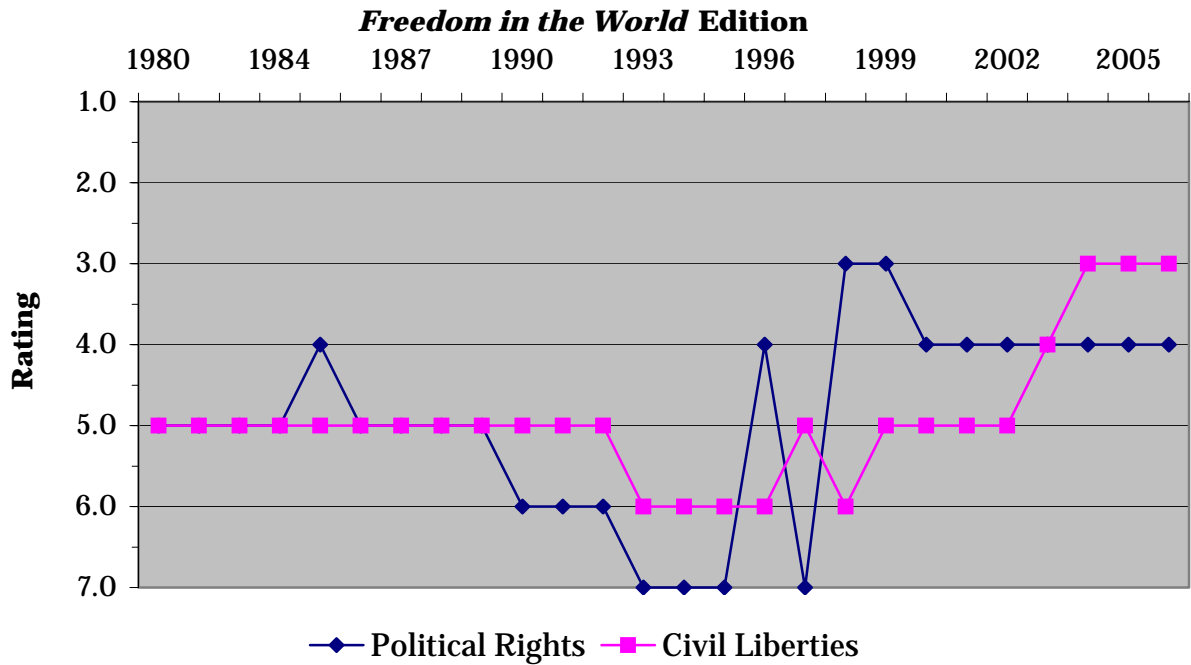
Freedom in Mozambique, 1980-2006 (Figure 13)



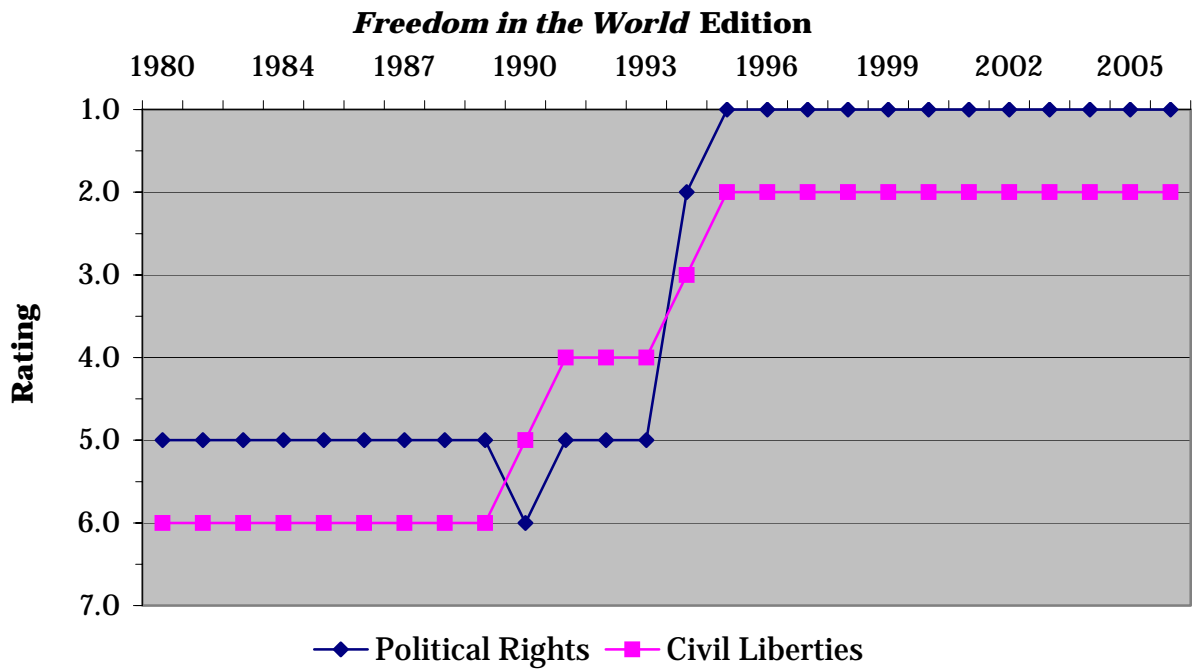
Freedom in Nigeria, 1980-2006 (Figure 14)



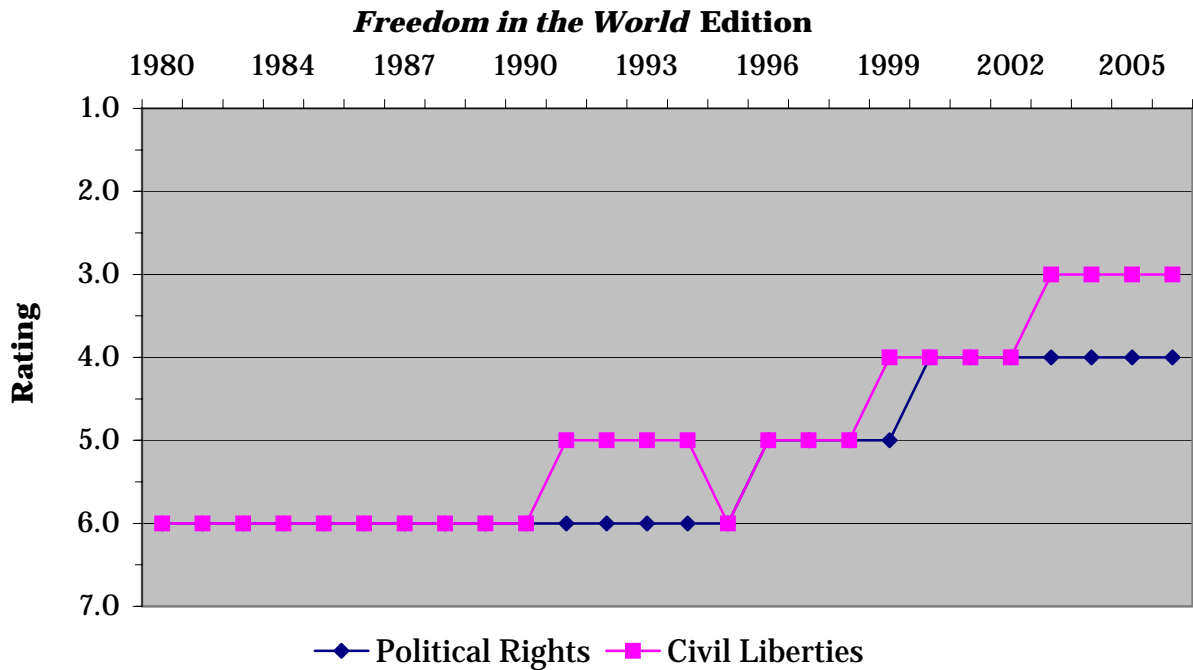
Freedom in Sierra Leone, 1980-2006 (Figure 15)



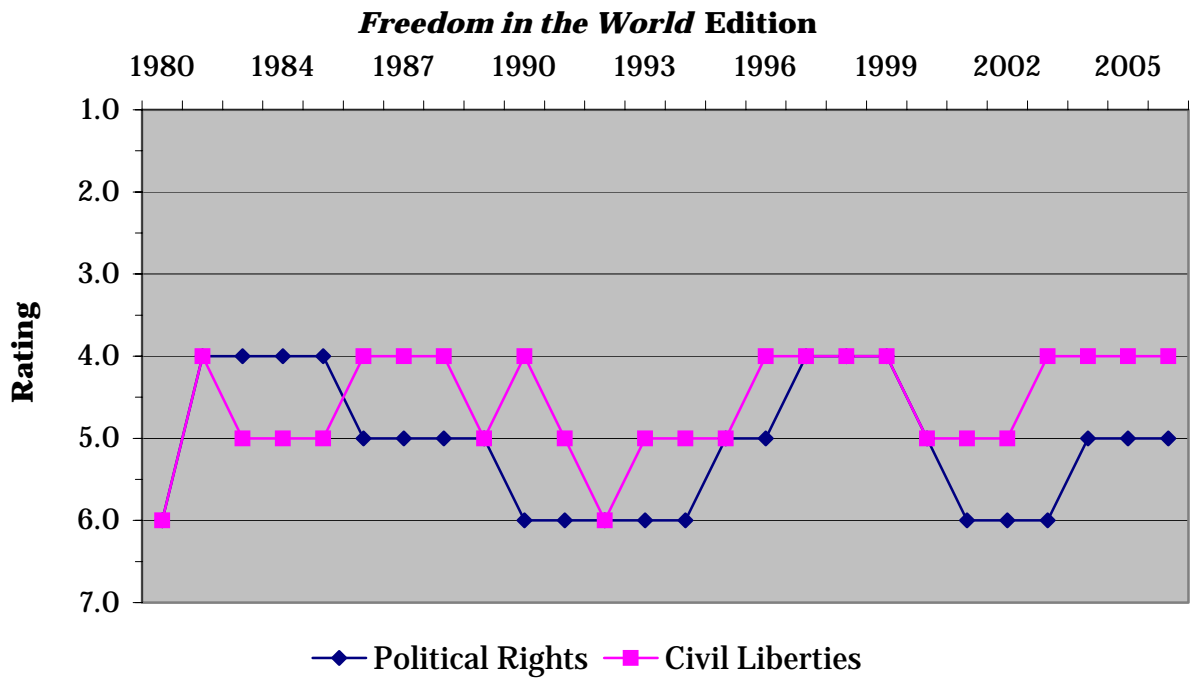
Freedom in South Africa, 1980-2006 (Figure 16)



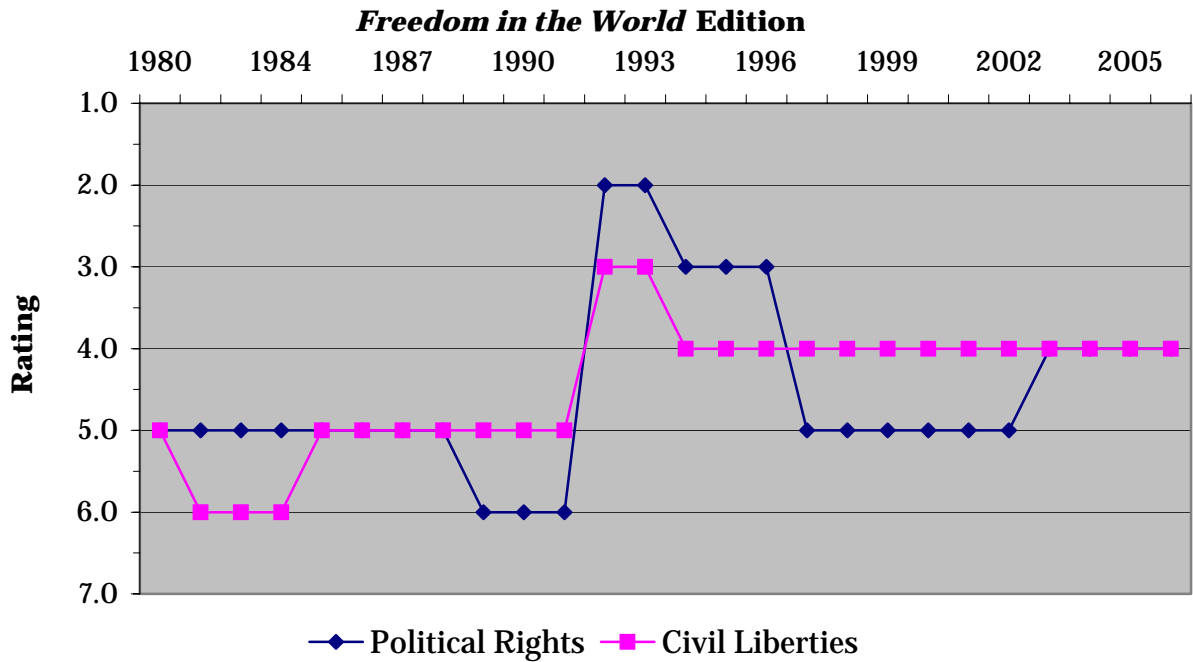
Freedom in Tanzania, 1980-2006 (Figure 17)



Freedom in Uganda, 1980-2006 (Figure 18)



Freedom in Zambia, 1980-2006 (Figure 19)



Freedom in Zimbabwe, 1980-2006 (Figure 20)

