



## Human Freedom Index: The East African Perspective- Thomas Zidia & Polycap Nyaribo

August 26, 2015

In 1856, Alexis de Tocqueville stated in his writings that, ‘He who seeks freedom for anything but freedom’s self is made to be a slave’. Perhaps the modern times call for a revisit of the Tocqueville’s classical work more than ever before, and that’s exactly why the [Cato Institute](#), the Fraser Institute and other partners published the [Human Freedom Index](#).

Human freedom refers to a social concept recognizing the dignity of individuals, which is the absence of coercive constraint in a country. The [Human Freedom Index \(HFI\)](#) measures the state of freedom in the world through a comparison of countries. 76 unique indicators are used to measure economic and personal which include the rule of law, security and safety, movement, religion, association, assembly and civil society, expression, relationships, size of government, legal system and property rights, access to sound money, freedom to trade internationally, regulation of credit, labor, and business. A total of 152 countries were evaluated for these parameters, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 represents more freedom. Information about the benefits of freedom in the society can be deduced from the HFI, especially in administration. Northern Europe, North America and Western Europe emerged as the regions with highest freedom levels while the Middle East, South Asia and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa had the lowest levels.

In Eastern Africa, Tanzania is the top ranked country at position 94 with a Freedom Index (FI) of 6.57. Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia follow at positions 97, 104, 108 and 145 respectively with FIs of 6.57, 6.45, 6.40 and 5.22 respectively. The Eastern Africa countries are all ranked in the bottom half of the countries surveyed and perform dismally against global average FI of 6.96. The HFI shows that there is a correlation between freedom and democracy since most of the countries with a higher FI have well established democratic systems. On the other hand, Eastern Africa countries are relatively young democracies and these could perhaps explain their dismal performance. Only Tanzania has experienced successive smooth transitions of political regimes.

Countries with a higher index when it comes to the rule of law such as Hong Kong (7.5) and New Zealand (8.1) translates to a higher index for security and safety at 8.7 and 9.8 respectively. These are the key ingredients for ultimate freedom in a country since no one would be infringing on another person’s rights and civil liberties. This is not the case in East Africa where the

performance on the rule of law and security is slightly above average. Rwanda is the best performer in this regard at position 78 with an index of 5.1 for the rule of law and 6.7 for safety and security. Kenya (89) and Tanzania (100) rank have indices of 4.3 and 4.7 respectively for the rule of law and 7.7 and 7.4 for security and safety. It is clear that pure freedom cannot exist in an environment that does not adhere to constitutionalism, which usually results in impunity and lack of freedom for citizens.

Nations that rank high for association, assembly and civil society have a higher FI as exemplified by the first 10 nations (having a minimum of 8.9 for assembly, association, and civil society). This shows that these nation allow their citizens to exercise freedom by airing their views within the law. On the other hand, most African countries suppress the freedom of association, assembly and civil society. Kenya has a score of 8.4 while Tanzania has 7.3. East African countries need to increase the space for freedom of association, assembly and civil society if they are to really ensure freedom for their citizens. Freedom must be the ultimate goal for all nations for them to prosper socially, economically and politically.

However, all is not lost since even some of the world's superpower countries don't rank at the top. The United States of America ranks at position 20 yet it is at the forefront of championing for global freedom. Africa's 'superpower economies' South Africa and Nigeria ranking at position 70 (6.99) and 139 (5.44) respectively; in East Africa, only Ethiopia performs poorly than Nigeria at position 145 (5.22). The HFI also looked at freedom in terms of economic freedom in various countries with the top quartile of freedom enjoyed at significantly higher per capita income countries (\$30,006) than those in other quartiles; compare that with the per capita income in the least-free quartile which is \$2,615. Most African countries fall the lower quartile with countries such as Senegal recording an average FI of 6.20. It is not only Sub-Saharan African countries that perform poorly on the HFI, but also developed countries such as Russia at position 111 (6.36), which is slightly higher the average East African index of 6.22. Kenya (6.57), Uganda (6.40), Rwanda (6.45) and Tanzania (6.58) enjoy more freedom than Russia. China at 132 (5.86) is way below the East African average, yet more developed.