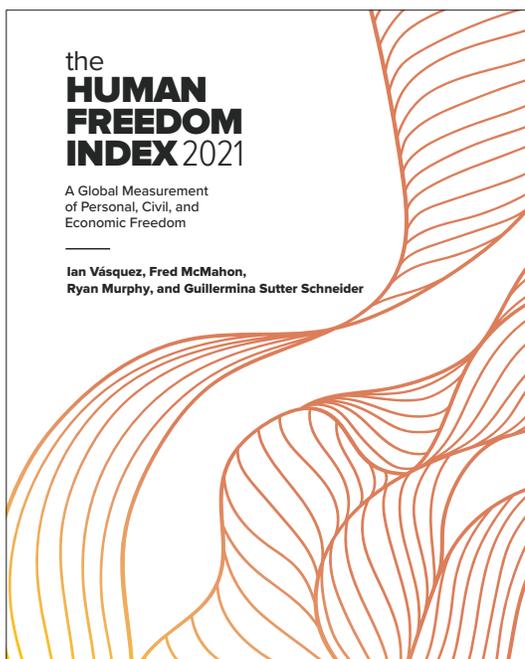


Human Freedom Index releases 2021 edition

Measuring Freedom from Switzerland to Syria

Everyone agrees that freedom is important, but that seemingly simple principle implicates a wide range of public policy choices and different forms of government. Most people have a sense of whether a nation is a free country, but articulating the standards that define one and undertaking a comprehensive analysis is a daunting task. Most who compile global rankings of various sorts restrict themselves to narrower and more easily definable categories, measuring factors such as the regulatory environment, civil liberties, democracy, press freedom, or other specific topics.



The *Human Freedom Index* is unique because it takes in the whole scope of human freedom. To do that, it produces scores for 82 distinct indicators across 165 jurisdictions, encompassing 98.1 percent of the world's population. Just released in its seventh annual edition for 2021, the *Human Freedom Index* is authored by Ian Vásquez, Fred McMahon, Ryan Murphy, and Guillermina Sutter Schneider and is copublished by the Cato Institute and the Fraser Institute, based in Canada.

As the authors explain, “The contest between liberty and power has been ongoing for millennia. For just as long, it has inspired competing conceptions of freedom.” Part of the report’s intent is to produce a comprehensive data set

allowing for research about correlations between different kinds of freedoms, but it also aims to flesh out a fuller definition of freedom in the process.

“Freedom in our usage is a social concept that recognizes the dignity of individuals and is defined by the absence of coercive constraint. . . . Freedom thus implies that individuals have the right to lead their lives as they wish as long as they respect the equal rights of others.”

Each country’s 82 indicators are grouped into categories covering the rule of law; security and safety; movement; religion; association, assembly, and civil society; expression and information; relationships; size of government; legal system and property rights; sound money; freedom to trade internationally; and regulation.

The trends are not comforting. Only 17 percent of the global population lives in jurisdictions that gained freedom from 2008 to 2019, while 83 percent lost ground. During that time, the most-improved nations included Myanmar (Burma), Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Ethiopia, and Armenia, though they still have much room for further improvement. The greatest declines were seen in Venezuela, Turkey, Nicaragua, Syria, and Bahrain, as authoritarian leaders have sought to crack down on dissent.

The countries at the top of the list demonstrate the strong correlation between freedom and prosperity, with a mix of high and rapidly growing income levels. Switzerland takes the

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Cato News Notes

WELCOMING A NEW VOICE

Recently, Cato welcomed Cathy Young as a new cultural studies fellow. She writes on a wide variety of cultural and political topics, including gender issues and family law, freedom of speech and intellectual tolerance, diversity, education, and perspectives on American history, as well as Russia and U.S.-Russian relations from her perspective as a Russian immigrant to the United States. Young is also a weekly columnist for *Newsday*, a writer at *The Bulwark*, and a contributing editor at *Reason*.



SURVEY SAYS . . .

The Cato 2021 Speech and Social Media National Survey queried 2,000 Americans and found that three-fourths of Americans don’t trust social media companies to make fair content-moderation decisions. The survey, conducted by David Kemp and Emily Ekins, also found widespread hostility to social media companies, including that 81 percent of Republicans say companies banning Donald Trump from their platforms violates the First Amendment.