

United States Drops To Twentieth In Human Freedom Index

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The United States of America is the beacon of modern democracy, and the land of the free, right? Well, it turns out that may not be as accurate as many would believe. According to the latest Human Freedom Index, released on August 18, good ol' 'Murica has dropped all the way to 20th in liberty and freedom, based on a combination of factors.

The study, put together by the American Cato Institute, Canadian Fraser Institute, and the German Liberales Institut, measures everything from women's rights and civil liberties to economic freedoms and rule of law. The data used comes from between 2008 and 2012, the most recent available, and ranks 152 nations on how free they are.

The big things dragging the United States down are the War on Terror, the War on Drugs, the incarceration epidemic, and an erosion of property rights. Some may seem obvious, like the War on Terror, which gave us the Patriot Act, arguably one of the worst programs ever to be enacted in the United States for civil liberties. Even now during the campaign for president there are several candidates who not only support it, but want to see it expanded (we're looking at you Chris Christie).

The War on Drugs is another major government program that has led to more problems in the United States than it's resolved, let alone other countries, via its focus on locking up people for life simply for smoking a joint. It is a major contributing factor to wealth and income inequality, racial strife, and the epidemic of police violence in this country. Not only that, but it has helped to make the United States the world leader in prison population, and it's not even close.

The top ranking country in the freedom index is, surprisingly, not even a country per se. For purposes of this study, Hong Kong is treated as an independent nation, though it is under the thumb of the decidedly oppressive Chinese government. In fact, Cato researchers believe that China's attempts at wiping out democracy will serve to drop it out of the top spot in the near future. Switzerland, Finland, Denmark, and New Zealand round out the top five.

Neighboring Canada takes the sixth spot, no doubt thanks to their lack of corruption and consistency with rule of law. Economic freedom is a big boon as well for Canadians, something that has been steadily dropping in its southern neighbor.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Iran ranks dead last, followed by Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Zimbabwe, and Yemen. Other countries that would likely have ranked lower, such as North Korea, were not scored in the study, thanks primarily to a lack of data. Countries that topped the list are primarily from Western Europe, while African and Asian countries generally scored poorly.