

THE NEWS REVIEW

Canada sixth in its freedoms

Fraser Institute

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To the Editor:

Canada ranks sixth overall for its level of human freedom while the United States ranks 20th in the Human Freedom Index, released today by the Fraser Institute and a network of international public-policy think-tanks.

The index — which uses 76 indicators of personal, civil and economic freedoms to rank 152 countries around the world— is the most comprehensive freedom index so far created for a globally meaningful set of countries. The report includes rankings from 2008 to 2012.

“Our intention is to measure the degree to which people are free to enjoy classic civil liberties— freedom of speech, religion, individual economic choice, and association and assembly—in each country surveyed,” said Fred McMahon, Dr. Michael A. Walker Research Chair in Economic Freedom at the Fraser Institute and editor of study.

“We also look at the rule of law, which is essential for freedoms, as well as indicators of crime and violence, freedom of movement, limits on freedom due to sexual orientation, and women’s freedoms.”

Hong Kong tops the rankings followed by Switzerland, Finland, Denmark and New Zealand rounding out the top five. Other notable countries are Australia (ranked seventh), the United Kingdom (ninth), Germany (12th), Chile (18th), and the United States, 20th.

So, why does Canada rank higher than the United States, a country often referred to as the ‘Land of Liberty’?

According to the data, Canada has better scores on security and safety, the rule of law and economic freedom which is based on personal choice, trade openness, freedom to compete, security of private property and judicial independence.

“Over time the United States has seen an erosion of property rights and an expansion of quasi-judicial regulations. The data also points to a significant weakening in the rule of law,” McMahon said.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong’s placement atop the list may surprise some, but McMahon notes that Hong Kong’s ranking benefits from its high economic freedom score.

“While the freedom index doesn’t measure democracy, democracy has shown to be the best safeguard of personal freedoms. So, if China, which ranks 132nd in the world, encroaches on its one-country, two-system relationship—where liberty is protected under Hong Kong’s system—then we can expect Hong Kong’s ranking to deteriorate as some more recent data already suggest,” he said.

Internationally, the average rankings on the index, by region, were highest for Northern Europe followed by North America and Western Europe, and were lowest for the Middle East, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia.

The complete index, a joint project of the Fraser Institute, the Liberales Institut of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (Germany), and the Cato Institute (United States), is available as a free PDF download at www.fraserinstitute.org.