

## Land of the less free

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Francis Scott Key penned the Star Spangled Banner during a turning point in the War of 1812. Many know it from sporting events and it has been the National Anthem since 1931, when President Herbert Hoover signed the law making the words from 1814 officially the words citizens sing as the country's anthem. Each of the four stanzas end with the inspiring words, referencing the flag Land of the less free still waving over Ft. McHenry, "O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave." There is a variation of this verse, the land of the free because of the brave, emotionally tying freedom to those who have sacrificed to preserve freedom in the United States.

The U.S. has been inspired, as a nation, to fight in many wars as the 'defenders of freedom' and citizens want to believe the country represents the freest of places. Coercive constraint is the opposite of freedom. Coercion takes on many forms from peer pressure to laws, regulations, and even enslavement. A free nation, historically, may fall through a violent war or may lose freedom a small piece at a time. Losing it a piece at a time takes longer but accomplishes the same end, a people controlled through coercion rather than free to pursue happiness. The CATO Institute, in partnership with other organizations, painstakingly measures freedom around the globe and recently released the 2015 Human Freedom Index. The report's executive summary states;

***The index published here presents a broad measure of human freedom, understood as the absence of coercive constraint. It uses 76 distinct indicators of personal and economic freedom in the following areas:***

- ***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*

This report is not an emotional appeal for or against freedom. It is a scientific approach used to determine how free countries and their citizens are. The data gathered and analyzed led to an ability to rank 152 countries from the most to the least free. Iran came in at number 152, which may not surprise too many living outside of Iran. Many in the United States believe the land of the free and home of the brave ranks at the top of the list. Scoring for personal freedom and economic freedom combined created an overall freedom index score of 8.26 on a scale of 1 to 10, in CATO's study. Of the 152 countries measured this places the U.S. in the 20th position; 31st if only comparing personal freedom (8.71) and tied for 12th if only comparing economic freedom (7.81). From 2008 to 2012 many countries gained more freedom while many others declined in freedom. The U.S. declined from an index of 8.34 in 2008 compared with 8.26 in 2012. Some may look at the decline as simply a very small difference but history teaches freedom is often lost in a series of smaller steps.

Once all the data is available from 2013, which will give us the Human Freedom Index for 2016, it is very likely the downward trend will continue. There are more personal and economic regulations and laws being passed almost daily that will help in further reducing the index for the U.S. while many other countries are moving toward more freedom. From 2008 to 2012 the U.S. only lost three positions, slipping from 17th to 20th but it represents a gain of two positions from 2010 and 2011 when the U.S. was 22nd overall. If enough countries slip far enough the U.S. may not even drop out of the Top 20, at least not based on 2013 data, but are U.S. citizens more or less free in 2015 than in 2013?

Coercive constraint is growing with increasing pressure to add even more coercion in areas such as wages, energy choices, tolerance of views, and size of government, property rights, and more. A growing government with increasing influence in the daily lives of all citizens promises to deliver an index with waning freedom in the U.S. and the lyrics for the National Anthem may need to be updated to the land of the less free and home of the brave. Are you prepared to live less free, slowly, over the next several years?