

KY ranked among states with least freedom

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Is Kentucky among the least free states in the nation? One website seems to think so.

Freedom in the 50 States, which is owned by Washington D.C.-based libertarian think tank the Cato Institute, ranked Kentucky 41st on its overall list of states with the most freedom. New Hampshire was first, Indiana was fourth, and New York was last.

The rankings were calculated based on factors including how their policies promote freedom in the fiscal, regulatory and personal realms, according to the website. More than 200 policy points using data through 2014 were broken down into 20 different sections as a way to calculate freedom scores.

Kentucky received its highest rankings in tobacco freedom (7th), gun rights (8th) and land-use freedom (16th). They received their lowest scores in marriage freedom (44th), incarceration and arrests (44th), campaign finance freedom (47th) and personal freedom (50th).

Indiana, on the other hand, was ranked in the top-five in the following categories: cable and telecom freedom (first), campaign finance freedom (first), regulatory freedom (second), educational freedom (second), land-use freedom (third) and gaming freedom (third).

Freedom in the 50 States wrote the following about Kentucky:

Like its neighbor West Virginia, Kentucky has been one of the more regulated states in the country on both the economic and personal freedom dimensions. Unlike West Virginia, however, Kentucky so far shows little sign of improvement.

Although local taxes are low in Kentucky (2.9 percent of income), state taxes are high (5.9 percent). That means the state is very fiscally centralized. Government debt is also extremely high, at about 27.0 percent of personal income. Government employment is slightly higher than average, and subsidies are slightly lower than average.

Freedom in the 50 States said Kentucky, which has dropped six spots since 2006 in the biennial rankings, can improve its score by tweaking fiscal, regulatory and personal regulations.

Recommendations included reducing debt by tightening rules for municipal bond issuance and cutting spending, enacting a right-to-work law and reforming sentencing for nonviolent offenders.