

Human Freedom Index: Chile, Costa Rica lead in Latin America

December 6, 2016

The Human Freedom Index 2016, (HFI), was released on Monday, the second annual report that represents the state of overall freedom in the world based on a broad measure of personal, civil and economic freedom. Co-published by the Cato Institute, the Fraser Institute (Canada) and the Liberales Institut (Germany) from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, it looks into 179 distinct indicators in 159 countries on issues ranging from freedom of speech and association to women's freedoms, the extent of voluntary exchange, safety and security, the rule of law and more.

The HFI is the most comprehensive freedom index so far created for a globally meaningful set of countries. The HFI covers 159 countries for 2014, the most recent year for which sufficient data are available. The index ranks countries beginning in 2008, the earliest year for which a robust enough index could be produced.

On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 represents more freedom, the non-weighted average rating for 159 countries in 2014 was 6.93. The level of global freedom stayed about the same compared to 2008, but almost all countries experienced changes in their ratings, with about half of those increasing their ratings and half decreasing.

The top 10 jurisdictions in order were Hong Kong, Switzerland, New Zealand, Ireland, Denmark, Australia (6), Canada (6), the United Kingdom (6), Finland (9), and the Netherlands (10). The United States is ranked in 23rd place. Other countries rank as follows: Germany (13), Chile (29), France (31), Japan (32), Singapore (40), South Africa (74), Brazil (82), India (87), Russia (115), Nigeria (140), China (141), Saudi Arabia (144), Zimbabwe (148), Venezuela (154), and Iran (157).

In Latin America Chile is followed by Costa Rica, Uruguay, Panama, Peru, Suriname, El Salvador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Mexico, Paraguay, Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras, Argentina, Colombia, Guyana and Venezuela.

Out of 17 regions, the highest levels of freedom are in Western Europe, Northern Europe, and North America (Canada and the United States). The lowest levels are in the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. Women's freedoms, as measured by seven relevant indicators in the index, are strongest or least repressed in Europe and North America and least protected in the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa.

Countries in the top quartile of freedom enjoy a significantly higher per capita income (US\$37,147) than those in other quartiles; the per capita income in the least-free quartile is US\$8,700. The HFI finds a strong correlation between human freedom and democracy.

The findings in the HFI suggest that freedom plays an important role in human well-being, and they offer opportunities for further research into the complex ways in which freedom influences, and can be influenced by, political regimes, economic development, and the whole range of indicators of human well-being.