



Calculating freedom in an unfree world

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How does one quantify freedom? Is it even possible to calculate such a thing? Over the years, several entities have collaborated in an attempt to do just that. Freedom House, an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world, publishes a yearly report titled “*Freedom in the World*” which “assesses the real-world rights and freedoms enjoyed by individuals, rather than governments or government performance per se.” Additionally, “Freedom House does not equate legal guarantees of rights with the on-the-ground fulfillment of those rights. While both laws and actual practices are factored into the ratings decisions, greater emphasis is placed on implementation.” Their findings indicate an overall decline in human freedom over the past 10 years.

The 2016 Freedom House ratings show the United States as being in a decline, currently tied at 44th in the world with Cape Verde, Costa Rica & Mauritius. Among the countries listed as “more free” than the USA, are New Zealand, Uruguay & Portugal, which should not be a surprise to those who follow freedom indexes, also besting the United States in freedom are Canada, Australia, San Marino and all five Scandinavian countries.

Maybe you want more freedom, but also want to stay in the United States. “What to do?” you ask. The Cato Institute may have the answer. Jason Sorens & William Ruger produced a new edition of the *Freedom in the 50 States* rankings. Sorens & Ruger write, “the 2015–16 edition examines state and local government intervention across a wide range of policy categories — from taxation to debt, from eminent domain laws to occupational licensing, and from drug policy to educational choice.” Adding, “Although states that excel in one area of freedom — fiscal policy, regulatory policy, or personal freedom — do not always score well in the other areas of freedom, we recognize important relationships among all these dimensions of freedom.”

After crunching the numbers in 23 categories (involving 158 variables) of fiscal, regulatory & personal policy, Sorens & Ruger’s calculations determined that New Hampshire was the most free state in the United States. That’s not to say that New Hampshire is a libertarian paradise, there are still taxes and government-run schools. However, New Hampshire is metaphorical light-years ahead of Maryland, New Jersey, Hawai’i, California & New York – the five states at the bottom of the list. While New York is right below California in the rankings, that’s a little misleading as Sorens & Ruger calculated New York’s freedom ranking (-.98) to be almost twice as bad as that of California (-.50).

If these rankings tell us anything, it's that even within what some still refer to as "The land of the free" some places have more freedom than others. The real question is, where would an independent New Hampshire rank in Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* index?