

This report reveals how 'free' Michigan is – we're calling bullshit

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Just *how* free is Michigan compared to the rest of the U.S.? Well, according to the **Freedom in the 50 States** report by the right-leaning think tank, Cato Institute, Michigan clocks in at number 14.

The report itself appears to use fairly moderate "freedom" values weighted under categories like fiscal, personal, marriage, occupational, economic, etc. In the report, Michigan has improved in fiscal policy freedoms in recent years (i.e. lowered taxes) and has seen improvements in personal freedoms, specifically in reference to marriage and medical marijuana. The state also got good marks for seeing an increase in travel freedoms after motorcycle helmet laws were repealed in 2012. However, the report's policy recommendations to "improve freedom" includes (among other things) "...cutting school aid and giving localities the freedom to determine school budgets once again."

Before you start shooting off your guns and giving a good ol' hoot and holler of "Amuuurica!" let's be clear: this report is bullshit. Without contesting the merit of the values and the weight system applied in the report, let's instead discuss why the idea of ranking states based on freedom is flawed.

First, stop and consider freedom as a concept. Freedom isn't exactly straightforward, it has varying definitions depending on who you reference and in what context it's used. One interpretation according to the **Oxford Dictionary** reads, "The power of self-determination attributed to the will; the quality of being independent of fate or necessity."

Although this definition seems fairly straight-forward, the concept of freedom is both morally and culturally derived. Trying to place an objective value on a social construct is challenging. To someone that possesses a firearm, being able to own a gun means the freedom to protect oneself from harm. But to victims killed in the **237 mass shootings** so far in 2018, that "freedom" directly impedes on one's freedom to live.

Conducting a study that ranks a state's relative freedom based on arbitrary values is dangerous, and one must consider the agenda behind doing so. In this particular report, states that ranked the lowest in freedom were also states that largely vote Democrat. New York, Hawaii, California,

New Jersey, and Vermont all landed in the bottom five — and they all voted blue in the 2016 Presidential election. Comparitavely, eight out of the top ten "freest" states voted Republican.

So when we talk about "freedom," just remember that it's an abstract idea that is largely American. Although freedom is the bedrock for the foundation of our country, when weaponized as a political tool, it can be divisive. And what that ultimately creates are political and social scenarios that directly oppose the democratic values from which our nation was built upon.