



GOLDSTEIN: Democracy, capitalism best protectors of freedom, says report

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A new joint study by a Canadian and an American think tank argues democracy and capitalism are the best guarantors of freedom around the world, including everything from economic well-being to the rights of women.

The survey, *The Human Freedom Index 2020: A Global Measure of Personal, Civil and Economic Freedom*, was done by Fred McMahon of Canada's fiscally-conservative Fraser Institute and Ian Vasquez of the libertarian U.S. CATO Institute.

Given that, and perhaps surprisingly to some, they rank Canada in sixth place in their annual survey of freedom in 162 countries representing 94% of the world's population.

That's down two positions from Canada's fourth-place ranking last year, but still within the top 10 and well ahead of the U.S. in 17th place.

The rankings are based on 2018 data, prior to government lockdowns imposed globally this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The annual survey of human freedom examines 76 indicators of personal and economic freedom in 12 major categories.

They include rule of law; safety and security; movement; religion; association, assembly and civil society; expression and information; identity and relationships; size of government; legal system and property rights; access to sound money; freedom to trade internationally and the regulation of credit, labour and business.

With a perfect score of 10 and 0 representing the absence of freedom, the study concludes the global average is 6.93.

It found the world's 10 freest countries in descending order are: New Zealand (8.87); Switzerland (8.82); Hong Kong (8.74, prior to China's crackdown on democracy); Denmark (8.73); Australia (8.68); Canada (8.64); Ireland (8.62); Estonia (8.54); Germany (8.52); and Sweden (8.52).

The 10 least free, in descending order, are Central African Republic (5.25); Algeria (5.20); Iraq (4.90); Libya (4.83); Egypt (4.67); Iran (4.53); Yemen (4.17); Venezuela (4.08); Sudan (4.01) and Syria (3.97).

Among other major countries the survey ranked, the U.K. and U.S. tied in 17th place at 8.44; India in 111th place (6.43); Russia in 115th (6.31) and China in 129th (6.07).

Of the 10 global regions evaluated, the study says, the most free were North America (Canada and the U.S.), Western Europe and East Asia.

The least free were the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Freedom for women was highest in North America, Western Europe and East Asia, the lowest in the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Countries in the top quartile of freedom also fared the best economically, with average per capita income of \$50,340, compared to \$7,720 in the least free quartile.

The study concluded global freedom has decreased slightly over the past decade by 0.04%, with 70 countries increasing their freedom rankings and 70 decreasing them.

It also found the gap in freedom between the most and least free countries has increased by 6% in 10 years, when comparing the top and bottom 10% of nations in the human freedom index.

The study's authors say measures of global freedom are particularly important today, to help maintain a proper perspective, at a time, "when the world's leading market democracies struggle with economic problems and when hybrid forms of authoritarianism are being sold as viable alternatives to liberalism."

Indeed, they're also a validation of Winston Churchill's famous observation that, "democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried."

Similarly, capitalism, whatever its failings, is better than the alternatives.